



Christ's Perfect Provision-Part 6

When Your Focus is In Need of Adjustment

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As you're taking a seat, grab your Bibles, and I'd like you to turn—not to Luke, as we get started (we'll get there)—but to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

As you're turning there, I want you to think about the way that we just naturally, in every area of life, anticipate something before we experience it. Whether it is your thoughts about high school before you went there, and then you experienced it; and you can look back and compare what I thought high school would be and what it really was. Maybe it's marriage, and before we got married, you had a sense of what it would be like to be married and what that experience would consist of. And then you get married, and then you can compare your thoughts of what it would be like to what it really is. Parenting—what would it be like to be a parent and have kids? And then you have kids, and then you look at that experience compared to what you thought it would be like. And often there's differences.

Even in buying products—what would it be like to get that new phone? I read the advertisements, and I see what it has. And then you have it for a few months, and you can compare. Buying a car, buying a house, whatever it might be.

So when you look at the comparisons, we're always formulating expectations based on the available data—or better yet, on the data I choose to avail myself of, and read, and nourish my mind with, and get that sense of a composite picture of what I'm expecting. And sometimes our expectations are exceeded (not very often). And then sometimes we have that great sense of lament that we overestimated what the experience would be like.

I would like us to read here, Revelation chapter four, which is a picture of what's happening in this scene in heaven. It's the place that you believe, Christian, that you are going to be at. You're going to die on some gurney in some hospital, or some bed in some nursing home, or at your house, or in a car accident. You're going to be physically dead at some point. And you believe that you're going to be translated—the immaterial part, the conscious part of you is going to be translated into the presence of Christ. That's your expectation.



And you imagine that, and you think about it. And the person there at the center of all of this—God the Father, the Spirit of God, but the Lamb of God that’s there, the center of the throne—you have that picture of who that is; it is the person that you now envision when you pray to Him. This morning, when you got up, I trust you spent time in prayer—at least some sentences of prayer spill out of your mouth or through your mind—and you express yourself to Christ. And whatever it was, you had a sense of who He is. You sang songs—many of them directed, phrases and whole songs directed to Christ—and you had an idea of who He is.

My question is: is there going to be, in your own thinking, something—when you experience the reality of the presence of Christ, when you go from seeing through a glass dimly (to use Paul’s metaphor) into seeing Him face to face—is your expectation going to be exceeded by that experience? Or is it in some way going to be a “it’s not all it was cracked up to be”?

Revelation chapter four. Let’s take in this very important revelatory text. After these seven postcards to the seven churches: “After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’” Read chapter four verse two now: “At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven.” Majestic chair—okay, authority, power, King. “And the one seated on the throne.” Saw that too.

“And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper...” Lost most of us men there. I don’t know—what does that look like? “...and carnelian.” I don’t even know what that means. Right? I mean, we’ll look that one up. Some of you big on your gems—okay, you got something, I guess that’s helping you. “And around the throne was a rainbow”—finally something, right? I’ve got a sense of what a rainbow looks like—“that had the appearance of an emerald.” Well, I thought I was going somewhere, but now you lost me.

Around the throne, verse four, there were twenty-four thrones. This is a big room here. Big place. Lots of thrones—twenty-four. Envision that—twenty-four—that’s quite a few people that seem to be powerful people. “Seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders.” So, I got some important people there; and they’re clothed in white garments, and they had golden crowns on their heads.

“And from the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder.” Wow—noisy, chaotic, flashing, weird. “And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven



Spirits of God.” Sunday School graduate—now even that doesn’t make any sense. What—who—what? Seven Spirits of God?

“And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, on each side of the throne, there are four living creatures.” If you’ve been up with us in our daily Bible reading, we just read through Ezekiel 1 and 2; Ezekiel chapter 10—we were introduced to these bizarre “living creatures,” as they’re called. And here they are again, with these creatures being full of eyes. Now again, if I’m trying to envision this—full of eyes, in front and behind. “The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature was like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature was like an eagle in flight.” Hmm.

“And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within.” Draw that up in your imagination. “And day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who is seated on the throne—reference verse eight—how often is that? Day and night; they never cease to say it. When they do that and say that to the One who lives forever and ever, well then the twenty-four elders that you pictured in their white clothes and crowns on their heads—they would fall down before Him who was seated on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. And they would cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

Chapter five, verse one: “Then I saw in the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back.” Now that I can picture—a scroll, frontside, backside—“sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’” Now that’s what’s going to be explained in chapter six—the content through chapter twenty-two; I’m gonna get all this information about the future—that’s what the book is about. But we’re just examining the scene, just to get a picture of this place that you claim, when you die, you’re going to go there.

“No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it. And I began to weep—weep loudly,” John said, “because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and look into it.” And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah...” If you just rolled into church for the very first time, we know who this is, right? Who’s this? Second person of the Godhead—Jesus Christ. He’s the Lion. He’s the all-powerful One. He’s the Mighty One. He’s from the line of Judah—the one of the twelve tribes the promise was made in Revelation would never have



the scepter depart from it. So, it was gonna be the King here. “The Root of David,” comes from David’s line—“He has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

“And between the throne and the four living creatures, and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns”—I don’t know; I’m now trying to image this in my mind. Got the Lamb (who I know is the One from the tribe of Judah, the Lion, the Root of David—conquered). He’s got seven horns—now count them—seven horns, “with seven eyes”—getting really weird—“which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” Again, my pneumatology is just totally rocked—what are you talking about?

“And He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne. And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” You’ve just been inserted into this scene. Did you pray this morning? Pray last night? Think about this: your prayers envisioned in this place, being brought here to this scene in heaven—symbolically—through these golden bowls of incense.

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals’”—speaking of Christ, right?—“for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation; and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Verse 11: “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne the living creatures”—those bizarre creatures that they tried to describe—“and the elders”—white clothes, crowns—“and the voice of many angels.” How many? “Numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” That’s code for: can’t count them. And what were they saying? Apparently, it’s a big choir—really loud—here it comes: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive”—now—“power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

Catch what that means. Here they’re saying: that One right there is worthy of everyone’s power to be directed there, effort; all their wealth really belongs and should be given to Him; everyone’s wisdom—all their focus and their thought, all their mental exertion; all their might, all their power, all their sweat; and all their honor that they can produce; every bit of glory that they can come up with and cast; and all the blessing and the good that they could ever say—all of that belongs to the One to whom it is worthy: the Lamb who had been slain that has now been brought to life. And the four living creatures



said, “That’s right. That’s an accurate statement—everything belongs to Him. Amen.” And the elders fell down—which they’re doing a lot of here—and worshiped.

Just read two chapters from the Holy Bible, right? God’s inspired Word. And I’ve just kind of refreshed your mind with the apocalyptic picture here—which, of course, is symbolic—but it’s trying to communicate something about the reality of this place. And I just wonder: the way you think about your prayers going before God, and your relationship with Christ—the Mediator, the Lamb that bought you with His own blood—is the reality of what you’ll experience when you die going to exceed, or is it going to in some way disappoint, the expectation that you now carry about that Christ?

I mean, I hope it humbles you to the place where you can look at someone who you know has no real deep abiding respect for the Godhead, who says things like “the man upstairs,” “the big guy.” And I hope you chafe at that—you chafe at that. That’s blasphemy. You think, I don’t call the God of the universe “the man upstairs.” And then you read a passage like this. And as you sit in worship, you listen, you see the lyrics—your mind kind of thinks of a few things about—you cast out those words, you lead your family in prayer, you sit down and you talk to the Christ that saved you. You speak to God the Father. You think about your prayers going before God. Isn’t there some conviction that you feel like, “Wow, I can castigate this guy for his low view of God when he calls God ‘the big guy’ or ‘the man upstairs’; but am I viewing Christ with seven horns and seven eyes and people falling down...?” This is a scene that really stretches my sense of how amazingly big, large, huge, majestic, important this Person is—whom our kids down the hall are learning about with stories of Jesus feeding five thousand people and walking on water.

I was preaching at the Singles Alliance Retreat a couple weeks ago for our Compass singles—and great group, great group; it was a great experience. And as I was taking questions after a couple of my messages, they started asking all these questions. Someone got personal, which was great. And they were asking things like, “What books have really impacted your life?” It didn’t take me long—I’m just assuming—without pause I said, “Well, you know, one book that really I think has affected my Christian life early in my Christian life—providentially God allowed me to read this book, and it has really echoed through my own personal spiritual growth, I think—and hopefully, if you’ve been under my ministry for any amount of time, you can see it kind of reverberating in the ministries that I lead—is a book that I read really early on in my Christian life by a pastor—thirty years on the south side of Chicago, starting in the 30s, ending in the 50s. He wrote many books, and maybe many of you have been impacted by his books as well—Aiden Wilson Tozer, A.W. Tozer. And the book that I mentioned, that was the first to come out of my mouth and came first to my mind, the book that really impacted me, was his little tiny book—little thin paperback—*The Knowledge of the Holy*.”



And the reason that has kind of haunted me in ways throughout my whole Christian life is that reading it, just less than a year into my Christian life, I had this conviction from the very opening preface of the book that the problem that we have (that he says you can see the effects of all around us) is that we just don't, in our own thinking, get to the place of viewing God in a way that is worthy of God. We have these—what he calls—“a low view of God.” And he says that low view of God that we entertain in our minds, and we think is God, is something that is—here's his line—“the cause of a hundred lesser evils among us.” It's the fountainhead, he says, of idolatry. And thinking of God in a way, he says, that is actually libel to His character—this is an offense to God. As he says in the first chapter, there's nothing that God hates more than idolatry; and really, entertaining thoughts that are not only the fountainhead for idolatry, but the thoughts themselves that are less than God are idolatry themselves. And we're fine with it. We have a casual comfort and sense of, “Well, that's, yeah, the God I serve; that's the Christ I follow.” All you have to do is read modern Christian books, or listen to modern Christian music—so much of it is, you know, I think about that scene of me transferring from this world to be in the presence of God in my “software,” like my spirit, and there's all these songs about me... “Hey, oh Jesus, what's happening when we get it—maybe we'll dance a little bit too—hey Jesus, cool, look forward to seeing you.” And then I read the Scripture, which says, “You have no idea who you're talking about.” They have no sense of what it is in the throne room where the presence of the Lamb—who bears the marks as though He was slain—is worshiped by the twenty-four most important people in history, who are bowing down continually as the weirdest creatures you could ever imagine are flying around with six wings with eyes all over the place; with torches burning before the throne that represent the Spirits of God. You have no idea what you're talking about. You're not going to dance a jig with Christ when you see Him. There will be no high fives and “Yo, Jesus,” and “It's been great; I missed You, my buddy—been walking with me on the beach” and “footprints in the sand”—all this nonsense—about the eternal, omnipotent, sovereign Lord who is worshiped in heaven in a way that, if you were to see it for ten minutes, would blow your mind—as clearly it did John's.

Matter of fact, when he speaks of this One he's already heard His voice—when he refers back to the voice that he'd heard—go back to chapter one. I know you think I'm preaching on Luke today, but go back to Revelation chapter one, as we spend a little bit more time here. Look at verse number—verse number 12: Rev 1:12. “Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man.” Unless you're brand new, you know this—this always should, in your mind, take you back to Daniel chapter 7: the One who should be the formless, invisible God now is descending from a cloud, getting authority from that invisible God in the likeness of a son of a man—the Son of Man. And He's been given in Daniel 7, in this prophecy, all authority so that all peoples, all nations, and all languages should serve Him and only Him, and that all glory and all power and all things that we could produce that's ever good—the best of what we are—should be directed to that Person: the Son of Man.

John enlists that language, and he says He's clothed in a long robe with a golden sash around His chest. And His hairs—the hairs of His head—were white. Now trust me, John knew Jesus well—walked with Him through Galilee and Judea—and he knows that His hair was not white. What—He had a hair day



or some makeover? “Your hair’s not brown anymore—what’s going on here?” No—it’s white. It’s white like—well—it’s white like snow. And His eyes—you know those brown Jewish eyes of Christ?—no, now they’re flaming fire. And His feet—here’s the symbolism; it’s so rich—but the idea of His authority and His established authority: it’s like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. And His voice was really sweet and compassionate and merciful—“Oh, it felt so good to hear His voice again.” No—no—it’s like the roar of many waters. In His right hand: seven stars. And out of His mouth came these wonderful compassionate words—it was like He was again talking on the Sea of Galilee there about the lilies of... No—sword this time. A sharp two-edged sword—it stung, it hurt, it wounded. And His face—oh man—now His face is no longer that visage that I remembered from my time walking for three and a half years with this Christ. Now it’s like the sun—I can’t even look at it—it’s like the sun shining in its full strength.

John sees now the glorified Christ as he’s falling down here on the island of Patmos. And clearly, as he falls down and he’s in fear and trembling, he remembers this: this is the glimpse of the Christ I saw in Luke chapter nine—in this event—when my view of Christ was instantly recalibrated. If you ask me if Peter, James, and John in Luke chapter five, chapter six, chapter seven, chapter eight, respected and honored Christ and saw Him as great—we already know that. Middle of chapter nine: “You are the Christ of God.” I mean, clearly they understood something about Christ and gave Him honor and respect. But the scene that I want you to finally turn to in Luke chapter nine, beginning in verse 28—they’re about to have their view of God radically transformed—transformed by the visage and the image and the figure of Christ being radically transformed before them. These visual images representing something of the attributes and the power and the magnitude of the importance of who this figure is.

Let me read it for you, beginning in verse 28; we’ll read through verse 36. “Now about eight days”—about eight days—about a week later—“after these sayings He took with Him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of His face was altered, and His clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with Him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure”—whose departure? Christ’s—“which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

“Now Peter,” verse 32, “and those who were with Him were heavy with sleep; but when they became fully awake they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. And as the men were parting”—or about to leave—“Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents—one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah’”—Luke adds—“not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them”—okay, so the cloud was there with these people; now we’re in it—“and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying”—very simply, three phrases—“‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him.’



And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.”

Interesting text. I want to break it down, simply and quickly this morning—verses 28 through 31. Let’s begin there, and just imagine putting yourself in the sandals of the disciples, and seeing Christ—being woken up (or, as the text is a little unclear in verse 32 as he goes back to describe the scene—maybe deep asleep or heavy with the desire to sleep—groggy, tired). All of a sudden, they see His face—awakened by the glory and the photons lighting up this scene. Afternoon? Evening? Morning? We don’t know when this was—probably late, if they’re tired; I don’t know. They’re so busy, they can be tired at any time—in the afternoon or evening—early evening, maybe late evening. But they see this and they’re woken up by it. His face is radically changed. His clothing is different. And with Him are Moses and Elijah, which, of course, are identified in verse 30. It says in verse 32 they first just saw “two men.” Of course, they don’t know—if I brought up Moses and Elijah here, you wouldn’t know who they were. You don’t know what they look like; they weren’t wearing name tags. Did they have an introduction time? “Peter, Peter—this is Moses”? I don’t know. But they found out, clearly, because Christ tells them: these are the two important people in the Old Testament that often are the figureheads of the Scripture—we talk about (and Jesus, by the way, this way) “the Law and the Prophets.” The Law was given by Moses; the Prophets—the quintessential, typified spokesman for God in the rest of the Old Testament—Elijah. Two of the most important people that we’ve seen.

And if you really want to freak out here a little bit—think this through. Both of these had strange exits from the planet. Moses died of natural causes there and, you know, as he’s looking over across the Promised Land; but his body, we learn, was disputed between Michael the archangel and Satan—remember that? Who cares? Why not just bury him and move on? Why would Satan ever want to argue for the body of anybody? I mean—what’s that all about? Well, apparently, we have here not just a vision—this is not some hologram—this is the actual glorified body of Moses. Because at that point (and I conjecture—I understand—but filling in the gaps here), we’ve got God, going through the dispatch of Michael, bringing up this body—much like our bodies will be brought up at the rapture—glorified, reunited with Moses. And Elijah—you know how he left the planet, don’t you? How did he leave the planet? Chariot came down.

Now, here’s Elijah watching this happen; and I know people are like, “Well, they went right to heaven.” Well—whatever that means—think that through. Have you flown in a plane and had all the data there on the screen, and it says how fast you’re going and where you’re going? And then sometimes you’ll see some of those planes even give you the temperature outside; and you go, “Oh, I can’t believe—is it that cold outside?” Really? Yeah—keep going. Do the Branson thing and get into space—you know how cold that is? Really cold—so cold it’s incomprehensible. Not to mention, it’s a vacuum—you know this; you know what vacuums do to bronchial tubes inside your lungs. That body—the fallen, temporal, human molecular structure—that allegedly didn’t just go “whoop” right up



and then they hung out in the living room somewhere in some celestial palace. You don't have to get it very high until you die—biologically die—just like Moses biologically died. The difference was (much like our quote-unquote “death”; it won't be much like a death because our software will simply have its housing changed, as 1 Corinthians 15 says) in a twinkling of an eye. And as Paul makes very clear for the last generation, when the trumpet is sounded, our bodies have to immediately metamorphose—they have to change into something that is now glorified and impervious to death; and there's nothing that will make it implode or explode or freeze.

Here we have these glorified bodies like Christ. And we can only assume—because there's no body—even though they went out searching for Elijah's body later; they thought, “Well, this whirlwind kind of put him up; we got to go find his body and bury”—they never found his body. Why? Because we assume, and rightfully so, that he was directly translated—much like our rapture translation—into the presence of God.

So if you go to heaven right now—which I trust that you believe you're going to—I believe, at least in two cases (and we might argue for a third)—but think about this: you've got not only Christ's body, but two other glorified bodies there—Moses and Elijah. I know this is speculative theology—but it's interesting, isn't it? These two bodies—glorified—in glory, return. You've got, flanked here, the Messiah; the writer of the Law; the quintessential preaching Prophet who represented the writing prophets. That had to blow your mind. Because here you have the One clearly exalted above Moses (who's quintessentially important in Jewish theology) and Elijah (who is so important—if you read the Bible—he represents so many things all the way through the last chapter of the Old Testament—Malachi chapter four). And Christ now is singled out—spotlight comes on Him—God speaks about Him. Peter's befuddled—saying things that Luke thinks are silly there—and I don't want to stretch it, but clearly this is not a good commentary on his comment there in verse 33.

What did this do to them? Change their view of Christ. Number one (half an hour into the sermon): I need to elevate our view of Christ—elevate your view of our King. I know you say He's the King of kings, Lord of lords—you need to elevate your view of Him, especially as we approach Christmas. Because there's no time when we are tempted to think like the world: that Jesus is some domesticated little baby in a manger, and that's a pretty cute story, and He lived a good life, and He's a great example for us.

I want you to think of the dedication of the temple in Solomon's day. Now, if you don't know much about biblical history, before the splitting of the kingdom—the ninth century, tenth century BC—you've got a unified kingdom under David's leadership. You had all the borders secure—all the borders advanced—and the warrior, the great fighter, the skilled fighter, David, had established peace



in the kingdom. And the baby born with a silver spoon in his mouth ascended the throne—Solomon. It was a rocky ascension, but he got to the throne and he sat there in peace with all the things; and talking about silver spoons—silver didn't even matter anymore. The Bible says gold was all that mattered because silver was so common. And he built a building for God to be worshiped in. And that building was the most magnificent building—I guarantee you—that anybody in the ancient world had ever seen.

And the Jews were there at the dedication with thousands of people assembled; and Solomon, the king, in the regalia of the monarch, stands up in front of this outlandish monument of human achievement and architecture (and talk about opulence, with gold everywhere) and he dedicates it in a prayer. And he says in 1 Kings chapter eight, "I just want you, God, to realize that we know what we're doing here; and when it comes to knowing that You could never descend to fit into a building, I realize that heaven and the highest heavens can't contain You—much less this building that I've built." We know You—you will never fit into an opulent temple.

And yet, a thousand years later, a gangly twelve-year-old—dealing with his first pimples on his forehead—walks in while his parents were heading home and sits down with rabbis and priests, and starts showing them: this is no normal twelve-year-old. Stymied—amazed—at the wisdom of this twelve-year-old. Clearly, the Gospel writers understand—Luke has already presented to us early in the book—this is God incarnate. If the building—as He walks through the courtyard, the outer court, of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem where Solomon had built this opulent temple—now you have, not embodied in that grand building that he was in the shadow of, but in a twelve-year-old body—was the God of the universe.

The most amazing scene you could ever imagine—with the twenty-four of the most important people in the world constantly getting out of their thrones and worshiping this Lamb that was slain—walked—God incarnate. "Heaven and the highest heavens can't contain You." That was a true theological statement. But here's the mind-blower: Philippians 2 says even so, the One who existed with all of the credentials and attributes of God emptied Himself and took on the form of a man; and being found in the likeness of men was willing to go to the cross.

I'm not big on the nativity scenes—I know you think I'm a curmudgeon and all that. We have them—come to my house, we have them. They're not up yet; they'll be up I guess next week. I'm not against them. But sometimes they get a little too cute. When the old Precious Moments starts putting out, you know, nativity scenes, then I start to move, "Okay..." When the sheep look like cartoon characters, and the little baby Christ is, like, you know, sixteen pounds—I struggle with the domestication of that scene. Not that I don't believe that there was a brown-eyed baby born in a Bethlehem stable—I believe that. But you'd better keep your theology intact with Revelation 4 and 5 clearly in view. Because as



Jesus prayed in John 17, He said, “Return to Me the glory I had before I came and before the foundation of the world.” So I know this image that I just caught in Revelation 1 and Revelation 4 and 5 is nothing new for Christ. He’d had that glory—with the worship of the four living creatures and all of the angels and everybody that was ever there—perfected by the coming purchase of Christ on a cross; they all gave their glory and their honor and their worship to the second person of the Godhead. That needs to be kept in view.

And while, you know, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” plays in the background and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” every now and then they still rotate in the mall songs “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” written by Charles Wesley that knew a little bit about biblical theology. When you hear that carol this year, can you just stop and listen—particularly if they happen to play the second verse? You know these familiar words, don’t you?

“Christ, by highest Heav’n adored”—we just read about it. “Christ, the everlasting Lord”—who was, who is, who is to come—“Late in time behold Him come”—finally, here He is—“Offspring of the Virgin’s womb. Veiled in flesh”—you know what that means?—“Veiled the Godhead see”—do you see that? Or is it just a cartoon character to you—just a cute little scene, a baby in a manger? “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity.” Hail—you know what “hail” means, right? Salute, bow down, worship, acknowledge. “Hail the incarnate Deity; Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel”—what does “Emmanuel” mean? “God with us.” God with us.

I think when Charles penned those words, he had God in view, which is a little different than a lot of our views of “the man upstairs” or “the big man” or whatever. “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see.”

Sometimes it’s hard because of the package things come in. I think—I had a meeting this week with a very important and influential and powerful, rich businessman. And, you know, when you’re preparing for meetings like that—and this is one for the good of the church—and I’m going there to represent the church in a very important meeting (can’t tell the details right now—will later, perhaps; but I will), but I’m sitting across from this guy, and I walk in and I think I’m in the wrong place. Look at this guy—I’m thinking, “This is who I drove up here to have a meeting with?” I mean, literally, if you saw this guy walking down the street, you’d think he’d reach out his hand and ask for spare change. And yet, the more I talked, the more I realize: this is no transient who wants my spare change. This guy’s powerful, well-connected, rich. This guy could pick up the phone and do amazing things—the power he wielded, the money he had at his disposal, the people at his beck and call to do things all over Southern California. And I thought, “Wow—the package really belies the person I’m talking to here.” Talk about not looking the part—this man didn’t look the part. And I guarantee you, the image of Christ that you have in your mind certainly doesn’t look the part anytime between the birth of Christ in



Bethlehem and even the scene of His resurrection as He speaks with the disciples and the Marys there at the tomb, and Martha. I'm just telling you—that belies who He really is. Got to elevate your view of our King.

You want a diagnosis passage on this—you've got to look at Malachi chapter one. We have no time for it now, but do a study of Malachi chapter one; and when you're done with that, go to Hebrews chapter twelve, verses twenty-two to the end of the chapter, and use those passages in your own study (because I have no time to deal with it). But look at the things in your life—like your prayer life, your service to Christ, your sacrifice, your giving, the energy you bring, the attention you bring to God—and say, "You know what—that really is a diagnostic of how I view this Christ that I say I worship and follow." And perhaps you'll recognize we have a long way to go in elevating our view of Christ. And when you think you've arrived, you'll learn more about the greatness and majesty of Christ; and you'll continue to almost be frustrated in a pursuit of making sure you're not a mental idolater by settling into a view of God that is not accurate.

Verse 32 of our passage is printed there in your worksheet: "Peter and those who were with Him"—that's James and John—"were heavy with sleep" when this whole scene started. We're going back now, recapitulating a bit of the setting of this. And here we have—hey, you know what—when this all started, you had the disciples heavy with sleep. Now, that's a bit grammatically ambiguous—though some commentators would argue, you know, this is clear. The idea is: we're not sure whether they're groggy and really tired and they want to sleep, or whether they're *in* sleep. Nevertheless, they're not at their best; they're not alert. And yet, when this comes, it says—middle of verse 32—they "became fully awake because they saw His glory," and these two men who had yet to be identified—they see two men standing there with Him.

So we have them being roused from their slumber—at least their groggy physical attitude; they're roused now to see the glory of Christ and these two heavy-hitters—two of the most important men of the Bible: Moses and Elijah. And as they were parting—we don't get much, other than we learned earlier—they're talking about the task of Jesus to go to Jerusalem. Peter says to Jesus, "Whoa—Jesus, wait—Master, it's good that we're here. Let us make three tents—three tabernacles, three booths." This is the same word we use in the Feast of Booths when they go out and set up their leafy little tents. "Let's get some foliage here out and let's make some tents—some tabernacles—for them. We'll make one for You; we'll make one for Moses; and [one for] Elijah."

Now, I don't know what you make of that, other than the motivation was clearly: "Let's keep these guys around. Can we hang out here for a while?" Luke, uncharacteristically, gives us a comment here after the dash at the bottom of verse 33, and he adds his commentary; and it says, "not knowing what



he said.” Now, clearly, he knew what he said—this is an idiom to talk about the fact, “He didn’t know what he was talking about.” Rarely do we see this kind of implied diss of the first pastor—senior pastor of the church of Jerusalem—a very important player; the one who gets the keys of the kingdom given to him by Christ; I mean, someone who is here exalted as a very important biblical character—and Luke says, “That was just not the right response.” Not—“didn’t even”—what was he thinking? Saying that—silly, not right, inappropriate for the setting.

Now, I don’t mean to be poetic about my point here in verse 32—they were clearly physically tired and sluggish. But in verse 33—even when they were roused and awake—they gave a really silly response to this. It is not, “Let’s have Elijah and Moses stick around; we can do a little Q&A with them—keep them here; we’ll get everybody here; let’s have them around for…” That’s not the point. Jesus, the Messiah, is flanked with Moses and Elijah to make a point about Christ; and God is going to make it very clearly: “Listen to Him.”

I put it this way on my outline: we need to shake off any complacency—any kind of that casualness, any kind of inattentiveness—any kind of thing that would lead us to say things like Peter said that just are not the sharpest, smartest, insightful, connected, thoughtful things to say or do. Sure, it’s a play, I suppose, on the physical fatigue and grogginess of them in verse 32—they were awakened by this vision. But they weren’t awakened really well enough in their own thinking about how they should perceive the greatness of Christ here; and Luke comments on that.

I don’t have time to take any of these passages, but let me at least give you a couple. If you look through the Bible for the way we’re supposed to have, as an orientation of our thinking—a description of our personalities, the way in which we should go about living the Christian life—the words “alert” and “awake” and “sober” are constant refrains. Jot this reference down, if you would: 1 Thessalonians chapter five. If you read 1 Thessalonians chapter five, at the heart of that in verse six is: “Let us not sleep, as others do.” Now, clearly, we’re in analogy land—the Bible is not recommending that you do not sleep; we prefer that you do sleep; you have to sleep—because I’m not talking about literal sleep. But whatever we’re describing as a kind of mindset for Christians that’s like that kind of sleepy, groggy, casual, perfunctory Christian life—just go through the motions, do my thing—don’t live like that. But instead: “Let us keep awake; let us be sober.” That picture is what that whole passage is trying to accomplish in the thinking of the followers of Christ at Thessalonica.

Now, I want to be like that. How do I be like that? Couple things. The context of 1 Thessalonians chapter five begins with and gets back to the fact that we could meet Christ at any time. He’s coming like a thief in the night; but He’s coming like a thief in the night for *those* people. But for us, we’re children of the day; we’re sober; we’re alert; we’re thinking; we’re ready for His return at any time.



That will keep you alert. If you're going to take some sub-notes here, how about this—letter A: I like the word *imminence*—imminent—at any time, any moment, you could be in the presence of the One we just read about in Revelation chapter four and five.

The Bible says those that are not living alert, when Christ comes, they shrink back—they're ashamed. They're living a kind of life that's not appropriate to being in the presence of Christ. They don't think about the fact that before this day is over, you could be face to face with Christ. And that Christ is not one you're going to high-five or dance a jig with—this is going to be Someone that you are going to be in awe of; and the majesty and greatness and power and omnipotence and sovereignty of that transcendent figure will blow your mind. You could be there today. That's the One you should pray to. That's the One that we should sing to. That's the One we should ponder in our thoughts about serving Him and representing Him and witnessing for Him this week—that Person you could meet at any moment. Imminence will help you.

Jesus told parables about that. When people think that the master is long in coming, the servants start to go out (and here's the imagery of the parable) and go get—go get drunk. They just go get drunk—they go party. That's the next thing He deals with in the passage: "Those that sleep, sleep at night; those who get drunk, get drunk at night; we are of the day—let us live sober lives." That's about your intensity in the Christian life.

I read—man criticizing me in this ministry (always anonymously, right?)—posting publicly about—like—the bars in this church, and... You know the complaint that I read (which I try not to read them all, but when I get them) is like: "It's too intense. Too intense—too much intensity." That was a word used. When I die and look back at my life and ministry and teaching—if you've been following along in the sermon with me emotionally and intellectually—do you think there's any chance I'm going to look back and say, "Darn it, I was way too intense about Christ down there. Should've lightened up, man. Why couldn't I have just been more casual about all the teaching? The guy just was so intense—pushing people to be thinking biblically—and what was wrong with me?" Not a chance.

I've told you this before, but when I lay in bed at night and I stare at the dark ceiling in my bedroom and I think about Mike today—serving Christ, representing Christ, sharing Christ, doing what you did for God—I don't ever sit there and fear, "Man, I was too intense for Christ today." My fear, as a servant of Christ who will stand before the *bēma* seat of the King, is always—I fear that I wasn't intense enough, that I wasn't more forceful, I wasn't more forthright, I wasn't clear enough. So shake off any complacency. And if you think that's crazy—"Man, you're already a zealot." Well, don't be a crazy zealot—I don't think we're zealous enough.



Imminence may help you. Here's another thing that may help you—and I grab this from a word that's used that is the antithesis of this. It's the word in Greek *nōthros*. *Nōthros* is the word that's translated variously—it's translated things like “sluggish,” “lazy.” It's translated, for instance, in Hebrews chapter five, verse number eleven, as “dull.” And the context there is in combination to the study of the Word, and it says, “You've become dull of hearing.” And then he advocates this: “Stop just drinking the milk of the Word—can you start eating some meat?”

So here's what I'm going to say: imminence will help me be an alert Christian. Here's the thing, argued for as the remedy for that sluggish Christian life that's not the way it ought to be—who says dumb things in light of things that are profound and important; that doesn't respond with the alertness for the season and for the moment and for the issue—but has (as the passage ends) his perceptions—his faculties of discernment—trained by what? By being skilled in the Word.

So, I don't know how you want to put it—letter B—but *biblical intake*. And it's not lazy biblical intake, where we go back to the same thirteen themes that I like in the Bible and just keep sucking on the milk of the Word. But are you expanding and pushing your knowledge of God's Word—the depth and the breadth and the length of the wisdom of God? Are you really ingesting that with the kind of eager learning that the Bible expects that people should have toward the truth? If not, the Bible says you'll be lazy—oh, you'll be exposed to the Word—“I read my Bible.” Sure, you'll read your Bible. But you can still be a lazy Bible reader.

Shake off any complacency. Alert, focused, urgent mindset. Imminence will help. A certain kind of biblical Bible study is going to help.

Thirdly is the word *nōthros* across the page in Hebrews chapter six. Hebrews chapter six, verse twelve, now uses the word—but it's not in the context of Bible study; it's in the context of serving Christ. And it says this: you need to use or employ the same *earnestness* of those that you've watched, and imitate them—because they are the ones you've seen the outcome of their faith (you've watched the outcome of their faith). Imitate them, and they show *earnestness*—because if you don't, then you'll be described as sluggish. It says: “Do not be *nōthroi*, but be imitators of these”—desire and push toward having that same *earnestness* (that's a great Greek word)—that diligence and that care and that attention and that focus.



Secret Service agents, I assume—not always (I should be careful with that illustration—this illustration may fall apart on several levels)—but picture yourself as a Secret Service agent. And the only way it works is for you to picture your favorite president. So, I mean, it may be the current one—but pick your favorite president in your mind that you’re going to serve as a Secret Service [agent]. Now you’re serving in the White House as a Secret Service agent for someone who has in his pocket a communication device that can launch missiles; who can pick up a phone in his office and deploy Navy SEALs and Army Rangers to go do things. So you’re there serving someone in your suit coat who can deploy people in camo and call in helicopters and send in tanks. But he’s asked you: “Can you watch here in the house—take care of the house—keep people from hopping the fence, running through the front doors?” Let’s just say your favorite president asks you to do that.

All I’m saying is: you feel the privilege of that, and you recognize, “You know what—I’ll be alert; I’ll stay alert; I’ll be on watch.” Is there any parallel the Christian should have? Absolutely. He says you are supposed to, as a part of the church, be in this organization as the pillar and foundation of the truth; and you are to fight—not with weapons that the world uses—but you’re fighting ideas. You’re fighting anything that raises itself up against the knowledge of God (I’m quoting here in 2 Corinthians 10). That idea of me being vigilant against things that in any way mismatch the character or the truthfulness of God and His Son and His plan of salvation—I want to be a defender; I want to be on the lookout. He’s asked me: live a holy life—I want to be on the lookout against sin and temptation in my life. I need to be vigilant—awake, sober, urgent. So much we could say about that; but you’ve got to shake off any complacency. The Christian life is always described as one that’s living with that sense of readiness.

Lastly, verses 34 through 36. They get overshadowed by this cloud; the cloud now is amplified with a voice: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him.” A lot of things you could have said—you identify who He is; there’s a lot of things you could have said about Him. “Worship Him.” “Follow Him.” I don’t know—“Listen to Him” is the core—is the message, right? “Listen to Him.” Verse 36: “When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone, and they kept silent.” Now that may be mysterious to you—you’d want to tell people about this; but what you miss in this truncated, abbreviated statement at the end of the Transfiguration is what we learn in Matthew and Mark, and that is that Jesus expressly commanded them: “Listen—don’t tell them about this; keep this quiet right now.” So you’ve just heard a voice from heaven say, “Listen to Him,” and the first thing He says is: “Don’t tell anybody about what happened.” They didn’t. I mean, that’s even a statement that at least is a good point in their favor: “They kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.”

Number three in our outline: we need to resolve to obey His Word. I’d like to say, you know, if I’m just coming up with thoughts on this—“Hey, resolve to worship Him; resolve to honor Him; resolve to talk”—but the text says that what Peter, James, and John needed to see, as leaders in this movement called Christianity that we call Christianity, is: “Listen to Him.”



Have you ever seen the Orthodox Jews take their tours—and they read, and they read it like this? You’ve seen that, right? Whether you’ve been there—maybe to Israel with us—and you’ve seen them in the synagogues; we’ve seen them at the Wailing Wall; and they’re always, you know, doing this as they’re reading their Bibles. If you ask a rabbi about that, some of them will take you to Isaiah 66: “To this one I will look—the one who trembles at My word.” Some of them will take you to Ezra 10—another text in which God’s people gathered there in the post-exilic rebuilding of Jerusalem; they realized their sin, and they had to do something very, very, very difficult. Let me read this for you. And as they were asked to do that, it says: “Do this according to the counsel of my lord, and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the Law. Arise, for it is your task; we are with you; be strong, and do it.” The people that do what God asks—at great cost to their personal comfort—are described as those who tremble at His word—who see His commandment and they tremble at that.

Cloud—when God spoke out of the cloud in Exodus 20 and gave the Ten Commandments, the people were freaked out. You remember that in Exodus 20? And after the Ten Commandments were given and all the peals of thunder were going on, like we saw in Revelation 4 and 5, people said, “We don’t want to hear it anymore. Moses, you talk to us—you be the intermediary; you relay the message—but we don’t want to hear Him—over this—we’re afraid we’ll die.” God says something interesting there at the end of Exodus 20—He gives Moses the information, and He has Moses go to the people and says this: “Do not fear. God is doing this to test you”—starts in verse 20, by the way—“God is doing this to test you, so that you will fear and keep His commandments.” Did you catch that? They are afraid—“We don’t want to hear the voice of God; we’re gonna die.” Moses is sent to say, “Tell the people, ‘Don’t fear.’” What does that mean? You’re not going to die—God didn’t want to kill you. But He’s sending these very dramatic pictures of His greatness and majesty so that you’ll *fear* and keep His commandments.

Don’t buy into 21st-century American Christianity that says we shouldn’t fear Christ. Of course you should fear—not that you will be cast into outer darkness, or (as John says) that you will fall under the condemnation or judgment that was due us; the cross has absorbed all that. I don’t fear condemnation—not the condemnation that I tell people they ought to fear if they’re not saved. But because I recognize, as Hebrews 12 says, that my God is a consuming fire, and I come to Him with reverence and awe—I better fear. Fear enough—a kind of fear that has the fear that I better not disregard what He says. Repeatedly in the book of Hebrews: “Pay attention to what you’ve heard—because if you don’t pay active attention to it, you’re going to drift from it.” Hey, if the Old Testament cloud speaking—if all of that resulted in just retribution—you think you’re going to disregard Someone greater than Moses, Someone greater than Elijah? If you neglect what He says—“We must pay better attention—special attention, careful attention, active attention—to what we’ve heard.”



I know I'm a bad pastor because I should have taken you to 2 Peter chapter one, but jot it down please so that you can at least pretend I talked about that today. You can have it in your notes—you can look back years from now and say, "Yeah, he dealt with that passage." And even though I didn't deal with the passage, you wrote it down and it looks like I dealt with the passage—and maybe you'll go home and read the passage. But when Peter reflects on this later (2 Peter chapter one, verses 16 through—I'd say—read all the way through chapter two, verse three), he says, "You know what—that whole scene on the mountain, that Transfiguration, leads to one exhortation of these people: you do well to pay attention to that prophetic word—the prophetic word that was confirmed by that word from heaven about Christ and listening to Him. It's a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns."

I wanted to end the sermon with what I hoped would be—in my planning—a recalibrated view of Christ, that we'd all be saying, "Wow—we have to view Christ more exalted," as our third value of the church articulates. We have to maintain a high view of God, and it's constant work.

Understand with me—let me dismiss us with a word of prayer:

God, it's a hard morning for us to look at our own lives and see that—and I hope for those who follow me, at least have followed along with what I'm saying here—we see the inadequacy of our thoughts about You. We can only imagine that we don't think of You rightly, and even in a recalibration morning, even in a time to elevate our view, we know that probably a year from now, and five years from now, we'll learn more about the immense profundity of Your greatness, and we'll have to recalibrate and tweak and elevate our view even more.

But God, we are insistent on continuing that process. We want to understand, by the work of Your Spirit—as Paul said to the Ephesians—what is the breadth and the height and the depth of any one of Your attributes. And God, I pray that we would be motivated by the fact that the One that is so awe-inspiring is One that has laid down everything for us to be forgiven.

God, I know we feel unworthy; we feel sometimes a great sense of guilt regarding our sin. But let us rejoice today that it is all released from us because of Christ's unspeakable—I mean, really, just the unfathomable—sacrifice of Himself for us. Make us grateful for that—profoundly grateful—regardless of what material things or temporal things we can be thankful for this week. Let us let that be the anchor and the foundation of what we're thankful for.



In Jesus' name, amen.