

St. Paul: On The Same page

11.03.13 Week #271

Day One: Exodus 3:1-15
Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,"⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...

"I'm coming." When was the last time you heard those words? I'm willing to bet that when you did they were a great relief.

A young mother, with ears tuned to hear the sounds of her child's distress, calls out, "I'm coming" as she runs to the rescue at a cry that she can tell is more than just the ordinary trouble.

A husband answers his phone at work to hear that his wife has been in an accident. And you hear him say, "I'm coming" as he heads out the door to his car. He doesn't pause to shut down his computer or put away his work. He drops everything to

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2 Thessalonians 2:1

come to the side of those he loves.

"I'm coming," even when it's not spoken in an emergency, when you hear that your parents or your children or someone you love is on their way to visit, those words give a sense of relief.

God tells Moses, "I have come down to deliver" the children of Israel from their sufferings. Perhaps you never heard God's voice speak these words, but you have his promise that he would come to you. Think back to some of those times, and feel the relief.

Prayer: *"Come, Lord Jesus," how many times I have prayed those words. How many times you have answered my prayer. Thank you, Lord. Amen.*

Day Two: 2Thess 2:1-8, 13-17

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way.

The believers in Thessalonica were alarmed. Evidently they had been listening to people telling wild stories about Jesus' second coming to the effect that perhaps Jesus had already come and they had missed it!

Of course, sophisticated and educated modern people like ourselves would never fall for such a thing, would we? Deceiving teachers, authors of a shocking book, people claiming to have had a vision, could they convince us that we should sell our possessions, or change our life plans, or join a group that would direct our lives?

Sadly, it has happened many times and it continues to happen. An author who claims to have spoken to God in an isolated wooden shack sells millions of copies of his book

to people who long for a new or clearer picture of God. An author who claims to have visited heaven, or hell, tells us to work harder to be good people.

Christian teachers have insisted that we must believe in Christ's return on a certain date. Teachers from other religions have predicted world-ending catastrophes. And even secular scientists have warned us that the world would end from floods, asteroids, freezing, warming, nuclear war, genetically modified organisms, or rampant disease.

Paul wrote to his friends to calm and comfort them, and to point them to the best focus for their attention. "God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved... ¹⁴To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, only you know that great day. And we will not fear the day on which Jesus returns, for it will be a day in which we see your love. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 20:27-40

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother."²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.³⁰ And the second³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died.³² Afterward the woman also died.³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

Did you read all those details of the text above? I copied it all out so show you how people often love to create detailed requirements for how we ought to live. Strange hypothetical situations are imagined in order to justify new rules. And clever logical

traps are constructed in order to have something to debate for hours on end.

How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Can God make a stone so large that he cannot lift it? Will my dog be in heaven, and if not then how could I be happy? Jesus wastes little time on such questions. He cuts right to the heart with his answer. He says, in essence, heaven is not what you think.

Being with our heavenly Father forever is not about enjoying more and more of the stuff we long for on earth. That would be like promising unlimited amounts of candy.

No, heaven is about having the only thing that is really worth having – the thing that Jesus has made it possible to have already now! It is about being one with God again. Being reconciled, forgiven, and at peace.

Prayer: *Dearest Lord Jesus, I have wasted much of my life worrying about trifles and longing for worthless things. Give me the eyes of those in heaven who gaze at you and see all that is precious. Amen.*

Day Four: Concerning the Coming

The next three Sundays, November 10th, 17th, and 24th, are the last three Sundays of the church year. The usual readings for our worship tend to focus on the second coming of Jesus and the end of this world. That poses a bit of a problem for preaching.

Most of us don't spend a lot of time thinking about the end of the world, since we're busy with this world. And preaching similar themes for three weeks, followed by the season of Advent in which we focus on the expectation of Jesus' coming as the Savior, feels like a lot of repetition.

(Don't tell anyone, but I tend to think of these next three Sundays as doom, doomer, and doimest.)

But there is an aspect of these lessons that it might be very important for us to consider. An entire section of our hymnal is called "the church militant" because we believe that we are all in the midst of a spiritual war. And yet, many American Christians do not feel particularly military. Our lives tend to be focused on our children and

grandchildren, soccer games, food and clothes, and Michigan football.

Did you, by any chance, notice this line in one of our favorite hymns that we just sang, A Mighty Fortress? It went like this, "of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none other God. He holds the field forever."

Many people miss the meaning of that word "sabaoth." It's Hebrew, but many people confuse it with the word "Sabbath" which means "rest." Sabbath refers to the day of rest, Saturday.

But sabaoth doesn't mean rest. It means *armies.* It means warrior hosts, legions of angels. Our God is called the Lord God Sabaoth – not the God of Rest but the God of powerful armies!

And Jesus promises that those armies will be victorious in the great battle for the prize that God desires... us. Drums and trumpets and marching feet, as we look to the last day we know that our God is coming in power to save us!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I often long for rest. But I pray, fill me with the spirit of battle, to defend the truth and overcome wrong. Amen.*