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The Future of the Church (Part 2)



When Shall These Things Be? - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the concept of the future of the church in relation to God's kingdom. Drawing on biblical texts, Gregg argues that the church should be seen as a part of God's kingdom and that its ultimate purpose is to bring darkness into the light and make disciples of all nations. He emphasizes the importance of the church's growth and maturity, with the ultimate goal being the holiness and purity of the bride of Christ. Gregg believes that when the glory of the Lord appears upon the church, it will have a tremendous evangelistic impact on the world.

Transcript

I'd like to continue talking about the future of the church, which we began in our previous lecture. And I pointed out that when I'm talking about the church, I'm not talking about what many people mean by the church, which would mean to them an organized group of believers meeting in a building somewhere, or a network of such people, or a group of people who are such organizations called a denomination, or in any sense an institutionalized entity. I do believe that those institutions do contain members of the true church.

I believe that every evangelical congregation has some representatives there of the true body of Christ. The problem is that there are also in every one of those organizations that I'm aware of some people who are not part of that true body of Christ, and therefore the way the Bible uses the word church as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, God's kingdom, his subjects, is not a term that is coextensive with what we call the organized church. There's an overlap in the two definitions, but I'm thinking of the particular biblical concept of a person attached to Christ, abiding in Christ by faith, somebody who actually has a relationship with God, has been born again, has the Holy Spirit residing within him, and that person and all the persons collectively who fit that description are the church in the world.

That's the church of which the Bible speaks of, the future of it. And I was saying last time that a lot of our understanding of God's purposes and of the future, fulfillment of his purposes, is tied in with the concept of the kingdom of God. And we saw that the first

time the kingdom of God was mentioned in Scripture was in Exodus when God told the Jews that if they would be obedient to him and keep his covenant, they would be his kingdom.

But we saw that they did not keep that covenant, they did not obey him, and therefore a time came when Jesus had to give them the sad announcement, the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to another nation that will bring forth the fruits of it. And that announcement is a prediction of the kingdom identity now belonging to a new entity, not Israel, but the spiritual Israel which is made up of the faithful remnant of Israel plus any Gentiles that may have joined them in this olive tree or in this vine or however we want to use the images, in this body as Paul put it in Ephesians chapter 2. We'll look at some of those passages later on, but I want to finish up before I go further, I want to finish up what I began to talk about, the kingdom of God, last time. When we talk about the future of the church, there's many metaphors and many images that come into play.

We've got the idea of a harvest, we've got the idea of a body, we've got the idea of a bride, we've got the idea of a house, a house of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit. All of these are images of the church found in the New Testament and each of them suggests certain things in the context that use these metaphors about the future of the church, the ultimate destiny of the church when God has brought forth his purposes there. But right now we're working on this idea of the kingdom of God.

And I'd like you to look at Daniel chapter 2. Remember I said that the kingdom of God is identified today with the church. There are many, many, many people who would disagree with that statement, but can I help it if I'm right? I don't know how one could see what Jesus said on this subject without concluding that the people that he refers to as his subjects, the people that he refers to as his kingdom, are the people that we call the church, that the Bible calls the church. And so if someone doesn't agree with that identification, I apologize for disagreeing.

And there are some who feel very strongly about that, but from the scriptures I mentioned, I do not see how one could reach other conclusions without bringing them to the text already, prefab. If we draw from the text where it says, it seems to me that the church is identified today with God's kingdom. We are his subjects today.

Now, if you look at Daniel chapter 2, there was a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had of a statue, an image made of several kinds of metals. The head was of gold, the chest was of silver, the belly was of bronze, and the legs were of iron. The feet were of iron and clay.

And in his vision, he saw a stone, which was differentiated from all those metals, and it came and it struck this image in the feet so that the image collapsed. And this stone, which apparently was not very large at the beginning, grew into a great mountain to fill the whole earth. And in so doing, it ground into powder all the metals of that image so

that they were carried away like the fine chaff in the wind.

That's the dream. Nebuchadnezzar did not know the meaning of the dream, but Daniel received a revelation from God as to its meaning, and he gave the meaning. We will not read the entire section where he does so, but he basically says that each of these metals represents a successive world empire.

The head of gold represents Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's realm, the Babylonian Empire. The chest of silver represents the media Persian Empire, which conquered Babylon and supplanted it as the world empire, as the world leader. The belly of bronze represents the Grecian Empire, which under Alexander the Great conquered the Persians and supplanted them as the major world power.

And then the legs of iron represent the Roman Empire, which conquered Greece, or the Grecian Empire, and Rome became the final empire of this vision. Now, what about the stone? Well, Daniel interprets that in verse 44, Daniel 2.44. Daniel said, And in the days of these kings, now these kings must refer to the kings represented by the metals of the statue, particularly those kings that were reigning at the time when the stone struck the image in the feet, which would be the Roman Empire. In the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people.

It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. And inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and it broke in pieces, the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, the gold, the great God has made known to the king, what will come to pass after this? The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure. Now, he said that this stone, which became a great mountain to fill the whole earth in the dream, represents the kingdom of God, or the way he put it, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom.

So it is God's kingdom, this stone. The head of gold was the kingdom of the Babylonians. The chest of silver, the kingdom of the media Persians and so forth.

But the stone was the kingdom of God. It was not of worked metal. It was a stone not made with hands.

It was of divine origin. Unlike other kingdoms that had military prowess, the kingdom of God was something that God established. And it, though small in its beginnings, eventually would rise and grow into a great mountain to fill the whole world.

This is what Daniel said. Now, he said this would happen in the days of these kings. Now, in the vision, the last kings are the fourth empire, the iron legs, which merged into a feed of iron and clay.

And therefore, that was the Roman Empire. And therefore, we must assume that the

prediction must be fulfilled during the time of the Roman Empire. Well, the Roman Empire fell in the late 400s A.D., and therefore, the fulfillment of this vision must be already in the past.

Now, the dispensationalist believes differently about this. The dispensationalist believes that the kingdom has not yet been established and will be established at the second coming. In fact, that little stone is perceived by the dispensationalist as basically representing the second coming of Christ, striking the image in the feet and establishing the millennial kingdom, which will fill the whole world.

Now, you might say, but how do they work that out since it strikes the image in the feet and the feet of the Roman Empire? Well, the dispensationalist acknowledges that the Roman Empire fell in the fifth century, but they say there will be in the last days a revived Roman Empire represented by the feet and the ten toes of the image. And so it is the second coming of Christ, not the first, that is represented by the stone. And that stone will come when Jesus comes, he will conquer the revived Roman Empire represented by the feet and the toes.

Now, upon what exegetical principles is this interpretation arrived at? Well, it's called the exegesis of necessity because the dispensationalist does not believe that Jesus established the kingdom of God when he came. The dispensationalist believes that the kingdom of God was offered to the Jews, rejected, and postponed until the millennium. That's the distinctive view of dispensationalists, which no Christians ever believed before 1830.

It's a distinctly Darbyite view. But because they believe the kingdom was not established at the first coming and will be at the second coming, they must assume that this establishment of the kingdom of God did not happen during the reign of the Roman Empire in history, but there must be another Roman Empire in the future, a revived Roman Empire. Now, is there any reference in the Bible to such a revived Roman Empire? No, there isn't.

There isn't any place in the Bible that says the Roman Empire will be revived. What they have done here is what they do with the 70 weeks. What do they do with the 70 weeks? Well, if they don't want to believe that all the 70 weeks were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, they find a gap of 2,000 years or more between the 69th and 70th week.

It's not in the text, but they find it there by an exegesis of necessity. Why? Because they must have a future 70th week for their system to be true. And if that's already been fulfilled, that kind of robs them of that in their system.

Likewise, because the kingdom must come at the second coming in their theology rather than the first coming of Christ, we must have a revived Roman Empire in the end times. There is a gap, therefore, of at least 1,500 years between the ankles and the feet of this

image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, though Nebuchadnezzar did not see such a gap, nor did Daniel mention such a gap. It took a man arising no earlier than 1830 to first see there was a gap there in those ankles.

But the prophecy, the dream doesn't say so, and the interpretation doesn't say so, which makes it very difficult to believe a mere man living centuries afterwards who conjectured that it must be so. I would rather believe what the church has always believed and what is the natural interpretation of passage, that the fourth empire was the Roman Empire, and during the reign of the Roman kings, of the Roman emperors, God did establish a kingdom. The New Testament bears witness of that.

Jesus said the kingdom of God is in your midst. Jesus said the kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus said the kingdom of God is within you.

Paul said that we have been translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of his own dear Son. The saints in Revelation are saying God has made us unto our God kings, or a kingdom of priests. God has made us a kingdom of priests.

It says in Revelation 5.10, and also earlier in Revelation chapter 1, I think verse 5 or so. But the point here is that the New Testament confirms that, in fact, God did exactly what Daniel said. During the time of the Roman Empire, the emperor Tiberius was a Roman emperor when Jesus began preaching, and he was also the emperor when Jesus died.

He was also the emperor on the day of Pentecost when the church was born. We have, of course, the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. God did establish a kingdom.

But notice the prophecy is that it's small and it grows into a big mountain to fill the earth. It sounds like it's got a great destiny. Now, of course, the dispensationist doesn't believe that the church has a great destiny.

The church is going to shrivel up and die and become apostate and blow away, except for the little remnant that will be raptured. The church as a whole is going to become a disaster as far as the dispensationist is concerned. Therefore, to associate the growth of this stone into a great mountain with the present church age is impossible for them.

The mountain is too glorious. It's too powerful. It's too overwhelming.

It's too invincible. Therefore, they would say, well, this is after Jesus comes back and does this. But you may have noticed a pattern here.

What the dispensationist does, different from what historic Christianity has always done with prophecy, is what historic Christianity always said Jesus did at the first coming, dispensationist says, no, he didn't do any of that at his first coming. He'll do it at his second coming. I mean, all Christians agree that it requires the coming of Christ to accomplish these events.

But the question is, is it the first or the second coming? Because the dispensationists believe that Christ's first coming essentially was a failure, that he failed to establish the kingdom, and therefore he'll succeed where he failed when he comes back. The historic view of the church is that Jesus never failed at anything, and that what he came to do, he did. And if he came to establish the kingdom, as he said he did, he succeeded.

It says in Isaiah 42, verse 4, he shall not fail, nor be discouraged. It says in John 17, Jesus is praying in John 17, and he says, Father, I have accomplished everything that you sent me to do. At the end of his ministry, in verse 4, John 17, 4, I have glorified you on the earth.

I have finished the work which you have given me to do. Now, everyone agrees that Jesus came to establish the kingdom. He announced that.

It's just that the dispensationists believe that because of the non-cooperation of the Jews, Jesus failed to accomplish what he came to do. And then he had to postpone it and do it later when he comes back. Historically, Christians have believed that the New Testament teaches that Jesus did not fail in anything that he attempted to do, and that he did, in fact, establish the kingdom that he came to establish.

But the historic Christian view is that that kingdom is spiritual, not political. It's not Jewish. It's the church.

And now let's look at Matthew. In the Gospel of Matthew, we have some parables very much like that vision we just talked about in Daniel. There are two parables in a row here.

In Matthew 13, verses 31 through 33, there are two parables. Actually, there are many parables in this chapter, but I just want to focus on these two because they tell us something about the future of the church. It says in Matthew 13, verse 31, another parable he put forth to them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds.

But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. Another parable he spoke to them. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until it was all leavened.

Now, these two tell us something about the future of the kingdom of God and its ultimate destiny. Both of them indicate that the kingdom of God starts out quite small, like a mustard seed, but it grows into a great tree. It is like a little pinch of yeast that is put into a large three measures of meal.

But despite its small size, it influences. Now, both of these suggest that the kingdom of God in the world will have a tremendous impact. It will grow large and influential.

In other words, these present a positive vision for the future of the kingdom of God. It will grow, like Daniel said, into a great mountain from the earth. In this case, a little mustard seed into a great tree.

And it will infiltrate society. It will infiltrate the world in which it has been planted and cause a rising of the whole lump, as the yeast does in a dough. That is a positive thing.

So, these are positive predictions about the future of the kingdom. Let me tell you how the dispensationalists interpret these parables, because they take them just the opposite way. The mustard seed parable is said to have an ominous final line, because at the end of verse 32, when the seed has become a tree, it says, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.

Now, the nesting of the birds in the branches of the tree are thought to be the infiltration of evil and compromise and apostasy and false teachers. That, in fact, what Jesus is predicting is that in the end times, the church will be shot through with wickedness. And the birds of the air nesting in the branches of the tree suggest this.

Now, where do they get the idea that the birds represent evil? Well, I have a former pastor who said, well, it's the rule of exegetical constancy. If a symbol is used in one parable to mean a certain thing, the same symbol used in another parable must mean the same thing. And you will note that earlier in chapter 13, Jesus told the parable of the sower and the birds of the air came and ate the seed that fell on the wayside.

And Jesus said that the birds there represented the devil. And that the devil comes and snatches away the word when it's not understood. Therefore, if the birds in an earlier parable represent the devil himself, then how can it not be that they would mean something evil in this parable as well, where the birds of the air come and nest in his branches? Therefore, the dispensation says this is a prediction that the church in the end times will be infested with evil because of this law of exegetical constancy.

The birds in one parable are the devil. Therefore, in this parable, there must be something bad also. Now, there are serious problems with this argument all around.

One is that there is no such thing as a law of exegetical constancy. Such a law is a fabrication. There is no valid law.

If you'll read the various parables in this chapter, you'll find that the first one is about a sower sowing seeds. The second one is also about a sower sowing seeds. And the third one is also about planting seeds.

The first one is about the seed falling on different soils. The second one is the parable of wheat and the tares. And the third one is the mustard seed parable.

And that being so, we find that there are seeds in all three of the first three parables.

However, in Jesus' explanation of the parables, we find that in the first parable, the seed is the word of the kingdom, the word of God, as Luke puts it. So, we have the seed is the word in the first parable.

The second parable, the seed is the children of the kingdom. People are the seed, the good seed in the field. In the parable of wheat and the tares, the good seed are the children of the kingdom, the tares are the children of the wicked one.

So, now we have two parables in a row. Both have the sower sowing seeds. But in the first one, the seed is the word of God.

The second one, the seed is the people of God. And in the third one, the parable of the mustard seed, the seed is simply the kingdom of God itself. Now, if you've got the word of God represented by sown seed in one parable and the people of God in another, it proves that the symbol does not mean the same thing every time it's used.

Each parable has its own self-contained context for interpretation. Therefore, it is not a given that if birds represent something bad in one parable, they must represent something bad in another. After all, in the context of a sower sowing seeds, birds eating the seeds is a bad thing.

It hurts the crops. It hurts the produce of the farmer. The birds are the enemies of the crop.

But in the context of a big tree and birds nesting its branches, the birds are not enemies of the tree. The birds are not harmful. That's what trees are for, partially, and what birds are for.

They live together well. They have a symbiotic relationship. And not exactly, because I don't know that the birds really promote the health of the tree.

It might. They might pick up some of the seeds and spread them by their flight and so forth. I mean, there's a symbiotic relationship between birds and trees.

The birds are not an enemy of the tree. They don't corrupt the tree. Therefore, it is not a given that the birds must be negative in this parable just because some other parable where they do play a destructive role, they are negative.

Now, let me show you something else. If you look at Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, this one in Daniel chapter 4. And in this dream, he saw a big tree. And the tree was a nesting place for birds and so forth, and it was cut down.

And then it grew up again. And Daniel gave the interpretation. But the tree is described this way in Daniel 4.11. The tree grew and became strong.

Its height reached the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of the earth. Its leaves

were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it.

The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. Is this a bad picture or a good picture? It's a positive picture. Lovely leaves, abundant fruit, shade for the beasts of the field, food for everybody.

This is a positive picture. The birds were in the branches, but it was not a negative thing. This, as Daniel pointed out later, represented Nebuchadnezzar in his glory, providing a great shelter and a great protection for those under his dominion.

The birds of the air and the animals that found shelter there represent the peoples of the world whom he protected when he was doing well. Later on, the tree was chopped down as Nebuchadnezzar was. But the point is, to picture a great empire providing shade and shelter for helpless woodland beasts and birds is not a negative picture.

It's a positive picture. Furthermore, if you look over at Ezekiel chapter 31, we have the identical imagery used of another king, the Assyrian, and the Assyrian empire. What was true of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel's vision was true of Assyria in Ezekiel's vision, Ezekiel 31.

It says there in verse 3, Indeed, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon, with fine branches that shaded the forest, and of high stature, and its top was among the thick boughs. The waters made it grow, underground waters gave it height, etc., etc. Verse 5, Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field, its boughs were multiplied, and its branches became long because of the abundance of water as it sent them out.

All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs, under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young, and in its shadow all great nations made their home. Again, using the same imagery that was used of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, it's now used of the Assyrian empire. All the nations, like animals, made their home under the shade of this tree.

Now you've got birds in its branches too. Is this an image that's bad? No, no more than the beasts of the field bearing their young under it. It's just talking about how a tree is a good thing.

It provides shade, it provides shelter for creatures, and food for them, and a nesting place for birds. This is not negative. But you can see that it's the same imagery that Jesus used of the kingdom of God.

What is said of the Babylonian and of the Assyrian kingdoms is also true of the kingdom of God. It becomes a shelter place for those who take shelter in it. In fact, there is the same imagery used in Ezekiel 17 when it's in fact talking about the kingdom of God.

If you look at Ezekiel 17, verses 22 through 24, it says, Thus says the Lord God, I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, and it will bring forth boughs and bear fruit and be a majestic cedar.

Under it will dwell birds of every sort. In the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish.

I the Lord have spoken and have done it. Now this is a prediction, as I think virtually all would agree, of the kingdom of God. God will eventually exalt the lowly, who is Christ, and make a great tree out of him.

This is the same thing Jesus predicted in the mustard seed parable. A small seed grows into a big tree. In both cases, what? The birds find shelter there.

Is this bad? Of course it's not bad. That's what trees are for. There is nothing in the least negative implied by birds in the branches of a tree.

And when Jesus said of the mustard seed in verse 32 of Matthew 13, when indeed it is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in his branches, he's just repeating a very common Old Testament prophetic image, which was used of mighty kingdoms that became shelters for helpless people. The Babylonians, the Assyrians, even the kingdom of God is described that way in the Old Testament. And here's how Jesus describes the kingdom here.

Here it's not a cedar, but a mustard, because he wants to emphasize the smallness of the seed from which it grows. But the point is, it grows into a majestic kingdom. The birds in the branches are simply a common biblical figure.

They do not have any negative connotations whatsoever. So what this is, is very similar to Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the little stone, like a mustard seed, a little stone grows into a big mountain, the seed grows into a big bush, fills the whole earth. Again, it is a prediction of the success of the kingdom of God and its expansion.

It is not a prediction of its corruption. Neither Daniel nor Jesus are predicting the corruption of the kingdom. When he talks about them growing from small beginnings, which small beginnings were just Jesus and the disciples, into a great movement that fills the whole earth, which it has become even now.

Now, what about the parable of the leaven? Once again, the dispensationist holds a very different view of this parable. In verse 33, Jesus said, Matthew 13, 33, another parable,

he spoke to them, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. By the way, I should comment, he says the kingdom of heaven here.

This is no different than the kingdom of God. You will remember that Daniel said, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom in Daniel 2.44. This is the kingdom of the God of heaven. Abbreviated, you can call it the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

It is the kingdom of the God of heaven. You will find if you do the trouble, I have done it and you can do it for yourself to convince yourself, but you will find that if you compare these parables and others like them in Matthew where the term kingdom of heaven is used, compare them with the same parables in Luke or Mark and you will find the kingdom of God is the term here. They are interchangeable terms in the Bible.

Anyway, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until it was all leaven. Now, what does dispensationist do with that? It certainly sounds like Jesus is saying the kingdom of God is going to have a tremendous impact on society. It is going to leaven society like leaven leavens a lump.

Well, no, they say no, you have got that law of exegetical constancy again. Jesus said beware of the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees. And Paul said that a sinful man in the church in 1 Corinthians 5 was a little leaven that would leaven the whole lump and ruin the lump.

Therefore, leaven is bad. Leaven is a negative thing. Leaven, like the birds of the previous parable, has always got to be something bad.

Therefore, they say what this parable is saying is that the kingdom of God will be infiltrated, it will be leavened by sin in the last days. The kingdom of God is like a lump of dough that is infiltrated with leaven and in its final end it will be shot through, fully leavened with sin, with compromise, with corruption. This is exactly how the dispensationalists interpret this parable.

It would be a valid interpretation if it said that, but in fact it says the opposite. It does not say the kingdom of God is like a lump of dough and someone put leaven in the lump of dough. It says the kingdom of God is like leaven, which somebody put into a lump of dough.

The kingdom is not the element that receives the leaven in the parable. The kingdom is the leaven that is inserted into an element. The kingdom is the leaven and this proves beyond the question that the law of exegetical constancy is a fabrication.

Because indeed, leaven sometimes, because of its natural tendency to permeate and influence the dough, it does sometimes serve as a good picture of sin or of hypocrisy. But it also serves as a picture, in this case, of the kingdom of God. Leaven does not have to mean only one thing.

It is oversimplification for the sake of convenience to say that it always has to mean the same thing. Then you have to make Jesus say what he did not say. Jesus did not say the kingdom is going to have leaven put into it.

He said the kingdom of God is like leaven that is put into something else. And therefore, again, we have a parable of the victory and success and power and influence of the church transformed by the dispensationalists into a prediction of the failure and the destruction and corruption of the church. It's kind of interesting.

You've got absolute opposite visions of the future of the church in these two systems, dispensationalism and non-dispensationalism, which is all the other views that aren't dispensational, feel the same way that amillennialism does. Only dispensationalism has this negative view. As far as I know, I don't know of any responsible Bible scholar who is not dispensationalist who takes this approach.

It doesn't fit the parables. So we see that there is prediction that the kingdom of God will expand and infiltrate and have tremendous impact. Now, there are also references throughout the Scripture to the kingdom of God having dominion over the kingdom of Satan.

I don't have time right now to go into all the Scriptures that talk about this. There are some in your notes. It was predicted back in Genesis 3.15 that God would send a seed of the woman who had crushed the head of the serpent.

This is a veiled reference to Christ and the devil and the conquest of Christ over Satan. There are two kingdoms at war, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and it is predicted the kingdom of God will win. In 1 John 3.8 it says, for this cause the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil.

In Hebrews 2 verses 14 and 15 it says that Christ, through death, destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, that he might deliver those who were all their lifetime kept subject to bondage through the fear of death. In Colossians 2.15 it says that through the cross Christ disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross. In Romans 16.20 Paul points out that this victory of Christ is carried out by the church.

Christ has accomplished the victory over Satan, but that victory is one that needs to be enforced. I have always seen the picture of David and Goliath as a very worthy type of the mission of the church, because David is a type of Christ, there is no one doubts that in the Bible, David is a type of Christ. I would like to suggest that David's conquest over Goliath is a type of Christ's conquest over Satan at the cross.

You might remember that the conflict between David and Goliath was not just a quarrel between two men, but two kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the philistines. And

these were representative warriors, they were the champions of two kingdoms coming out to meet and to contend, and the decision was made that whoever won, let's put it this way, whoever lost, his kingdom would be subject to the kingdom of the winner. Remember that? Goliath said, send out a man and if I kill him, then you'll be our slaves, and if he kills me, then you'll be our slaves.

So the fate of two kingdoms was at hand, was at stake in this combat between two individuals. David killed Goliath, as we know, and I believe that that is like what Jesus did, he conquered Satan. Therefore, it was determined from that day forward that Satan's kingdom must be subject to God's kingdom, to Christ's kingdom.

But what happened after that, after Goliath fell? Do you remember? Well, the philistines, when they saw their champion was dead, they came and surrendered willingly, right? No, I hope you've read the story, they didn't do any such thing. They ran the other direction. They fled.

The philistines fled from the Israelites, and the Israelites pursued after them until they'd spoiled them and conquered every last one of them and left none of them uncaptured. And so what you find is the victory was won by David over Goliath personally, but the David's kingdom, David's people coming against the kingdom of the philistines. Now, during that time when the Jews were pursuing the philistines, there's no question as to who won.

It's not like there were still issues of battle to be decided. It was already decided. The philistines were in flight.

The Israelites just had to catch up with them, just had to go and enforce the victory that already existed upon the reluctant losers. And so also, ever since Christ has died, Satan's kingdom, Satan has fallen. Satan is conquered, the Bible says.

But the enforcement of that victory is through the church going into all the world, preaching the gospel, making disciples of all nations, bringing them out of darkness into the kingdom of light, teaching them not to follow Satan, but to observe all things whatsoever Christ the new king has commanded. That's what the church's task is. It's a mop-up operation.

Merely, the battle is won, the war is won, but the last mop-up is still happening. And therefore, Paul says in Romans chapter 16, something rather interesting, because we know that it is Christ who crushed Satan under his feet, but Paul said to the church in Romans 16, 20, and the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. It's God who crushes Satan, but he's going to do it under the feet of the church.

Now, Paul said this would happen shortly, so he must be referring to some event, some change, something that occurred in the Roman Empire shortly after this was predicted.

But the church still exists, even though the Roman Empire is gone. Certainly, the Roman Empire did succumb to Christianity.

That's a matter of history. But the church, through the preaching of the gospel, through living out faithful lives, through making disciples, conquered Satan. God conquered Satan under their feet.

That's where the post-millennialists get tremendous ammunition, because people say, oh, those post-millennialists, they just think that the kingdom can be brought in by human effort. Not so. The post-millennialist doesn't believe that the kingdom can be brought in by human effort.

They believe it is God who will conquer the world, but it will be through the church. What's wrong with this? Everything God's done in the last 2,000 years, he's done through the church. Why wouldn't he accomplish his final victories through the church, too? Well, I'm not saying he will or won't.

I'm just saying that the criticism of post-millennialism that misrepresents post-millennialism as being humanistic or social gospel-ish or that having too much confidence in the nature of man is a false notion. The post-millennialist believes exactly what this verse says, that God will accomplish his victory over Satan, but he'll do it under the feet of the church, through the church. You see this also over in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi chapter 1, I mean, excuse me, chapter 4, verse 1, says, For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly, will be stubbled. That day is coming that will burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that I'll leave them neither root nor branch. But you who fear my name, or to you who fear my name, the Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts. Who's he talking to? He's talking to you who fear my name. God will trample the wicked under the feet of the righteous.

Now, this is not political, this is not military, this is spiritual. The conquests that the church has made and is making currently in the world are through the preaching of the gospel. It is a spiritual conquest over spiritual enemies.

It is not a forcible conversion by the sword. It is not a conquering of pagan lands with military effort and forcing them to become Christians. That's not what's being discussed here.

What's being discussed here is a trampling Satan under feet, the wicked, the host of darkness. Look over at Psalm 91. This becomes rather clear.

In Psalm 91, it says in verse 11 through, well, let's go down to verse 9 through 13. Psalm 91, 9 through 13. Because you have made the Lord who is my refuge even the most high your habitation.

Who's that? The righteous has done that. No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways, and they shall bear you up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent. You shall trample under foot. Now, someone might argue this is a promise made to Christ.

After all, the devil did quote these verses to Christ as if they applied to him. But I personally don't see any specific limitation of them to Christ. The scripture is about those who are righteous in general.

He who dwells in the secret place of the most high and abides in the shadow of the Almighty. There's many references to this person generically who is the righteous. Certainly Satan could apply it to Christ because Christ was a righteous person too, as well as being Christ.

But when it says you shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent, you shall trample under foot, certainly has its echo in Christ's own promise to the disciples. In Luke chapter 10 and verse 19, Luke chapter 10 and verse 19, Jesus said to his disciples, Behold, I give you authority over to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. Obviously it doesn't mean physical serpents and scorpions, but the power of the enemy, Satan.

And nothing shall by any means hurt you. This is a recasting of the words in Psalm 91, and also I believe a recasting of the words of some predictions in Isaiah chapter 11. But the point here is Christ has given his disciples the victory over serpents and scorpions, over the power of the enemy, and they will trample them under foot.

So that in Revelation 12, 11, we read of this conflict between the power of Satan and the power of Christ's disciples. And it says of the disciples, they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony they did not love their lives unto the death. All of this has been popularized these days under the general heading of spiritual warfare.

There's a lot of spiritual warfare seminars and books out now. I've taught on it. In fact, later this year I'm going to teach a series on spiritual warfare.

The term spiritual warfare is not found in the Bible, but it's become a very common term among Christians to refer to this process of taking authority and conquering and trampling upon the demonic powers in the world and for the kingdom of God to take

ground from the kingdom of Satan. We'll have more to say about that when we have an entire series on the subject of spiritual warfare. Therefore, we'll pass over it now without further comment.

One thing that is clear, though, is that the dominion that the church is to gain over the world is that of evangelism, not of physical power, not of force. We see that, for example, in Jesus telling the disciples, go and make disciples from all nations, teaching them to observe what I've commanded you. He said to the disciples in Acts 1, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Jesus said this gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations and then shall the end come, Matthew 24, 14. Interestingly, he doesn't say this gospel of the kingdom must conquer through the sword, but shall be preached in all nations as a witness to all nations, then the end will come. Prior to the end, we don't read of a conversion of all nations, just a witness to them, a preaching to them.

Therefore, it's not necessary to assume that all will be converted as the postmillennial vision necessarily suggests, but certainly the whole world will be impacted. It's entirely possible for the world to have a tremendous beneficent impact it realizes because of the presence of the gospel and the church within its midst. So the kingdom of God is a common theme in the scripture, very significant plans God has for the kingdom, to grow into a great mountain to fill the earth, to be a great tree, to be like leaven infiltrating, leavening the whole lump of dough and conquering Satan and his kingdom.

So these are things that the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God. And that's the church. Therefore, we read of the destiny of the church in passages like this.

Now there's more. There's another image when we move from the idea of just the kingdom of God to some of the other imagery used of it in the scripture. You find that the scripture refers to the church as a ripening crop of grain.

For example, Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 3. In 1 Corinthians 3, verses 5 through 9, Paul said, Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers or servants through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted Apollos water. He's talking about the church. He planted the church and Apollos watered the church, but God gave the increase.

The church grew because of God's working in it. And he says in verse 9, For we, meaning he and Apollos, are God's fellow workers. You, meaning the church, are God's field and you are God's building.

Two different metaphors for the church that are of interest because they're frequently used in scripture. The church is God's field. The church is God's building.

And therefore, the preaching of the gospel is compared to sowing seeds on different

kinds of soils in some of the parables. Of course, the first parable in Matthew 13 is the parable of the sower. But look at Mark chapter 4, if you would.

I'd like to show you an interesting parable about the growth of this crop, the growth of this kingdom and what its future holds. In Mark chapter 4, we have a rather short parable, verses 26 through 29. He said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow.

He himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself, first the blade, then the head, then that full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

Now notice here, there is a harvest, there is a sickle. That harvesting I'm going to associate with the end of time, the great harvest. Now it's possible that he means something else, but I don't think it's likely that he does.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the harvest there was the time of the end, and I suspect that that is the case here. He speaks of when the harvest has come, it's when the grain ripens. Now notice he says, The harvest time is determined not by some set calendar day, but by the ripening of the grain.

When the grain ripens, then the harvest has come, he puts in the sickle. Now notice he says, The seed is sown, and then it comes up first the blade of grass, that's what a little bit of grain plant looks like initially, it just looks like a little blade of grass, and then on the stalk there are ears of corn or wheat, there is the head, and then the full corn or the ripe grain in the head. Now he's probably talking about wheat here, I don't know if you'd be more familiar with wheat or corn or whatever, it's true of any kind of cereal grain I suppose, but wheat, you know the heads form, or with corn, an ear of corn forms on the stalk, but the grains inside the head are not mature yet.

There is a formation of the structure of the ear first, and then within the head the grain ripens. Now what is ripened grain? Well ripened grain is simply a duplicate of the original seed that was planted in the first place. Now the original seed that planted the King of God was Jesus himself.

Jesus said except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone, but if it dies then it produces much fruit, he's referring to his own death. He's like a grain of wheat. He fell into the ground, he died, he rose again and came forth in a new plant, the church.

The church is that thing, it started out as a little blade, on the day of Pentecost there were only a few thousand, relatively small compared to the population of the world, but it grew into a great stalk, and then there formed heads on the stalk, and within the

heads grain ripens, and when it ripens, what do you have but replicas of the first seed, Christ himself, we become like Christ. The maturing of the saints is something we'll talk about a little later in another context, not very much later, but the maturing of the Christians into the likeness of Christ is what happens when grain in the head ripens and becomes like the original seed that was planted. Jesus is the original seed, we are the grains.

Now, what's this business about first the blade, then the head, then the ripe grain in the head? I believe that a head of grain with unripe grain in it is like a gathering of Christians, like any church you would go to or any gathering that may be not even so institutional, just where Christians gather in fellowship and in the context of their relationships together, they ripen, they grow. The Bible certainly teaches that maturity takes place in the context of relationships, and we could say each congregation, each gathering of Christians is like a head, and it's full of unripe grains, full of immature people who aren't like Christ yet, but it is in the context of that fellowship, and there are many such fellowships on the stalk. The stalk is the worldwide body of Christ.

There are many heads on that, many gatherings of saints. But in the gathering of the saints, there is the ripening of the saints. The ripe grain ripens in the head, in the ear of grain.

So, Jesus definitely makes a distinct prediction that there will be a ripening of the harvest, that there will be mature grain before the harvest comes. This tells us, I think, that the church is a ripening crop. Someone plants, someone waters, God gives the increase, and eventually it will be ripe, and when it is, that's the harvest.

This suggests, then, that if you want to know how near we are to the end of time, it's not so wise to look at what's going on in Israel. It's better to look at what's going on in the church, because the church is the indicator. The church is God's project.

The church is God's field, and this church field will not be harvested until the grain is ripened. It's an amazing thing how many people there are who think that God is likely to rapture the church when he has not yet fulfilled the purposes of the church. The church is far from mature at this point, it seems to me, by almost any standard of measurement.

And yet, some people think that Jesus might rapture us today. Well, he might, if I'm quite mistaken, he might, but I don't think he's going to. Why should he wait two thousand years, as he has, for the grain to reach a certain stage, and then harvest it before it reaches full ripeness? Why wouldn't he wait for what he's waiting for? Why wouldn't he wait until the harvest, like he said he was going to do? The sickle goes in when the ripe grain is in the ear, when the Christians, when the church, are matured, okay? And we read in some of these parables that this ripening occurs in the midst of opposition, in a hostile environment.

This doesn't happen in the millennium, this happens during the church age, because Jesus said it's like a crop growing up, and someone has sown tares, and the enemy has done this. And the tares are going to grow alongside with the wheat, this is of course a parable in Matthew 13, until the harvest. So, although the grain crop is ripening, there is also the ripening of the wicked, who have been sown alongside them.

There is a polarization, I think, to be expected in society. Not so much that society becomes more saved, but more polarized. The saved will become more God-like, more Christ-like.

The unsaved will probably ripen into their corrupt maturity as well. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, which we did not read, but it's in your notes, it's Matthew 13, 24-30, a sower sowed good seed, and an enemy came and sowed tares. And when the servants of the man realized that tares were sown there, they said, shall we go pluck up the tares, they're not belonging there.

He said, no, you might mistake some of the good grain for a tare and pluck it up, why don't we just wait until the harvest, let the two grow and ripen together, side by side. And then in the harvest, we'll be able to tell the difference much more easily. Yes? Yes, in a different context, yes, harvesting witnessing or gathering souls is one form in which the term harvest is used in Scripture.

I think in a different context, though. Yes, a metaphor can be used for many different things. I do believe that the in-gathering of people into the church is a harvesting.

But also the harvesting of the church at the end of time is a different kind of a harvest. I personally believe that is when the Lord comes back. I mean, a person is free to have a different opinion, but I personally think that's what he's referring to.

And so the parable of wheat and the tares indicates that God is not going to remove the wicked from the earth until the end, until the ripeness has come. Why? Because it's much easier to tell a wheat from a tare when they're ripe. They look so much alike when they're not ripe.

When they ripen, it's evident what's a wheat and what's a tare. Well, similarly, even today, it's hard to tell a Christian from a non-Christian sometimes. There are Christians that aren't very mature Christians and therefore look more like tares than like wheat.

And there are tares that aren't Christian at all but look a little like Christians because they're basically moral people or they might even go to church. If we were to say, okay, let's pull out all the tares and leave all the wheat, it would be really hard to tell who's who. But in the harvest, both will be ripened.

There will be more of, I believe, a polarization. I believe the church will become more holy and the world will become more wicked. And there will be no question in anyone's

mind who's the wheat and who's the tares.

Now, I may be reading more than Jesus intended in that parable, but it seems like that's the very message of the parable. It seems like that's exactly what the parable is saying to me, so that's how I understand it. So we have not only the church being like a kingdom that's spreading out and infiltrating the whole world, we also have it like a ripening crop of grain growing into the image of Christ as individuals in the context of fellowship.

And this maturity process must be completed before the harvest comes, Jesus said in Mark 4.29. Now, let's take another image. We talked about the harvest image. Let's talk about the body of Christ image.

Everyone knows that the church is called the body of Christ in the scripture, but what does that have to do with the end of the church's career and its destiny? Look at Ephesians chapter 4. We'll see some eschatology there related to the church as seen as a body of Christ. Ephesians 4.11-16, Paul said, And he himself gave some to the apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Edifying means building up.

For the body of Christ to be built up. Until, okay, how long is this process of building up supposed to be going on, of edifying the body of Christ? Well, until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect or mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Now, this passage dovetails well with what we were just talking about, a ripening crop of grain.

The grain matures, bodies mature. A baby grows into an adult. Now, we know we're the body of Christ, but did you know that the body of Christ has to grow up? Did you know the church can be immature? And did you know a church can be mature? Actually, Paul indicates that the maturity of the saints occurs how? Well, look at verse 16, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies.

Remember, we talked once about relationships. Joints are relationships between two parts of the body, just like we talked about maturity takes place in the relationship of the head of grain. So also, if we shift the metaphor to that of a body growing, then the body grows by that which the relationships produce.

In relationship, things are supplied that contributes to the edifying of the body in love and growing up in love. Now, in the parable of the harvest, there was an emphasis on the ripe grain in the head. That is, the individual grains have to become mature.

Here also, there's a reference to individual maturity. He says in verse 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. We need to grow up.

He says in verse 15, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him. We grow into Christ's likeness, just like the grain in the head grows into the likeness of the grain that first planted the plant, we become Christlike. Paul said actually in Galatians 4.19 to the church in Galatians, my little children, with whom I travail again in childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

It's an interesting concept, until Christ is formed in you. That's Galatians 4.19. We are to be maturing into the image of Christ individually. But there's more in this passage than individual growth.

This tells us more about the future of the church even than the harvest does, because that harvest thing just points out to the individual grains becoming ripe and therefore ready for harvest. But there's something more. In the image of the body of Christ, it's not just the finger of a baby grows up into a man's finger, and the nose of a baby grows up into a man's nose, but the rest of the body stays baby.

The whole body grows together. All the members grow individually, so that the net result is a growth of the whole body. There's a corporate maturing that takes place too.

As individual Christians cease to be children tossed to and fro by every wind of darkness, as individual Christians grow to maturity, the whole body corporately experiences a corporate maturing. And that is what is meant in verse 13 of this passage, where it says, until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is corporately to be reached by the church.

Corporately. How do I know that? Because he says, until we all, plural, come unto a singular perfect man. Now, if you have another translation, it might say something like, until we come to perfect manhood or something like that.

That's an obscuring of what the Greek actually says. Because it's awkward to say, until we attain to a man. Because we are men and women, not a man.

Right? Wrong. We are a man. That man is the body of Christ.

Paul introduced that concept back in chapter 2 of the same epistle. In Ephesians 2.15, when Paul is talking about God taking the remnant of Israel and the remnant of the

Gentiles who believe in making the body of Christ out of them, he says in verse 15, Ephesians 2.15, Having abolished in his flesh the enmity that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself, that is in Christ, one new man from the two, that is from the Jew and the Gentile, thus making peace. Christ took the Jew and the Gentile and made in himself a new man.

Who is that new man? The church. The body of Christ. But the new man has to become a mature man.

Paul says in Ephesians 4.13, until we all come unto a mature man, to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ. I've got those words in the wrong order. Who is that? That's in Ephesians 4.13. Now it's interesting that Paul speaks of the maturity of the body of Christ corporately as measured on the scale of unity.

Because he says in Ephesians 4.13, until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, the unity of faith and the unity of knowledge of the Son of God, unto a mature man. The church, which is an immature body, has to grow into a mature body, a mature man. And in so doing, it will be reflected in the unity of the faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

This concept, that unity is the scale upon which the corporate maturity of the church is measured, is found also in 1 Corinthians 3. In 1 Corinthians 3, verses 1 through 4, Paul talks about the Corinthian church as an immature church for this very reason. It's not united. He says, and I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual people, but as unto carnal, as to babes in Christ.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you're still not able. For you are still carnal. For where there is envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? This is immaturity.

These are babes. They can only drink milk. They're immature.

Why? Because they say, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos. Sound like any church you've ever heard of? Interesting. The immaturity of the church is seen in its divisions.

The maturity of the church into a mature man is seen in its unity of the faith, its unity of the knowledge of the Son of God, according to Paul in Ephesians 4, verse 13. Unity. Now remember, I'm not talking about the institutional church, because I don't think Paul is.

We're not talking about the World Council of Churches or some ecumenical movement where we just gather all the organizations that call themselves a church and bring them under one big umbrella and say, we're now the big mega-world church. I don't believe in that, because I don't believe that any of those organizations are all made up of Christians. I believe there are Christians in all of them, and there are non-Christians in all

of them.

And it is not, what fellowship has light with darkness? What communion has Christ with Belial? I don't believe that Christ is looking for a unity among believers and non-believers in the institutional church. He's looking for a unity among those who are really his people, who are really part of his body. And therefore, when people read about God's concern for unity in the church, many people mistakenly think that means we need to get all these organizations together and get rid of denominations and get rid of the individual churches and so forth, and just get them all under one big umbrella, one big union of churches.

No, that's not it, because the churches that we would be joining together are themselves not wholly Christian, not wholly made up of believers. Some are, some are not in these churches, but the real unity of the saints is seen in the relationships of true believers in Christ, which I see this kind of unity developing in my lifetime more than I think it did previously, because it used to be, I mean, a guy like Servetus, who had a different doctrine than Calvin, came to Geneva when Calvin was ruling, and he burned him at the stake. Why? Doctrinal differences.

You know, Zwingli burned 4,000 Anabaptists. Why? Differences of opinion about baptism. You know what I mean? Just little things like that.

There was no unity among believers. Now, Zwingli, I presume, was a believer. I'm not sure.

I don't know what to make of it, but, I mean, Jesus said, I mean, John said, no murderer has eternal life abiding in him, so maybe Zwingli wasn't even saved by God's standards. But the point is, there have always been a high degree of hostility or lack of participation, lack of brotherhood between people who had different theological systems, but what I've seen in the last, oh, it seems to me maybe 25 years, maybe 30, is a move in the direction of people who really love God, loving other people who really love God, and saying, hey, it doesn't matter a whole lot to me what you think about this subject, baptism, predestination, the rapture, these issues. You know, those are the issues that are big stuff for some old-fashioned, divisive Christians, and I know people who have been kicked out of churches because they didn't believe in the Millennium, and I've known churches that were kicked out of associations of churches because they believed in Calvinism, and the movement didn't.

I mean, this is absurd. I mean, all the people involved love Jesus, all of them are true Christians, all of them are saints, but thank God that I see a movement, which the Holy Spirit himself must produce, it can't be done by man, because it's done spiritually among spiritual people. And it is a movement that even though many of these people are in churches of different names, and those churches will probably forever have different names and different theologies that they stand for, yet there is a unity among true

believers, and that's a spiritual thing.

And there's a growth in that area. There is a unity that is based upon a common faith. There is a unity that is based upon a common knowledge of Jesus.

It's the unity of the faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. And in that context, Christians, true Christians, the church grows into an organization or an organism, I should say, that is more like a mature body spiritually in the earth. And that is, I believe, what we find Paul talking about when he talks about the body of Christ.

Many things in the body of Christ imagery suggest that Paul sees the maturity of the body as a necessity. That's what God made the body for, is to grow up into him in all things. Therefore, we can say that it is predicted in Scripture.

The church is like a kingdom at war that will conquer all its enemies. It will fill and impact the whole earth. It is like a harvest of grain or a field of grain ripening, which will individually, each grain will ripen before the harvest.

And it is like a body where the individual members are growing, but also the whole body corporately is growing into something spiritually more mature than what it has been in the past. A lot of people want us to just duplicate the first church in the book of Acts, and they think, well, we'll really be doing great if we can just have everything now just like it was in the first century. But I would suggest that church in the first century was an infant church.

I mean, in the early chapters of the book of Acts, they didn't even know that Gentiles could be in there. I mean, they were not exactly mature. They had some good things that I'd like to see restored in the modern church, but that's just, that's not the goal.

The goal is not to be like the church in the book of Acts. That was the baby church. The goal is to be at a mature church, and Christ is working on that through the Holy Spirit.

Now there's another image of the church that is important for understanding its future, and that is the imagery of the bride of Christ. The church is also the bride of Christ. In Ephesians chapter 5, verses 25 through 27, Ephesians 5, verses 25 through 27, it says, Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself.

I presume at the rapture, he'll present the church to himself. What condition will the church be in then? A glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. Now maturity is measured, the body of Christ is measured on the lines of unity within the body, and cooperation among the members of the body, but there's another thing that God is looking for in his bride, and that's holiness, purity, sanctification.

The church will be presented to Christ, when it is presented to Christ, as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or blemish. Now I don't know what degree of purity God's holding out for, but I have a feeling that the church as he sees it today isn't fitting that description, no matter what the standard is. I don't see a very glorious, holy church presenting itself to the world today, or to Christ.

And it says specifically that Christ gave himself to the church so that he might present it to himself as a glorious church, a glorious bride. If you look at Revelation chapter 19, Revelation 19 verses 6 through 8, it says, And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, Alleluia! For the Lord our God omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife, the church, has made herself ready.

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Now this is the wedding day. On the wedding day, the bride puts on her garment.

She doesn't put on her wedding garment before that. It's on the day of the wedding, the wedding of the Lamb, the marriage of the Lamb has come, the bride has made herself ready. This is very prophetic.

How can the marriage take place without the bride making herself ready? I do not believe that we are living at a time where the bride has made herself ready. If being ready means having her clothing on, certainly a bride doesn't go out until she's got her clothes on, onto the platform to marry her husband. And what are the clothing? The righteous acts of the saints.

The church is to be pure, the church is to be righteous, the church is to be holy and blameless, spotless and wrinkle-free. And that is the church that Jesus wants to marry. You guys, many of you don't know whom you may marry, but I imagine that you don't picture your wedding day, if you do foresee a wedding day, with a wife who is dressed in tattered clothing or dirty clothing or whatever.

And Christ doesn't intend to marry a wife like that either. Jesus came to present to himself a glorious church without spot, wrinkle or anything. And it says in Revelation, the church makes herself ready.

Not alone, not without God's help. It's obviously the work of the Holy Spirit and the church, but the church has to be involved. The church has to make some motion in the direction of being clothed with righteous acts.

And until the church is so described in realism, then the church has not made itself ready and the bride is not prepared. So we can add to our list of things that the Bible says

about the future of the church is that the church will be holy, the church will be mature, the church will be Christ-like, the church will be unified, the true church, the true believers. The church will be glorious.

And with reference to the issue of glory, we come to our final point in the notes. The Bible makes it very clear that God's ultimate design is that his glory would be seen in all the earth. He says that three separate times in the Old Testament.

In Numbers chapter 14, by the way, that's not the only time, but he says something almost identical, the same statement three times. In Numbers 14, 21, it says, but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. The earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

That's God's ultimate purpose. In Isaiah 11, we have an additional statement similar. Isaiah 11, 9 says, they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Now we hear that the earth is going to be full of the glory of the Lord. Now we read that the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. And those two verses we've just read are put together in one verse.

In the book of Habakkuk, which is hard to find because it's a little book among the line of prophets. It's right after Nahum. Makes it easy, doesn't it? The book of Habakkuk in chapter 2 and verse 14, it says, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Now you've got a combination there of the verse in Numbers and the verse in Isaiah. Because the verse in Numbers said the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Isaiah said the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Now we've got those two combined. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In a sense, the world is already filled with his glory.

The heavens declare the glory of God in every language under earth or on earth, under heaven. And in Isaiah chapter 6, he heard the seraphim singing, the whole earth is full of his glory. And to those who have eyes to see it, indeed, the earth is full of his glory.

In a sunset or in the growing of a flower or in watching all kinds of things, you can see the glory of the Lord if you have your eyes open to it. But the world doesn't see that. You see, what has to be filled, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord has to fill the earth.

The glory of the Lord does fill the earth, but people don't know it yet. The world has not seen it yet. There's a prophecy in Isaiah 40 in verse 5. It says the glory of the Lord shall

be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

Let me show you something interesting over in 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I'm going to have to go rapidly because I have much to say and only a few minutes left. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 6, it says for it is indeed God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give, check this out, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now, the light of the what? Knowledge of the glory of God. That's what Habakkuk said the earth is going to be filled with like the waters cover the sea. The knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth.

But Paul says it's happened to us already. God who called the light to shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus. By seeing Jesus we have seen the glory of the Lord.

By receiving Christ, by getting the vision of Jesus, we have seen and therefore are aware of the glory of the Lord. The knowledge of the glory of the Lord has come to us, but the guarantee is it's going to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, which is why, of course, the gospel that has brought the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to us has got to be carried to every place under heaven. Now, the glory of the Lord in the Old Testament was seen in the tabernacle and also in the temple.

In the Old Testament when the tabernacle was completed, it became the house of the glory of the Lord. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, which were the manifestations of the glory of the Lord, came to rest in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later in the temple. In fact, when both of those buildings were dedicated, a cloud, which was the glory of the Lord, filled those buildings and the priests could not even stand to minister.

They couldn't even go in there because the glory was so thick. The house of God in the tabernacle and the temple were the house of his glory. The place where he will glorify himself or show his glory to man is in his house.

Well, in Isaiah chapter 60, which I personally believe is a prophecy about the church for many reasons I don't have time to give right now, but in Isaiah chapter 60 in verse 7, God said, All the flocks of Keter shall be gathered together to you. The rams of Nebioth shall minister to you. They shall ascend with acceptance on my altar and I will glorify the house of my glory.

God wants his glory to be manifest and known in all the earth and it will be manifest through the house of his glory. He will fill his house with his glory. If you look at the book of Haggai, which is not in your notes, by the way, I'm just pulling this one in addition to what's in your notes.

In the book of Haggai, chapter 2, it says in verses 6 and 7, For thus says the Lord of

hosts, Once more, it is a little while, I will shake the heaven and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations and they shall come to the desire of all nations, which is the Messiah, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the Lord of hosts. In verse 9 he says, The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts, and this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts. God intends to fill his temple with glory.

In the New Testament, the temple of the Lord is the church. In Ephesians chapter 2, we do a lot with Ephesians today because Ephesians is the epistle about the church and that's what we're working on here. In Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 through 22, Paul said, Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built, like a temple is built, on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom, that is in Jesus, the whole building being joined together grows into a holy temple.

This is a building under construction. It's like the body of Christ grows into a mature man. This temple grows.

It's a living temple made of living stones, according to Peter. It grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built or assembled together for a habitation of God in the spirit. The church is the habitation of God.

It is the house of his glory. Peter said in 1 Peter 2, 5, We all as living stones are built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices. The church is to have the glory of the Lord manifest in it.

The church is the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the house of God's glory, and that is where the glory of God will be seen in all the world. It says in John 1, 14, speaking of Jesus, The word became flesh and was manifest among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father.

We beheld the glory of Jesus, John said, and Jesus was the glory in the image of his Father, and we also are growing into that glory and image of Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18. 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18, powerful verse, says, But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. This is not a human work, this is the Holy Spirit's work.

But by the Spirit of the Lord we are being changed from glory to glory. As we look at the glory of the Lord, as we look at Jesus, we are changed into his likeness from glory to glory, into that image. The glory of the Lord is his image.

The image of Christ is the glory of the Lord. He is the express image of his person, and

the bright shining of his glory, according to Hebrews 1, 3. What I'm saying is that the church is to become glorious. The church is to become like Jesus.

And the glory of God that was seen in Jesus will be seen in the church. How do I know that? Well, there's much in the Scripture on that. Look at Romans 8. It's interesting, Romans indicates that this glory is the result of suffering.

If there's an increase in the manifestation of the glory of God to be expected, it may be that it will be through an increase in suffering of the church, very possibly. As the tares ripen and the grain ripens, one could expect the tares to not be friendly toward the grain, and there might be suffering. But Paul says in Romans 8, 18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Notice this. The glory is going to be revealed. Where? In us.

In the church. In the temple of the Holy Spirit, the glory is going to be revealed in us, Paul said. What's more, our sufferings actually make that glory emerge, according to Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 4, verses 16 and 17, Paul said, Therefore we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Our affliction is working for us glory.

Where is this glory going to be appeared? In us. The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Paul said in Romans 8, 18, Now he tells us that the afflictions actually work the glory in us.

To become more Christ-like is what it means to have the glory of God manifest in us. For his glorious character, his glorious image to be manifest in our lives, is God's destiny for us. But this requires suffering, because this suffering, the affliction, works for us, this glory.

Look at 1 Peter, chapter 4, to see this connection again. 1 Peter 4, verses 12-14 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he is blaspheming, but on your part he is glorified. When you suffer with Christ, you partake with his glory, and when his glory is revealed, you will have a share in that too.

In 1 Peter 5, verse 10, 1 Peter 5, 10, Peter says, But may the God of all grace, who calls

us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. God calls us to his eternal glory. He calls us to bear his glory, to exhibit his glory, that is, Christ's likeness.

And the Bible indicates that that glory is like a sunrise. In Isaiah 60, verses 1-5, it says, Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but his light shall be seen upon you, and his glory shall appear upon you.

And it says, And the Gentiles shall come to the light of your rising. That when the glory of the Lord appears on the church, it will have a tremendous evangelistic impact on the world. We saw already in Malachi chapter 4, verse 2, that it said, Until you who fear my name shall the Son of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings.

There is something very interesting in 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 19. Peter says to the church, We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed, as a light that shines in a dark place until the day dawns, and the morning star arises in your hearts. The morning star is Christ.

You heed the scriptural light until the day dawns. What is the dawning of the day? When the light, the glory of Christ, when the day star arises in your hearts. You know, it says in Proverbs 4, verse 19, The path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn that grows brighter and brighter until the full day.

Proverbs 4, verse 19. It's in the notes I've given you. The path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn that gets brighter and brighter until the full day.

This is the destiny of the church. If we are the righteous, then our path becomes brighter and brighter. The glory of the Lord, we're changing his image from glory to glory.

The dawning of the light, of the glory of God, and the day when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea, arises as we progress, as we grow into that likeness from glory to glory. As the church matures, the vision of Christ will become more clear to the world, and his glory will be seen upon us. And this is taught in many places in Scripture, but we don't have time to go any further with this.

I'd like to. It's a glorious vision, but we don't have time to give it. In your notes, there are some additional Scriptures besides those that I gave.

I picked and chose sort of on the fly because I was watching the clock and realized we're going to have to close it right here. But this is the future of the church, to be like Christ, to be Christ's instrument of conquest over the demons and over the powers of darkness, to become mature, unified, pure like a bride, blameless and spotless. This is what Christ is waiting for, and I don't know that we should very realistically anticipate his coming until the church gets closer to that goal.

But I'm ready for Jesus to come back today if he chooses, but I think the Bible indicates that what you should be watching to determine whether his coming is near or far is not Israel, is not Russia, is not the common market, is not red heifers being bred somewhere or another, but the church. The church is what God is working on, and it is the church that he's bringing to maturity. When the church comes to maturity, then there is certainly reason to expect that the end is near.

Until then, we keep growing in that direction through the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. All right, with that we close.