

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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## **Editorial Introduction**

By Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. I trust the battle progresses well on your front.

Welcome to JAC147 - the 147th edition of Journal of Aggressive Christianity. We have three guidelines for our contributions: edifying, orthodox, and provocative. And our slate of articles in JAC147 fits the standard. We're grateful to each of our contributors for their generous, challenging submissions.

Captain Erin Wikle (USW) kicks things off with 'Theological Drift: A new reality in The Salvation Army.' This article was originally published in Volume 4 of The Western Territorial Salvation Army Biblical, Theological, and Missiological Society.

Steve Bussey (USE) follows with 'No Orthodoxy?', a corrective to the very drift Wikle has identified.

Captain Sam Nolan Jones (USC) learns some healing lessons in Exodus 14, 15 through 'Bitter Waters'.

Major Terence Hale (C&B) helps all of us, including those drifting without orthodoxy, to see a new way, in 'Generous Eyes And New Wine: Perspective From Luke 4-6'.

Major Charles Roberts (USE) helps us apply these new lenses and new ways of seeing in 'Ezekiel 37 And The Restoration Of Hope'.

Captain Erik Johansson (Latvia) helps us to see the great commission from a new perspective in 'An Exegetical Study Of Philipians 3:17-21.'

And we wrap up JAC147 with two pieces, one aimed at Salvos - 'Salvationist Quadrilateral' and one aimed at folk who aren't following Jesus - 'An Experiment For Those Living Without God Today'.

As always, please read devotionally, share liberally, and apply missionally. If you finish up JAC147 before JAC148 is due out (December 1 will feature a special feature, should Jesus tarry), be sure to review the previous 146 issues.

Stay close to Jesus. Keep fighting as warriors. Much grace.

## Theological Drift – A New Reality within The Salvation Army

By Captain Erin Wikle

*Originally published in Volume 4 of The Western Territorial Salvation Army Biblical, Theological, and Missiological Society.*

### Introduction: Under Pressure

In the age of deconstruction and post-pandemic life, post-Christian America is experiencing dissatisfaction accepting simple faith in Jesus. Some seek a faith less limited and tethered to a biblical heritage and history that collides with the pervasive and convincing values of secular Western culture.

It stands to reason while we (followers of Jesus) should not be divorced from culture, perhaps we too, should not be wed to her. Recall to mind Jesus' wisdom when he said we are to be in the world, not of it.<sup>1</sup> Consider then how culture has not just had her way with the world but is demanding (though not for the first time) the devotion of the *church*. Culture is deceptive, persuasive, fickle, and feigns satisfaction. She is ever boasting: "to thine own self be true".<sup>2</sup> Estranged from True Reality which anchors right thinking, right living, and righteousness itself, she has captivated our gaze.

We are under pressure. We are a polarized nation holding fast to its freedoms. We are a divided people bearing the scars of every hill we have insisted on dying upon. Racial tension is at an all-time high. Equity and individuality are at the forefront of the new American dream, as is transcending the limits of human design. Never before have we had access to so much information. Twenty-four-hour news cycles and platforms espousing opinion and self-canonized truth wreak havoc on the human psyche, having become systems of widespread indoctrination entirely unto themselves (because if it is written, it must be "true."). Meanwhile, everyone has become a best-selling author.

In view of this, what course of action does scripture advise regarding the teaching of truth?

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.<sup>3</sup>

If the time referred to in this passage is not now, it is simply a matter of when. Written near the time of his death, the words of Paul remain a critical warning today

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<sup>1</sup> John 17:16 NIV.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2-4 NIV.

where “the self—not God or Scripture—is the new locus of authority in Western culture.”<sup>4</sup>

When under significant pressure, the human body enters a stress response of “fight-or-flight.” How will we respond to such pressure threatening the very core of our thinking, believing, and operating as a people of God who have been given all authority in heaven and earth to do just as Jesus’ disciples did?<sup>5</sup>

## Thesis

This paper explores the critical dangers of theological drift to our movement, with novel doctrine and culturally motivated reinterpretations threatening the authentic witness and mission of Jesus as expressed by The Salvation Army. This is examined through how theological drift relates to our foundation, our beliefs, and our practice.

## The Threat of Theological Drift

The term “drift” implies gradual movement from a starting point. Our starting point is the life of Christ Himself, revealed through scripture which is infallible. Recall the Road to Emmaus, how both travelers were kept from recognizing Jesus until He reminded them what Scripture and the prophets said about who He was and disclosed himself as Immanuel, the Word made flesh. “*Then* their eyes were opened and they recognized him...”<sup>6</sup> Remember how their hearts burned within them when they were helped in their unbelief by Jesus himself.<sup>7</sup> So, too, the problem of post-Christian America does not exceed the solution of a post-resurrection Jesus. There is no truth that is not connected to the narrative of God’s self-revealing and saving action through the person of Jesus Christ. How we view and interact with the world must be entirely encompassed by the Gospel.<sup>8</sup> More than a perspective or lens by which we interpret the world, Jesus invites us to receive His Kingdom where He has more than taken up residence but is *Lord*. By his authority, He invites us to citizenship that requires both obedience to and emulation of the Risen King Himself.<sup>9</sup>

Drift occurs over time. Most may not realize they have arrived at a new idea, belief, or different theological destination altogether because the nature of “drift” is derived from its subtlety. One hardly knows he has wandered before realizing he is lost. Imagine where those on the Emmaus Road may have wound up had Jesus not appeared before them. Remember how Cleopas explained that he had *hoped* Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 10:1-8 NIV.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 24:31 NIV.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 24:32 NIV.

<sup>8</sup> Blakemore, Stephen. “The Story of God’s Self-Revelation: Divine Action, Historical Narrative, Human Response, Explanatory Power. Ideological Threats to the Church at Wesley Biblical Seminary, January 24, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Phil Needham *Community in Mission*, 109.

was the one.<sup>10</sup> This is no criticism against thinking deeply about how we arrive at belief, nor is this an indictment on deconstruction itself. Deconstruction is not the problem; rebuilding on anything but a firm foundation is. Blind faith is also not the answer. Rather, the answer is faithfulness to the person of Jesus as revealed through Scripture and history. This must remain our foundation: “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Orthodoxy: A Totalizing Gospel**

Fifty days after the resurrection, Pentecost occurred, and the early church was formed and catalyzed following the events our entire faith hinges upon. The early church centered itself on devotion to the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer; everything was shared and held in common.<sup>12</sup> Yet, this early faith community would soon experience its first fracture when Ananias and Sapphira, swayed by a simple lie sewn into the fabric of their thinking, would assert: we don’t have everything we need. Thus, they took what God was not giving them, lied about it, and received death as their reward. When others soon heard about it, a people first compelled by Love became gripped with fear.<sup>13</sup> The letters written over the course of Peter, Paul, and John’s lives and ministries remind us of what seemed a constant calling back to truth and full trust in Jesus, from the beginning. For centuries, this has been the plight of the church.

Though it rapidly advanced across nations, extending to both Jews and Gentiles moving beyond cultural boundaries, the Gospel of Jesus was met with contention and contempt by those who could not accept Truth in its totality. Those who rejected the gospel completely were less a threat to the church than those who rejected it in part. Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote about those *who knew God* but did not glorify Him, saying: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”<sup>14</sup> To the church in Colossae and Laodicea he warns, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> To the church in Corinth he appeals, “that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”<sup>16</sup> To the church in Ephesus he reminds, “You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.”<sup>17</sup> And so church history would include stories

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:21 NIV.

<sup>11</sup> *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:42-44 NIV.

<sup>13</sup> Act 3:5-11 NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:21-25 NIV.

<sup>15</sup> Colossians 1:8 NIV.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10b NIV.

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 2:18 NIV.

of schisms, both great and small, and the rise of denominational distinctives, setting faith groups distinctly apart from each other, where they could not otherwise agree.

And what of this rising reality within The Salvation Army? Of greatest concern is growing disagreement over matters of social justice, human sexuality and expressive individualism, transhumanism, and acceptance of the Bible as complete and all-encompassing – each indicating a lack of unity in “mind and thought.”<sup>18</sup> What we believe must be centered on the Gospel and the truth of scripture properly interpreted. Interpretations themselves may seem fruitless, but each perspective is not relative. We must put in the work to determine the most likely intent of the biblical authors and thus arrive at the meaning and truth God has for our lives. Those outspoken about certain theological distinctives, on many sides, have experienced cancel culture run amuck. We aim for healthy dialogue to affirm the truth of God but lack strategy for what happens when we honestly disagree with each other and cannot reconcile perspectives.

What happens when there is disagreement about what the Word says? Will acceptance of novel interpretations become the only reasonable way to avoid division, altogether? More likely and more dangerous would be that we look away, ignoring the tell-tale signs of theological drift, uniting instead over what we are most famous for: doing good. The issues of our beliefs, doctrines, and Scriptural interpretations must be dealt with. Dr. Stephen Blakemore, philosophical theologian, warns, “failure to deal with the Church’s *nature* and focus on the Church’s *mission* can lead to a kind of cultural “Babylonian captivity.” Focus on the “how” questions without serious consideration of the identity of the Church can lead to a preoccupation with what the situation of the world is “demanding” of the Church.”<sup>19</sup>

It is not that Jesus has called us away from fulfilling his mission on this earth. It is simply that we must not allow our *doing* to precede our *being*. It is not either-or, but both-and. What we think, believe, and know to be true about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is vital. It can never be an after-thought. What we think informs what we believe. What we believe informs our ability to rightfully engage in mission. With the confession of Christ on our lips, it is *how* mission bears out through our apostolic witness to the world that matters.

The Gospel of Jesus, upon which our entire movement came to be, is totalizing, touching every corner and crevice of our thinking and doing, finding no closet door closed or attic space un-swept.<sup>20</sup> It is not a gospel of convenience, rather one quite inconvenient and unconventional given the narrows Jesus calls us to live within and the widening path the world says it prefers.

Brian Zahnd, author and expert in the age of deconstruction writes: “[...] We all have a theological house – some of it we inherit and some of it we construct ourselves. Our theological house is not Jesus, but the space that Jesus inhabits in our thought

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10b NIV

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Blakemore, *Holy Love*, 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Blakemore, Stephen. “The Story of God’s Self-Revelation: Divine Action, Historical Narrative, Human Response, Explanatory Power. Ideological Threats to the Church at Wesley Biblical Seminary, January 24, 2022.

and speech. Our theological house can be helpful and enhancing, worthy of our King, or it can be inadequate, possibly injurious, and unworthy of our King.”<sup>21</sup>

What will those whose human needs we are positioned to meet come to know about Jesus? Will we adopt a message loosely based on the Bible for the sake of making it more palatable? Or will we pick apart Scripture to better suit the moment, allowing secular culture to dictate what is needed?

Needham writes of the challenge of keeping the Salvationist movement truly alive, calling our attention to the “either or” prioritization issues of our institution: evangelism *or* discipleship, social outreach *or* spiritual witness,<sup>22</sup> as though our work in these unique spheres is not of one garment – each thread tightly woven together in both faith and practice. It is here our orthodoxy must intersect with our orthopraxy.

### **Orthopraxy: Love God, Love Others**

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself...’”<sup>23</sup>

In other words: “*Love God, love others.*” Poignant at best, this seems somewhat an ill-defined, oversimplification of mission. What is it to truly know and practice *love* as it was designed, embodied, and intended by God Himself?

Let us begin here: *God is love.*<sup>24</sup> His essence is Father, Spirit, and Son, each person deferring to the other. He was before the foundations of the earth. And He will always be. Jesus, the very image of the invisible God,<sup>25</sup> whose life was poured out in an act of decisive revelation displays to humankind a Creator who “truly is love, [whose] divine power is not a ruling fist, but an open bleeding hand.”<sup>26</sup>

John writes, “Beloved let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows (γινώσκω/ ginōskō) God.”<sup>27</sup> The call to action emanates from our first being loved. It is not that God *gave us love*, but Himself *is love*, and has given us Himself. Then in verse 11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.” *Love is perfected in us.*

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Zahnd, *When Everything's on Fire*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> Phil Needham, *Christ at the Door*, 112-113.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 22:37-40 NIV.

<sup>24</sup> 1 John 4:8 NIV.

<sup>25</sup> Colossians 1:15 NIV.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God*, 60.

<sup>27</sup> 1 John 4:7 (NIV) *know*: γινώσκω/ginōskō: to know through personal experience, used to convey “knowing” as though through sexual intimacy.

We love because we know capital “L” Love, not love as the world defines, describes, or demands it. Jesus commands we first love God entirely – with heart, soul, and mind – nothing withheld. Second, He commands we love our neighbor. Let love be actualized through our *doing*: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, serve the needy, sit with the lonely, welcome the estranged. But what more? Blakemore contends, “Calling people to repent is an act of love as much as meeting needs. The last is easier, but fallen culture confuses and corrupts us, and confronting people’s lifestyles and worldviews regarding gender, race, sexuality, greed, rage, and meaning, is to offer holy love’s healing, recreating gift.”<sup>28</sup>

If love is perfected in us, does it not point right back to Jesus who is Holy Love, Himself? Identity-obsessed Western culture says love affirms and agrees. In Jesus’ economy and in His Kingdom, it’s different: love doesn’t give itself over to the whims of culture for the sake of agreement, it stands for truth and leads with grace. Author and speaker John Mark Comer writes this about Jesus: “You do see [Him] say hard things on a regular basis – uncomfortable things, unpopular things, the kind of things that eventually got him killed. But most of the time, his tone was tender and wise. [...] Jesus disagreed with people constantly, *in love*.”<sup>29</sup>

Acceptance and affirmation are headlining this cultural moment. Human nature has become something individuals or societies have taken to invent for themselves.<sup>30</sup> The Creation Story in Genesis highlights humanity as the crown of God’s creation, the culminating result of His Divine work, saving the very best for last. Creating us male and female, designed in His perfect image, but otherwise *incomplete*, Holy Love breathes His being into our bones.<sup>31</sup> Yet, contradicting this Biblical narrative is the notion that “the world exists as raw material to be manipulated by our own power to its own purposes, requiring humanity to bear the burden of discovering meaning and purpose entirely on its own, according to its own terms”<sup>32</sup> We were created; we are not being created, or recreated for that matter. It is inarguable: if we did not make ourselves, we cannot define ourselves.<sup>33</sup> Yet, with “love” so tightly bound to affirmation and acceptance (no questions asked), we have condemned our brothers and sisters, our *neighbors*, to some sort of “hell on earth” where Jesus has no right to access the whole of who they are. This wrong ideology will only ever result in the resurrected Jesus being anything but King. We must come back to a fuller understand of what it means that *God is love*.

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen Blakemore, *Holy Love*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:27, 2:7 NIV *breath of life*: נְשֵׁמָה/neshemah: refers to “Word”, different than “ruach” which refers more to the Spirit of God.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 39, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Blakemore, Stephen. “Systematic Theology: Eschatological Perspective in All Our Soteriology.” Ideological Threats to the Church at Wesley Biblical Seminary, January 2, 2022.

## Conclusion: Strengthen What Remains

Where we do not agree, what might result? Dr. Andy Miller, Professor of Historical Theology, suggests, “We are essentially a part of two different Armies.”<sup>34</sup> We must first acknowledge that “functionally and theologically,” separation has already occurred within our movement.<sup>35</sup> Though inherently united in Christ, The Salvation Army suffers from fundamental disagreement over what is truth and what is true reality. Competing Scriptural interpretations span the spectrum of faith in Jesus, resulting in the real challenge to reconcile differences. James warns, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”<sup>36</sup> We now face a crisis of identity, our *One Army* suffering the ill-effects of not knowing what it believes, though it remains unchanged within our doctrine. As Commissioner Needham urges in his seminal work, *Christ at the Door*, we must decide who we are, warning of “the creeping intrusion and unconscious adoption of the values of the surrounding culture” which seeks to threaten the church and water down the ethics of Jesus.<sup>37</sup> On either side of the camp, Jesus did not give us his resurrection power that we might pervert it for our purposes.<sup>38</sup> We must do the hard work of prayerfully and graciously engaging in hard conversations with those we do not share everything in common.

As Salvationists, we must continue to affirm that Scripture in its totality is inspired by God and contains His saving revelation, [thus] its authority “overshadows all other authority.”<sup>39</sup> Nothing should persuade us otherwise: not personal opinion, not social pressure, not secular rhetoric, not theological drift. “[Scripture’s] authority supersedes all other claims, and its teaching authenticates all other spiritual truth.”<sup>40</sup> Subverting the authority of Scripture threatens to dismantle the grounds by which we can reliably know our Triune God, understand the essence of humanity, and interpret His best for our lives. If we cannot stand firmly on what the word of God says, we cannot stand at all. We must “strengthen what remains” for the sake of the church, for the sake of the lost, for the sake of The Salvation Army.<sup>41</sup>

There is work yet to be done. We each have a holy obligation to put our hand to the proverbial plough of reading and interpreting Scripture from a singular, Biblical worldview, faithfully imparting its meaning to those we witness to – *this* is love made manifest among God’s people. The authentic witness of The Salvation Army depends on its remaining anchored to True Reality which informs right thinking and

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<sup>34</sup> Andy Miller, *Conservative vs. Progressive Visions for The Salvation Army*, 1:05:55

<sup>35</sup> Andy Miller, *Conservative vs. Progressive Visions for The Salvation Army*, 1:08:08

<sup>36</sup> James 1:23-24 NIV

<sup>37</sup> Phil Needham, *Christ at the Door*, 104

<sup>38</sup> Romans 8:11 NIV

<sup>39</sup> *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 6

<sup>40</sup> *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 8

<sup>41</sup> Revelation 3:2 NIV

practice. Where we have unanswered questions and unresolved concerns, we must engage in the hard conversations and have faith to take Jesus at his word.

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## No Orthodoxy?

By Envoy Steve Bussey

I recently heard that a popular idea spreading around - particularly on Tik Tok of all places (and even in large parts of the church) - is that before the early church Council of Nicea in 325 AD that there was no such thing as "orthodoxy" (right belief) - but that the idea of shared, universal beliefs was the means by which the newly formed Christian and Roman Empire (under Constantine) limited and controlled the beliefs, values, and practices of a broad-tent Christianity that didn't care much for doctrine! The theory suggests that "heterodoxy" (i.e., a smorgasbord of beliefs) was more widely accepted during the first three centuries of Christianity and that the idea of "orthodoxy" was never a part of the early Church!

How does one respond to such an idea? By returning to the earliest sources to examine the evidence for ourselves. I must warn you, that this theory doesn't seem to jive with the writings of deeply respected early church leaders! But I get ahead of myself!

### Background - Irenaeus & Valentinus

One of those sources was written by Irenaeus (130-202 AD), who was the disciple of Polycarp (69 - 155 AD), who was the disciple of John the Apostle!

Irenaeus was born in Smyrna in Asia Minor (roughly 35 miles from Ephesus), where he was raised in a Christian family. In Revelation 2:8-11, we read Jesus' words, where he commends the Church of Smyrna for suffering harsh persecution for the faith - and yet they REMAINED TRUE to the gospel. These Christians were fed to lions, crucified, killed by wild dogs, set on fire, burned at the stake, and even boiled in oil! If you were a Christian who grew up in Smyrna, you were either insane - or you really (I mean, REALLY) believed the gospel!

Irenaeus' mentor, Polycarp, was the bishop of Smyrna in the midst of these persecutions - and most likely was present when the book of Revelation was being written (possibly by Polycarp's mentor, the Apostle John). In 155 AD, Polycarp was taken to Rome where it was demanded that he recant his faith. His response was that for, "Eighty-six years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King?" Polycarp was martyred for his faith by being burned alive in the Coliseum in Rome. Again, not something you would do for beliefs you casually adopted... These were beliefs he was not only willing to live for - but he would die for them!

[Side note: We need to think seriously about how much we ACTUALLY believe what we say we believe in. Do we really know what we believe? Are we willing to stand against the flow of culture for those beliefs? Did you just sign on the dotted line so you could be part of some group or wear a fancy badge or set of clothes? Are you willing to live for your beliefs? How about willing to suffer? How about willing to die? Okay, things got dark quickly. Let's continue!].

Iraeneus chose to follow in the footsteps of his parents and mentor, becoming the leader of the church in Lugdunum in Gaul (present-day Lyon, France) following the martyrdom of Pothinus. He was the second bishop to oversee this church.

During this time, Iraeneus was exposed to the expanding influence of the heresy known as "Gnosticism" - which was being championed by a theologian named Valentinus (100-180 AD), who began to teach in Alexandria and then expanded to Rome where he opened a major school of thought that had wide influence. Valentinus was a brilliant intellectual who had come under the influence of the Gnostic philosopher, Basilides. He also was a follower of Theudas, who had been a follower of Paul the Apostle, but then also shifted into a Gnostic form of Christianity.

Valentinus was convinced he was destined to become a bishop (senior leader) in the church because he was considered an able man in both genius and eloquence. He was highly ambitious, but when he was overlooked, became quite vengeful and committed to exterminating the truth! His influence spread far and wide and tickled the ears of many who bought into his highly syncretistic ideas!

For anyone who watched the Marvel movie, "The Eternals" - well, many of those ideas came from Valentinus as his fellow Gnostic philosophers! He believed that at the beginning of time, there were 30 Aeons (Eternals) [you can Google this, but there were 8 Ogdoad Aeons + 10 Decad Aeons + 12 Dedecad Aeons] - and that the Bible affirms these ideas (which it doesn't).

Iraeneus considered himself neither a genius nor eloquent - but he DEEPLY BELIEVED in the TRUTH of the gospel, and he wasn't afraid to STAND UP for these beliefs - even if this were to result in persecution. Growing up in Smyrna and witnessing Polycarp's ministry had prepared him that being a true disciple meant taking up a cross and following Jesus, not metaphorically - literally!

### **"Against Heresies"**

In a series of books entitled, "Against Heresies," Iraeneus begins to systematically unpack Valentinus' teachings to prove how they are founded on absolutely false assumptions. In his advice, we find a TON OF WISDOM for how we should discern error, correct it, and realign and defend the true gospel.

Here is some of Iraeneus' advice:

"These men falsify the oracles of God and prove themselves EVIL INTERPRETERS OF THE GOOD WORD OF REVELATION. They also OVERTHROW THE FAITH OF MANY, by DRAWING THEM AWAY, UNDER A PRETENCE OF SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE, from Him who rounded and adorned the universe; as if, forsooth, they had something MORE EXCELLENT AND SUBLIME TO REVEAL, THAN GOD who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein."

Do you ever hear people saying this? That they have found a "better way" to understand the gospel? When you hear this, we need to be on our guard!

Iraeneus continues:

"By means of specious [misleading in appearance] and plausible [that which seems like it makes sense] words, they CUNNINGLY ALLURE the simple-minded to INQUIRE INTO THEIR SYSTEM, but they nevertheless clumsily DESTROY THEM, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions respecting the Demiurge ['they' being Gnostics and Platonic philosophers believed had created the universe]; and these simple ones are UNABLE, even in such a matter, to DISTINGUISH FALSEHOOD FROM TRUTH."

This same process is extremely popular today. We call it "narrative displacement" - where ideas that "sound" like they are good and even Christian are actually rooted in ideas that are actually anti-Christian. These flourish particularly when discipleship is lacking and believers have not been trained in strong beliefs and are susceptible to counterfeit gospels. During these times, it "seems" like something is Christian because it uses similar words. This creates a vacuum where "novel interpretations" can be offered - which quickly lead many from truth to falsehood, often without the individual even realizing it!

Irenaeus warns:

"ERROR, indeed, IS NEVER SET FORTH IN ITS NAKED DEFORMITY, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced, MORE TRUE THAN THE TRUTH ITSELF."

This is what was happening with Valentinus - and is happening even in our own world today. Irenaeus says, "...they proceed when they find anything in the multitude of things contained in the Scriptures which they can adopt and accommodate to their baseless speculations."

So Irenaeus begins to outline the ideas of Gnosticism and tackles how they are inconsistent with the true Christian faith. Wait a second... I thought there wasn't an "orthodox" Christian faith until Constantine - when those Church Councils were formed to remove all the heterodoxy that made the early church so vibrant??? Let's see what the guy who knew the guy who knew John who knew Jesus has to say in the tenth chapter of his first book - a chapter entitled, "Unity of the Faith of the Church Throughout the Whole World"!

He begins by stating how the entire Christian world of his time (about a century and a half before that first Council) believed the same thing! Don't believe me - listen to Irenaeus:

"The Church, though dispersed through our whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received FROM THE APOSTLES and their disciples THIS FAITH:"

And here comes what we might call "sound doctrine" or "Orthodoxy":

"She believes in ONE GOD, the FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN, AND EARTH, AND THE SEA, and ALL THINGS THAT ARE IN THEM; and in ONE CHRIST JESUS, THE SON OF GOD, WHO BECAME INCARNATE FOR OUR SALVATION; and in the HOLY SPIRIT, who proclaimed through the prophets the

dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father "to gather all things in one," and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our LORD, and GOD, and SAVIOR, and KING, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess' to Him, and that He should execute JUST JUDGMENT towards all; that He may send 'spiritual wickedness,' and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into EVERLASTING FIRE; but may, in the exercise of His GRACE, confer immortality on the RIGHTEOUS, and HOLY, and those who have KEPT HIS COMMANDMENTS, and have PERSEVERED IN HIS LOVE, some from the beginning of the Christian course, and others from the date of their REPENTANCE, and may surround them with an everlasting joy."

Wow! That sounds pretty orthodox! It also is quite consistent with the Nicene Creed... and much of what is considered the orthodox beliefs of the church. These are qualities that have remained the same. That means they DON'T CHANGE.

Does the gospel need to be 'contextualized' or adapted to new cultures? Absolutely! And Irenaeus agrees. However, he distinguishes that while there might be unique expressions of different cultural contexts, there is a UNIVERSAL TRUTH that unites ALL BELIEVERS ACROSS SPACE AND TIME. This is a CRITICAL point. In other words: If you don't believe the main teachings, you cannot call yourself a Christian.

Irenaeus continues:

"As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, YET, AS IF OCCUPYING BUT ONE HOUSE, CAREFULLY PRESERVES IT. She also believes that these POINTS OF DOCTRINE JUST AS IF SHE HAD BUT ONE SOUL, and one and the SAME HEART, and she PROCLAIMS them and TEACHES them, and HANDS THEM DOWN, with PERFECT HARMONY, as if she possessed only ONE MOUTH.

For, although the LANGUAGES of the world are dissimilar, yet the IMPORT OF THE TRADITION IS ONE AND THE SAME. For the Churches which have been planted in GERMANY DO NOT BELIEVE OR HAND DOWN ANYTHING DIFFERENT, nor do those in SPAIN, nor those in GAUL, nor those in the EAST, nor those in EGYPT, nor those in LIBYA, nor those which have been established in the CENTRAL REGIONS of the world.

But AS THE SUN, the creature of God, is ONE AND THE SAME THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, so also the PREACHING OF THE TRUTH SHINETH EVERYWHERE and ENLIGHTENS ALL MEN THAT ARE WILLING TO COME TO A KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH."

So, while the gospel might be communicated in different cultures - we preach the SAME gospel that has been embraced and celebrated since Jesus commissioned

the early Church. This is why Catherine and William Booth emphasized the "pure gospel" - make sure we aren't preaching a false gospel - or false doctrine for that matter! Our aim is to root ourselves firmly in the Bible and the consensual Christian tradition. We must examine ourselves to make sure we haven't been swayed by a false message!

In her sermons on "Aggressive Christianity," Catherine Booth laid out her second indispensable condition is "a PURE GOSPEL."

She states, "I mean by that, God's own pure metal, the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ. There seems, now-a-days, in the Church and the world, as many different views of the Gospel as there are of secondary matters and of minor doctrines. One person has one notion of the Gospel, another has another until there has come to be a fearful distraction in the minds of many who are constantly listening to what is called the Gospel. May God the Holy Ghost help us this afternoon to look at it impartially and carefully."

May God certainly help us today as He did Irenaeus and as He did countless, faithful believers to hold tight to sound doctrine. Here are some final thoughts from Scripture to reflect on:

"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

"So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Ephesians 4:14).

"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 1:13).

"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following" (1 Timothy 4:6).

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

"But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1).

"Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20).

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

## **Bitter Waters**

By Captain Sam Nolan Jones

I've had a few hard months. Days I didn't feel like I could take a full breath. Many...if I'm honest. I've been sick to my stomach about hard decisions I've had to make as a leader - and cried. Frustrated about situations out of my control. Sad and disappointed by people. Many of these feelings puts me in fight mode - my natural protective mechanism I'm not normally aggressive. So I've also been fighting with myself to live surrendered - to live patience and grace - to live out trust in God - to guard my words. And all of this has left me pretty tired overall.

Tonight after a long day, I read over my scripture study for my sermon Sunday - Exodus 14; God is delivering His people out of slavery in Egypt. The people see great power shown. Exodus 15 begins with a song of praise. Then Moses leads the people away from The Red Sea for three days and can't find water and when they finally do find water - it's bitter. And obviously the people complain. So, Moses cries out to the Lord.

Scripture says that God told Moses to throw a tree into the waters and it made it sweet and it says there He made them a statute and regulation, and tested them.

Sounds ominous.

Exodus 15:26 - And He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and listen to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."

I'm so grateful for a God who comes alongside us in our grumbling, at the bitter waters where we have such a need for a drink but no good options - maybe seems like none - and He touches the waters to make them good, not just clear but sweet - and invites me into relationship (as He always does) into following Him and then proclaims to be the "Lord my Healer."

There's so much hurt in our world. Many open wounds. If you're sitting beside bitter waters - I pray that you would call out to God and that He would give you sweet water to drink in whatever way you need that and remind you that He is the Lord your healer.

He is a mighty God who cares for us. He isn't laughing at us beside the bitter waters or scolding us for needing a drink or for complaining we've got no good thing to drink.

He's ready to meet our need, to call us to follow, to remind us that He is the Lord our healer and we don't have to fear His might nor struggle without Him.

Heal us great Healer - use the bitter travel stop in our own lives for deeper trust in You and deeper work of healing and growth in us. Amen.

## Generous Eyes And New Wine: Perspective From Luke 4-6

By Major Terence Hale

I have a friend who in his very early 40's lost his eyesight and became fully blind. Since that accident his life has become about learning to live within new parameters and beginning to interpret and interact with the world in whole new ways. I have only connected with him since he has been blind, so I don't really know what life was like for him before his accident, but I am always impressed when we meet up and he tells me how life continues to evolve for him and what new opportunities and challenges have presented themselves as he continues to learn to live as vision impaired person. That being said, in every conversation, without fail we land on a topic that causes him to reflect on what it was like when he was fully sighted and in some way lament losing his vision. Every time we chat or go for a coffee, I am reminded that sight is a great gift that shouldn't be taken for granted.

That is part of the reason that I find Jesus' words in Matthew 6:22-23 so intriguing. Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" The idea of healthy and unhealthy eyes, which in the Greek translate as generous and stingy eyes has been, pardon the pun, eye opening for me. Doesn't that idea make you want to go full on after eyes that see your reality in a generous way, filling your life with the light of possibility and promise. The stingy alternative just doesn't seem appealing.

I want us to take the Generous vs. Stingy paradigm and apply it as a filter on Luke 5-6. Taking time to consider this passage there is conveniently a theme of seeing and not seeing. We have groups of people, some seeing the glory of God amongst them (generous) and others not seeing, and outright missing it (stingy).

### Generous

First up we have Peter who features heavily in this passage. As we meet Peter, we get a sense that he has fledgling generous eyesight, he is growing into it. We read that Peter has been around Jesus, had Him as a guest in his home, saw Him do amazing things, and even heal his Mother-in-Law (Luke 4:39). But it wasn't until he 'saw' the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:8) that he also sees the holiness of Jesus. What if this is showing us how the eyes of our hearts are fused to the priorities of our hearts? (I don't know what that says about Peter's relationship with his Mother-in-Law, but we won't go down that rabbit hole.) Our priorities, passions, concerns, and fears, serve like blinders to our soul, making our eyes stingy, and can cause us to miss the glory, grace, holiness, and love of God moving around us.

Despite this negative possibility there is a seed of good in that reality. First, if it is true that misplaced priorities and passion act as blinders to the movement of God around us, the opposite can also be true. When our priorities are right aligned, when we embrace generous eyes, we can then see God's glory when no one else can, or when negative circumstances are ranging around us.

Secondly, there is hope. As with Peter, Jesus in His love and grace keeps working to get our attention even when we are not paying attention to Him at all. Peter went from simply seeing the miracle in Luke 4 to seeing Jesus through the miracle in Luke 5. In our lives and ministry, what do we want to see more the miracle or the miracle maker? We see in the miraculous catch of fish that seeing Jesus in the miracle melts away our misplaced priorities. As a fisherman Peter undoubtedly had been concerned about the catch of fish and the income it would bring, but after he 'saw' Jesus, and received a new priority from Jesus, to become a fisher of men, he simply walked away from the catch. This is the gift of generous eyes. As we will see shortly stingy and weak eyes require us to squint and focus on the small details causing us to miss the beauty of the broad strokes God is painting in our lives.

With all of this in mind we see some other vision issues. Luke 5:29 tells us that after Jesus had healed the paralytic who was lowered through the roof by his friends, and more importantly forgiven him of his sins, "Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today.""

If we hold to the principle that our eyes are fused to our hearts, what does this say about the priorities of these people? What were they looking and longing for? They were clearly people with generous eyes, looking expectantly for a move of God. Generous eyes are marked with expectancy. Are our lives and ministry marked with the same? Perhaps the question for us is "What have we seen?" Let's do a quick inventory check. Think back over the past week, seven days should do it. Can you say with the people from Luke 5, "I have seen remarkable things?" If not, why not, is it because God is not doing remarkable things, of course not! He is the Living God, creator, and sustainer of all things, He only does remarkable things. So, what might be the issue? Are we even paying attention? Generous eyes will see the remarkable where others miss it. In our lives and ministry, in our leadership and worship, in our corps and denomination we need the vantage point of expectancy that generous eyes bring.

## **Stingy**

These are important questions because there is a hard lesson to learn from the example of the Pharisees and religious leaders. The bottom line is that we can see that they in fact cannot see. They had stingy eyes. They questioned the forgiveness and healing of a man on two occasions (Luke 5:21 and 6:7), they complain about Jesus' dinner companions (Luke 5:29-32), and they challenge Jesus' religious practices (Luke 5:33 and 6:2). Jesus' challenge to them was correct, "If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness." (Matthew 6:23) Even when the Pharisees decide to concentrate and look closely it is only for the point of finding fault (Luke 6:7). What does this say about their motivations and priorities? Would we have been much different? We should remember the saying, "Good is the enemy of best." Stingy eyes are concerned with maintaining the status quo. Weak eyes are comfortable with good but weak faith.

These examples of generous and stingy eyes are summed up in Jesus' illustration of new and old wine skins at the end of Luke chapter 5. The Pharisees have been narrowing their stingy eyes as the narrative progresses through the chapter and move from life altering, Kingdom level stuff, like the forgiveness of sins (5:17-26), to

medium size concerns like relationships and dinner companions (5:27-32), to finite and relative inconsequential concerns of religious ritual (5:33). It is as if their spiritual eyesight is deteriorating the harder they strain to focus on the wrong things. Their eyesight is so bad, and they must lean in so close to have any sense of visual clarity, that they are unable to see the bigger picture of God's salvific activity. This is a good reminder for us, it is a sure sign that our eyes are growing stingy and dark if our concern is drifting from big Kingdom matters to small religious ones.

It is at this point, when the Pharisees appear to have completely lost the plot, that Jesus offers the parable of the wineskins (5:34-39) to try and help them, and by extension us, reset our vision parameters. Jesus reminds us that new wine needs to wine skins, a flexible and adaptable container for a dynamic and growing reality. If we try and put the new wine, the new Kingdom reality Jesus is ushering in, into the old wineskin parameters or paradigms of yesterday's blessings and frozen assessments and understandings of how God operates, it simply won't work. The blessings of God will spill out of our broken religious container, and we will be left wondering why we come up empty and still thirsty each time we go for a drink.

### **Call To Decision**

This part of the parable we likely know very well but it is the last line from Jesus that has always stood out for me and gives a final warning about stingy and weak eyes. Jesus says in verse 39, "And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" What Jesus is warning about here is that given the free choice we will default into choosing the old wine. We are effectively addicted to the old wine. I will openly confess that I know nothing from personal experience about wine of any sort. (Except for that one time I think I accidentally drank real wine at an Anglican communion service, but that is a whole other story.) But common wisdom says that the older and more aged the wine the better the taste and quality, this is what Jesus is appealing to at this point. Just like people would choose old wine over the new, so if left to our own devices and submitting to a mindset informed by stingy eyesight, we will choose the comfort of the old and familiar over the new and unknown. As much as we like idea of fragrant new wine bursting out and changing the spiritual landscape in our lives, families, communities, and corps we must embrace the point of view of generous eyes or we will return to the old, sometimes without even noticing, spilling all the potential of the new wine on the ground.

Old or New; Generous or Stingy? An honest answer is needed. So, one last point, generous eyes are not truly comfortable because they are eyes wide open shedding light every facet of our lives, requiring of us a brutal honesty that is inescapable but at the same time brings dynamic Kingdom living. Bottom line is that we can't cheat on this one, the Holy Spirit is already nudging us in the direction we need to move. Let's lean into it with EYES WIDE OPEN!

### **Consider this prayer today...**

Again, Jesus, I ask for the generous eyes you talked about. I am tired of the stifled short sightedness of stingy eyes that seek to only serve my preference and maintain my comforts. Help me to see and perceive the Father's Kingdom around me, with a depth only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. Jesus, I want new

wine skins for the new wine of Holy vision, the fruit that comes from seeking to see from your perspective. Give me grace to not be content, or to be enticed back to the comfort of the old wine, but instead to step expectantly into the thrilling discomfort of fully embracing the new. Eyes wide open Jesus, eyes wide open! Amen!

## Ezekiel 37 And The Restoration Of Hope

By Major Charles Roberts

### Introduction:

The book of Ezekiel is a prophetic book filled with visions, symbols, and messages from God. In Ezekiel 37, we encounter one of the most famous visions, where God reveals to Ezekiel a scene of dry bones coming to life. This vision serves as a powerful metaphor for God's ability to restore hope and life to seemingly hopeless situations. To fully understand the significance of this passage, we'll delve into the historical background of Ezekiel's ministry, explore the symbolism of the vision, and examine supporting Scriptures that highlight the theme of restoration and hope.

### Historical Background:

Ezekiel was a prophet and priest who lived during a tumultuous period in Israel's history. He was among the first group of exiles taken to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem in 597 BC. The people of Israel were in a state of despair, feeling abandoned by God due to their disobedience and the destruction of the temple. It's in this context that God called Ezekiel to prophesy to the exiles, delivering messages of both judgment and hope. As with all the prophets, the actual lived experience of the prophet is in fact prophetic.

### The Vision of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14):

In this vision, God transports Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones, representing the lifelessness and hopelessness of the Israelites in exile. Let's break down the elements of the vision:

- **The Valley of Dry Bones:** The bones are a symbol of the exiled Israelites who have lost hope and feel spiritually dead.
- **God's Question to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:3):** God asks Ezekiel if these bones can live, emphasizing the seemingly impossible nature of the situation. This question challenges Ezekiel's faith and underscores the sovereignty and power of God.
- **Ezekiel's Prophetic Action (Ezekiel 37:4-6):** God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, declaring God's promise of restoration and life. As Ezekiel obeys, the bones begin to come together, tendons and flesh cover them, and breath enters them.
- **The Explanation of the Vision (Ezekiel 37:11-14):** God interprets the vision, explaining that the bones represent the exiled Israelites who feel spiritually and nationally dead. God promises to open their graves, bring them back to the land of Israel, and restore them spiritually. This restoration symbolizes the revival of hope and a renewed relationship with God.

### Supporting Scriptures:

Psalm 126:4-6: "Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them." This passage

parallels Ezekiel's message of restoration and shows that God can turn mourning into joy.

Isaiah 43:18-19: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" These verses remind us that God's power to bring about newness and restoration is not limited by our past failures or circumstances.

Romans 8:11: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." This New Testament passage echoes the theme of resurrection and restoration found in Ezekiel's vision.

What is the symbolic application of the phrase in Ezekiel 37 - "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished."

The phrase "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished" from Ezekiel 37:11 carries significant symbolic meaning within the context of the chapter and in relation to our own lives. The life is carried in the blood, and blood is made in the bones. Therefore, the very idea of bones is symbolic of the total function of the person. This phrase captures the deep sense of despair, hopelessness, and spiritual desolation experienced by the exiled Israelites. Symbolically, it reflects the human condition when we feel cut off from God, when our circumstances seem impossible, and when we have lost all hope.

Let's explore the symbolic application of this phrase:

- **Spiritual Deadness:** The phrase "our bones are dried up" reflects spiritual deadness and separation from God. Just as dry bones lack life and vitality, we can find ourselves spiritually dry and disconnected from God when we allow sin, disobedience, or life's challenges to distance us from Him.
- **Loss of Hope:** "Our hope has perished" speaks to the loss of hope in the face of overwhelming circumstances. When we encounter trials, suffering, or disappointments, it's easy to feel as though our hope has vanished. This loss of hope can lead to despair and a sense of being trapped in a cycle of hopelessness.
- **Brokenness and Desperation:** The imagery of dry bones evokes a sense of brokenness and desperation. It symbolizes our broken state when we are unable to fix or restore our own lives. In times of brokenness, we may feel helpless and unable to mend the situation ourselves.
- **Human Inability and God's Sovereignty:** The phrase highlights the contrast between human frailty and God's sovereignty. In our own strength, we are powerless to bring about restoration and hope. However, the vision of the dry bones coming to life emphasizes that God's power can transform even the most lifeless and hopeless situations.

- **Cry for Divine Intervention:** This phrase serves as a cry for divine intervention. When we recognize our own spiritual dryness and the loss of hope, we are positioned to seek God's help and guidance. It's a call for God to step in and breathe life into our circumstances, just as He did with the dry bones.
- **Hope in Restoration:** While the phrase initially conveys hopelessness, it also points us toward the possibility of restoration. The very act of acknowledging our spiritual dryness and lost hope can lead us to seek God's restoration and renewal in our lives.

Don't these factors in this list remind you of COVID?

In our lives today, we can relate to the symbolic application of this phrase when we face challenges, setbacks, and moments of spiritual desolation. Just as God's promise in Ezekiel 37 was to bring life to the dry bones, we are reminded that God can bring renewal, hope, and restoration to our brokenness and despair. This phrase encourages us to turn to God in our moments of hopelessness, trusting in His power to bring about transformation and renewal in our lives. It also serves as a reminder that our hope is ultimately anchored in God's faithfulness and redemptive work, *vis a vis*, Christ at Calvary.

But when the foundations are crumbling, what do the righteous do? Here's an idea for you:

"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality" by Peter Scazzero provides a framework for developing a mature and healthy spirituality that encompasses emotional well-being and deep connection with God. Let's relate the principles from this book to the themes found in Ezekiel 37:

#### 1. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality and Contemplative Spirituality:

Ezekiel 37 illustrates the journey from spiritual dryness to restoration. The valley of dry bones represents emotional and spiritual deadness. Just as Scazzero emphasizes the importance of connecting with our emotions and practicing contemplative spirituality, the vision in Ezekiel encourages us to engage with our emotional and spiritual state honestly before God. The process of prophesying over the dry bones can be seen as a contemplative practice of acknowledging our brokenness and seeking God's restoration.

#### 2. Incarnational Spirituality:

Ezekiel's prophetic actions in the vision demonstrate a form of incarnational spirituality. He physically engaged with the dry bones, representing God's involvement in our brokenness. This resonates with Scazzero's call to embody our spirituality and engage with life fully, rather than compartmentalizing our faith and emotions.

#### 3. Practicing Sabbath Delight:

The message of restoration in Ezekiel 37 echoes the idea of finding delight in God's restoration. The restoration of hope and life is a cause for celebration, much like the concept of practicing Sabbath delight in the midst of life's challenges, as advocated by Scazzero.

#### 4. Honoring the Body: - The Body is not a minor prophet

The vision of the dry bones can symbolize the emotional and spiritual toll that neglecting our emotional health can take on our bodies. Scazzero's principle of honoring the body reminds us that our spiritual and emotional well-being are interconnected, and addressing one impacts the other.

#### 5. Process of Emotionally Healthy Spirituality:

Ezekiel's journey from a valley of dry bones to a restored and living community aligns with the process of emotional health that Scazzero outlines. The vision illustrates that genuine emotional and spiritual transformation involves acknowledging brokenness, embracing God's work of restoration, and moving toward wholeness.

#### 6. Perfection vs. Emotional Health:

The phrase "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished" reflects a sense of despair resulting from trying to maintain a facade of perfection. Scazzero's axiom of letting go of false ideals and embracing emotional health is mirrored in the vision, where God restores hope by addressing the reality of the situation rather than pretending everything is fine.

#### 7. Enlarge Your Soul Through Grief and Loss:

The emotional depth of the phrase "Our bones are dried up" captures the weight of grief and loss. The vision of restoration reminds us that God is present even in times of loss, and healing and enlargement of the soul can emerge from addressing and processing grief.

#### 8. Discover the Rhythms of the Daily Office and Sabbath:

Ezekiel's prophetic engagement with the dry bones and his obedience in speaking life align with the idea of engaging in daily spiritual practices. Just as the dry bones came to life through prophetic declaration, our spirituality can be nurtured through consistent rhythms of spiritual practices.

#### 9. Grow into an Emotionally Mature Adult:

The entire process in Ezekiel 37—from acknowledging spiritual dryness to experiencing restoration—reflects the journey toward emotional maturity and spiritual growth. Scazzero's principle of becoming an emotionally mature adult is embodied in the transformation seen in the vision.

#### 10. Develop a Rule of Life:

The vision of restoration in Ezekiel 37 can be seen as a foundational aspect of developing a "rule of life." It emphasizes the importance of aligning our lives with God's transformative work, integrating our emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions into a holistic rule of life.

In summary, the themes in Ezekiel 37 resonate with the principles of emotionally healthy spirituality outlined by Peter Scazzero. The journey from dry bones to restored life reflects the process of embracing emotional well-being, cultivating a mature spirituality, and integrating our faith with all aspects of our lives.

Peter Scazzero's quote, "Jesus may be in your heart, but Grandpa is in your bones," highlights the idea that our family history, experiences, and generational patterns can deeply influence our behavior and emotions. This quote can be connected to Ezekiel 37 in a way that emphasizes the transformation and renewal that God brings to our deepest places, even those influenced by our family and past.

#### 1. Generational Influence:

Ezekiel 37:1-14 portrays a vision of dry bones coming to life. These bones represent not only the spiritual and emotional state of the people of Israel but also the generational history and legacy they carried. The Israelites' spiritual dryness and hopelessness were influenced by their past actions and the consequences of their ancestors' choices. Similarly, Scazzero's quote acknowledges that our family history and generational influences can shape our emotional responses and attitudes.

#### 2. Transformation and Restoration:

The vision of the dry bones being brought back to life parallels the concept of transformation and restoration in Scazzero's quote. Just as God restored hope to the Israelites through the renewal of their bones, He can also transform our ingrained patterns, behaviors, and emotions that have been influenced by generational baggage. This restoration goes beyond surface-level change; it reaches deep into the core of who we are, even down to our "bones."

#### 3. God's Redemptive Work:

Ezekiel's prophetic actions in the vision emphasize God's ability to address the deep-rooted issues of the people. Similarly, Scazzero's quote reminds us that even though we have Jesus in our hearts, we may still carry unresolved emotional and generational wounds. However, God's transformative work, depicted in Ezekiel 37, shows that He can penetrate those deeply ingrained areas and bring healing, restoration, and renewal.

#### 4. Integrating Faith and Emotional Health:

Both Ezekiel 37 and Scazzero's quote emphasize the integration of faith and emotional health. The vision illustrates that our emotional and spiritual states are interconnected, and God's transformative work involves restoring both. Scazzero's quote encourages us to recognize that our emotional health has roots in our family history, and addressing these roots can lead to greater emotional and spiritual well-being.

#### 5. Moving from Despair to Hope:

The phrase "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished" from Ezekiel 37 reflects the depth of despair experienced by the Israelites. Similarly, Scazzero's quote acknowledges that our generational baggage and emotional wounds can lead to patterns of despair. However, the vision's message of restoration and Scazzero's emphasis on emotional health both point toward the possibility of moving from despair to hope through God's redemptive work.

In conclusion, connecting Ezekiel 37 to Peter Scazzero's quote "Jesus may be in your heart, but Grandpa is in your bones" underscores the transformative and renewing power of God. Both the vision of the dry bones and the quote emphasize that God's work of restoration goes deep into our generational patterns, emotions,

and behaviors. Through His redemptive work, God can bring healing, renewal, and transformation to even the most deeply ingrained aspects of our lives, allowing us to move from a state of spiritual and emotional dryness to a place of hope, healing, and wholeness (aka, Holiness)

**Conclusion:**

Ezekiel 37 is a powerful reminder that God is able to bring life and hope to even the most hopeless situations. Just as God breathed life into the dry bones, He can breathe new life into our brokenness, despair, and spiritual deadness. The vision teaches us to trust in God's power to restore, renew, and bring about transformation in our lives. As we meditate upon this passage, may we find comfort in the promise of God's restoration and allow it to inspire us to cling to hope, even in the midst of challenging circumstances.

## Exegetical Study Of Philippians 3:17-21

*or Making Heaven on Earth is our Business*

*or Context is Always King.*

By Captain Erik Johansson

*This is a slightly edited version of a sermon on Philippians 3:17-21, first time given for Ystad Corps, Sweden, September 2020.*

If you want to explain something rather complicated to someone, and make sure the other person understands it, the best way is often to use parables and examples from the society the person lives in. It is true today, and it was true 2000 years ago, when Paul wrote his letters in the New Testament. Paul, the ever so brilliant writer and globetrotter, was a master at using symbols and metaphors from the society he or his readers lived in to make sure his readers understood his message. A great method that any PR guru of today would endorse. There is only one problem: how do you make sure you understand what Paul is saying when you read the text 2000 years later, in a completely different cultural and historical context? Well, you study the context it was first in! Let us therefore look into Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi and see what we can understand when we read things in its historical and societal context. Let's start with learning about the town!



As you can see in the picture above, Philippi is a city in northern Greece, quite close to today's Bulgaria. But even though the town was located in Greece, it was, most importantly, a Roman colony. The town had been founded around 44 BC. by Roman soldiers who had stayed there after fighting a war against Greece and twenty years later another wave of retired Roman soldiers had moved in.

This fact, that it was a Roman colony populated by Roman soldiers and their descendants, is the key to understanding this whole passage, so let's take a moment and learn what a colony is. Merriam Webster's dictionary defines it as *"an area over which a foreign nation or state extends or maintains control"* and *"a group of people*

*who establish residence in that area and who retain ties with the parent state*<sup>42</sup>. In other words: it's a part of one country, outside its own country's borders. The people living in the colony, the colonizer, have one task above everything else: to make the new place become like the homeland. If you have ever visited a country that has been a colony you would recognize this. For example Australia. It was founded as a British colony - tens of thousands of kilometers away from England. But if you've ever been there, you would've noticed that a lot of things are still very much like in Britain: they speak English, they drive on the left side of the road, the old houses look suspiciously much like British houses and in pictures from the colonial days you would see people wearing the same clothing as in cold and rainy England, even though they lived in a tropical climate - and on their coins they still have the British king or queen. Simply put: Australia was created to be a mini England on the other side of the world. And that was true for Philippi also; it was created to be a mini Rome far away from Rome. Or as we call it with one word: a colony.

So try to remember this when we look at the Bible passage:

*17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

*18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

*19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

*20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

*(Philippians 3:17-21 NIV)*

The text is at the end of chapter three, in a book with only four chapters all together. It is written by Paul to the Church in Philippi and he starts by saying that he understands that it is difficult for them because they have enemies that don't like them. Exactly who the enemies were, we can mostly speculate about, but the main message is clear: There are people there who don't like the Church in Philippi. Paul wants to encourage them and he does so by writing that *"...our citizenship is in heaven."*<sup>43</sup>

Now, remember that he is writing to descendants of Roman colonizers. People who, if someone had asked them about their citizenship, proudly would have stated *"we are Romans!"*. That is, they saw themselves as people originating from the capital of the center of the then known world and home of the mightiest person on earth - the Roman Emperor. That they happened to live in a geographical area that was called Greece was irrelevant; they were proud Romans!

And for the Church, the Christians in Philippi, what kind of citizenship did they have? A heavenly one, but of course! Because heaven is where God lives, and as Christians their King was Jesus - not the Roman emperor. In other words, what Paul

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colony> - Read 21st of September 2023

<sup>43</sup> Some translations use "homeland" or equivalent instead of citizenship. However, the greek word used by Paul is "πολίτευμα" (politeuma) - a word that most NT scholars agree is a word with political connotations and more similar to citizenship.

is doing is that he is using the Roman empire colonial language that they all understood so well, to explain that they - the Christians in Philippi - are now a new kind of colonizers; not colonizers of Rome, but colonizers of Heaven! And as people living in an imperial colony they understood very well what Paul was telling them: their job is to make Philippi to be like their homeland that is no longer Rome, but Heaven. Or as General Willam Booth expressed it some 1800 years later: *"Making heaven on earth is our business!"*<sup>44</sup>

Then comes the next part:

*"...and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,"*

Again, we need to remember that he is writing to people in a colony. A person living in a Roman colony knew that if his homeland, where he has his citizenship, is Rome, then that is from where the rescue - the emperor himself - will come from if it gets really difficult. But let's not be confused here: a colonizer's job is to make the colony become like the homeland. So, yes, their ultimate hope was in the emperor. But, not that he would come and bring them to Rome - most of the Philippians had never even been to Rome and had no reason to want to go there - but that the Emperor would come and bring Rome in all its fullness to the colony! Therefore, when they read these words from Paul, they understand very well what he was telling them: that one day the King - Jesus Christ - will come from heaven - the homeland - and save them. Not by taking them away from Phillipi, but by making Phillipi like heaven in all its fullness.

And finally, what will this rescue look like?

*"...by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."*

It seems like Paul is saying that it will be like when Jesus rose from the dead: First, we will be resurrected with new perfect bodies - just like it happened for Jesus. And, secondly, that Jesus will take everything under control - instead of being just a small colony of heaven, heaven will be here completely.

Someone who has read this far might say to themselves: *"That's a nice history lesson - but what does that mean for me?"*. Well, I am glad you asked. Because if we understand these verses correctly, it has a dramatic effect on our lives.

First: If we understand that we are not citizens of this world, but citizens of heaven, then we understand that our lives are not to be lived by this world's standards, but by the standards of heaven. Just like the Philippians didn't live by the standards of Greece, but by Rome, we can't live our lives primarily according to whatever our earthly passports say, but according to our heavenly homeland.

Second: If we have colonizers of heaven on earth - that means we have to try to build heaven here where we live. Remember, a colonizer's dream is not to leave the colony for the homeland, but to take the homeland to the colony. Therefore it's our

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSth5dpE6L4> - Watched 21st of September 2023

job as Christians to make this world as much like heaven we possibly can. In heaven there is no poverty or injustice - therefore we need to make sure we fight poverty and injustice on earth. In heaven everyone worships Jesus - therefore we need to make everyone around us a follower of Jesus. And so on, and so on.

And finally, even if the work is hard and we are facing difficulty and even persecution, we can have comfort in the fact that one day - at the end of time - Jesus will come back and bring heaven down to earth in all its fullness. And for the perfect world, we will be given new perfect bodies and there will be no more death, war, pollution, sickness, poverty or injustice. That day, our colony of heaven on earth, will no longer be a colony, but heaven - the homeland - will cover the whole earth.

If you are not already a citizen of heaven - today is your day. You can apply for citizenship today by repenting from your sins and starting to follow Jesus.

Amen.

## Salvationist Quadrilateral

By Major Stephen Court

We're a tough bunch to categorise. We've got these solid biblical doctrines that justifiably direct people to paint us a 'conservative'. We've got this record of 'next of kin' to the homeless that understandably lead people to describe us as socially liberal.

Salvationists hope to be, inspired by Ephesians 4;

evangelistically aggressive,  
missionally optimistic,  
socially prophetic, and  
Biblically strategic.

EA – defined in one encyclopedia as 'ultra-revivalist', we go for repentance and faith in immediate response to divine revelation.

MO – we're aiming to win the world for Jesus and we believe that God is good (what He commands He enables).

SP – our social action bolsters our evangelising, representing Jesus to the world by seeing what He's doing and doing what we're seeing.

BS – God's Word is living and active in our lives and warfare – not only do we believe all the Bible to be inspired by God but it informs and directs our warfighting.

... as a discussion starter, anyway.

The concept of the quadrilateral is ripped off of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral that is a method of theological reflection based on four things: Scripture, tradition, reason, and Christian experience (Wesley didn't make up the framework but is credited with the development of this specific reflective practice).

So, properly, and appropriately (in that we're salvos), the Salvationist Quadrilateral is not so much about theological reflection as spiritual action.

The other influencing factor in the creation of the Salvo Quadrilateral is the whole personality type industrial complex. We've had friends enamoured with several of these, including Clifton's Strength Finder, DISC, Enneagram, Myers' Briggs', among many more (and, of course, the related Christian version of this – spiritual gifts test that we prefer to more accurately call 'spiritual inclination' tests [not that there is anything wrong with that!]). One of these (maybe more) likes to tag the top two characteristics – each identified by two letters (as the Salvo Quad!) – so that someone would call themselves HCPS (HardCore Primitive Salvationist – though that is somewhat redundant, admittedly), for example (these are not real personality type test identifiers!).

So, while we shy away from being pigeon-holed AND being boxed in, we might admit that a combination of a couple of these 'spiritual actions' in the Salvo Quadrilateral might even more accurately identify salvos in the war...

So there are a number of possibilities:

EAMO  
EASP  
ESBS  
MOEA  
MOSP  
MOBS  
SPEA  
SPMO  
SPBS  
BSEA  
BSMO  
BSSP

(the reason there is EAMO and MOEA is that the first characteristic is meant to be the prominent on

In the personality tests, people answer a bunch of questions to help distill the right answers. We haven't created those (yet?). But, why not ask yourself, which of those combinations most accurately identifies you, today?

Are you...

evangelistically aggressive/missionally optimistic,  
evangelistically aggressive/socially prophetic,  
evangelistically aggressive/Biblically strategic,  
missionally optimistic/ evangelistically aggressive,  
missionally optimistic/socially prophetic,  
missionally optimistic/Biblically strategic,  
socially prophetic/evangelistically aggressive,  
socially prophetic/missionally optimistic,  
socially prophetic/Biblically strategic,  
Biblically strategic/evangelistically aggressive,  
Biblically strategic/missionally optimistic,  
Biblically strategic/socially prophetic.

The bigger question is what combination do you WANT to best describe you a year from now?

And, in light of that, what do you want to change in your life so that it happens?

On a group level, understanding people's inclinations and inspirations might help you optimize spiritual impact in the great salvation war?

Meanwhile, we're even more interested in Paul's type list in Ephesians 4 of apostles / prophets / evangelists / shepherds\teachers (or, disciplers):

11 So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)

(and, yes, Holy Spirit distributes as S/He desires – and that likely includes all four to any given person at any given moment – including all four present in your group of disciples, today)

The Quad formula for each General.

Here goes (discussion starter):

- 22- Buckingham MOBS
- 21- Peddle EABS
- 20- Cox: BSSP
- 19- Bond: EAMO
- 18- Clifton: BSEA
- 17- Larsson: MOBS
- 16- Gowans: SPEA
- 15- Rader: EAMO
- 14- Tillsley: MOBS
- 13- Burrows: MOEA
- 12- Wahlstrom: MOBS
- 11- Brown: BSSP
- 10- Wiseman: EAMO
- 9- Wickberg: MOBS
- 8- Coutts: SPBS
- 7- Kitching: MOEA
- 6- Orsborn: MOBS
- 5- Carpenter: SPBS
- 4- E Booth: EAMO
- 3- Higgins: EABS
- 2- B Booth: BSMO
- 1- W Booth: EAMO

You might wonder, since we lack questions (still) and because most of the people on that list have been promoted to Glory, how we got to these conclusions. These were conversation-starting stabs. For instance, Higgins never preached with an empty mercy seat so we gave him EA. Bramwell is credited with building the organisation and so he gets BS. William was the greatest evangelist up to his lifetime in history so he leads with EA, but also believed that we were going to win the world for Jesus in his lifetime, thus MO. Wiseman is known as the evangelist general so he leads with EA. Clifton paid great attention to architecture of The Army biblically (Handbook of Doctrine, SBSA, etc.) and invaded countries at an unmatched rated since the Founder, so BSEA. And so on...

Four generals led with BS.  
Ten followed with BS.

Seven led with EA.  
Four followed with EA.

Three led with SP.  
Two followed with SP.

Eight led with MO.  
Six followed with MO.

There were five EAMOs: William Booth, Evangeline Booth, Wiseman, Rader, Bond.

There were six MOBS: Orsborn, Wickberg, Wahlstrom, Tillsley, Larsson, Buckingham.

Two were SPBS: Carpenter and Coutts.

Two were EABS: Higgins and Peddle.

Seven had unique combinations.

The prominence of BS isn't surprising, given this (google) definition:

strategy (n.)

1810, "art of a general," from French *stratégie* (18c.) and directly from Greek *strategia* "office or command of a general," from *strategos* "general, commander of an army," also the title of various civil officials and magistrates, from *stratos* "multitude, army, expedition, encamped army," literally "that which is spread out" (from PIE root *\*stere-* "to spread") + *agos* "leader," from *agein* "to lead" (from PIE root *\*ag-* "to drive, draw out or forth, move"). In non-military use from 1887.

Now, I'm not interested in suggesting that one coordinate combination is better than another. But what is interesting is recognising the strengths of one set of coordinates and how to complement them in partnering and supporting roles. For example, if your CSM is BSMO, it might be helpful to have a CO who is SPEA. Or if you HLS is MOSP, it could really work well if her aHLS is BSEA. And so on... (this goes for TCs and cabinets, and generals and staffs).

How would you describe yourself?

What characteristics do you most value? Most aspire to in your own life?

What might you want to think about doing to nurture them?

What coordinates in a leader should we be looking for in the next General?

The answer to that question (aside from the revealed will of God) depends on your assessment of the last generation of The Salvation Army. If things are going great, then you'll want more of the same. The last seven scale out as follows: Buckingham:

MOBS, Peddle – EABS, Cox: BSSP, Bond: EAMO, Clifton: BSEA, Larsson: MOBS, Gowans: SPEA. There is such a big mix there (four different lead characteristics and five BSs, two SPs, four EAs, and three MOs) that the only thing you might suggest is a lead SP (since Gowans is the last such).

If you are less positive about the last decades you might want change – but the big mix makes it difficult.

There are so many factors to consider. For example, maybe you love EAMO because we had such effective generals so characterised. But you note that we've had a recent EAMO. In that case, though, you have to keep in mind that her term lasted only two years, probably too short to see the positive change that EAMO might predict. So, rather than an argument against another EAMO, it might actually be one in favour.

All interesting stuff to think about for generals, and for the rest of us, for corps councils and cell groups...

## **An Experiment For Those Living Without God Today**

By Major Stephen Court

To clarify, we're talking about people who don't have a real relationship with God in their life. So, everyone from full-on atheists to agnostics and all kinds (not 'every kind) of 'ists' including false religionists through to those who show up on an odd Sunday out of habit or obligation, and those who knew God back in Sunday School days like they had a friend in kindergarten who they haven't seen for decades...

So, for those types, here goes:

He's here.

We think you know it. There are few real atheists out there. The rest of us know that God exists. You know it deep down (or higher up). What you might not be convinced of is that He cares, and He has the power to intervene in your life. We're not aiming at convincing you of those things in this post but maybe we can suggest a little experiment?

(the experiment)

Why not ask God to demonstrate that He cares and has the power to intervene in your life?

You don't have to be that vague. You can and should be quite specific. Pull out something that is bothering you. Maybe it is an ailment or a glitch in a relationship or current life predicament. Put it out there in the context of God demonstrating that He cares and has the power to intervene in your life and see what happens.

God loves you. Not only does God exist, care, and have the power to intervene in your life, but He loves you.

In fact, He loves you, heaps He made you for relationship with Him...

... This is so critical that until you have a relationship with God you are missing out on your life's purpose. Does that mean your life is useless? Well, no, you can do a lot of good and meaningful things and have rich relationships and make a difference in this world. But you will have missed your calling.

You might have one of those fancy smart phones with all the bells and whistles. It even has a flashlight on it. It's like using the fancy phone exclusively as a flashlight. That works. The fancy phone could serve you as a flashlight for its whole life. But it has the capacity for so much more. And it is intended for so much more.

Can you imagine limiting your life to being a good flashlight when you were meant for so much more?

The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins. Mine, too, of course, but we're talking about you right now. How is that significant? In so many ways.

Jesus is the perfect human being. He never sinned. What humans forfeited to satan, the perfect Human regained for us. He atoned for our sins. He conquered sin

and death. He rose to life again. He defeated the devil. He ascended to heaven. He sits on the throne in heaven right now surrounded by the four living beings, the 24 elders, the saints and martyrs, and legions of angels. And He's coming back.

Whew. That could use a bit of elaboration and clarification. Here goes:  
He's not only the perfect human being. He is also God. The one and only God.

There is one true God. And, mysteriously, there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God's name is Yahweh – for those who haven't been around this for awhile, the name less recently was translated Jehovah. Yahweh, the only wise God, is the godhead.

And His death and resurrection is the only means of forgiveness. There is no other way you can be saved from sin and hell.

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes back in physical form, everything wraps up. Eternal life – already begun for followers of Jesus – bursts, explodes into fullness. God's kingdom ripens into maturity and God reigns over all the earth – literally reigns.

This is something you definitely don't want to miss out on (because a lot of people have made the choices such that they will – more on that presently\*).

The Lord Jesus Christ – God the Son – invites you, right now, "Come, follow Me" (it's in the Bible - Mark 1:17).

Now, isn't that the most amazing invitation in history? The creator God – the one and only – is inviting you into His life! Mind-boggling.

This is the invitation you don't pass up. This is the one for which you change plans, make special arrangements, sacrifice whatever is necessary so that you can accept.

But, because this invitation comes to you from the creator God – the one and only – it isn't only an invitation.

It's a command.

He is commanding you. "Come, follow Me."

He made you. He has a legitimate original claim on your life.  
He also died on the cross for your sins. He has a legitimate moral claim on your life.

How do you accept such an invitation? How do you comply with such a command?  
(we don't mean emotionally – with joy, relief, appreciation, humility... - though those are all appropriate)

Jesus clarified in Mark 1:15 that the way we accept the invitation, the way we comply with the command, is to repent and believe.

'Repent' is to turn from our sins. This involves sorrow for sin, confession of sin, renunciation of sin. And 'repent' includes a change of mindset – worldview – such that God become sovereign in our thinking.

'Believe' is so much more than intellectual assent or speculative opinion. In the Gospel it is equated with 'obey' (John 3:36, for example).

Accept Jesus' invitation into His life today. Repent and believe. Submit to God. (Only) He will forgive you, regenerate you, justify you, adopt you into His family, and so much more.

\*We didn't cover that bit about people making choices that exclude them from God's kingdom. Well, quickly, if you choose to reject God's invitation and command, you are on the outside. You miss out on His atonement – including forgiveness of sins – and His kingdom.

This kingdom continues through eternity – heaven and a renewed earth. And by your choices you will have excluded yourself from that kingdom. The alternative after we die is hell. Don't go to hell. Repent and believe. Submit to Jesus. Today.