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CHRIST SUPREME: *The Summation* of Christian Hope

Recover a Vision Shaped by the
FOCUS of His Supremacy

On her way home from Sunday School, Wendy announced from the back seat of the car: “I guess God must have made the world with His *left* hand.” Her mother inquired, “Why would you think that?” “Because today we learned that Jesus is sitting on His *right* hand!” A humorous misunderstanding, to be sure, but one that highlights a beautiful Biblical picture for the high honor God has given His Son.

Jesus’ activity at the Father’s side was certainly not lost on religious commentators when the Soviet flag was lowered over the Kremlin, indicating the internal collapse of atheistic Communism. Transpiring on Christmas Eve of 1991, it provided further evidence of the great eternal truth: “Jesus reigns!” His Kingdom is decisive in all the affairs of humankind.

As *Time* magazine observed in one of its first front cover stories for the 21st century: “It would require much calculation to deny that the single most powerful figure — not merely in these two millennia, but in all human

history — is Jesus of Nazareth.” In the same manner, the Christ proclaimed in Scripture, whose dynamic displays of dominion have dominated the past 2000 years, is the only explanation for the endurance and advance of the Church, despite its sailing so frequently “through bloody seas” (as Isaac Watts put it).

But an equal indicator of authority is how Christ intends to dominate the *future*. Just as the course of ages gone by cannot be understood apart from Christ’s supremacy, neither can the ages to come. All of God’s intentions for the road ahead of us, including the Consummation itself, impinge on the exaltation of Jesus — who He is as the Son of God, where He leads in the Purposes of God, how He imparts the Resources of God, and what He receives from the People of God. “The cosmic Christ” — that’s what John R. W. Stott names Him in his commentary on Ephesians 1, and for good reason.

Christ in His reign is the “summation” of every promise God has proclaimed to the world. Understanding this can significantly transform our view of His lordship in general, and of His personal involvement with each of us as individuals. In this chapter we’ll find out why as we explore:

- **How Christ’s reign is both the center and circumference of God’s Kingdom.**
 - **How His supremacy sums up Old Testament hope.**
 - **How His Incarnation embodies God’s promises.**
 - **How His Crucifixion secures God’s promises.**
 - **How His Resurrection unleashes God’s promises.**
 - **How His Ascension advances God’s promises.**
 - **How His Return will complete God’s promises.**
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The FOCUS of His Supremacy

(Daniel 7:9-14)

At her mother’s knee, Condoleezza Rice (Secretary of State under President George W. Bush) was taught to see Christ’s supremacy in a special way. The

daughter (who became an accomplished pianist) was reminded: “Condoleezza, when leading a time of spontaneous worship at church, remember if you play in the key of ‘C’, which is the foundational key in music, the congregation will always be able to follow you.” Recalling that insight, Rice adds: “In the same way, Christ is God’s ‘C’ chord, and that is why we always seem to find our way back to Him, sometimes in spite of ourselves.”

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense is it Christ’s very nature to be the summation of all hope?

If we ask, “Who is the *focus* of the future of the universe?” or, more accurately, “Who occupies the *throne* that is the focus of the future of the universe?” Scripture knows only one answer: Our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ supreme! We read: “Then I saw a lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne ... and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb ... and they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.... Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise’ ” (Revelation 5:6-9).

His highest title — the Greek word employed by New Testament writers — was “*Lord*” (Kurios). It was also a term used by Greek-speaking Jews to translate the Hebrew word for Jehovah (Yahweh). As Fuller Seminary professor, Ralph Martin, documented: Throughout Scripture “Lord” not only denoted “rulership based upon competent and authoritative power, the ability to dispose of what one possesses....” but when applied to our Savior, it declared that “Jesus Christ is installed in the place which rightfully belongs to God himself as the Lord of all creation ... the place of cosmic authority.”

No wonder Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic work on the person of God’s Son (possibly his greatest legacy before the Nazis executed him by hanging in 1945) was titled unequivocally: *Christ the Center*. He wrote: “It is the *nature* of Christ to be the center.” He didn’t say that making Christ the center is the goal of God’s plan, or that this idea defines the ultimate result of God’s activities. Rather, every indication of Scripture, Bonhoeffer concluded, is that centrality is inherent to Christ’s very being. He’s the One that everything is wrapped around, that everything must come back to. This is *who* He is.

But there's even more to our Lord than that. As we saw in chapter 1, it is also His very nature to be supreme. He is the *circumference* — the One in whom everything is wrapped up and summed up; the One in whom all the saints must forever live and move, to find their identity and destiny. Being *supreme*, in other words — being in Himself the *summation* of God's purposes and promises — is equally inseparable from who Christ is, eternally, as the Son of the Father.

For many founders of the first 120 colleges in America, this idea was a prevailing conviction. For example, in the *College Laws* written in 1642 the Puritan benefactors of Harvard University wrote: "Let every student consider well that the end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3), and therefore to lay Christ at the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. Seeing that the Lord giveth wisdom, everyone shall seriously by prayer, in secret, seek wisdom of Him." From its outset⁴⁹ this world-renowned academic institution confessed that the most brilliant scholarship would never be able to supercede one overarching truth: *Christ alone sums up in Himself all reality as its supreme focus.*

THINK WITH ME ...

Who do *you* say that He is and what words would you use to say it?

"We're having a national conversation about Jesus" suggested *Christianity Today* toward the midpoint of the first decade of the 21st century. *New York Times* bestsellers, blockbuster movies, journals and magazines, TV documentaries, Grammy winners — from every direction there seemed to be increased desire to talk about the Savior. But the editorial went on to suggest that we may not be talking about the "real Jesus", stating that "talking about the real Jesus is a dangerous thing". *Christianity Today* concluded: In the New Testament the real Jesus "is a consuming fire, the raging storm, who seems bent on destroying everything in his path, who either shocks people into stupefaction or frightens them so that they run for their lives.... He swirls, a tornado touching down, lifting homes and businesses off their foundations, leaving only bits and pieces of the former life strewn on his path.... We need to talk with biblical honesty about the One who would not only love and forgive us but also demolish all our cultural images of him."

Remember the debate the Twelve had about Jesus as they walked the roads of Caesarea Phillipi? They were responding to Jesus' penetrating question to Peter (Matt. 16): "*Who do you say that I am?*" Finally, Peter answered with the familiar words, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." But did he or the others really grasp the full implications of that brief sentence? Based on what many Scriptures teach about the meaning of those two titles — "*the Christ*" and "*Son of the living God*" — Peter's response was equivalent to saying (and this is the vision of Jesus that must be injected into the national conversation mentioned above):

LORD JESUS ...

■ *You are the Superlative One.*

You defy all human categories. No language is adequate to describe You. No analysis can fully record all the roles You must play to advance God's ever-expanding Kingdom. (1 Pet. 1)

■ *You are the Incomparable One.*

You remain in a class by Yourself — no duplicates, no clones. Your importance will continue to eclipse all others, outranking every other being in Heaven, Earth or Hell. You will reign 'world without end' (2 Thess. 1).

■ *You are the Exalted One.*

For eternity, You will hold the primary focus of our praises, a position of unrivaled distinction, prestige and majesty in the universe. You will be the joy of all peoples, worthy to receive every treasure, every dominion and every ounce of praise (Rev. 5).

■ *You are the Preeminent One.*

In time, in space, in history and throughout eternity, You forever lay claim to the universe. As You held the primacy at the beginning ('firstborn of creation', Col. 1), so You will hold it at the End ("firstborn from among the dead", Col. 1). All things to come are Your possession, to do with as Your Father pleases.

■ *You are the Sufficient One.*

Nothing can ever exhaust Your power and resources. You require no 'outsourcing'. You will forever prove totally adequate for all our longings, or fears, or needs, or heart cries. You are the final inheritance of each of God's children (Phil. 3).

■ *You are the Triumphant One.*

None of Your enemies will prevail. You will defeat all foes unconditionally — both human and demonic — to emerge forever unthreatened, unhindered and victorious over all opposition, permanently and forever. You are the everlasting Overcomer (Rev. 17).

■ *You are the Unifying One.*

Bringing all things under Your feet as Lord, You will permanently redeem and reconcile to the Godhead innumerable sinners from all the ages and all the nations. In the Consummation, all creation, as well as the Church itself, will be held together in perfect harmony by Your irrevocable decrees and Your indestructible might (Heb. 1).

QUOTABLE QUOTE

We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created — everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was supreme in the beginning — leading the resurrection parade — He is supreme in the end. From beginning to end, he is there, towering far above everything, everyone. All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe — people and things, animals and atoms — get properly fixed and fitted together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross.

(COLOSSIANS 1 — THE MESSAGE)

These things being true (and this is just the beginning of a list of Biblical attributes implied by Peter's brief confession), it certainly seems appropriate to address Him, as well, by saying: "*You are the Christ, the Summation of Christian Hope!*"

On that red-letter day Peter was beginning to wake up to how His Lord was, in Himself, the *focus* of everything the Father deserves, desires, designs and declares. There in Matthew 16, whether he fully grasped it or not, in essence Peter confessed: "*As Son of God*, wherever You dwell all of God's promises are gathered to You, guaranteed by You and summed up in You. As *Christ* you are ordained and anointed as supreme — absolute and universal in every way. You are supreme in the appeal You make to sinners. Supreme in the scope of Your activities on our behalf. Supreme in the depth of Your transforming power for all the Redeemed. Supreme in the irreplaceable ministry of Your high priestly work for saints in heaven and earth. Supreme in the eternal relevancy of Your reign extended throughout the entire universe.

Supreme in the magnificently indescribable future into which You are taking all who are Yours.”

In another place, the Lord Jesus answered His own question to Peter when He said to John: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 22). Not only was He at the beginning, but He Himself is the Beginning. Not only will He be waiting for us at the end, He is the End. All history streams from Him and is directed toward Him, to be completed by Him. The eternal past has no other eternal future but Christ alone. There is only *one* in the entire universe of whom God has ever said without qualification: “With you I am well pleased” (Luke 3). Thus Christ and Christ alone can insist on being the center and the circumference — the One to whom all supremacy belongs, whose supremacy encompasses all.

That’s why Christian hope draws its ultimate meaning from this one unique individual. As we saw in the last chapter, for Christians hope is ultimately a *person*. That person embodies our grandest expectations. He’s ready to take us beyond our wildest dreams. Everything needed to secure the promises of God to us has come to pass in Him — by the virtue of who He is, by what He has done and is doing, and by where He is taking us with Himself.

Any human prospects (Christianly or otherwise) that leave Him out of the equation for *all* He really is in Himself, must inevitably dissolve into irrelevance, confusion, emptiness and unmitigated despair. Our future is not preeminently about things, or events, or prophetic dramas, but about Christ. “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain”, was Paul’s motto (Phil. 1). Or, as J.B. Phillips translates the verse: “For living to me means simply ‘Christ’, and if I die I should merely gain more of him.”

THINK WITH ME ...

In what ways is Christ the *only* focus for every bit of hope we have?

Martin Luther likened the supremacy of Christ to an antique *magnifying glass* revealing intricate designs on a medieval map. Details at the center of the lens stay crisp and clear. But around the edges, the graphics of the document tend to grow increasingly distorted. Therefore, one must keep the important landmarks at the center of the lens.

Similarly, in order to properly magnify the hope Christ brings us, we need to keep Him as our foremost *focal point*. That’s how we study the

exquisite map of God’s grand purposes among the nations. Jesus is our focal point for history, in church growth, for our mission to the unreached as well as in daily living. He will *remain* the focal point in the Consummation as well. For eternity all reality will be magnified to the thousandth power through the superb perspective He alone gives to those seated with Him “at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1).

Here’s another metaphor to help make sense of this truth: Consider a *slide projector*. Though we have many pictures to review, just one bulb is needed to project each of them onto the screen. In the same way there are thousands of hope-filled passages in the Bible, but just one Person is needed to make those truths burst into life. Only one Person comes shining through every verse, revealing more of His supremacy every time He does. “The whole of Scripture is one book, and that one book is Christ,” concluded medieval Christian leader, Hugh of St. Victor. “The Bible is the cradle in which Christ is laid,” observed Luther. “The Scriptures spring out of God and flow into Christ,” proclaimed William Tyndale.

In fact, the Scriptures nurture a cornucopia of descriptive names that suggest how Jesus is seen when projected through a myriad of God’s promises, such as:

- The Way
- The Truth
- The Rock
- Dayspring from on High
- Son of Righteousness
- Light of the World
- Bread of Life
- The Light
- The Bright Morning Star
- Prince of Peace
- Good Shepherd
- Lion of Judah
- Alpha and Omega
- Name Above All Names

And we could list, literally, a hundred other formal titles that God’s Word bestows on our Lord. In other words, our God-given prospects are tied up so comprehensively in this one Person that the Bible requires an entire registry to define for us how and why He is (to use another title) “the Hope of Glory” (Col. 1:27). The titles not only express what Jesus means to us but also what we can expect from Him. Each is a statement of *hope*.

Looking at the breadth of these descriptions, I often like to paraphrase a familiar statement from the brilliant 4th century African bishop, Augustine:

“The one who has Christ has everything.
The one who has everything except for Christ really has nothing.
And the one who has Christ plus everything else
does not have any more than the one who has Christ alone.”

Colossians 3:11 agrees. It states this focus succinctly, in just three words — which is why it became the main title of *Joyful Manifesto*: “Christ is all!” Isn’t it obvious why I made this choice?

THINK WITH ME ...

Why does it make sense to say our hope in God is “summed up” in Christ?

When you balance your checkbook, there comes a point to “sum up” your account. You add a number of entries together to get the grand total. Even so, in Christ the promises and purposes of all the ages have been “summed up” — brought to their grand total, unequivocally and irrevocably. There’s nothing left out. There’s nothing more to add to the tally.

Jesus sums up all meaning in current reality. He also sums up all outcomes in *future* reality. He’s the source of a New Covenant, a New Creation, and a New Destination — by grace alone, through faith alone, in Him alone. He embodies right now what God’s promises will look like when they are fulfilled. Christ is not only the End toward which we move. He is also the *means* to reach that End. Whenever we say “Jesus is Lord”, we are confessing both — that He *sums up* the End as well as provides *the means* to it.

Therefore, our primary Message of Hope — which is our greatest tool for confronting and curing the crisis of supremacy in today’s Church — must begin with this truth: Christ’s supremacy is the *summation* of Christian hope. *God has no hope for us beyond who His Son is.* He is the ultimate focus of every promise. Glorifying the Son is the final outcome — the singular conclusion — of every Kingdom advance God has ordained.

This requires our Savior to be both an *excluder* and an *includer*. On the one hand, as the Bible testifies, He *excludes* every other source of hope. He’s all there really is. There’s room for no other. He must exclude all those who choose to put their confidence in any other kind of hope. But, on the other hand, He is also an includer. He *includes* in Himself every prospect God has for us, for the rest of eternity. And He *includes* with Himself all who trust in Him to receive those everlasting blessings.

Consider the impact of the Salk vaccine which eradicated polio in the 1950's. Once discovered, it rendered all other medicines and therapies for the disease irrelevant (i.e., it was exclusive). But it also became the harbinger of health for anyone around the world who took it in time (i.e., it was inclusive). The unrivaled preeminence of Christ as the hope of the universe is something like that: Exclusive and inclusive, simultaneously. That's why we say every promise of God must be summed up in Him.

THINK WITH ME ...

Where does the Trinity fit into the hope in Christ we confess?

Finally, before we proceed to unpack how “summation” is short-hand for “supremacy” — how all of God's purposes are gathered up in the Son alone — let me reassure you of my bedrock commitment to the truth of the Triune God. In confessing Christ as center and circumference I'm not suggesting that Jesus is all there is to God; that all deity has been collapsed into Christ alone; that our destiny is *only* about Him. I agree with Dr. Timothy George: “What makes God, God? It is the relationship of total and mutual self-giving by which the Father gives everything to the Son, the Son offers back all that He has to glorify the Father, with the love of each being established and sealed by the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from both. The doctrine of the Trinity tells us that relationship — *personality* — is at the heart of the universe.”

Maintaining the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity — and, in the process, transforming us into people with Christ-focused purposes — will never cease to be a *Trinitarian* project. Every dimension of hope is initiated by the Father, developed by the Spirit, while always exalting the Son. The radiance Christ brings us, as the Son of the Father, is inseparable from the fundamental nature of the Godhead — just as the rays of the physical sun could never exist apart from the sun itself. Ultimately, it is the uniqueness of His relationship to the Father and the Spirit, rather than His saving mission for the Redeemed, that bestows on Him preeminence in everything (Col. 1). Nothing about Christ as the focus of God's promises should ever rob the Father or the Spirit of equal praise.

The early Church understood this. Confessing Jesus to be Lord, the Church confirmed His divinity by its witness to the full panorama of God's attributes, functions, authority, power and rights in Him. The adoration of the Son by early Christians (many of whom were previously monotheistic Jews who abhorred idolatry) was unqualified and wholehearted. Nowhere,

observes Donald MacLeod, do we find any debate in the 1st century over His inherent superiority as God. As far as they were concerned, when Jesus taught, God taught. When Jesus healed, God healed. When He wept, God wept. When He suffered, God suffered. When He conquered, it was the triumphant work of the Godhead. Wherever Jesus' reign broke through, the whole Trinity was on display. Culminated under Jesus as Lord, eternity held for them just one additional climactic drama: Everlasting worship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the three-in-one.

When men and women surrendered to Jesus to become His disciples, they were initiated into a relationship with the Tri-Personal Being (Matthew 28 commands us to baptize: "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"). And whenever a promise was fulfilled in Jesus' name, the glory belonged equally to the Godhead who made it all possible, working together as One to bring it about. As 1 Pet. 1:2 reminds us, we are: "... chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood...."

Even in the Consummation, it will be the mission of the Son to secure before the whole universe the glory *of* the Godhead, *for* the Godhead, in the *midst* of the Godhead. One day, this will come about fully as He will submit Himself (and everything He has conquered), by the Spirit, to the Father's pleasure. Yet even that only can happen once the Father, by the Spirit, has secured for His Son the full recognition of His lordship over everything in Heaven and earth and under the earth (compare Phil. 2:5-11 with 1 Cor. 15:20-28 and Rev. 5). Without qualification (as John records), the Son will prevail steadfastly at the center of the Father's throne, world without end, while the Spirit's fires illuminate Him there, for elders and angels (and all of us) to behold and adore with abandon (Rev. 4, 5 and 21). Permission to live for Him with passion at this very moment springs from the passion that will be required of us when His glory is fully revealed.

As I was waiting to catch a plane not long ago, my attention was arrested by the front page headline on a newsstand rack. "*He's no 'Son of God!'*" leaped from a Minneapolis newspaper. The reporter told of 35 Muslim preachers from the local Islamic Center who fanned out that month to nearly 300 Christian churches and ministries in the Twin Cities to present lectures on their view of Christ. Their challenge to Christians? Here's how one speaker put it: "The Trinity is merely a human lapse toward polytheism.

Christians have become hung up on the Messenger, Jesus, and in the process they have forsaken his message. They should have just stuck with the teachings of Jesus. They should have revered him as the prophet he is, and avoided all the other embellishments.”

And I thought to myself: Embellishments? Quite to the contrary. From the Bible’s point of view, *who* the Messenger is, in the unbroken fellowship of the Trinity, determines unconditionally the legitimacy and potency of the supremacy He claims and the hope over which He reigns. Therefore, any message He proclaims is woven automatically into who He is as the Son of God. He is the only Prophet ever to appear among the nations who has focused all prophecies and promises on Himself alone. This is how He brings us to God. No Jesus, no hope. The Father won’t let us have one without the other.

Six Biblical Themes

Exploring How Christ Is the Summation of Christian Hope

Now, let’s get down to specifics. Briefly, I’d like to survey six major themes in Scripture that wrap hope and Christ’s lordship together, rendering them permanently inseparable:

- 1) **Old Testament:**
the *foreshadowing* of our hope in Christ
- 2) **Incarnation:**
the *manifestation* of our hope in Christ
- 3) **Crucifixion:**
the *guarantee* of our hope in Christ
- 4) **Resurrection:**
the *anchor* of our hope in Christ
- 5) **Ascension:**
the *advancement* of our hope in Christ
- 6) **Return:**
the *consummation* of our hope in Christ

1) Old Testament: The *Foreshadowing* of Our Hope in Christ

(Jeremiah 33)

We might paraphrase St. Victor to read: “Even the *Old Testament* is really one book. That book is Christ.” If we were to blend together the massive number of Old Testament promises — including sweeping, breathtaking horizons of the Coming Kingdom laid out by a score of prophets — what would we have? *In the final analysis we construct a dazzling portrait of the person of God’s Son* — an extensive and vivid description of what His supremacy entails. That’s because every vision offered there, without exception — whether of grace or judgment — *requires* Him for its truest meaning and its grandest completion.

THINK WITH ME ...

How do Old Testament texts on creation prepare us for Jesus’ majesty?

This is certainly the case when it comes to the abundance of Old Testament reflections on God’s glory in creation. Accounts include the vivid dramas that open Genesis; the awesome portrayals that shook Job; Isaiah’s visions of natural forces implementing God’s judgments; Habakkuk’s reassurance that the whole earth will respond with

oceans of praises to God; or the many Psalms that tell us (in the words of the 19th): “The heavens declare the glory of God ... like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion.” The purpose of these texts was to encourage Israel to ponder nature’s witness to the greatness and grandeur of God.

Finally, these time-tested reflections on creation served their maximum mission as they added texture to the meaning of Jesus’ supremacy — by whom everything was made and from whom everything gained life (Jn. 1). In the flesh, the Savior summed up all the glory to which the heavens testified from the beginning. Drawing on Old Testament understandings of

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(God) has now, at the end of the present age, given us the truth in the Son. Through the son God made the whole universe, and to the Son he has ordained that all creation shall ultimately belong. This Son, radiance of the glory of God, flawless expression of the nature of God, himself the upholding principle of all that is, effected in person the reconciliation between God and man and then took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high — thus proving himself, by the more glorious Name that he has won, far greater than all the angels of God.

(HEBREWS 1 – PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

creation's wonders, texts about Jesus like Colossians 1, Romans 1 and John 1 explode with deeper meanings.

For years, thousands of congregations have sung Jack Hayford's uplifting chorus called "Majesty". It starts out, you may recall: "Majesty, worship His majesty, unto Jesus be all glory, honor and praise. Majesty, Kingdom authority, flows from His throne, unto His own, His anthem raise." But what does Jesus' majesty mean? How can we ever properly define it?

Well, listen to Hayford's own answer: "To say our Lord is 'clothed in majesty' is to say that *all creation is window dressing for His excellence*. It all points to Him. And just as a king's palace with all its royal décor reflects something of that king's personality, so creation reflects the magnificence of our Lord's nature and character." In other words, exploring creation so extensively, the Biblical writers prepared us for the day God would become flesh and dwell among us in the full display of Jesus' majesty (Jn. 1). Creation is "window dressing" for His supremacy.

But the Old Testament took believers further in their understanding of the expected Messiah, sharing with them heart-stopping foreshadowings of His coming glory.

THINK WITH ME ...

How does Jesus sum up the Old Testament's "shadows of supremacy"?

My good friend Evelyn Christenson likens the abundance of Old Testament predictions of Christ's supreme place in the purposes of God to an obstetrician's "ultrasound". This computer-generated picture provides a pregnant woman the ability to see the child forming in her womb. Viewing shadowy movements on the monitor brings her unexpected excitement. The mother-to-be can even take the images home as black and white prints. But, Evelyn adds, after the baby is born no one ever hangs a series of framed ultrasound photos on her living room walls, or keeps them in her wallet to show friends. No, after the birth the ultrasound pictures are quickly replaced by an album full of dramatic photos, in living color, of the actual child. As meaningful as prenatal images may be — as faithful as they are in predicting something of what the baby will look like — their value is quickly surpassed the moment the infant is enfolded in the mother's arms. This illustrates the link between God's ancient promises and the Person who was born in a stable to sum them up in Himself.

Let me modify the metaphor slightly. Consider a *shadow*. Referencing Old Testament customs and traditions Paul reminded Christians that “these are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2). A shadow can be useful — providing us shade or alerting us to someone approaching. But basically, a shadow calls attention to something beyond itself — to the object that casts it. In the end, Old Testament hopes suggested the shape of Someone far more vivid and tangible and powerful and eternal than any shadow could be.

To borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis, ancient Scriptures contained the “shadowlands” of Christian hope. Like paper silhouettes, Old Testament dramas, personalities, expectations, predictions, types and themes provided faint but fascinating — even *tantalizing* (1 Pet. 1) — outlines of Christ and His redemptive mission. In virtually every event and story recorded, using texts found in virtually every book, Christ was pre-visionsed. He was anticipated. But none of these shadows could be adequately understood until the One who cast them was revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

The hope held out in such passages was *foreshadowed*, we say. Great expectations awaited their revelation in New Testament teachings about God’s Son. Covenant promises were always anchored exclusively in the sovereignty of God’s own character and actions. But then, in the “fullness of times” (Gal. 4), they burst forth bodily, revealing unprecedented realities, in plain view of the nations. They sprang into the foreground of world history by the incarnation of a Savior. Early Christians were convinced that Jesus embodied in Himself everything the Bible (Old Testament) claimed about God’s greatness, and about the guarantees of His Kingdom. For example, compare the closing verses of Isaiah 45 (“... before me every knee will bow and by me every tongue will swear ...”) with the opening verses of Philippians 2 (... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord ...). This is one of a thousand illustrations of how 1st century believers linked the “shadows of supremacy” with the glory of Jesus’ authority over everything.

THINK WITH ME ...

How did Christians look at the Old Testament through “Jesus’ glasses”?

Finally, it happened. Full of Holy Spirit joy, Jesus invited His disciples to step out of the shade into the mid-day brilliance of His saving mission

among them: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings [Old Testament] wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” (Luke 10).

From that moment, it was impossible for believers ever again to study the Old Testament without seeing Christ and His Kingdom permeating its pages. His coming created “Act II” in redemption’s drama. The early Christians uncovered significance in Old Testament passages not apparent to ancient Israel, because now they knew Who the story was about, and how the story would conclude. In Christ, the Old Testament is *fulfilled*, we Christians say. What that really means is that now all of its promises are *filled full* — full of the Son to whom everything pointed. Consequently, hundreds of Old Testament verses are woven into the New Testament story by its writers.

Here are few examples of what 1st century believers saw through “Jesus’ glasses”:

- He is the new *Adam* of a promised re-creation, the overseer of a new race of worshippers to inhabit a new Eden with God’s praises (Rom. 5).

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The prophets who told us this was coming asked a lot of questions about this gift of life God was preparing. The Messiah’s Spirit let them in on some of it — that the Messiah would experience suffering, followed by glory. They clamored to know who and when. All they were told was that they were serving you, you who by order from heaven have now heard for yourselves — through the Holy Spirit — the Message of those prophecies fulfilled. Do you realize how fortunate you are? Angels would have given anything to be in on this!

(1 PETER 1 — THE MESSAGE)

- He is the promised seed of *Abraham*, raised up to complete the patriarch’s calling to bless all the families of the earth (Gal. 3).
- He is the greater *Moses*, leading us out of sin’s captivity into redemption’s eternal inheritance (1 Cor. 10).
- He is the superior son of *David*, bringing with Him an everlasting throne and kingdom that conquers all others (Acts 2).
- He is the prophet’s *Prophet*, challenging and replacing the status quo, not just in one nation but throughout the whole creation (Heb. 1).
- He is the suffering *Servant*, who sacrificially bears the sins of His people and then extends through them His redemptive, healing mission to all peoples (1 Pet. 2).

What, after all, did Jesus mean by His oft-repeated claim that everything He did was “according to the Scriptures”? Quite simply: The Old Testament narrative culminated in His person and His triumphs. Its whole plot pivoted on Him. He was the goal of every redemptive initiative launched there.

In the Consummation, Israel had expected to see her vindication before her enemies; deliverance from all suffering; victory over every evil power; restoration to God’s full favor; a whole new beginning stretching into eternal ages. But to everyone’s utter amazement The End invaded this present Age through a Nazarene rabbi. In Himself and by Himself, Israel’s destiny was achieved in the truest sense God ever intended. Now, those promises await the Great Day when Christ completes them fully and finally — *consummately*, we might say — for His people.

Isn’t it curious how on the first Easter, as Luke 24 reports it, Jesus kept coming back to the ancient foreshadowings?

“And beginning with Moses and all the prophets
He explained to them what was said in all the
Scriptures concerning Himself.

(Then they said), ‘Were not our hearts burning within us
while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’
(Then He said), ‘Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me
in the Law of Moses, The Prophets and The Psalms.’

Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

He told them, ‘This is what is written:

The Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and
repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in
His name to all nations.’ ”

It appears that Old Testament hope was the agenda most on Jesus mind when He rose from the dead. In this Risen One, prophetic history had reached its pinnacle, not only for Israel but for all earth’s peoples. The sunrise of promised immortality had broken in upon the world stage with a furious blaze (2 Tim. 1). Now, every other promise could unfold. Before the presence of His Royal Highness the shadows could flee once and for all.

No wonder those Emmaus disciples, so filled with despair at the beginning of their journey, found their hearts burning within them, “strangely warmed” (as Wesley described it) by the way Christ unfolded for them how the Old Testament was alive in Himself. This same deliverance

from hopelessness — this same encounter with the Lord of Glory — awaits any of us who allow Him to instruct us “along the way”.

Thus, as you study Old Testament promises (like those found in **Appendix V**) let this be one of your major goals: See with new eyes how ancient visions of God’s awesomeness — whether from Moses or David or Job or Malachi — as well as dramatic stories of God’s activities — recorded in Exodus or 2 Chronicles or Daniel or Joel — provide happy hints of more to come. In what sense are such promise-laden texts merely shadows when compared to how they finally found expression and culmination in the person and reign of God’s Son? *In other words, how does our Lord Jesus “sum up” and “flesh out” what the Old Testament set forth about the themes of supremacy and hope?*

2) Incarnation: The *Manifestation* of Our Hope in Christ (Isaiah 9:1-7)

When Jesus walked among us, He not only brought a more comprehensive *revelation* of hope but also a new *activity* by Heaven to secure that hope. What He did and said in His earthly ministry revealed the determined strategy of the Father to bless the redeemed eternally. In the days of His flesh Christ was the hope of the universe, not “on hold” but “on the move”.

Certainly, He was a prophet of glorious things to come — the preeminent Prophet of the ages. But He was a prophet who was also a Son (Heb. 1). Ministering in Galilean hamlets, He was hope-in-*action*, not just hope-in-*words*. In Him, the Kingdom was “at hand” (Mk. 1). In Him the Kingdom was “coming”. He vindicated His words by extraordinary deeds of power, representing early stages of the Consummation itself. (“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come to you” Luke 11). Therefore, every force of hopelessness — gripping His hearers’ bodies, minds, hearts and spirits — was countered, exorcised and replaced with *Himself*.

THINK WITH ME ...**How does calling Jesus the “Son of Man” magnify hope in His supremacy?**

Of all the Old Testament titles Jesus took for Himself, none was used more frequently than *Son of Man*. And for good reason. Taken from the writings of two Old Testament prophets, it permanently married themes of incarnation, supremacy and hope.

Throughout Ezekiel God used the title to describe the seer’s humble position in serving captive Jewish exiles. Borrowing the phrase “Son of Man”, Jesus likened His experience to that of Ezekiel’s humiliation and sufferings. It recalled for His followers the costliness of bringing hope to captives of sin. Being a son of *man* pointed to how He emptied Himself of all divine prerogatives in order to bring spiritual refugees into the prerogatives of divine promises (see Phil. 2).

But the phrase also appears in the book of Daniel. There, *Son of Man* describes something quite different. There we find a human but radiant figure coming on clouds of glory to receive authority over the whole earth on behalf of all peoples (Dan. 7). In a similar way, Christ represented His incarnation as the fulfillment of Daniel’s vision. Because He became one of us, a son of *man*, He also became God’s climactic word on the reclamation of our race, including the reconstitution of God’s creation. As representative Man, He was given all authority over human destiny just as Daniel promised.

Son of Man, therefore, points to Christ’s *servant* role as well as to His *sovereignty* role in God’s eternal plan for the nations. It gives the Incarnation and the Kingdom promises common ground. In fact, it weds them as one and the same.

In “the face of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4) everlasting God-ward hope took on temporal, concrete contours. As the express image of God, as the imprint of God’s nature (Heb. 1), Christ embodied all God’s promises in a human life — for the first time, and the only time, in history.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

At the beginning God expressed Himself. That personal expression, that word, was with God and was God, and he existed with God from the beginning. All creation took place through him, and none took place without him. In him appeared life, and this life was the light of mankind. The light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out ... so the Word of God became a human being and lived among us.

(JOHN 1 — PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

church fathers thought of it this way: In the God-Man, humility was embraced by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity.

But He entered into our hopeless condition at an even more profound level. He laid hold of that which perpetrated our worst nightmares. By assuming our sin as if it were His own, He endured the penalty of our rebellion against the promises of God and against the God of all promises. In our place, He entered the black hole of humanity's most horrifying form of hopelessness. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He cried. Under the judgment of the Cross He shared our desperate straits, drinking our bitter cup to the end. Amazing grace! He paid the ultimate price to allow us to re-enter the Heavenly hope we had forfeited, the hope that Scripture calls eternal life

In human flesh He experienced the humiliation of exile from the throne of the universe. He put His own destiny squarely on the line as He submitted to the Father's will. He emptied Himself — He *donated* Himself! — so that in spite of the godless sinners we are, God might bring to pass, *even in us*, His consummate plan for the ages through the life-giving reign of His Son. What supremacy is His!

Consider further: By taking on human flesh, by abandoning Himself to be the Servant of servants, Christ actually renounced any claim to final control over His own destiny. He placed Himself totally at the Father's disposal. He left in the Father's hands completely the fulfilling of covenant promises. The Son made Himself "nothing" (Phil. 2), because He chose to wait for the Father to vindicate Him, for the Spirit to raise Him, and for lasting lordship to be bestowed upon Him. To be sure, the glory He received as He ascended on high was the same glory He had with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity (Jn. 17). Still, by lifting Him up out of disgrace and despair and destruction, and by giving Him a name above every other name along with a throne above every other dominion, God sealed irrevocably every promise Christ proclaimed (Eph. 1).

The faithfulness of the Father to the Son incarnate, who surrendered so unconditionally to His will, was ultimately displayed when He presented to Him the nations as His inheritance (Ps. 2). The Son has become the *heir* of all for which we could ever hope (Heb. 1). Even so, the Father will manifest the same faithful commitment to everyone who sets his or her hope on the Son and "kisses" Him (as Psalm 2 puts it — an act expressing full allegiance to the crown He wears).

The incarnation provides irrefutable proof that our God is personally committed to the future of humankind. Why? Because, through endless ages a *Man*, delivered from death, will occupy the Praises of Heaven — a Man who is, at the same time, God — One with the Father and the Spirit. As a Scottish theologian once noted: We have hope because “the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the Majesty on High”. For the Father to renege on even one of His promises to us is for Him to renege on His promise to glorify His Son. Quite rightly, the old hymn boasts: “Blessed *assurance*, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!”

3) Crucifixion: The *Guarantee* for Our Hope in Christ

(*Ephesians 1:7-12; 2:12-13*)

Let’s go back now to look specifically at Christ’s *sufferings* in more depth. In doing so, we scale the summit of His supremacy.

Church father Lactantius, serving in the 4th century court of Emperor Constantine, suggested: “No nation is so uncivilized, no region so remote, that either His passion or the heights of His majesty is unknown. So, in His suffering, He stretched forth His hands and measured out the world — so that even then He might show that a great multitude (collected out of all languages and tribes, from the rising of the sun even to its setting) was about to come under His wings!”

In other words, the passions of Christ made the reign of Christ universal. *Hope* holds meaning for a Christian (and for the nations) only to the degree the *Cross* holds meaning. We cannot understand the full breadth of our destiny in Jesus apart from understanding the breadth of His sufferings that guarantees that destiny for us.

All the wealth of God’s promises, held out to us by the Gospel, depends entirely upon Calvary to become reality for any sinner. Therefore, Jesus focused His entire earthly life toward the Cross. It was there He was able to secure God’s purposes for Heaven and earth, including each of us. How overwhelmingly precious is the certainty of our prospect: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up

for us all — how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8). Every promise God has ever issued to the human race is captured by that phrase: “all things”. The Cross, it appears, is the fountain-head of everlasting bounties to be poured out relentlessly upon grateful saints everywhere, for all time and eternity. So great was the sacrifice of God’s Son — so marvelous its ramifications, so extraordinary its accomplishments, so all-encompassing its consequences — that every other grace the Father has granted is unconditionally guaranteed in the Son.

THINK WITH ME ...

Why is the Cross the great crossroads for our future?

When you’re on a trip, arrival at any crossroads requires decision. At that point, a traveler can’t remain neutral. Avoiding a choice will simply prevent you from going any farther.

In our spiritual journey, Christ’s death marks the most critical crossroads for a hopeless humanity traveling toward Eternal Judgment. It’s the most authentic “*cross-road*” there is. On the harrowing hill of execution, just one single day created the historic moment toward which every promise of Scripture to the nations had pointed, and from which every promise will reach ultimate fulfillment. At the foot of the Cross two themes converged. The glories of God was one, including: all the streams of His blessings, all the triumphs of His grace, all the manifestations of His majesty, all the grandeurs of His holiness, all thunders of His judgments and the all-subduing power of His love. The other theme consisted of deadly dramas dictated by the sins, sicknesses and sorrows of our rebel race.

Then, the Cross provided the pivot-point to turn sinners away from the dead-end of the latter road and toward a dynamic new destination in Jesus. There He took upon Himself creation’s futility and decay. He took upon Himself the cancer of our terminal hostility toward God. Through what happened our Lord provided a way of escape out of darkness to bask evermore in the thick brilliance of divine beauty. At that crossroads outside Jerusalem 2000 years ago, our Savior became by Himself the Super Highway back to the Father, where we will never cease to delight in the Lamb’s wounds. We will celebrate without ceasing the consummate glory of His agonies. We will forever delight in all the possibilities that His sufferings have turned into realities. If that’s not a vision of His *supremacy*, then what is?

No one ever suffered like the Master suffered. In Himself and by Himself, He penetrated the bowels of mankind's miseries. He drank the bitter dregs of our spiritual perdition. What He endured had unfathomable impact on the powers of darkness. For all the redeemed He absorbed and exhausted and displaced, irrevocably, the fatal specter of divine judgment and eternal death.

That's why we call it *Good Friday*. In place of our alienation, estrangement and enmity, that bleakest of days opened for all time *inexhaustible goodness* — so good, in fact, that even former enemies might share in it, eternally, through union with the conquering Redeemer. He satisfied every condition for fully restoring to us our God-ordained calling. By His sufferings, Jesus not only *purchased* our hope for us. He actually *inherited* it for us. The promises are exclusively His, first of all by *right*. But they are also His by *righteousness* — that is, by fulfilling all of God's righteous requirements on our behalf, including the endurance of the Father's just retribution upon our sin (Lk. 3).

His plan from the outset was to act in our stead and on our behalf. He took responsibility to accomplish what we could never do for ourselves. He answered creation's groanings for release from decay (Rom. 8). He freed us from the futile ways of our fathers (1 Pet. 1). Every inheritance we have in God's Kingdom has been bought and paid for by God's Son. We have become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, rescued by blood to share in His glory for ages to come (Rom. 8).

At the Cross God offered each of us a *wonderful exchange* that included:

- My depravity ... exchanged for Christ's pure righteousness.
- My mortal death ... exchanged for Christ's immortal life.
- My despair ... exchanged for a joyous destiny summed up in Him.
- My curse ... exchanged for eternal blessings that flow from His wounds.
- My judgment ... exchanged for a safe place inside His Kingdom.
- My defeat and destruction ... exchanged for His inexhaustible victory.

So again I ask you: If Christ's death accomplished all of this, could there ever be any greater display of His all-consuming dominion?

THINK WITH ME ...**How has the Cross eliminated every false hope for us?**

What happened at the Cross permanently exposed counterfeit paths to joy. It unmasked the lies inherently found in the world's *false* hopes. Calvary was God's masterful stroke of defiance toward rebel dreams. By it He confirmed that our hopeless estate is far worse than we first dared to believe. Sacred blood bears witness before all peoples that our own efforts are undeniably in vain. Left to ourselves all of us are incapable of satisfying either our longings or God's justice. We are confined instead to a cataclysm called eternal death.

If there was any other way to secure our future, then surely Christ's suffering was an insanely tragic endeavor (to paraphrase Gal. 2:20-21). The reality is just the opposite, however. The Cross challenges all peoples to repent of the foolish illusions of our own pomp and power. At the same time the Cross sets before nations unprecedented prospects as bright (and beautiful) as the promises of God — circumscribed by a slain Sacrificial Animal who, at this very moment, is ruling the universe as a Lordly Lion, carrying everything to its pre-ordained Consummation.

THINK WITH ME ...**Why do Christ's sufferings crown Him supreme over every hope we have?**

Ultimately Christ's supremacy does not consist in His ability to *impose* His will uncontested — to break, or take, or shake things up (all of which He will do one day). Rather, His supremacy is preeminently about His ability to *redeem* — to reclaim, to reconcile, to restore, to remake and to re-deploy salvaged sinners to serve Kingdom agendas. Therefore, *the Cross is really His crown*. Final vindication of the Son's right to the Eternal Throne consists of His willingness to lay aside His rights, to obey His Father even to the point of submitting unto death. Hope triumphs not only *through* His travails but also *in* His travails.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

One of the Elders said, 'Don't weep. Look – the Lion from Tribe Judah, the Root of David's Tree, has conquered. There, surrounded by Throne, Animals, and Elders, was a Lamb, slaughtered but standing tall ... and they sang a new song: Worthy! Take the scroll, open its seals. Slain! Paying in blood, you bought men and women, bought them back from all over the earth, bought them back for God. Then You made them a Kingdom, Priests for our God, Priest-Kings to rule over the earth ... the slain Lamb is worthy! Take the power, the wealth, the wisdom, the strength! Take the honor, the glory, the blessing!'

(REVELATION 5 – THE MESSAGE)

In that Great Day when God's promises in Christ reach their climax, the Cross will still dominate. Throughout endless ages Christ's wounds will appear to us, as the old hymn says, as "rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified". In the New Jerusalem, the victorious Monarch will always be viewed, at the same time, as a bloodied Martyr.

Therefore, the Cross will forever remain the high watermark of all manifestations of Christ's supremacy – unsurpassed, throughout endless ages. At no point will Jesus ever appear to Christians to be more exalted than when He became the sacrifice for our sin. Nowhere will He ever blaze forth in victory more vividly than when He was vanquished on Golgotha's tree. To worship Him as He deserves, focused on Him as supreme upon His throne, we must learn first to marvel at Him supreme upon His Cross.

What was written on Pontius Pilate's sign nailed above His head? "This is the *King* of the Jews" (emphasis mine). Even then His supremacy bannered His sufferings.

4) Resurrection: The *Anchor* for Our Hope in Christ

(1 Corinthians 15:17-28)

In the Resurrection Christ's preeminence comes shining through in a whole other way. In the Resurrection He stands unique among all religious leaders of any world religion, whether gurus or prophets. He is the only Master ever to come back permanently alive from the grave, and that by His own power (Jn. 10). In the Resurrection He remains forever unchallenged, utterly superior and totally beyond the pale of all other contenders.

A word of promise *He* speaks, therefore, must retain unparalleled legitimacy. Because He lives, God's purposes and promises are vindicated and validated for all who believe. When God raised Jesus from the dead, the unprecedented prospects He had preached became wonderfully wedded to His very person. The "Message of Hope" and the "Messenger of Hope" merged into one.

In 2004 Mel Gibson's epic film *The Passion of the Christ* stormed the theaters of the world. It was viewed with deeply felt emotions by tens of

millions. Many Hollywood critics savaged the movie, however, because to them it seemed to consist of two hours of nothing but mindless brutality. Yet to multitudes of Christians, *The Passion* had the very opposite affect. Why? Because as believers we knew that, first, the sufferings represented on the screen were eternally redemptive, and therefore profoundly precious, for those who call Jesus their Lord. Secondly, we also knew that the story continued right through an empty tomb (as the last few moments of Gibson's film sensitively portrayed), making all the bloody agony of the previous 24 hours foundational for a renovated universe in which our Risen Sacrifice would reign in glory.

THINK WITH ME ...

How many victories did His resurrection achieve?

"Christ is victor!" This is a familiar weekly cry among the world's Orthodox Christians — Greek, Serbian, Russian and others. That's because for this wing of Christendom, everything is thoroughly infected by their vision of the Resurrection. You read it in their theologies. You see it in their dazzling icons. You hear it in ancient liturgies that embrace two worlds at once — they describe the worship of God as a descending of "Heaven to earth". That's how alive Jesus is for them. You note it as well when they speak of the "communion of saints". For them this experience includes a tangible intersecting of believers in glory with believers below. For Orthodox believers, both groups are equally alive in Christ, which is why many have embedded the photographs of loved ones on their tombstones to emphasize how alive the deceased *still* are.

Surely, Christians of every stripe must echo something of the Orthodox perspective on Easter. We must declare with them that *all* our spiritual triumphs draw their vitality from one supreme victory: When Christ rose to destroy the final opponent to every God-given hope, He swallowed up death itself. Our Lord not only brings us forgiveness by His bloody wounds but He also frees us by His risen body. He not only cleanses the sin that eternally separated us from God. He also rose to confound, every day in every way, the sin that would enslave and defeat us even now.

Christ is Victor! Let this truth erupt with undying praise to the Triune God. Christ is Victor! Let this truth place our Savior in His position as the heir of all things past, present and future. Christ is Victor! Let this truth reinforce His role as exclusive source of hope for all humanity, the One we can trust unhesitatingly with our farthest-reaching expectations.

Christ is Victor! Only this explains why the early Church worshipped Him so fervently, bestowing on Him a vast array of royal titles. Only this vision explains why, despite its ghastly horrors, they celebrated His sacrifice, seeing it as the pinnacle of God's promises. This is where they found courage even in the face of mockery and martyrdom. This is why they acted as Kingdom ambassadors to their enemies. Their hearts were held steady by the sure and certain hope of their *own* resurrection in Christ. They walked in life-changing experiences of His death-destroying power. Filled with the very same Spirit that took Jesus out of the tomb, they could not be silent. They could not be contained.

Christ is Victor! — All of God's promises are permanently preserved for us in the risen Prince of Life (Acts 3). This witness alone should cause every Christian today to join the shouts of Heaven and say — “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11).

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense is Christ also now the firstfruits of all our hope?

Crushing the jaws of the tomb, Christ became *firstfruits* — the beginning, the initial wave — of a future resurrection that lies before us all. We may not yet have the whole harvest, but in Him we hold God's pledge of that harvest. In fact, in Him the harvesting has already begun, with additional (and far more extensive) reaping just ahead (1 Cor. 15).

Lazarus was resuscitated by Jesus, only to die again (Jn. 11). But Christ Himself was resurrected with an eternally indestructible body (Jn. 20-21). He, not Lazarus, now reigns as our prototype. He's the *template*, we might say, not only for our individual resurrection bodies but also for the glory that will saturate the entire creation when everything is enveloped by a universal recapitulation back to Jesus, the Consummation.

Out of a borrowed tomb, *a new order of existence emerged within time and space*. Much more than some memorable miracle passed down as a story from ancient times, the Resurrection is the out-breaking of something utterly *new* that remains with us permanently. Nothing could be more contemporary than this. It is the beginning of the ultimate triumphs of God's grace. It is the inception of a victory that's currently spreading across the earth, destined to envelop everything, everywhere, not long from now.

In our risen Lord, the splendor of the New Heaven and Earth was

unveiled for His disciples to behold — immediately. The Resurrection was not some freakish intrusion into the natural order of things. It was the anticipation — better yet, the implementation — of an indestructible life (Heb. 7), eternally destined by God for our blessing and His praise.

Just as the incarnation draws its meaning from the *first* creation; just as the crucifixion is necessitated by the helpless condition of the *fallen* creation; even so the Resurrection permanently positions all believers in a *new* creation, even at this very moment (2 Cor. 5).

THINK WITH ME ...

In what way does the Resurrection anchor every other hope for us?

We might say that the risen Christ *anchors* us to all the promises of that new creation. That's what Hebrews 6 concludes. Because of Christ's unparalleled reversal of death, our confidence about the outcome remains steadfast: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure ... where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

Just as an anchor, though invisible below the waves, firmly tethers a ship in a storm, even so Christ supreme over the grave grips us and holds us, unshakeable, to every single dimension of God-given hope. He "ties" us directly to a future in which "no longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face ... and they will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22). He sovereignly binds us to *Himself*, "the hope of glory", with chains of love that cannot be broken (Rom. 8).

His Resurrection encourages us, then, to resist drifting back into hassles of human hopelessness. It gives us a rock to cling to in life's disillusioning floods. It empowers us to endure life's most disheartening storms. It summons us into constant celebrations of the risen life of Christ within us. It reassures us that when our destiny is consummated in Christ we'll discover that not one of our labors for Heaven was ever in vain.

Without question, that day of our deliverance is coming. Soon, we too will be physically raised

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us.

(2 CORINTHIANS 1 — THE MESSAGE)

with Christ to reign with Him (1 Thess. 4). As surely as light dawns tomorrow, there's a date scheduled when we will stand *bodily* on the earth, raised incorruptible and immortal (1 Cor. 15).

The ramifications of this for today's Christians are breath-taking. It

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son now so that he may bring glory to you, for you have given him authority over all men to give eternal life to all that you have given him. And this is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and him whom you have sent — Jesus Christ. Father, I want those whom you have given me to be with me where I am; I want them to see the glory which you have made mine — for you loved me before the world began.

(JOHN 17 – PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

should provide us incomparable, God-concocted cures for every other crisis we face. It should reverse every shortfall of confidence about His Kingdom as well as any wavering of passion for His glory. It should compel us to lose our lives for His sake and the Gospel — to serve the advance of His global cause among earth's peoples — knowing that in the end because He lives we shall live also (Mk. 8 with Jn. 14).

In the early days of the Bolshevik revolution, the newly empowered communists forced a debate in Moscow at a local university between a party leader and the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. When the priest arose to speak, instead of attempting to refute his atheist opponent, he gazed on his audience briefly, then said this simple phrase: "Christ is risen!" The building shook with a thunderous, spontaneous, unanimous three-fold response: "He is risen indeed! He is risen indeed! *He is risen indeed!*"

Then the priest sat down. He knew the auditorium was filled with good Orthodox Christians who recited this liturgical response every Sunday morning. This was their unshakeable conviction. This prevailing hope was the only prospect they needed at such a dark hour for their nation. The communist members on hand that day were silenced. Nothing remained to be said. Christ was all. The Principalities and Powers must have taken notice as well (Eph. 3).

I suspect that "He is risen indeed!" will continue to be a message of hope, proclaimed and praised and practiced by all of us, throughout all of eternity. It's a permanent piece of the Church's vision for the supremacy of God's Son.

5) Ascension: The *Advancement* of Our Hope in Christ (*Psalm 2 and Psalm 110*)

Whenever you ponder the majestic Christological portraits of Scripture — texts such as John 1, Ephesians 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1 or Revelation 1 — remember this: They were written just a few short decades after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. They bear witness to the magnitude of devotion and praise Jesus was already receiving as Lord by that point in time. Why was the early Church’s vision of the Savior so expansive and so highly exalting?

The simple answer: Beyond His incarnation, crucifixion and Resurrection, 1st century Christians lived daily in the full awareness of Christ’s *Ascension* (Acts 2). Their hearts were set on His coronation and current position at God’s right hand (Col. 3). They breathed the very air of His active role from the throne of Heaven, holding sway as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords that He already was.

To be sure, Christ inherently possessed the *power* to govern the universe by virtue of His creating it. In addition, He could claim the inherited *right* to preside over it because of His death and Resurrection. But now, seated at God’s right hand, He had a *direct role* in the success of His reign due to activities unfolding at His throne every moment. And the early Church knew it because they experienced it.

When Paul wrote about preaching only “Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2) we mustn’t forget: Paul envisioned his message as *Christ* crucified. In other words, the apostle’s word about the power of the Cross made no sense apart from the Ascension. We know this, because the technical title given God’s Son — that He was the “Christ” or the “Anointed One” — had been reserved for centuries by serious Jews like Paul to be given only to one person: The promised final Sovereign — the ultimate heir of David who would be set apart by God (anointed) as universal King, crowned as Lord of the cosmos, Ruler of the nations and Head of the Church. The Ascension *confirmed* for 1st century disciples like Paul that Jesus was precisely the Supreme Redeemer they had anticipated. Exalted as the mighty Messiah of God, He was ready to reclaim subjects for His Kingdom by the blood of His Cross (Col. 1).

Even pagans took note of this unwavering passion for the current kingship of Jesus, labeling believers as “*Christ*-ians” (Acts 11) which, in the

Greek, implied “people who have become fanatics about the current reign of their Anointed Lord”.

THINK WITH ME ...

What practical difference should it make that Christ is on the throne?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

He has determined the times of their existence and the limits of their habitation, so that they might search for God, in the hope that they might feel for him and find him ... He now commands people everywhere to repent. For he has fixed a day on which he will judge the whole world in justice by the standard of a Man whom he has appointed. That this is so he has guaranteed to all men by raising up this Man from the dead.

(ACTS 17 – PHILLIPS)

It is true to say the Transfiguration (Mt. 16) *foreshadowed* the glory of Christ’s coming Ascension and enthronement. Even more amazingly, we could say the Resurrection, as the spectacular explosion into time and space of a whole new creation provided the *prelude* (“phase one” if you will) for the full “symphony” of Christ’s eternal dominion. But the Ascension offered even more. It transformed the Transfiguration and the Resurrection from *momentary acts*, on a mountain top and in a garden, into a *permanent state* to impact everything from here to eternity, both now and later.

Because Jesus ascended, the active advance of God’s Kingdom streams out everywhere. It flows forth from one royal Court, through one royal Person, with incomparable precision of purpose. All of life, whether for individuals, churches or nations, plays itself out under the immediate, unstoppable, unavoidable (even if unrecognized)

sovereignty of the Son of God. He’s the most contemporary ruler there is. He is “the Ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1).

Our Lord has no serious rivals in the universe. Instead the Father is aggressively uniting all things under His Son’s feet this very moment. Christ is not waiting to be crowned as king. He is only waiting to be *recognized* as king. Reigning as its only Sovereign, He is responsible to judge the world and then cleanse it for His own uses, one way or another (Acts 17). Even as you read these words, He is actively restoring all creation, according to God’s eternal plan, by the increasing subjugation of all things to Himself (Eph. 1). One day earth’s peoples from all the Ages will be convincingly

conquered at the great Climax. They will be summed up in our Lord forever, either by *redemption* or by *judgment*. His supremacy comprises the only horizon toward which all of us are moving, whether believers or unbelievers.

The message of the Ascension comes down to this: *What Jesus will be Lord of ultimately, He is fully Lord of now. Whatever hope Jesus' reign will offer the universe ultimately, it offers believers now.* All things are as much under His authoritative oversight at this moment as they will be in the day of His Return. Even now He freely exercises all of His divine prerogatives, executing divine purposes. This is as true today as it will be at the crowning hour of the Consummation.

The great midpoint of history now lies behind us. The future has broken in upon us. Now it unfolds before us day by day. Since Christ's coronation in Heaven, according to Acts 1, the Church not only looks *up* (for His return), and looks *out* (on His missionary advance), but also looks *forward* (to whatever more of His Kingdom is about to be revealed among the nations). God's Word assures us that in every step of our journey His Son continues extending His scepter, enforcing His dominion, validating His victories. That's why we have full assurance that our labors for Him will never be wasted. Our mission to earth's peoples is not a fool's errand. In fact, He's actually going before us as we go.

All of this has very *practical* implications for our personal walk with God's Son. Even before the End our union with Him should bring us powerful *foretastes* each day of who He will be for us then, when He wonderfully wraps up all history and all creation in Himself. "Christ is in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1) — just this one verse links us experientially, through the dynamics of His indwelling dominion, with the New Heaven and Earth. Consequently, as amazing as it sounds, believers are actually invited to experience life-changing "beginnings of the End", ahead of time. In other words, we can expect "*approximations* of the Consummation" (as we'll term them in chapter 4) because He is already ruling.

At the throne right now, the future has been described and decided — in a Person! Whenever and wherever His reign breaks through into our ordinary routines there's more than meets the eye. His grace toward believers incorporates key themes of His Grand Finale. That's because He Himself defines those themes — whether then or now — by virtue of who He is, where He leads, how He imparts and what He receives. In other words, by virtue of His supremacy.

THINK WITH ME ...**Why is Psalm 110 quoted so frequently in the New Testament?**

Consider for a moment Psalm 110. It is the most frequently quoted or referenced Old Testament passage by New Testament writers. Why is that? Why, out of all the ancient promises, did the first disciples turn to this ancient hymn time and time again? The answer is obvious. This one text spoke more clearly than most about who they understood their ascended Jesus to be as He worked in His Church. Supremacy, you'll notice, is its central theme:

“The Lord says to my Lord:

‘Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.’

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion;
you will rule in the midst of your enemies.

Your troops will be willing
on your day of battle ...

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:

‘You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek’...

He will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

He will judge the nations...”

Psalm 110 pinpoints the single greatest reality unfolding around us today. Its drama interprets both the front page of our newspapers as well as the frontlines of our mission. It reinforces that peoples and events everywhere are being woven into Christ's reign, whether they know it or not. No matter how far from the center of divine activity we may seem to be, Christ engages every human domain. He engages kingdoms of finance and commerce, entertainment and education, industry and labor, the arts and sciences, rulers and governments. There is not a square inch of any sphere of existence for which it cannot be said: “Christ rules over *you!*” All ambitions will soon be cut or culminated in Him.

History is not moving in a vacuum. At His footstool, Psalm 110 tells us, we can watch history pursuing one increasing purpose: To bring about the fullest possible expression of Christ's supremacy, to the farthest bounds of

earth, to the greatest extent envisioned by the Father. Nothing will ever turn this battle back at the gates.

Our hope in God stands strong because Jesus' reign already stands strong. Installed as Messiah, His promised work of universal restoration is underway. His lordship is becoming increasingly visible among all peoples, as God works through His own. The whole earth boasts wondrous potential for experiencing and expressing God's glory. The Son's victory procession is on the move across the planet, recruiting people from many tribes and tongues.

Therefore, wherever they live and whatever they face Christians can expect to walk daily in ever-increasing demonstrations of His supremacy, by the power of His Spirit in us. No wonder Psalm 110 predicts: "Your troops will be *willing* on your day of battle." In view of what He is up to, enthusiasm for serving Him will be unbounded.

THINK WITH ME ...

How are we a part of Christ's missionary invasion among the nations?

Similar to Psalm 110, Isaiah 9 confirms that "of the increase of His government there shall be no end". No matter what the future holds out to us, we can be sure of this: The impact of Christ's rule will continue to swell and grow — not shrink and shrivel — from age to age, until the Climax of All Things arrives. *This hope has consistently propelled Christ's global cause of world evangelization.*

In the 2nd century, for example, Clement of Alexandria wrote: "The whole world, along with Athens and Greece, has already become the domain of the Word." North African Christian scholar Tertullian, writing around the same time, boldly asserted that "We have filled every place — cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market places, palace, senate, forum" leaving nothing to the pagans "but the temples of your gods". Why? In the same treatise he exclaimed that even peoples inaccessible to Roman armies had become "subjugated to Christ" through the Gospel, adding: "In all these places the name of Christ reigns. Christ's name is extending everywhere, believed everywhere, worshipped by all the nations, and is reigning everywhere." Early Church fathers were convinced that Christ's Kingdom was *advancing*, generation after generation.

Like waves ascending up a beach in the momentum of an incoming tide, despite periods of ebbs and flow, the missionary purpose cannot be stopped.

Its Champion remains undaunted, concerned for all peoples, Lord of all peoples, for all time to come. God has no “Plan B”. At this very moment, our lofty Leader is about the business of bringing about unconditional surrender among all the nations through the spread of the Gospel. In our generation this planet-wide mission is one of the most vivid expressions of the all-embracing scope of Christ’s Ascension.

From the throne Christ has never ceased directing a 2000-year-old global missionary invasion of the nations with the Gospel. True to His universal presence, there is no place His ambassadors go where He has not gone ahead of them. With full authority He sets the stage for our arrival before we get there. He works through us when we arrive. He sustains the impact of His reign long after we move on.

The Father has given His Son keys to countless doors, in cities and communities, doors just waiting to be opened. There are peoples poised by sovereign grace, even now, to be reached with His salvation. There is no place on the planet Christ cannot and will not lead His missionary Church in its victory parade (Mt. 28). He intends to *fill* the nations with the hope of the Gospel (Acts 1 with Col. 1). Sovereignly rearranging the affairs of mankind as needed to bring everything to pass, the Father has set His heart on countless sinners yet to be drawn to His promises in Christ Jesus (See 2 Cor. 2, 3, 4).

With full determination this mission-sending God has narrowed His sights on *our* generation. He sees more than two billion people still completely unevangelized. He knows there are multitudes who have no knowledge of who His Son is — who have no one like them, near them, even to begin to tell them. But He refuses to leave earth’s peoples in this hopeless condition. What is God’s *goal*? — to achieve the greatest possible glory for His Son, among the greatest host of humans, to the fullest extent possible, in a way that magnifies forever the triumphs of His mercy and the supremacy of His Messiah.

THINK WITH ME ...

What does opposition to His mission tell us about His supremacy?

To avoid any spirit of trivial “triumphalism”, however, let’s be clear on one thing: Christ’s missionary cause not only initiates *harvest fields*; it also instigates *battlefields*. Any war is costly, usually bloody. Skirmishes are lost and won. Not every moment in the service of Jesus’ Kingdom offers visible,

unalloyed advances in His mission. There are Forces of Darkness opposed to God's promises, ready to fight them, and us, to the death.

Still, we can boast in our undiminished hope. Though not physically present, Christ is right now actively subduing His enemies, dethroning Principalities and Powers in many places. Increasingly He is putting limits on their opposition to His dominion among the nations. Though the time of their full destruction awaits the Consummation, God's Son is rapidly rendering them ineffective and unproductive. He is breaking their *stranglehold* on earth's peoples. He is tearing down their *strongholds* against the Gospel. He is upholding His cause to bring saving hope to sinners everywhere (compare Rev. 12:1-12 with Heb. 12:25-29). The increased martyrdom of Christians over the past century alone, in unprecedented numbers, only serves to reinforce how decisively and effectively Christ's redemptive mission is penetrating enemy territory.

In 1948 Dwight Eisenhower published his memoirs on World War II entitled *Crusade in Europe*. As commander-in-chief of the Allied Forces, he faced many pressures to give up his primary goal, to use the beaches of Normandy for an all-out invasion of the Nazi empire at the earliest practical moment. Two sentences on page 48 in his book sum up his story well: "History has proved that nothing is more difficult in war than to adhere to a single strategic plan. Unforeseen and glittering promise on the one hand, and unexpected difficulties or risks upon the other, present constant temptations to desert the chosen line of action in favor of another."

In the same way, *our* Supreme Commander will never waver, despite all the opposition. He will not desert His invasion of the nations. He will not turn back from fulfilling the promises of the Father, or fail to recapture uncontested what is rightfully His. His "one strategic plan" is for every knee to bow, by either redemption or judgment, in the confession of His Kingship over all, to the glory of the Almighty Father (Isa. 45 and Phil. 2).

THINK WITH ME ...

Why is our Ascended Ruler also our chief prayer partner?

Let's return to the teaching of Psalm 110 for a moment. There we read that His reign will reach out through His role as *High Priest*. Heaven-bound in the Holy of Holies, He has taken charge permanently *as a man of prayer*. This may be the most strategic confirmation of His reputation as the summation of Christian hope.

The theme of Psalm 110 is picked up and expanded throughout the book of Hebrews. Jesus' prayers, we learn there, are the *primary* means of expressing His supremacy right now. Fundamentally, they are how He works out the far-reaching ramifications of His Cross and Resurrection, both for churches and for nations.

For example, we read: "He has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to His ancestry, but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.... And a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.... Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.... Because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him because He always lives to intercede for them" (selected from Heb. 7).

Poised every moment at God's right hand, our Lord Jesus bears on His heart two things: Heaven's promises and the saints' pleas — simultaneously — mingled together. He presents both to the God of all hope. As our Chief Intercessor, He stands up for His people's longings. He claims for us the Father's absolute favor. It is due Him as the Son and as the King of all kings. His perpetual priesthood procures for us God's promises for every godly desire, every act of obedient faith, every redemptive mission, every battle with the Devil — and especially, for every crisis of supremacy we may experience.

But there's more. Because He is supreme, Jesus is also the ultimate *answer* to all of our prayers. That's why the last prayer of the Bible (Rev. 22) simply says: "Come, Lord Jesus." Who He is, in kingly array, will finally bring total satisfaction to every cry of our hearts. His prayers ensure for all of us that the crowning conclusion of our prayers will unfold — as it unfolds for His universal Kingdom — just as the Father ordained from eternity (Rom. 8).

The triumphs of the Empire of the Son, present and future, are inseparable from how the Father delights to respond to the prayers of the Son. This certainty should hold every Christian captive to a Kingdom-sized vision that refuses to let us go. Because He is Lord, as the Bible teaches repeatedly, those who hope in Him (and pray accordingly) "will not be disappointed" (Isa. 64).

6) Return: The *Consummation* of Our Hope in Christ (Revelation 19:6-16; 22:12-13)

Kingdom activities that unfold *this* day around the Savior will, on *another* Day, reach cosmic proportions. Just as Christ's lordship has public dimensions now, those same dimensions will be permanently and incomparably magnified in the Hour He returns to culminate the promises of God.

Two discourses in John's Gospel make this point in dramatic fashion. Responding to critics of His Sabbath healings, Jesus exclaimed: "To your amazement [the Father] will show [the Son] even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life ... the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father ... A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out ..." (Jn. 5). With the crowd that sought Him only for the miracle of multiplying loaves and fishes,

Jesus did not mince words: "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day ... I am the living bread ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day..." (Jn. 6). In both cases, Jesus tied immediate claims of His supremacy to how His authority would be revealed at the End.

To grasp fuller depths of Christ's glory today, therefore — to understand how He truly sums up all Christian hope in Himself — we must actively mine-out the incomparable truths of what the *fulfillment* of His reign will look like in the Age To Come. The term normally used for the everlasting displays of our Lord's dominion is the "*Consummation*".

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Just as surely as it is appointed for all men to die once, and after that they pass to their judgment, so it is certain that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many and after that, to those who look to him, he will appear a second time, not this time to deal with sin but to bring full salvation to those who eagerly await him.

(HEBREWS 9 – PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

THINK WITH ME ...**How does hope *inaugurated* become hope *consummated*?**

In one respect, as we've just seen, His coronation inaugurated the beginnings of the Final Day. But it did so only in *preliminary* forms within the unfolding drama of history (properly re-spelled, *His-story*). Current experiences of Christ's supremacy parallel, but only initially, what we'll behold *more fully* when Jesus comes back to bring forth a New Jerusalem under His triumphant gaze (Rev. 21-22). All foretastes of the promises wait to be "consummated" at that Hour.

Of one thing we can be sure: At this very moment He's preparing for something much grander and more conclusive than we can imagine. There's coming a revolutionary revelation of His reign, when the unbelieving peoples of earth will groan in fear, seeking to flee His face (Rev. 6). Christ will bring down the curtain on the dead-end tragedies of this fallen world, to raise it again on that fabulous Forever Festival that the Bible terms eternal life. Faith will flow into sight. Promises will culminate in ways beyond comprehension, visitation of God we call our Lord's visible return in Glory.

Would you like to understand more thoroughly how Christ's lordship can reinvigorate discipleship *right now*? Then, join me to explore a vision of the final dimensions of His eternal Kingdom. To enter into a truly victorious life with Him day after day, we need to uncover something of the *ultimate scope* of the hope of His Final Victory. To benefit thoroughly from His Headship over the Church in *this* generation, we need to grasp greater measures of the grace by which He will rule His people *later*.

What I'm saying is this: If we want to help the Church discover the full extent of Christ's majesty and power; if we want to re-convert fellow believers back to Him for ALL that He is, it makes sense to devote significant time to learning how He intends to bring our destiny to its Climax.

As we're about to discover in the next chapter, Christ is more than just the *summation* of our hope. He is also the *consummation* of that hope. It is impossible to understand His supremacy — to define adequately what the "all" in the phrase "Christ is all" truly means — apart from understanding what the soon-arriving, decisive Day of His Power will tell us about *Him*. How will we interpret His lordship the hour we see Him coming in clouds of glory (Rev. 1)? I'd like to take the next few pages to talk about it.

PARTING WORDS FROM NAPOLEON

Napoleon Bonaparte's final days were spent in despair and defeat due primarily to his own shameful ambition and lust for power. Yet toward the end of his life the brilliant French emperor remarked, in what may be his most memorable words:

"Everything in Christ astonishes me!

Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything
with which I am able to compare Him
and by which I am able to explain Him.

Here is everything extraordinary."

[emphasis mine]

If only this military general had nourished a heart that acted in concert with such convictions. If only he had submitted to Eternity's Emperor. I'd like to paraphrase Napoleon's insights, suggesting how he might have spoken of Christ had he known Him for ALL that we have just discovered in this chapter:

Everything in Christ astonishes me!

There is no other who can compare with Him.

Nothing in all creation can secure my destiny apart from Him.

Every inexplicable grace the Father offers flows from Him.

Christ Supreme is the extraordinary summation of all my hope.

Is this the One to whom *your* heart belongs? Is this how *you* are prepared to praise Him forever?

