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CHRIST SUPREME: *The Consummation* of Christian Hope

Recover a Vision Shaped by the
FULFILLMENT of His Supremacy

In *The Silver Chair* (one volume in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*), a dreadfully thirsty little girl named Jill finds herself desperate to drink from a stream of water. Unfortunately, it is guarded by a fearsome-looking lion named Aslan (the Christ figure in the Narnia series). Lewis describes how, overcome by thirst, "she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first." Jill asks and receives permission from him to come and drink. The lion's voice frightens her so much, however, that she wavers over risking another step toward the stream.

"Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?"

"I make no promise," said the Lion ...

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion ...

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion. “There is no other stream.”

It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward.

With this incident Lewis illustrates the tension all Christians should feel about their relationship with God’s Son.

On the one hand, around Christ flows a river of blessing filled with the riches of His Kingdom. It is sufficient to quench our deepest thirsts as well as satisfy the pervasive longings of a whole creation. Christians are invited to drink with abandon, to consume without hesitation all He promises us. Yet, we do so knowing this: Christ will also consume *us* with Himself in the process. This is the ultimate transaction held out to everyone in the Gospel. This is what Lewis understood so well: God calls us both to consume Christ (never to cease feeding upon the wealth of power and riches in His Kingdom) and to be consumed with Him (like the fiery bush Moses witnessed as it was consumed with the flames of God’s glory, yet able to keep on burning).

“*Consummation*” is the technical word theologians use to define the decisive nature of a Christian’s destiny in Christ. In light of Aslan’s proposition, we might spell it “*consume-ation*”!

In an exhaustive treatise on New Testament teaching, Professor George Eldon Ladd concluded: “You can’t understand God’s redemptive work in history apart from the Consummation. *The Consummation is the true focus of all revelation.*” In other words, the Gospel is not simply about “how to get to heaven when we die”. Rather it summons us to live every day increasingly awake and alive to the lordship of Christ. Why? Because bearing down on top of us is the *fulfillment* of who He is, where He’s headed, what He’s doing and how He’s blessed (the four facets of supremacy). For every believer, the warning is clear: “The End of all things is at hand” (1 Pet. 4).

The Consummation provides one of the most powerful perspectives on the supremacy of Christ. It summons us to take a hard look at how He will show Himself supreme at the Climax. Here’s how Paul painted it for a congregation:

“For God allowed us to know the secret of His plan, and it is this:

He purposes in His sovereign will

that all human history will be consummated in Christ,

that everything that exists in Heaven or earth

shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Him.”

— Ephesians 1:10 (*Phillips translation, emphasis mine*)

In this chapter, therefore, we want to:

- **Explore the meaning of the Consummation and how it manifests Christ's primacy in the universe.**
 - **Pinpoint how important it is for us to see the fulfillment of all things in Him.**
 - **Uncover some of the important dimensions of the Consummation that magnify His supremacy today.**
 - **Identify how Christ embodies in Himself, both "then" and "now", the core characteristics of the Consummation.**
 - **Apply our new understandings to restoring hope and passion toward Christ within our lives and our churches.**
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The FULFILLMENT of His Supremacy

(Revelation 21:1-22:7)

Let's start with some old fashioned candidness. *Is the Consummation the dimension of hope in Christ's supremacy by which you and I are really prepared to live today?*

In other words, based on who the Consummation will one day reveal our Savior to be — the sole subject of our Eternal Bliss — is He the same Person we thought we welcomed when we first gave our lives to Him? How comfortable are we with building an ongoing, intimate relationship with the One who will soon climax human history under His sovereign's scepter? Knowing that the very same Person who inhabits our lives right now, demanding our hearts, is the same King who will consummate everything in Heaven and on earth in His glorious Person, do we actually expect to *enjoy* Him anytime soon?

To ask this another way: Is this Fulfiller-of-All-Things the one with whom we're willing to risk a deepening love (Jn. 15)? In all honesty, is He the kind of "Lion" to whom we truly want to draw near, drinking in His glory as we savor His "river of delights"? Are we prepared to pursue a *personal* relationship with the One enthroned on High (Rev. 5), before whom all nations will come out for disposal, and in whom all of God's

purposes will be fulfilled to the uttermost, forever?

Bottom line, I'm asking: Does the concept of "consummation" genuinely express the way we want to know Him, both now and later? Are we willing to consume *this* Lord Jesus and, even more, be consumed *with* Him for ever and ever? And are we equally eager to help other believers experience with

us this similar encounter on this side of Eternity?

It is my intention in this chapter to encourage all of us to dare to respond to each of these questions, maybe for the first time, with an unhesitating "Yes" ... and see what happens!

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Before you know it, the Son of Man will arrive with all the splendor of His Father, accompanied by an army of angels. You'll get everything you have coming to you, a personal gift. This isn't pie in the sky by and by. Some of you standing here are going to see it take place, see the Son of Man in kingdom glory ... (He) led them up a high mountain. His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes. Sunlight poured from his face. His clothes were filled with light ... a light-radiant cloud enveloped them, and sounding from deep in the cloud a voice: 'This is my Son, marked by My love, the focus of My delight. Listen to Him.'

(MATTHEW 16 AND 17 – THE MESSAGE)

THINK WITH ME ...

How should the hope of "consummation" affect our daily lives with Christ?

Privately, from time to time, most people (Christian and non-Christian) reflect on the End of the World, whether on the final state of their own lives or on the wrap up of human history in general. Recent polls, for example, indicate that more than one-third of Americans say they are plugged into international news to see how it relates to what the Bible teaches about the destruction of the world. Seventeen percent believe Christ's return will materialize in their lifetime.

In a front cover story on *The Bible and the Apocalypse*, *TIME* magazine observed that when mothers tell their children that a situation "is not the end of the world" that becomes the little one's introduction to humankind's basic reference point. "We seem to be born with an instinct that the end is out there somewhere. Just as all cultures have their creation stories, so too they have their visions of the end." Calling the book of

Revelation a "Technicolor spectacle" on the climax of history, *TIME* pinpoints a primary paradox for those who believe its predictions: "How should we react — with hope or with dread?"

Properly understood, the End was intended to fill *Christians* with nothing less than reactions of rousing expectations toward our Savior. God wants us to look forward with joy to the future He has planned for us. As psychologist John Eldredge reminds us, a story is only as good as its *ending*. Without a proper outcome the drama of life can easily become a nightmare for any person. Anticipating our Happy Ending in Christ, however, takes away fear and frees Christians to enjoy, this very minute, the spectacular story we're a part of — and more importantly, enjoy the Person who makes that story worth living.

Dread has no place in a Christian's outlook once we understand two fundamental facts: First, "the Consummation" — the glorious climax to history, that is HIS-story — provides the most comprehensive definition for Christ's supremacy and the hope it brings. Second, this has immediate and exciting implications for our walk with Him today, too.

THINK WITH ME ...

How much do you feel a part of history's grand and glorious goal?

Theologians often speak of history as *teleological*. God has a clear goal (*teleos*) in mind for the nations. All human events, moving under God's sovereign hand, flow toward the Appointed Hour when Christ's Kingdom will be all that remains. Nothing in this world is static. Under Christ's current reign everything is in transition toward the fulfillment of that vision. From the moment each human being was conceived, divine destiny has beckoned us, as it has the entire creation, toward Judgment Day. In the same way, from the opening moment of our *new* birth, the consummation of all things in Christ was written into the DNA of the new creation Christians have become in Him (2 Cor. 5).

Scripture, however, does not encourage naiveté about this goal. We shouldn't project parades of progress or methodical marches moving upward toward the blossoming of some utopian dream. From the Fall forward it has remained clear: History knows no evidence of permanent spiritual progress, no means to reclaim our original innocence by our own efforts, no foolproof road map we can improvise to traverse back to Eternal Dwellings. The rise and collapse of previous civilizations substantiate that something outside of the human race must intervene. More specifically, *Someone* bigger than we are must step forth to extract us from both persist-

ent pits of personal despair and terrorizing threats of global disintegration.

Enter God's eternal plan! Enter the promises of Heaven's unprecedented, choreographed rending of the skies! Enter the *fulfillment* of Christ's supremacy — climaxing with an in-breaking that will one day, at the End of all things, permanently establish His reign, in realms both visible and invisible! "God's two creations (writes John Stott) — his whole universe and his whole Church — must be unified under the cosmic Christ who is supreme head of both."

Like a master surgeon's precise incision, Christ will soon "slice open" Heaven and earth to reveal death-defying displays of God's sovereign glory and grace. As already noted, His Coming will be literal and dramatic. Inescapable. Unavoidable. Utterly transforming. And it will be realized with greater specificity than the prophets ever had words to portray.

In fact, the nature of evil is such that the End can come no other way. It is absolutely *required* for Christ to intervene decisively at the close of the conflict of the ages in order to deliver a people helpless to rescue themselves, and hopeless if left to themselves.

The Bible actually stakes God's reputation on His ability to conquer and destroy all evil thoroughly. It makes the revelation of His glory inseparable from His power to reclaim fully His creation back from Dark Powers; to unleash in totality the redeeming work of His Son in all directions; to establish visibly Christ's Kingdom before all beings in Heaven and earth and under the earth; to have the King sit upon His Throne uncontested and unhindered forever. There *needs* to be a Consummation. There needs to be an Hour when everything is compelled to confess and confirm the supremacy of God's Son!

The owner of what many regard as the greatest race horse of the 20th century put it well in the acclaimed movie *Seabiscuit*: "The end of the race is not the finish line. The *future* is the finish line." That's equally true for every disciple who runs the race of life. Our eyes must be fixed on Jesus and the Consummation of everything in Him. It is for this we strive and pray and hope.

THINK WITH ME ...

What Biblical themes define the *Consummation* of Christ's supremacy?

As an historic doctrine of the Church, the idea of the Consummation has

been around a long time. The teaching consistently has incorporated the promise that our Redeemer is *supreme enough* ...

- to complete God's plan in every detail.
- to give God's Kingdom its ultimate manifestation.
- to bring about the climax or grand finale of God's promises.
- to dominate fully the New Creation as Heir of the universe.
- to consummate the destiny of God's people with God's glory in God's presence.

In each phrase above, the ultimate outcome is clear. Drawing parallels once again with Aslan in *The Silver Chair*: The Father's intention is that when the Consummation finally breaks upon us, the universe of necessity will become engaged permanently with Christ and no other. We will consume Him and be consumed with Him. Multiple Scriptures predict we will be possessed by His every word, devoured with delight in His majesty, passionately enthralled with His magnificence. We will be caught up in giving Him unending praise in full view of His Throne. (Take a moment to think about that. You will be there to see it!)

The Consummation was certainly familiar to *Old Testament* saints. Scholars note that hundreds of Jewish prophetic expectations about the Climax targeted a handful of major themes, including these:

- No matter how dark the circumstances, God's righteousness will triumph among nations.
- The Kingdom will come forth at God's decree despite all opposition.
- The judgments of God upon the nations will bring permanent justice and peace to earth.
- Believers can expect the return of God's manifest glory to inhabit Zion.
- His presence will rally exiled saints to serve Him there once again.
- Then they'll witness the enthronement of God's King over Zion and all the earth.
- God will make His home among them, defending and saving them from every enemy.

- God will rebuild and fill His temple so He might be worshipped by His people forever.
- God’s people will *prepare* for the End because history is moving toward this Grand Finale.

According to *New Testament* writers, in His Son the Father finally intends to bring every one of these ancient themes to glorious completion. He will maximize them in exquisite detail. Christ will oversee unprecedented fulfillments of each prophetic design, even those set in motion thousands of years ago. In that Final Hour all things spiritual and physical will converge around one, overarching revelation of the Second Person of the Trinity in the full power of His Kingdom. That is why it is appropriate to call Christ Himself the “*consummation* of Biblical hope”. Our whole future is lodged in Him. It is defined by Him. It is ultimately consummated in Him.

THINK WITH ME ...

How does Christ’s second coming add weight to his supremacy now?

The Church has always lived in the expectation of the renewal and recapitulation of all things in Jesus. Ours is not only a God who “is and was” but also a God who “is to come” (Rev. 1). Christ is both Alpha and Omega. There is a time just ahead of us when He will come to His creation and His people in a more confrontational way than He ever has before. On that Day every hope toward which the committed Christian is invited to press will be brought to culmination.

That’s why Martin Luther said that there are really only two days on a Christian’s calendar: “today” and “that Day”. Without a doubt *that* Day is straight ahead because Christ *is* coming back! When He returns, *all* of us will be involved in His powerful in-breaking, one way or another. When this happens, Christ’s reappearance will have as much tangible reality for you as the chair you’re sitting on has for you at this moment, as you read this sentence. So, how much of a difference should that make in my walk with Jesus today? A lot! Let me show you why.

Three important Greek words are used in the New Testament to describe this impending, unparalleled revelation of the supremacy of God's Son:

- *Parousia*
referring to His tangible, even visible, presence when He arrives.
- *Apocalypsis*
referring to His dramatic unveiling or disclosure at that time.
- *Epiphaneia*
describing how His appearing will be indisputable, unavoidable and impossible to deny.

But guess what: These words aren't just about Christ's triumphal return. They can also be used to portray what happens any time God steps in to reactivate, in Jesus, deeper experiences of His promises at work among His people.

In other words, whenever God grants a heart's desire for more of Christ's *power* to fill a life, one can expect to experience more of Christ's *presence*, more of His *unveiling*, more of His decisive *interventions* on our behalf. Whenever Christ involves Himself by His Spirit to carry out God's purposes for us, in a sense we could say He "comes" to us. He actually promised us: "I will not leave you ... I will come to you. Because I live you also will live ... obey my teaching. My Father will love [you], and we will come to [you] and make our home with [you]" (Jn. 14).

At the End when Christ's climactic breakthrough takes place, it will be simply the ultimate "*come-summation*". In other words, it will be the grandest of all His comings. It will be the one "coming" that finally and completely sums up every other time He has ever drawn near to His people as Lord! Every other coming of God's Son into our lives by His Spirit, day-by-day, takes its cue from that final "Second Coming".

QUOTABLE QUOTE

This judgment will issue eventually in the final denouement of the personal coming of the Lord Jesus from Heaven with the angels of his power. It will bring full justice in dazzling flame upon those who have refused to know God or to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Their punishment will be eternal exclusion from the radiance of the face of the Lord, and the glorious majesty of his power. But to those whom he has made holy, his coming will mean splendor unimaginable. It will be a breathtaking wonder to all who believe — including you, for you have believed the message that we have given you

(2 THESSALONIANS 1
— PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

To put it differently: The Consummation shouldn't be limited in our thinking to some cataclysmic, apocalyptic episode. There's more to it than scenarios spelled out in popular prophetic graphs and charts or by dime-store novels developed around plots about end-times conspiracies. Rather, every time Christ meets a believer's spiritual hunger, or heals broken relationships, or empowers expanded missionary outreach, He supplies us with rich *foretastes* of the day when the Consummation will unfold thoroughly.

Biblically speaking, in this age the Spirit wants His Church to experience preludes of each theme of the Consummation (including justice, healing, community, worship, and divine presence). In this age every Christian is automatically in the thick of a huge cosmic drama, from Creation to Consummation, moving toward victory with every passing day. Even current world events reported on CNN are somehow a strategic part of this all-encompassing epic. In it all, Christ is both the central plot and the chief character ... *now*, the way He will be at the End.

Come to think of it, this fact is by far the most compelling and fastest-breaking international news story CNN could ever aspire to broadcast!

He's Leading Us into Quite a Future!

(Micah 4:1-13)

Library shelves bulge with centuries of books documenting different views on the *drama* of the Consummation. Currently, for example, a popular twelve-volume fiction novel portrays what might happen worldwide (by some interpretations) after Christ "raptures" the whole Church away to heaven (as some teach He will). Imagination-grabbing, these books have sold by the millions, more to non-Christians actually than to Christians.

Throughout Church history debates about the End have sometimes turned quite fierce. Shrill arguments have been waged over the identity of characteristics, activities, characters, plots and props expected to surface in the Final Act of redemption's story. But let's be thankful that on many of the basics Christians remain in agreement (even if we're still not all agreed on what will happen within the timeframe immediately preceding it). This has been especially true

when the heart of the discussion has remained centered on learning from prophetic visions more about the glorious greatness of the One whose arrival all of us anticipate. What are some of those points of agreement?

THINK WITH ME ...

What will the consummation of Christ's supremacy *not* include?

To start with, most agree that more is said in Scripture about what the Consummation will not include, than what it will. For example we are told there will be no death, no mourning, no crying. We are told that pain and heartache will pass away. Sin will be banished. Satan will no longer prowl. Why this emphasis on the negative?

On the one hand it is much easier for the Bible to tabulate all the ugly dimensions of a fallen world with which we are so familiar, and then simply declare: "Under Christ's reign, there will be no more of that!" On the other hand, the Grand Finale involves such an all-encompassing, unparalleled unleashing of Christ's supremacy that the vision begs for graphically adequate categories to picture it.

The fact is, the End-of-the-Age incorporates a measure of blessings beyond what we mortals are able to comprehend, let alone verbalize. This should humble us. There will always be a magnitude — a mystery — to Christ's lordship, wherever and whenever it is manifested, that we will never fully grasp, nor ever be able to fully explore. This will be even truer at His return. As Paul writes in Romans 11: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.... Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!"

THINK WITH ME...

What will the consummation of Christ's supremacy *include for sure*?

All the great prophetic world religions, influencing over half the world's peoples — Judaism, Islam and Christianity — promote breathtaking narratives of the Final State. All three refer to it as "Heaven".

The afterlife's allure has been painted (sometimes literally on canvas)

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

The Master Himself will give the command. Arch angel thunder! God's trumpet blast! He'll come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise — they'll go first. Then the rest of us who are still alive at the time will be caught up with them to the clouds to meet the Master. Oh, we'll be walking on air! And then there will be one huge family reunion with the Master. So reassure one another with these words.

(1 THESSALONIANS 4 — THE MESSAGE)

with a spectrum of enticing visions. Some anticipate dark-eyed virgins at the beck and call of faithful martyrs. Some envision gardens and palaces and mansions of gold. All three refer to unending feasts accompanied by angelic choirs with indescribable bliss spawned by a bonanza of God's resplendent beauty. All three talk about reunions with loved ones in a joy that knows no bounds. The Koran, for example, refers to a place with upholstered couches, pomegranate trees, deep green pastures and unlimited opportunities for sensual pleasures. At least three quarters of the American population believe in basic Judeo-Christian pictures of heaven as an actual place, though we seem divided over whether it is a luxurious arboretum or a well laid-out gated community.

This much we know with confidence from the *Bible*: The Consummation will not deposit us on some celestial shore where eons crawl by

tediously. More accurately, time will be transformed by eternity. *Simultaneous realizations* of all that God originally designed, desired, deserved and decreed since the beginning of Creation will take place in us and around us, through the reign of His Son. No longer will Christ's kingship be experienced in bits and pieces. Rather, the Consummation will fully exhaust what His dominion is all about. It will display it in one grand, unending panorama that penetrates the most profound longings of our souls.

Canadian theologian John Stackhouse sums up many Biblical pictures of eternity this way: "Heaven, in fact, has not been portrayed as a boring place, but the location of the highest aspirations of the human heart." C.S. Lewis reflected once: "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world."

In other words, our deepest hungers for happiness should signal to us a great deal about the Coming Ages. They tell us we were made to inhabit another dominion, to relish the blessings of another Kingdom. The Spirit of God tantalizes us with what's ahead for us in Jesus. He activates a wealth of expectations in us that foreshadow the breadth of joys in the coming

Consummation. In doing so, He precludes our ever settling for anything short of the final revelation of the Son of the Father. Reflective of E.T.'s heartcry for his mother planet (the main theme in the Spielberg movie *The Extra-Terrestrial*), the Spirit stirs an inner restlessness that keeps us from allowing anything or any place — or any one — to substitute for the final “Home” for which we were made (Isa. 61-62).

So, we need to take heart. Our yearnings will be fulfilled with God's tangible supplies. According to Scripture, the Consummation is destined ultimately to manifest itself with *historical literalness*. The Father loves to carry out His promises (as well as our longings) in concrete, practical ways. How can we be sure? Just look at how He did this when fulfilling the prophecies related to the *first* coming of His Son. Most Biblical scholars agree that the Bible portrays an eternity which retains an ongoing physical creation, not unlike what God originally intended in Genesis 1.

We won't float way on illuminated cotton clouds. Instead, the current creation will be both emancipated and renovated by Jesus for our full use. To our joy themes derived from the initial Garden of Eden will be reactivated, though greatly expanded. Creation, liberated from the bondage of decay (Rom. 8), will be incorporated into a new world, concentrated within the jeweled walls of a new city fashioned by the Architect of Heaven (as the colorful imagery of the last two chapters of Revelation details for us).

Taking its cue from that vision, the early Church eventually constructed what was termed a “*theology of recapitulation*”. By this they meant God would rebuild His physical creation, restoring it to all He originally designed, yet doing so in a way that outshines the literal grandeur of any previous expressions of the heavens and the earth. With the risen Redeemer at the helm we can anticipate a whole new quality of spiritual life to emerge within the literal creation, further magnifying the essence of His supremacy.

Let's examine this last thought a little more carefully.

THINK WITH ME ...

In what ways will Christ's reign require both *continuity* and *discontinuity*?

As just noted, there will be a strong measure of *continuity* between the original creation and the consummate new creation. The earth, renewed and purified, will still be the same kind of sphere, destined to be covered with praises to God like waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). In part Scripture

promises that its inhabitants, captivated by the knowledge God's glory "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4), will radically improve the earth *just by their being there*, filling it with holy passion to bring eternal delight to the Godhead.

Which means, it seems to me, that what will render the Consummation especially *new* is how it will be animated by the Holy Spirit's ongoing ministry of Christ's life to His people. The Spirit will inspire the saints' devotion. He will carry us toward rightful worship of God as well as righteous activities for God. Our glorified bodies, directed by the Holy Spirit ("spiritual bodies" Paul calls them) will be able to participate fully in every other dimension of Christ's final Kingdom — both seen and unseen (1 Cor. 15).

On the other hand, Scripture also teaches an obvious *discontinuity* between the old creation and the new. Turning to Dr. Stackhouse again: "Heaven's most welcoming features seem to correspond nicely to *inhospitable counterparts* on earth." [Emphasis mine.] The Consummation will establish permanent peace versus international chaos. The Bible promises beautiful dwellings to replace earthly squalor; abundance to replace the oppressive poverty of the masses; mutual love to replace the age-old exploitation of one human being by another.

Discontinuity transpires as everything passes through the fire — engulfed in God's holy purgings (2 Pet. 3). We call it Judgment Day. It involves a cataclysmic display of divine revulsion and opposition to all evil. It will fill up and seal all other judgments throughout history. It will publish and finalize every one of God's previous decrees against our fallenness and our rebellion. The inescapable consequences of opposing God's purposes in Christ will be published abroad, ratified as just and true by Heaven's citizens (Rom. 2 and Acts 17). "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.... The nations were angry and your wrath has come. Time has come for judging the dead ... for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev. 11).

In that awesome hour, everything that is not of Christ — everything that remains unyielded to His supremacy — will be consumed by His wrath. ("Hide us from the face of Him on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" Rev. 6) We must never forget that despite God's overflowing favor, there hovers a matching and equally more sobering theme of His fearsome fury. He will banish all things that are incompatible with His Son (Rev. 20).

And the last enemy to be destroyed is Death itself (1 Cor. 15).

In addition the Consummation will instigate another similarly radical break with the present. God will utterly crush Satan and his lethal forces, abruptly bringing to conclusion their ages-old resistance to Christ's dominance. "The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.... Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ....'" (Rev. 12).

Of course, by death, resurrection and ascension, Christ's victory over the Devil has *already been won*. But sinners and demons alike still must *concede* that victory. Though Christ claims full kingship, reigning at God's right hand He must, and will, *prevail* one day as King everywhere. Not only has He inherited the Kingdom, but He must also return in timely fashion to *establish* it, pervasively, until His dominion obliterates the jaws of Hades itself. In that day, the final revelation of Christ's victory over Hell's hoards will be as comprehensive as the rebellion they have waged against Him all along.

This too is part of the fulfillment of His supremacy. Resting in Jesus' lordship, a Christian will always nurture vision for the maximum destruction of the demonic.

THINK WITH ME ...

How will the fulfillment of Christ's supremacy be expressed in community?

Coalesced around the Son in the presence of the Everlasting Father and in the bonds of the Holy Spirit, God's children will enter into a quality of life we might best term "community unity" or even "Trinity unity". It is the consummate answer to Jesus' prayer for the Church in John 17 as He prayed for oneness precisely *because* it was the divine destiny for God's redeemed from the beginning.

The fulfillment of Christian hope will always be visibly *social*. "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.... I will create Jerusalem to be a delight, and its people a joy. I will ... delight in my people.... They will build houses and dwell in them" (Isa. 65). Following Judgment Day, the Consummation will inaugurate an unprecedented fellowship. Earth will be filled with exultant saints from all the ages, ready to become dearest neighbors forever. The Bible teaches that history's final chapter will

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

In the re-creation of the world, when the Son of Man will rule gloriously, you who have followed Me will also rule, starting with the 12 tribes of Israel. And not only you, but anyone who sacrifices home, family, fields — whatever — because of Me will get it all back a hundred times over, not to mention the considerable bonus of eternal life. This is the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first.

(MATTHEW 19 — THE MESSAGE)

introduce one single, world-sized society, comprised of people from every tongue and nation. Together forever, the redeemed will not cease to thrive in the presence of a creative, innovative, inexhaustible, unlimited and uncontainable God of love. The Father will be forever revealing to us more and more of His incomprehensible glory to those welcomed in the Beloved One (Eph. 1).

Such wonder-filled Providence will show no partiality. Whatever He reveals of Himself, and whatever agendas He may call us to advance in His eternal purposes in Christ, will come to us *in community*. It will require us to pour out ourselves in love for each other, without reservation, as we seek to honor God's Son with one heart and voice (compare Rom. 15 with 2 Peter 3 and Rev. 22). Just as hope and faith will remain, so love will remain — with the greatest of the

three, the most visible expression of them, being love not only for the Triune God but for all the saints who love Him too. (1 Cor. 13). The authors of both Isaiah (65-66) and Revelation (21-22) coined a fascinating term for this phenomenon: *New Jerusalem*. The image draws together a wealth of prophetic streams from Old and New Testaments regarding the final shape of the “people-hood” of the saints.

Consisting of multiple cultures of the world, purged of all depravity and rebellion, one congregation will emerge to inhabit the Heavenly Habitat. The Church Triumphant, as theologians call it, will unveil the manifold grace of God in Christ through varieties of creative worship and service. Washed in His blood, a marvelously mystical mosaic will lay invaluable treasures before the Son in everlasting, unceasing, all-consuming concern for His glory (Rev. 5 and 21). Made up of “living stones” (1 Pet. 2 and Eph. 2), this timeless tabernacle will consist not of mortar but of immortals — people like you and me — rallied before God's face in undistracted devotion to the Lamb on His Throne.

Because of the preeminence of Christ and His cross, everything in heaven and earth will remain forever reconciled in perfect harmony (combine Col. 1

with Eph. 1). Peace on earth, coupled with peace with God, will unite the saints in peace with one another as the incomparable Peacemaker dwells in their midst in royal splendor. What more desirable destination could we hope for?

THINK WITH ME ...

Why must Christ's reign climax in a ravishing vision of the Godhead?

Without question, the heart and soul — the apex — of the Consummation will be the *renewed vision* of the Triune God reflected in the radiance of the triumphant Son. We read: “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 His name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22).

Beyond every other ecstatic enjoyment of the Age to Come, none will surpass its zenith: Christ's presence, displayed for us to marvel at, welcoming us into encounters with the Living God as a result. We will be enraptured with Christ's glory straight on, but unafraid.

You may ask, what about the passage that describes how, at the End, the Son delivers up the Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15)? The answer is not complicated. To be sure, when the End comes He will subordinate Himself and His Kingdom to the Father just like a devoted Son would be expected to do. Nonetheless He will remain exalted as our Mediator-Monarch, still actively leading us in salvation's saga throughout all ages to come. Christ will continue His role as the New Adam of our race. He will remain the Husband to the Bride (Eph. 5). Wherever God's inexhaustible grace continues to pour out on the New Heaven and New Earth, the One who is the “glory of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1) will remain at the forefront of the action. He will never cease to be lifted up before the saints so we can worship His matchless majesty. This in turn will bring unending honor to the Father who gave Him up for us all (Phil. 2). As a result, the Triune God will appear to be even more “all in all” to His redeemed people (1 Cor. 15).

Imagine, you and I will actually witness every bit of this! Not long from now! One day soon, we will be thoroughly alive to Him, seeing Him and interacting with Him on the most intimate terms. And this experience will never end.

In ancient times the Greek word *apocalypsis* (which, as we've seen, is used in the Bible to refer to the Consummation) was originally coined to

describe a special occasion at the climax of a week of wedding festivities. It was the moment when the veil of the virgin bride was lifted so that the groom and all the guests could finally look upon her beauty. Interestingly, this always took place immediately before the next big event when the couple would slip away to the honeymoon suite. There they would consummate their marriage in sexual union.

Even so, when the Book of Revelation calls the Consummation the “Marriage Supper of the Lamb”, it is borrowing from this ancient tradition. It is pointing us toward that moment when, at Christ’s return, we will be ravished together by what lies “behind the veil”. Out of this unprecedented revelation of God’s glory to us — as well as out of the unveiling of Christ’s finished work in us — we will enter into greater intimacy with the risen Redeemer than we have ever dreamed existed. That will be a *consummating* experience to say the least!

THINK WITH ME ...

So, who will be consumed with Christ and who will just be consumed?

No wonder “consume” lies at the heart of the English term “Consummation”. Biblically speaking it appears there are one of two profound destinies for all of God’s creatures: Everyone will either be consuming Christ and consumed with Him — or they will be just plain *consumed*. One or the other.

In the “Consume-ation” everyone not consumed with Christ as their Redeemer Lord will be irrevocably banished from His presence. Inevitably the fate of those who permanently reject God’s offer to be consumed *with Him* will be consumed *by Him* — by His judgments, that is. Our Lord is likened to “consuming fire”, Hebrews 12 tells us. When He comes back, we’re told, He will be “revealed with fire from Heaven against all ungodliness” (2 Thess. 1). The Lion will banish into outer darkness those who refuse to participate in the gift of eternal life, abandoned to everlasting weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25). This will overtake countless sinners from all the nations and all the ages.

This tragedy should make every believer weep as well. For it will be, literally, the *death of hope* for the unsaved, forever. The Lost will be consigned to the appalling atmosphere of stifling, irreversible hope-*less*-ness. Every prospect of true life will vanish — consumed. Every hint of hope

will be snuffed out without mercy — consumed (2 Thess. 1 and 2).

After reading an earlier draft of *Joyful Manifesto*, one committed Christian wrote me to say: “David, I have been so blessed to be one of your readers for this book. But when I finished reading your words on this page, I felt a sense of unspeakable sadness. I strongly sensed that I needed to get on my face before reading another word and cry out for all those — especially in my own family — who do not even know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.” That’s precisely the pain we are supposed to feel. Our desire for the New Heaven and Earth should increase in us a godly aching for those dearest to us who may never share in that happy day.

Yet that same vision of awful outcomes should empower Christians to press forward with greater anticipation, even while we bear our unceasing burden for the Lost. For we’ve inherited an alternate destiny. For all saints — those who have trusted Jesus, surrendered to Him, washed themselves with His blood, clothed themselves in His righteousness — the future calls for endless ages of thriving in union with Him as the glorious Sovereign of the Universe. He will become the unending passion of our lives forever. (The whole of chapter 5, “*Christ: The Consuming Passion of Christian Hope*”, explores this in depth.)

We will dwell in a Kingdom that abounds with hope-filled-ness, with promises realized and yet with much more to come. We will inhabit the Home of a Creator whose glory and grace remain eternally inexhaustible, yet always consumable. The Father has ordained for His Son to be the One we consume forevermore, just as Jesus invites us to do in John 6.

At the Marriage Supper (Rev. 19), lamb appears to be the main dish!

QUOTABLE QUOTE

... from Jesus Christ — Loyal Witness, Firstborn from the dead, Ruler of all earthly kings. Glory and strength to Christ who loves us, who blood-washed our sins from our lives, who made us a Kingdom, Priests for his Father forever — and yes, he’s on his way! Riding the clouds, he’ll be seen by every eye, those who mocked and killed him will see him, people from all nations and all times will tear their clothes in lament, oh yes, the Master declares, ‘I am A to Z. I am the God Who Is, the God Who Was, and the God About To Arrive. I’m the Sovereign-Strong.’

(REVELATION 1 — THE MESSAGE)

THINK WITH ME ...**Why does the *Consummation* project a perfect portrait of our Lord Jesus?**

Imagine an architect's enticing a client with blueprints for a prospective office complex. See her using a flip chart of transparencies, placing one design on top of another, gradually exposing how every window, gable, door and wall will finally fit together to form the desired structure. Eventually the presentation reveals her entire architectural scheme for the outside of the new building.

Similarly, as each of God's promises is fulfilled in Jesus, we could say each is superimposed one on top of the other. What will finally emerge,

QUOTABLE QUOTE

In the center the Son of Man, in a robe and gold breastplate, hair a blizzard of white, eyes pouring fire-blaze, both feet furnace-fired bronze, his voice a cataract, right-hand holding the Seven Stars, his mouth a sharp-biting sword, his face a perigee sun. I saw this and fainted dead at his feet. His right hand pulled me upright, his voice reassured me: 'Don't fear: I am First, I am Last, I am Alive. I died, but I came to life, and my life is now forever. See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates. Now write down everything you see: things that are, things about to be.

(REVELATION 1 — THEMESSAGE)

when all promises are gathered up in fullest revelation, will be the premiere picture of Christ Himself. *The Consummation will become God's grand eternal portrait masterpiece of His Son.*

When that day comes, surely all will be stunned the way John was in Revelation 1. The apostle had intimately followed Christ in the days of His flesh. Many years later on Patmos, however, he suddenly found himself utterly speechless before Him. Gazing on His ascended Savior in that hour, John was overwhelmed with fresh, unexpected, consummate dimensions of a greatness he had not previously known. He fell at Jesus' feet in bewildered, awe-inspired stillness, like a dead man. So taken back was he with what he saw, he could do nothing but silently surrender and wait. That day John literally saw his Lord as the Consummation up close and personal. It was right there in Christ's face (John wrote), shining like the sun with a baffling brilliance.

What this suggests is simply that Christ and the Consummation are forever "joined at the hip". To understand one is to expand our understanding of the other. There's genuine synergy here. Just as you cannot explain an acorn without somehow relating it to the oak tree from

which it came, in a similar way you cannot explain the Consummation unless you relate it to the Christ who is its source and substance and song.

When the multitude of Bible prophecies has come to pass, we will find that the Consummation is simply all about *Him*. No wonder Paul exclaims, regarding the One “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”, that “to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever” (Eph. 3)!

The Consummation Must Impact Our Daily Walk with Christ

(1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

The visiting salesman knew how to make the pitch, so my parents ended up with a 12-volume children’s illustrated Bible for their eleven-year-old son. A few nights later I picked up a volume to thumb through the pictures with little intention of actually reading anything. I chose the last one in the series. The moment I cracked it open, however, I found myself enthralled with a story I never knew was possible.

Colorful illustrations vividly captured some of the best known scenes from the Bible’s final book, the Revelation of John. On page after page scenes of judgment, and Heaven, and fierce conflicts, and monsters, and angel choirs stretched before me. But it was the two-page spread picturing Revelation 19 — showing a Conqueror clothed in regal robes, seated on a white stallion, surrounded by armies of saints — that stunned my unsuspecting heart and seized my soul. Portrayed wearing a jeweled diadem, this incomparable King was piercing the clouds with the overwhelming radiance of His face, putting His earthly enemies to flight. This was a Jesus of whom I had never been told.

Before long on that winter evening, snuggled alone in a living room chair, I felt something like an electric shock that seemed to travel my body from head to foot. Although it was years later that I finally determined deeper meanings for what I experienced that night, there’s no doubt that from that moment the reality of Christ’s supremacy, waiting to be decisively displayed in the Final Battle, molded both my ambitions and my decisions.

Even in my darkest moments — even when I’ve wandered into selfishness and sin — it has been that vision of Christ that restored my soul. Introduced by a few elementary drawings but subsequently filled out for me by hundreds of Scriptures, His consummate glory continues to call me back daily to a wholehearted devotion to His Kingdom.

What I’ve come to understand, however, is that this is no private eccentricity. The fact is, the Bible calls all believers to order their steps *as if* we were already gathered about the Throne — to live *as if* we were already standing in the visible presence of our King. Because, in a very real way, our union with Christ makes this so.

THINK WITH ME ...

What if we acted as if the Consummation *was here and now*?

Think of it: Ascended on high, our Redeemer has, in one sense, already reached the climax of history. He got there ahead of us. The future can now be seen in Him with finality. In Christ the corrupted order of our existence — with its depravity, evil, sin and death — has been replaced with a new order, able to produce fruits of godliness, truth, love. In Him the *quality* of life expected in the Consummation, even if we don’t yet have the quantity of it, has already been revealed for all to see ahead of schedule. “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (1 Jn. 1).

True, the end is not yet. But every day we do worship Jesus exalted above, who shows us what the End is all about, preserving in Himself every guarantee that the End will come to pass as gloriously as it has been foretold (see Heb. 2). George Ladd reminds us again that Christ is “the presence of the future”. He is the future for which the human race was created. As I like to say, at the Father’s right hand the Son provides a “preview of coming attractions”!

What we’ve discovered in this chapter is that because of our union with such a Savior, the Christian is already abiding, *in principle*, in the Consummation. And that should change how we tackle each moment we live for Him.

Consider this: Outside the Kingdom humankind proceeds daily from the present into the future, with little sense (or hope) about what the future actually holds. What other choice do finite sinners have, separated from the living God? However, thriving under Christ’s rule *the believer begins with*

the future and works its implications back into the present. This places all decisions, ambitions, relations and missions in a totally different context.

Said another way, for the Christian the Consummation defines *in principle* how Jesus operates in our lives right now. It establishes guidelines about what He is willing to do for us daily, as well as how we ought to respond to Him daily. From the moment of new birth, every believer enters into a never-ending life, as comprehensive and as wonderful as the Savior Himself.

As the Puritans taught, Christians are never stuck with “half” a Christ as we labor in this present world. To the contrary, from the day of salvation we are immediately in union with the whole Christ — with the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13). In other words, *when Christ comes at the end of the age, He will not have any more inherent glory than He has at this very moment.* What He is Lord of ultimately, He is Lord of *now*. Who He will be in the Consummation is who He is *now*. If the End is summed up in God’s Son, then in a most amazing way the End is with us even now.

That’s why we are invited to anticipate expressions of His supremacy today that resemble, in principle, what it will be like to live under His reign throughout the endless ages to come. This puts a whole new dynamic into discipleship!

THINK WITH ME ...

What if we acted as if the Consummation *could arrive soon*?

Of course, there’s still much more to come. The full experience of the End awaits the return of Christ, which could happen at any time — literally. Little remains to unfold, most Bible scholars agree, before the Grand Finale makes its appearance. As the book of Revelation reminds us more than once, Jesus is coming “soon” or “suddenly” or “unexpectedly”.

Even mission strategists agree that all the resources and manpower needed to complete the Great Commission in one generation are in place, assuming the Church is revived and empowered to finish the task. This is profoundly significant because Jesus taught: “This gospel of the Kingdom must be preached throughout the world as a witness to every people, and *then* the End will come” (Matt. 24).

This perspective can unleash new vitality into service to Christ now. This perspective can foster unwavering obedience in victorious living now. As Peter writes: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, *what kind of people ought you to be?* You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

They are enemies of the Cross of Christ. These men are heading for utter destruction ... this world is the limit of their horizon. But we are citizens of Heaven: our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the Savior who will come from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change these wretched bodies of ours so that they resemble His own glorious body, by that power of His which makes Him the master of everything that is.

(PHILIPPIANS 3 — PHILLIPS TRANSLATION)

forward to the day of God and speed its coming.... We are looking forward to a new Heaven and a new Earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, *make every effort* to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him” (2 Peter 3, emphasis mine).

In chapter 12 of our *Joyful Manifesto* we explore many practical and exciting implications of this insight for an everyday walk with Jesus as Lord. There we redefine the Christian experience with a key phrase: *anticipatory discipleship*. Simply put, this refers to obeying Christ *in anticipation of* all that is to come. Both in immediate fulfillments of God’s promises in Him as well as in the ultimate destiny held out to us in Him, Christians should seek to grow a life of discipleship that is *fully compatible* with all God has promised us in the unending reign of His Son. We should do so anticipating increased measures of His sovereign grace at every turn.

When the Final Hour does appear, one of two conclusions will transpire for every believer:

Either the Consummation will reveal how much of this life was spent in indifference toward and even resistance to the reign of Christ; or, the Consummation will provide convincing confirmation that our commitment to Jesus was lived, even in this present age, in willing response to, and active pursuit of, His lordship in all things (Titus 2). One of these two outcomes will characterize our earthly pilgrimage. Either straw or gold will be found in our hands the day we enter the Throne Room, the value determined by the Lamb’s holy fire (1 Cor. 3). There ought to be sufficient motivation in this fact to drive all of us back to Jesus with a consuming passion for His supremacy right now!

THAT DAY AND THIS DAY

Writing at the turn of the 20th century, A.B. Simpson thrilled over the growth of his own hope in Christ. Increasingly the worldwide advance of the Kingdom animated his ministry. Having founded a national alliance of Christians banded together to seek completion of the Great Commission in their generation, this Presbyterian clergy pastoring a New York City congregation was determined to find ways to re-mobilize his followers with even greater zeal for God's glory.

To do this, his preaching and writing frequently took aim at the Consummation. For him, above most other spiritual incentives, a vision of the Outcome had the compelling force needed to help the Church tackle its daunting task among the nations. These words are good medicine for mission-minded believers anytime, including those in the 21st century:

Our little lives are too small to fit this magnificent hope.

Let us make them larger, grander and more in keeping
with the mighty, inspiring motive which comes
from our expectations of that glorious day.

What a day it will be!

Gather together all the treasures of sight, all that is beautiful.

Gather together all the treasures of sound, of sweet harmonies.

Add to these all the treasures of the heart, of dear loves, holy friendships.

Ransack the treasures of time.

Pile them all in one.

Then double them. Then triple them. Then quadruple them.

Then multiply them a hundredfold. Then multiply them a thousand fold.

Then multiply them by thousands of thousands.

Then multiply them by all the arithmetic of all the ages.

What a day it will be!

As it did for Simpson, pursuing Christ as the consummation of Christian hope will strike fatal blows against any current crisis of supremacy in the Church. That's because expanding our horizon this way gives us a fresh take on who Christ *really* is. It sharpens and reforms our Christology. It re-ignites our passions for His greater glory. It reinforces our resolve to carry out Kingdom ministries. It compels us to live as if we truly expected to walk with Christ as our supreme Lord not just for now but forever.

But despite all we've just uncovered in these past two chapters about our Lord Jesus Christ, the story of His glory is not over! The next two chapters take us further. They explore more fully the scope of the hope that cures the crisis of supremacy

Here's where we're headed next. Any reformation of contemporary Christology requires us also to re-visit Biblical teachings on approximations of the coming Kingdom to be experienced today — ***approximations*** of the Consummation, we might say. Such approximations define the normal Christian life under the Redeemer's rule. Regularly God wants to give us — as individuals and churches — introductory experiences of the Grand Finale. He invites us to enjoy firstfruits of His reign. He intends for us to delight in how the Spirit causes Christ's supremacy to invade our daily routines, or Christian fellowship, or times of worship, or Gospel missions at home and abroad. By injecting into the Church right now *preliminary installments* of Jesus' eternal reign, God desires to transform our fervency for intimacy with Jesus as Lord.

I can personally testify: Uncovering these "approximations" has changed my life. I would never want to go back to where I was before. I'm pretty confident it will do the same for you.

THE CONSUMMATION

The following “river of words” is a diagram which summarizes how Christians throughout the centuries have defined the Consummation.

Each phrase also expands our hope in the supremacy of God’s Son.

Zenith
 Summit
 Pinnacle
 Culmination
 Great Assize
 Grand Finale
 Denouement
 End of the Age
 Crowning Hour
 Commencement
 Eucatastrophe
 Final Triumph
 Total Vindication
 Eternal Effulgence
 The New Jerusalem
 Cosmic Capitulation
 Victorious Outcome
 Ultimate Destination
 Supreme Masterpiece
 Mission Accomplished
 Paragon of the Universe
 New Heaven and Earth
 Unqualified Perfection
 Creation’s Quintessence
 Inexhaustible Celebration
 Magnificent Consequences
 Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 Promised Fulfillment of All Things
 Travail of the Cross Satisfied in Full
 Universal Outpouring of the Spirit
 Everlasting Habitation of the Father
 All-Consuming Supremacy of the Son
 Consummate Revelation of God’s Glory

