

The Coming of the Father

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There is a thread of scripture running throughout the Bible; Rick Railston addressed it in his opening message. It's God's desire to dwell with men, and then that develops further into God's desire for His children to dwell with Him. It was striking to me when I began to see how strongly that's worded in scripture, how consistent it is in scripture. There is actual animus, there's actual resistance to teaching that God wants to be with us, not just some day, but as soon as possible and as much as possible. It was shocking to me that there was such opposition to that concept.

That subject is actually an extension of the first commandment and it's why we must unconditionally be willing to put God first. You can't be focused on Jesus Christ if your focus is going to ultimately be on the Father. Yes, we seek Christ, He is our example, we are His disciples, we emulate Him. God the Father is our center. God the Father is our ultimate focus. Being with the Father, Him in us and ultimately us with Him, is the only way that relationship can truly exist. As I said, it's the thread through the whole Bible, so I want to start in Genesis 1 with an example. I'll try to finish in Revelation with an example, just showing, again, the bookends of the concept. In Genesis 1,

Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; (NKJV)*

I want them to be like Us, and God did so. And He said,

26 continued) ... let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle ... (NKJV)

The intent was not that they would have dominion over each other, but what have we done? We've done everything possible to exercise dominion over the thing that God did not give us to do. The living creatures, that was our dominion. The dominion was not to rule over one another, in fact that is what the Gentiles do, and to the degree that we do, then we become like that—in that sense, ungodly, not according to His spirit. At the end of the account of the creation, it says,

Genesis 1:31 *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. (NKJV)*

The physical creation is just exactly what God intended. It wasn't like, this is close and I hope to improve it, and this will work some day—no, it's exactly what He wanted and that's what He did. He created Man so that He could be with him—His people, in the flesh, His children, in the spirit. One thing I've heard, more than anything else at this Feast, is "God is love." Love is a relationship; He is relational. God wants us to

participate, to engage, He wants to be with us. The love is expressed and that is one of the most fundamental descriptions of what God is. Look at Leviticus 26; I read from Genesis 1, just to show that, right out the door, God says we're going to be just like each other, or, at least, you're going to be like Me; I'm not going to be like you (the process goes in the other direction). In Leviticus 26, verse 11, it says,

Leviticus 26:11 *I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you.*

12) *I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.* (NKJV)

That's in the midst of the blessings and curses, and this is the blessing end of it. I'm going to be right there, I'm going to walk with you, you're going to know Me, I will lead and guide and teach you. Why would we not like that? Why would we not want that? Why would we be opposed to that? It's hard to understand. Again, going back to the other side, Hebrews 11—it's still Abraham, it's still back in the Old reference compared to the New—but in Hebrews 11:8, what did Abraham look for? The same thing, except Abraham had God's spirit and mind in him, so he knew God in a greater way.

Hebrews 11:8 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.* (NKJV)

What did we hear in the Feast this year? If you're going down a street in the wrong direction, the first thing you do is stop, the next thing you'd better be doing is turning around, and then you'd better get going. If you do not get going, you fail. Israel would not go into the Promised Land; God says, I am done with you—you stopped. They sinned out of Egypt, God kept working with them. They sinned more, He made a covenant with them. When they refused to go forward, He said, we're done, it's over, I'll work with your children. Your children will go forward.

If we don't go forward, God is done. We have to keep moving.

9) *By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;*

10) *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* (NKJV)

New Jerusalem. So imagine that. Abraham comes up in the resurrection, waiting for the promise, whose builder and maker is God, and hears: I'm sorry, we don't have New Jerusalem ready yet, it's still under construction and we're working on it, and in about 1,100 years, you'll see.

That's not what's going to happen. Abraham is going to come up, he's going to expect to dwell with God, and he will dwell with God. That's New Jerusalem. That's not after everything is over, that's what the whole point and purpose is. It's what we're looking for as well.

Real estate has a phrase that I won't get right exactly but it's so simple that I think we'll recognize it. How do you determine the value of a property? Location, location, location. That's what this is. Look at Psalm 132. It describes the location on which God has put His focus. Verse 13 is where I'd like to start.

Psalm 132:13 *For the LORD [Yehovah] has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: (NKJV)*

Do you believe that? Well, of course. We have to believe it. God said so.

14) *"This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. (NKJV)*

God gets what He wants. If He wants it, He gets it. He made the creation the way He wanted it, it wasn't flawed, it wasn't missing something. He did exactly what He wanted and He got it. Man sinned, but God started him out in a physically perfect environment.

15) *I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread.*

16) *I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

17) *There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.*

18) *His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish."* (NKJV)

God has chosen Zion. Zion is the fortress that David conquered, which is on the ridge, the top of which is Mount Moriah. Zion was on the ridge, down the way. Zion is the City of David. Zion is also used for Jerusalem, it's used for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and it's used for the descendants of the inhabitants of Jerusalem—Zechariah 8. Sometimes I think the word Zion is used in a way that is not fully accurate for what is intended.

It's interesting, I had my notes before the Feast and when Rick got up to speak, I started circling scriptures, circling scriptures, circling scriptures, and I took them all and set them aside. My wife said, Mark, you can say them twice. I didn't need to say them twice. There are so many verses in the Bible that say God is going to dwell with men—physical human beings—and we, as His children, are going to dwell with Him. You can give a sermon and then throw it aside, and get a whole other set of scriptures and speak from them, and that's what I chose to do. You can thank me later. ((laughs)) I took Zechariah 14, which Rick used very heavily, and in my notes I went through it line by line, and then I put in the verses in the New Testament that matched the Old Testament events and I had those in my notes. At some point I just took the whole collection and clipped it out, and that's a whole sermon for another day. I'm not even going there today. Come back; we'll try it another day. In Zechariah 8:1, it says,

Zechariah 8:1 *Again the word of [Yehovah] the LORD of hosts came, saying,*

(2) *“Thus says the LORD [Yehovah] of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.’*

3) *“Thus says [Yehovah] the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion ... (NKJV)*

Believe that. Imagine it. God says, I’m coming back, we say, You can’t come back, or, maybe You’ll come back some day. No, it’s what He says.

3 continued) *... and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain.’ (NKJV)*

When God shows up, it is now a mountain—Mount Zion. We use Mount Zion the way the world uses Mount Zion; I think there is a mistake in that. Mount Zion, from what I’ve studied, is where God’s throne is. So when Mount Zion is in heaven, it means God’s throne is in heaven. When Mount Zion is on the earth, even if it’s in Jerusalem, then God’s throne is in Jerusalem. When I study and I look at it, I think, fine; God’s throne now is in Jerusalem, and what are the circumstances during the time when the throne is there?

4) *... ‘Old men and old women shall again sit In the streets of Jerusalem ... (NKJV)*

It sounds like the Pacific Church of God, actually. ((laughs))

4 continued) *... each one with his staff in his hand because of great age.*

5) *The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.”*

6) *“Thus says the LORD [Yehovah] of hosts: ‘If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?’ says the LORD [Yehovah] of hosts.*

7) *... ‘Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west;*

8) *I will bring them back ... (NKJV)*

Israel is going to be restored at the beginning of the Millennium. Israel is going to be in the land during the Millennium.

8 continued) *... and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.’ (NKJV)*

This message, this thread of scripture, is absolutely everywhere. Again, from my studies, I believe Zion is the City of David; it’s Jerusalem, it’s the people, it’s the descendants of the people. Mount Zion is God’s throne. We sing those songs. We’ve sung them for as long as we’ve stood in church and stood up to sing. Sometimes I think, how did I not see that? I sang it, I cried out to God in voice, and I didn’t even understand what it meant. God is opening our minds to see Him more clearly. What an incredible opportunity.

I've always understood and believed that Jesus Christ is going to be on earth during the Millennium, and I've always believed and understood that we are going to be there with Him. So it's not a matter of, I have to go show you that Jesus Christ is going to be there; that's where we came out the door, so to speak—where we began. What I need to add to that is that God the Father is going to be there as well. They will both be there during the Millennium. John 14, a scripture I used to explain away; I was taught to explain this away, and I did a good job. I'd like to undo some of that. I'd like to try to take it for what it says. John 14, verse 1.

John 14:1 *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God [Excuse me? Under the Jews, He is saying, you already believe in God], believe also in Me.*

That isn't exactly the way we used to explain it.

2) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (NKJV)

We are going to dwell in the Father's house. I've actually seen in ministerial conferences, a slideshow, showing a father's house, and how they excavated these types of structures in the Middle East and in Israel. Where the structure is, the son would add on to the father's house and there would be a room for his family, and it would expand. Yet, we look at such a picture—they excavated it out of the dirt to show that's how it was added to—and we didn't believe it was so. It is so. The Father's house has many rooms that are being prepared for us to dwell in, so we can be with our Father. It's exactly what God has always said.

Back to the book of Isaiah 2. I've tried in my notes, where I could, to put things in books so that we could stay in one book, for one point, and move a little bit, because you can teach this from any place in the Bible almost. It's incredible. Isaiah 2, verse 1.

Isaiah 2:1 *The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

2) Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house ... (NKJV)

It can be symbolic but it can also be Mount Zion—it's His house, it's where His throne is.

2 continued) ... shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

3) Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways ... (NKJV)

It says, *He will teach us.* We will hear Him.

3 continued) ... *and we shall walk in His paths.*” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of [Yehovah] the LORD from Jerusalem.

4) *He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.* (NKJV)

We know that’s the Millennium. We’ve taught that for decades, and it says God Himself, our Father, will be teaching us in those days. Not at a distance—not distance learning, so to speak, but hands-on, up front, real and personal. Isaiah 4, verse 2.

Isaiah 4:2 *In that day the Branch of the LORD ...* (NKJV)

Now that’s another whole subject but *the Branch of the LORD* is shown prophetically to be Jesus Christ, as He will come on the earth,

2 continued) ... *shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped.*

3) *And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.*

4) *When the LORD has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,*

5) *then [Yehovah] the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering.*

6) *And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.* (NKJV)

The cloud and the fire was this element that portrayed God’s presence with Israel, and it’s portraying His presence here in His mountain, where He has placed His throne, and the timing is during the Millennium.

The first time I saw this next scripture in Isaiah 24, my reaction was, wow, all this is here. In studying my Bible there are times, if I’m looking for something, I have to go through and read all of the prophetic books, looking for one thing in order to see it. I wish it weren’t so, I wish I could multitask, but I’ve had to go through all of it. I’ve joked that I can tell you, from the smudge of my thumb, on the edge of the page, what books I’ve been reading since I got this Bible. I believe that how to live this Christian life is the bread and butter of scripture. I’ve taught the bread and butter of scripture all my ministry. I didn’t think I understood prophecy, I thought someone had to tell me what the answer was because I didn’t really know it, and it didn’t have a lot of utility in me because I couldn’t just go do it after church. I’ve taught the bread and butter, it’s good, let’s imbibe, but that’s not what I’m doing now. I’m looking for the part of it that I didn’t think I could understand, and it’s amazing—the harder you work, the smarter you get, the luckier you get, is how I think that goes. The more I study the Bible, the more I come to understand. I saw this in Isaiah 24, and I said, wow. It’s talking here about the

Day of Yehovah, it's talking about the trauma of those days, the judgment that comes on the earth and then what happens in that context. Verse 19 of Isaiah 24.

Isaiah 24:19 *The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly.*

20) *The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again. (NKJV)*

Babylon is going to fall. The system is going to be destroyed and God's system will come and replace it.

21) *It shall come to pass in that day that [Yehovah] the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones,*

I believe those are the rebellious angelic beings.

21 continued) *and on the earth the kings of the earth [the rebellious human beings].*

22) *They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; (NKJV)*

I believe we're talking about the spirit beings that are put into a condition of restraint during the Millennium.

22 continued) *... after many days they will be punished. (NKJV)*

The punishment is different from the restraint. The restraint is the imprisonment, then after the release, the punishment is their destruction.

23) *Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; for the LORD [Yehovah] of hosts will reign ... (NKJV)*

This is now speaking of this time when there's cataclysm on the earth, the point when the angelic beings that are in rebellion are restrained.

23 repeated) *[Yehovah] of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem ... (NKJV)*

I believe those are two things: Jerusalem is where I'll be with My people and Mount Zion is where I will be with My children.

The passages just pop out and it's amazing. It's incredible, actually, what God has begun to show us. I've tried to express that our concept of God the Father has not just been incomplete, we've actually had, to a degree, a disparaging image of God. I've said, He's not a deadbeat dad. He's going to be at the birth, He's going to be at the wedding. It's not like you're going to come to the birth and He's not around and

available, and then you'll come to a marriage supper and a wedding and He's off in the distance, waiting to get involved, and then you're on the earth for 1,000 years, and thinking, I can't wait to go see Dad—what a day that will be. No, we're with Him—we're in New Jerusalem at that time. The Father is intimately involved with each of His children. He is the one who arranged the marriage. This is an arranged marriage and we're the ones who were chosen to participate. He's not only going to be at the wedding, if there is a ceremony He's going to perform it. It's the wedding that He set up and called for. God the Father is not like us. Unfortunately, some of us have had a mixed experience in our own families, and it clouds the way we see Him. We see Him through the color of our own experience. Unfortunately as well, we have come to see Him at times through the color of how we have been taught, that He's off and away, He's busy, He can't get His hands dirty on mankind, or, we're kind of an embarrassment to Him in some way and He can't really be in our presence; He can't even be with the physical creation before there was sin, even though it was perfect and exactly what He wanted. None of that is true.

My mother died when I was about a year and a half old, and I'll just say things didn't go that well after that. It was traumatic, it happened in very short order, and she was gone—from healthy to dead, maybe two weeks. When I refer to these things, going back, the honest answer is, at one and a half I don't remember the story. Sometimes, with my brothers, in talking to them, or listening once in a while, or asking a question of my dad when he was alive, I've wondered sometimes if the story comes out exactly the way it is, but it's as close as I know it or can explain it.

I took a trip with one of my brothers earlier this year. He had some property across another state and wanted me to go with him. So I traveled with him and he mentioned something I had never heard before. He said my dad had written letters to our stepmother. My mom died, there were a couple of years in there where we were taken care of by a relative, and then my dad remarried. So as a baby—a young child—my stepmother was my mother. I never knew my mother so I never looked at my stepmother as anything other than my mother. But my brother had seen letters that had been carried and held by one of my other brothers (I have three brothers but there were two of them at the time when we were all young; one came later). He had seen letters from my dad to my stepmother and they were tender letters, talking about the children and how much they meant to him, how close he was to the children and how he would hold them, and expressing to her this invitation to come and be their mother—they need a mother. I've never seen those letters; on this trip was the first time I heard they even existed. He had mentioned some of that because we were reflecting on what it was like to grow up in our home, and every one of us boys boiled out of that house at the first opportunity—we were gone and happy to be gone.

I sat with my dad, many years ago, before 9/11, when you could go sit in the lobby of the airport or the gates, and you could be there openly and come in and out, and I asked him, Dad, how long did it take you to get over Mom's death? He said, I never did. I thought, Dad, wrong answer. He went on and remarried, and we were a family and there was a roof over our heads, but there was a hardness that was probably always

there, certainly reinforced after trauma. What my dad went through in his life—he never finished school because his dad gambled away the farm. Gambled it away—he had one and then it was gone so he never finished school; he had to go to work. Then World War II came along, so he went to war in the Pacific campaign. He becomes an officer, actually goes up the ranks to officer, but somehow he and I have one of the same spiritual gifts—insubordination ((laughs)). So he had a little trouble at some point—you get high enough to get noticed and all of a sudden there are obligations put on you. So the war ended and he came home, with a big jar of medals. One of my brothers picked those up early on, which is fine, because I didn't really want them anyway. There was a jar of medals—a jar. I didn't know what that was because I never really asked him. I used to talk to him about certain things but didn't ask him a lot, because, growing up, we just weren't that close.

Growing up, Dad was distant. He didn't hold us. I do not remember, ever, one time, sitting in my father's lap. He had polio as well, there were financial problems, and there were drinking problems—we're talking serious on all counts. There were complications. With your dad, you walked with him, you followed him around but it wasn't, let's touch—it just wasn't so. I do not remember even one time being tucked into bed. I remember walking into the front room; come say goodnight, we would walk into the front room—goodnight—they're watching TV. After we said goodnight, we would put ourselves to bed. So I joke that nobody raised me; I raised myself.

We came and went; if we left in the morning and came back in time for dinner, as long as it was 5 o'clock, it didn't matter where we had been. We were expected to be good boys, we were expected to come home in time. You got a shirt on for dinner, you didn't show up in a T-shirt, and if you got out of line and you stepped back, it got worse. If he smacked you because you were out of line and you stepped back, now you're resisting arrest, so to speak, so they're going to cuff you and take you down. I'm just saying I grew up in an environment where I wasn't very close to my dad. He did take us fishing when we were kids. He fished—we just got in trouble. My brother had a big yellow felt hat, and he put these little medals on it that you carry when you travel; it was his treasured hat, and we got in some big row at the end—we were the last car out at the fishing area and campground, and my brother said something—Dad got mad and grabbed that hat and threw it, and it sailed off into the bushes and we drove away. That was the end of that. We came back in the spring and that hat was still there—we were the first ones back in. I don't remember, maybe my brother went and retrieved it.

My other brother carried a snake home in his pocket in the back seat—you can see some of what we got into was legitimate trouble because we earned it. It was a water snake and he wanted to take it home. We're in the back seat driving home and this snake is peeking its head out, and he's stuffing it back in; we got home and kept it in the garage for a while, then it escaped. So we earned our share, but the honest answer is, it wasn't an affectionate home in that respect.

I go in the army, because life wasn't going that well for me, either, and there's a lot that goes through there, but the time came that God called me. The time came, I respond,

come to repentance, He forgives me and gives me His Holy Spirit, and I trundle off to what was the church's college—Ambassador College—as a freshman, and I'm halfway through the first semester, and thinking, I need to do something, I'm learning, this has got to change. So I called home. My mom and dad are on the phone, it was pleasant, it was civil, and I said at the end of the call, I love you, Mom and Dad; my mom comes back and says, we love you too, son, and it was just quiet. I sat there for a second and said, Dad, I love you—I love you, too. There was quiet, then Dad said, love you too, son. I was in college, out of the army, twenty-three or twenty-four years old, and it was the first time in my memory that my father said, I love you too. God brought me to a place where I realized that my dad had always loved us, he had always provided for us, but there was a barrier there and a breach, and there was injury and there was whatever there was. The fact is, it just had to be that you reached across there and engaged, and from that day forward the affection was openly expressed. When we would go home later, with my wife and our children, there were hugs, there was affection; we were followed out into the yard as we got into the car to leave. That's all it took, and I'm grateful for that.

I think sometimes the way we look at God our Father is impacted by what we lived and experienced here. We need to see past whatever that is. Some of us are fortunate and came up in a very nurturing environment, and some of us left home and never looked back. I got in an argument with Dad once; I tried to hurt him emotionally in the argument—not physically, emotionally—I tried to hurt him, after high school. Then I walked out the door and left. I returned when I was older. That was all healed. I'm grateful, and God gave us that.

We have a relationship available to us with our Father that is personal, intimate, where He is actually going to be there, and we will be with Him. Physically, God is also going to be with His people, and that's what the Millennium portrays. God's throne, Mount Zion, in Jerusalem. He's going to reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. How does that work? We're going to see. God will work it out.

Look at the announcement in Revelation 11, verse 15.

Revelation 11:15 *Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He [our Lord] shall reign forever and ever!"* (NKJV)

I tell you, the first time that popped out at me, I was amazed. God the Father and Jesus Christ are taking the kingdoms of this world and beginning to reign over them. God has always been King, but that's not the point. The point is, He's going to come down with His throne, on the earth. Now, there is a process: We rise to meet Christ in the air (seventh trumpet), then Christ actually takes us and presents us to His Father, or you could say God the Father brings us to Himself—whichever way you want to describe that process—in heaven. We are in the temple in heaven during the bowl plagues that then pour out, which take months—they have to, with armies moving, Euphrates dries up—it's not a just moment in time. God the Father comes down and subdues the

enemies of Jesus Christ. I want to walk through some of that. Christ comes down. I will openly say there are a few holes in my understanding of exactly each event but I can see the overall picture—when New Jerusalem comes down, we are in it.

Let's go to Thessalonians; I want to go to one place here. We go to one place in Thessalonians but I want to walk through a few of the verses and at least show you the context, and as we study, we're going to learn, we're going to grow in our understanding. I gave a sermon a couple of months ago where I used a scripture the way I have always used it, and it was pointed out to me that actually there was a different context than the way I portrayed it. I looked at it and said, that's right. I feel like I'm constantly peeling off one more layer of scale, and hopefully getting closer and closer to what God intended, and what He has given.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 *But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.*

18) *Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us.*

19) *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?* (NKJV)

The seventh trumpet; we rise to meet Christ in the air. It's our Lord Jesus Christ. If it had said, "in the presence of Lord" in the Greek, it would actually be God the Father because of the way those terms are used. We go to 1 Thessalonians to look at the return of Jesus Christ. Let's just see what else is here. Chapter 3, verse 11.

1 Thessalonians 3:11 *Now may our God and Father Himself ...* (NKJV)

It says, *our God*—isn't that great? Paul said, I worship the God of our fathers. That's because the God of the fathers of Israel was God the Father. He was the Father of Israel, which is one kind of relationship, but He's our father, which is actually another.

11 continued) *... and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.*

12) *And may the Lord ...* (NKJV)

'The' is here, so this is describing Jesus Christ.

12 continued) *... [may Jesus Christ] make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,*

13) *so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God [our the God, in the Greek] and Father [God the Father is the God, in the Greek] at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.* (NKJV)

Now you take the reference in chapter 2 that was just about Christ, then you take the reference in chapter 3, and now you have God and Christ in the context. The chapter

we use is chapter 4, and in chapter 4 and verse 13, here's the part we probably read the most.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep ...* (NKJV)

I hate to say it, but we've been ignorant. We've been unlearned in some respects. That's in the process of change.

13 continued) ... *lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

14) *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.* (NKJV)

God the Father. Now this scripture opens up just a little bit beyond how we've used it over the years.

15) *For this we say to you by the word of ...* (NKJV)

The term would be *Kýrios*. There are different forms of it but that's the main root word. This is the Father. The word 'the' is there in the English, it is not there in the Greek. So when it's by itself, it is a reference to our Father.

15 repeated) ... *this we say to you by the word of the Lord* [Yehovah, our Father], *that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord ...* (NKJV)

—*the Lord*; that is Jesus Christ, because the "the" is actually there. It's confusing in the English because it all reads the same, but it's not all the same in the Greek. The Greek person who heard this (or the Hebrew in the text) would have understood it.

15 continued) ... *the coming of the Lord* [Jesus Christ] *will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

16) *For the Lord Himself* [Jesus Christ] *will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God* [His Father, our Father]. *And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

17) *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord* [Jesus Christ] *in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord* [Yehovah, God the Father]. (NKJV)

God the Father. There's actually a distinction between the two in the original text and that distinction makes the passage very clear and easy to understand. It's all muddled in the English. I'm sorry, I didn't do it, but it's our job now to be willing to take a look, to be willing to consider. Who are we always going to be with? Our Father. Christ is going to be there too. Sometimes the only one in the context is our Father and sometimes the only one in the context is Jesus Christ, and sometimes They are both together. It doesn't mean if the focus is on our Father that Christ is missing in action. It means that's not the point, that's not the lesson. So take the point—the lesson—and

then we don't need to use that as a reverse definition of what isn't happening, but rather for what the lesson hopefully should be.

18) *Therefore comfort one another with these words.* (NKJV)

These words are more comforting than they used to be. I've heard so many times, this is like starting all over again in love, God is love, I feel it in a way that's more personal. Honestly, I've had people say, I never felt this way in the beginning, the way I feel now. What an incredible blessing and gift.

As we study, as we learn from each other, as we share and vet—we don't just get to stand up and be the answer. No, we need to be vetted, every one of us. The teachers vet each other. Just to make sure. If we can't agree on it then how are we going to teach it? If you can't explain it to your brother who is a teacher, how are you going to explain it to your brother who is being taught? There's a process and it's a responsible one, hopefully. We try to push the envelope just a little, once in a while. I'm trying to push the envelope without poking a hole in it. That's how this works; I don't want to tear the envelope but I would like to push it just a little bit.

If the story then is that we rise to meet Christ in the air, and if then He takes and delivers us to the Father, then that's Revelation 11. So it's very possible that as we go forward, those parts of Revelation that are progressive or in chronological order—which all of it is not—where then would we find the firstfruits? Wouldn't they be right there at God's throne, in the temple, in heaven? That's where they are. Revelation 14.

Revelation 14:1 *Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion [that's God's throne], and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.*

2) *And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.*

3) *They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.*

4) *These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.* (NKJV)

It's not just God the Father we're going to be with, we're going to be with Jesus Christ—the Lamb. It just said so—you just add that up, it's the same.

4 continued) *... These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.*

5) *And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.* (NKJV)

The firstfruits are there at a time when God's throne has not yet descended to the earth. That's where we are. That is not the story I was told. No wonder it didn't make any

sense, and I had to be told what the answer was, because you couldn't just look at scripture and make sense of it for yourself. When you know who God is in the record of scripture, you can read your own Bible, it will pop out and confront you, and you'll see it. Then again, there are things that we will also learn from one another.

What's interesting is, we are without fault (I say "we" hopefully), before the throne of God. The word *before*, in the Greek, means, before the face of, in the presence of, in the eyes and sight of. This is not conceptual; we're talking reality. The people who would read that or hear it in its original language would recognize the word and know what the message was. In Revelation 16:12, we have the sixth angel now; we're protected in the temple during the bowl plagues that are going to be poured out on the earth. As far as we know, I would say with Pentecost being the first resurrection, the bowl plagues are poured out symbolically between Pentecost and Trumpets, Trumpets being the Day of Yehovah, taking a year's time to fulfill. If it's different than that, I'm sure we'll have some gain.

Revelation 16:12 *Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.*

13) *And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.*

14) *For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. (NKJV)*

One time I asked, who is buried in Grant's tomb? (I wasn't making a joke.) The answer given was "Grant"—good! Who fights the battle of the great day of God Almighty? You get only one guess—God Almighty. It just means exactly what it says. It's the battle of the great day of God Almighty. Why does it say it that way? I'll tell you why; look at Psalm 110. It's the most quoted reference in the entire New Testament from the Old Testament. There's nothing that was used more than this as a reference to those who taught God's people or to those who would listen. Psalm 110:1 says:

Psalm 110:1 *The LORD [Yehovah] said to my Lord [Adonai] ... (NKJV)*

Okay? God the Father said to Jesus Christ; there's no question—this appears five or more times in the New Testament and is explained.

1 continued) ... *"Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." (NKJV)*

Who is going to make the enemies the footstool? Our Father. Who is then going to receive His Kingdom? Jesus Christ. God says, I'm going to do that. We reply, no, You can't do that; You can't get Your hands dirty. God says, dirty? I made the dirt! I understand dirt. I'm there, I'm going to do it. Isaiah, chapter 31—we'll do one example

from the Old Testament and then we'll do one example from the New Testament. In Isaiah 31, verse 4, it says,

Isaiah 31:4 *For thus the LORD [Yehovah] has spoken to me: "As a lion roars, and a young lion over his prey (when a multitude of shepherds is summoned against him, he will not be afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise), so the LORD [Yehovah] of hosts will come down to fight for Mount Zion and for its hill. (NKJV)*

That's actually Zechariah 14, which I'm not going to go to because Rick already told us the answer, and I don't want to be anticlimactic; he got there before I did. It's a wonderful example. It's the one example about which so many say, there's one thing I know—I know that's Jesus Christ. Well, if that's the one thing you know, then you don't even know one thing. ((laughs)) I don't know what to say. Hebrews 10, look at that in the New Testament, verse 11. I don't know how to walk around this passage.

Hebrews 10:11 *And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (NKJV)*

Not by the blood of bulls and goats—we know that.

12) *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,*
13) *from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. (NKJV)*

That's what it says. It always said that. I wish somebody would have shown me that in college. I could have been in trouble sooner. ((laughs)) Maybe it's a good thing I had all those peaceful years, and the country club membership, and the benefits I got to enjoy. God the Father is the one who is going to destroy Babylon and He is the one who gives the Kingdom to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ takes assignments; He's a Servant of God and He fulfills His assignments. God says, you're the Lamb—I'm sure there was agreement there, no question—we can't exactly say how that took place, but God the Father is the Supreme Being. Jesus Christ obeys and is the Lamb, and He does it perfectly. When He's done, He says, it's finished; He dies—unto You I commit My Spirit. It was an assignment, He did it, He fulfilled it, and it was finished. It's like the Kingdom—He receives a Kingdom; in 1 Corinthians 15, it says He hands the Kingdom back to God the Father, so that God will be all in all. Same thing: Jesus Christ has an assignment, He's going to judge, He's going to be the judge of all mankind. Christ will fulfill His assignment as God's Servant; when He's completely done, He says, it's over, here's the finish—back to You. That's how this works. There are examples of that and it's frankly exciting. We can go back to Isaiah 66; we're still in the context of our Father putting down the enemies of Jesus Christ, and then handing Him His responsibilities. Isaiah 66, verse 10, says,

Isaiah 66:10 *Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;*

11) *that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.”*

12) *For thus says [Yehovah] the LORD: “Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; on her sides shall you be carried, and be dandled on her knees.*

13) *As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”*

14) *When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD shall be known to His servants, and His indignation to His enemies.*

15) *For behold, [Yehovah] the LORD will come with fire and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.*

16) *For by fire and by His sword [He has a sword portrayed] the LORD [Yehovah] will judge all flesh; (NKJV)*

We answer to God, and God judges through Jesus Christ, so you just have to see all of the verses in context.

16 continued) ... *and the slain of the LORD shall be many.*

17) *“Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, to go to the gardens after an idol in the midst, eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse, shall be consumed together,” says the LORD. (NKJV)*

That's just exactly what the story says. Down to verse 22.

22) *“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says [Yehovah] the LORD, “so shall your descendants and your name remain.*

23) *And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says [Yehovah] the LORD. (NKJV)*

He says *flesh*, and yet He's on the earth ruling; His throne is in Mount Zion and His feet are in the temple of Jerusalem, so to speak. The ark is His footstool. That portrayal is the way the answer has been made. Jesus Christ is coming to the earth to rule. Why do you think God the Father is coming to the earth? To dwell with men and to have His children with Him. God the Father is coming to the earth to be worshipped. When you see the references to the Father on the earth, people are coming up to worship in Jerusalem. The way of Yehovah, the way of the Lord, as quoted in the New Testament, is a highway, in Isaiah, three times. Make straight the highway—the highway of holiness. Lay out the road straight so people can get to Jerusalem to worship Him—to worship Him during the Millennium. It's like, that was always there; it's still there. Ezekiel 37. I'm going to start at the end of verse 23. It just says,

Ezekiel 37:23 *Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. (NKJV)*

This is everywhere.

24) *“David My servant shall be king over them [over Israel] and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them.*

25) *Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.*

26) *Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.*

27) *My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (NKJV)*

The sanctuary is the holy place, the tabernacle is God’s dwelling. Do we understand it perfectly? No, but it’s coming clear—some of the mud is starting to wash out of the stream, and we can look in there and see the stream for ourselves, and it’s starting to come clear. What a blessing that will be. Isaiah 60, verse 1, is the verse that I used fairly recently. I used it in the context I’ve always used it. This is the resurrection of the firstfruits and what a glorious moment that’s going to be. They are going to come up and shine, and God’s glory is going to be on them. Every funeral I’ve ever given (except for maybe a couple, based on how the context was and who was attending) had this verse as part of my message. Somebody recently said, well, actually, that’s Jerusalem. I looked at it and said, you’re right, I made a mistake. There’s another piece of that layer of the onion—there it goes, one more scale hits the ground. This is speaking of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 60:1 *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. (NKJV)*

It’s talking about the restoration of Jerusalem. Go over to verse 10.

10) *“The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you; for in My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you.*

11) *Therefore your gates shall be open continually; (NKJV)*

The firstfruits don’t have walls and gates. I was told what the answer was; it made sense to me at the time, I liked it, and then someone said, that’s not the answer. I looked at it and said, you’re right.

11 continued) *... they shall not be shut day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession.*

12) *For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined.*

13) *“The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious. (NKJV)*

Rick got up and said, this is the place of *My feet*. And the name of that city shall be YEHOUAH IS THERE [Ezekiel 48:35]. That’s what he said—it’s in there, it’s all part of the same message.

We started in Genesis, let’s go to Revelation. Revelation 21, the new heavens and the new earth is the restoration of all things. This is the old heaven and the old earth; enjoy it, it’s pretty nice as it is, except for all the evil. We’re living in a bubble, thankfully.

Revelation 21:1 *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.*

2) *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

3) *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.*

4) *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

5) *Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” (NKJV)*

God is going to restore it to the way He created it in the first place, before there was sin, before there was destruction. This is the restoration of all things.

5 continued) *... And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”*

6) *And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.*

7) *He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (NKJV)*

Those are two relationships—you will be My people, you will be My children. The Tree of Life was in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life is in New Jerusalem. The symbolism is the same—the offer of salvation. It’s part of God’s restoration.

8) *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (NKJV)*

When you start out in the beginning, in the book of Genesis, God says, I made you like Me because I plan to be with you, and I want you to be with Me. All through the Bible, over and over and over, He repeats it; you get to the very end and He says, let Me remind you of what I’ve been telling you all these times. God is going to dwell with His children, and God and His children are going to dwell in the midst of men.