

What Did Jesus Accomplish on Golgotha?

by John Hultink

1. Introduction

DEAR GRAND AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN,

The papers on *Golgotha* and *Falling Asleep* are without question the two most informative and important papers I have ever written. During the course of my life I have read so many books on the subject discussed in these two papers that to merely mention that figure might make you dizzy. Don't worry. You won't have to read all those books. Looking back I realize it took me decades to come to a true understanding of the fundamentals dealing with these two subjects. I see now that many of the books I did read were really not that important. I hope to translate whatever insight I did garner from reading those books into what I have written in these last two papers of my life. The nature of the subject material eventually made it plain to me that I needed to rely more heavily on the revelation contained in Scripture. It has provided the primary source material.

Now, if I fail to convince you of my point of view, well, as "they" like to say, the outcome of this particular discussion is not a "salvation issue." If after reading this material you still believe you will take up a bodiless existence in heaven, you will become part

of a very large crowd. I do, however, firmly believe that if one continues to cling to the traditional view of what Jesus meant when He referred to Paradise on the cross and what happens to us when we die, you will miss out on acquainting yourselves with many of the incredible achievements Jesus did, in fact, bring to fruition on the cross. I do not believe that Scripture teaches the prevailing view that the important dialogue between Jesus and the criminal on the cross was primarily about going to heaven on that Good Friday. I believe I can demonstrate from Scripture that that is most definitely not what Jesus was talking about when He said: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." I may as well tell you at the very outset since these papers cover a lot of ground that the mission Jesus **fulfilled** on the cross on Good Friday was the fulfillment of the promise He made 4,000 years earlier as the pre-incarnate Christ in the Garden of Eden (Paradise). It was then that He told Adam and Eve that He would lift the curse that the two of them had unleashed upon the creation as a result of making a covenant with Satan (Gen. 3:15). There was no mention in this promise minimizing God's love for the world and instead having you and me take up residence in heaven. That is not the prescribed history revealed in Scripture.

We, today's children of God, live two thousand years after the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God. During the course of those two thousand years, the *object* of the sacrifice made by the Son of God on Golgotha has been smudged more and more into something that happens to us when we die. While in fact that sacrifice changed the meaning and conduct of our day to day lives. The *existential* reality of what Christ achieved on the cross is being deferred to what happens to us when we die, that is, going to heaven.

As a result of making a covenant of disobedience with Satan, mankind was expelled from Paradise and placed under a curse. Christ came to earth to lift that *curse*. And to restore the original goal of the creation for His Father. That goal was to return those who are reborn by the Spirit of God to Paradise. In the words of John Calvin, that goal is summarized in these words: "I Offer My Heart To You, O Lord, Promptly and Sincerely." Creation exists to glorify God. And man's place in that creation is to live in Paradise. Man was created to manage God's creation. And to realize the cultural potential the pre-incarnate Christ had incorporated into that creation.

In that short dialogue with the converted criminal, Jesus emphatically stated that: Mr. Criminal, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43b). You will come to see that Jesus indeed meant to say: "in Paradise." The common interpretation of Jesus' words to the criminal is that the two of them are going to heaven on that Good Friday.

That is a misinterpretation. Jesus' momentous, prophetic revelation of mankind's return to Paradise is misinterpreted to mean that upon death man's soul will ascend to heaven to temporarily engage in a bodiless existence there. There is no such revelation recorded in Scripture. A privileged few believers went to heaven, but they went with their bodies being glorified. Even now there are millions of Christians who believe that heaven will become their *permanent* home.

What do we actually know about living a life in heaven in the absence of our bodies? Scripture never describes or alludes to such an existence. It's all dubious speculation. Christ promises us a future even more magnificent than that attested to by the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:1-7). Christ has given us a portrayal of that Paradise in the last two chapters of the book of Revelation. At the Second Coming, heaven and earth will unite. God will live in fellowship with mankind! God and His Son will come to live in the New Jerusalem where they will establish their thrones. The New Jerusalem, we are told, will be established on earth. A river of living water will issue from beneath the throne of God and we will eat the fruit provided by the two trees of life planted on each side of the river of life. Life will be more glorious than it was in the Garden of Eden. There will be no tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It will no longer be possible for mankind to sin. And we know from Revelation 2:7 that Paradise is the only place in all of creation where the tree of life is to be found. The same tree that was planted in the Garden of Eden. On Golgotha Jesus regained the legal right for us to eat of that tree once again.

1.1 The Relationship Between Heaven and Earth

When I attended Dr. H. Evan Runner's class in Philosophy 101 at Calvin College in 1964, he had his students read sections of Dr. Vollenhoven's class notes entitled: *Isagoge Philosophia*. That is, if the student could still read Dutch. (Those notes are now available to all in English translation.) Dr. Vollenhoven was the brother-in-law of Dr. Herman Dooyeweerd. They both taught philosophy at the Free University in Amsterdam beginning during the early part of the twentieth century. They were an exceptional pair of Christian teachers. They took the Scriptures literally (or naturally).

Drs. Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven developed a philosophy informed by foundational, Christian principles. Dooyeweerd boldly stated that if you wanted to come to a true understanding of created reality you had to confessionally believe in creation by Divine fiat, the fall into sin by a historical Adam and the redemption to newness of life in Jesus

Christ. Students who acquaint themselves with the insights of these two scholars will rise head and shoulders above the insights possessed by your average Christian student.

I will never forget the tantalizing sense of wonder that enveloped me when I read the following in Vollenhoven's *Isagoge*: "No student who fails to come to a biblical understanding of the relationship between heaven and earth will ever come to a correct understanding of created reality." Really? I outstripped the construction of the Christian school system in Ontario. My entire education, up to grade 12, took place in secular public schools in Wallaceburg. I must add that in those days there was still a high percentage of Christian school teachers in the public system. But I had never before heard a sentiment like the one expressed by Dr. Vollenhoven. Was it really true that one had to come to terms with the relationship between heaven and earth in order to come to an understanding of created reality? I can now grasp the truth of that statement from personal experience. So if one does not believe in God, one will never come to understand creation (reality) for what it is in Jesus Christ. Certainly, you can still add 2+2 and build skyscrapers. The *structure* of created reality basically remained in place after the Fall. But you will never come to know who you are or why you are here. Nor will you ever come to understand the meaning of 2+2 or why it is possible to construct skyscrapers. We are subject to the spatial dimensions of width, height and depth. Yet Jesus intimated that Peter should be able to walk on water. Peter demonstrated that he could not. The "creational" possibility of walking on water was present but he, like us, could not realize the potential because he lacked faith. In that respect the "structure" of creation in some instances was no longer accessible to mankind because of sin.

Yes, we live on earth in the context of a three-dimensional reality. We *cannot* come to grips with the *substance* (essence) of what exists. As the Greeks tried to do. We can study created reality and develop a table of elements as revealed to us by God, but we cannot create these elements or trace them back to their origin. Because they have their origin in the Word of God. We can only study and come to understand the various ways in which all things in creation function. We cannot come to an understanding of things "in and of themselves". But we have come to know that there are elements like hydrogen and oxygen. They exist separately. Yet when 2 parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen combine we get water. Why do oxygen and hydrogen combine to form water? Because Christ *wills* it. All of creation hangs together *in Him*.

There is a spiritual reality that exists alongside of our earthly reality. It consists of the Triune God and angels. Some of those angels rebelled under the leadership of Satan.

So now we deal with demons and fallen angels and spiritual powers in the air around us.

We have to come to learn to understand reality in terms of the immanent¹ and the transcendent.² What does Scripture mean when it states that all things are created in Christ *from before the foundation of the world*? And what does it mean when the apostle John, when recording his experiences in the book of Revelation, tells us that he was “in the Spirit”? What does Paul mean in 2 Corinthians 12 when he says he does not know whether he was “in the body” or “out of the body”? And what does it mean when Colossians 3:3-4 tells us that we died and that our lives are now hidden *in* Christ *with* God? And did Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, actually see heaven open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God? I don’t believe many teachers reference these subjects while they are teaching Christian students the so-called merits of theistic evolution. Yet these are issues that need to be taken into account when we study God’s creation and when we attempt to come to an understanding of what happened on Golgotha and what happens when we die.

1.2 Overview

So the compelling question for you and me is this:

What all did Jesus accomplish on Golgotha? He triumphed over Satan and conquered death on our behalf. And for those who believe in Him, He regained Paradise. Jesus’ reference to Paradise in His dialogue with the converted criminal was intentional and “place specific.” He did not intend to be duplicitous by referring to “Paradise” while he actually meant “heaven,” as many theologians suggest. He renewed the possibility of communion and fellowship on a renewed earth for us with the God who created us. Upon Christ’s ascension to heaven forty days after His resurrection, Satan was thrown out of heaven. Ten days later, after Satan’s permanent expulsion from heaven, the Holy Spirit descended upon the earth in power (Acts 2). From then on, God the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers. He is the Comforter and the Teacher Jesus promised His disciples and us! That was one of the great achievements Jesus realized on the cross. God living **in** us: that is the meaning of renewed fellowship with God. What a Saviour! Even through death the Holy Spirit takes us into Christ’s eternal kingdom.

The Man Jesus who regained unlimited power over creation for His Father is like no

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1. Immanent means our physical reality.
 2. Transcendent means our spiritual reality.

other Person on earth. As the second Adam, He became like us in all respects except for sin. True Man. He is also true God. Two natures yet **one** Person. The first chapter of the gospel of John provides a powerful description of Jesus as the **Word** with these words:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1). The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us (John 1:14). John the Baptist saw Jesus (the Word) coming towards him and said (to those around him), **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). John the Baptist was saying that Jesus would be the sacrifice that would atone for the sin of the world. The first Adam in a moment’s time forfeited man’s right to live in Paradise (the Garden of Eden). Jesus Christ, the second Adam, regained our right to live in Paradise. He accomplished this in a single day’s time. That majestic day’s work ended at around 3pm on Good Friday. Golgotha became the great turning point in history.

Your destiny and mine, dear grand and great-grandchildren, rests in the hands of the Man who became the historical figure known as Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The Saviour of the world. Yes, He actually saved the world from destruction for His Father. That is how much God the Father loved the world. Our relationship to Jesus and the meaning of our existence as it unfolds throughout the course of our lives was determined on Golgotha. Whether you and I live forever to meet again on the renewed earth as described in the two final chapters of the book of Revelation, or forever perish, is an issue which was also determined on Golgotha. Jesus, the Messiah, in order to set us and the cosmos free from the destructive curse unleashed in the Garden of Eden and from the deadly power of Satan, died for the sin of the world. Yes, He traded His life for ours. Willingly. Throughout the course of your lives you must make certain you regularly hear the echo of the cry that emanated from the cross two thousand years ago only moments before Jesus committed His life into the hands of His Father. Yes, in Greek what Jesus shouted was just one word. It was that one little word referred to by Martin Luther in his triumphant hymn. Luther said that one little word would “fell” Satan. And it did! That single word brought Satan to destruction. That single “word” would also set hundreds of millions of people the Father had elected from before the foundation of the world – FREE! Set them FREE from captivity to death. Set them free from an unremitting life of unforgiven sin and endless sorrow. Free from having lost the meaning of life. That little word which our Saviour shouted from the cross that afternoon on Golgotha at 3pm on Good Friday, with His last breath translated into Greek, is: **TETELESTAI**. Translated into English

that word declared: **IT IS FULFILLED**. The **promise** the pre-incarnate Christ made to Adam and to Eve and to all those who would come to believe in Him by the mercy of God the Father. The promise made in Genesis 3:15 was **fulfilled** on Golgotha. The right to make the declaration that that promise was **fulfilled** was purchased by Christ at a very high price. After Golgotha it has once again become a reality to be able to live with Christ in Paradise, the new Garden of Eden, with its two trees of life as described in Revelation 21 and 22.³ That right was purchased with His blood. As you will come to see, that life in Paradise has already begun. We have been given the greatest gift of all in spite of our sinful condition: *The Comforter! The Teacher!* Who will accompany us everywhere. Even into death.

2. The Scene of Golgotha

2.1 *The Reason for the Death of the Son of God*

In order to understand the event of Golgotha, we must turn to the beginning: Paradise.

Paradise, as perfect communion between God and man, was lost because of Adam's disobedience. Adam made a covenant with Satan and as a result, he and all his posterity, became the slaves of Satan, a slavery that ends in death. Christ, the second Adam, in fulfillment of the promise He made in Genesis 3:15, went to Golgotha to nullify the binding nature of that contract. The contract made between the first Adam and Satan was made null and void on Golgotha. Perfect fellowship between God and Christ-confessing mankind was re-established. On Golgotha Christ again ushered in Paradise. All of this happened on Good Friday, on the cross. To give you the depth and breadth of this reality as it worked itself out throughout history is the task of the pulpit. As Jesus said on the road to Emmaus with the two strangers: the Scriptures (O.T.) are all about Me.

2.2 *God working through all of History towards Golgotha*

Between the time the pre-incarnate Christ made that promise (Gen. 3:15), God permitted 4,000 years of history to unfold. God had manuscripts written (that collectively became the Bible) which recorded the redemptive-historical dimensions of that 4,000 year time

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3. There is a "now" and a "not yet" dimension to this paradisaal reality that will be discussed later in this paper. Both you and I know well enough that Revelation 21 and 22 have not yet been *fully* realized. It has only just begun. The best is yet to come in a creation without sin. A creation where we meet God face to face.

period. It is not my intention to summarize that history. Read Paideia's *Story Bible for Older Children* by Anne de Vries at dinner time with your children. Read both the Old and New Testaments. These will give you and your children a wonderful, historical "overview" of the wisdom, the generosity, the power without limit, and the unrestrained love of God – eventually manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ. The *Story Bible* will give the reader and listener a good sense of the *timeline* of created reality from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Paradise, as perfect communion between God and man was regained on Golgotha because of Jesus Christ's perfect obedience. When your grandchildren get older, treasure the Bible itself as your life-line to the Holy Spirit. Your best friend *on earth* bar none!

2.3 At the Appointed Time

"But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law" (Galatians 4:4). This verse declares that God the Father sent His Son when "the time had fully come." There were many things occurring at the time of the first century that, at least by human standards, seem to make it ideal for Christ to come when He did.

1. There was a great anticipation among the Jews of that time that the Messiah would come. The oppression under Roman rule over Israel made the Jews hungry for the Messiah's coming and a restoration of Israel under a king like David.
2. Rome had unified much of the world under its government, giving a sense of unity to the various lands. Also, because the empire was relatively peaceful, travel was possible, allowing the early Christians to spread the gospel. Such freedom to travel would have been impossible in other eras.
3. While Rome had conquered militarily, Greece had conquered culturally. A "common" form of the Greek language (different from classical Greek) was the trade language and was spoken throughout the empire, making it possible to communicate the gospel to many different people groups through one common language.
4. The fact that the many false idols had failed to give them victory over the Roman conquerors caused many to abandon the worship of those idols. At the same time, in the more "cultured" cities, the Greek philosophy and science of the time left others spiritually empty.

5. The mystery religions of the time emphasized a savior-god and required worshipers to offer bloody sacrifices, thus making the gospel of Christ which involved one ultimate sacrifice believable to them. The Greeks also believed in the immortality of the soul (but not of the body). Later, this Greek belief proved to be an immense obstacle to Christian belief.
6. The Roman army recruited soldiers from among the provinces, introducing these men to Roman culture and to ideas (such as the gospel) that had not reached those outlying provinces yet. The earliest introduction of the gospel to Britain was the result of the efforts of Christian soldiers stationed there.

The above statements are based on men looking at that time and speculating about why that particular point in history was a good time for Christ to come. But we understand that God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), and these may or may not have been some reasons for why He chose that particular time to send His Son. From the context of Galatians 3 and 4, it is evident that God sought to lay a foundation through the Jewish Law that would prepare for the coming of the Messiah. The Law was meant to help people understand the depth of their sinfulness (in that they were incapable of keeping the Law) so that they might more readily accept the cure for that sin through Jesus the Messiah (Galatians 3:22-23; Romans 3:19-20). The Law was also "put in charge" (Galatians 3:24) to lead people to Jesus as the Messiah. It did this through its many prophecies concerning the Messiah which Jesus fulfilled. Add to this the sacrificial system that pointed to the need for a sacrifice for sin as well as its own inadequacy (with each sacrifice always requiring later additional ones). Old Testament history also painted pictures of the person and work of Christ through several events and religious feasts (such as the willingness of Abraham to offer up Isaac, or the details of the Passover during the exodus from Egypt, etc.).

The timing of Christ's incarnation was such that the people of that time were prepared for His coming. The people of every century since then have more than sufficient evidence that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah through His fulfillment of the Scriptures that pictured and prophesied His coming in great detail.

2.6 Everything was Leading to this Redemptive Moment

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

It is going to happen. After 4,000 years it is going to happen. The great day of salvation is going to become reality. The good news of eternal life is going to become available to people of all nations. Because today is Good Friday. The *conditions* for the return of Paradise are going to be met this very day. Before this day has run its course, Jesus will conclude the day by victoriously shouting: TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED! I have done everything that My Father has asked of Me. On this very day, Paradise will return. Yes, the *conditions* for sinless, righteous fellowship with My Father by the believing descendants of Adam will have been met. While many erroneously assume that Paradise means “heaven”, I have come to see it as referring to the restored relationship with God, which begins immediately at the moment of salvation. We will see that God the Father confirms this reality when we deal with Matthew 27:50-53.

It is Good Friday. Jesus has been accused, judged and condemned. He will now be crucified. God the Father will forsake Him when He becomes sin. A decisive role is about to be assigned to two criminals in reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. The synoptic gospels make it clear that the *condemnation* of Jesus, as He hangs on the cross, is a universal condemnation by those who express a point of view. Up to this point, the gospels do not report a single voice that speaks up in defense of Jesus. Or why He is on the cross. Not one. Not even among the multitude of Israelites on their way to Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover of the angel of death in Egypt years ago.

2.7 Universal Condemnation and Silence

The reader is plainly told that: “Those who passed by [the cross] derided Jesus, shaking their heads and saying, ‘Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.’ In the same way the chief priests along with the scribes, were also mocking Jesus among themselves and saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah the King of Israel come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.’” (Mark 15:29-32). Imagine for a moment what would have happened if Jesus *had* come down from the cross, which He indeed had the power to do. The only reason Jesus remained on that instrument of death was His love for His Father and His love for the millions for whom He was this day paying the ransom to enable those millions to receive the gift of eternal life.

It is important to pay close attention to what the Scriptures now tell us about the role the two criminals will play in the context of Jesus’ crucifixion. How do they behave?

Is it not the Holy Spirit who directs Mark to inform us of the following: “Those [plural] who were crucified with him also taunted him” (Mark 15:32b). And Matthew reports much the same thing: “The bandits [plural] who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way” (Matt. 27:44). The inexcusable behaviour of the two criminals is carefully recorded. You may want to ask yourself: Why? Why did the Holy Spirit consider it important to record their unbelief? One of these two criminals on the cross eventually became a convert, but it is first impressed upon the reader that he was no friend of Jesus during those early morning hours on the cross.

3. The Conversion of One Criminal

Over my 82 years, I have heard many sermons on the conversion of the thief. Many of those sermons dealt with Luke 23:42-43 as their text:

⁴² And he [the criminal] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ And he [Jesus] said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Those sermons preached over the years almost invariably ended by informing the congregation that Jesus and the converted criminal together went to Heaven that very day. But as I have come to learn, Paradise is not to be regarded as synonymous with Heaven. The *larger context* in which this short dialogue between Jesus and the criminal takes place is seldom highlighted. The revelation that both criminals taunted Jesus earlier in the morning appears to be of little importance when it comes to understanding Luke 23:42-43. But the importance of this revelation cannot be *exaggerated*.

3.1 A Sudden Turn: From Mockery to Worship

It is *impossible* to arrive at the dynamic meaning of vv. 42-43 without understanding the impact of v. 39 which reads. “One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” This criminal is once *again* vilifying Jesus. He expects his fellow criminal to join in.

This *greater context* is indispensable to a biblical understanding of the powerful meaning of the short dialogue between the criminal who is converted and Jesus as recorded in Luke 23:42-43. The *information* provided by Scripture that **both** bandits taunted and

mocked Jesus during the earlier hours of the morning on Good Friday is information that is *vital* for anyone who desires to come to a biblical understanding of the important role these two bandits played in helping us to understand Luke 23:42-43. How do the interpreters of Scripture account for the conversion of one of these two criminals?

A fair deal of speculation has been recorded in theological manuscripts and Study Bibles over the centuries in attempts to explain what *motivated* that one bandit to speak out dramatically in defense of Jesus and to make it plain *why Jesus was on the cross*. Why did this criminal come to Jesus' defense? How is it possible, you and I may ask, that during the earlier morning hours the same criminal who vilifies Jesus and thereby manifests himself to be a child of Satan, a child of darkness, later turns and defends Jesus most dramatically? Why? Because sometime before noon, according to the Scriptures, the same bandit who earlier stood in service of Satan has become a child of God. *How was this radical transformation in his heart commitment brought about?* Much theological ink has flowed from many pens in attempts to answer this question.

4. The Father's Role in Salvation

As I reflect on this, I wonder if God the Father, in His love for the Son, ordained this moment to ensure that one voice would rise in His defense. The Father must not have been pleased that no one had spoken out to declare *why* Jesus was on that cross.

4.1 Divine Initiative from John 6

According to the wisdom of Scripture there is only one possible explanation for this criminal's radical transformation. And the **key** to understanding this man's transformation is found in chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. There the steps are outlined, by Jesus, that are involved in the conversion of unbelievers. How does the conversion of this particular criminal, like all other "criminals," occur? In John 6:44, on an earlier occasion, Jesus carefully explains how this happens: "*No one* can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Note that the *fullness* of the resurrected life begins on the last day as noted four times in this paper.) And yes, it is no one other than God the Father who *enables* a sinner to be designated a believer. A *second* scriptural witness attesting to this same fact is given in verse 65 where we again hear Jesus saying: "This is *why* I told you that *no one* can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." It is God the Father who chooses the sinners to be redeemed by Jesus. This

criminal, this outspoken child of Satan who earlier added to Jesus' suffering, now majestically becomes a worshipper of Jesus while he hangs on the cross. And the compelling reason for this change of allegiance is that God the Father *enabled* this man to become a believer. It had nothing to do with his history or background. Jesus understands very well what is happening before His very eyes.

4.2 The Gift to the Son

I used to wonder why the Father of Jesus who so graciously sent an angel to comfort Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, sent no angel to comfort Jesus on the cross. I now understand that it is also clear from what happened to this converted criminal and from John 6:44 that he was *enabled* to become a believer in Jesus *only* because God the Father so enabled him. The conversion of this man was God the Father's incomparable gift of love to His Son, shortly before the Son is encompassed by the terrors of hell. No angel came to the cross to comfort Jesus for the simple and wonderful reason that God the Father Himself "came" to the cross. Jesus understood what was happening. At the cross the Father enabled one of the two criminals to become His child. This demonstrable act of love on the Father's part filled Jesus with joy. And as the reader will soon see, and as experienced by Jesus, the Holy Spirit was in attendance at the cross as well. Both the Father and the Holy Spirit manifested their presence at the cross in terms of what happened there. The Father came to enable one of the two criminals to become a follower of Christ.

5. The Work of the Holy Spirit

And the Holy Spirit came to the cross on behalf of the Father to *teach* that converted criminal what to confess. It is important to remember that **all** knowledge comes from God (Isaiah 28:23-29). The converted criminal was motivated and taught by the Holy Spirit to initiate the dialogue between himself and Jesus. It was not an act of his own devising. This was the *one* instance that words from the cross were not initiated by Jesus. The initiative was from God the Father and from God the Holy Spirit to the joy of God the Son.

God the Father takes note from Heaven of what is transpiring on Golgotha during those early morning hours. God the Father takes note of how His beloved Son is being taunted and vilified and scorned and blasphemed by *all* who spoke. Even by the high

priest and the scribes. The Father observes how not even a single individual speaks the truth concerning His Son's world-altering sacrifice on the cross. A sacrifice that will re-define history. A sacrifice that will convert the sinful nature of millions of descendants of the first Adam. Yes, transform their sinful nature into a nature of righteousness. A transformation that will result in the return of Paradise *on that very day*.

And so the Father decreed that one of those two criminals hanging beside Jesus is to become His child. A brother to Jesus. The Father then deputizes this convert as His spokesperson to address the whole world that day and for centuries to come. To declare the breathtaking truth concerning His Son on Golgotha. This convert will herald the truth made known to you and me two thousand years later because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit on that day. The criminal's conversion stands as a powerful testimony of God's grace at work – even in the final moments of life.

The dialogue which now follows between Jesus and this convert deputized by the Father is the short but remarkable narrative recorded in Luke 23:42-43. This world-altering dialogue between Jesus and the converted criminal most likely took place as the morning progressed towards noon,⁴ Luke relates the following important information: “One of the criminals who hung there [again] hurled insults at Him saying: ‘Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” But this time the now-converted criminal does not join him. Here we witness the presence of Satan as he continues to take the initiative of unbelief. Only by this time the converted criminal has been taught by the Holy Spirit to declare the **true nature** of Jesus' presence on the cross. God the Father will no longer tolerate the truth being suppressed.

5.1A Divinely Orchestrated Dialogue

Yes, by this time God the Father has deputized the converted criminal to proclaim a response *on His behalf* to the deceptive words of the unbelieving criminal who speaks out on behalf of Satan. This time, however, the *converted* criminal powerfully responds. And there can be no mistaking that this converted criminal has been taught by the Holy Spirit

4. The reader should remember that God the Father and the Holy Spirit do not abandon Jesus until He becomes sin for us. Jesus still addresses His Father to ask for forgiveness for what is taking place. Becoming sin takes place on Jesus' part at noon when the Light disappears and the darkness of abandonment encompasses the earth.

to declare what the Father wants declared. The words of wisdom he speaks are profound. Think back a moment to what Jesus taught us in a similar situation in Matthew 16:15-17:

“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, **but by my Father in Heaven.**”

And so it is with this converted criminal. He speaks the words that have been revealed to him by the Father of Jesus. The criminal, enabled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, responds to his fellow criminal with the following moving words of wisdom: “Don’t you fear God?”, he asks the unbelieving criminal, “Since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. *But this man has done nothing wrong.*” What an astonishing declaration. By what authority is the converted criminal speaking? First he makes a confession of his own guilt; then he declares that Jesus has done nothing wrong. Truly remarkable! A wisdom that is not of his own making. His declaration is made on behalf of the Father of Jesus. God the Father knows that Jesus is innocent of any sin of His own. He is indeed sinless. That is what enables Him to pay the ransom for others. Finally, someone on Golgotha has spoken the truth concerning the reason Jesus is dying there. And has done so on the initiative of the Father. It is God the Father who is declaring that Jesus is innocent! Make no mistake about it. Remember, that is the reason why the reader is informed earlier by Matthew and Luke that at the outset of Good Friday the converted criminal in fact *vilified* Jesus. He did not believe in Jesus’ innocence.

6. The Kingdom of God and Paradise Restored

The stage has been set for God the Father to announce the world-altering sacrifice of His beloved Son. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have come to Golgotha to arrange for this announcement to be made. One of the two criminals on the cross is going to play a *key role*. He has been granted a new heart resulting in a new life. Eternal life. Yes, even though this converted criminal will soon die, he will not be dead. He will be in Paradise with Jesus (Read Colossians 3:3-4). His death on Golgotha will be a mere transition from the present life to “falling asleep in Christ.” We will examine the biblical meaning of this

teaching in the other paper. Permit me to say at least the following at this time: The phrase “falling asleep in Christ” will become a major theme in the New Testament as we will see.

6.1 The Criminal’s Prophetic Declaration

Important for the reader now is that this criminal is about to address the Messiah. He is about to address the Son who is the image of the invisible God. The One who is the firstborn of all creation. The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20). In Him all things were created, things in Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things. And in Him all things hold together. Even as hydrogen clings to oxygen to form water. As an expression of His will (Rev. 4:11). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He who is all in all (Col. 1:15-20). He who is hanging on an instrument of death, our Creator, the Son of God.

6.2 Jesus’ Response: “Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise”

Yes, there our Creator hangs between Heaven and earth. To all outward appearance He is as helpless as a newborn child. Yet He has the power to step down at will. As an object of pity, this Man of sorrows is about to re-define history. He is about to transform the sinful nature of millions of children descended from the first Adam. He will do this as the second Adam. He will grant these sinful children a nature of righteousness. His presence on this cross is indeed of world-altering significance. Believers are about to return to the Garden of Eden.

6.3 Paradise and the Return to Eden

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have set the stage for the single most important event in the history of the planet about to take place on Golgotha. And this unequalled historic event is to be *initiated* by a converted criminal as he now turns his attention from reprimanding his fellow criminal to Jesus. He addresses Jesus with these simple but profound words:

“Jesus, remember me [the request]
when (emphasis added) you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). [the

prophetic declaration]

Yes, a simple request followed by a dynamic, prophetic declaration. A declaration that will resound for thousands of years and that will change the very character of *all* life to come on earth.

The criminal is not asking to go to Heaven with Jesus when the two of them die this Good Friday. This converted criminal has no conception of Heaven. And the Holy Spirit has nothing to say on the subject. The Holy Spirit working in this man's heart is not about to give him an expectation of Heaven, as so many theologians will do in the centuries to come.

The *request* made by the criminal serves to inform believers of all ages (even we who live 2,000 years after this event) that death for the believer no longer means the end of life. An issue that was in doubt for many in the Old Testament. The converted criminal knows he is going to die. And he knows that Jesus is going to die. Yet in spite of this certain knowledge, the converted criminal, in faith, asks Jesus to remember him. And in spite of this knowledge about dying, he is nevertheless testifying that Jesus is going to come into His Kingdom. These words spoken by the converted criminal border on the irrational if viewed in unbelief. The criminal will soon die and so will Jesus. And won't that be the end of the affair? How can the criminal possibly expect to be remembered after he has died as well, as prophesy that Jesus is coming into His Kingdom when Jesus will also soon have died? The wisdom of God the Father. God the Father deals with reality not only in immanent terms but in transcendent terms as well.

The request by the criminal to be remembered after he had died *assumes* that death is not the end. Not for him and not for Jesus. The prophetic declaration made by the criminal *assumes* that he be remembered at a *specific* time. He *asks to be specifically remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom* even although he has no idea when that will be. There is no mention of Heaven. None! The focus of the dialogue between the criminal and Jesus is riveted on *the coming of the kingdom of God* on earth (see Rev. 12:10-12). The criminal asks to be remembered specifically at the time when Jesus comes into His Kingdom. The dialogue between Jesus and the criminal is not about Heaven, and it is not about Paradise either, as far as the criminal is concerned. The criminal asks to be remembered *when* Jesus comes INTO HIS KINGDOM! Remember **Who** is the criminal's teacher? Because this Teacher knows what He is talking about. So now the important consideration is this: Will

Jesus answer his question about the kingdom? After all, wasn't the criminal's question informed by the wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit? Was the criminal's question not a principled question and is the answer the criminal is about to receive not a principled answer?

Of course, Jesus understands perfectly well what is happening before His very eyes. His Father has granted the righteousness Jesus is purchasing with His blood on the cross for sinners to one of the two criminals hanging beside Him. His Father has enabled this now-converted criminal to become His spokesperson and to declare (in the absence of any other declarations) **the reason why Jesus is on the cross**. And it is not so that believers can take up a life in Heaven. No, the reason Jesus is on the cross is spelled out in capital letters by this converted criminal when he turns from addressing his fellow criminal to now addressing Jesus. The dialogue that is here taking place between this criminal and Jesus is a dialogue that will declare *the long promised transformation* of the sinful nature of millions of people (Ezek. 36:26). The transformation of the sinful nature inherited in Eden from the first Adam. That nature (see Romans 6) is about to become a nature of righteousness in Christ Jesus. And that righteousness will open the doors of *the Kingdom of God* to peoples of all tribes and nations and languages. The curse of Babel is being broken (see especially Acts 2). The dialogue between Jesus and the converted criminal is riveted on God's Kingdom, God's Kingdom, God's Kingdom. Yes, God's Kingdom is being restored on Golgotha! From now on God will deal with the peoples of all the earth. Salvation has indeed come by means of the Jews. And has already been coming for two thousand years.

7. Jesus is the only One, in all of Scripture, Who *Addresses* Paradise

Jesus is the only One in all of Scripture who addresses the biblical teachings about Paradise. At this point already someone may take issue with what I have just said. They may wish to argue that the apostle Paul address the issue of Paradise in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. That is simply not the case. Paul does not tell his readers a single thing about Paradise as such. Not a thing. He tells his readers that he was caught up to the third heaven and that he was also caught up into Paradise. He heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. And Paul shares, in words only, "the surpassing greatness of the revelations." But about the third heaven and Paradise themselves, Paul tells his readers nothing. We will come back to this in greater detail when discussing 2 Corinthians 12:1-7. The only point I wish to make here is that 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 has been misinterpreted to claim that the

third heaven and Paradise are synonymous. One and the same reality. But about Paradise itself, Paul tells us *nothing*.

The word Paradise is never employed by the Old Testament as written in Hebrew. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the Septuagint borrowed the Persian word, *paradeisos* to refer to the garden of Eden (see Gen. 2:8-10). Consequently, the Garden of Eden became identified with Paradise. It is that understanding of Paradise that Jesus referred to on the cross. We will deal with the meaning of Paradise in Luke 23:43 separately. The issue of the biblical meaning of Paradise is of such paramount importance that a bit of repetition will serve us well.

Paradise! What role does the biblical revelation about Paradise play in Scripture? Any exegete of Scripture who has not already prejudicially and willy-nilly committed his or her heart to equating Paradise with heaven, will immediately note how sparingly the term Paradise appears in the New Testament. Furthermore, such a person will also immediately agree that the only Person in Scripture to meaningfully take the term “Paradise” upon His lips is Jesus. Yes, the apostle Paul takes the term upon his lips in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 but only to inform the reader that he is under strict orders not to discuss Paradise *at all* even although he has visited the place. Why is that? Is that not unusual in the extreme? Why can Paul not share with us what he saw? Those questions will be answered when 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 is discussed in the next section. You will be surprised at the answer.

The word “heaven”, in one form or another, appears in the Bible 582 times. The word “Paradise” appears only three times. And once indirectly (Revelation 22) in the New Testament. Do you not find that revealing? Does that not suggest that the word (or idea of) Paradise has a very specific meaning and place in God’s revelation? And that when Paradise is referred to there must be a specific reason? In the Old Testament Paradise is referred to as *The Garden of Eden*. It is later translated into Greek as *paradeisos*. That is where the New Testament “borrows” the word from. That is why Jesus uses the word “Paradise” on the cross in His response to the converted criminal. Jesus expects there to be recognition of Paradise when He refers to it. The only thing we *know* about Paradise is what is revealed to us in Scripture. And **everything** that is revealed about Paradise in Scripture is revealed to us by Jesus. Don’t you think that in itself also tells us something about the meaning of “Paradise” **when as its first mention it is referred to by Jesus from the cross?** The cross and Paradise are *inseparably* related. Apart from an unusual context involving the Apostle Paul, the only Person employing the word Paradise *in the entire New Testament* is Jesus. Again, why? Is it perhaps because Jesus is the only Person authorized by

the Father to address the gift of Paradise which He procured for believers *on the cross*? Is it perhaps because the Father of Jesus insists that the new Paradise be associated with the blood of Jesus? After all, was it not Jesus who purchased Paradise for us with His precious blood on the cross? We will shortly come back to what Jesus teaches us about Paradise as referenced in Luke 23:43, Revelation 2:7 and Revelation 22.

The subject of Paradise is key to understanding the meaning of our present life as well as what happens during the interim, and upon Christ's return.

First, a more detailed word about the incredible experience Paul had when he is permitted to view the third heaven, but especially Paradise. You guessed right. The two are not the same. Heaven and Paradise are two entirely separate entities.

7.1 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 on the Meaning of Paradise

Let's first try to come to grips with Paul's exceptional reference to Paradise. It is amazing what wonders God will perform for those who faithfully proclaim the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 (the 7th verse which is often ignored is important as we shall see), Paul informs his readers that fourteen years earlier he had an exceptional experience. God enabled Paul to witness the reality of the third heaven, God's throne room, as well as the reality of Paradise, a foretaste of a world orchestrated by God in Jesus Christ. Whether Paul had this experience in the body or apart from the body Paul does not even know. That does tell us, however, that it was a most remarkable experience. It was "other" than a worldly, three-dimensional experience. It made an indelible impression upon Paul. While in this "state" of "in the body" or "out of the body", it is essential for us to realize that Paul refers to experiencing *two realities*: He experiences the reality of the third heaven **and** he experiences the reality of Paradise (see v. 7). Why otherwise describe each experience in such detail? While Paul experienced these two realities he notes that "He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell." Certainly something to look forward to, but he tells us *nothing* about the third heaven or about Paradise. He was strictly forbidden from doing so. It was an exceptional and unique experience. And it was purposely intended by God to be personal to Paul. And Paul kept the event to himself for fourteen years. Even when he does refer to it, he tells the readers of Scripture *nothing* beyond the fact that he had the experiences.

Now in verse 7 Paul writes: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations (plural)..." So what revelations has Paul actually discussed

in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7? Is he not talking about the revelation of the third heaven and the revelation of Paradise? Are these not the two revelations of which he is speaking? Why speak of these experiences in the plural if, as some theologians insist, they were a single experience? What would inspire an exegete when Paul speaks about the third heaven and Paradise as separate events, to **insist** it was his intention to *identify* these two as one and the same reality? Paradise is heaven and heaven is Paradise! If that were indeed the case, why doesn't Paul just say so? But he doesn't. In verses 1 and 7 he very meticulously distinguishes between the two. So why do so many interpreters of Scripture identify the two? Worse yet, they interpret 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 to teach that when believers die, they go to live in heaven to await Christ's return. That is what they assert Jesus also said to the malefactor on the cross. You and I are going to heaven today. These two texts then become the so-called biblical warrants for making that claim. This reveals an unwarranted prejudice: heaven and Paradise are one and the same reality. But how meaningful is it to go to heaven to wait for Christ's return at the time of the Second Coming **when we are said to already be with Christ in heaven?** Wait for Christ's return while actively living with Him in heaven? Is that not contradictory? In fact, Scripture teaches no such thing. And thereby this forced interpretation of the text becomes **their** understanding of the meaning of Paradise which, in fact, trivializes the awesome world-altering reality Jesus brought to fruition on the cross. We will come back to this when we look at Jesus' meaning of Paradise as employed by Him in Luke 23:43.

On a lighter note, you grandchildren may be wondering why God, in Jesus Christ, arranged this spectacular viewing of the third heaven and Paradise for Paul. I have. I believe that in this instance it may be responsible to speculate a little:

The reader is informed that Paul's unusual experience is already 14 years old. That in itself is remarkable. So we know that Paul has had this knowledge and the joy of these "viewings" for 14 years. What a God! We also know that during that time Paul suffered a great deal. Many attempts were made on his life. As Stephen was being stoned, in Paul's presence, for witnessing to the reality of Jesus as the Messiah, heaven opened and Stephen saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. What a blessing for Stephen. What a comfort as he was undergoing a horrific death. Stephen's words and true peace of mind did not escape Paul's notice. And when Jesus was on the cross and about to suffer the abandonment of His Father, God the Father empowered one of the criminals to reinforce the comforting knowledge that at the end of His ordeal Jesus would come into His kingdom. And now, it's Paul's turn. Paul writes about experiencing the reality and splendor of the

third heaven and that of Paradise. This happened not that many years before he will die a martyr's death. In light of the intolerable suffering Paul was undergoing during his ministry, it pleased God in Jesus Christ to give Paul a firsthand viewing of the prize that awaited him at the resurrection. That is how I understand the meaning of Paul experiencing the reality of the third heaven and the reality of Paradise. He *witnessed* Jesus Christ in all His glory and power in the third heaven. What a revelation. Enough for a lifetime.

Do you grandchildren have any notion of the countless number of times God has come to the aid of those who suffer for the sake of His name? The account of God's loving concern for Paul as recounted in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 does not add anything to our understanding of the nature of Paradise. And it most certainly is not a warrant for equating heaven and Paradise. Therefore it is highly prejudicial and antithetical to teach that the two are one and the same thing. It is an abuse of the text. And worst of all, it *trivializes* what Christ is accomplishing on the cross. Jesus' reference to Paradise on the cross is then interpreted to merely mean that its goal is a "passage to heaven" to await the Second Coming. What a mountain of contradictions. How will the exegetes ever crawl from under them when challenged with the biblical account?

7.2 Faulty Exegesis

Here is an example of faulty exegesis. In an article by P. H. R. van Houwelingen, entitled "*Paradise Motifs in the Book of Revelation*" – Part 1 in the Magazine, *LuxMundi*, March 20, 2011, the author commits the mistake, along with many other reformed Bible teachers, of again equating heaven with Paradise. He writes: "In Luke 23:43 and 2 Corinthians 12:4, *paradeisos* denotes the *heavenly Paradise*, the abode of believers after death." What authority does he cite to make this bold proclamation? He cites Luke 23:43 and 2 Corinthians 12:4. The very texts he is supposed to exegete. These texts warrant no such conclusion. The Bible is not acquainted with the phrase or the idea of a "heavenly Paradise." Cite the texts where such a "heavenly paradise" is found in Scripture? Is it not the New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven upon earth that becomes the throne room of the new Paradise? The Paradise Jesus purchased for us on the cross will be established on earth (Revelation 21 and 22). This will happen by virtue of the reality that God the Father and Jesus will establish their throne there. And more importantly, the Paradise Jesus purchased for us on the cross manifests the **presence** of Paradise in **this life** as a present reality. Just reflect on Pentecost! God **in** us. And it is this incomparable gift from God which makes our lives in this sinful world such a joy, nevertheless. Even as one is stoned

to death. And that is what Paul, or Saul, could not comprehend. What was it with these Christians? Why did Stephen die with forgiveness and God's glory on his lips? Until he became a Christian himself. And then God said: Let Me show you the third heaven and Paradise. They are the prize for all your suffering.

I can see some of you older grandchildren smile. You want to ask me a question or make a comment. Great. Go ahead. "Well, Opa, how do you expect to formulate an argument against the tradition of "Paradise = heaven" when that argument is much, much older than you are and so well entrenched? *Every* Study Bible of multiple versions we turn to teaches that Paradise = heaven.⁵

5. Herewith a sample of the widespread literature teaching that we go to heaven upon death as disembodied souls to carry on life there:

The NIV Study Bible notes: "In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) the word 'paradise' designated a garden (Ge 2:8-10) or forest (Ne 2:8), but in the NT (used only here [Luke 23:43] and in 2 Co 12:4; Rev 2:7) [the word 'paradise'] refers to the place of bliss and rest between death and resurrection (cf. Lk 16:22; 2 Co 12:2)."

The New RSV Study Bible informs the reader that: "*Paradise*, originally a royal garden, the Garden of Eden in the Septuagint, and later as here, is a synonym for heaven."

The New Century Version Study Bible informs the reader that "paradise" is another word for heaven.

The *NIV Study Bible* on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 teaches that the term "paradise" is synonymous with the third heaven, where those believers who have died are even now "at home with the Lord."

The authoritative Dutch *Staten Bijbel* of 1586 also asserts that "paradise" is synonymous with heaven.

The Ryrie Study Bible, NAS edition, teaches that in the LXX (Septuagint) in Genesis 2:8, the word "paradise" suggests a garden, but in the three New Testament uses the word "paradise" speaks of heaven.

The *MacArthur Study Bible* notes the following: "The word paradise suggests a garden (it is the word used of Eden in the LXX), but in all three New Testament uses it is speaking of heaven."

Consider also the commentary on Luke 23:43 in the *ESV Study Bible*, which states:

Good question. A legitimate concern. My answer is not difficult. Ask Martin Luther how a prejudice is transformed into a principle. The *view* I am presenting to you grandchildren in this paper is not mine. To the extent that I have understood Scripture, it is God the Father's, and I am doing my level best to present and communicate that view to you grandchildren. I will say more about it later. But remember, after Jesus has cried *tetelestai*, His Father responds by tearing down the curtain in the Holy of Holies and the Father awakens many dead saints from their sleep. Why? Because Jesus shouted *tetelestai*. It is fulfilled. Are these acts on the part of the Father not clear signs of the return of Paradise? The curtain of separation is abolished between the Father and His children. Death is abolished. Once you have weighed my complete presentation of the biblical givens and come to the conclusion that I have not made my case, by all means, go on believing that Paradise and heaven are one and the same thing. I believe you do so to your own detriment. But I don't think that will happen. God the Father makes a convincing case on behalf of His Son by exercising a sign of the return of Paradise at the very moment that Jesus dies. It is important to realize that the Father's return to the cross on Golgotha actually took place at 3:01p.m. after His Son had shouted: *Tetelestai. It is fulfilled*. The curse of Genesis 3:15 is lifted. I will make what I *believe* to be the Father's case when I discuss Matthew 27:50-53. If I am unfaithful in my interpretation someone will have to point that out to me. *On the basis of Scripture*.

8. The Meaning of the Dialogue: Luke 23:42-43

"Jesus Remember Me..."

A request by the converted criminal to be remembered by Jesus. A request to which Jesus responds. But not by stating that the two of them are going to Heaven this very day as taught on the basis of conventional wisdom. No! The criminal has no conception or expectation of Heaven. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the second part of the words the criminal speaks from the cross is not a request or a question. No, after having asked to be remembered, the criminal is making an important *prophetic declaration* in harmony with his request to be remembered. The *context* in which he wishes to be remembered is *very specific*.

"Paradise is another name for heaven, the dwelling place of God and the eternal home of the righteous (cf. 2 Cor. 12:3; Rev. 2:7)."

Jesus, remember me.... *when?*
...when you come into your kingdom.

The criminal is not *inquiring* into the *coming* of the kingdom of God, rather, he is *declaring* that Jesus at some point **is** going to come into that kingdom (although he does not know when). **But Jesus does!** As we will see. Jesus realizes that His Father, by deputizing this recent convert, has presented Jesus with the opportunity *to announce to the whole world and for all generations to come* that the reason He is offering His life on the cross is to offer all believers of all time a paradisaal *state* (not place) of being through the Holy Spirit, who will soon come to dwell in the hearts of all believers. The criminal has just made a declaration that not only concerns him personally, but which has universal implications: *Thy Kingdom come!* Jesus is the answer to the Lord's Prayer. Directed by the Holy Spirit who does not make mistakes and whose words are clear and faithful and true, the criminal asks Jesus to remember him **when** Jesus comes into His kingdom. And it is in the context of this declaration about **coming into His Kingdom** to which Jesus responds: Verily I say to you:

"Today you will be with Me in Paradise."

The Kingdom of God about which the criminal inquired is here made synonymous with Paradise by Jesus.

In this dialogue, Paradise as originally experienced sinlessly in the Garden of Eden by the first Adam was the perfect manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is saying that His presence on the cross on Good Friday is restoring that reality. At least in spirit. At least as a "state of being."

8.1 Golgotha: The Event that Re-Defines History

As long as we view the converted criminal as an individual speaking as a result of his own initiative, his own background, his own education, his relationship to Jesus and what is transpiring between the two, and what he is saying is not all that revealing or significant. And that is probably why Scripture provides the reader with *no information whatsoever* about who he is. He serves as a deputy and Jesus as King. Nothing must detract from the Kingdom-Paradise theme. The role the criminal is performing on the cross has nothing

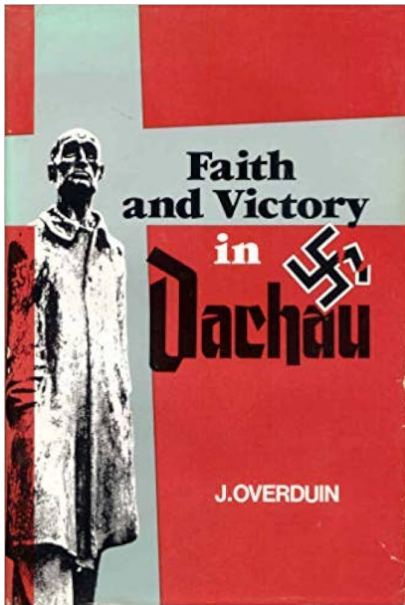
to do with who he is or who he has been. All we know is that by his own admission he was worthy of death. His background is not relevant. But once the *believer* learns to view the relationship of the criminal to Jesus as a relationship arranged by the Father as well as a relationship inspired by the Holy Spirit – once the believer realizes the existence of such a divinely inspired relationship, then it takes on a joyful depth of meaning. In other words, once the believer views the criminal's request (Jesus, remember me) as well as his prophetic declaration about the kingdom as a result of the work of the Father and the Holy Spirit, then the insight conveyed by the criminal's words take on the same depth of meaning as the words spoken by Jesus which He spoke to Peter in a similar situation. The insight in question was not given to you by flesh and blood, Mr. Criminal, but by My Father! Consider again what Jesus said on that occasion: Peter, your declaration that "I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God [and that this] was not revealed to you by flesh and blood [which actually amount to nothing] but by my Father in Heaven" (Matt. 16:15-17). And here again it is My Father in Heaven who has given the converted criminal the insight to ask to be remembered as well as to declare that as a result of Jesus being on the cross, He is going to come into His Kingdom. *And in the context of your prophecy, Mr. Criminal, God the Father has provided Me with the occasion to declare to the whole world what I am accomplishing this day by My presence on Golgotha.*

The dialogue between Jesus and the criminal is most decidedly about the pre-eminence of re-establishing the kingdom of God lost in Eden by the first Adam. Listen to Christ's triumphal response to the criminal (and to you and me) as to *when* He is coming into His Kingdom:

Today I am going to regain Paradise on behalf of My Father." This insight was not given to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father who came to the cross.

So it is important, Jesus is saying, to listen very, very carefully Mr. Criminal and all of you whom My Father has elected from before the foundation of the world, because you are going to learn *right here and now* what my death as payment for sin is going to accomplish as it relates to My coming into My Kingdom:

You may not realize it, Mr. Criminal, but I am in the process of coming into My Kingdom on this cross this very day as we speak. My coming into My kingdom will be concluded at 3 p.m. TODAY! Paradise will once again exist. I am purchasing its presence by My blood. Not tomorrow. Not upon my return. **TODAY!** Not yet as a



place but most assuredly as a *state of being*.

TODAY, yes on this very day, Mr. Criminal, all those who confess that I am on this cross without sin of my own but have taken upon Myself the sin of the world, yes, to all those who confess that I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God, to them I am declaring that as of today, you will be with Me in Paradise. And My Father will send out the Holy Spirit *in power* fifty-three days from now to confirm My words. God in us! I will accomplish **everything** on this cross that My Father has asked of Me. All the conditions necessary for the return of Paradise lost in the Garden of Eden will be restored today by 3 p.m. When in a few hours

I shout: **TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED!** *Paradise will have returned.* Not tomorrow, not next year, not at the end of time. **TODAY!** Not yet as a place (Rev. 21 and 22) but as a “state of being.” Even in the hell of Dachau, Paradise will be as close to you as the Holy Spirit *who will come to live in the hearts* of all believers.⁶ Yes, this will happen fifty-three days from Golgotha. Loving, sinless fellowship between the Father and His children as they come into the world – RE-ESTABLISHED because of Golgotha. I am coming soon.⁷

Yes, the treachery of the first Adam will be undone *today*. The darkness will disappear and the Light will have returned. When as a result of the first Adam’s disobedience you inherited a sinful nature, **today**, as a result of my presence on this cross and because I am present on this cross as the second Adam, your legal representative, and as the Righteous One, all those who confess My name will now inherit my Righteous nature. You will be as righteous in Me as you once were unrighteous in the first Adam. While history continues to unfold in the power of what I, Jesus, have ac-

6. You would benefit immensely by reading the book *Faith & Victory in Dachau* by J. Overduin, published by Paideia Press in 1978.
7. We must learn to see time in terms of our lifetime and that of our believing relations. While we live we have the Holy Spirit and after we die our lives will be *hidden* in Christ with God (Col. 3:3-4). We will have lost the use of our bodies. What Vollenhoven called “the cloak in which we function.” Meanwhile, we will live our lives **in Him** and so await the resurrection and our reappearance in our spiritual bodies.

complished on Golgotha and until all the elect have entered my fold, My Kingdom, and *Paradise will have returned in your heart*. Joy beyond measure. Joy of the presence of My Spirit! Until the day Paradise returns in all its earthly splendor and glory on the renewed earth. On that day I will have done away with all sinful flesh and granted all believers a spiritual body and immortality. Believers will from then on experience a multi-dimensional reality. This will happen after history has taken its course under My supervision (See Rev. 4 and 5) and hundreds of millions who confess My name during those lifetimes will live with Me forever in My Father's kingdom. Paul was not permitted to reveal to you what he saw regarding Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-4) but I, Jesus, *may* reveal particulars about the new Paradise (Rev. 21 and 22).

8.2 Jesus Forsaken by the Father

The Father of Jesus and the Holy Spirit have done their work on Golgotha by means of the dialogue between Jesus and the criminal. The nature of what Jesus achieved on the cross was instantly confirmed by God the Father (Matt. 27:50-53). Jesus has presented His Father with the gift of His life and in so doing His Father has gifted Jesus with the return of Paradise.

We now turn our attention to Matthew who reports the final three hours of Jesus on the cross (in silence) as follows:

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour [from noon to 3 p.m.]. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour [3 p.m.] Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

Matthew imparts the important information to the reader that during Jesus' final three hours on the cross, the Father has forsaken Jesus. For anyone to be forsaken by the Father is the biblical definition of hell. When Judas Iscariot accepted the "sop" from Jesus' hand we are told that Satan entered into him. He was forsaken by God and dead within 24 hours. If you and I were to be forsaken by the Father, such "forsakenness" would result

in our death as well. Jesus, as the Son of Man and the Son of God laboured under that “forsakenness” for an incredible three hours. For three hours Jesus was in hell and bore the curse for the sin of the world. All of it He took upon Himself until finally He cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Of course, Jesus knew why His Father had forsaken Him. What was spoken was spoken for our benefit. He had become sin for us. He assumed upon Himself the responsibility for all sins ever committed and those yet to be committed. And the Father’s punishment for that mountain of sin ended in His death. Isaiah 52:13-14 informs the reader that Jesus suffered so intensely that He was no longer recognizable as human.

See, my servant will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴Just as there were many who were appalled at him—

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

Jesus suffered a death that those who believe in Him will never have to suffer: the death of being forsaken by the Father. No one who is forsaken by the Father can live. **No one!** Not even the second Adam.

8.3 Divine Confirmation at Golgotha

After having reported that Jesus cried out that He had been forsaken by His Father, Matthew reports that Jesus cried out once more in a loud voice and gave up His spirit (Matt. 27:50). It is commonly believed that what Jesus cried out just before His death were the words recorded in John 19:30. **TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED!** Jesus declared this as His accomplishment on Golgotha! He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Gave it. His spirit was *not* taken. Paul later informs the reader in 1 Corinthians 15, the great chapter on the resurrection, verse 20, that Christ is the “*first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep.” Yes, there is no denying this reality. When Jesus committed His spirit into the hands of His Father, He fell asleep! To deny the truth of this is to deny the *Sola Scriptura* pre-eminence of Scripture.

Jesus’ suffering on the cross has come to an end. His work is finished. He has achieved nothing less on Golgotha than the transformation of reality. Those who died as a result

of the disobedience of the first Adam and thereby inherited the first Adam's sinful nature have now come to inherit a new life as a result of the obedience and the sacrifice for sin made by the second Adam, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All the conditions for the return of Paradise have been met. When the converted criminal also soon dies, he will indeed enter Paradise. As Paul later explains in Colossians 3:1-4. First the believer will “die” to sin (v. 3). But then the message shifts to the eschaton: “When Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with Him in glory” (v. 4). From God's point of view, believers exist immanently and transcendentally. To us this is indeed a mystery.

8.4 John 19:28-30 in English and in Greek

The word *tetelestai*, translated as “It is finished” in most translations, is the word Jesus shouted from the cross moments before He died.

The Death of Jesus

19:28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to
 Μετά₁ τούτο₂ <ὁ₄ Ἰησοῦς₃> εἰδώς₃ ὅτι₆ πάντα₈ ἤδη₇ τετέλεσται₉ λέγει₁₄ ἵνα₁₀
 Meta touto ho Iēsous eidōs hoti panta edē tetelestai legei hina

fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there,
 τελειωθῇ₁₁ ἡ₁₂ γραφή₁₃ → διψῶ₁₅ → σκευός₁ μεστόν₄ → ὄξους₃ ἔκειτο₂
 teleiōthē hē graphē → dipsō skeuos meston oxous ekeito

so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch
 οὖν₆ → περιθέντες₁₁ → σπόγγον₅ μεστόν₇ τοῦ₈ ὄξους₉ ὑσσώπω₁₀
 oun perithentes spongon meston tou oxous hyssōpō

and held it to his mouth. 30 • When Jesus had
 <11 προσήνεγκαν₁₂ • 15 αὐτοῦ₁₃ <τῷ₁₄ στόματι₁₅> οὖν₂ ὅτε₁ <ὁ₆ Ἰησοῦς₇> →
 prosēnenkan autou tō stomati oun hote ho Iēsous

received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and
 ἔλαβεν₃ τὸ₄ ὄξος₅ → εἶπεν₈ → τετέλεσται₉ καὶ₁₀ κλινὰς₁₁ τὴν₁₂ κεφαλὴν₁₃
 elaben to oxos eipen tetelestai kai klinas tēn kephalēn

gave up his spirit.
 παρέδωκεν₁₄ τὸ₁₅ πνεῦμα₁₆
 paredōken to pneuma

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, who taught Greek and Latin at Mid-America Reformed Seminary for twenty-five years, has helped me formulate the following about the meaning of the word *tetelestai*. Writes Dr. Kloosterman:

My view of the meaning of *tetelestai* in English is that the verb and its cognates refer to “motion that comes to a stop.” So translations like “fulfill,” “complete,” and “accomplish” all indicate a process or activity that has been ongoing but now reaches its terminus, its end or goal. The rendering of “finish” suggests merely “stop,” “cease,” “done.” In John 19, the verb *teleo* is used several times, and I think the translation can be uniform. To render Christ’s saying on the cross as “It is finished” is not required by the Greek. Given the context, I think a better rendering would be “It is accomplished,” or “It is fulfilled.”

This is confirmed by the Latin Vulgate, which uses the rendering *consummates est* for Jesus’ saying on the cross. The notion of “consummation” or “consummate” has within it the idea of process-that-is-reaching-its-goal/purpose/intention.

I find the above analysis helpful.

I am in my eightieth year and have listened to many sermons. I have also read entire books of sermons. And preaching on the text: “Today with Me in Paradise” is quite popular around Easter. I have never heard a sermon that used the phrase: “It is fulfilled” rather than: “It is finished.” That strikes me as unusual. Personally, I have always had difficulty understanding the meaning of the phrase “It is finished.” What or who exactly does the pronoun “it” refer to? And what are we to understand by the meaning of the word “finished”? *What* is finished? Is it Christ’s life and His suffering that are “finished”? Would it not be more redemptive-historical to stress that Christ’s promise in Genesis 3:15 had been **fulfilled**?

Dr. Kloosterman has offered us his educated point of view. The Greek text does **not** require that the word *tetelestai* be translated as “It is finished.” Nelson points out that in chapter 19 of the gospel of John, the word *tetelestai* is found twice. In plain English, the verses 28-30 in John 19 from the ESV read as follows:

²⁸ “After this, Jesus knowing that all was now *finished* (*tetelestai*), said (to *fulfill* the Scriptures) “I thirst.” ²⁹ A jar of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said “*It is finished*” (*tetelestai*), and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

So in verse 30, which of the two phrases best conveys to the reader what is happening on Golgotha? Is it the phrase, “It is finished” which is then harmonized with the idea that Jesus is going to heaven with the criminal? The NIV Study Bible suggests that the phrase: “It is finished” means that Jesus died as a victor and had completed what He came to do. That point of view can then be harmonized with Luke 23:43, which according to the NIV teaches that Paradise referred to by Jesus on the cross is “the place of bliss and rest between death and resurrection.”

Dr. Kloosterman, studying that question, remarks that the Greek does not require that the expression, “It is finished” be used. He goes on to state that a better rendering would be the phrase “it is accomplished” or “it is fulfilled.” I agree. When using the phrase “it is fulfilled” the pronoun “it” stands for Genesis 3:15 and “fulfilled” more powerfully captures the redemptive-historical meaning of the world-altering event unfolding on the cross. After all, it is Genesis 3:15 that Jesus has fulfilled on the cross.

8.5 Matthew 27:51

What happened next, that is to say, what happened at the **very moment** when Jesus dies should leave no doubt in the mind and heart of any Christian as to what Jesus actually achieved on Golgotha. The text in Matthew 27:51 uses the Greek words *kai idou* which in English means the equivalent of: *And behold* (ESV) or *At that moment* (NIV). Take note dear reader. The Scriptures report that several events of immense consequence took place at the **very moment** of Jesus’ death.

9. Are Paradise and Heaven Synonymous?

An event of cosmic consequence has taken place on Golgotha. As a result the Creator of the universe has been laid to rest in the grave of a rich man. The Son of God who created all things visible and invisible has died (i.e. “fallen asleep”, 1 Cor. 15:20). He has sacrificed His life at the request of His Father for the sake of those whom the Father elected to have eternal life. It was a sacrifice that God the Father did not actually demand of the father of all believers, Abraham (Gen. 22:19). But He did ask that sacrifice of Himself and of the Son He loved. Yes, the Son of God has sacrificed His life because His Father loved the world He made that much (John 3:16-17). The Son, the Son alone, was capable of paying the required ransom.

In a dialogue with a converted criminal hanging beside Him, the Son made the

promise that this criminal would on this very Good Friday enter into Paradise with Him. Did the Son in fact fulfill that promise?

According to conventional wisdom, He did *not*. Many theologians and students of Scripture do not actually believe that Paradise, which is a demonstrable *earthly* reality, was regained on Good Friday on the cross. Others do not believe that Paradise as an earthly reality will ever be regained. Heaven is their home. That explains why so many Christian authors write books entitled *Heaven is my Home*. Both the ESV and NIV Study Bibles exegeting the meaning of Luke 23:43 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 and 7 emphatically teach that Paradise and Heaven are one and the same thing.⁸ So according to their interpretation of Scripture, what Jesus was in fact promising the converted criminal is that he would continue his earthly existence in Heaven.⁹ And such indeed is the conventional understanding of Jesus' reference to Paradise in Luke 23:43. When Jesus told the criminal that he would be with Jesus in Paradise that very day, Jesus supposedly was informing the criminal that he was going to Heaven. That being the case why did Jesus not simply say so? The question therefore arises: Are Paradise and Heaven indeed one and the same thing? A careful study of the biblical references to Paradise *that will follow* in this article should convince most serious students of Scripture otherwise. Paradise and Heaven are *not* synonymous. The Kingdom of God and Paradise **are** synonymous. The criminal proclaims that Jesus *will come* into His kingdom. Jesus replies that "Paradise" (regained) will *today* become a reality. The second Adam has regained forever what the first Adam forfeited.

9.1 Theological Confusion and Conflation

The conflation of Paradise and Heaven is so widespread—so ingrained—that I challenge you to find an evangelical, popular, or academic source that explicitly denies their synonymity. You would be hard-pressed to do so. But rather than placing the full burden on you, I have gathered several examples to illustrate just how deeply this assumption is

8. The NIV Study Bible on 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 states that "the term 'Paradise' is synonymous with the third Heaven..."

The ESV Study Bible on Luke 23:43 states that "Paradise is another name for Heaven." The ESV also teaches that Heaven is the *eternal home* of the righteous.

9. In Dr. Venema's book, *The Promise of the Future*, we read in the footnote on page 58: "It [Paradise] refers... to what we would commonly term 'Heaven.'"

embedded.

The widespread confusion regarding the distinction between Paradise and Heaven has led to a fundamental misunderstanding of Christ's work on the cross. The general consensus among theologians, pastors, and Christian literature asserts that Paradise is merely another name for Heaven, thereby obscuring the radical nature of Christ's victory at Golgotha. This conflation has deep theological ramifications, as it distorts the biblical narrative and diminishes the full scope of redemption accomplished through Christ's sacrifice. In the following subsections, we will examine the extent of this misinterpretation as expressed in Study Bibles, commentaries, sermons, and books, and offer a biblical correction to this error.

9.2 Study Bibles on Luke 23:43

A survey of Study Bibles reveals a common trend: the assumption that Paradise and Heaven are synonymous. This assumption leads to the erroneous belief that believers, upon death, immediately transition to a disembodied existence in Heaven.

The *NIV Study Bible* commentary on Luke 23:43 states:

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), the word 'Paradise' designated a garden (Ge 2:8–10) or forest (Ne 2:8), but in the NT (used only here and in 2 Co 12:4; Rev 2:7) [the word 'Paradise'] refers to the place of bliss and rest between death and resurrection (cf. Lk 16:22; 2 Co 12:2).

Here, the NIV commentary simply assumes that Paradise refers to a spiritual abode distinct from the physical world, equating it with Heaven. The critical flaw in this interpretation is that it fails to recognize that Jesus' use of the word *Paradise* in Luke 23:43 was not an abstraction about an intermediate state but rather a declaration of the restoration of God's Kingdom on earth. By misreading this passage, millions of Christians have been led to believe that Heaven is their immediate destination upon death, rather than recognizing the biblical hope of resurrection and the renewal of creation.

Similarly, the *New RSV Study Bible* states:

Paradise, originally a royal garden, the Garden of Eden in the Septuagint, and later as here, is a synonym for Heaven.

This assertion overlooks the fundamental biblical theme that Paradise, as depicted in Genesis, is an earthly reality. Paradise was never a distant, ethereal place but rather the original dwelling of mankind in the presence of God, a reality that will be fully restored in the New Creation.

Other Study Bibles follow suit:

- *The New Century Version Study Bible* states that “Paradise” is simply another term for Heaven.
- *The MacArthur Study Bible* claims that in all three NT references, “Paradise” means Heaven.
- *The NET Bible* insists that Paradise is the abode of the righteous dead, equating it with Heaven.
- *A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament* affirms that Paradise refers to the very bliss of Heaven itself.

Each of these interpretations imposes an unbiblical framework onto Scripture, reinforcing the misleading idea that upon death, believers immediately experience a fully realized afterlife in Heaven, rather than awaiting the resurrection.

9.3 Commentaries and Their Mistaken Views

Commentaries perpetuate the same error by interpreting Luke 23:43 in a way that disconnects Paradise from its biblical, earthly context.

The *Korte Verklaring* commentary claims that the criminal who repented “went to Heaven with Jesus within hours.” This assertion not only misreads the passage but also ignores Jesus’ descent into the grave and the necessity of resurrection.

John Wesley, in his *Explanatory Notes*, describes Paradise as “the place where the souls of the righteous remain from death till the resurrection.” However, if Paradise were simply a waiting area for disembodied souls, why would Jesus use a term so heavily associated with the restoration of the Garden of Eden?

Similarly, John Darby’s *Synopsis of the New Testament* asserts:

The thief had asked Jesus to remember him when He returned in His kingdom. The Lord replies

that he should not wait for that day of manifested glory, but that this very day he should be with Him in Paradise (that is, Heaven).

This reading of the text fails to grasp the full implications of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Jesus was not referring to a distant spiritual realm but to the immediate restoration of Paradise as a present reality through His sacrifice.

9.4 Sermons and Their Mistaken Views

Many contemporary sermons also reinforce the mistaken idea that Paradise is merely another word for Heaven.

For instance, the Rev. Matt Carter of Austin Stone Community Church preaches that Luke 23:43 teaches that “the joy of Heaven will be knowing Jesus forever.”¹⁰ While it is true that the ultimate joy of believers is found in Christ, this interpretation completely bypasses the eschatological hope of the New Earth and the resurrection of the body.

Similarly, Rev. Peter Slofstra of the Christian Reformed Church states: “Paradise is the word Jesus used on the cross to describe Heaven.”¹¹ Again, this interpretation lacks a biblical foundation and conflates two distinct realities.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon *The Dying Thief in a New Light*, states:

Still, I think he has the best of it who is converted, and enters Heaven the same night.

Spurgeon's preaching is powerful, but in this instance, he too assumes an unbiblical view of Paradise. Jesus did not take the thief to Heaven that night; rather, He proclaimed the restoration of Paradise through His atoning work.

10. Rev. Matt Carter, “Today You will be with Me in Paradise,” *Austin Community Church* (2014). <https://austinstone.org/resources/sermons/481--today-you-will-be-with-me-in-paradise/>.

11. Rev. Peter Slofstra, “Today You will be with Me in Paradise,” *Christian Reformed Church* (2012). <https://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/reading-sermons/today-you-will-be-me-paradise-0/>.

9.5 Books and Their Mistaken Views

Numerous books further propagate this error.

Randy Alcorn, in his influential book *Heaven*, writes:

During the Crucifixion, when Jesus said to the thief on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43), he was referring to the present Heaven.

This interpretation leads to an artificial division between a “present” and a “future” Heaven, when in reality, the biblical hope centers on the resurrection and renewal of creation.

Derek Prince, in *War in Heaven*, states:

Paradeisos (Paradise) is the Greek word for a “garden.” It describes God’s garden in Heaven.¹²

This claim has no scriptural basis. The biblical depiction of Paradise consistently points to an earthly reality, not a celestial one.

Erwin W. Lutzer, in *The Serpent of Paradise*, writes:

Christ’s death opened Heaven to those who are His children. To the thief on the cross He could say, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). There is now a direct route to Heaven, opened by One who Himself has entered.¹³

This statement misrepresents the nature of Christ’s accomplishment. The curtain in the temple was torn, graves were opened, and a new reality was inaugurated—not merely access to Heaven, but the return of Paradise.

10. Implications for Theology and the Church

The confusion between Paradise and Heaven has significant theological consequences.

12. Derek Prince, *War in Heaven: God’s Epic Battle with Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003), 13.
13. Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Serpent of Paradise: The Incredible Story of How Satan’s Rebellion Serves God’s Purposes* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 96–97.

By misplacing our hope in an ethereal afterlife rather than in the resurrection and the renewal of creation, the Church loses sight of the full grandeur of God's redemptive plan. The message of Luke 23:43 is not that believers will escape to Heaven upon death, but that through Christ's sacrifice, the Kingdom of God has been restored.

10.1 Recovering a Biblical Hope

The tearing of the temple curtain and the resurrection of the saints on Good Friday confirm this truth. It is time for the Church to recover a biblical understanding of Paradise as the reality Christ has inaugurated—a reality that will be fully consummated in the New Creation.

Is it merely a matter of opinion whether or not Paradise and Heaven are said to be one and the same thing? Can the *identity* of the two be confirmed by Scripture? Why refer to Paradise at all if its simply another word for "Heaven"? Does Scripture engage in needless confusion? Revelation 4 and 5 deal with Heaven in detail but there is no mention of Paradise until chapters 21 and 22 where it is implicitly mentioned in fulfillment of Rev. 2:7. And then in relation to earth.

As I have previously stated, Heaven and Paradise are not synonymous. Most emphatically not. And such is not an option. Once a student of Scripture takes the step to *challenge* the prevailing opinion that Paradise and Heaven are synonymous, he will come across many Scriptures that confirm him in his doubts. More on this subject later.

God the Father at the moment of Jesus' death has *something* of consequence to say about what Jesus accomplished on Golgotha. And that *something* relates to our earthly reality and not to Heaven. Even more emphatically, that something is not so much what the Father of Jesus wants to *say* about Golgotha as what *He actually does* in His response to the event of Golgotha.

At the *very moment* (Gr. kai idou) that Jesus shouts: **IT IS FULFILLED**, Jesus is saying: All that you asked of Me Father has been fulfilled. It is then God the Father who glorifies His Son. How does God the Father honour His Son? The Holy Spirit saw to it that that awesome honor was recorded for us in Matthew 27:50 and 51a. Verse 50 informs the reader that when Jesus cried out again, He gave up His spirit. Jesus has died; He has fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20). At that *very moment*. God the Father *acts*. Yes, the believer is clearly informed that God the Father *acts* at the very moment when Jesus shouts: IT IS FULFILLED! At that exact moment the reader is informed that God the Father tore the

curtain in the temple, that is, in the Holy of Holies, from top to bottom. The *curtain*, the reality of sinful man's separation from a holy God, has been nullified. The life-threatening barrier is gone. Believers are now *more righteous* than they were before Adam sinned, for they will now no longer have their sin imputed to them. That is what happened as a result of Golgotha. Thanks be to Jesus Christ. They will eventually also receive their glorified bodies and never again be able to sin or die. The righteousness they receive as a gift from the sacrifice Christ merited for them on the cross is already so consequential that the Holy Spirit comes to live in their hearts. Don't bother to try and reconcile the two realities: On the one hand, the end to our sinning when we receive our glorified bodies at the time of Christ's return and on the other hand the reality that the Holy Spirit already now dwells in us. That we sinners already stand righteously before God as a result of standing in the company of Jesus. Rejoice at the realization that *nothing* is impossible for God. And after Golgotha nothing can separate us from God.

Rather reflect for a moment on God the Father's actions at the very moment of Jesus' death. The curtain of separation has been made of no effect. I am free. Glory hallelujah. I have been set free from my sin. And that is Paradise.

But God the Father does more than annul the deadly legal function of the curtain of separation at the moment of Jesus' death. God the Father then acts to *annul death itself*. The incident as described in Matthew 27 is almost beyond belief. In verses 51b-53 we read the following:

And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

No sooner has the power of death as manifested by the curtain in the temple been annulled, that the reader is then told that there is an earthquake which reduces to rubble the stones sealing the tombs of many graves. The tombs have been opened. The bodies of **many** holy *people* who had died were raised to life. Imagine that. Believers who had died were brought back to life. Yes, *many*! The text clearly emphasizes that this spectacular event was occasioned by God the Father *at the moment of Jesus' death*. These many believers were awakened at around 3pm on Good Friday. Why? To attest to the power over death Jesus had achieved on Golgotha. According to the Father. They were all instructed

to go into Jerusalem to testify to what had happened in that cemetery. *But not until* Jesus had arisen *first*. Imagine the consternation and joy resulting from these *many* appearing to relatives and friends and acquaintances. Look who has come to our house! It is uncle and brother and mother, etc. etc., so and so. But how is that possible? They died!

Scripture informs us that this stupendous event indeed took place. At the initiative of the Father. But it provides us with not a *single* detail. Why? Because you can imagine the details for yourself. Just picture someone who you know who has died and who comes to your front door. It is almost beyond imagining. But in light of what has happened on Golgotha, God the Father wants to establish a relationship and emphasis of “from death to life” upon all generations to come after Golgotha. The Father’s *keynote* comment about Jesus’ sacrifice on Golgotha is that Jesus has made it possible for the believing dead to return to life. Now read the concluding verses of 1 Corinthians 15. And here they are. A foretaste. That is why Scripture records that this happened **at the moment** of Jesus’ death. *The two are intimately related*. The saints involved will, however, have to spend the weekend in the cemetery. They may not go into Jerusalem until after the wondrous resurrection of Jesus, who will not only come back to life on Easter morning but who will, as the second Adam, also receive His glorified body at this time. The spotlight is not on the saints who have come back to life but on what Jesus has accomplished. God the Father is casting the spotlight on the Son He loves and on what His Son accomplished on Golgotha. That is the point of the Father awakening many from their sleep.

One wonder follows upon another. First, a criminal is deputized to engage in the dialogue of all dialogues. Then Jesus declares that Paradise will return that very day. Then the curtain of separation and death between God and those who believe is torn away. Finally on that Good Friday **many** saints who have fallen asleep come back to life. They are requested to spend the weekend in the cemetery. But will soon fill the hearts of many with wonder upon wonder.

11. The NEW Life Brought About by Paradise

Good Friday! A day of wonders. A day of eternal life.

In Matthew 27:51b, the believing reader is given the following remarkable account of what the Father did after He tore down the curtain in the temple the moment Jesus died. This is what we are told:

The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of **many** holy people (not sinless, but faithful worshippers of God) who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs and *after* Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many people.

Amazing! Amazing! Amazing! Are the first words out of my mouth. Jesus died and immediately the Father awakens many (hundreds) of believers who had fallen asleep. Wonderful new life is given to them. Thank you, Jesus. When God the Father goes to work on your behalf expect the unexpected. Can you not sense the jubilation in His actions? And not unexpected. He *is* the Creator of heaven and earth and of you and me. And you can rest assured that the Father was delighted when He heard the cry from the cross He had been waiting to hear. The cry: TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED! Don't misunderstand. The Father was not looking forward to His Son's death. But He was awaiting the deliverance of the creation from the curse. And that necessitated Jesus' death.

Once again, at the very moment of Jesus' proclamation that He had fulfilled the promise He had made in Genesis 3:15, the Father used the power of that earthquake to shatter the stones that sealed the tombs in which we are told, **many** bodies of believers had been buried. The Father returned the breath of life (Genesis 2:7) to these people, gave them their memories back and enabled them to come out of their tombs. What a spectacle that must have been! Just imagine a cemetery in your neighbourhood where suddenly several hundred graves are opened. Believers previously dead are walking around everywhere. Trying to orient themselves. Yes, eventually they're sitting around waiting for Easter. Once again this took place **at the very moment** of Jesus' death. And we have on good authority that was on Good Friday at 3p.m. In one manner or another, the Father instructed these newly awakened believers to stay in their cemetery until Easter morning arrived; until after Jesus had first risen from the dead. They were not to precede Jesus into Jerusalem.

Why? Why did God not awaken these people from their sleep on Easter morning so they would not have to sit around in that cemetery all weekend? Do you grandchildren have an answer to that question? From a perspectival point of view the Bible is a very accurate and tightly written document.

God had a very good reason for bringing these believers back to life **the very moment** His Son died. God the Father wanted the two events of the death of His Son and

the renewed “coming to life” of these many believers to be *unmistakably related* to each other. God wanted them and us believers who live 2,000 years after the fact of Golgotha, to see the connection. The awakening of these believers was a small foretaste of the Great Resurrection to come at the time of Jesus’ Second Coming. And the awakening of those who had fallen asleep in this isolated cemetery was to be directly associated with the great wonder Jesus achieved on the cross. **THIS IS THE MEANING OF THE CROSS!** The dead come back to life. Satan is toast! Death has been conquered. Paradise has and is in the *process* of returning. Yes, it is here. Those who have the eyes of faith to see God at work will now, after Golgotha, see manifestations of Paradise everywhere. Even in the death of Stephen, as he is stoned to death, because of his testimony to what Jesus did for believers on the cross. Stephen saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand. And God gave him the grace to forgive his enemies. Will any of us see Jesus before the great resurrection at Jesus’ Second Coming? Who knows? But all of us will receive grace sufficient to see us through this life with meaning and purpose if we are the children of God. That is God’s gift in Christ to all of us because of what Jesus did for us on Golgotha. Soon, Satan will not only have to fight Christians. He will have to do battle with the Holy Spirit who then lives in them. Samson took on a thousand of Satan’s underlings and so can you during the course of your life if you are endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit.

What happened in Jerusalem on an infinitesimal scale on that first Easter morning will soon happen in the company of Jesus. Hundreds of millions of fellow believers, dead and living, will be caught up together in the *clouds* (no, that is not a metaphor) to meet the Lord in the air. Perhaps to watch the earth being cleansed of its filth before we return to a renewed earth. And to a new Jerusalem where the Father and Jesus will dwell. Just imagine! It is a grandeur that the greatest of all fairy tales cannot convey.

God the Father intended to imprint the scope of what Jesus achieved on Golgotha on our minds and our **hearts** with the dual events of the torn curtain and the awakening of many believers in the graveyard. Is there possibly a more powerful testimony to the scope and power of Jesus’ promise to the criminal than when Jesus said: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”? Jesus said it would happen. And at the moment of Jesus’ death, the Father saw to it that it did happen. It would be clear to all that His actions were the celebration of His Son’s victory on the cross. Yes, at 3p.m, God tore the curtain of separation and awakened many saints from their sleep as a testimony to Jesus’ great achievement on the cross. Even the centurion and those who were with him were amazed.

When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54).

Yes, truly. Let us also truly appreciate Christ’s gift of His life. It was the Son of God who purchased eternal life for us on Golgotha. And it was no One other than God the Father who by His actions recorded in Matthew 27:51-53 declared communion between Him and believers once again restored. And in that cemetery God made the attestation that on the cross, Jesus had conquered death and had showered newness of life on all those who acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior. In a few days, Jesus would take forty days to say so Himself.

12. Revelation 2:7 on the Meaning of Paradise

And that, my dear grand and great-grandchildren, brings us to the meaning of Paradise as revealed in Revelation 2:7.

The opening verse of the book of Revelation reads as follows: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.” Ask theistic evolutionists to explain this relationship between heaven and earth. They will blubber like two-year olds.

After greetings and an introductory statement in chapter 1, there follow the seven letters to the seven churches. These seven churches actually existed in Asia Minor during the first century A.D. The book of Revelation was not written to enable Hal Lindsey to write a speculative novel about Jerusalem in the 20th century. It was written to provide and support the early Christians who were faced with many attacks on their faith. Of these seven letters, the letter which you and I are primarily interested in is the first letter, namely, the one written to the Church in Ephesus. And then only the conclusion. That letter concludes with these comforting words: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (**Note** that what the Spirit is about to say, He says to *all the churches*. And that includes our church). This is what the Spirit has to say about Paradise: “To the one who conquers I will grant the right to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” That is a wonderful promise. Once again the Scriptures offer the reader no warrant for equating Paradise with heaven. The third heaven is God’s throne room (Rev. 4 and 5). The Scriptures do, however, offer insight into how we are to understand

Paradise. Paradise is the place where the tree of life, which was so prominently present in the Garden of Eden, is to be found. **The tree of life is to be found in the Paradise of God.** And it is to the Paradise of God that Scripture teaches us *we are going* at the time of the resurrection when Christ returns in glory. And that Paradise is the new heaven and the new earth combined; it will then exist as one. The New Jerusalem will be located on the renewed earth, and it is there that God's throne will be established. In the New Jerusalem.

This brings us to the *indirect* references to Paradise in the book of Revelation. The tree of life is referred to no less than **three times** in chapter 22. It is the same Paradise referred to in chapter 2:7. These references inform the reader that Paradise will once again be part of earth. As a matter of fact, the earth will be Paradise.

At the beginning of history, Paradise was an identifiable part of our earthly reality. It was located in the Garden of Eden. Better yet, the Garden of Eden was Paradise. It was part of a three-dimensional reality (It is possible that prior to the Fall, life was "more" dimensional), perhaps part of a multi-dimensional creation. But now we are told by many authors, pastors and scholars that when we die, our bodies are left behind and we travel to heaven as a spirit. Then we are told that heaven and Paradise are one and the same place. Presumably this means the following: 1) Only our bodies die, and we take on a bodiless existence; 2) When we die we go to heaven, that is, Paradise. So why bother with Christ's return? But Revelation 2:7 informs us that an identifying feature of Paradise will once again be the tree of life. Are we to believe that a garden and trees and fruit are part of the reality known to us as heaven? The claim is made that heaven is also Paradise. Is heaven with its inhabitants not a spiritual reality? Are trees and fruit now part of this spiritual world? To ask the question is to answer it. Is the reality known to us as "transcendent" (heaven) not a multi-dimensional, spiritual reality? Angels appear out of nowhere. The preincarnate Christ meets Abraham. The servant of Elijah has his eyes "opened" and sees the mighty army of God which has come to Elijah's aid. And to go on. Just read the Old Testament. And the New.

When Jesus returns, and it can't be soon enough, especially at your grandmother's and my age, Paradise will *once again* be firmly established as an identifiable place on earth. Paradise has always been an earthly reality. In the beginning Paradise was the home of humanity. And after Christ's return, Paradise will once again be part of (the New) Earth. If as so many theologians insist, that Paradise is in fact heaven, when did this happen? And where in Scripture can I read about that? And how can trees and fruit be grown in a

spiritual reality like heaven? Would it still be spiritual?

13. Paul and Jesus on Paradise

It really is quite amazing when you pause to think about it. The Apostle Paul was privileged above all other Christians. Jesus Christ who once appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus now appears to him to reveal the splendor of the third heaven as well as the splendor of Paradise. Yet Paul is forbidden to whisper a single word about the grandeur and the glory of what he saw. So do we miss out on everything Paul saw until the time of the resurrection? Not at all. I believe Paul was forbidden to reveal what he saw in both the third heaven and Paradise because that privilege, that revelation, that right to disclose those wonders, God the Father granted to His Son.

Think! Have we ever been short changed? Have we been left wondering what the third heaven and Paradise are about? Are we to think of them as one and the same? Not at all. What Paul was **not** permitted to reveal to us, Jesus Christ reveals to us in considerable detail in the book of Revelation. His book! And the *nature* of Paradise is revealed to us in the first instance in chapter 2:7. Through the apostle John, Jesus gives us the book of Revelation. A good part of that book I find a challenge to grasp. On the other hand, much of the book of Revelation is as transparent as looking through a pane of glass. Let me give you three highlights described in the book of Revelation, none of which Paul ever had the opportunity to read. It is possible that some or all of what Jesus reveals to us about the third heaven and Paradise in the book of Revelation, Paul witnessed in person either in or out of the body. Perhaps Paul saw, in the Spirit, what John also saw in the Spirit. John knew the difference between the third heaven and Paradise. The first he describes in chapters 4 and 5 and the second in chapters 21 and 22.

Here is the first highlight about the third heaven and Paradise revealed to us in the book of Revelation.

14. Revelation 4 and 5 on the Meaning of Paradise

Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation: The door to the third heaven is wide open. The apostle John is invited to enter the third heaven in the Spirit. He witnesses God ruling from His throne and Jesus seated at His right hand. Surrounding the throne are twenty-four other thrones and seated on those thrones are twenty-four elders. Angels are not said to be elders. These elders are human beings. Among these elders may very well

be included individuals who the Bible informs us went *bodily* (with their new spiritual bodies) to heaven. We know that included Enoch (Hebrews 11:5-6), Elijah (2 Kings 6:17), and Moses, who appeared at the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). Later I will share an article with you about the fight the Archangel, Michael, had with Satan over the body of Moses. It is incredible what transpires in the spirit world. Jude, the brother of Jesus, tells us about it.

It is also possible that included among the twenty-four elders there were disciples of Jesus who were martyred for their faith. Yes, what I write is speculative. But those twenty-four elders are historical creatures, and they had to have come from somewhere. I am not a theologian so I can get away with a little speculation. In any event, you guys and gals are free to use your own imagination as to what the throne room of the Father and the Son looks like. God will surely not mind. He may even stimulate your imaginations. After all, that is one of the reasons He gave us that gift.

John tells us that there are also four living creatures with six wings in the throne room of God. Day and night these living creatures never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. They throw their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy our Lord and God, to *receive* glory and honor and power...”

Why are these elders saying that God in Jesus Christ is worthy? Is it because Christ went to Golgotha to reclaim creation's loyalty for His Father? Not in the first instance. As important as Golgotha is to our salvation and to God's honour, the worthiness and the glory and the power bestowed upon God in Jesus Christ are offered to Him for a more *foundational* reason. An achievement that focuses our attention on the very *root* of our being. Listen to how Scripture describes why Christ is deemed worthy by the company of heaven. And if you are ever tempted, during the course of your lives, to entertain the lie of creationary evolution, ask yourself why all of heaven worships God in Jesus Christ.

The most exalted thing that can be said by heaven about God in Jesus Christ is that the Father has placed Christ in charge of the origin and management of all of creation. May Paul also have witnessed this scene when he may have been out of the body? Here follows why God in Jesus Christ is worthy to receive all glory and all honour and all power:

**“He created all things,
and by His *will* they were created
and have their being (Rev. 4:11).**

The work of God as Creator is singled out as the one activity that exalts God in Jesus Christ above all else. So don't you grandchildren dare to muck with the blasphemy of theistic evolution.

In God's creative will lies the key to the question how the cosmos originated. The creation is God's masterpiece which *He will never abandon*. Jesus went to Golgotha for His Father to reclaim that creation, and the loyalty of its subjects belongs to Him. Before the first Adam sinned, the creation of the earth was characterized as *The Garden of Eden*, that is, as Paradise. Christians have a tendency to elevate the worth of heaven above the worth of the earth. *God does not*. They are both His creations. The Father so loved the creation that He gave His only begotten Son to have Him reclaim it. And according to Revelation 21 and 22, upon Christ's return in glory, there is going to be a *new* Jerusalem on *earth* (Do you get it, Hal Lindsey?) where God will establish His throne. Earth will become Paradise, and the focal point of all created reality.

I will never forget the Sundays our minister preached on these chapters from the book of Revelation in our congregation in Wallaceburg. I was a teenager then. And our minister was a young seminary student. Ours was his first congregation. His name was John Groen. Yes, Henry Groen's brother. You know him. He goes to Adoration. Well, John Groen preached for weeks on the book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, when I was a teenager. Those chapters are bursting with information about the third heaven and God's rule of the universe in Jesus Christ. Those chapters are an open door into the third heaven. All of you should read these chapters often. The scroll containing the history of the world, the Lamb, the seals. World history is under Christ's authority. He is the Lamb of God. These two chapters alone will tell you where you came from, what you are doing here on earth and where we, who confess the name of Jesus, are going. For a snapshot of

that impending reality you also need to read chapters 21 and 22, where you will find Paradise and the tree of life *on earth*. Yes, indeed. When Jesus told the criminal: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”, that is precisely what He meant: It had nothing to do with a bodiless existence in heaven.

No, I will never forget the first time I heard those sermons on the book of Revelation preached by Rev. John Groen. They stimulated what was probably the happiest time of my life. It was then that I began to grasp the meaning and the power and the joy of the gospel as revealed in Jesus Christ. And that experience has never faded. The intensity? Yes, it is gone. These old bones of mine have experienced too much worldliness. But then the intensity at times was so exhilarating that there were occasions when I walked out of church after one of those sermons not knowing if my feet were still touching the ground or not. Believe me, you don’t often get sermons like that. They are preached by an individual who is “high” on the Spirit and who believes *every word* he reads in Scripture. There have been many fine ministers since that time, but Rev. Groen was an exceptional experience who came at an exceptional period in my life.

In any event, the point I am trying to make is that on the basis of what the reader is told, we are not given any reason whatsoever to believe that there are an inordinate number of Christians in heaven. Christians in heaven are never referred to except for a few who went to live in heaven under special circumstances. And these believers were given a great deal of exposure. And they went to heaven “body and soul.” As *whole* people. And would these presumed millions of “souls”, if they are indeed consciously present in heaven, not also have fallen down in worship and awe before the Father and the Lamb as described in Revelation chapter 4? Why are they not mentioned? And in this context, there is no mention at all of Paradise. If heaven and Paradise are indeed identical, would we not have heard about that? We hear a great deal about the third heaven in chapters 4 and 5, but we don’t hear about Paradise until chapters 21 and 22. And then in relation to the new Earth. Yes, when we die we go to be with Christ. Our lives are **hidden** with Christ in God. And Christ is in heaven. True. But Paul in Colossians chapter 3 makes it *very clear* that our lives are **hidden** in Christ. This “hiddenness” does not appear to give us any visible presence in heaven. That raises the question: *How* are we with Christ when we die? That question I hope to address in the paper on falling asleep in Christ. Meanwhile, we may rest assured that Revelation 4 and 5 teach us a great deal about the third heaven; they teach us nothing about Paradise per se.

15. Christ's Ascension to Establish His Kingdom (Rev. 12)

The 12th chapter of the book of Revelation is fascinating reading. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the life of Christ including the event of Christ's ascension to His throne. The ascension took place 40 days after Easter morning. Christ has been to Golgotha. He has conquered death. Upon Christ's return to heaven after thirty some years on earth, there is about to be a radical (radix: root) change in the *status quo* in heaven. Satan and his rebellious angels are going to be permanently cast down to earth. Satan will lose whatever legal status he had in heaven. Such as in the case of Job and Aaron. Satan's access to God's throne is terminated as of the day that Jesus assumed His position of power as Savior at the right hand of God the Father. That day is referred to by the church calendar as Ascension Day. This happened ten days prior to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit burst upon the scene on earth. To equip the saints in their service of God and in their battle against Satan who has become a roaring lion.

Before we try to come to an understanding of Paradise in light of Revelation 12, I need to point out that there is a significant segment of Christianity that believes that Satan is still in heaven accusing the elect mercilessly. I call attention to two books¹⁴ written by otherwise fine, evangelical Christians. They try to make the point that Jesus did indeed execute a stunning victory over Satan on the cross, but that this victory did not result in the expulsion of Satan from heaven. The reason these two authors, with millions of others, adhere to this point of view is because they are premillennialists. They believe that Satan will be thrown out of heaven in the middle of the Tribulation period. That period according to them has still not arrived after two thousand years, consequently Satan's expulsion from heaven is believed to be a future event. As Calvinists we place a strong emphasis on the covenant and God's promises. We believe that the promise the pre-incarnate Christ made 4,000 years ago in Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled on Golgotha at about 3p.m. on Good Friday. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the Father would no longer tolerate Satan's accusing presence. And he and his fallen angels were thrown down to the earth. Read chapter 8 of the book of Romans. "Who will bring any charge against

14. Derek Prince, *War in Heaven*; Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Serpent of Paradise*. Both of these books advocate the belief that Satan still has access to God in heaven where he is permitted to continue to accuse the elect day and night. Reformed people with a strong covenantal emphasis do not share this belief. They believe Satan was thrown out of heaven the moment Christ ascended to God's right hand. As we will see, this happened for a very good reason.

those whom God has chosen? Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus died for us.” We are as righteous as Christ. After Golgotha, Satan has *nothing* to accuse us of. The belief of some that Satan is still in heaven is the most compelling reason I am not a premillennialist. Christ’s kingdom has already been established (Rev. 12:10). And in God’s sight we are free of sin. Satan has been deprived of the very possibility of accusing the elect.

We believe that the Revelation 12 is a dramatic account of historical events that have actually taken place two thousand years ago. The opening verses of this chapter inform the reader that the powers of His creation are placed at the disposal by God of a woman who is pregnant and who about to give birth to a son. An enormous red dragon, Satan, appears. He seeks to devour her Son the moment He is born. The woman indeed gives birth to a Son in Bethlehem, a male child, who will rule all the nations with a scepter of iron. That male child can only be identified as Christ. And the woman’s child was snatched up to God and **to his throne**. This is an obvious reference to Christ’s ascension 40 days after He was raised¹⁵ from the dead. What the reader has just been given is a thumbnail sketch of the life of Christ who had to flee to Egypt to escape the murderous intrigue of Herod and the dragon (Satan).

Then follows in Revelation 12:7-9 one of the most remarkable events in history. Just listen to John’s account:

⁷ And there was war in heaven. Michael (God’s archangel) and his angels fought against the dragon (they started this war), and the dragon and his angels fought back. (They did not want to surrender access to heaven) ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they **lost their place in heaven**. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. **He was hurled to the earth**, and his angels with him.

Ten days after Satan is thrown out of heaven, the Holy Spirit invades the earth on behalf of the Father and His Son. The powerful assistant Jesus promised His disciples has come.

What you and I want to pay particular attention to are two events. **First**: the male

15. Who resurrected Jesus? In Acts 2:24 Peter says that “God raised Jesus from the dead” (the Triune God). Galatians 1:1 says the Father raised Jesus. 1 Peter 3:18 says the Spirit raised Jesus. John 2:19, Jesus predicts that He will raise Himself.

child who now rules all the nations with an iron scepter (see 2:27). This is clearly a reference to Christ's ascension. And **second**: The moment Christ ascends, Satan and his mob are thrown out of heaven onto the earth. They have come down to earth as "murderous lions" who seek to destroy those who have communion with God in Jesus Christ. But now these Christians have the Holy Spirit living **in** them. The same Holy Spirit who assisted in the creation of the universe. The same Holy Spirit who gave Samson all his power. The same Holy Spirit who accompanied Israel out of Egypt.

Allowing for some imagery, the 12th chapter of the Book of Revelation is clearly historical. The reader is given a brief account of Christ's birth, Satan's attempt to destroy Christ, and Christ's ascension to the righthand side of His Father. This introduction acclimatizes our thinking to the historic battle between Christ and Satan in the rest of chapters 12 and 13; the account of that battle now comes to its climax.

It is important to keep the sequence of events that represent Christ's life on earth in historical order. Christ is born in Bethlehem. Satan's henchman, Herod, makes an attempt on the child's life once he realizes this child might become a king. Satan and Herod fail. Joseph is warned in a dream, by an angel, to flee to Egypt and stay in Egypt until the angel informs him it is safe to return to Nazareth. Jesus grows up and begins His ministry when He is around thirty. His life is an unbelievable combination of miracles and signs and wonders. He manifests Himself as the Messiah King. Bread and fish materialize in His hands to feed thousands. He heals the sick without number. He walks on the waves of the sea. He commands the wind and the waves. All of creation heeds His command. He even brings the dead back to life. He restores their memories. These numerous accounts alone condemn theistic evolution for the lie that it is. Jesus is the Word. And the Word commanded all things into being.

Christ's ministry of wonders and miracles lasted only about three and a half years. The fiercest opposition His ministry faces comes from the leadership within the community that claims to worship His Father. During His ministry fallen angels recognized Him and demon-angels had to submit to His command. But the leaders of God's people, possessed by demon-spirits themselves, plotted to kill Him. They considered murdering Lazarus for no other reason than that the awakening of Lazarus testified to the glory of God and the deity of Jesus. They finally succeeded; they blackmailed the Governor of the region, Pontius Pilate, into crucifying Jesus, even though Pilate declares Jesus innocent three times.

After loudly shouting "It is fulfilled!", Jesus surrendered His life to the Father. Accord-

ing to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Christ was the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. In my other paper we will see the role “falling asleep in Christ” plays in our whereabouts during the interim – the period between death and resurrection. On Easter morning Jesus was raised (raised Himself) from the dead. The first thing He did was to caution Mary not to cling to Him. *He had not yet returned to the Father.* For forty days He testified to His new life. On the fortieth day He returned to His Father in heaven and the moment He arrived we are told there is war in heaven. Satan realizes he has lost his Jobian claim to accuse the elect. Because of Golgotha! Satan’s influence is now strictly limited to the earth. God the Father will no longer listen to Satan. Not in the redemptive presence of His Son.

Now, grandchildren, I am going to interject a few paragraphs about Christians who do not believe that war erupted in heaven upon Jesus’ arrival. Those who adhere to this view are propagating what I believe to be a destructive heresy. They are negating the impact of what the Father did *in response* to Jesus’ sacrifice **the very moment He died (Matthew 27:51-53)**. We have covered this issue in part and will come back to it after we have taken a short overview of premillennialism. There was a time when this was a current issue. As a result, Paideia Press published two books on the subject.¹⁶

“Are you certain, Opa?”, one of you grandchildren may ask, “that Satan was thrown out of heaven *at the very moment* that Jesus, who had been given all power in heaven and on earth and that He assumed His position of authority at the right hand of the Father? After all, there are millions of sincere Christians who believe this event must yet take place.” You are right, of course, dear grandchildren. I checked the Internet, and Hal Lindsey’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, sold 35 million copies by 1999, was translated into more than 50 languages, and was turned into a movie. That is quite a statement.

You are right, grandchild. Lindsey’s book caught the imagination of millions of people and became a publishing phenomenon. But what counted, what would have made the book a *prophetic* sensation is the issue of whether or not Lindsey’s interpretation of what he believed to be prophetic predictions were accurate. Lindsey put his reputation on the line by providing specific dates for specific events. We are not going into details but as it turned out, his predictions were not accurate at all. The restoration of the Temple of Solomon still has not taken place. If you grandchildren would like to learn more about biblical prophecy, read several books published by Paideia Press in 1977/78 entitled *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*, and *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle?*

16. *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* was authored by Cornelius Vanderwaal; *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle* was authored by T. Boersma.

At this point you may ask: But what has Satan being thrown out of heaven to do with Jesus' promise to the criminal that: "Today you will be with me in Paradise?" We must remember that God's revelation is progressive. The *main* act in the drama of our salvation and the salvation of the universe is without question Jesus' glorious sacrifice on the cross. But there are many glorious acts that follow. Just think of the Father tearing down the curtain and awakening several hundred people in that graveyard. And there will be more acts to follow as a result of that liberating freedom that Jesus procured for us on the cross.

Now you have to reflect a moment on the role that Satan has played since his rebellion in heaven in relation to God's creation. Especially his adulterous relationship to the first Adam, his descendants and their role as the Father's vice-gerents on earth. In relation to the creation, Satan became the unconscionable spoiler. An agent of hate and death and envy and destruction. And that unwarranted opposition to God began in heaven. Satan is the creation who lies at the heart and root of all misery.

The primary reason Jesus went to the cross was to destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8). Remember that Satan was the agent who plotted the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (the Garden of Eden). On the cross Jesus destroyed the devil's work. And the first step the Father took when Jesus took His well-earned position at the right hand of the Father was to instruct the archangel Michael and the army of the Lord to throw Satan and his demon-angels out of heaven. The Father would no longer tolerate the intolerable presence of Satan in the company of the obedient Son who had restored the original purpose and faithfulness of God's creation.

The expulsion of Satan was the first step in the total powerlessness of Satan. It also made it possible for the Holy Spirit to descend upon the earth in power. Satan's role as accuser had been permanently terminated. The Father would not tolerate any further accusations against the elect in the presence of His Son (Rom. 8). Satan's demise is a testimony to Jesus' achievement on Golgotha. Glory be to the Father. What a salvation!

16. Pentecost as the Realization of Paradise Now

The gifts that accrue to us as a result of Christ's work on the cross are many. The first was granted to us by the Father at the very moment Jesus died. Yes, at the moment Jesus died. God tore down the curtain of separation in the temple and we became the temples of God. And the Father awoke several hundred people who had fallen asleep back to life. Wonderful, wonderful manifestations that Paradise had in fact returned. Paradise mani-

festes in a sinful world, but Paradise nonetheless. And in God's good time our lives are to become "Paradise lives" without qualification.

A few days later on Easter morning we received the gift of a resurrected Savior who would become our big brother for eternity. With God as our Father. What a family. No re-born son or daughter will ever be without a family on the new earth.

But then there is the Holy Spirit our Comforter. Just think, two thousand years after Golgotha, you and I are in possession of the Holy Spirit. Yes, in possession. He is the Father's gift to us. After witnessing to many people that He is alive, Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father. God can no longer tolerate the sight of Satan and has Michael, the archangel, throw Satan out of heaven. And ten days later, the Father gifts His children on earth with the Holy Spirit. That gift is the most powerful indication that when Jesus said: "Today you will be with me in Paradise this very day", that that is exactly what happened.

Paradise, dear grandchildren, exists wherever there is communion between God the Father and His children. Well, communion was restored, in power, ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven. An inexpressible gift of love from the Father made possible by Jesus' gift of Golgotha. Here follow the highlights of our salvation that took place in a mere fifty-three days from Good Friday to Pentecost:

- Good Friday: God the Father enables a criminal on the cross to become His child.
- The Holy Spirit directs this converted criminal to declare that Jesus is innocent of any wrongdoing. He is not on the cross for His own sins but for the sin of the world.
- Along the way the criminal confesses his own sins and makes us aware that we also are all criminals.
- Then the Holy Spirit directs this criminal to put *teeth* into the sign that hangs above Jesus' head announcing that He is a king. No, not *a* king, but the King of the universe. King of kings.
- God deputizes the criminal to see to it that Jesus will not die *incognito* (as a stranger). Even two thousand years later, the world knows Who died on Golgotha and why. And at Christmas, much of the world lights up in brilliant colour and songs of praise are sung on the radio for a month. Never mind the motivation. *It happens!*
- **THIS MAN**, the criminal announced to those within his hearing and to us:

THIS MAN IS COMING INTO HIS KINGDOM! His universal kingdom of righteousness and peace.

- And Jesus' response to this declaration is clear: Yes, Mr. Criminal, today you will be with Me in Paradise. I am hanging on this cross to transform the world into a Paradise that is even more glorious than the original Garden of Eden. And it will come to pass at 3pm this afternoon when I shout **TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED.** My Genesis promise is fulfilled.
- At 3:01p.m. that Good Friday afternoon the curtain of separation in the Holy of Holies in God's temple in Jerusalem is torn apart. Abolished!
- Reunion between God and re-born mankind is achieved on that very day.
- Jesus is raised (arises) from His sleep (1 Cor. 15:20).
- Easter morning Jesus cautions Mary not to hold on to Him. He has not yet returned to the Father. His return will happen on ascension day.
- Jesus meets two men on the road to Emmaus and explains to them that the Old Testament was all about Him. And that on the cross He fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament.
- For forty days, Jesus testifies that He is **alive** to many believers.
- Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascends to His Father in heaven to take His place at the right hand of the Father to rule the nations.
- His Father, at the moment of Christ's return, has Michael and his angels throw Satan and his fallen angels out of heaven.
- Ten days later, Pentecost. The Holy Spirit leaves heaven and descends upon the earth to dwell in the hearts of millions of believers and continues to do so to this very day. What a witness. What a comfort.
- Yes, Mr. Criminal, as you say, Jesus was coming in His Kingdom. And is coming still until His Father says: "Enough. The number of the elect is full." And we are then all invited to the Great Banquet on the renewed earth.
- Then we will live a life on earth we cannot begin to imagine. It will be the life God intended for Adam and Eve. Only much more. We will have spiritual bodies and will no longer be restricted to a three-dimensional existence.

Yes, all of this was the result of Golgotha and the fifty-three days just before and just

after Golgotha.

So, in the words of C.S. Lewis freely adapted from his book, *Mere Christianity*, and applied to what happened on Golgotha: “...let us not come with any patronizing nonsense” about Jesus having died and gone to hell so that we can spend a short disembodied period of time between our death and our resurrection in heaven.¹⁷ A short stay for us in heaven is not what Jesus set out to accomplish on Golgotha. That Scholastic (nature – grace; two storey) view of reality is a trivialization and denial of what actually transpired on Golgotha and the during fifty-three days shortly before and afterwards. Golgotha put us on the road back to Paradise. It is not about going to heaven. Golgotha gave us the Holy Spirit: God **in** us. It gave us renewed communion with the Father. Golgotha removed the curtain of separation between us and the Father. That is why I *believe* those searing words written by C.S. Lewis in which he cautions fellow Christians not to trivialize the Person and work of Jesus Christ, *apply* to the gross error of equating heaven and Paradise. Read those words often, dear grandchildren, for yourselves.

Next Easter when sermons are preached on Luke 23:43 let the word go forth that God in Jesus Christ on Golgotha transformed the direction of creation. He sent His Holy Spirit to earth to redirect the lives of millions. The Holy Spirit: *God in us!* Yes, Mr. Criminal, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Yes, indeed! Jesus is coming into His king-

17. For the reader’s reference, here follows the full quote by C.S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*, warning Christians not to *trivialize* who Jesus is: “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said (and *did* J.H.) the sort of things Jesus said (and did) would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Throughout the Old Testament, the great sin repeatedly committed by God’s people is to trivialize what God says. Not take it seriously. To understand what happened on Golgotha we must take Jesus’ teachings about Paradise and about “falling asleep in Christ” seriously. See my other paper.

dom on Golgotha, and we get to experience the return of Paradise in our lifetime also as it moves towards its consummation when Jesus returns.

17. Revelation Chapters 21 and 22 on the Meaning of Golgotha

These two chapters are all about Paradise even though the word “Paradise” never appears in either chapter. How then can we be certain that these chapters are indeed about Paradise? Because of Revelation 2:7. Remember Revelation 2:7? Jesus promised the seven churches that all those who remained faithful to Him during the course of their lives, to those Jesus will grant the right to eat of the tree of life **which is in the Paradise of God**. Wherever the tree of life is found, there also one finds himself in the Paradise of God. So it was in the beginning with Adam and Eve on earth, and so it will be with the children of God on the New Earth at the time of the resurrection.

The apostle John *saw* (Revelation 1:2) what he describes for us in chapters 21 and 22. Yes, even though what John describes for us in Revelation 21 and 22 is not yet part of the new created reality, and as far as we in our three dimensional reality are concerned, does not yet *exist*. Nevertheless, John **saw** what he describes for us because he saw it in the Spirit. And the Spirit, who is God, is not subject to time and space. We earthlings live in “time” and are subject to time and space. We can talk about “yesterday”, but we cannot relive it. God can! We can talk about “tomorrow” and even make plans, but we cannot *experience* tomorrow until tomorrow comes. But God can. God made us so that we are subject to the laws of time which He created. That is one of the reasons we Christians know with absolute certainty that creation did not evolve into being over a period of billions of years. Such a phenomenon would be so out of character for an Almighty God, that the very suggestion verges on the *absurd* (and blasphemous). In the first chapter of Genesis God revealed to us that He created the world in six days. We are also told *how* He did it. He *spoke* the creation into being through the power of His Word. He willed creation into being (Rev. 4:11). If you feel comfortable speaking in such terms about God, we can say that the **mechanism** of creation is the **WORD** of God. When Jesus stood in front of the grave of Lazarus, he said: “Lazarus, come forth.” Jesus, the Word of God, spoke a command and Lazarus did indeed “come forth.” Shouldn’t Christ receive a Nobel Prize in science for identifying the mechanism of the origin of all that exists in creation?

God in Jesus Christ is Lord of creation. Christ can actually tell the waves of the ocean to lie down. And He can issue a command so that manna falls from heaven year

after year to feed millions. And He will deliver the manna on a schedule; delivery doubled on Saturdays and passed over on Sundays. That pretty well takes alternate explanations for the origin of the *manna* out of the hands of smart alecks. He is also Lord of time. God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are not subject to time. For God a thousand years are as one day (Psalm 90:4). We are creatures of time. Now that may all change when we appear with Christ in glory in our spiritual bodies at the time of the Second Coming. We may be given the right to exercise a power over creation that is promised to those who have true faith (the size of a mustard seed). And on the renewed earth we will have that faith.

What John describes in Revelation 21 and 22, he saw in the Spirit. The vision that Paul experienced of Paradise, he may also have experienced out of the body and in a manner similar to what the apostle John witnessed. Paul may have seen what Jesus reveals in Revelation 21 and 22. Since God is not bound by time, He can show us, in the Spirit, what He pleases when He pleases. That is what it means to be in the Spirit. But this we also know with a certainty that brooks no doubt. Jesus promised the converted criminal on Good Friday that on that very day they would together, in Paradise, even though they would both have fallen asleep. For confirmation of Christ's falling asleep, see 1 Corinthians 15:20. And to that subject I will return in my other paper on falling asleep in Christ.

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 impart important information about the new heaven and the new earth. John informs his readers that he is carried away in the Spirit (21:10) and shown the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. And the angel who functioned as a tour guide showed John the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the street of the city; also, on *either side* of the river, John saw **the tree of life** with its twelve different kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit *each month* (22:1-2). There just is no end to what God can do.

Do you get the point being made here guys and gals? What John saw will not exist and become reality until Christ returns in glory. At that time what is now described in detail in Revelation 21 and 22 will come to pass and will become history. *And yet, John "saw" it all.* Nothing is impossible for God. And now you and I can "see" it as described by John. That's God for you. He can show you, in living colour, a preview of a film which has not yet been produced.¹⁸ Not a frame of it. Theistic evolution? Clap-trap. B.S. Pretentious,

18 Remember that God is not subject to the laws of His own creation. He is faithful to those laws but they do not apply to Him. God sees **all** of history from before the

deadly nonsense. Theistic evolution is a “sophisticated” form of character assassination aimed at Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe. And the suggestion that macro-evolution is not a salvation issue is contradicted in spades by James K.A. Smith on pages 61 and 62 of an article entitled: “What Stands on the Fall”, in a book he co-edited entitled, *Evolution and the Fall*. Every Christian should read those two pages. They give a Christian an honest view of what Bio-logos teaches rather than its attempted justification by Timothy Keller.

There may be a very great deal that escapes our ability to comprehend in respect to what John is revealing, but one thing is *certain and true*: God’s promises keep getting better and better, dear grandchildren. The tree of life (which is found only in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7), and of which God gave Adam and Eve the right to eat in the Garden of Eden at the outset of history, and from which all were subsequently forbidden to eat because of Adam’s great transgression – that tree of life, says the apostle John, he saw again in the Spirit. And in that vision the trees of life were planted down the main street of the New Jerusalem. And not only that but this time there were two trees of life, one on each side of the river of living water which issued from the throne of God and the Lamb; this time those trees offered their fruit every *month*. Twelve different fruits a year. See what I mean? When I say God in Jesus Christ has the power to do *anything*, I am only repeating Scripture. If He wills, God can grow apples and oranges and bananas on the same tree. That may create harvesting challenges, but God can surely do so. When we are in possession of faith like a mustard seed, can you imagine what we can then see and do? Well, remain faithful to the Father and His Son all the days of your life. That Day is coming.

The vision you behold, says the Spirit to all of us, is what God in Jesus Christ has in store for us when we awake to the sound of the trumpet. Paradise as a place will again become a reality on the occasion of the third world-altering turning point in history. **Christ’s return!** Then all of creation will once again become Paradise! Meanwhile, you have *Paradise* in your heart because you have the Holy Spirit in your heart. God with us and in us. He will live in fellowship and communion with you. He will *never* forsake you

foundation of the world from beginning to end. It is a small thing for God “to share” His totality view of created reality with the apostle John, or Paul. He takes John up in the Spirit, the Spirit who is also God. And through the eyes of the Spirit, John can see any part of creation God wants Him to see. Remember Jesus’ comments about seeing Nathanael under the fig tree? The day is coming when we also will have such vision. Yes, we shall then see face to face. What a future.

or leave you. You are more than a conqueror through Him who loved us. Read Romans chapter 8 again. Even death cannot separate us from the Holy Spirit and God in Christ Jesus:

³⁸ For I am sure that **neither death** nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, **nor anything** else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

What more do we desire? What more do we dare to ask for? God in Christ Jesus has given us His all. He has given us His Son on Golgotha. What more could we possibly ask for?

Jesus went to Golgotha for us. He also went to hell for us. Paul wrote these incredible words for you and me in Romans 8:38-39. *Satan has become impotent in terms of that which counts*. He can kill you, but he cannot take your life. God showed Paul a vision of the third heaven and one of Paradise, and he had John show us Paradise as described in Revelation 21 and 22. Yes, the Paradise described in the book of Revelation will become reality at the time of Christ's return. Then our lives will no longer be *hidden* in Christ with God. Then we will *appear* in the company of our Saviour and all of you, if you love Him until the day you fall asleep. Meanwhile we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. God in us! That communion **is** Paradise. Yes, said His Father, as He tore the curtain of separation and awakened hundreds of saints. That communion is what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. Today with **Me** in Paradise. Fifty three days of endless wonder. And at the conclusion of those days Paradise is regained.

18. A Glorious, Glorious Future. Forever.

And the final and the greatest Day in all of history is coming. It is not far away. Keep your lamp lit. Listen to how the apostle Paul describes that Day in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57:

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imper-

ishable, and we shall be changed.⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For our beloved Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled our obedience to the law for us on Golgotha. Satan has been muted.

Yes, dear grandchildren and great grandchildren, the victory is **given**. That is why Jesus went to Golgotha for you and for me. His life for ours. All we have to do now is *believe* (John 6:29). And out of faith we must live lives of gratitude bearing fruit as directed by the Spirit. Once again, the Spirit is your best friend. Talk to Him often.

Keep the faith and we will all see each other again soon enough in a Paradise we can now already “sense” in the Spirit and read about in Scripture. Oh, what a future! What a future with God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. What a future indeed. Face to face.

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