

What Did Jesus Accomplish on Golgotha?

by John Hultink

1. Introduction

DEAR GRAND AND GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN,
The papers on *Golgotha*, *Falling Asleep* and *The Two Criminals* are without question the three 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 three 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 what I understand to now be a true understanding of the fundamentals dealing with these three subjects. I see now that many of the books I did read were really not that important or helpful. I do hope to translate whatever insight I did garner from reading those books into what I have written in these three papers which are available online. The nature of this subject material eventually made it plain to me that I needed to rely more heavily on the revelation contained in Scripture than on books about that revelation. Scripture has proven to be the primary source of my insight.

Now, should 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 materi-

al you still believe you will take up a bodiless existence in heaven, you will merely 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 on the cross to Paradise 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 convincingly from Scripture that that is most definitely not what Jesus was talking about when He said to the penitent criminal: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." We have to remember that Jesus spoke these words in *response* to a declaration by the criminal about Jesus coming into His Kingdom. I may as well inform you at the very outset since these three papers cover a lot of ground. 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) and subsequently repeated throughout the entire Old Testament. It was in this context of what He knew would happen in 4,000 years that He told Adam and Eve that He would eventually lift the curse that the two of them had unleashed upon the entire creation as a result of their making a covenant with Satan (Gen. 3:15). This promise of deliverance by the pre-incarnate Christ was a reaffirmation of the Father's love for the world (John 3:16-17). In spite of sin, the Father was not going to abandon His creation. But we should realize that among God's people in the Old Testament there is no expectation that they will go to heaven when they die. In the Old Testament the reference to "sleep" is a metaphor for death. So where did that expectation that we go to heaven when we die come from for us?

We, today's children of God, live two thousand years after the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God. God became Man. During the past two thousand years, our understanding of Golgotha has been more and more oriented to something that happens to us when we die. After all, were Jesus and the penitent criminal not about to die? And did Jesus not state that the two of them would that very day be in Paradise? But to view Jesus' words as meaning the two of them were going to heaven is a serious misunderstanding. In truth, the sacrifice on Golgotha actually changed the meaning and the nature of our day to day lives. It changed the meaning of how we lived our life on earth. The Old Testament meaning of "sleep" as a metaphor for death was transformed in the New Testament as "falling asleep in Christ." It meant life.

But unfortunately, the *existential* reality of what Christ achieved on the cross affecting our daily lives has actually been interpreted to indicate what happens to the believer when he or she dies, that is, Golgotha is about going to heaven when we die. In truth, the reality of Golgotha is that believers come into possession of eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Here and now. Today! Our death is no more than a *transition* to be with Christ (Col. 3:3-4).

Not tomorrow but in the here and now. Golgotha is a return to Paradise, that is, perfect fellowship with the Father. A return that is true for us as well as the criminal on the cross. As punishment for making a covenant of disobedience with Satan, mankind was expelled from Paradise¹ and placed under a curse, the curse of death. Christ came to earth to lift that *curse*. And to restore the original purpose of the creation, namely, to glorify His Father. The goal of Golgotha was to return to Paradise those believers who are reborn by the Spirit of God. God **in us**. Perfect fellowship. On earth. Today! In the words of John Calvin, that reality is summarized in these words: “I Offer My Heart To You, O Lord, Promptly and Sincerely.” Life is intended as worship of the One true God. Creation exists solely to glorify God. And man’s place in that creation is to live in Paradise, that is, to walk and talk with God the Father during the entirety of one’s life. To come to a New Testament understanding of Paradise it is imperative to come to an understanding of what God the Father did at the very moment of Jesus’ death as described in Matt. 27:50-53. God the Father tore down the curtain of **separation** and awakened many who had fallen asleep. Was man not created to rule over God’s creation on God’s behalf? Was it not his mandate to realize the cultural potential that the pre-incarnate Christ had incorporated into that creation? And was Golgotha not the event that made such a re-born life possible?

In that short dialogue on the cross with the penitent criminal, Jesus emphatically stated the following: Mr. Criminal, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43b). And the reader will come to see that Paradise and heaven are **not** synonymous.

This article will hopefully help you come to see that Jesus indeed meant to say: “in Paradise.” The *mistaken* interpretation of Jesus’ words to the criminal is indeed that the two of them were supposedly going to heaven on that Good Friday. That view is a debilitating misinterpretation of that dialogue. Jesus’ ascension, His return to the Father was

1. In this context we should look at Paradise in a twofold sense: a) Paradise here is the Garden of Eden, a physical place, and b) Paradise is also the state in which God and believers live in perfect fellowship. A fellowship restored by **the event of Golgotha**.

still 43 days away. Jesus' momentous, prophetic revelation of mankind's return, and not just the criminal's, to Paradise is misinterpreted by many to mean that upon death man's soul will ascend to heaven to temporarily engage in a bodiless existence with many other believers who have died. There is no such revelation recorded in Scripture. Scripture teaches that when we die, we go to be with Jesus. That reality is not in doubt. Did Paul not say that: "It is better by far to depart and be with Christ"? But that is not the same as declaring that he went to live in heaven. That is not what he said. He said he was going to be **with Christ**. But as described in Colossians 3:3-4. A privileged few believers have indeed gone to heaven, but they went with their bodies being glorified. Believers such as Moses and Elijah. Today there are actually millions of Christians who believe that heaven will become their *permanent* home. From this point of view there is no need of a resurrection on the last day when Christ returns. Nor is there any truth then to what is described in Revelation 21 and 22.

What do we actually know about living a life in heaven in the absence of our bodies? **Nothing!** Colossians 3:3 clearly states that our lives are **hidden** with Christ in God. The revelation of Colossians 3:3 can be taken with a "grain of salt" as is done with so much of God's revelation, but then we should not insist that *our* view is biblical. Scripture never describes or alludes to a heavenly existence. Such talk is all dubious speculation. Christ promises us a future which is even more magnificent than the one 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. What Paul was not permitted to reveal, Jesus **later reveals** in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. At the Second Coming, heaven and earth will unite. Jerusalem will come down out of heaven. Heaven is coming to earth and not vice versa. All creatures will then receive a spiritual body. Yes, even our *bodies* will be spiritual. Imagine that. God will live on earth in fellowship with mankind! God the Father 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 and not in heaven. God the Father, so to speak, is once again coming to commune with man in the Garden of Eden. This time the entire earth is the Garden and this time not only to visit but to permanently establish His throne. In that "garden" a river of living water will issue from beneath the throne of God, and Jesus' throne, and we will eat the fruit provided by the two trees of life planted on each side of that river. Life will now be more glorious than it ever was in the original Garden of Eden. There will be no tree of the knowledge of good and evil this time. It will no longer be possible for mankind to sin and die. We now possess Christ's

righteousness. And we are told by Revelation 2:7 that Paradise is the only place in all of creation (including heaven) where the tree of life is to be found. The same tree that was planted in the Garden of Eden will then be planted in the New Jerusalem. On Golgotha Jesus earned the legal right enabling believers once again to be permitted to eat of that tree. **Forever.** Is not that symbolized by the eating and drinking the fruit of the Lord's Supper today?

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 read the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. No questions asked.

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 a creation that came into being by Divine fiat, believe in the biblical account of the fall into sin committed by a historical Adam as well as believe in a complete redemption leading to a new life in Jesus Christ. Students who acquainted themselves with the insights of these two scholars would subsequently rise head and shoulders above the insights possessed by your average Christian student because Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven's students confessed the foundational principles of created reality as taught in Scripture. And God greatly blesses such a confession.

I will never forget the tantalizing sense of wonder that enveloped me when I read the following in Vollenhoven's *Isagoge*: "Any student who fails to come to a biblical understanding of the relationship between heaven and earth will never come to a correct understanding of created reality." Really? There were no Christian schools in Ontario when I attended high school. My entire education, up to grade 12, took place in secular public schools in Wallaceburg. I should 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, between the temporal and the eternal, in order to come to a meaningfully (normative) 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 and go to the moon. The *structure* of created reality basically remained in place after the Fall. Although man lost some of his capacities. Peter could no longer walk on water. But the creation as such is still accessible to unbelievers as well as believers. But you will never come to know who you are or why you are here or where you are going apart from Christ. Nor will you ever come to understand the true meaning of **why** 2+2 is 4 or why it is *possible* to construct skyscrapers and go to the moon. Or to ‘come to see’ the true *structure* of creation as Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven and other Christians did. As humans, we are subject to the spatial dimensions of width, height and depth. And we know that we know that we are subject to the laws of gravity. Yet Jesus amazingly intimated that Peter should have been able to walk on water if only he had the requisite of true faith. Peter demonstrated that he could not walk on water as a result of Adam’s fall, the consequences of which he inherited. The “creational” possibility of walking on water had been at his disposal but he, like us, could no longer exercise that potential because he, as we, lacked the requisite **faith**. In that respect the knowledge of the laws of the elements of creation in some sense were no longer accessible to mankind because of sin. And much knowledge, as a gift from God, came late in time. For instance, my mother during the early years still did her wash with a washboard.

Yes, we live on earth in the context of a three-dimensional reality. That much we can grasp. But we *cannot* come to grips with the *substance* (essence) of what exists and *how* it exists. Something the Greeks tried to do. They repeatedly tried to grasp the *essence* of reality. In vain. 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. Their origin is not accessible to us because all things have their origin **in the Word of God**: Let there be! Yes, the Word of God is the *origin* of all that exists, Charles Darwin. We can only study and come to understand the various ways in which all things in creation *function* but now *how* they came to be. We cannot come to an understanding of things “in and of themselves” or of their essence as believed by the Greeks. But *we have come to know* through Divine revelation that there are elements like hydrogen and oxygen (see Isaiah 28:23-29). Hydrogen and oxygen exist separately. Yet when 2 parts of hydrogen and

one part of oxygen combine, water is formed. Why do oxygen and hydrogen, two gases that exist independently, combine to form a liquid like water? Bertrand Russell does not know. Because Christ *wills* it that way. Christ's *will* is the law (Rev. 4:11). Hydrogen and oxygen respond to Christ's will, that is, Christ's will as the *law* that holds for creation. All of creation functions according to the law (will) of God. All things hang together ***in Him***. ***In Christ***. Read Paul's letter to the Colossians.

There is a spiritual reality that exists alongside of an earthly, physical reality. The spiritual reality consists of the Triune God and angels. Some of those angels rebelled under the leadership of Satan. So now we find ourselves dealing with demons and fallen angels and spiritual powers in the air around us. And we find ourselves under the influence of the greatest demon of all, namely, Satan.

We need to come to learn to understand reality in terms of the immanent² and the transcendent.³ What does Scripture mean when it states that all things are created in Christ *from before the foundation of the world*? Christ actually knew me thousands of years before I was ever born. 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 but are not dead. That our lives are now **hidden with Christ in God**? And did Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, actually see heaven open and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God? He certainly did. Heaven and earth are inseparably related to each other. I don't believe many teachers reference these subjects while they are teaching Christian students the so-called false merits of theistic evolution. Yet these are issues that need to be taken into consideration when we study God's creation and revelation **and** when we attempt to come to an understanding of what happened on Golgotha. The creation is not a self-subsisting reality. Why do you think Golgotha was the turning point in history? Or don't you? How did heaven and earth relate to each other in this instance? And why did the dialogue on the cross between Jesus and the criminal reveal to the believer the very *heart* of what Jesus accomplished on Golgotha? What actually transpired on Golgotha destroyed the power of death and gave believers the gift of eternal life. Yes, now! Today! Paradise has returned as perfect communion between God the Father and man. At this very moment, Christians experience that renewed communion that is

2. Immanent refers to a physical, earthly reality.
3. Transcendent refers to a spiritual, heavenly reality.

re-birth. Not only tomorrow, but already today. “**Today** you will be with me in Paradise.” What is the Christian to understand by Paradise in this context if not a reunion between God the Father and believers?

1.2 Overview

The compelling questions for you and for me is the following:

What exactly did Jesus accomplish on Golgotha? Did He not triumph over Satan and death and sin? Did He not conquer death on our behalf? And for those of us who believe in Him, did He not regain Paradise? The Paradise or fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall? Did Jesus not enable the believer to once again have perfect fellowship with the Father ***in Him***? Was Jesus’ reference to Paradise in His dialogue with the penitent criminal not “word specific” and intentional and was it not “place specific”? The place being *this* world? Do believers not *now* experience Paradise ***in Him***? Even in Dachau! Or was Paradise merely a synonym for heaven as conventionally believed? Did Jesus intend to be duplicitous by referring to “Paradise” when He actually meant to refer to “heaven,” as many theologians and Study Bibles suggest? Did Jesus renew the possibility of sinless communion and fellowship for us with God the Father who created us? What are we to make of Matthew 27:50-53? Why did the Father of Jesus do what He did at the **very moment** of Jesus’ death? If the Father’s **actions** at the moment do not teach us what Golgotha was all about, what will? Upon Christ’s ascension to heaven forty days after His resurrection, was Satan not thrown out of heaven? Why? Was it not because the Father no longer viewed believers as sinners because they had now been gifted with total righteous **in Christ**? And ten days later, after Satan’s **permanent expulsion** from heaven, did not the Holy Spirit descend upon the earth in **power** (Acts 2)? Because Satan had been thrown out of heaven and was no longer there to accuse the believer? God the Holy Spirit, believe it or not, came to live **in** the believer. Yes, became One with us. And was Golgotha not necessary to make that possible? And from then on, did God the Holy Spirit not dwell in the hearts of all believers? Is He not the Comforter and the Teacher Jesus promised His disciples and us? See John 14:16-17. Was that not one of the great achievements Jesus realized on the cross? And never mind “going to heaven.” God living **in** us: is that not the meaning of renewed fellowship with God? Has the “curtain of separation” not been torn down for us also? How are we to understand all of these events? How do they relate to that dialogue between Jesus and the converted criminal?

The Man Jesus who, after His death, regained His unlimited power over creation on behalf of His Father is like no other Person on earth. As the second Adam, He became like us in all respects a human except for sin. True Man. While also true God. Two natures yet **one** Person. Incredible! The greatest of many mysteries. The first chapter of the gospel of John provides a powerful description of Jesus as the **Word** as follows:

“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).

Take away the sin of the whole world? John the Baptist was declaring that Jesus would become the *sacrifice* great enough to atone for the sin of the *entire world*. The first Adam in a moment's time forfeited man's right to live in fellowship with God, that is, Paradise. Jesus Christ, the second Adam, regained the right for believers to once again live in fellowship with the Father, that is, once again live in Paradise. Yes, once again live in perfect fellowship with the Father! Jesus accomplished this reality in a single day's time. That majestic day's work ended at around 3 p.m. on Good Friday. Golgotha, in truth, became the great turning point in history: renewed fellowship with the Father (see. Matt. 27:50-53).

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. For what cause would you be willing to sacrifice your son? Our relationship to God the Father and the meaning of our existence as it unfolds throughout the course of our lives was sealed on Golgotha by Jesus. Whether or not you and I meet again on the renewed earth and live forever 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 believers and the cosmos free from the destructive curse unleashed in the Garden of Eden by the first Adam and from the deadly power Satan gained as a result of that betrayal, died for the sin of the world. Yes, He sacrificed His life for ours. Willingly. Freely. Throughout the course of your lives you must make certain you regularly hear the echo of the cry that emanated from the cross on a hill 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 one little word did fell him. That single word brought Satan to destruction. That little “word” would 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 that cross, that instrument of death, that afternoon on Golgotha at around 3pm on Good Friday, with His last breath in Greek, is: **TETELESTAI**. Translated into English that single 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 and subsequently throughout the entire Old Testament was **fulfilled** on Golgotha. The legal right to declare that that promise had been **fulfilled** was purchased by Christ at an extremely high price, the price of His own life. The life of the only begotten Son of God.

After Golgotha it has once again become possible to live with Christ in Paradise, the new Garden of Eden as described in the final chapters of the book of Revelation, with its account of the two trees of life.⁴ That right was purchased with His blood. As you will come to see, life in Paradise has already begun. We have already been given the greatest gift of all in spite of our remaining sinful flesh: *The Comforter! The Teacher!* This Comforter will live in us and will accompany us *everywhere*. Even into death when the great transition takes place and our lives become hidden in Christ. (See Colossians 3:3-4). Amazing.

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 come to understand the meaning of Paradise as revealed in Scripture.

Paradise, as a state of perfect communion between God and man, in the first place was lost because of Adam’s disobedience. Adam made a covenant with Satan and as a

4. There is a “now” and a “not yet” dimension to this paradisaical 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 only just began on Golgotha. The best is yet to come in a creation free from sin. A creation where we meet God the Father face to face and see God as He really is.

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, legal 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, that is, He ushered in sinless communion between God the Father and believers. All of this happened on Good Friday, on the cross. To give you the depth and breadth of this reality as it works itself out through history is the task of the pulpit. As Jesus said on the road to Emmaus to the two strangers: the Scriptures (O.T.) are all about Me. There would be no Old Testament history if that history could not look forward to Golgotha.

2.2 God working through all of History towards Golgotha

Between the time the pre-incarnate Christ made that promise (Gen. 3:15), God enabled 4,000 years of history to unfold. (Dear reader, please ignore that nonsense involving millions of years as propagated by Biologos). God had manuscripts written (that collectively became known as the Old Testament) which recorded the redemptive-historical dimensions of that 4,000 year time period. It is not my intention to summarize that history. For your children (and yourselves), read Paideia's *Story Bible for Older Children* by Anne de Vries at meal 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 fellowship of perfect communion between God the Father and believers was regained on Golgotha because of Jesus Christ's perfect obedience. When you grandchildren get older, treasure the Bible itself as your life-line to the Holy Spirit. Your best friend *on earth* bar none!

2.3 All of History 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 because communion between My Father and believers will have been re-established in my Person. In Christ. The curtain of separation will come down. Those who have fallen asleep will testify to new life. Yes, the *conditions* for sinless, righteous fellowship with My Father by the believing descendants of Adam will once again have been fulfilled. While many erroneously assume that the Paradise referred to by Jesus on the cross means “heaven”, I have come to see it as referring to the restored relationship with God, which begins immediately at the moment of a believer’s re-birth. We will see that God the Father confirms this reality when we deal with what the Father did as recorded in 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 as discussed *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 thousands of Israelites on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the **Passover** of the angel of death in Egypt years before. There will be no Passover by the angel of death for Jesus on this Good Friday.

2.4 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 *had* Jesus 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 re-establish communion between His Father and those who believed in Him.

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? Was it not to make us aware that 2,000 years later that what follows was not the sovereign initiative of the criminals? One of these two criminals on the cross actually becomes a convert, but before that happens the Holy Spirit impresses upon the reader that this convert 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 remarkable conversion of this one thief. Many of those sermons dealt with Luke 23:42-43 as their text:

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

Those sermons preached over the years almost invariably ended by informing the congregation that Jesus and the penitent criminal together went to Heaven that very day.⁵ And so, Paradise and heaven have become synonymous among the theologians. 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. But it clearly teaches that the **kingdom** (of God) and Paradise are synonymous. Also the revelation that both criminals taunted Jesus earlier in the morning is considered of little importance when it comes to understanding Luke 23:42-43. Nevertheless, the importance of this revelation is not easily exaggerated. An event of world-altering import is taking place on Golgotha. And that event includes a criminal who had been converted to play his role.

5. This in spite of the revelations where Jesus says to Mary in John 20:17, “Do not cling to me for I have not yet returned to my Father.” And Acts 1:3 which accounts for Jesus’ 40 days on earth after His resurrection. Also, Jesus ascended into heaven forty days *after* His resurrection. And not on Good Friday.

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 importance of v. 39 which reads. “One [Note, only one this time] 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 once again join in as he has done before. But by now being converted, he doesn’t.

This *greater context* is indispensable to a biblical understanding of the powerful meaning of the short dialogue between the criminal who is now 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? Does anyone know?

A fair deal of speculation among those who do address this question has been recorded in theological manuscripts as well as Study Bibles. Over the centuries these attempts to try to explain what *motivated* that one bandit to speak out so dramatically in defense of Jesus as well as 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 in the day 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 of his heart commitment brought about?* Much theological ink has again flowed from many pens in attempts to answer this question. Spurgeon addressed the question in no less than three separate sermons on Luke 23:42-43. And still missed the point.

4. The Father’s Role in Salvation

As I reflected on this, I wondered if God the Father, in His love for the Son, ordained this moment to ensure that one voice at least would rise in Jesus’ defense. The Father must not have been particularly pleased that **no one** had spoken out to declare *why* Jesus was on that cross. No one. At least not until the Holy Spirit took hold of one of the two criminals.

4.1 Divine Initiative recorded in John 6

According to the wisdom of Scripture and a mosaic approach to understanding it, 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 to His listeners 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." (No mention of going to live in heaven.) Yes, it is no one other than God the Father who *draws* a sinner to become a believer. That is the Father's prerogative. A *second* scriptural witness confirms this. It attests to this same reality as emphasized 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 who are to be redeemed by Jesus. This particular 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 exercised His prerogative to *enable* this man to become a believer. It had nothing to do with his history or his background. It was entirely God the Father's initiative. Jesus understands very well what is happening before His very eyes to this one criminal. And it fills His heart with joy.

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 penitent criminal and from John 6:44 and 6:65 that he was *enabled* to become a believer in Jesus *only* because God the Father so enabled him. It was the Father Himself who had come to the cross. 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 understands perfectly what is happening. Was He not the One who had spoken the words in John 6? Twice! 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, as experienced by Jesus, the Holy Spirit was also in attendance at the cross. 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 and the Holy Spirit would become the criminal's Teacher.

5. The Work of the Holy Spirit

Yes, the Holy Spirit came to the cross on behalf of the Father to *teach* that penitent criminal what to confess. It is important to remember that **all** knowledge comes from God (Isaiah 28:23-29). The penitent 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 initiative. Far from it. This was the *one* instance that the seven 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 who witnessed this man's transformation while He hung on the cross.

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 speak up. Even by the high priest and the scribes. The Jewish religious leaders. 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 enabling them to once again commune with the Father. A transformation that will therefore signal a return to Paradise lost in the Garden of Eden.

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 on Good Friday the truth made known to you and me two thousand years later moved by the guidance of the Holy Spirit on that day. The criminal's conversion stands as a powerful testimony of God's sovereign grace at work – even in the final hours of this man's life.

5.1 The Father is Sovereign

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 penitent criminal most likely took place as the morning progressed closer towards noon,⁶ 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-penitent 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 penitent criminal has been taught by the Holy Spirit to declare the **true nature** of Jesus’ presence on the cross. Satan must have been surprised. And furious! God the Father will no longer tolerate the truth being suppressed.

5.2 A Divinely Orchestrated Dialogue

Yes, by this time God the Father has deputized the penitent criminal to proclaim a response *on His behalf* to the deceptive words of the unbelieving criminal who again speaks out on behalf of Satan. This time, however, the *penitent* criminal responds powerfully. And there can be no mistaking that this penitent criminal has been taught by the Holy Spirit to declare what the Father wants declared. The words of wisdom he speaks are profound. Think back a moment *mosaically* 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 penitent 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

6. 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.

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 penitent criminal speaking? By the authority of God the Father, of course. 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 penitent criminal in fact *vilified* Jesus. He did not believe in Jesus’ innocence then. Now he does. By the grace of God the Father.

6. The Kingdom of God and Paradise Restored

The stage has been set for God the Father to announce the world-altering sacrifice His beloved Son is in the process of making. 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 re-born resulting in a new life. Eternal life. Yes, even though this penitent criminal will soon die, he will not be dead. His life will be hidden *with Christ in God* (Read Colossians 3:3-4). His death on Golgotha will be a mere transition from his present life to “falling asleep in Christ.” That is, a conscious fellowship. He will be at rest. We will examine the biblical meaning of this teaching in greater detail in the other paper about “Falling Asleep in Christ.” 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 I hope you will come to 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. How can it be?

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 **in Him**. His presence on this cross is indeed of world-altering significance. Believers are about to return to the Garden of Eden where the first Adam lived in perfect fellowship with God the Father.

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 that will take place on Golgotha. And this unequalled historic event is to be *initiated*, humanly speaking, by a penitent criminal as he now turns his attention to Jesus from reprimanding his fellow criminal. 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 to come and that will change the very course of history and the character of *all* life that will follow on earth.

The criminal is not asking to go to heaven with Jesus when the two of them die this Good Friday. Scripture testifies against this possibility. This penitent criminal has no conception of heaven. And the Holy Spirit, of course, 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 on the basis of this text 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 existence. An issue that was not the case for most in the Old Testament. The penitent criminal knows he is going to die. And he knows that Jesus is going to die. Yet in spite of this certain knowledge, the penitent criminal, in faith, asks Jesus to remember him. **When Jesus enters into His Kingdom.** And in spite of this knowledge about Jesus also dying, he is nevertheless certain that Jesus is going to come into His Kingdom. These words spoken by the penitent 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? In the Old Testament, do people (also believers) not "die the dust of death"? (Dan. 12:2). How can the criminal possibly expect to be remembered after he has died as well as having prophetically declared that Jesus is coming into His Kingdom? How can he do this when Jesus will also soon have died? Why? Because the important event will take place **before** either of them dies. This wisdom is of God the Father. God the Father deals with reality not only in immanent terms but in transcendent terms as well. And as remarkable as it may sound, Jesus coming into His kingdom is an event that according to Jesus takes place before either Jesus or the criminal die. Today! Yes, **today** your prophecy will be fulfilled, Mr. Criminal. Today you will enter Paradise.

The criminal *asks to be specifically remembered when Jesus comes into His kingdom* even although he has no idea when that event will take place. 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! Now, remember, dear reader, **Who** is the criminal's teacher? Because this Teacher does know what He is talking about. The Holy Spirit knows when Jesus will come into His Kingdom. So now the important consideration is this: *Will* Jesus actually answer the criminal's question about Jesus coming into His 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 from Jesus?

Again, Jesus understands perfectly well what is happening between the two of them on the cross. His Father has gifted the righteousness Jesus is even now purchasing with His blood on the cross. That righteousness is being gifted to one of the two criminals now hanging beside Him. His Father has *enabled* this now-penitent criminal to become His spokesperson and to declare (in the absence of any other declaration) **the reason why Jesus is on the cross**. And that reason is not so that believers can take up a new residence in heaven. No, the reason Jesus is on the cross is spelled out in capital letters by this penitent criminal when he turns from addressing his fellow criminal to now addressing Jesus. The *dialogue* that will here take place between this criminal and Jesus is a dialogue that will declare *the long promised transformation* of that 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 new nature of righteousness **in Christ Jesus**. And possession of that righteousness will open the doors of *the Kingdom of God* to believing peoples of all tribes and all nations and all languages. The curse of Babel, the confusion of languages, is being broken (see especially Acts 2). The dialogue between Jesus and the penitent criminal is *riveted* on **God's Kingdom, God's Kingdom, God's Kingdom**. Not heaven. Yes, God's Kingdom is being restored on Golgotha! And Satan's kingdom as well as death is being destroyed. From Golgotha on Good Friday God will again deal with peoples of all the earth. Not just Israel. Salvation has indeed come by means of the Jews. But now for the whole world! Satan entered the first Adam's heart in the Garden of Eden and established his counter kingdom. That kingdom will now be destroyed on Golgotha. We know with certainty that this happened because after Golgotha, the believer is righteous **in Christ**.

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

Jesus is the only One in all of Scripture who addresses the biblical teachings about Paradise. At this point someone may possibly take issue with what I have just said. They may wish to argue that the apostle Paul also addresses the reality of Paradise in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. That is simply not the case. There is the mention of the existence of Paradise, but 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 both the third heaven as well as up into Paradise. Yes, Paradise. About Paradise, Paul heard things he could not repeat, things which man may not utter. So Paul shares, in words only, "the surpassing greatness of the revelations."

He offers the reader no details. None! I repeat, 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 12:1-4, 7. The only point I wish to make here is that 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 has been misinterpreted when the claim is made by theologians that the third heaven and Paradise are synonymous, that they are one and the same reality. We will come back to that. Meanwhile, about Paradise, Paul tells us *nothing*. Not a word about what he saw.

The word Paradise is never employed by the Old Testament. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the Septuagint, it was the Septuagint that 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 biblical meaning of Paradise is of such paramount importance that a bit of repetition will serve the reader well.

Paradise! Question: 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 believer 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 12:1-4 but only to inform the reader that he is under strict orders not to discuss what he saw. 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 12:1-4, 7 is discussed in the next section. Concerning the appearance of the word “Paradise” in the New Testament, you will be surprised.

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* which 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 penitent criminal. Jesus expects believers to recognize the word 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 at 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, and also Paradise. You are right. The two are not the same. Heaven and Paradise are two entirely separate entities. In Scripture, Paradise is always *discussed* within the context of earth (Paul did not have a *discussion* about Paradise).

7.1 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, 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 12:1-4, 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 12:1-4, 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 12:1-4, 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: namely, 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 in the company of millions of fellow believers?** Wait for Christ’s return while actively living with Him in heaven? Has He not already “returned” for you? 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 as well as Paradise. This happened not that many years before he will die a martyr's death. In light of the intolerable suffering Paul would undergo 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 both the third heaven and the reality of Paradise. He *witnessed* Jesus Christ in all His glory and power in the third heaven. (See Rev. 4 and 5). And he received a preview of Rev. 21 and 22. 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 12:1-4, 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 again *trivializes* what Christ accomplished 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? Is Jesus' response about Paradise to the criminal not in response to the criminal's declaration that Jesus is going to come into His Kingdom? Are not the criminal's reference to "Kingdom" and Jesus' reference to "Paradise" synonymous?

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, as well as 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, what warrant 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 he cites as warrants for his interpretation. These texts do not warrant the conclusion that heaven and Paradise are synonymous. There is no mention of heaven. The Bible is not acquainted with the phrase or the idea of a “heavenly Paradise.” Paradise is of the earth! See Revelation 21 and 22. Why does the author not cite the texts where such a “heavenly paradise” is found in Scripture? Is it not the *New Jerusalem* that will actually come down out of heaven to earth and become the throne room of the new Paradise? Again, 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 on earth. 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. What could possibly be more paradisaic? And it is this incomparable Paradisaic gift from God which nevertheless makes our lives in this sinful world still such a joy. Even as one is stoned to death. And that is what Paul, or then called 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 at the outset graciously said: Let Me show you the third heaven where I dwell and Paradise which already exists in the heart of the believer as described in Revelation 21 and 22. These are the gracious prizes you will receive for all your witnessing that will result in 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 as conventional? Is it not true that *every* Study Bible of multiple versions teaches that Paradise = heaven. So why do you question this? And they are right. Heaven and Paradise have become synonymous.

What follows now is a *sample* of the widespread literature that teaches that we go to heaven upon death as disembodied souls to carry on a new existence with fellow

Christians:

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** [emphasis added] of bliss and rest between death and resurrection (cf. Lk 16:22; 2 Co 12:2).”

QUESTION: Why then does the New Testament repeatedly use the phrase: “falling asleep in Christ” when a believer dies? And how do we interpret Colossians 3:3 where it is revealed that our lives are **hidden** with Christ in God? Why *hidden*?

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** [emphasis added] for heaven.”

NOTE: How then is the reader to understand Rev. 2:7 where it states that Paradise is the place where the believer if he conquers will be given the right to eat from the tree of life?

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.”

NOTE: Are they then eating the fruit from the tree of life as described in Rev. 2:7? Or should we believe what is revealed in Rev. 21 and 22?

The authoritative Dutch **Staten Bijbel** already in 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.

NOTE: Then why did the criminal on the cross not ask Jesus to remember him when they went to into heaven rather than when Jesus came into His *Kingdom*?

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.”

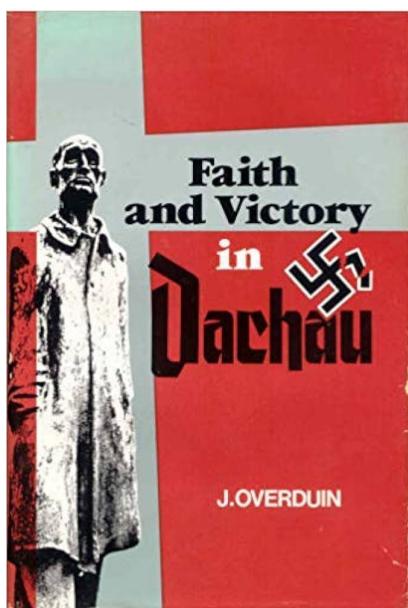
NOTE: What is the biblical warrant for speculatively asserting this?

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

NOTE: Is the eternal home of the righteous not described in detail in Revelation 21 and 22?

CONCLUSION: The above are only a few of the many instances where Paradise is equated with heaven. That view has become conventional wisdom.

You grandchildren will come to see how much richer the use of the word Paradise is in the New Testament. Ask Martin Luther how a prejudice is transformed into a principle. The *view* of Paradise I am presenting to you grandchildren in this paper is not mine. To the



extent that I have understood Scripture, it is the view of 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 what God the Father said in a moment. But remember, after Jesus has cried *tetelestai*, and given up His life, it is His Father who responds by tearing down the curtain of separation in the Holy of Holies and it is the Father who awakens many “dead” saints from their sleep. Why? Why does this happen at the *very moment* Jesus dies? Because Jesus shouted *tetelestai*. Meaning: **It is fulfilled.** Paradise has now returned in the hearts of believers. And will soon return in all its splendor. These

acts on the part of the Father are clear signs of the return of Paradise in the **here** and **now**. Because the curtain of separation between the Father and His children is abolished **in the here and now**. Death has been conquered. What the Father does here is express in concrete **actions** what Jesus has achieved on Golgotha. Victory over separation and victory over death. The Father's **actions** are mesmerizing, hypnotizing.

Once you have read and considered 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. Reality will eventually manifest itself. I believe, however, that you do so to your own detriment. Because you have thereby failed to assimilate the incredible import of the meaning of tearing down that curtain and the meaning of bringing believers back to life **at the very moment of Jesus' death**. Does this not testify to what Jesus' death achieved? But I doubt that you will agree with the conventional view. God the Father makes a convincing case on behalf of His Son by exercising a sign of the return of Paradise that shouts the "good news" of renewed life and communion with the Father, at the *very moment* that Jesus dies. It is critical to realize that the Father's response to what happened on the cross on Golgotha actually took place at **3:01 p.m.** At the moment, yes, at that very moment His Son had shouted: *Tetelestai. It is fulfilled.* And died! The curse of Genesis 3:15 is lifted. According to the Father, Christ's death has made all things new. I hope to further make what I *believe* to be the Father's assessment of what Jesus achieved more evident 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.* And why, by the way, is Matthew 27:50-53 not the text every minister of the gospel proclaims more frequently with power on Easter morning? Death to the curtain of separation. Death to the power of death. God the Father has so declared it is so. **At the moment of Jesus' death.** What clearer signs could a believer ask for than these two that attests to the **accomplishment** of Christ's death?

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

"Jesus Remember Me..."

A request by the penitent 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 that very day as taught on the basis of the conventional view. 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 are 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*. Listen:

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

THE DIALOGUE ON THE CROSS IS ALL ABOUT THE KINGDOM!

The criminal is not *inquiring* into the *coming* of the kingdom of God, rather, he is *declaring*, prophetically, 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 renewed life in the Kingdom of God. Just think: Jesus promised his disciples that when He left, the Helper would come to take His place (John 14:15-17). The Holy Spirit would 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!* Well, here it is. Jesus on Golgotha is the answer to the Lord's Prayer. Directed by the Holy Spirit who does not make mistakes and whose words are always clear and faithful and true, the criminal asks Jesus to remember him **when** Jesus comes into His Kingdom. And it is in response to this declaration about Jesus **coming into His Kingdom** that Jesus responds: Verily I say to you, Mr. Criminal: **Today! Today! Today!** You will be with me in Paradise. **Before** you die. And so will millions of others in the years to come. Before they die.

Yes, repeat those precious words:

"Today you will be with Me in Paradise," Mr. Criminal, while you are still alive.

I, the incarnate Jesus ransomed my life for the return of Paradise. **Today!**

You will live to experience the return of my Kingdom, Mr. Criminal, because it will happen at around 3 p.m. when I shout: **TETELESTAI!** At that *moment* My Father will tear the curtain of separation in the temple.

The Kingdom of God about which the criminal prophesied is made here by many

theologians synonymous with heaven. However, wherever the Kingdom of God manifests itself, there also Paradise is already present in its initial manifestation in the hearts of all believers.

In this dialogue, Paradise as originally experienced sinlessly in the Garden of Eden by the first Adam is now again the perfect manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is purchasing that with His presence on the cross. Good Friday is responsible for restoring that Paradisal reality. Not yet in the fully manifested way revealed in Revelation 21 and 22 but in the way experienced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The return of Paradise has not only become a possibility but after Golgotha has become a reality as well. Every Christian on earth is living in the Kingdom of God as it moves towards its full and final manifestation upon Christ's return.

8.1 Golgotha: The Event that Re-Defines History

As long as we view the penitent criminal as an individual speaking on his own initiative, and in terms of his own background, his own education, and his own relationship to Jesus then what is transpiring between the two, and what is being said is not all that revealing or significant. And that is probably why Scripture provides the reader with *no information whatsoever* about who the criminal is. That information is not relevant. He serves as a spokesperson and Jesus as King. Nothing must detract from the Kingdom—Paradise theme so fundamental to that dialogue. 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* realizes that the relationship of the criminal to Jesus is a relationship inspired 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, the dialogue now takes on a joyful and liberating 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 inspired by 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 about who He was. 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 other 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 penitent criminal the insight to ask to be remembered as well as to declare that as a result of Jesus' presence on the cross, He is in the process of establishing 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.* As a result of My sacrifice, today Paradise has returned. Perfect communion between God and man will once again become possible. There will no longer be a curtain of separation.

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

Today, Mr. Criminal. **TODAY**, I am coming into my Kingdom because my Kingdom and Paradise are synonymous. The insight about my Kingdom was not given to you, Mr. Criminal, by flesh and blood, but by My Father who came to the cross to enable you.

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 realize *right here and now* what my death as payment for sin is about to accomplish as it relates to the return of My Kingdom:

You are not able to realize it, Mr. Criminal, but at this very moment I am in the process of coming into My Kingdom. Yes, I am coming into my Kingdom on this cross this very day as we speak. My coming into My Kingdom will occur at 3 p.m. **TODAY!** Paradise will then once again exist. Because I will have undone what the first Adam so recklessly did in the Garden of Eden. So much so in fact that when I ascend into heaven forty days after My resurrection, My Father will command Michael to throw Satan out of heaven. Satan will no longer be entitled to accuse the elect because of Golgotha which has made the elect righteous. As righteous as I am. I am purchasing the return of its presence by the power of My blood. That blood will wipe away what transpired in the Garden of Eden. Not tomorrow. Not upon my return. **TODAY!** Today Paradise will return. Not yet in its full manifestation as described in Revelation 21 and 22 but most assuredly in the way that believers can once again experience it.

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 today to confirm this reality. God **in** us! I will accomplish **everything** on this cross on this day that My Father has asked of Me. All the conditions necessary for believers to be able to return to Paradise, lost in the Garden of Eden, will be restored today by 3 p.m. by my blood. 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.⁷ 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. And I am coming soon.⁸ At that time My Kingdom will become visible to all in all its glory.

Yes, the consequences of the sin of the first Adam will be undone *today*. The darkness will disappear. The Light will return. 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 this time 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 accomplished on Golgotha and until all the elect have entered my fold, My Kingdom, as *Paradise regained will live 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

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7. You would benefit immensely by reading the book *Faith & Victory in Dachau* by J. Overduin, published by Paideia Press in 1978.
 8. 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 are *hidden* in Christ with God (Col. 3:3-4). We will have temporarily lost the use of our bodies. What Volleghoven called “the cloak in which we function.” But meanwhile our lives will exist **in Him**. And so await Christ’s second appearance when believers will **appear** with Him because at that time they will have received their glorified bodies. Yes, that is the reality that Christ achieved on Golgotha.

and granted all believers a spiritual body and immortality. Believers will, from that day onward, experience a multi-dimensional reality. This transformation will begin to happen after history takes its course under My supervision (See Rev. 4 and 5) and hundreds of millions who have come to confess My name during their lifetimes will live and reign 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). I, Jesus, *may* reveal what I have purchased as the new Paradise on Golgotha. (Rev. 21 and 22; See Rev. 4 and 5 also).

8.2 Jesus Forsaken by the Father

The Father of Jesus and the Holy Spirit have accomplished their work on Golgotha through means of the dialogue between Jesus and the criminal. The nature of what Jesus achieved on the cross is now apparent to all and is 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: sinless communion between God the Father and the believer.

We now turn our attention to Matthew who reports the final three hours of Jesus on the cross (in total 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 now imparts the important information to the reader that during Jesus' final three hours on the cross, the Father has forsaken Jesus. There is darkness and there is utter silence. 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. Judas is now damned. He was forsaken by God and dead within 24 hours. If you and I were to be totally 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” of the Father 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 took upon Himself the responsibility for every sin ever committed and those yet to be committed. And the Father’s punishment for that mountain of sin ended in forsakenness and His death. Isaiah 52:13-14 makes the startling revelation that Jesus suffered so intensely during the darkness that He was no longer recognizable as a human being. We read:

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 now 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 because He has agreed to assume our sin.

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 spoke this single word (in Greek) as His definitive accomplishment on Golgotha! He had fulfilled everything recorded about Himself in the Scriptures. He then bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Gave it. His spirit, his life, was *not* taken. Paul later informs the reader in 1 Corinthians 15, the glorious 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 the second Adam committed His spirit into the hands of His Father, He fell asleep! To deny the truth of this historical reality is to deny the *Sola Scriptura* pre-eminence of Scripture. That is

why the conventional wisdom of so many theologians that “sleep” in the New Testament is synonymous with death is so terribly mistaken. It, in effect, serves to destroy Jesus’ accomplishment on Golgotha. This revelation is true! **Believe it!**

Jesus’ suffering on the cross has come to an end. His work on the cross is fulfilled. 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 and death have now come to inherit a new life, they are reborn as a result of the obedience and the sacrifice of the second Adam, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All the conditions for the return of Paradise were met on Golgotha. History will now unfold accordingly. The Kingdom of God has returned. Read Rev. 12:10-12. Before the penitent criminal also dies, he will have entered Paradise. As Paul later explains in Colossians 3:1-4. First the believer will “die” to sin (v. 3). But then Paul’s 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 at one and the same time. To us this is indeed a mystery. But this we know: When the criminal died having witnessed the return of Paradise and Jesus’ cry: **TETELESTAI**, his life became hidden with Christ in God. When Christ appears at the end of time, the criminal will also once again appear in his glorified body.

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

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

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

The Death of Jesus

19:28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to
 Μετά¹ τούτο² ὁ⁴ Ἰησοῦς⁵ εἰδὼς³ ὅτι⁶ πάντα⁸ ἤδη⁷ τετέλεσται⁹ λέγει¹⁴ ἵνα¹⁰
 Meta touto ho Iēsous eidōs hoti panta ēdē tetelestai legei hina

fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there,
 τελειωθῆ¹¹ ἡ¹² γραφή¹³ διψῶ¹⁵ σκευῶς¹ 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
 ἔλαβεν³ τὸ⁴ ὄξος⁵ εἶπεν⁸ τετέλεσται⁹ καὶ¹⁰ κλινὰς¹¹ τῆν¹² κεφαλὴν¹³
 elaben to oxos eipen tetelestai kai klinas tēn kephalēn

received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and
 ἔλαβεν³ τὸ⁴ ὄξος⁵ εἶπεν⁸ τετέλεσται⁹ καὶ¹⁰ κλινὰς¹¹ τῆν¹² κεφαλὴν¹³
 elaben to oxos eipen tetelestai kai klinas tēn kephalēn

gave up his spirit.
 παρέδωκεν¹⁴ τὸ¹⁵ πνεῦμα¹⁶
 paredōken to pneuma

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 Dr. Kloosterman’s analysis helpful.

I am in my eighty-fourth year and have listened to many sermons. I have also read entire books of sermons. And sermons on the text: “Today with Me in Paradise” are 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”? True! But would it not be more redemptive-historical in emphasis to stress that Christ’s promise in Genesis 3:15 and its exposition in the entire Old Testament has been **fulfilled** on the cross?

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 and translated as: “It is finished.” 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 branch⁹ 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? After all, it is all over is it not? 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 as referred to by Jesus on the cross is “the place of bliss and rest between death and resurrection.” That is: heaven.

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 many references in the Old Testament. Does not the word “fulfilled” more powerfully capture 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.

And what was accomplished on the cross is far from over in its telling. There was much more to come.

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

9. The angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites who had put blood on their door posts with a hyssop branch.

dear reader. The Scriptures report that several events of immense, world-altering consequence took place at the **very moment** of Jesus' death. These important events were occasioned by Jesus' Father.

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). The second Adam. Fallen asleep in Christ. Truly a mystery. He 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 earth He made for man. The Son, the Son alone, was capable of paying the required ransom.

In a dialogue with a penitent 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? Even though both died on this day?

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 forever 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.¹⁰ So according to these interpretations of Scripture, what Jesus was in fact promising the penitent criminal is that he would continue his earthly existence in heaven.¹¹ And such indeed is the conventional

10. 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.

11. 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.'"

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 they were actually 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, they **are** synonymous. The criminal prophesies that Jesus *will indeed 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 in the Garden of Eden. That is the meaning of Golgotha.

9.1 Theological Confusion about heaven and Paradise

The identity of Paradise as heaven is so widespread—so ingrained in the world of theology—that I challenge you to find an evangelical source that explicitly denies their synonymy. 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 identity is embedded in the popular literature.

The widespread identification of Paradise and heaven as synonymous has led to a fundamental misunderstanding of Christ's work on the cross. The general consensus among theologians and pastors, as well as much Christian literature on the subject asserts that Paradise is merely another name for heaven, thereby obscuring the *radical* nature of Christ's victory at Golgotha. This identity has serious theological ramifications, since it distorts the biblical narrative and diminishes the full scope of redemption accomplished through Christ's sacrifice. In the following sections, I will examine the extent of this misinterpretation as expressed in Study Bibles, commentaries, sermons, and books. Then I will suggest a biblical corrective to replace 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. Some believe this transition to be permanent.

The *NIV Study Bible* has the following to say about Luke 23:43:

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).

The teaching that Paradise also refers to a place of bliss and rest between death and resurrection is biblical. But that bliss and rest are **IN CHRIST** and not in an existence in heaven (Col. 3:3-4).

The NIV commentary does simply assume 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. Jesus said: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. If Paradise is indeed meant to refer to heaven then how is the reader to understand Rev. 2:7? By misreading Luke 23:43 this way, millions of Christians have been led to believe that an active life in heaven is their immediate destination upon death, rather than recognizing that what the first Adam turned "upside down" the second Adam once again "turned right side up." Both events took place on earth. Jesus did not die so He and the criminal could go to heaven. Jesus died to re-establish the Kingdom of God.

Yes, Jesus died so He could come into His Kingdom as declared by the criminal.

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. (See Rev. 21 and 22.)

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.

QUESTION: Where in Scripture is the believer informed about this particular bliss? Can the believer experience bliss before he is in possession of his or her glorified body which they receive only at the resurrection?

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 bliss of the resurrection. And little attention is given to the phrase “Falling asleep (in Christ)” which appears 18 times in the New Testament. Why is that? Please inform me if you are in possession of worthwhile material on the meaning of the phrase: “Falling Asleep in Christ.”

9.3 Commentaries and Their Mistaken Views

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

The *Korte Verklaring* commentary claims that the criminal who repented “went to heaven with Jesus within hours.” This assertion is not only misreading the passage but it also ignores Jesus’ descent into the grave (See 1 Cor. 15:20) and the account of His ascension 40 days after His resurrection.

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

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, [Did the Lord, really?] but that this very day he should be with Him in Paradise [that is, Heaven].

QUESTION: Jesus in heaven 40 days before His ascension?

The return of Paradise as the return of perfect communion between God and man is not here acknowledged. Regrettably.

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 preached that Luke 23:43 teaches that “the joy of heaven will be knowing Jesus forever.”¹² What about the new heaven and the new **earth**? 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 a glorified body.

Similarly, Rev. **Peter Slofstra** of the Christian Reformed Church states: “Paradise is the word Jesus used on the cross to describe heaven.”¹³ Again, this interpretation lacks a biblical foundation and equates two distinct realities. Hopefully that will become clear in the discussion of the meaning of “Paradise” in the New Testament.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon *The Dying Thief in a New Light*, talking about the criminal states:

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

12. 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/>.

13. 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/>.

NOTE: Where is the biblical warrant for such a view?

Spurgeon's preaching is usually powerful, but in this instance, it assumes an unbiblical view of Paradise. Jesus did not take the thief to heaven that afternoon. Rather, the New Testament teaches that believers when they die, "fall asleep in Christ." (See 1 Thess. 4:13-18.) What is needed is a biblical exegesis of that phrase which is sorely lacking.

9.5 Books and Their Mistaken Views

Numerous books serve to propagate the error of equating Paradise and heaven.

Randy Alcorn, in his popular 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.

In Alcorn's 500-page book on heaven, he does not offer a single warrant to support the view that Paradise is heaven. He simply assumes as much. Alcorn's interpretation results in an artificial tension between a "present" and a "future" heaven. In reality, the biblical future hope centers on the resurrection, a spiritual body, and the renewal of creation. Christ will establish His throne in the New Jerusalem *on earth* (Rev. 21 and 22).

Much of what is written about heaven is wildly speculative.

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

Paradeisos (Paradise) is the Greek word for a "garden." It describes God's garden in heaven.¹⁴

Is there any mention of a garden in heaven anywhere in the book of Revelation? In Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the tree of life which is located in Paradise is said to be on earth.

Where in Scripture are we taught that there is a garden in the present heaven? This claim has never been given a scriptural basis. The biblical depiction of Paradise consistently points to an earthly reality, not a celestial one.

14. Derek Prince, *War in Heaven: God's Epic Battle with Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003), 13.

Erwin W. Lutzer, in his book *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.¹⁵

This statement, once again, misrepresents the nature of Christ's accomplishment on Golgotha. The "Paradise" Jesus is referring to is the renewed fellowship between God and man made possible by His death. God tore the curtain **of separation** in the temple. Why? Because Christ's sacrifice on the cross made believers righteous in the presence of the Father. Graves were opened and those who had fallen asleep came back to life. Why? Because a new reality had been inaugurated by Christ on the cross. That new reality was a return of Paradise, a return to fellowship untainted by sin with the Father.

10. Implications for Theology and the Church

The confusion between the reality of Paradise and the reality of heaven has significant theological consequences. By misplacing our hope in an afterlife in heaven upon death rather than placing it in the resurrection (Col. 3:4) and the renewal of creation, the Church loses sight of the full grandeur of Christ's redemptive work on Golgotha. The message of Luke 23:43 is not that believers will "escape" to heaven upon death, but rather that through Christ's sacrifice, the Kingdom of God has been restored and thereby Paradise has been regained. On earth. The first Adam did not lose contact with heaven. He lost "contact" with the Kingdom of God by opening the door to the kingdom of Satan through his disobedience. Christ went to Golgotha to destroy the work of the devil.

10.1 Recovering a Biblical Hope

The tearing of the temple curtain which represented separation from God as well as the resurrection of the saints on Good Friday as a return from death to life confirms the truth that **Paradise** as lived in the Garden of Eden had been restored on Golgotha. Is it not time for the Church to recover a biblical understanding of Paradise as the reality Christ inaugurated through His suffering and death. On Golgotha. A reality that will be fully con-

15. 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.

summed in His second coming.

Is it merely a matter of opinion whether or not Paradise and heaven are declared to be one and the same thing? Can the *identity* of each not be confirmed by Scripture? Why refer to Paradise at all if it is simply another word for “heaven”? Does Scripture willfully engage in needless confusion? Revelation 4 and 5 deal with heaven in detail but there is no mention of the presence of Paradise. Not until chapters 21 and 22 where it is implicitly mentioned in fulfillment of what is promised in Rev. 2:7. And then in relation to Paradise on earth. The “conquering” mentioned in Rev. 2:7 is performed on earth. And the tree of life is found on earth as well.

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

God the Father at the moment of Jesus’ death has *something* of world-altering significance to say about what Jesus accomplished on Golgotha. And that *something* relates to our earthly reality and not a heavenly one. Even more emphatically, that something is not so much what the Father of Jesus wants to *say* about Golgotha as what *He actually does* say in His **response** to the great salvation achieved by Jesus on Golgotha.

At the *very moment* (Gr. *kai idou*) that Jesus shouts: **IT IS FULFILLED**, Jesus is saying the following: All that you asked of Me, Father, has been fulfilled. All of it. It is then that God the Father glorifies the Son who has just died in a most remarkable manner. How does God the Father honour His Son? The Holy Spirit saw to it that the **awesome honor** the Father bestowed on His Son is **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; the second Adam has fallen asleep according to 1 Cor. 15:20. And at that *very moment* of Jesus falling asleep. God the Father *acts*. Yes, God the Father honors Jesus by **acting**. Yes, the believer is unmistakably informed that God the Father *acts* in a most momentous and exceptional manner at the **very moment** when Jesus shouts: IT IS FULFILLED! At that exact moment the reader is informed that God the Father tears the curtain in the temple, that is, in the Holy of Holies, and tears it from top to bottom. The power of the *curtain* which communicates the deadly reality of sinful man’s separation from a holy God, has been made of no effect. The life-threatening barrier between God and man no longer

exists. Believers are now *more righteous* than they were before Adam sinned, for they will now no longer have their sins counted against them. That is the gift made possible on Golgotha. Thanks be to Jesus Christ. The curtain of separation between God and man no longer exists. The other Act of the Father is that believers who had fallen asleep come back to life. At the very moment of Christ's death. They were made righteous by Christ's sacrifice. A gift from the Father merited for them on the cross. It is a gift so consequential that the Holy Spirit will come to live in their hearts. This will happen on Pentecost. Yes, the Holy Spirit will come to live in their hearts forever. 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. The reality described in Scripture is that we sinners already now stand righteously before God the Father because of what Jesus achieved on Golgotha. It is a *current* fact. How often have you heard a sermon on Matthew 27:51-53 on Easter Sunday? Rejoice at the realization that *nothing* is impossible for God. Yes, a torn curtain and believers who died brought back to life as a result of what happened on Golgotha. That is God the Father's **response** to what Jesus achieved on Golgotha. There is nothing that can now separate us from the love of God because of Jesus Christ seated at the Father's right hand. Our Saviour.

Reflect again 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. You may not use it as a tablecloth. That in itself is marvelous. I am free. Glory hallelujah. I have been set free from the demands of the law because Jesus has fulfilled those requirements for me. "It's mercy all, immense and free. For, O my God, grace found out me." And that in itself my fellow believers is a return to Paradise. Believers are on **the way**. There is still our sinful flesh to be replaced by glorified bodies but "sinners" are on the way. Already they have the Holy Spirit.

But God the Father does more than annul the deadly legal function of the curtain of separation at the moment of Jesus' death. At that moment, God the Father also acts to **annul death itself**. Talk about returning Paradise. **Death** was Satan's power over us. We could not keep the law of God. Now Christ has conquered death on Golgotha by keeping the law for us. God the Father in these actions confirms beyond a doubt that Paradise has in fact returned. The incident as described in Matthew 27 is almost beyond belief. But it is true. 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.

Yes, appeared to many. To declare what Jesus had achieved on Golgotha.

No sooner has the curtain of separation which separated God from the believer been made of no effect by the tearing of this curtain in the temple, when the reader is also told that there is an earthquake which reduces to rubble the stones sealing the tombs of many believers. The tombs have now been opened. The bodies of **many** holy *people* who had fallen asleep are given back **life** by God. The Bible does not say that there are believers who had gone to live in heaven. It identifies these believers as having fallen asleep. Not as having gone to heaven. The Bible teaches that those believers' lives "are hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) when they fall asleep. Miraculously, these believers now regain the use of their bodies. God is indeed capable of doing *anything*. There lives are now no longer "hidden." They once again *appear*. Imagine that. Believers who had fallen asleep instantly regain the use of their bodies. God is indeed capable of doing that. He brings people who have fallen asleep back to life. Instantly. And the text informs the reader that there were *many* who were brought back to life. The text also emphasizes that this spectacular event was occasioned by God the Father *at the moment of Jesus' death*. These many believers were then awakened at around 3pm on Good Friday. The timing is not insignificant. Especially not when the text states this event occurred *at that very moment*. **This timing attests to the power over death that Jesus' death had achieved on Golgotha.** He died for sinners who now come back to life. This event took place according to the testimony of the Father as recorded in Matthew 27. They were then all instructed to go into Jerusalem to testify to what had happened in that cemetery. *But not until after* Jesus had arisen also. They were not to appear until after Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20).

Imagine the amazement as well as the joy as a result of so *many* believers appearing to relatives and friends and acquaintances in Jerusalem. What an unprecedented reunion. Look who just appeared. It is uncle and brother and mother and sister. How is that possible? What are they doing here? They died, did they not? And then they learn that Christ has died and also risen from the dead.

Later, from Corinthians, we learn that Christ is revealed as having returned from those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20).

Scripture informs the reader that these two stupendous events indeed have taken place. At the initiative of the Father. Amazing. The Scriptures do not provides us with a *single* detail. Not a word is recorded about those amazing events. And not surprising. Why not? Because you can imagine the details of those reunions between those who came back to life and the living for yourself. Just picture someone who you know who has died (fallen asleep) and who then comes to your front door. What would your response be? And what God the Father did by bringing many believers back to life testified to Golgotha. Jesus declared that **Today** Paradise would return. And this incredible awakening “from death to life” will be a powerful witness for all generations to come about what happened on Golgotha. The Father’s response to Jesus’ sacrifice on Golgotha is not about heaven but about the Kingdom of God which has been restored in power. Jesus’ sacrifice on Golgotha made it possible for the believing dead to return to life. Now read the concluding verses of 1 Corinthians 15. What happened in that cemetery will also happen at the time of Christ’s return. What happened in that cemetery is a foretaste of the resurrection to come. At the time of Christ’s second coming. That is why Scripture records that this happened **at the moment** of Jesus’ death. The connection between the two is undeniable. *The two events are intimately related.* Christ’s death gave life to many in that cemetery.

The saints involved are now instructed to spend the weekend in the cemetery. They may not go into Jerusalem until after the wondrous resurrection of Jesus, who will come back to life on Easter morning. The spotlight is not, in the first place, on the saints who have come back to life but on the great work Jesus has accomplished on Golgotha. God the Father is casting the spotlight on the Son He loves and on what His Son **accomplished** on Golgotha. The rebirth of all who embrace what happened on Golgotha. That is the reason of the Father awakening so many from their sleep so they can testify to what Jesus accomplished on Golgotha. Do not believe for a moment that this reality escaped their attention. The first Adam was expelled from Paradise. Christ, the second Adam, has once again opened the gates of Paradise for all those who believe.

One wonder follows upon another. First, a criminal is converted and deputized to initiate the dialogue of all dialogues. Then Jesus declares that Paradise lost in the Garden of Eden would return that very day. God the Father would see to it that we would view signs of that return. How? First, the curtain of separation is torn away. Then on that Good Friday at 3 p.m., **many** saints who had fallen asleep come back to life. They are then in-

structed to spend the weekend in the cemetery to await the resurrection of Jesus. After which they may go into Jerusalem to fill the hearts of many fellow believers with wonder upon wonder. Can you imagine the discussions that took place? The wonder of what happened on Golgotha was not that Jesus and the criminal were going to heaven. No! The wonder of that day was that Paradise once again became a present reality.

11. NEW Life Brought About by Paradise

Good Friday! What a day of wonders. A day that gave the believer the gift of eternal life.

In Matthew 27:51b-53, the believing reader is given the following remarkable account of what the Father did **after** He tore down the curtain in the temple. And again He did it 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 who had fallen asleep 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.

Wow! Wow! Wow! What a spectacular event. And what is the point God the Father is here making?

Amazing! Amazing! Amazing! Those are the first words to come out of my mouth upon realizing what the Father has done when Jesus has just died for the sin of the world and at that world-altering moment, God the Father awakens many (hundreds) of believers who had fallen asleep. Renewed life is given to them. When God the Father goes to work on Jesus' behalf expect the unexpected. Can you not sense the jubilation in the Father's actions? Giving life to those who have fallen asleep. And not unexpectedly. After all, He *is* the Creator of heaven and earth and of all who have life. We can rest assured that the Father was delighted when He heard the cry He had been waiting to hear for four thousand years from the cross. The cry: TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED! The work of Satan has been laid to waste. The Father was delighted at the deliverance of His creation from the power of sin as far as the curse is found. And that deliverance could only be achieved by Jesus. True God and true Man.

Once again, at the very moment of Jesus' proclamation that He had fulfilled the promise He had made in Genesis 3:15, His Father commanded the power of an earth-

quake 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” to these “bodies” (Genesis 2:7). And so they came back to life. The Father then gave them back their memories and enabled them to come out of their tombs. Dressed in clothes the Father provided them with. What a spectacle their appearance must have made! Just imagine a cemetery in your neighbourhood where suddenly several hundred graves are opened. Believers previously asleep are now walking around in this graveyard. Trying to orient themselves. What has happened? They ask each other. Yes, eventually they are enabled to figure it out so they sit down among the tombstones to wait the arrival of Easter. Amazing! Once again this event took place **at the very moment** of Jesus’ death. And we have it on good authority that the Day was Good Friday at 3p.m. In one manner or another, the Father instructed these newly awakened believers to stay in that cemetery until Easter morning had arrived; stay until after Jesus has **first** risen from the dead. They were not to precede Jesus into Jerusalem. Their coming back to life and Jesus’ resurrection had to be seen as related to each other.

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? The Bible is a very carefully and accurately written document. So why this order of events by the Father?

God had a very good reason for bringing these believers back to life at **the very moment** that His Son died. God the Father wanted the two events of the death of His Son and the renewed “coming back to life” of these many believers to be *unmistakably related* to each other. Jesus’ death was the source of their life. God wanted them and us believers who live 2,000 years after the fact of Golgotha, to see the relationship between the two. The awakening of these believers was a small but important 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. **ETERNAL LIFE. THE RETURN OF GOD’S KINGDOM. THAT WAS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE CROSS!** The establishment of God’s Kingdom which leads to new life. The dead coming back to life was a sign that Satan had lost his power. He lost the power of his most effective weapon: **death**. As a result of Golgotha, believers had become *righteous* **IN CHRIST**. And so death no longer had power over them. God the Father acknowledged as much. By bringing the bodies of many “dead” believers back to life. **Paradise regained**. Perfect fellowship between God

the Father and sanctified believers restored. Yes, Paradise regained. Those who have the eyes of faith to see, saw God work His will.

God the Father intended to imprint the scope of what Jesus achieved on Golgotha on our minds and on our **hearts** with the dual events of the torn curtain and the awakening of many believers in the graveyard. Is there a more powerful testimony to the reality and power of Jesus' promise to the criminal that Paradise would return: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise"? Jesus promised Paradise would return. At the moment of Jesus' death, at 3 p.m. on Good Friday it did. The Father saw to it that believers would understand. It would be clear to all that the Father's actions were intended to celebrate His Son's victory on the cross. Death to the curtain of death. And life to the dead. Yes, at 3p.m. on Good Friday, God tore the curtain of separation down and awakened many saints from their sleep as a **testimony** to Jesus' great achievement on the cross. Even the centurion and those 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 the gift of Christ's life. It was the Son of God who purchased eternal life for us on Golgotha. And it was none other than God the Father who by His actions as recorded in Matthew 27:51-53 declared that communion between Himself and believers was now once again restored. In Jesus' name. In the cemetery where God made the attestation that on the cross, Jesus had not only conquered death but had also showered newness of life on all those who acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior. In a few days, Jesus would rise and then take forty days **before returning to heaven** to manifest Himself, the Lord of life, to many. Acts 1:3 reads as follows:

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

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.” And now we also know.

Ask theistic evolutionists to give an account of this relationship between heaven and earth. They will blubber like little children.

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 and Christ’s return in the 20th century. It was written to encourage early Christians who were faced with deadly attacks on their faith. Of these seven letters, the letter which you and I are primarily interested in now 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 Christ through 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 deny the reader a warrant for equating Paradise with heaven. It is the third heaven that is God’s throne room (Rev. 4 and 5), and not Paradise. The Scriptures do, however, offer insight into how we are to recognize the *whereabouts* of Paradise. Paradise, declares Rev. 2:7, is the **place** where the tree of life, so prominently present in the Garden of Eden, can be found. **The tree of life is to be found in the Paradise of God.** Note that the tree of life is mentioned no less than *three times* in Revelation 22. 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 a union of the new heaven and the new earth. Heaven and earth combined, they will exist as one. And it will be located **on earth**. 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. On earth. There is no mention at all of believers taking up residence in the present heaven. That is why Jesus deliberately said to the criminal: **Today** you will be with Me in Paradise. Yes, at 3 p.m.

13. The Indirect Reference to Paradise

Our attention is called 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 identical to the Paradise referred to in chapter 2, verse 7 and the Garden of Eden. These references inform the reader that Paradise will once again represent life on earth. As it was in the Garden of Eden prior to the first Adam's fall. As a matter of fact, the entire earth will then become 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 may have been "multi" dimensional), perhaps part of a multi-dimensional creation. Peter would have been able to walk on water. Because he would have had faith. Now, however, 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 disembodied spirit that functions *as if* it did have a body. Further we are told that heaven and Paradise are one and the same reality. 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. If such is the case, why bother with Christ's return? Apparently we already have a glorious existence. But Revelation 2:7 informs the believer that an identifying feature of Paradise will once again be the presence of the tree of life. Wherever the tree of life is found, there we find ourselves in Paradise and we there may eat the fruit of the tree of life. Are we expected to believe that a garden and trees and fruit are part of the present reality known to us as heaven? Is the present heaven then synonymous to the Paradise described in Revelation 22? The claim is made that heaven is synonymous with Paradise. But is heaven with its inhabitants not a spiritual reality? Have trees and fruit now become 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 pre-incarnate Christ addresses Abraham from heaven. The eyes of the servant of Elijah are "opened" and he sees the mighty army of God which appeared to protect Elijah. Is this not a spiritual army? And at what point do believers who go to live in heaven when they die receive their spiritual existence?

When Jesus returns, Paradise will *once again* be firmly established as an identifiable place on earth. Paradise always has been an earthly reality. In Paradise, in the Garden of Eden, God the Father and mankind enjoyed perfect, sinless fellowship. Such was the case in the Garden of Eden. That is why it is referred to as Paradise. In the beginning Paradise was the earthly 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 identical to

heaven, when did this identification take place? And where in Scripture can I read about this identity? And how can trees and fruit be grown in a spiritual reality like the present heaven? Would heaven still be spiritual? These difficult and conflicting questions are seldom asked and never answered.

14. Paul and Jesus on Paradise

It really is a quite an amazing especially 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 appears to him again to reveal the splendor of the third heaven as well as the splendor of the Paradise to come (Rev. 21 and 22). Remember, God is not subject to time. God views reality from beginning to end. Paul is forbidden to whisper a single word about the grandeur and the glory of what he saw in both instances. The two experiences were personal and intended to fortify Paul in his very difficult mission. So as a result you and I miss out on everything Paul was permitted to see **until** the time of the resurrection? Not at all. I believe Paul was probably forbidden to reveal what he saw in respect to both the wonders of the third heaven as well as Paradise because *that privilege, that revelation, the right to disclose those wonders*, God the Father granted to His Son who redeemed creation. Read Revelation 4 and 5 about the third heaven and Revelation 21 and 22 about Paradise. Paul was privileged to see all of this which Jesus later revealed to us. Yes, to us!

Think! Have Christians ever been short changed? Have Christians ever been left wondering until the end of time what the third heaven and Paradise are all about? Are we in fact to think of Paradise and heaven as one and the same thing as suggested by many theologians? Not at all. What Paul was **not** permitted to reveal to us, Jesus Christ reveals to believers later on in considerable detail. In the book of Revelation. His special book! After all, He *purchased* the return of Paradise for us with His blood. And the presence and importance of Paradise are revealed to Christians in the first instance in chapter 2:7 of the last book of the Bible. There the believers are informed that Paradise is the **reward** that will be granted to those who **conquer**, to those who combat Satan and his many lies. Through the apostle John, Jesus presents us with the contents of the book of Revelation. A good part of that book I find challenging to grasp. On the other hand, other sections of the book of Revelation are as transparent as looking through a pane of glass. But of one thing I am certain: the book of Revelation is intended for the present church beginning with the seven churches in Asia Minor. *And now for us*. Let me give you three highlights

described in the book of Revelation, a book which Paul never had an opportunity to read. It is likely that part of it if not all of what Jesus reveals to us about the third heaven and Paradise in the book of Revelation, was personally witnessed by Paul either in or out of the body. Paul saw, in the Spirit, what John also saw in the Spirit. After all, there is only one third heaven and only one Paradise. Both Paul and John knew the difference between the third heaven and Paradise as described in chapters 4 and 5 and chapters 21 and 22 of the book of Revelation. They actually witnessed the existence of **both** places.

Now follows the first highlight describing the third heaven as well as Paradise as revealed to us in the book of Revelation.

15. Revelation 4 and 5 on the Meaning of Paradise

Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation record that the door to the third heaven is wide open. The apostle John is invited to enter that third heaven in the Spirit. He witnesses God ruling created reality from His throne and he witnesses 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 never described as elders. These elders are indeed human beings. It is very well possible that among these elders are 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 on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:3). Later I will share an article with you about the battle between the Archangel, Michael, and Satan over the body of Moses. Quite a revelation. It is incredible what transpires in the spirit world. Jude, the brother of Jesus, assures us the battle referenced in his letter took place.

It is also possible that included among the twenty-four elders are disciples of Jesus who were martyred for their faith. But no specifics are provided. Yes, what I write is somewhat 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 be permitted a little speculation. In any event, you grandchildren are “free” to use your own imaginations. 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 do these elders believe that God in Jesus Christ is worthy to receive honour, glory, and power? Is it because Christ went to Golgotha to reclaim creation's loyalty and obedience 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 Jesus Christ are offered for a more *foundational* reason. They are bestowed upon Christ in words that focus our attention on the very *root* of our existence. Listen to how Scripture describes why Christ is deemed worthy by the company of heaven to receive glory and honour and power. And if you are ever tempted, during the course of your lives, to entertain the lies of theistic evolution, ask yourself why all of heaven worships God in Jesus Christ. The most exalted thing that can be said in heaven about God in Jesus Christ is that the Father has placed Christ in charge of the origin and supervision of *all of creation*. May Paul have witnessed this scene when he was privileged to view the third heaven? He saw a lot. Here follows why God in Jesus Christ is worthy to receive all glory and all honour and all power. Because

**“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 about with the blasphemous teachings of theistic evolution which deny every confession of the Christian faith including God in Jesus Christ as **Creator**..

In the revelation of God's **creative will** lies the key to the question as to how the cosmos originated. The question of origins. The creation is God's masterpiece, His architectural wonder, which *He will never abandon*. Jesus went to Golgotha for His Father to reclaim that creation, and the loyalty of its redeemed subjects belong to Him. Before the first Adam sinned, the creation of the earth was characterized as *The Garden of Eden*, that is, as Paradise. Perfect fellowship between God and man. 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 of the world that He gave His only begotten Son to have Him reclaim it. Christ alone had that power. 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. In the future the *Earth* will become Paradise, and the focal point of **all created reality** and God's presence.

I will never forget the Sundays Rev. Groen preached on these particular chapters from the book of Revelation in our congregation in Wallaceburg. I was a teenager then. And our minister was a recent young seminary graduate. Ours was his first congregation. His name was John Groen. Yes, Henry Groen's brother. You know him. He goes to Adoration URC. Well, John Groen preached on the book of Revelation when I was a teenager. Especially chapters 4 and 5 are bursting with information about the third heaven and God's rule of the universe in Jesus Christ. Those chapters are an open window into the third heaven. All of you should read these chapters often. Read about the scroll which contains the history of the world, the activity of the Lamb, the "unbreakable" 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 you 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* described in detail. Yes, indeed. When Jesus informed the criminal: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise", that is precisely what He meant: What I am doing on this cross will result in the return of Paradise, the one lost in the Garden of Eden. It had nothing to do with a bodiless existence during the interim in heaven. During the interim our lives will be **hidden** (we have no body) with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). At the time of Christ's return we will receive our glorified bodies and **reappear**. Dealt with in detail elsewhere.

No, I will never forget the first time I heard those sermons on the book of Revelation preached by Rev. John Groen in Wallaceburg. They stimulated what was probably the happiest period 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*. Especially because of what happened on Golgotha. And that experience has never faded since. The intensity? Yes, the intensity is gone. These old bones of mine have experienced too much worldliness (sin). 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 himself 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 has retained an exceptional place in my heart because he made his presence felt at an exceptional period in my spiritual growth. And of my history.

In any event, the point I am trying to make is that on the basis of what the reader is told by Scripture, we are not given any reason whatsoever to believe that there are millions of Christians in heaven continuing their earthly lives. Christians said to be living in heaven are never referred to in Scripture except for a few who went to live in heaven under special circumstances. And the presence of these believers is dealt with in some detail. They went to heaven "body and soul." As *whole* persons. And would the commonly 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 along with the twenty four elders as described in Revelation chapter 4? Why are they not mentioned? Anywhere. And in this context, there is no mention at all of Paradise. If heaven and Paradise are indeed identical, would we not have been given a reference to Paradise? We hear a great deal about the third heaven in chapters 4 and 5, but we don't hear a word about Paradise until chapters 21 and 22. And then in relation to Paradise on the new Earth. Yes, when we die *we go to be with Christ*. That is beyond question. And Christ *is* in heaven. That is also beyond question. However, Colossians *reveals* to us that our lives are **hidden** with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 describes our (1) conversion and (2) our "lives" during the interim. Colossians 3:4 describes Christ's return along with the twenty-four elders. Paul in Colossians chapter 3 makes it *very clear* that our lives are **hidden** in Christ. This "hiddenness" does not appear to account for any visible presence in heaven. That raises the question: *In what way* are we with Christ when we die? That is the question I address in the paper on "falling asleep in Christ." We should at least realize at this time that when our **life**, at the time of our *actual death*, is with Christ, we have lost the use of our bodies until the resurrection. Meanwhile, we may rest assured that Revelation 4 and 5 teach us a great deal about the third heaven while it teaches us nothing about Paradise as described

in Revelation 21 and 22.

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

In the first instance, the believer should realize that the Holy Spirit will not come in power to all peoples and to all nations until Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, and Satan and his minions are thrown out of heaven. Why thrown out? Because God the Father will not permit Satan to accuse those who are **righteous** in Christ.

The 12th chapter of the book of Revelation in this respect is fascinating reading. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the life of Christ including the event of Christ's ascension to His throne (Rev. 12:5b). This ascension took place 40 days after Easter morning. Christ had been to Golgotha. There He conquered death. So 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 as a result of Adam's sin. In the Old Testament, Satan could accuse believers. Such as in the case of Job and Aaron. Satan's access to God's throne is *now* 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 event took place ten days prior to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit burst upon the earth in power. In order to equip the saints in their service of God and in their battle against Satan who has now been confined to earth and become a roaring lion. Knowing his time is limited.

17. Is Satan Still in Heaven?

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 in Christ's presence. I refer to two books¹⁶ written by otherwise fine, evangelical Christians. These two authors try to make the point

16. 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.

in these books that Jesus did indeed execute a stunning victory over Satan on the cross, but that the victory did **not** result in the expulsion of Satan from heaven. The reason these two authors, along with millions of other believers, 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 of history according to them has still **not** arrived after two thousand years. Consequently Satan's expulsion from heaven is believed to be a future event. And so, Satan is still accusing the elect. 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 before Golgotha in Genesis 3:15 was **fulfilled** on Golgotha at about 3p.m. on Good Friday. When Jesus shouted: **IT IS FULFILLED**. (See especially Matt. 27:51-53). Therefore, when Jesus ascended into heaven, the Father would no longer tolerate Satan's accusing presence. On Golgotha, Satan lost his *judicial* right to accuse the elect who had now become *righteous in Christ*. And Satan and his fallen angels were *thrown down to the earth*. Read chapter 8 of the book of Romans. "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus died for us." We are now 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)**. In response to the converted criminal's declaration about Christ coming into His Kingdom! Also, consider Christ's response to the criminal: **TODAY!** When the penitent criminal asked Jesus to remember him. In God the Father's sight **IN CHRIST**, we are free of sin. All that remains is for us to die. Satan has been deprived of the very possibility of any longer accusing the elect. The day of Job ended on Golgotha.

We believe that Revelation 12 is a dramatic account of *historical events* that have actually taken place two thousand years ago in heaven **upon** Christ's ascension. The opening verses of chapter 12 of the book of Revelation inform the reader that the powers of His creation are placed, by God, at the disposal of a woman who is pregnant and who is 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 and has now been doing so for 2,000 years. That male child can only be identified as Christ. After His ministry on earth, the woman's child was snatched up to God and **to his throne (Rev. 12:5)**. This is an obvious reference to Christ's ascension 40 days after He was raised¹⁷ from the dead.

17. Who resurrected Jesus? In Acts 2:24 Peter declares that "God raised Jesus from the

What the reader has just been given is a thumbnail sketch of the life of Christ who had to flee to Egypt, imagine that, to escape the murderous intrigue of Herod and that of the dragon (Satan).

Then follows, in Revelation 12:7-9, one of the most remarkable events in history. Try to visualize John's account. The reader is told:

⁷ And there was war in heaven. [Imagine that: *war* in heaven.] Michael [God's archangel] and his angels fought against the dragon [Michael and his angels started this war], and the dragon and his angels fought back. [They did not want to vacate heaven] ⁸ But he [Satan] 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.

Is it possible for Scripture to give the believer a *clearer* account of what happened when Jesus ascended into heaven after Golgotha?

Ten days after Satan is thrown out of heaven, the Holy Spirit invades the earth on behalf of the Father and His Son. This is the powerful helper Jesus promised His disciples (and us) and now the Spirit has come. The Spirit of **POWER!** Just think of Samson.

PENTECOST!

What you and I now want to pay particular attention to are two events. **First:** the male child who now rules all the nations with an iron scepter (see Rev. 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. Their rule of terror has ended. Think of Job. They have come down to earth as "murderous lions" who seek to destroy those who have communion with God in Jesus Christ. Their objective is to prevent the Kingdom of God from taking foot on earth. But thanks be to God, **now** Christians have the power of the Holy Spirit living **in** their hearts. 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

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.

Spirit who accompanied Israel out of Egypt. That Spirit now dwells in us. And don't you grandchildren ever fail to call upon His assistance.

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, then Satan's attempt to destroy Christ, and then Christ's ascension to the right hand side of His Father. After the awesome victory He achieved on Golgotha. This powerful *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. And what a climax!

It is important to keep the sequence of events that represent Christ's life on earth in historical sequence. 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 in their murderous attempt. There is wailing in Bethlehem. Joseph is warned in a dream, by an angel, to flee to Egypt, imagine that, to the land of slavery, and to stay in Egypt until the angel informs Joseph it is safe to return to Nazareth again. Jesus grows up and begins His ministry when He is around thirty. His life is an unbelievable combination of miracles and signs and wonders. After all, He is the Creator. He manifests Himself as the Messiah King. Bread and fish materialize out of nothing in His hands at will 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 events alone condemn the tom-foolery of theistic evolution for the lie that it is. Jesus is the **Word**. And the **Word** commanded all things into being. The **Word**, Jesus Christ, is God and Lord of **all**.

Christ's ministry of wonders and miracles and unimagined power lasted only about three and a half years. Satan is fit to be tied. The fiercest opposition His ministry now faces comes from the Satan-inspired 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 reason other than that the awakening of Lazarus testifies to the glory of God and the deity of Jesus. They finally succeed; they blackmail the Governor of the region, Pontius Pilate, into crucifying Jesus, even though Pilate declares Jesus innocent three times. Pilate's wife warned him on the basis of a dream she had. Have nothing to do with this Man.

Jesus is judged, condemned, and crucified. By His Father. For your sins and mine. He suffers the abandonment of His Father, that is, HELL, on the cross. He cries out knowing

He is innocent: My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me? **But He knows why.**

After loudly shouting “IT IS FULFILLED!”, Jesus surrendered His life to the Father. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. In my other paper we will see the role the New Testament reality of “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.* His return was imperative for it would occasion the expulsion from heaven of Satan. For forty days He testified to His resurrection. Especially to His disciples. See Acts 1:3. On the fortieth day He returned to His Father in heaven and the moment He arrived we are told that *there is war in heaven.* Satan realizes he has lost his God-given right to accuse the elect. As he did repeatedly in the Old Testament. Because of Golgotha! Satan’s influence is now strictly limited to the earth. God the Father will no longer listen to Satan’s accusations. Not in the redemptive presence of His Son who has been victorious on Golgotha. Satan’s back is broken. He is now a cripple. But still a powerful one. World War II. Dachau.

Now, grandchildren, I am going to interject a few paragraphs about Christians who do not believe that war erupted in heaven upon Jesus’ ascension. Those who adhere to this view are propagating what I believe to be a destructive heresy. They are negating the significance of the acts the Father performed *in response* to Jesus’ sacrifice on Golgotha at **the very moment Jesus died (Matthew 27:51-53)**. We have covered this issue in part and we will come back to it after we have taken a short overview of a movement called premillennialism. There was a time when this was a very current issue. Think of Hal Lindsey. **As a result**, Paideia Press published two books on the subject.¹⁸

“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 by His Father and as well assumed His position of authority at the right hand of the Father—that Satan was thrown out of heaven, at the moment of Jesus’ ascension? After all, there are millions of sincere Christians who believe this event of Satan being thrown out of heaven must yet take place.” Can they all be wrong?

You are right to be concerned dear grandchildren. But check the Internet. Hal Lindsey’s book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, sold 35 million copies by 1999 and was translated

18. *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* was authored by Cornelius Vanderwaal; *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle* was authored by T. Boersma. These two books are still available in one form or another from Paideia Press. They’re as relevant as ever.

into more than 50 languages. It was also turned into a movie. That is quite a performance. But not a thing he predicted came to pass. Jerusalem has still not been rebuilt.

Your concern is well-founded dear grandchild. Lindsey's book caught the imagination of tens of millions of people and it became a publishing phenomenon. But what counted, what would have made the book a *prophetic* sensation as well as a best seller 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 to discuss details but as it turned out, his predictions were not accurate at all. The restoration of the Temple of Solomon, for instance, still has not taken place. If you grandchildren would like to learn more about Hal Lindsay and 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?*

At this point you may ask: But what has the event of 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 and victory on the cross. The reason we know without a doubt that Jesus' sacrifice and victory on the cross resulted in the return of Paradise is because of the many glorious acts that follow at the **very moment** of Jesus' death. Just think of the Father tearing down the curtain of separation as well as awakening several hundred people in that graveyard. And that is not all. There will be more acts to follow as a result of that liberating freedom that Jesus procured for us on the cross. Think of Pentecost to name just one.

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

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. Especially Satan's power over death. Therefore, the first step the Father took when Jesus

took His well-earned place 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 not tolerate the intolerable presence of Satan in the presence of His Son. The Son who had earned the righteousness of all believers for all time on the cross.

The expulsion of Satan was the first step in rendering Satan totally powerless. 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. And Satan knows it. Glory be to the Father. What a salvation! What a sacrifice.

18. Pentecost as the Unmistakable Return of Paradise

The gifts that accrue to believers as a result of Christ’s work on the cross are many. The first manifestation of that reality became apparent through the Father at the very moment Jesus died. **Yes, at the moment Jesus died.** God tore down the curtain of separation in the temple. **We** became the temples of God through the soon to be realized indwelling of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of Christ’s death the Father also awoke several hundred people who had “fallen asleep.” He brought them back to life. Wonderful, unmistakable manifestations that Paradise had in fact returned. Remember, Paradise exists where there is perfect fellowship between God and the believer. Paradise manifested in a sinful world, yes, but Paradise nonetheless. Made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who makes it possible for us to again relate to the Father. And in God’s good time, when Christ returns again, our lives are to become “Paradise lives” without the present tension of our sinful flesh.

A few days after Good Friday, 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 son or daughter who is reborn will ever be without a family on the new earth. It will no longer be necessary for us to do that difficult thing of forgiving our neighbour since there will be nothing to forgive.

Just think: At Pentecost we meet the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Helper. Just think, two thousand years after Golgotha, you and I are also in possession of the Holy Spirit. Yes, in possession. He actually dwells **in us**. He is the Father’s gift to us. Because of Golgotha. God in us. After witnessing to many people that He is alive, Jesus ascends to

the right hand of the Father. And now God will no longer tolerate the sight of Satan. God has Michael, the archangel and his fellow angels, throw Satan out of heaven. Yes, actually throw Satan out of heaven. And ten days later, the Father gifts His children on earth with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Because of Golgotha. How much closer can a believer get to God than that? Renewed fellowship with the Father. Back to Eden! Paradise. Made possible through the sinless spirit. Thank you! Thank you Jesus! Closer to God than Adam and Eve ever were. That gift is the most powerful indication that when Jesus said: “Today you will be with me in Paradise, yes, this very day”, that that is exactly what happened. The first Adam walked and talked with God. We have the indwelling of the Spirit who is God.

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 inspires this penitent 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 this 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* (that is, as a stranger). Even now, two thousand years later, the world still knows **Who** died on Golgotha and **why**. And at Christmas, much of the world is lit up in a spectacular display of brilliant colour and songs of praise. These are sung on the radio for a month, no less. Never mind the motivation. *It happens!* December is different from all other months. God the Father sees to that.
- **THIS MAN**, the converted criminal announced to those within his hearing and to us today: **THIS MAN IS COMING INTO HIS KINGDOM! That** is what

Golgotha is all about. Remember me, Jesus, he says, when you come into your Kingdom. The Kingdom made possible by Golgotha. Christ's universal Kingdom of righteousness and peace. Of which all believers this very day are members.

- 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 renewed Paradise that is even more glorious than the original Garden of Eden. And the beginning of that kingdom will come to pass at 3pm this afternoon when I shout **TETELESTAI! IT IS FULFILLED**. All that I promised My Father I have fulfilled.
- At 3:01p.m. that Good Friday afternoon the curtain of separation, the curtain of death, in the Holy of Holies in God's temple in Jerusalem is torn apart. Abolished! By God the Father to testify concretely to what Jesus achieved on the cross.
- Reunion between God and re-born mankind is achieved on this very day.
- Jesus is raised (arises) from His sleep (1 Cor. 15:20) on Easter morning.
- On Easter morning Jesus cautions Mary not to hold on to Him. He has not yet returned to the Father. So Jesus did not go to heaven on Good Friday when He died. His return will occur on ascension day. See also Acts 1:3. On that day, Satan will be thrown out of heaven, never to return. Satan's kingdom will from now on be challenged by the Holy Spirit on earth.
- Jesus meets two men on the road to Emmaus and explains to them that the Old Testament is all about Him. About His coming. And that on the cross He fulfilled all the promises made in the entire Old Testament except His second coming.
- For forty days, Jesus testifies that He is **alive** to many believers in many places (Acts 1:3).
- 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. And still rules today. Until His return.
- His Father, at the moment of Christ's return to heaven, has Michael and his angels throw Satan and his fallen angels out of heaven. **Now** has come the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ and His rule (Rev. 12:10).
- Ten days later, after Satan has been thrown out of heaven, Pentecost. The Holy Spirit leaves heaven and descends upon the earth to dwell in the hearts of millions of believers as He continues to do so to this very day. What a witness. What

a comfort. What an impact resulting from Golgotha. Renewed, sinless fellowship with the Father.

- Yes, Mr. Criminal, as you prophesied. On Golgotha, Jesus was coming into His Kingdom. And is ruling still until the time His Father says: “Enough. The number of the elect is full.” We are then all invited to the Great Banquet on the renewed earth. What a party that will be.
- From Golgotha forward believers from all over the world will begin to live a life on earth they cannot begin to imagine. It will be the life God intended for Adam and Eve. Only much more. God has become Man in Jesus Christ. We will then have *spiritual* bodies and will no longer be restricted to a three-dimensional reality. Paul says Christians will be in for the joyful surprise of their lives. He has already seen that surprise.

Yes, all of this, present and coming, glory was achieved on 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,” says Lewis, 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.¹⁹ A short

19. 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 in Lewis’ exact words: “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 hap-

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 during the fifty-three days afterwards. Golgotha is the event intended to 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 the Father and us. 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. This includes the error of equating heaven with Paradise, I believe.

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 by transforming the hearts of people. He sent His Holy Spirit to earth to redirect the lives of millions. The Holy Spirit: *God in us!* Think about that. Yes, Mr. Criminal, **“Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”** Yes, indeed! Jesus is coming into His kingdom on Golgotha, and we get to experience the return of Paradise in our lifetime even as this transformation moves us towards its consummation when Jesus returns at the end of time.

19. 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? Why? Because of Revelation 2:7. Scripture must be viewed in context. Like a great mosaic. Remember Revelation 2:7? Jesus promised the seven churches that all believers who remained faithful to Him during the course of their lives, to these 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. Scripture tells us so. That is how 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 living a three dimensional reality are concerned, does not yet *exist*. But God is not bound by time. And neither is His revelation. So neither is John. John **saw** what he describes for us because he saw it **in the Spirit**. And for the

pened on Golgotha we must take Jesus’ teachings about Paradise and about “falling asleep in Christ” seriously. See my other paper.

Spirit, who is God, “seeing” is not subject to time and space. We earthlings live in “time” and are subject to the function of 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 arrives. But God can. God made us so that we are subject to the laws of time and space 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 millions and billions of years. Such a trial-and-error phenomenon bound by time would be so out of character for an Almighty God, that the very suggestion verges on the *absurd* (and is blasphemous). God is not *subject* to the laws (of time) He created, He is their Sovereign. The laws of creation are His servants.

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.** Don't let evolutionists tell you otherwise. God willed creation into being (Rev. 4:11). If you feel “comfortable” speaking in such terms about God, we can also say that the so-called **mechanism** of creation is the very **WORD** of God. When Jesus stood in front of the grave of Lazarus, he said: “Lazarus, come forth.” A simple command. Jesus, the Word of God, spoke a simple command and Lazarus responded to that command and did indeed “come forth.” Shouldn't Christ receive a Nobel Prize in science for identifying the mechanism that resulted in the origin of all that exists in creation? Namely, His Word! Because it is true.

God in Jesus Christ is Lord of creation. Creation obeys His every command. Christ can actually tell the waves of the sea to lie down. And He can issue a command so that manna falls from heaven year after year for forty years and each day feeds millions. And He delivers the manna on His schedule; delivery doubled on Saturdays and passed over on Sundays. That pretty well takes any alternate explanations for the origin of the *manna* out of the hands of “smart aleck explanations,” does it not? 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. That is our present inescapable condition. Now that may all change when we appear with Christ in glory in our spiritual bodies at the time of the Second Coming. We probably will be given the right to exercise 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, a certainty that brooks no doubt. Jesus promised the penitent criminal on Good Friday that on that very day they would together, be 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 reveal important insight into 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, flowing down the middle of the street (does heaven have streets?) of the city; also, on both sides 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. And what He did was show John what the new Paradise would look like. At least in part.

Do you get the point being made here guys and gals? What John saw will not exist and become reality for us until Christ returns in glory. At that time what is now described in detail in Revelation 21 and 22 will come to pass, it will become history. *And yet, John "saw" it all.* God is not limited by time and space. Nothing is impossible for God. And now you and I can "see" it as well as described by John in the book of Revelation. That's God for you. He can show you, in living colour, a preview of a film which has not yet been produced.²⁰ Not a frame of it. And God sees it all. Since there is no "hidden" future for God. Theistic evolution? Clap-trap. B.S. Pretentious, drivel, deadly nonsense. Theistic

20 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 foundation of the world. He sees it 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 cares to show him. Remember Jesus' comments about seeing Nathanael under the fig tree? The day is coming, I believe, when we also will have such vision. Being without sin. Yes, we shall then see God face to face. What a future. So many wonderful surprises!

evolution is a “sophisticated” form of character assassination aimed at the character of Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe. It attempts to “assassinate” His revelation. And pretends that macro-evolution is not a *salvation issue*. That 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 the blasphemy Bio-logos teaches by means of theistic evolution. It is truly frightening. It is truly godless.

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** in the Spirit in the New Jerusalem. And in that vision the trees (there are now two) of life were planted down the main street of the New Jerusalem. So we know their physical location. 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. In the New Jerusalem these trees will offer 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*. Remember, 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. In the New Jerusalem, we will come into 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. And we will see it.

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 once again become a reality. It *began* to happen on the occasion of the final world-altering turning point in history. Golgotha! Leading to **Christ’s return!** Then **all** of creation will once again become Paradise! Meanwhile, you now 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 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 or God in Christ Jesus because when we die our *lives* are hidden with Christ in God awaiting the return of our glorified bodies:

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).

NOTHING! What more could a believer possibly ask for?

What more can we desire? What more do we dare 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 of Him?

Jesus went to Golgotha for us. And there He also experienced 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. Christ is now your life. God showed Paul both 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* again in the company of our Saviour and this is true for all of you, if you love Him until the day you fall asleep. Meanwhile in this life we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. **God in us!** That communion **is** the beginning of Paradise. Yes, said Jesus' Father, as He tore the curtain of separation down and awakened hundreds of saints. That says God the Father is the reality Jesus accomplished for believers on the cross. Today with **Me** in Paradise. To accomplish that I will give those who believe my Holy Spirit. Fifty three days of endless wonder as a result of My sacrifice. And at the conclusion of life, *ascension* and Paradise is regained.

20. A Glorious, Glorious Future. Forever.

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 [but the Holy Spirit can], 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 [speaking in earthly terms] will be raised imperishable, 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 [Who fulfilled the law for us and made us righteous in His Father’s sight].

Yes, our beloved Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled our obedience to the law for us on Golgotha. Satan has been muted. The Father has silenced Satan’s voice. Forever! In the presence of His Son.

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 by reading Scripture and prayer.

Keep the faith and we will all see each other again soon enough in a Paradise we can already now “sense” in the Spirit and that we can 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 in a new creation without sin.

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