

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

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New Zealand Mountains by Michael Avati

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,... 1 Pet 1:3

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the **blessed hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Tit 2:11-14

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Dear Friends,

John's disciples were disturbed and confused. He had been the rising star; multitudes were coming to him to hear the message of repentance and baptism. Then came Jesus. From their perspective, He just appeared on the scene and instantly caught the attention of the crowds. John's ministry was dwindling. His followers said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified – behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" Understanding the situation, John replied, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Jesus was a hit everywhere. He had no problem with 'church growth'. Thousands of people turned out to hear him speak, to see or receive miraculous healings or to eat bread and fish. If it were our day, He would write books, speak at conferences, appear on TBN or be invited to the White House. Christianity today celebrates celebrity. Jesus, however, knew that you NEED to touch the one. As a consequence of the crowds and the Pharisees, Christ headed out of Judea toward Galilee. "But He needed to go through Samaria." Jesus NEEDED to go through it – why? - to minister to one poor woman who was 'unlucky at love' at least four or five times. God is intensely interested in and committed to the one. May we follow His example. *God bless you!*

In Christ's Love, John and Darlene Dickey



Pergola in Amalfi by Aagaard

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The Pastor Posture

John 21:1 - 19

Seven disciples and an all-nighter. Nothing to show for it. Almost like their nets were broken.

After Jesus' resurrection, after He had spoken with His followers but before His ascension, these fellows were back in their old stomping grounds and turning to their old trade. "Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.'"

"They said to him, 'We are going with you also.' They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing."

In order to appreciate what's happening in this chapter, we need to take a look at the previous chapter of John's gospel. There, he concludes with, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

In the first 20 chapters, he spelled out his version of the good news to lead people to faith in Christ. But then, in the last chapter of his book, he launched into something different. It is not directed to those just coming to faith in Jesus; it rather speaks to those who have known Him and yet are in need. In need of what?

Glad you asked. You see, as awed and overjoyed as these ragamuffins were with their risen Savior, they were surely discouraged and down on themselves for their own behavior – Peter, as you recall, not many days

earlier dished out some satanic advice to Jesus concerning the cross and then denied vigorously ever knowing Him at His trial. After the resurrection, Thomas was filled with an almost defiant doubt that Jesus was alive again. James and John certainly remembered disputing with the others when they desired thrones on the left and right of Christ's. Nathanael and the others deserted Jesus, leaving Him in the garden like a bunch of scared cats. Surely, it was on their minds and they must have pondered just how do you face such glorious majesty when your life includes such a travesty of failures?

Peter had once told Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8) Even a relatively righteous man is confronted with his short comings before a perfect holy Lord. Isaiah the prophet, beholding the glory of God said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isa 6:5)

I suggest that these guys weren't fishing for enjoyment. They were in the retreat of guilt and condemnation. And they caught nothing. You recall Jesus told them, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4,5) Yes, indeed, their 'nets' if you would, were broken.

"But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them,

'Children, have you any food?' They answered Him, 'No.'"

Now, everyone knows that it's rare to find an honest fisherman. (ha) But, these guys didn't even have a story about the one that got away. Their two-letter answer said volumes.

"And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

John recognized the handiwork of the Lord and perhaps that's one reason why this story was special to him. Undoubtedly, he remembered a similar event that had marked the beginning of his own discipleship. (See Luke 5:1-11)

"Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea." Fascinating! How many of you know that if you want to swim well, you don't drape yourself in a coat or cloak. Clearly, this was something that stuck out in John's memory as well. What was Peter thinking?

Was he trying to prove something to the Lord? Why was his outer garment necessary? Obviously, he was so thrilled that he didn't want to wait for the boat to get to shore and the fish were the last thing on his mind. But he wanted that covering. He didn't want to approach his Lord 'in the buff' so to speak. He was zealous to come to Jesus but careful to be covered. I suggest that it was another indication of the self-consciousness born from the awareness of his sin. Adam and

Eve did the same thing back in the garden of Eden. (See Gen 3:7)

"But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.'"

Many good sermons have used these verses to affirm God's ability to provide the things we need – that we inevitably wind up tired, hungry and empty handed when we launch out on our own. If we will but turn to Christ, He will provide.

But that is not what I think the primary message is here. Jesus was clearly inviting fellowship. Isn't His grace and love obvious. Rather than a lecture or rebuke, a breakfast is prepared – a welcome back meal. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever! These guys probably thought the Lord was bitterly disappointed with them and on the look out for others who would be more faithful and less bumbling. But of Jesus, it is written, "A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench;" (Isa 42:3) He even credits them with catching the fish! Ha!

"Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken."

Don't you just love this guy? First, he leaves the others to drag this haul of fish so large that they couldn't take it in the little boat. And now, when he notes the Lord's interest in the fish, he jumps up and

single-handedly drags the whole catch to shore.

"Why do you suppose the number of fish is recorded? And why are we told the net was not broken? Earlier, in a similar miracle, Luke says when they took in a haul miraculously, the net broke (5:6). This speaks of evangelism. In the amphitheatre, in crusades, the Gospel is preached and a haul is taken in, but not all who respond will continue on. In the Parable of the Soils, only one in four goes on to bear abundant fruit (Matthew 13). Consequently, when we baptize 60 or 80 people on a Sunday morning, I know not every one is going to go on and bring forth fruit abundantly. But of those who are truly in the Kingdom, of those who are brought to shore, not one will be lost. Each one will be accounted for exactly. Thus, as this scenario unfolds, Jesus shows Peter and John that they are not only fishers of men, but tenders of sheep."

"You see, in the arena of evangelism, we cannot deal with statistics because we can't see men's hearts. But in shepherding ministry — in pastoring, in discipling, in parenting — we must account for every sheep. We must be aware of the brother or sister in need of tending, of touch, of care. Whose job is this? Yours and mine together. Those of us who love the Lord have the joint responsibility of saying, 'Where is #151? I gotta go find him.'" (Jon Courson)

Yes, the net did not break and that caught John's attention. You see, John was a net mender. Jesus found him doing just that when He called him to follow (See Matt 4:21)

and we know from both scripture as well as church history that John was a mender of 'nets' within the body of Christ. Also, there's nothing like a friendly meal to help mend a discouraged heart. So...

"Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast.' Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, 'Who are You?'--knowing that it was the Lord."

Surely, they recognized the miraculous haul of fish just as John did. But, there was more – His manner, His kindness and then... His servant-heart --

"Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. "

This gives me such hope. These guys had physically witnessed the resurrected Savior twice before (all right – just once for you Thomas) and they still wound up in a dumpy, fishless, all night boon-doggle. How often I've mused, 'If I could just see Jesus, just once, I'd be so faithful, so obedient, so...' but it wasn't just seeing the Savior that changed these guys, that drew them on and motivated them to give their all for Jesus. It was loving Him. *"For the love of Christ compels us..."* (2 Cor 5:14)

"So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'"

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

OK, all of you net-menders – take note. Jesus referred to either the

fish or the fishermen when He said, "...more than these", but that's not the most important issue. Peter was addressed as Simon which connotes the opposite of Peter. Simon implies wishy-washy or go-with-the-flow. Peter means rock. This is relevant but not the key either.

The word for love He used was 'agapao' which means to love dearly. With this, the target was revealed. The question was perfect. The issue is, always has been and always will be – love. Loving God supremely.

Simon searched his heart.

He was on the spot. His honest answer was, "Lord, you know I 'phileo' You." Or "I like you." Phileo means love, but it is not at all the caliber of 'agapao'. It is more akin to friendship.

"He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?'"

"He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'"

"He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'"

In this second question, there was no comparison. Jesus simply asked, "Do you agapao Me?" It is interesting that, as with the first round, Peter said, "Yes" but qualified it by again saying that he 'phileo'ed Jesus. Clearly, Peter was confessing that he did not have this agapao love for Christ.

Consequently, Christ 'notched' it down again...

"He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?'"

"And he said to Him, 'Lord, You

know all things; You know that I love You.'"

"Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.'"

This time, Jesus used 'phileo'. He said, "Simon, do you phileo Me?" and Peter was grieved or literally 'thrown into sorrow or sadness' not because of three questions but because the third one was the one he had been so bitter about – he phileo'ed but he also failed.

Jesus started with "Do you agapao Me more than these?" or "Do you love Me supremely." Then, He simply asked, "Do you agapao Me?" And then, He concluded with, "Do you phileo Me?" Now, one good explanation for this is that Jesus was restoring Peter regarding his three denials. However, there is something more here to be understood.

To love God supremely has been the foundation and essence of His desire for us from the beginning. (See Mat 22:37; Deut 13:3) Peter, who had spent some three years in the presence of Christ, had witnessed the crucifixion and then the resurrected Messiah could not confess to this kind of love. Yet, Christ was not surprised or disturbed. Rather, what John, the apostle of love observed and presented to us was a mending of Peter's 'net' and a revelation of Christ's heart for all who would minister to His people.

Jesus didn't refer in this passage to the coming power of the Holy Spirit. That came later. He did however lay out a clear path to supreme love which of course is the fruit of the Spirit. In that, He gave Peter three charges, each

associated with a degree of devotion. Beginning with the last one and moving backward chronologically, let's examine them closely.

At entry level so to speak, (v17) in His third interchange with Peter,

Jesus said to him, the transliteration "bosko mou probaton" which is translated "Feed My sheep." Indeed, bosko means feed and mou means my or mine, but probaton more appropriately means any four-footed grazer. Jesus was saying, "OK, Simon, you phileo

Me. Feed my four-footed grazers." This is the proverbial step in the right direction. Mending nets takes time, and the best thing to do is to get busy helping others – feed their souls – get out of your pit of self – leave the conundrum of your sin nature in the Lord's hands. Start feeding His grazers. At this point, that's probably all they look like to you – they belong to the Lord, but they're just grazers.

Now, for the second interchange -- progressing heavenward toward agapao love, to love Jesus dearly, there is the associated, "poimaino mou probaton" (v16). This is best translated as "Tend my grazers as a herdsman." At this point, it is more than feeding, it's tending. The typical Middle Eastern herdsman in tending his master's property would

watch for enemies of the herd, defend the herd, heal the wounded, find and save the lost or trapped and love the herd so as to earn their trust. These herdsman, contrary to the way we do in the west, would walk before, and the animals would follow.



Deeper, holier love has associated with it deeper commitment and involvement with those God loves. There is a greater giving out. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." (John 13:35) Specifically, agape love. When

feeding becomes tending, when phileo becomes agapao, that's when the world begins to recognize us as Christ's. Many dear people in ministry get stuck in the phileo and feeding. They teach, teach, teach but they don't reach out in compassion and real self sacrificial tending of God's 'grazers'. (Ouch!)

OK, now for the first interchange -- the summit is heaven's love – a supreme love for God – to agapao Him "more than these". It makes no difference what the word "these" refers to; it's ambiguous because it simply means more than anything else. Associated with this, Jesus charges Peter to "bosko mou arnion". With "bosko", we're back to feeding, but the key is that we're no longer feeding just any four-footed grazers. "Arnion" means "little

lambs". Little lambs are nursed. Nursing is feeding in close quarters. It's intimate. It's not just leading the way into green pastures or tossing some grain their way. The sustenance is coming from you, from your heart. And it might hurt a bit. It is when we have this kind of love that we see the herd as a flock and, by the way, not as a bunch of old ewes or rams but little lambs. We see God's children as He sees them. This is also important for it is how Jesus Himself is seen in heaven. In Revelation, He is described as such 24 times. You might say that when our love for Jesus is agapao and supreme, we see Him in His people.

Peter and the boys had gone fishing apart from Christ's direction. That's pretty clear because they came up empty, they caught nada. They'd gone their own way. And recall, Peter had girded himself before diving into the water – the natural response of the self-willed man or woman before a holy, loving God. It is because we are ashamed that we sense our loveless heart must be covered. However, playing upon this circumstance, Jesus foretold that he would completely change, that he would one day give his life for his Lord.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger (or until now and for some time), you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me.'"

In closing, I submit that our church corporately is hurting for lack of pastors, not just in name or title but in truth. Oh, we have lots of wonderfully dedicated people in the pulpit teaching and preaching and most are there with a deeply sincere heart to love and tend God's people. But our churches as a whole simply don't model the life and ministry of Christ. Today's churches are businesses with slogans and growth plans that mimic corporate business strategies. We have equated size with success while multitudes in our midst remain untended.

I suggest that there are manifold more pastors in our family than we would have ever believed. From our text we can see that while 'nursing shepherds' is the ministry associated with loving Christ supremely, in many places it's nearly impossible to even get an appointment with the pastor. We've got it wrong in this approach. Gifted oratory and good organization is not necessarily synonymous with spiritual health and growth even if multitudes attend. Someone once said, "A big church is like a battleship and a battleship can do a lot more damage to Satan than a rowboat." That's probably true but that ship will surely sink if it's holey rather than holy.

I humbly urge each of us to consider what Jesus said to Peter and how it may apply to us and to our family in Christ. And may God raise up in our midst many, many more with the gifting and grace to pastor – to feed, to tend and to nurse as He leads.

Meekness and Rest

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Matt.5:5A

A fairly accurate description of the human race might be furnished one unacquainted with it by taking the Beatitudes, turning them wrong side out and saying, 'Here is your human race.' For the exact opposite of the virtues in the Beatitudes are the very qualities which distinguish human life and conduct.

In the world of men we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Instead of poverty of spirit we find the rankest kind of pride; instead of mourners we find pleasure seekers; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear men saying, '*I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing*'; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find men quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command. Of this kind of moral stuff civilized society is composed.

The atmosphere is charged with it; we breathe it with every breath and drink it with our mother's milk. Culture and education refine these things slightly but leave them basically untouched. A whole world of literature has been created to justify this kind of life as the only norm alone. And this is the more to be wondered at seeing that these are the evils which make life the bitter struggle it is for all of us. All

our heartaches and a great many of our physical ills spring directly out of our sins. Pride, arrogance, resentfulness, evil imaginings, malice, greed: these are the sources of more human pain than all the diseases that ever afflicted mortal flesh.

Into a world like this the sound of Jesus' words comes wonderful and strange, a visitation from above. It is well that He spoke, for no one else could have done it as well; and it is good that we listen. His words are the essence of truth. He is not offering an opinion; Jesus never uttered opinions. He never guessed; He knew, and He knows. His words are not as Solomon's were, the sum of sound wisdom or the results of keen observation. He spoke out of the fulness of His Godhead, and His words are very Truth itself. He is the only one who could say 'blessed' with complete authority, for He is the Blessed One come from the world above to confer blessedness upon mankind. And His words were supported by deeds mightier than any performed on this earth by any other man. It is wisdom for us to listen.

As was often so with Jesus, He used this word 'meek' in a brief crisp sentence, and not till some time later did He go on to explain it. In the same book of Matthew He tells us more about it and applies it to our lives. '*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*' (Mat 11:28-30) Here we have

two things standing in contrast to each other, a burden and a rest. The burden is not a local one, peculiar to those first hearers, but one which is borne by the whole human race. It consists not of political oppression or poverty or hard work. It is far deeper than that. It is felt by the rich as well as the poor for it is something from which wealth and idleness can never deliver us.

The burden borne by mankind is a heavy and a crushing thing. The word Jesus used means a load carried or toil borne to the point of exhaustion. Rest is simply release from that burden. It is not something we do, it is what comes to us when we cease to do. His own meekness, that is the rest.

Let us examine our burden. It is altogether an interior one. It attacks the heart and the mind and reaches the body only from within. First, there is the burden of **pride**. The labor of self-love is a heavy one indeed. Think for yourself whether much of your sorrow has not arisen from someone speaking slightly of you. As long as you set yourself up as a little god to which you must be loyal there will be those who will delight to offer affront to your idol. How then can you hope to have inward peace? The heart's fierce effort to protect itself from every slight, to shield its touchy honor from the bad opinion of friend and enemy, will never let the mind have rest. Continue this fight through the years and the burden will become intolerable.

Yet the sons of earth are carrying this burden continually, challenging every word spoken against them,

cringing under every criticism, smarting under each fancied slight, tossing sleepless if another is preferred before them. Such a burden as this is not necessary to bear. Jesus calls us to His rest, and meekness is His method. The meek man cares not at all who is greater than he, for he has long ago decided that the esteem of the world is not worth the effort. He develops toward himself a kindly sense of humor and learns to say, 'Oh, so you have been overlooked? They have placed someone else before you? They have whispered that you are pretty small stuff after all? And now you feel hurt because the world is saying about you the very things you have been saying about yourself? Only yesterday you were telling God that you were nothing, a mere worm of the dust. Where is your consistency? Come on, humble yourself, and cease to care what men think.'

The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He rests perfectly content to allow God to place His own values. He will be patient to wait for the day

when everything will get its own price tag and real worth will come into its own. Then the righteous shall shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father. He is willing to wait for that day.

In the meantime he will have attained a place of soul rest. As he walks on in meekness he will be happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace which meekness brings.

Then also he will get deliverance from the burden of **pretense**. By this I mean not hypocrisy, but the common human desire to put the best foot forward and hide from the world our real inward poverty. For sin has played many evil

tricks upon us, and one has been the infusing into us a false sense of shame. There is hardly a man or woman who dares to be just what he or she is without doctoring up the impression. The fear of being found out gnaws like rodents within their hearts. The man of culture is haunted by the fear that he will some day come upon a man more cultured than himself. The learned man fears to meet a man more learned than he. The rich man sweats under the fear that his clothes or his car or his house will sometime be made to look cheap by comparison with those of another rich man. So-called 'society' runs by

a motivation not higher than this, and the poorer classes on their level are little better.

Let no one smile this off. These burdens are real, and little by little they kill the victims of this evil and unnatural way of life. And the psychology created by years of this



kind of thing makes true meekness seem as unreal as a dream, as aloof as a star. To all the victims of the gnawing disease Jesus says, '*Ye must become as little children.*' For little children do not compare; they receive direct enjoyment from what they have without relating it to something else or someone else. Only as they get older and sin begins to stir within their hearts do jealousy and envy appear. Then they are unable to enjoy what they have if someone else has something larger or better. At that early age does the galling burden come down upon their tender souls, and it never leaves them till Jesus sets them free.

Another source of burden is **artificially**. I am sure that most people live in secret fear that some day they will be careless and by chance an enemy or friend will be allowed to peep into their poor empty souls. So they are never relaxed. Bright people are tense and alert in fear that they may be trapped into saying something common or stupid. Traveled people are afraid that they may meet some Marco Polo who is able to describe some remote place where they have never been.

This unnatural condition is part of our sad heritage of sin, but in our day it is aggravated by our whole way of life. Advertising is largely based upon this habit of pretense. 'Courses' are offered in this or that field of human learning frankly appealing to the victim's desire to shine at a party. Books are sold, clothes and cosmetics are peddled, by playing continually upon this desire to appear what we are not. Artificiality is one curse that will drop away the moment we kneel at Jesus' feet and surrender ourselves to His meekness. Then we will not care what people think of us so long as God is pleased. Then **what we are** will be everything; what we appear will take its place far down the scale of interest for us. Apart from sin we have nothing of which to be ashamed. Only an evil desire to shine makes us want to appear other than we are.

The heart of the world is breaking under this load of pride and pretense. There is no release from our burden apart from the meekness of Christ. Good keen reasoning may

help slightly, but so strong is this vice that if we push it down one place it will come up somewhere else. To men and women everywhere Jesus says, '*Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*' The rest He offers is the rest of meekness, the blessed relief which comes when we accept ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend. It will take some courage at first, but the needed grace will come as we learn that we are sharing this new and easy yoke with the strong Son of God Himself. He calls it 'my yoke,' and He walks at one end while we walk at the other. Lord, make me childlike. Deliver me from the urge to compete with another for place or prestige or position. I would be



By Hans-J Stoffels

simple and artless as a little child. Deliver me from pose and pretense. Forgive me for thinking of myself. Help me to forget myself and find my true peace in beholding Thee. That Thou mayest answer this prayer I humble myself before Thee. Lay upon me Thy easy yoke of self-forgetfulness that through it I may find rest. Amen.

From The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer

Ensnoced and Ecstatic

I've always loved that word – ensnoced. I heard my pastor use it some years ago; ever since then it has been like a mental perennial that seems to blossom year after year in my heart and mind with new beauty. It means to 'shelter or conceal' and as one who longs for the Lord's appearing, for a heavenly home, I long to be ensnoced in the arms of my Savior and doubtless, you do as well.

Yet this wonderful expectation, what the Bible refers to as our 'blessed hope', has been shrouded for all of us in degrees of mystery. In fact, the Thessalonian believers were quite disturbed when they were told in error that Christ had come and they'd been left behind. The apostle Paul addressed this in his letter Second Thessalonians Chapter Two. He wrote:

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter as it from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

And now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming." (2Thes 2:1-8)

As you see, he starts by reminding them concerning two things – the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, and then he says 'Don't be shaken up by others trying to convince you that the "day of Christ" (or more accurately "day of the Lord" - that is, His second coming) already came.'

He then follows with some specifics on a series of events leading up to the Day of the Lord, clarifying their order in sequence. There are four of them we need to understand:

1. A "falling away". The Greek word here is apostasia from which we get our English word 'apostasy'. The Greek word however does not necessarily mean the exact same thing as the English descendant and it has led to some debate concerning this verse. 'Apostasia' is an adjective in the ancient Greek meaning "something seperative" and is a derivative of the word 'aphistemi' meaning "to remove". It is significant to note two things about this word – first, that it is in the feminine form and second, that its object is implied, i.e. it is not explicit in the verse but is understood based upon the context set by the previous verses.

It is used in only one other place in the New Testament – Acts 21:21 where Paul is informed of being accused of teaching believers to 'be separated' from the Law of Moses. In that case, the object is explicit and is the Mosaic Law. It could be that the object linkage in this verse may have influenced our contemporary perspective of the meaning of the word in 2 Thes 2.

Now, other scriptures such as 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3 and 2 Tim 3:13 make it clear that the last days church will face some serious problems from within and without. Thus, it's understandable that this passage could be considered in some aspects to be pointing to the final apostasy – certainly, the church in some areas has grown very weak and compromising. However, the church has experienced several periods of wide spread apostasy throughout its history. As an example, during the Inquisition, the church murdered millions of sincere believers.

And it should be noted that the true church of born anew believers is growing phenomenally under persecution in many parts of the world. So while some parts of the church are indeed becoming apostate, some parts are growing more fervent and fruitful. Arguably, our current apostasy is not yet universal.

So for a number of reasons, I am personally convinced that this passage in 2 Thes does not refer to the apostate church but rather to the rapture of the true church; notice that the implied object that 'apostasia' refers to is the world for the context is clearly given by Paul

in verse one as our gathering together to Christ, not our separating from Him and to faithfully interpret the scripture we must follow the author's line of thought – that's called 'context'.

(It should be noted that good Bible teachers line up on both sides of this – some, like Kenneth Weiss and Dr. E Schuyler English agree that this passage refers to the rapture while others claim it is referring to the apostate church.)

Now recall that the adjective is feminine as you would expect for it refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ separating from the world as He snatches us up to meet Him in the clouds. (See 1 Thes 4:16-18)
2. Chronologically, the event of verse seven in our passage happens at this time also. "He who restrains" is generally acknowledged to be the Holy Spirit and the word for "restrains" literally means "to hold down". Also, "...until He is taken out of the way," is equally translated 'until out of the midst He becomes'.

That is, the Holy Spirit, Who is in all true believers is holding down the lid so to speak on the full expression of evil in the world, but He is taken out of the midst and thus out of the way of the evil one. Now, He cannot be taken out of the midst of the believers or God would be lying when He said, "*Never will I leave you. Never, will I forsake you.*" (Heb 13:5) So clearly, He is taken out of the midst of the world as He presents the church to Christ at the rapture.

Now, I am personally convinced that the Lord's Spirit will still be at work on the planet during the time of

the “lawless one” – i.e. the Tribulation, because it appears that 144,000 Jewish men are sealed or anointed near the beginning of it and huge numbers of people get saved during this time as evidenced in Revelation chapter seven.

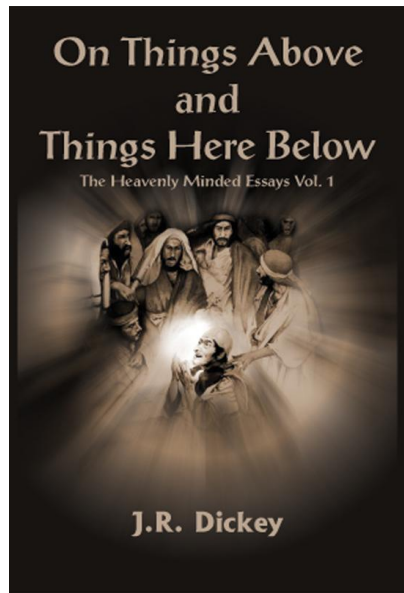
So it could be that as Abraham’s servant brought Rebecca to Isaac in Genesis 24, a beautiful Old Testament picture, so the Heavenly Father’s Holy Spirit will bring us to Christ. Even now, “the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ (Rev 22:17) to our Lord Jesus and to the unsaved. The Holy Spirit and the bride of Christ are inseparable until the bride is safely ensconced and ecstatic in the presence of her Bridegroom.

3. The revealing of the “lawless one”. Next, the “man of sin,” otherwise known to us as the anti-Christ, will be revealed. Thus, it is not right for believers to be looking for him in this present time. He won’t be ‘seen’ until after we are gone. On the contrary, we are repeatedly instructed in scripture to be watching for Jesus. Now, the revealing of the AC will be at the beginning of the seven year long ‘tribulation’ period. Revelation chapters 6 – 19 describe it in some detail.

4. Then comes the “Day of the Lord” – that is, His second coming to earth. This could also refer to a period of time when He pours out His judgment but if so, it still culminates in His second coming. He doesn’t stop at the clouds as with the rapture. This will be the literal, awesome, forceful invasion of the earth and the complete destruction of the rebellious

kingdoms of man. Christ will conquer all who oppose Him, imprison Satan and establish a 1000 year righteous reign over the remnant of sinful man.

The Rapture, Tribulation and the Second Coming or the Day of the Lord is barreling down the tracks toward us and nothing will prevent them. Let’s not get rooted in this world but rather ensconced in ecstasy – His presence.



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I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. John 10:11