

Week 53

Introduction

The “Revelation of Jesus Christ” is the last message from heaven recorded in the scriptures. God gave it to Jesus who sent his angel to deliver it to the apostle John, exiled by the Romans on the island of Patmos, to show his disciples events which were to happen in the earth beginning shortly after the prophecy was received (1:1). The revelation was “signified”, i.e. expressed in signs, so it is necessary to compare scripture with scripture to determine what the symbols mean. Those who study the Bible carefully and have a knowledge of history can readily see that God remarkably revealed beforehand what would happen during the two thousand years from John’s day to the coming of Christ. A blessing is pronounced on those who read this prophecy intelligibly and respond to the instructions therein, and they are also blessed now in being able to see the hand of God at work throughout history and in making themselves ready for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Week 53

Revelation 1

Sunday

John first revealed the prophecy to the disciples in seven churches (“ecclesia” in Greek) in Asia Minor v.4, making known that the message came from Jesus who shed his blood for them, who is the first begotten from the dead, who is exalted to be “Prince [Chief Ruler] of the kings of the earth”, and who will come again and be acknowledged by all the world vs.5-7. John was shown a vision of “the Lord’s day” when Christ will return and raise the dead with a great voice and the sound of a trumpet v.10. John saw the multitudinous Christ in glory, i.e. the body of saints of which Jesus is the head v.14. He will come as the sun of righteousness v.16, united with a multitude of saints whose voice is like many waters, i.e. peoples. The aspect of the body is fearful because it will be a time of judgment – by him who has a two-edged sword and burning feet to trample the wicked vs.15-16.

Jesus will also bring everlasting salvation. He is the one who was dead but is alive for evermore and he comes with the key of hell (the grave) and of death v.18. He will open the grave and release the faithful, then close it again so that they will never return to it. He is a manifestation of God, and they will be also. The LORD declared he is the first and the last (Isa.44:6) and he will manifest himself in Jesus and the saints. Jesus was the first one raised from the dead to the divine nature, and the saints will be the last ones v.17.

At that time Jesus was in heaven but he was fully aware of events on the earth and in the lives of his disciples. He is therefore symbolized as the Son of man walking among the golden candlesticks which represent the ecclesias vs.12,20. It was to seven of these ecclesias that the message was sent, and John was told to write what he saw concerning the state of the disciples at that time as well as of future events to affect both the disciples and the inhabitants of the earth v.19.

Jesus sent a letter to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor, addressing “the angel” v.1 of each congregation, i.e. the elders who possessed the Holy Spirit, and identifying himself by some feature of the vision seen by John in chapter 1, e.g. to Ephesus he is the one holding the seven stars and walking in the midst of the candlesticks v.1 (1:12,16), being in control of the elders and among the congregations. In each letter he reveals his knowledge of their behaviour as his disciples, a true assessment as opposed to the one they might make of themselves, saying: “I know thy works” v.2. He commends the Ephesian disciples for their works, labour and endurance, and for their faithful maintenance of the purity of the Truth by removing apostates from their fellowship vs.2-3. In particular, there were some who claimed to be apostles v.2 but led others away from the Truth, as Paul had prophesied (Acts 20:30), and others who overthrew the faith of many for they were “Nicolaitans”, meaning “vanquishers of the people” v.6. The Ephesians faithfully withdrew fellowship from these disciples according to the apostles’ commandment, and as they were commended by Christ vs.2,6.

However, Jesus had somewhat against them in that the fervour of their first love of the Truth had diminished. He therefore warned them to repent, otherwise the candlestick would be removed, i.e. the congregations would cease to be a repository of the Holy Spirit, and the light of the truth would go out, which is what happened in the end to all these congregations. However, great and glorious promises are made to the faithful. In particular, they will be permitted to eat of the tree of life, an allusion to the garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve were expelled, meaning that they will be enabled to live for ever in the paradise which God will create in the promised land v.7. We should be encouraged by the incentives given to the disciples at the end of each letter, for the promise is not to them alone, but to all those who are willing to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches v.7.

To the congregation in Smyrna, Jesus identifies himself as “the first and the last, which was dead and is alive” v.8 (1:11,18) and commends them for being rich in faith despite being literally poor v.9 (Jas.2:5). He also commends them for rejecting those disciples who in reality denied the true faith and were therefore not of “the Israel of God” (Gal.6:16) though they claimed to be “Jews” in this sense (John 4:22). Claiming to be “Christian” while not being so in reality is labelled “blasphemy” by Jesus. Unfortunately, at the end of the first century disciples departed from the true faith in considerable numbers and formed a religious community they called “Christian” but which Jesus called “the synagogue of Satan” v.9 in contrast to the “Ecclesia of God” 1Cor.10:32.

Jesus warned the disciples in Smyrna that they would shortly suffer severe persecution by “the devil”, the false accusing Roman authority which would throw some of them into prison, but if they were faithful unto death they would receive the crown of life v.10. The promise to them, and to all who listen and obey the Spirit’s teaching, is that they will not be hurt by the second death, i.e. when they are raised from the dead they will never again be consigned to the grave v.11.

The disciples in Pergamos had to face extreme persecution because it was the centre of adversity (the Satan) but they were faithful to Jesus' name, even when faced with death v.13. They also suffered as a result of apostate brethren in the congregation who introduced false doctrine v.15. There was also another class of false brethren who lorded it over the disciples for "filthy lucre" (1Pet.5:2) like Balaam v.14 (2Pet.2:15) and soon these men, who used Christianity as a source of money, took control of the churches. The absolute wealth of the churches throughout Europe and the opulent "living" of the clergy give testimony to this. Jesus declared he would fight against those who would not repent v.16, but those who overcame and remained faithful could look forward to honourable exaltation. This is symbolised in two ways v.17: firstly, by the manna hidden in the ark of the testimony which never corrupted (Ex.16:32-34) to represent eternal life; and, secondly, the white pebble given to victors in the Roman Games which meant they would live and not die.

Jesus also acknowledged the works, love, faith, and endurance of the disciples in Thyatira but warned them of apostates who had to be avoided. These are represented by Jezebel vs.20-24 and a consideration of this historical queen (1Kgs.16:31) teaches us the character of these people who called themselves "Christians" but revelled in seduction, fornication, adultery and false teaching, producing disciples who are called "the children of Jezebel" whose end is death. The doctrines of these adversaries of the truth are very deep v.24 and true disciples need to keep close to the word of God to remain unaffected by the error (2Cor.11:3). Those who remain faithful, however, and hold fast until Christ comes v.25, will reign with him over the nations vs.26-27.

Week 53

Revelation 3

Tuesday

Only a few in Sardis remained faithful, the majority having a name to live but were dead vs.1-2, and these few were exhorted to be watchful because Christ could return at any time v.3. The saints are depicted clothed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is their righteousness (Rev.19:8). Therefore Jesus exhorts his disciples to keep their garments clean, in the sense of being holy, so that they can be counted worthy to walk with him in white in the future v.4. Those who attain to this honour have their names in the book of life. Names are written therein at baptism and, while they can be removed because of disobedience, if our names are in the book at Christ's return we will be given life and Jesus will honour us before his Father and his angels v.5 (Mat.10:32; Luk.12:8).

Jesus has the key of David v.7 (Isa.22:22) and he will sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem and reign over Israel when he will have great power, including that over death and the grave. He will be able to open the grave and bring anyone out, never to return to it. Jesus presented another kind of door to his disciples in Philadelphia, the door of opportunity v.8, and if they kept his word and confessed his name they would be greatly honoured in the future. False Christians, who through the centuries have persecuted the true disciples, will then be made to acknowledge the faithful v.9. A time of severe trial was about to come upon the world v.10 but the disciples were encouraged and exhorted

to hold fast to the truth, taking care that no-one took their crown or diverted them from the one true faith v.11. The faithful will, at the return of Christ, become permanent and eternal members of God's house and family v.12.

Jesus is the beginning of the new creation of God v.14, being the first begotten from the dead. He rebuked the disciples in Laodicea for being lukewarm towards the truth v.15 and warned them he would, as it were, spue them out of his mouth v.16. This church, like many others later, became opulent, self-satisfied and self-righteous, when in reality and in the eyes of Jesus, they were spiritually wretched, poor, blind and naked. The antidote to this state was that which could be bought without money (Isa.55), the word of God providing a golden faith, spiritual enlightenment, and holiness v.18. The message is to all who will listen to the Spirit's word in the scriptures v.22 and we are wise if we knock on the door of opportunity that Christ has set before us. If we respond correctly, and live faithful and righteous lives, Jesus will dwell with us for ever v.20. He will also invite us to sit with him in his throne, which is the throne of the LORD v.21, and reign with him in Jerusalem for a thousand years (Rev.20:6).

The seven letters, though addressed to seven specific ecclesias, are directed to any who will listen attentively to the messages. They promise us a glorious future so we should examine our own selves in the light of the description of the disciples in these seven churches and respond favourably to the warnings and exhortations of Jesus. In particular, we should learn and remain faithful to God's Truth revealed in his word, keep separate from those who deny the faith, even if they claim to be Christians, and do righteousness by determinedly obeying the commandments of Christ.

Week 53

Revelation 4 and 5

Wednesday

In these two chapters John describes the vision he had of Jesus and the saints in future glory. He was called to this scene by a trumpet sound v.1, just as the saints will be awakened from the dead by a trumpet call (1Cor.15:52), with the faithful invited to enter the political heavens to reign with Christ v.1. Immediately John was in spirit v.2, representative of all those who will be changed to Spirit nature. He saw Jesus upon his throne and it is significant that the aura around him was like a jasper and a sardine stone v.3 because the first of these is sky blue, or heavenly, while the second is flesh coloured, so that these two together represent the divine and human aspects of Christ. The saints are represented by twenty four elders to show that they will be priests as well as kings 1:6, for David organised the priesthood into twenty four orders (1Chr.24:1-19), and they are dressed in white raiment, representing their righteousness, and crowned with gold, representing their faith v.4. The saints are also the Israel of God which is consistently represented in the scriptures by four living creatures v.6 with four faces v.7 which are those of the cherubim upon the mercyseat of the ark of the covenant, the four standards of the camp of Israel, and the four aspects of Jesus presented in the Gospels. When Jesus and the saints reign, instead of the nations being in turmoil as "the sea and waves roaring" Luk.21:25, they will be at peace and like "a sea of glass"

v.6. Jesus will then be a manifestation of God in the earth and all the saints will honour him vs.8-11.

John then observed a scroll full of writing and sealed with seven seals but no-one was worthy to open it, causing John to weep 5:1-5. This scroll contained information about events in the earth from that time until far into the future, showing the outworking of God's purpose. Daniel saw similar visions and enquired: "O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" and was told that "the words were closed up and sealed till the time of the end" Dan.12:8-9. The end of the Mosaicera had arrived and the book was to be opened by the only one worthy to do so, the Lord Jesus Christ vs.5-8 bringing great joy to the saints who sang a new song to him: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" vs.9-10. The confident hope of the true disciples of Christ,

founded on the promises of God, is to reign with him on the earth. It is not to go to heaven, or any other imagined idyll, but to be with Jesus in the Kingdom of God in the land of Israel. When Jesus returns and the dead are raised, he will be acclaimed by multitudes of saints and ten thousand times ten thousand angels vs.11-12, and all people of the earth will bless the Lord God and his Son Jesus v.13 who will reign on his Father's throne for ever.

Week 53

Revelation 19

Thursday

The early church was soon corrupted and two communities calling themselves "Christian" emerged, one represented by a whore who had defiled herself in adultery and the other by a virgin. This imagery is used throughout the Book of Revelation, which symbolises the history of Europe through the last 1900 years, with the whore gaining the ascendancy and persecuting the saints. But the righteous judgments of God will come upon this unfaithful community vs.1-3 to the rejoicing of the resurrected saints, many of whom were tortured and murdered by this apostasy. At that time of judgment upon the nations, the saints will rejoice because the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife, the virgin community which has remained faithful and pure, has made herself ready vs.5-7. They will be clothed with righteousness v.8, and the truly blessed will be those who are called to this marriage supper of the Lamb v.9.

John also saw in vision the judgments of God executed by the Lord Jesus upon his enemies vs.11-21. The events do not take place in the literal heaven v.11 but in the political heavens, and Jesus will fight against the nations who oppose him and be established in the earth as KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS vs.15-16. The rulers of many nations will make war against Christ v.19 because they will not want to lose their power and position, but they will all be defeated. We may wonder what will motivate these nations and their rulers to go to war against Christ after he has defeated the armies of Russia and her allies, saved Israel, and proclaimed himself king of Israel and ruler of the world to bring righteousness, peace, and blessing to mankind (Rev.17:14). The explanation is

in the doctrine of many Christian denominations. They teach that a supernatural “Devil and Satan” will come to the promised land and make a treaty with Israel and that it will be this evil being who defeats the invaders. They will tell their congregations that the great power in Israel is “the Antichrist” and that they should join together to fight him, which many will do fatally. It will be a great test for the people of the earth, but not to Christ’s true disciples because they will already be with him. The gospel will again be proclaimed throughout the earth and men and women will need to choose whether to obey Christ or oppose him. Those who survive this “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation” (Dan.12:1) will live as mortal individuals during the reign of Christ and have the opportunity to obtain eternal life to be given at the end of his thousand year reign.

Week 53

Revelation 20 and 21

Friday

Chapter 20 describes, symbolically, how Sin will be restrained during the Millennium vs.1-3 and how, after the saints have reigned with Christ a thousand years vs.4-6, it will again influence the nations to rebel against him vs.7-8. This will bring the final

crisis to end with the second resurrection and judgment vs.9-14. Eternal life will given to the faithful so that everyone then remaining alive will be immortal, with death and the grave completely destroyed v.15. There will then be “a new heaven and earth” but with no more sea 21:1 because this symbolises the mortal population of the earth of which there will then be none. Verse 2 commences a new vision of the events at the beginning of the Millennium when the saints are manifested as both the bride of Christ and the new Jerusalem. God will dwell with them v.3 and remove all sorrow and mourning because none of them will ever experience death again v.4. The LORD will make all things new v.5, therefore he commands John to write his words down for the benefit of all who read. God’s words are faithful and true and we should take heed of them because they promise everlasting life v.6. If we overcome ourselves and do righteousness we shall inherit all the things God has promised and be his son or daughter eternally by becoming a partaker of the divine nature v.7, otherwise we shall suffer the second death which is oblivion for ever v.8.

The saints as a body are the bride of Christ v.9 and when John was shown her he saw, in fact, a new city of Jerusalem vs.10-27. This is a symbolic city, the features of which represent important characteristics of the saints in the future age. It is heavenly vs.10-11, Israelitish in composition vs.12-13, and founded upon the teaching of the apostles of Jesus Christ v.14. Its measurements and composition are perfect, being a cube of purest gold vs.15-18 founded upon twelve precious stones vs.19-20 and with twelve gates of pearl v.21. This presents to our mind’s eye a glorious prospect with so many features highlighting the purpose of God with Israel and the development of a faithful community by the teaching of the apostles. This immortal community will not require a temple because the need for priesthood and sacrifice will have been removed by Christ v.22, and they will not need the sun and moon for light, either naturally or spiritually, for they will all be enlightened by the Lord Jesus

and his Father v.23. This community of saints will also enlighten the nations, who will bring their glory and honour to it vs.24-25. This is a glorious prospect and we are wise if we take our opportunity now to do righteousness so that we are not excluded from this marvellous future but are invited to enter the city because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life v.27.

Week 53

Revelation 22

Saturday

In the beginning God placed our first parents in a paradise. That was lost, but the LORD has promised to restore it in a more glorious condition. The curse of sin and death will be removed v.3 and not only will the land flourish with an abundance of trees but the saints themselves will be trees of righteousness for the healing of the nations v.2. They will be immortal and able to see the Son of God in glory because they will be of the same divine nature v.4, and they will reign with him for ever and ever v.5. This message is true because it is the word of God, and the same LORD who sent prophets to Israel sent an angel to John to show his servants what must come to pass v.6.

This glorious future will be inaugurated when the Lord Jesus returns, and he will come "quickly", i.e. suddenly v.7. When this happens there will be no more opportunity to accept God's marvellous invitation and do what Jesus commands. The unjust will remain unjust and the righteous will remain righteous v.11, and Jesus will come to reward everyone according to his work v.12. Blessed are they

who do Christ's commandments v.14 for they will be included in, not excluded from, the redeemed community vs.14-15. God has sent his message, and the invitation to all is to "Come" and "drink of the water of life", i.e. to intake the word of God, and the invitation is free to anyone who wants the glorious rewards he offers.

Jesus has declared plainly he will come quickly v.20, and all the faithful look forward to this earnestly for they love his appearing, and they exclaim with the apostle John: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus".

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GOD’S TRUTH REVEALED IN THE BIBLE

There is one true and living God, the creator and sustainer of the Universe who, in the Bible, reveals the truth concerning himself and his purpose with mankind.

The purpose of God

The ultimate purpose of God is to populate the Earth with righteous men and women who will live for ever. This will be achieved: firstly, by the development of righteous people; and, secondly, by the change of their nature to immortality and incorruptibility. This purpose will be completed at the end of seven thousand years, and the Bible is mainly about God’s dealings with mankind over this period. God also has an ulterior purpose by which, after six thousand years of human government, the world will be ruled in righteousness by his son Jesus Christ for one thousand years, and during the past six thousand years God has been inviting men and women to inherit this glorious future. This is the Gospel, or good news, taught throughout the Bible.

A Saviour promised from the beginning

The first chapters of the Bible describe how God by his Spirit, his power, transformed the Earth from an empty shapeless world, completely covered with water and enveloped in darkness, into a flourishing planet teeming with life. The first man and woman, enjoying life in a paradise, were given the opportunity to develop righteousness, defined as obedience to God’s commandments, but they disobeyed despite being warned that the consequence of their sin would be death, i.e. unconsciousness and dissolution in the grave. Not only did they therefore die, but were responsible for introducing sin and death into the world. Sin is revealed in the Bible as the great enemy of mankind. All of us sin and are worthy of death, but God has a plan to save a great many individuals. Indeed, immediately after this first transgression it was revealed that salvation would be achieved through “a seed of the woman”. This turned out, four thousand years later, to be Jesus the son of a virgin, Mary.

God’s promise to Abraham and Christ

The Old Testament scriptures inform us of God’s dealings with mankind during those four thousand years and, in particular, about men and women who believed God’s promises and obeyed his commandments. These individuals are set forth as examples for us to follow so that we, with them, might in the end inherit eternal life. Foremost among these faithful men was Abraham to whom God made specific promises and who, because of his faith and works, was counted by God to be a righteous man.

When he was told to leave his own country and go to a land which God would show him, he obeyed. He journeyed to Canaan (Israel and Lebanon today) where God promised that he and his seed would inherit that land for ever and that in him and in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. The promised seed again turned

out to be Jesus, as the New Testament declares with the added assurance that if we are Christ's then are we Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise!

The kingdom of God

Abraham's natural descendants in the line of Jacob, his grandson renamed *Israel*, became God's chosen people whom he formed into a kingdom and a holy nation. Some four hundred years after Abraham's day his descendants were delivered from slavery in Egypt and brought into the promised land, and the kingdom of God was established: its people were God's people; its territory was the Holy Land which God calls his land; its rulers were judges appointed by God; its laws were God's laws; and its king was God himself.

This kingdom was a theocracy in which the people were blessed if they obeyed God's laws but punished if they disobeyed but, finally, because of wickedness and idolatry, they were removed out of the land and scattered throughout the world. Nevertheless the promise of God remains that all Israel will be regathered into the promised land and the kingdom of God will be re-established. During the existence of God's kingdom in the past the people of Israel had the opportunity to show the faith and do the works of Abraham, be counted righteous like him, and ultimately with him inherit eternal life.

God's promises to David and Christ

Notable among the faithful was king David, a man after God's own heart, who sat upon the throne of the LORD over Israel. God also made specific promises to him by which his seed would sit upon his throne and rule over the his kingdom for ever. Again, this is Jesus, as the angel said to his mother Mary before his birth: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob (Israel) for ever". Therefore Jesus was given the title *Christ* (Anointed One) because he was anointed, as was David, to sit upon the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem.

Jesus our Saviour from sin and death

He was also named *Jesus*, meaning "Saviour", because he would save his people from their sins. The Old Testament, all written before his birth, is full of information about him, not only that as the great king he would restore the kingdom of God to Israel and bless the nations of the earth, but also that he would save men from sin and death. We all sin and consequently die, because "the wages of sin is death", but God gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The Bible reveals God's plan to gain the victory over sin and death. God himself would raise up a

man with our sinful nature, to be tempted in all points as we are, yet who would never sin during his whole life. This was achieved by producing a child, not by the will of man in the natural way, but by the power of God acting on a woman to produce a child who would be, not only a son of man, but also a son of God. Such a person would have the strength of mind to overcome our sinful nature and live a perfect life and, being personally innocent of transgression, could in justice be allowed to live for ever. Jesus therefore, after living a sinless life, was executed in a public declaration of God's righteousness; was laid in the grave; and, after three days, was raised from the dead and his body changed to immortality. Jesus is the "firstborn from the dead" who after his resurrection went to heaven to be our intercessor at God's right hand until the day appointed for him to return to the earth to rule the world in righteousness. At his coming many others will be brought from the dead and have their bodies changed into immortality and incorruptibility so they too can live for ever.

The marvellous opportunity

The long period of Christ's absence is a time of opportunity for men and women to take advantage of the salvation provided by his life, death, and resurrection. God declares he will count us righteous and give us eternal life if we carry out his simple instructions. These are: believe his promises; voluntarily end our lives by "dying" to our old sinful nature; be buried in the waters of baptism; and be born again to newness of life in which we serve God and do righteousness. Physically, we remain the same people but God reckons we are no longer "in Adam" and thereby related to sin and death, but "in Christ" and related to righteousness and life. His promise is that when Jesus returns to the earth all those "in Christ" will be raised from the dead and given eternal life. Jesus will judge the living and the dead at his coming. Those rejected will return to the grave, experiencing the second death. Those accepted will have their bodies changed, putting on incorruptibility and immortality to become partakers of the divine nature, and they will then live and reign with Christ for a thousand years, and never die.

For two thousand years the Gospel taught by Jesus and his apostles, the good news of the kingdom of God and the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ, has been disseminated throughout the world, beginning with the commission Jesus gave his apostles: "Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Many, throughout the generations during the last two thousand years, have responded faithfully to Christ's invitation, and we too may follow their example, although the signs of the times in the Scriptures indicate that the time of opportunity is fast running out. These signs, particularly of events in Russia and in Israel which will result in a Russian invasion of Israel, indicate that the moment of God's open intervention in world affairs is close at hand.

The glorious future

Those who embrace God's truth have a glorious hope for the future. They can look forward to the early return of Christ to the earth, to change of nature into immortality, and to working with Christ in saving and blessing the peoples of the earth when there will be "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". The prayer will then be answered for those who have prayed the prayer Jesus taught: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven". God will re-establish his kingdom in the land of Israel as it was in the days of David but with Jesus as his king. Jesus will reign in Jerusalem over God's people of Israel who will be the citizens of his kingdom and over all other people who will be the subjects of his empire. Those who have been raised from the dead and made immortal will live and

reign with Christ for a thousand years, helping him establish and maintain righteousness and peace throughout the earth. The word and the law of God will go forth from Jerusalem for the obedience of all nations and the whole earth will be covered with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

At the end of the Millennium there will be another resurrection and judgment of those who have lived during Christ's rule, and the righteous among them will be given eternal life. Christ will destroy the last enemy, which is death, and God's purpose will be achieved: everyone living on the earth will be immortal. Christ will then deliver the kingdom to his father and God will be all and in all.

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