

Resurrected to Life

**An exhortation to set our eyes,
our minds and our hearts
on the Kingdom of God.**

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Sermon Overview:

Session 1 – An Overview

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NOTE (June 2006):

Since writing and presenting this series of lectures on Heaven some 5 years ago, I have come to see that I had made some significant errors regarding our status and location after death. I have also now read Randy Alcorn's new book 'Heaven', as well as Anthony Buzzard's 'The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah' and 'Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven'.

While there are some very significant disagreements in theology between Buzzard and Alcorn, I personally believe that these three books taken together and extracting the truth revealed from them gives the best overview of the future reality for those who have the faith of Jesus.

Buzzard best illustrates the focus of the message of the Messiah on the future Kingdom of God, as well as the true Hebraic and Biblical understanding of life after death. Alcorn presents the most comprehensive analysis of what life will be like in the future Kingdom of God.

What is presented here is a very brief summary of Alcorn's biblical analysis of life in the Coming Age.

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Session 1: Overview:

All of us have our likes and dislikes, our own passions and desires of our hearts. God has, in recent times, given me a much greater passion for the Coming Age after the return of Messiah Jesus and a desire to share its wonder with my brothers and sisters. I wish to uplift and encourage you today as I have been so uplifted and encouraged by my deeper knowledge of our future time in the Kingdom of God and by setting my mind on that place.

I believe we are all, both believers and non-believers to a large degree, strangers in this age. We all seek and thirst for the pure water that is provided by our Heavenly Father through a person and a place. Jesus is that person and the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God) is that place.

Like 'Big Kev' [Big Kev is an Australian maker and seller of cleaning products who used to advertise on TV and talk of his products – his most well-known line was "I'm excited"] "I'm excited!" – except that I'm excited about something a lot more significant than cleaning products!

For Christians, *life in the Coming Age, in the Kingdom of God*¹ is our true home. Paul said, "As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" ([2 Corinthians 5:6-8](#)).

In [John 14](#) Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also." Do you realize what a great compliment he pays us?! *He wants to be with us!*

Think about it. The Carpenter from Nazareth has gone to prepare a place for us!

When we get married and are due to have our first child, we prepare a place for her/him, fussing over wall paper and the cot and toys, etc.. The quality of the place limited only by the skills and resourcefulness of the parent. What kind of place will He have prepared for us?!

How keen are you to see the place He has prepared for you? Are you prepared to depart this world today? Are you ready for the return of our Lord Jesus tonight?

If a brother or sister in Christ is dying, we do what can be reasonably done medically, we never withhold essential care, we certainly never assist in suicide, but neither do we wish them to desperately cling to this life as if it were all there is.

Imagine a homeless street kid offered ownership of a huge mansion. He might cling to his boxes and garbage cans in a back alley--he just doesn't know better.

Jesus says, "Come blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Tailor made for us, to fulfill our God-given dreams and desires, to be our eternal home.

Home is acceptance, security, rest, refuge, deep personal relationships, great memories. Home is where your treasure is. If the Coming Age of eternity is your home, then your mind and heart and treasure will be there.

Perhaps that answers the question of why the Kingdom of God means much less to us than the saints of God throughout the ages. We have tried to build our ultimate home on earth. We have become citizens of this world. Our hopes rise and fall with this world, rather than being centered on the next.

The question is, do you think and live as if this world, or the next world, was your home? Is your mind on this present age or on the Kingdom of God?

¹ I have sometimes used the term 'heaven' meaning the 'new heavens' rather than the more biblical 'Kingdom of God' for simplicity and clarity.

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Some quotes of well-known Christian writers:

John Tillotson: "He who provides for this life but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment but a fool forever."

Martin Luther: "There are two days on my calendar-'Today' and 'That Day.'"

Matthew Henry: "It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day."

C. S. Lewis: "If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

The Bible teaches that for Christians, our home is with Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:8](#)). When he sets up the Kingdom of God we will be with him.

When we are resurrected to life in the Coming Age, the Kingdom of God will immediately feel like home because we'll instinctively connect it to all we longed for and occasionally caught magical glimpses of in this age.

Let me look back and tell you a little about when we first migrated to Queensland. It was Jan 5th 1989, we had hired a car at Brisbane Airport, staked it full of suitcases and 4 children and drove out to Kooralbyn. As we turned off the Mt Lindsay Highway my wife looked at the hills and trees and the brown, yellow and green and felt she was arriving home. She sensed that this was where her heart longed to be – a place of serenity, beauty, security and peace. Perhaps, her sense of arrival and 'home-coming' was a taste of what we will experience on 'That Day'.

But in the Kingdom of God we won't just look back; we'll look forward to and anticipate all that's ahead of us there. The longer we're in the Kingdom of God, the more memories we'll make and the more our home in this Coming Age will be...home. It won't lose its homeyness-it will always gain more.

May God give us the grace to live now with the perspective that will be ours one moment after we die.

There's an old saying, "those who are Heavenly minded are of no earthly good." Yet in [Colossians 3:1](#) Scripture commands us to set our minds on Heaven, where Christ is.

C.S. Lewis said "It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."

When we are properly Heavenly minded we will be of maximum Heavenly and earthly good. But when we are earthly minded we will ultimately bring no good to heaven or earth. A.W. Tozer used to say, "We do well to think of the long tomorrow."

How do we know what Kingdom of God is like?

Well, in the last number of years there have been lots of testimonies about personal OBEs, "out of body experiences." Some of these may be real visions of the Coming Age but I would argue that none of them are true.

For in some cases a non-Christian is met by a being of light who gives him reassurance and welcomes him to paradise.

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This is directly contrary to Word of God. Especially significant since Scripture specifically says Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (The writer of bestseller *Embraced by the Light* is a Mormon with some very unbiblical theology.)

Many of these testimonies or books are unbiblical and misleading, full of false doctrine. They imply that those who don't know Christ will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God, contrary to [John 14:6](#), [Acts 4:12](#), and many other passages. Just because someone thinks he saw Jesus or an angel in a near-death experience doesn't mean it's true. Scripture warns us that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)).

Some of these stories are however most uplifting and may be true. I read *Vanya* by Myrna Grant many years ago. Vanya (a young persecuted Russian Baptist soldier) describes how he was bodily lifted from his barrack bed and taken to heaven. His description seems to some degree believable and his life story is certainly most amazing.

However, Roberts Liardon's book "I saw Heaven" (when he was 8) is a bit hard to swallow and his theology is in error. (see Christian Witness Ministry CD – available from www.christian-witness.org).

[He is now a prosperity preacher – that is a theology that basically argues we are in Kingdom of God now and virtually denies the return of Christ – see my articles on Amillennialism]

Ultimately our only totally dependable authority is the Word of God.

We know Kingdom of God will be indescribably beautiful and wonderful. Think of snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef. It is absolutely breathtaking. The thousands of fish of every shape and size and colour, and just when you think you've seen the most beautiful creation here comes another one. It's endless. Why should we expect the Coming Age to be so incredible. Simply imagine all the best this world currently has to offer and imagine this beauty without the corroding influence of sin and evil.

What is the Kingdom of God?

Simply the Garden of Eden revisited but with one significant difference. No possibility of sinning and being cast out again. The last Adam, the Messiah Jesus has provided the way to restore the intimate relationship with God that the first Adam lost.

God Almighty is calling people to have the same faith that Jesus has, so that they may (in the future) enter into the Coming Age, the Kingdom of God on a renewed, redeemed earth. The lives we lead now through having the faith of Jesus may give us entry into this Kingdom - Jesus is preparing a place for his brothers and sisters (those who hear God's word and do it – Luke 8:21) in the future Coming Age.

Anthony Buzzard explains this well:

"The Gospel as Jesus preached it invites you also to dedicate the rest of your life to preparation for participation in the supervision of that future Kingdom on a renewed Earth. You are invited to be a co-heir of the Kingdom with the Messiah. In short, the Jesus of history, the original "theocrat", continues his work of recruiting members of his royal household, the theocratic party, who are urged to prepare themselves with divine help to take part in the Messiah's government of the future. This will be the first and only administration to rule the world successfully." (from *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* p7).

The 'new Jerusalem' is a city whose builder and maker is God. A city by definition consists of residences. People live together. No isolation.

The area of the 'new Jerusalem' we are told in Revelation is roughly equivalent to Australia's land mass!

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The base is 5.76 million square kms (Australia is approx. 6.4 million sq kms —so the 'new Jerusalem' is about 90%!! of the land mass of Australia). A city 2400 kms high--780,000 stories! (If not literal, why exact measurement?!).

It would seem obvious that with the existing laws of Physics you cannot build a city that many stories high. But of course God is not limited by the laws he put in place and may well create new laws for the future Kingdom of God.

City will have walls, gates, streets. Three gates on each side, 12 gates total. Access from all over new earth.

No down payment, closing costs, mortgage payments, property tax, electricity & gas bills.

And if you think you'd never like the city, it's because you're thinking of current earthly cities, with litter and dirt and crime. The 'new Jerusalem' city will have all the freshness and vitality and openness of the country with all the vibrancy and interdependence and relationships of a city. And there will be no racial divisions between people.

Water. No seas to separate people of earth but fresh water--a great river, flowing not stagnant.

Trees. Tree of life, bears twelve fruits, leaves for healing, palm trees (palm branches). Vegetation--garden. Why not? Eden was a garden.

Thrones. Clothes. Precious stones and materials. Streets of gold--most costly materials of earth are common in Kingdom of God.

Animals--certainly not incompatible with Paradise. Eden was full of them! Revelation talks of several angels riding out on horses. Elijah--chariots and horses of fire come to and from Heaven. Elisha--God sent horses and chariots and warriors from Heaven.

Light. No secondary sources. No generators and power lines, even the sun is not necessary for illumination. Illumination right from God himself--the lamb is the lamp. There may be no night – certainly, not in the figurative sense of darkness being an absence of love and a presence of evil. Physically, it could mean a variation in brightness; maybe a gentle suffused light.

But what will we do in the Kingdom of God?

We won't float around and play harps and fold our wings. In fact, we won't have wings--not even all the angels are said to have wings, and people are never said to.

And Saint Peter isn't manning the gate either!

We will eat food, and have banquets. Christ promised that we would eat and drink at table with him; plus come from all over to sit at the table with Abraham and patriarchs. We will feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

When Christ was on earth in his resurrection body, he ate fish. There was clearly no need for him to so it would appear that he did so to further demonstrate that physical nature of his resurrection body and for the pleasure we get from the taste and sensations of food.

There will be an endless supply of water and food. No famine or drought. No food poisoning, no indigestion, no high or low blood sugars.

Eating is not just to eat--the table is the center of conversation and fellowship. We will meet and converse with other inhabitants of the Kingdom of God. God tells us we'll fellowship with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. We'll meet David and Ruth and Esther and John the Baptist and Mary and Peter. We can look

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forward to meeting and feasting with such people as Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Charles Spurgeon, A. W. Tozer, and Keith Green!

The angels are rational communicative beings--we will no doubt converse with them. The guardian angel concept is biblical. Because they are "ministering spirits" who serve us, we will no doubt get to know those that ministered to us and protected us during our years on earth. The Bible says some we have extended hospitality to are angels. **Luke 16** speaks of being welcomed into eternal dwelling places by those we've ministered to on earth.

We will serve Christ in the kingdom. We are called joint heirs with Christ. We will own property, residences in the Kingdom of God. We will enjoy those treasures that we have laid up for ourselves in Heaven while on earth in this present age.

Revelation 22:5 says we will reign with Christ over the earth. **Luke 19** tells us those who have been faithful in this life will be placed in authority, some over one city, some five, some ten. **1 Corinthians 6** tells us we will judge or rule over angels.

How else will we serve Christ besides ruling? Well, we will be creative and exercise abilities--all will sing and some will play instruments. (Harp and trumpet mentioned, but no doubt many other instruments too.)

We will no doubt compose, write, paint, carve, build. We will exercise our God-given gifts, and continue to develop and perfect our talents.

We will worship in the Kingdom of God. See **Revelation 5 and 15 and 19**. We will join with those of every tribe and nation and tongue in singing praise to the Lamb. We will become lost in our worship, even more than we can imagine now. Twice in Rev. 5 it says the living creatures and "the elders fell down in worship." Overcome with emotion.

Revelation 4 tells us of four living creatures, covered with eyes, one that looks like a lion, one an ox, one a man and one an eagle. They each have six wings, and "day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

I grew up next to the ocean (Carters Beach, South Island, New Zealand) --the constant reassuring comforting sound of the tide, the waves, forms a backdrop. Always there – day & night.

In the Kingdom of God, wherever we travel in the holy city or beyond, perhaps to the far corner of the universe, the backdrop sound will be this--day and night the chant of the four living creatures who never, even for a moment stop speaking the praise of God.

There will be no church buildings in the Kingdom of God. We will need no props to worship him. God Almighty will be the focus of all. Worship will be unaffected, without pretense, and without distraction.

We will lose ourselves in worship of God the Father and His only begotten Son, and before we turn to the duties at hand we may suddenly realize that we were so caught up in worship that we have spent the last hundred years gazing upon our Father and the Lamb!

We will worship God in singing. In Revelation 5 we are told of a choir of angels of ten thousand times ten thousand--that's a hundred million. And then we are told that the whole rest of creation joins these 100 million. The 100 million are merely a little ensemble up front. Can you imagine the power of the song? If hearing the Hallelujah chorus or Shout to the Lord moves us on earth, what will this be like?

The Kingdom of God will be dynamic, not static. We will learn, and progress in knowledge. When **1 Corinthians 13** says we will know in full, it's in contrast to seeing through a dark glass. We will know accurately. But we will not be all-knowing. Only God is that, and we will never be God. **Ephesians 2:6-7**: " .

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. . in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace . . ." A continual learning more about God, who can never exhausted.

And while theology will be our main subject (not the dry subject many may imagine when this word is uttered but the study of our amazing God!), I imagine we will learn of other things as well, perhaps in studying the wonders of a new universe that will declare his glory even better than this one. I would love to explore the universe, to discover and learn about the new and different. Why not? Who has placed in us the thirst for knowledge and understanding and beauty? Our Creator. And because he is a Creator he will go right on creating.

There will be travel, people will go from one place to another. Gates never shut. Our means of travel may be interesting--we are told we will be like Jesus and that his resurrection body is the prototype of ours. He walked through walls with his resurrection body. Perhaps we will have the option of walking, or traveling at the speed of light, or even the speed of thought.

Will we remember the past, what happened on earth before the return of Jesus and our bodily resurrection? Well, we know that in the Holy City, the 'new Jerusalem', there will be memorials to the twelve tribes and to the apostles. Remembrance is something very important to God. We will sing of Christ's redemption, his space and time history and death on our behalf. Christ's resurrection body bore the nail scars--this itself reminds us of redemption.

Some people take a verse in Isaiah ([Isa 65: 17-19](#)) out of context and conclude we won't remember our earthly lives. Of course, the pain of the past will be gone. But memories of the walk with Christ and the most intimate times with family and friends will surely not be. For what is worth remembering, our memories will be sharper, not duller.

Will we know our loved ones in the Kingdom of God? Of course. We'll know even those we *didn't* know on earth. Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah in the vision that was the transfiguration. They had died 900 years earlier and nobody had a picture. Christ's resurrection body resembled him--the disciples had a hard time recognizing him at first, but they thought he was still dead!

Those of us who long for justice, justice for the racially oppressed, for the politically persecuted, for the unborn children need to remind ourselves not to give up hope, not to become embittered. The Kingdom of God will bring great relief to the suffering, the hungry, the hurting. No crying, no pain, no sorrow, no more death. No hospitals, cemeteries. No sin.

God is watching. He's keeping track. In the future Kingdom of God he'll reward us for our acts of faithfulness to him, right down to every cup of cold water we've given to the needy in his name ([Mark 9:41](#)).

Pro-life work is often like this in that it often doesn't have obvious or immediate fruit. Those who spend their lives reaching out to Muslims and in other "low fruit" ministries should remember God says, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful," not successful ([1 Corinthians 4:2](#), KJV). Of course, we want to be successful, but we can't control the results. Those we must leave to God, reminding ourselves that one day we'll learn of eternal results we never saw in this present age. (Just as some of us may learn in the Kingdom of God that our present ministries weren't as successful as everyone thought.)

There is a fascinating contrast in the first three and the last three chapters of the Bible. In both we see the tree of life, a river, a bride and a bridegroom. In Genesis paradise is lost, in Revelation paradise regained. In Genesis Satan wins his first victory, in Revelation his final defeat. In Genesis God hides his face from sinful man, in Revelation "we shall see his face."

In Genesis the curse is pronounced, in Revelation it is removed. In Genesis the gates are shut, in Revelation the gates are open. In Genesis death first comes, in Revelation death is finally destroyed. And it is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, who is given full credit for all this.

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"God himself (personal) will wipe away every tear." No evil. No fear. No abuse, rape, murder, drugs, drunkenness, no bombs or guns. Walk streets at night. No miscommunication or fear of misunderstanding. And total intimacy with Christ and with God Almighty. We are told that he will give each of us a new name. A personal name that will mean much to us and to him.

The Kingdom of God will be deeply appreciated by the handicapped who will not be handicapped any longer. Think of those who can't walk and run and hear. Think of those blind from birth who will see for the first time. The hymn writer Fanny Crosby said, **"Do not pity me for my blindness, for the first face I ever see will be the face of my Lord Jesus."**

And think what the Kingdom of God will mean to the mentally handicapped, who will wake up in the Kingdom of God to great powers of understanding and learning. Who will be as free in their minds as those who were crippled on earth will be free in their bodies.

There will be marvelous diversity. Our God is a God of diversity and different-ness. Look around you. Look at your family. Look at the world. Look through a microscope or telescope. In Revelation 5 & 7 we see people of every tribe and nation and tongue worshipping God and the Lamb. This is true diversity. Some of what is called diversity today is perversity. But diversity under Lordship is a beautiful thing.

There will be great joy in the Kingdom of God. "In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures forever more. – Ps 16:11" **Of course, the greatest joy of the Kingdom of God will be being joined to Christ. If we truly love Christ we long to be with him.** As a bride is incomplete without her bridegroom, so are we without him. We long for the wedding, we long to consummate the relationship. Every other concern in life is secondary.

The next greatest joy will be being joined to our departed loved ones. The great reunion. That's what **1 Thessalonians 4** is saying--we will be together again. The certainty of ultimate Reunion is so sweet that it makes the parting bearable and almost exciting. None of us like to be away from our families, but the one redeeming feature is the anticipation of reunion. And the longer the separation the more glorious the reunion. Some of you will meet parents you've not seen for fifty years, some will meet for the first time your child who died before birth.

No relationships between two believers ever end. They can only be interrupted, but never terminated. My relationship with my father-in-law has not ended. Has your believing husband, your Father, your sister, your child gone before you? You will see them face to face, and worship with them side by side. This is the believer's certain hope (hope as used by Paul, etc means a certain expectation for the future) --a hope that can sustain us through life's darkest hours.

Scripture says our citizenship is in Heaven, not earth. We are ambassadors representing Christ on this earth. We are called aliens, strangers, and pilgrims on earth. We are told this world is not our home, but the future Kingdom of God is our home. We must live on earth in light of Heaven – that is with God's perspective. We must learn to live our short todays in light of the long tomorrow.

Imagine an ambassador from Australia who goes to work in another country that is generally hostile to his own. Naturally, he will want to learn about this new place, see the sights, become familiar with the people and culture. But suppose eventually he becomes so assimilated into this foreign country that he begins to regard it as his true home.

His allegiance wavers, and he gradually compromises his position as an Australian ambassador, becoming increasingly ineffective in representing the best interests of his mother country. His loyalties are transferred, and eventually he defects. In doing so he not only becomes useless to, but actually betrays the cause of his own country. Have you become to assimilated with this country?

Hebrews 11 (v. 13-16) describes the great people of faith this way:

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All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country--a Heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

The black slaves in early America understood the pilgrim mentality. Without possessions, without rights, they lived for another world, a better one. This central theme permeated their spirituals. They sang "I am a poor wayfarin' stranger, a travelin' far away from home," and "Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world."

May God give us the grace to live now with the perspective that will be ours one moment after we die.

It's a predominant theme of Scripture that this place is not our home and that the Carpenter from Nazareth has gone to prepare a place for us.

Perhaps the reason that we get derailed from it and don't pay attention to it is partly because of this demonic influence that tries to convince us that this world is really our home. But part of it, too, is that we fall into the myth that our bodies are a temporary thing that we live in on earth and then when we die our spirit is separated from our bodies until the resurrection.

However, every portrayal of the Kingdom of God that is made in Scripture is physical in its nature.

Perhaps we live under a Platonic myth that the body is evil and the spirit is good and then the spirit is separated from that evil body and somehow liberated from it.

That is one of the things that throws us off because we end up thinking that Scripture talks about the Kingdom of God in tangible, physical ways but that must not really be the way it is. So as a result, we don't really believe what Scripture says about Kingdom of God, and we rob it of the excitement.

So a good prayer for us would be:---"**that the things which will be most important to us one minute after we die will become most important to us now.**"

Bertrand Russell has been called the greatest mind of the twentieth century. Anticipating his death he said, "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."

Death is not a hole; it's a door. We don't end; we relocate to the Coming Age.

Through his death and resurrection the Carpenter flung open the door to the Kingdom of God. If you're a Christian suffering with great pains and losses, take cheer (John 16:33**). The new house is almost ready for you. Moving day is coming. The dark winter is about to be magically transformed into spring. Soon you will be home.**

What to do today:

"Go to where men die of thirst a stone's throw from pure water...go out into this world as a water-bearer for the Lord."

As long as we're still here in the parched wastelands of the present earth, God calls us to offer refreshment to a world full of people dying of thirst.

What should we offer them? Exactly what they thirst for--a person and a place. Jesus is that person. The Kingdom of God is that place.

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God is eternal. His Place is eternal. His Word is eternal. His people are eternal. Center your life around God, his place, his Word, his people, and those eternal souls who desperately long for his person and his place. Do this, and no matter what you do for a living, your days here will make a profound difference. An honest activity—whether building a shed, driving a bus, pruning trees, changing nappies, or caring for a patient—can be an investment in God's kingdom.

Your life on earth is a dot. From that dot extends a line that goes on for all eternity. Right now you're living in the dot. But what are you living for? **Are you living for the dot or for the line?** Are you living for earth or for the future Kingdom of God? Are you living for the short today or the long tomorrow?

How many sermons about the Kingdom of God have you heard lately? How many books or articles have you read about it? How many discussions about them in the last few months?

In the absence of a strong theology of the Kingdom of God and eternal rewards, the western church has been permeated by "prosperity theology" the gospel of health and wealth. We've been seduced to look only to short-term rewards of material gain, physical health and safety, and human approval.

What about you? Are you following the example of the saints by longing for the Kingdom of God (**Hebrews 11:13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:2**)?

Is the Kingdom of God and all it represents a central object of your attention? Have you "set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (**Colossians 3:1**)? Is your heart's attention there, rather than on "earthly things" (verse 2)?

---- end session 1 ----

Session 2:

I believe the Bible to be the inspired and infallible Word of God. If you can't convince yourself that something I say is in agreement with the Word of God then reject what I say.

May I say though that it is not always easy to discern if what you believe about an issue is biblical. For example it seems that many Christians today believe, as I mentioned last session that the Bible tells us the world is only a few thousand years old. Why do we think this? Well some 300 years ago Archbishop Ussher tried to use the genealogies in the Bible to date both the flood and Adam. He dated the flood at 2349BC and Adam at 4004 BC.

However the bible genealogies are not intended to be a complete record and have an unknown number of gaps in them. The Hebrews in relating their genealogies apparently only included those generations that suited their purpose. For example, Mathew 1.8 lists King Joram (Jehoram) as the father of King Uzziah, but the Old Testament (Kings & Chronicles) shows the Joram was actually the great-great-grandfather of Uzziah! Lets turn to Luke 3:35 – note that we are told that Arphaxad is the grandfather of Shelah. Now turn to Genesis 11:12 and we see Arphaxad listed as the father of Selah!

Thus Bishop Ussher's calculations were in error –we can't tell how many generations are missing in these genealogies. The whole of the recent creationist movement seems to be based on this fallacy!

Alternatively, the uninformed may see these apparent contradictions in Scripture as a demonstration that the Bible is not infallible but I believe this interpretation is a result of a lack of understanding and knowledge. The more I study the commentaries of scholars like Josh McDowell – author of 'More Than a Carpenter', 'Evidence That Demands a Verdict', etc, the more I believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.

So let us study God's word on our true home - Kingdom of God. Let us pray that each of us would really see God as he is and realize that the deepest longings of our soul are for him. Just as we have a deep longing for him—and he's the only person that can fill that void and that emptiness—likewise there's only

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one place that can fill that emptiness and that void for a place to belong. Look at the world around us. Not only are we searching for the perfect relationship, likewise people are looking for that perfect place—a house at the beach or in the mountains or out in the country—we were only made for one place and that place is Kingdom of God. That place is being prepared for us by the Carpenter from Nazareth, who's a builder by trade. It's going to be a magnificent place!

I think if we live with that in mind, realizing only one person can fulfill us, and only one place can fulfill us, then we can live each day expectantly, living our lives in such a way that we're obeying Jesus by storing up for ourselves treasures in Kingdom of God.

Everyday we live we're moving towards death and away from our earthly treasures.

That doesn't feel good if our real treasures are on earth. But if we've stored up our treasures in Kingdom of God, then every day instead of moving away from our treasures we'll be moving toward them.

So a good prayer for us would be:---“ **that the things which will be most important to us one minute after we die will become most important to us now. “ – how can we know?? – study the Word of God and pray for revelation.**

TWO JUDGMENTS: FAITH AND WORKS

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." (John 5:28-29) – this is a description of the resurrection at the second coming of the Messiah. It is the judgment of faith.

1. Scripture teaches first a judgment of faith, then a judgment of works, both for believers and unbelievers.
2. All true believers will pass the judgment of faith in Christ—their names are written in the Book of Life.
3. All unbelievers will fail the judgment of faith at the Great White Throne, since their names are not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:11-15).
4. The judgment of works follows the judgment of faith. Scripture states **all** men, not just unbelievers, will be judged for their works (**Prov. 24:12; Eccles. 12:14, Matt 12:26**).
5. The unbeliever's judgment of works comes at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:12).
6. The believer will not be condemned at the Great White Throne, but nonetheless still faces a judgment of works himself, at the "Judgment Seat of Christ."

THE JUDGMENT OF WORKS FOR CHRISTIANS

1. Jesus watches and evaluates the churches, keeping score, perhaps giving grades? (**Revelation 2-1-3,4-7**)
2. To Christians Jesus says, "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." (Revelation 2:23)
3. At the end of our lives all believers will give an account of their lives to their Lord. "We will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:10-12)
4. We will be judged by Christ according to our works, both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

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5. The result of this judgment will be the gain or loss of eternal rewards (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9,10; Romans 14:10-12).

The Bible treats this judgment with great sobriety. It is not a meaningless formality, but a monumental event in which things of eternal significance are brought to light and things of eternal consequence are put into effect.

THE NEGATIVE ASPECT OF JUDGMENT FOR WORKS

1. Some Christians will and others will not hear Christ say, "Well done my good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21)

2. Some Christians will be ashamed when they meet Christ-"Dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2:28)

3. Some Christians entering the Kingdom of God will "suffer loss" when their lives in this present age are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ.

"If any man builds on this foundation [the foundation of Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. **If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.**" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

4. Christians at the judgment seat will experience certain consequences of good they have failed to do and bad they have done:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

"Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism" (Colossians 3:25).

The believer's judgment is of works, not sins. But apparently the commission of sins results in the omission of righteous works. Hence, the loss of reward that we would have had if we hadn't lived in sin. There is no indication that rewards missed by virtue of lack of service on earth (1 Cor. 3: 13-15) will be later achieved in some other way. In the Kingdom of God, how we have lived in this present age on earth will have eternal effects.

A quote to finish this session on:

"Let no one apologize for the powerful emphasis Christianity lays upon the doctrine of the world to come. Right there lies its immense superiority to everything else within the whole sphere of human thought or experience. When Christ arose from death and ascended into Heaven he established forever three important facts, namely, that this world has been condemned to ultimate dissolution, that the human spirit persists beyond the grave and that there is indeed a world to come." A.W. TOZER.

---- end session 2 ----

Session 3:

Kingdom of God & How to get there!

Matthew 6:33 – But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...

Why are we looking at Kingdom of God tonight – because we are told in this scripture to seek it first.

Introduction:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heaven's will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?"

"You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:10-14)

Today's sensuously enticing TV commercials featuring the good life of materialistic success Present a set of false values – values that become embarrassingly empty when someone lies dying in the wreck-age of a flash car or stands in front of the coffin to pay respects to the remains of a beloved family member or friend.

The best an atheist can hope for is that death ends it all. Nor can a man who refuses to believe in God find any meaning in life except to attempt to contribute to the happiness of future generations and their only purpose can be the same – yet all are heading for atheism's oblivion. Nor can reincarnation offer a better hope: It merely represents a recycling also of what is ultimately doomed by the 2nd law of thermodynamics. ...The 2nd law of thermodynamics means that eventually the entire universe will degrade to the same temperature. This will result in what is called heat death – all life requires the transfer of heat from a higher temperature source to a lower one. When everything is at the same temperature no life can continue - all existence will be as though it had never been and will thus bear the final stamp of meaninglessness written across the universe itself. This is not the way it will end however because God has other plans.

The Kingdom of God was continually on the heart of our Lord and it was the context for everything that He taught His disciples. He made it clear that He was calling them to turn their attention and affection and interest from this world to the future Kingdom of God. Eg. Matt 6:19,20.

If you sincerely believe that Christ could return at any moment then you will hold onto the things of this earth far more loosely...

Christ tells us to watch and wait for His return.

Our hope, our ambition, our desire, our passion and dreams for the future are all to involve our eternal home in the Kingdom of God and not what we can achieve or accumulate on this earth in this present age. ... We are (to be) in this world but not of it, using but not abusing it, holding everything loosely, considering everything in this life of transitory worth. We are to live as strangers and pilgrims on this earth who are already, by faith, interest and affection and most significantly, mindset; "sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" Eph 2:6.

This does not mean that we have no concern for this world, or for the poor or that we do not actively seek to improve the moral and social climate of our world. Yet everything we do to benefit others on this earth must be done not for its social value alone but for the sake of Christ and for the glory of God. Furthermore, rescuing souls for the Kingdom of God must always take precedence over providing earthly benefits. Christ's own life is our model in keeping the proper balance.

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Mother Theresa provided a sad example of what is wrong with so much social action by Christians. While she cannot be faulted for her self-sacrifice, her very strong and high-profile, pro-life stance (she has certainly been one of my heroes) and for her tireless efforts to provide a clean bed and loving environment for the last days of the dying, she must be reprovved for neglecting their far more important eternal welfare. It is against the policy of the mission she founded to point out that Christ is the only way to the Kingdom of God. Instead, its aim is to help dying Hindu's to become better Hindus, dying Buddhists to become better Buddhists, etc. ... The brief comfort she and her followers provide for dying bodies is a poor substitute for the final torment to which she has allowed thousands to go by neglecting their souls.

World Vision also appears to be making the same sad mistake. In their December 2001 newsletter their CEO Lynn Arnold says " ... we must take up Christ's ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). The challenge is clear – to advance peace and reconciliation for all, and to build a world where the needs of the poor are met, no matter what their race, religion or gender." Let's read 2 Cor. 5:18-21. He seems to misunderstand what the scripture is saying in this passage – to reconcile is to bring into a right relationship with God and then with each other. To reconcile with God we must find Jesus. Also we are not to try to build a better world (without Jesus)... we are to bring others to Christ – only in the next world i.e. the Kingdom of God can real lasting peace and the needs of the poor be truly meet.

The attitude of the early church:

Peter and Paul cultivated an eager expectancy of the return of Christ (the rapture) and the habitation of the Kingdom of God. Lets Read Phil 3:20, & Titus 2:13.

Also the author of Hebrews in Heb 9:28 (read) –these scriptures declare that looking for Christ's return is the normal attitude expected of every Christian – an attitude that would be ludicrous if Christ could not return until after thousands of years of "millennium".

Peter and Paul knew that Christ would not return until after their deaths eg. 1 Cor 4:9, Acts 20:25-30.) – yet they still urged us to be expectant. Paul also cited as evidence that some former pagans had truly become Christians because they had begun "to wait for (the return of) His Son from heaven." 1 Thesalonians 1:9,10.

Obedience to Christ's command to "be ready" at any moment for His sudden return cannot be in vain, for it has its own reward. That attitude has helped watchful Christians to faithfully seek their heavenly home and reward rather than the things of this world. Since life at best is very brief, those who steadfastly kept their affection on things above were in the Kingdom of God very soon and surely will have no regrets at having laid up treasure in the Kingdom of God instead of in the world. Moreover the very hope of His imminent return had a purifying effect upon their lives. It also gives a great urgency to the Great Commission that can hardly be shared by those who believe there are yet centuries or even decades left for its fulfillment.

Think about it, the Lord urged this "expectant" attitude re the return of Christ Jesus knowing full well that millions of Christians would fall asleep in death before He returned. Therefore there must be something important, something integral to a good Christian life, about the mere attitude of expecting at any moment Christ's return and our transformation into His likeness.

Why? If we are in a right relationship with Christ we can genuinely look forward to his return. Yet no one (not even Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane) looks forward to death. The joyful prospect of our meeting Jesus in the clouds at his return, will attract our thoughts, while the distasteful prospect of death is something we may try to forget, thus making it less effective in our daily lives. The Second Coming also signals a climax of history and opens the curtain upon earth's final drama. It ends our stake in present age developments such as the lives of our children or the growth or dispersion of our wealth, etc. Also, as we feel we have some control over the timing of our death it reduces the incentive for godliness by making us feel we can afford to postpone a closer relationship with God until next week, next month or next year. In contrast we have no control over Christ's return as he will come for many of us when we least expect him (Matt 24:44)

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"Last days" prophecy as a subject takes up about 1/4th of the Bible. Thus it must be of great importance to God and hence to us.

Kingdom Now?!

As I mentioned earlier, our hope is not making this world better or in taking over this world but in being resurrected into the Kingdom of God by our Lord, to be married to Him in glory and to be part of the armies of heaven to rescue Israel, destroy His enemies and participate in His millennial reign. Our hearts should be in perpetual wonder at the prospect of this!

Christ told his disciples in response to a direct question that only a few would ever respond to His message (Read Matt 7:13,14, Luke 13:23-28) [What is a few – I don't know. Is it a few that each of us bring to the Lord from our acquaintance and outreach? – maybe less than 10 of every hundred we know?? With 6 Billion now alive and another perhaps 4 + billion who have died 10% would still be 1 billion?! There are apparently more than 1 billion who consider themselves Christians alive today.]

The early (1st century Christians) never entertained the vain and unbiblical hope of "changing the world for Christ" or of "winning the world for Christ" yet they were determined to win a multitude of individuals out of the world to future citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

In John 17 & 18 Christ says: "My kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36)...I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me (John 17:9)...out of the world. (17:6)" Jesus never said a word about reforming the corrupt Roman regime, never advocated any organized social or political action.. Similarly with Peter and Paul.

Of course, Christians ought to stand against such evils as homosexuality, abortion, pornography and the abuse of drugs and do all they can to limit godless influence in society but must not forget our primary responsibility to the world is to present it with the gospel.

The loss of the Kingdom of God's importance, the return of the Messiah's relegation to a vague and distant future role, and the churches identification with the world in its social and political struggles are combining to deaden the commitment of today's Christian to the biblical standards of separation from a godless world.

The Christian is empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a holy, separated, Christ-like life motivated by love for His Lord.

Liberal theologians speak in glowing terms of the marvelous "myth" of the resurrection and the "transcendental truths" which "live on" through such an idealistic concept. Paul bluntly called such sophistry a lie, pointing out that if Christ had not in fact resurrected the "we have found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ ..." (1 Cor 15:15).

Some celebrated Christians (eg. Malcolm Muggeridge) promote that this historical fact is of no consequence. Jesus specifically refuted such a belief when He said to His disciples: "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39). Muggeridge, et al – say the spirit of Jesus "manifested itself to his disciples" after the crucifixion (this 'spirit' ate fish & honeycomb!) – this is the unbiblical teaching of numerous cults.

Nor will the new age belief in reincarnation into a new body qualify, for the previous body (or bodies) remains the victim of death. Reincarnation makes death a normal part of the ongoing life cycle. Resurrection and reincarnation are both incompatible and contradictory. You cannot believe in reincarnation and be a Christian as it denies the once-for-all-time bodily resurrection of Jesus. Moreover the resurrection of Christ is the pledge that those who have received Him as Saviour and Lord will have their bodies raised from the dead also.

Luke 16:25: The rich man in Hades – he remembers and has remorse and thirst. Thirst for water begins mildly but eventually burns like a flame. Thirst is such torture for the same reason that a drink of water is so

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satisfying: water is essential to life. In the same way our bodies must have water, our spirits and souls thirst for God's love.

The Kingdom of God is the eternal enjoyment of God's love and presence.

Those who complain about the injustice of hell and the incompatibility of such final punishment with God's love must face the fact that nowhere in the Bible do we find so many solemn warnings to avoid the flames of hell as we do from the lips of Christ himself.

Death however is not the only way to the Kingdom of God. Christ made the astonishing and wonderful promise that He would come back again to take His followers to their eternal home without dying. This unique hope of Christianity, which powerfully inspired and motivated the early church (it should do the same for us), is being increasingly minimized or rejected today by Christian leaders.

The mission of Christ Jesus was to preach the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:38). He also claimed to be the only way into this eternal relationship with God Almighty.

The importance of Doctrine:

One of the most prized privileges that Christians enjoy today is the right to go to the Bible and decide what it teaches for themselves. Part of what it teaches is, of course, submission to church leaders – but not at the expense of conscience and biblical truth. There must always be a balance. Paul reminds us that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God ... for doctrine, for reproof, for correction ...” (2 Tim 3:16). All-evangelists, authors, pastors, and elders must be open to correction. Serious doctrinal error has crept into the church today – the necessary correction of such men is criticized as being divisive rather than being recognized as vital to truth and the well-being of the church as a whole.

2 Tim 4:2,3 – Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and (teaching) doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...” – it seems we have arrived at that time!

The Lifestyle of Christians:

Read Acts 5:13 – The power and purity of the church was so awesome that unbelievers dared not join it even if they could.

Read 2 Cor 6: 11-18. Christians, as prospective citizens of the Kingdom of God, are not to adopt the lifestyles of the unsaved, nor their fleshly ambitions and interests, and it appears are not to marry those who do not belong to Christ. Nor (it seems) are believers to become partners in business, or in any other way to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

God's Love:

If God used His irresistible power to force people into the Kingdom of God and away from hell where would love come into it? God has given us the free will to choose or reject Him. God pleads with mankind and mourns its waywardness (eg Isaiah 1) – He would not do this if He forced us to believe in Him. To influence man to do something against his will would destroy man as God made him. We would then not be capable of loving God and He would thus be robbed of the love for which He created man. To win hearts is far more meaningful than to coerce with power. God has all the glory when we say “yes” to His grace and love, because He has provided the way to salvation and drawn us by His Spirit. And man has all the blame when he rejects Christ, for God has done all that He can to persuade him to believe.

Satan was defeated at the cross. This means that those who now belong to Christ do not have to allow Satan any place in their lives. We cannot extend to others who are in rebellion against God the personal victory that is ours because of our submission to His will. They must be willing to obey Him also.

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The example of David:

May I suggest you read Psalm 22 written by King David: David – was a type of Christ – In Psalm 22 the crucifixion of Christ is clearly portrayed: even to soldiers gambling for His clothing, plus some of the very words Jesus would speak from the cross. [Ps 22:1 –God will forsake Him in His hour of need, Ps 22:7,8 –He will be scorned and mocked, Ps 22:16 –His hands and feet will be pierced, Ps 22:18 –Others will gamble for his clothes.] This is an amazing Psalm written some 1000 years before Christ's birth. Even the rejection of Christ by His own people is portrayed in David in many ways. Eg. 2 Sam 18,19) After being exiled from Israel, David waited to be summoned back – he sat in the gate of a city on the eastern shore of Jordan. ...

2 Sam 19:14,15: ...David is asked "Return thou and all they servants" So the King returned.

Could it be that our "David" having similarly been rejected and hounded off this planet, is sitting in the gate of heaven, grieved that His bride, His body is not calling upon Him to return to rule a world that so desperately needs him? Perhaps the church should lift its voice to heaven and cry "Come, Lord Jesus, come back!"

Parable of the nobleman's supper:

Read the parable of the rich man's supper (2nd Coming): Luke 14:15-24

This parable is about those in the church who have been invited to the Lord's Supper but are now not ready – they have been distracted by the cares and concerns of this world. This parable seems to indicate a last days apostasy (or turning away) within the church.

This parable presents the challenge: Do I really love Christ so much that no other love, no other earthly involvement or ambition prevents me from saying with sincerity and passion "Come Lord Jesus, come!"

The Kingdom of God is to be the scene of a great wedding that our Saviour has long anticipated. We ought to be eagerly anticipating His return to take us to His Father's house for our marriage to Him. How can His bride not share that joyful hope?

One of the most beautiful Old Testament pictures of the church as the bride of Christ is found in Genesis 24. Abraham's servant, a type of the Holy Spirit, had claimed Rebecca as Isaac's bride. As it is with us, however, she had to choose for herself between the husband waiting for her in a far country, and the family she would have to leave behind. "Will thou go with this man?" her family asked her and she said, "I will go" Such is the choice that confronts us. Surely the Bridegroom must grieve over a bride that is so reluctant to join Him in that great heavenly marriage.

Is it not time that the bride of Christ, laying all else aside, become excited about the prospect of seeing and being with her Bridegroom forever?

Oh that a great cry would arise from the church: "We love you, Lord Jesus! Please come and take us home! The Spirit and the bride say, Come! Come, Lord Jesus come!"

Another reason why we want Christ to return: We long to see Christ return to see Him glorified on this earth where He has been rejected for so long. If we love the Lord, then we will want to see Him honoured and praised where He was rejected. We long to see Him rule, whose right it is to rule, and we want to be at His side, singing His praises, pointing men to Him who is the Lover of our souls.

Love & Commitment:

God has said "I love you" 1 Corinthians 13 (read from verse 4-8). We need read no part of the Bible than this love chapter to know that man is a fallen creature. We know that Paul describes love so perfectly but we also know in our hearts that we can't measure up to this love.

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We may say “I love you” and deep inside mean “I love me and I want you”.

God who created this universe has spoken the wonderful words “I love you” personally and intimately to each of us. And he has done it by entering our humanity and dying for our sins upon the cross. He has thus so fully proved His love that there is no excuse for ever doubting it.

Love is not merely a sentiment that sweeps over us and which is beyond our control. Marriages are breaking up among Christians because the husband or wife claims no longer to love the other and often has “fallen in love” with someone else. This is not love at all, but a Hollywood-inspired counterfeit.

Love involves an unshakeable commitment of oneself to another – thus it involves not just emotions but an act of will. Christ is our example, and husbands are to love their wives as He loved the church. A Christ-like marriage would not be all peaches and cream. In fact it may well involve one partner suffering hatred, abuse and misunderstanding and giving love in return.

That is what Christ did, and that is the kind of love husbands are to have for their wives. Sometimes, most sadly, even this may not be enough when a spouse is in total rebellion against God.

Read Luke 10:27 “You shall love the Lord your God ...” – love does indeed involve deep emotion, but it is first of all obedience to God’s command. We can love our husband or wife or parent or mother-in-law and even our enemy, no matter how much evil we think they have done to us. It takes the willingness to let God pour out His love through us.

Christ has committed Himself to us for eternity and He expects us to make the same commitment to Him. And that commitment involves loving others if we truly love Him – for a lack of love for our brother is according to scripture proof that we do not really love God (1 John 4:20,21). How much more is the insistence that we cannot love wife or husband or parent a betrayal of the fact that our love of God, no matter how loudly we profess it, is not genuine at all.

God will not force anyone to enter the Kingdom of God, for that would not be an act of love. Moreover it would turn the Kingdom of God into hell, filling it with rebellious monsters for whom not only God but the angels and the redeemed could feel only intense loathing. Christ says that believers will be “as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt 22:30)

In the next session we will look at the amazing fact that we will see His Face; Crowns as Rewards; and the contrast of our faith with others, amongst other issues.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to share my love and passion for our Home and Lord.

----- end session 3 -----

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Session 4:

Welcome and thank you for this opportunity to share the Word of God.

Let us Pray: Dear heavenly Father, as we come together tonight to praise and worship you and to share and reflect on your Word, may your Holy Spirit lead us into a deeper understanding of you, your love for us and your desire for us to live at peace with you forever. If any word or thought tonight is not true to your Word, Lord may it find no resting place in our hearts and minds and be quickly forgotten. May all that is spoken from the pulpit tonight uplift and honour you father and your most precious son Jesus Christ. AMEN

Let me start tonight by summarising the last three sessions:

In **Session 1**, I stated that the **Kingdom of God is our true home; our mind should be first on the Kingdom of God.** Phil 3: 20 says: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ," Col 3:1-4 states "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."

Home is acceptance, security, rest, refuge, deep personal relationships, great memories. Home is where your treasure is. If Kingdom of God is your home, then your mind and heart and treasure will be there.

Perhaps that answers the question of why the Kingdom of God means much less to us than the saints of God throughout the ages. We have tried to build our ultimate home on earth in this present age. We have become citizens of this age. Our hopes rise and fall with this world, rather than being centered on the next.

I also discussed what the Bible tells us about what the Kingdom of God will be like: - from serving God, to such activities as ruling, composing, writing, painting, carving, building. We will exercise our God-given gifts, and continue to develop and perfect our talents. We will worship in the Kingdom of God. We will learn & remember, travel, share and see justice at last. There will be great joy in the Kingdom of God. Ps 16:11 states "In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures forever more." We will return to what scripture tells us about the Kingdom of God in the 2nd part of tonight's session.

In **Session 2**, I also spoke about our perspective: :---"**that the things which will be most important to us one minute after we die will become most important to us now.**"

I then outlined the physical reality of the Kingdom of God and spoke about the judgments of faith and works. The different rewards that will be ours in the Kingdom of God and the differing degrees of punishment for those who reject the faith of Jesus.

In **Session 3** I spoke on how to get to the Kingdom of God, and how we should live today in light of the Kingdom of God.

Our hope, our ambition, our desire, our passion and dreams for the future are all to involve our eternal home in Kingdom of God and not what we can achieve or accumulate on this earth.

I spoke about Second Coming and resurrection of believers and how our desire should be to see our Lord and bridegroom return quickly, so that the marriage supper of the Lamb may take place and the Lord reign over all.

I said: Is it not time that the bride of Christ, laying all else aside, become excited about the prospect of seeing and being with her Bridegroom forever? Oh that a great cry would arise from the church: "We love you, Lord Jesus! Please come and take us home! The Spirit and the bride say, Come! Come, Lord Jesus come!

I also commented on God's love and on how we are commanded to love and to follow the Lord's example when he said "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.{John 15:13}"

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Which brings us to tonight where we will look as why we don't think more about the Kingdom of God and what motivates us to follow God.

WHY DON'T WE THINK MORE ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

"If there be so certain and glorious a rest for the saints, why is there no more industrious seeking after it? One would think, if a man did but once hear of such unspeakable glory to be obtained, and believed what he heard to be true, he should be transported with the vehemence of his desire after it, and should almost forget to eat and drink, and should care for nothing else, and speak of and inquire after nothing else, but how to get this treasure. And yet people who hear of it daily, and profess to believe it as a fundamental article of their faith, do as little mind it, or labour for it, as if they had never heard of any such thing, or did not believe one word they hear." *Richard Baxter, 1649*

Our Gloried bodies:

It is easy to believe that the God who created the present universe (it obviously didn't just happen by chance – the more one understands the incredible history of creation the harder it is to believe in 'chance') is able to create a new one to take its place, from which sin, suffering, disease, and death will be excluded forever. Likewise it would be a small thing for the God who created us in the first place to recreate our bodies not merely as they were in our prime, but in a new form immune to fatigue, disease, or death.

CROWNS AS REWARDS In the Kingdom of God

Crowns are a common symbol of ruling authority. Five crowns are specifically mentioned as rewards:

1. *The Crown of Life*-given for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom.

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

2. *The Incorruptible Crown*-given for determination, discipline and victory in the Christian life.

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)

3. *The Crown of Glory*-given for faithfully representing Christ in a position of spiritual leadership (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

"To the elders among you, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

4. *The Crown of Righteousness*-given for purifying and readying yourself to meet Christ at his return.

"The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

5. *The Crown of Rejoicing*-given for pouring oneself into others in evangelism and discipleship.

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"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

". . . my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown . . ." (Philippians 4:1)

There may be innumerable crowns and types of crowns, and rewards unrelated to crowns. They are all graciously given by the Lord Jesus, and earned through the faithful efforts of the believer. Our rewards are given not merely for our recognition, but for Christ's eternal glory:

"The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'" (Revelation 4:10-11)

Though God's glory is the highest and ultimate reason for any course of action, Scripture sees no contradiction between God's eternal glory and our eternal good. On the contrary, glorifying God will always result in our greatest eternal good. Likewise, pursuing our eternal good, as he commands us to, will always glorify God.

While the Kingdom of God will be wonderful for all its inhabitants, not every believer's position and experience in the Kingdom of God will be the same. Just as those who are judged by our Messiah as unworthy to enter the Kingdom of God will receive different punishments (Matt .11:20-24; Luke 20:45-47), so the Kingdom of God has different rewards. Perhaps it will be a matter of differing capacity. Two jars can both be full, but the one with greater capacity contains more. Likewise, all of us will be full of joy in the Kingdom of God, but some may have more joy because their capacity for joy will be larger, having been stretched through their trust in and obedience to God in this life.

God appeals to our natures as people, not as sinners. Power, possessions and pleasures are legitimate desires he has instilled in us, and by which he motivates us.

HOW TO GAIN ETERNAL POWER, POSSESSIONS AND PLEASURE

The temptation is to try to grasp onto power, pleasure and possessions here and now, in the present world. The way of the Lord is to gain them in the future not by clinging to them in the present, but by forgoing them in the present!

The three-fold disciplines of fasting, giving and prayer are developed by Christ in Matthew 6:1-18, and each is said to offer a reward, either from man in the short term or God in the long term.

1. Fasting is denying the momentary pleasure of eating to gain eternal pleasure in God.
2. Giving is denying the momentary possession of riches to gain eternal possessions from God.
3. Prayer is denying the momentary exercise of one's own power to gain the eternal power of God.

Eating, accumulating and ruling are not bad-but in these three spiritual disciplines they are temporarily abstained from to accomplish a higher kingdom purpose.

THE THREE VOWS OF MONASTIC ORDERS

1. Vow of chastity (forgoing pleasure)
2. Vow of poverty (forgoing possessions)
3. Vow of obedience (forgoing power of self-determination).

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One need not forgo power, pleasures or possessions because he hates them. He may forgo them because he wants them in their purest forms, in another time, another world. Jesus told his disciples they could become great in the next world by being a servant in this one (Mark 10:42-44), and they could become rich in the next world by giving up riches in this one (Matthew 6:19-21).

It's not a matter of *no* gratification, but *delayed* gratification in the pursuit of *ultimate* gratification. It's forgoing present temporal gratification to achieve future eternal gratification. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot

Given the limitations of sin, we are ill-equipped to handle large doses of power, pleasures and possessions in this life. In the Kingdom of God we will be sinless, and will not abuse the power, pleasure and possessions entrusted to us.

GOD'S APPEAL TO POWER, POSSESSIONS & PLEASURE

1. Power in his kingdom

"Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'" (Luke 19:17)

"The Lord answered, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager? . . . he will put him in charge of all his possessions.'" (Luke 12:42-44)

2. Possessions in his kingdom

"Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven (*that is, with God*), where moth and rust do not destroy. . . ." (Matthew 6:19-21)

"Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." (Luke 12:33)

"Peter answered, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?' Jesus said, ' . . . everyone who has left houses or brothers . . . or mother . . . or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (*that is, life in the Coming Age*).'" (Matthew 19:27-30)

3. Pleasures in his kingdom

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalms 16:11)

"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven." (Luke 6:23)

"The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice." (John 3:29)

"A woman giving birth to a child has pain, but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy. So with you: **Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**" (John 16:21-22)

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly . . ." (Hebrews 12:22)

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." *Colossians 3:1*

CAN APPEALS TO OUR DESIRES REALLY BE SPIRITUAL?

John Bunyan, seventeenth century pastor and prisoner; author of *Pilgrim's Progress*: "The rewards are such as should make us leap to think on, and that we should remember with exceeding joy, and never think that it is contrary to the Christian faith to rejoice and be glad for them."

William Wilberforce, British Parliamentarian who spent his life working to abolish slavery: "Christianity proposes not to extinguish our natural desires. It promises to bring the desires under just control and direct them to their true object."

CS Lewis: "The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountainhead that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy."

"The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

God's promise that He will create a new eternal universe for His children to inhabit, into which sin, sickness and death can never enter (Isaiah 65:17-25, 2 Peter 3:10-14, Rev 21:1-8), places the fulfillment of life's purpose beyond both our wildest imagination to conceive and our most heroic efforts to achieve. With that understanding life ceases to be such a struggle and becomes a privilege and joy to receive daily in simple faith from the hand of God. For those who attempt to carry it themselves life eventually becomes a burden too great to bear. One must question the sincerity of those who claim to trust God for eternity but who betray by their worry and fear that they do not trust Him to care for their needs in this present life.

"They will see his face."

A most amazing aspect of the Kingdom of God is expressed in Revelation 22:4, which says of God's servants, "They will see his face."

There's no way to describe what a shocking statement this is to any Jew trained in the transcendence and inapproachability of God. The Creator said to Moses, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). The high priest could go into the Holy of Holies only once a year, and even then tradition says a rope was tied around his ankle in case God struck him down. (Who would dare go in to get him?)

The God who lives in unapproachable light became approachable in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). Though we will always be creature and he Creator, in the future Kingdom of God we will be able to live with him and actually "see his face." Incredible.

David anticipated seeing God's face in the Kingdom of God (Psalm 17:15). His prayer was "that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm ??). We will experience the answer to David's prayer. God's house will be our home.

WHAT MOTIVATES US TO FOLLOW GOD?

Fear of consequences:

"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

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Hope of short term rewards:

"Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10)

Hope of long term rewards:

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." (Matthew 6:20)

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him." (Deut. 7:9-10)

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30)

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." (Luke 12:32-33)

"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it." (2 Cor. 5:9)

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." (Hebrews 12:28)

MOTIVATION: WHY SHOULD WE OBEY GOD?

1. Out of our love for him as Father and Redeemer (Deuteronomy 7:9; 11:1; 30:20).
2. Out of our fear of him as Creator and Judge (Genesis 2:17; Deuteronomy 28:58-67; Hebrews 10:30-31).
3. Out of our hope in him as Rewarder of those who serve him (Deuteronomy 28:2-9; Hebrews 11:6).

WHY SHOULD WE EVANGELIZE?

Out of love for God, gratefulness to God, desire to please God, love for men, fear of their destination without Christ, hope for their fulfillment, hope for their service to God's glory, fear of our disobedience, hope for our eternal reward.

Each of these motivations is legitimate, and each compliments the other. In God's universe, what is right is always smart. Sometimes we need the combined persuasiveness of all these incentives to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

"Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear." (1 Peter 1:17)

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"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." (1 Peter 2:11)

"For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our Kingdom of Godly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (2 Corinthians 5:4)

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. . . For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:8-10)

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:24-27)

"Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.

"If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same." **C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity***

Like a bride's dream of sharing a home with her groom, our love for the Kingdom of God should be overflowing and contagious, just as our love for God should be (Revelation 19:7). Our passion for God and our passion for the Kingdom of God should be inseparable. The more I learn about God, the more excited I get about the Kingdom of God. The more I learn about the Kingdom of God, the more excited I get about God.

Our life in this present age leads directly into either the Kingdom of God, or the final punishment and the permanency of the second death. Life here is a running start into one or the other. The Kingdom of God and hell are both retroactive to earth. The best of earth is a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, the worst of earth is perhaps a glimpse of punishment awaiting unbelievers. Earth is the in-between world touched both by the Kingdom of God and permanent death, affording a choice between the two.

All who refuse to admit their sin, who are not willing to repent of their rebellion against God and to accept the death of Christ in their place, must endure the penalty they deserve. Having forfeited the right to live in God's presence, they must at the judgment, be finally separated from Him, if they refuse to accept the pardon He offers.

Will there be privacy in the Kingdom of God?

The existence of our own individual dwelling places implies privacy. We are also told Christ will give new names to the righteous, known only between him and them (Rev. 2:17). This is a secret, a private knowledge shared only between the individual and God. While there will be no sin to confess, presumably we will still want to have a private audience with God. There is every reason to believe we will still have the ability to go directly to our Lord, to talk to him not just in corporate worship but in private prayer.

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Will there be private ownership in the Kingdom of God?

One Christian author categorically states people won't own anything in the Kingdom of God. He believes this will assure our equality.

But what about the different “dwelling places” believers will have in the Kingdom of God (Luke 16:4,9)?
What about the treasures Christ commanded us to store up “for ourselves” in heaven (with God) Matt. 6:20?
What about the different crowns and rewards God will hand out according to our works (2 Cor. 5:10)?
What about the fact that we have an “inheritance” that will be given us in the Kingdom of God (Col. 3:24)?
Doesn't the word “inheritance” mean something tangible that will belong to us?

Will one believer's crown be as much mine as it is his? Of course not. What about the white stone God promises to give to overcomers, with our new name written on it, a name no one else will know (Revelation 2:17)? Will you and I have equal possession of those stones or names? No. The one God gives you will be yours, not mine. The one he gives me—if I'm an overcomer—will be mine, not yours. Is this ownership wrong or selfish? Of course not. Ownership is never wrong when it's God distributing to us possessions he wants us to own!

The Kingdom of God is not a socialist utopia in which private ownership is evil. Materialism, greed, envy, and selfishness are sins—ownership is not.

Our different personalities, rewards, positions, and names in the Kingdom of God not only speak of our individuality, but of how God, who loves us all, finds unique reasons to love us. You may love many of your family and friends around you, but you love different things about each.

Of course, God is the ultimate owner of all things. He owns not only all of the Kingdom of God, but everything in this age as well (Deut. 10:14; 1 Chron. 29:11-12), including the land (Lev. 25:23), the animals (Ps. 50:10-12), and all wealth in the possession of people (Hag. 2:8). He owns not only all things but all people (Ps. 24:1). He owns our very bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

So what is “ours” is ultimately God's, including whatever he gives to us. But that is every bit as true here on earth now as it is will be in the Kingdom of God. And the fact that God owns whatever is “mine” does not mean there is no distinction between what I own and what others own. The early Christians generously regarded their possessions as not just for them, but for others, and shared them generously (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32-35). But this did not negate private ownership. Peter told Ananias that his property belonged to him before he sold it, and the money belonged to him after he sold it (Acts 5:4). His sin was in claiming to give to God and others what he secretly kept. While in the Kingdom of God we will no doubt delight in sharing our treasures with others, they will still be our treasures, generously given to us by God.

Our faith vs others:

To be a Christian is to enjoy an intimate, personal relationship with Christ that is not matched by any other faith or belief system but is absolutely essential if someone is to be a Christian.

In contrast a Buddhist cannot have a personal relationship with Buddha nor is it necessary. Neither is the practice of Islam impaired because Mohammed is in the grave. It is no hindrance to any of the world's historic religions that their founders are dead and gone. Not so with Christianity. If Christ were not alive today there would be no Christian faith! Christianity is not a mass religion but a personal relationship.

I pray that you have been uplifted today to look forward to and long for your eternal home.

“Dear Father, May all that has been shared today and that is of You find a resting place in the hearts and minds of your saints. May your saints long to be with our Lord Jesus in your and our home and may we long to see your face and praise your name forever and ever.

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May we pray every day: Come Lord Jesus, come. Come quickly. May today be the day Lord."

----- end session 4 -----

Note 1: I highly recommend any books by Randy Alcorn such as *Deadline and Dominion*. Although fictional they have some biblical basis and are such an exciting and encouraging read. In fact most of this booklet is really just a combination of many articles from Randy Alcorn and his website www.epm.org, along with leaning heavily on Dave Hunt's book "What Ever Happened to Kingdom of God" for Session 3. (Dave Hunt's Web Site is www.thebereanall.org)

Note 2: (May 2005) Since writing and presenting these talks, I have read a number of books by Anthony Buzzard, in particular 'The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah' which have greatly deepened by understanding on this issue. I highly recommend this book and all of Buzzard's. Randy Alcorn has now released a book titled 'Heaven' which is also excellent and most uplifting.