

Sermon to the saints of God at Topeka – Sunday, September 24, 2017

The two wonders, the birth and a war

There are many metaphors used in the Revelation – some to relate the characteristics of entities – these great players of both the Quarrel of the Covenant through time and in the winding down to its glorious conclusion. Others are meant to relate the qualities, order and logistics of events ‘...to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.’ (Rev. 1:1) Real events that will play out, in the order both designed and revealed to us by God Almighty. Yet all these elegant metaphors are specifically chosen by God to relate precise meanings to us, though we do not presently know many of them with great clarity of mind. There is no metaphor chosen to mean a host of things – they are specific and exact (even when one might mean a specific thing on one level and another specific thing on another level).

I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets. – Hosea 12:10

Some of our oft-used aids in other areas of scriptural investigation, whether of a more ‘historical events’ nature or concerning elements of practical doctrine, fail here. Many expositors who, in many other areas of scripture are great teachers, have groped in darkness and resorted to strange, banal, disconnected guesses in this vital area of scripture. And while it is not important for us to know *everything*, as no man will ever know more than God shows to him, and it is certain that current gaps in our understanding will never keep us from our ultimate appointed lots - it is important for us to know *everything we can know*, and search the scriptures diligently in that regard. And this, not only for our acquaintance with the Revelation, but also seeing scripture in all other places in the Bible popping and sparkling with rich, new meaning for us that we had perhaps never seen (and is one of the ways that God gives light unto men). While some men sit on their hands and ask for light, they ask amiss. God commands us to study and ask for light. And from this area of Bible scholarship, many sober, godly men have shrunk.

Seiss: There is a widespread prejudice against the study of the Apocalypse. Though it is the great prophetic Book of the New Testament, the last of all the writings of Inspiration, a special message from the ascended Saviour to His Churches on earth, and pressed upon every one’s attention with uncommon urgency, there are religious guides, sworn to teach “the whole counsel of God,” who make a merit of not understanding it, and of not wishing to occupy themselves with it.

Pride may dent the conscience of a man who knows much else concerning God's word, but struggles here. He may shrink from fully investing himself in patiently returning to its study, perhaps intimidated in the flesh - as he may be used to coming to answers more readily, or having more complete answers (for himself or for others). He may also avoid it so as not to unwittingly give bad counsel to one who may want to ask of him concerning it. Whatever the case – the sum-total of the book's subject is given in its first words – *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Rev. 1:1). The Greek there is *apokalupsis* – which means: a disclosure of truth, instruction - concerning things before unknown. Taking this in fully should excite the mind of any true God-fearing Bible scholar to investigation – not by way of rendering him otherwise incapacitated or lacking mind share to fully perform his other duties, but to attention and labor *in the midst of* executing those other vital roles.

Seiss: This it is that John was made to see, and commanded to write, that all might learn exactly how things are then to be ordered. A tremendous Revelation is therefore brought before men in this Book. And if anyone would fully profit by it, let him bear with him this one vital and all-conditioning thought, that he is here dealing with Christ's own infallible foreshowings of the style, manner, and succession of events in which the Apocalypse awarded to Him by the Father is to take place. He who fails in this, misses the kernel of the Book.

I am very grateful to Elder Tim for having labored in this area of God's Word. We have all been edified by it, and exhorted to its attention, despite a relative paucity of meaningful extant scholarship from which to draw. There are certain elements of the present sermon that may seem like a rerun, in that those same places in scripture have been preached on before – most notably and excellently by brother Tim a couple years back (2/22 and 3/1 of 2015). But at those places, please bear with me – as the benefits of repeating what we believe we know about some of the more dense, difficult and enigmatic places in scripture can help comfort, concretize, bring back into remembrance, and provide a more fertile environment for seeing scriptural connections. It is important to continue to retrace and drill down afresh – especially in those places where not all of the dots at a place in scripture seem to align squarely in our understanding; for the Scriptures themselves speak to how to read, study and understand them:

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. – 1Thes. 5:21

Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. – 1Cor. 2:13

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: - Is. 28:9-10

If you encounter anything in the sermons preached over today and next Sunday, beyond what has been commonly thought, let it not be rejected too hastily in your minds; but please dispassionately weigh it, in the fear of God, and in proper regard for His infallible Word.

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: - Rev. 12:1

The Apostle tells us it is a 'sign' – the Greek is *shemeion* – a sign, mark, token:

- a. that by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known
- b. a sign, prodigy, portent, i.e. an unusual occurrence, transcending the common course of nature

Not simply a 'wonder,' in our commonly used sense of the word, but a representation or picture of something else which is intended to bring before us something beyond itself. This is the true subject of contemplation. It is a *great* sign as indicating something great, remarkable and momentous – so marvelous and extraordinary – indicating a thing of the greatest importance; a thing of the utmost consequence and consideration. And while it appeared 'in the heaven,' I do not believe this indicates the actual location of the sign – this is, I am convinced, simply the scene of the vision that is taking place, as the second 'wonder,' or sign, also appears in the same place (and is not in reality now, nor has it been for thousands of years, in the heavenly place occupied by God Almighty and the holy angels). Both signs appear in the heavenly regions where the vision is given to the seer, though both signs relate to both earth and heaven. The most important question is that of the object symbolized by this Woman. Who, without vagueness, is she, and what are we to understand, again – without vagueness, by her?

Brother Tim, and others, have preached rightly, I believe, that this Woman represents none other than the Church of Christ throughout time - from Adam to the last of God's elect. This Woman is the betrothed of the Lord – there is no other image which more richly sets forth that mystic body, which we recognize and identify in every age as the Church or people of God. There is an element of this grand sign, however - one worthy of

the most careful examination and consideration - that many have had difficulty with in framing with precision in clarity. This can be simply put as a question: If the Woman is the Church, throughout time, and the man-child is all of God's elect, and only His elect, both alive and dead in Christ at the time just prior to the birth (besides the 144,000 sealed Jews who we are shown to continue in the earth leading up to and during the millennial reign of Christ), then what is the difference (if any) between the Woman put forth in the great wonder, or sign, and the man-child put forth to whom she gives birth?

The answer is neither one given with ease or to be given lightly. I would ask you consider, beloved, that there is a meaningful difference put for us to know and consider, in this glorious passage, between the Woman and her child. Else, why the difference put? Why the particular framing of these metaphors by the Holy Spirit – put for us in this distinguishing manner? A woman, a birth, a child. I further ask you to consider what follows as a drilling down of both this momentous sign and the occurrence of birth to perhaps bring more clarity to the subject.

And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. – Rev. 12:2

This Woman is not described as becoming with child at some juncture (as at times is announced in scripture) – she is with child – she is in the way of motherhood. This is the characteristic of the Church in every period of its existence, and with special reference to what is to be fulfilled when the last trumpet shall sound. She ever bears in her body the maturing seed of a mighty birth awaited in the future. There is one individual outward figure, but that figure encloses and carries within it an invisible seed, the royal sons of a royal sire. As seen and known to us, the Church is the assembly of God's called and chosen people, manifest in the fellowship and profession of the outward signs of true religion. This assembly, however, embraces two classes, the truly elect and regenerate, whom God has begotten as His own children, and in whom the Church is seen and recognized as the congregation of saints; but along with them many nominal outward members, who are not God's children in living reality. Clearly not all are saints who profess Christianity and make outward observances; but who are the true members is not known by us with certainty, but to God only. Consider, beloved, that there is, therefore, a *visible* and an *invisible* Church — one woman, but encompassing about and insulating a hidden seed to be revealed hereafter. The invisible Church lies within the visible, and there is begotten, nourished, and borne, till the time comes for it to be brought forth. The visible Church is truly the Church, because the elect are in it, only it embraces some who are not of the elect. In it alone are God's true people to be found. In it are the means and instruments through which saints are begotten and nurtured, and the Church collected together, and

its offices and administrations filled. Though it has many who are not really what they profess, and are not of the inner household of faith, it does not cease to be the true Church of God and the only mother of saints on that account. It still glorifies God as the true Church. Their profession still is right, and the word and ordinances which they handle are still God's appointed means of grace and salvation. Their proper discipline still casts out leaven they see, after having done all to recover presumed members in meekness. And it is the Church as one glorious whole, outward and inward, visible and invisible, that we are to see in this magnificent Woman. And there is much in this sign to teach us duty, and to undergird and encourage our faith.

Seiss: The Church is meant for the work of begetting and bearing saints. It is not for show but for fruitfulness, — for the carrying and bringing forth of a royal seed of God, to inherit His kingdom, and to rule and reign in the ages of eternity. In all places and in all time, this is her office; this her aim. Ministers and people forget their calling, pervert their mission, and take the attitude of hypocrites and usurpers, where this is not their one sole aim in all their ministrations and endeavours. And as they devote themselves, often in sadness and tears, to this their work and aim, it is a blessed thing to know that, wherever the Church is, this her mission is being fulfilled, however imperceptibly to human eyes. God's fact-picture of the Church is, that where she is found, she is at the same time burdened with a seed begotten of God, which is being nurtured from her own body for a glorious birth-hour when time reaches its close. The woman is clothed with the sun. And to be clothed with the sun, one must necessarily be a glorious dispenser of illumination. And such is the visible Church. Its members and ministers have been the brightest lights of the ages. It is the pillar and ground of the truth — the golden candlestick of God amid the abounding and otherwise sunless darkness of this alien world. It is constituted and ordained for the teaching of the nations, and the bearing of the light of heaven to the benighted souls of men. People can learn the way of truth only through its testimony and confession. Christ hath said of His people, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). By them it is that the knowledge and joy of salvation are carried over the earth, and ministered unto the dwellers in darkness and the shadow of death. They are the dispensers of the light of God (sometimes in pretense, and sometimes in truth), and yet God is glorified in this and His Church is the bringer of light to a dark world in every age and time. It is a great and wonderful endowment and office; but this treasure hath the Lord given to His Church.

That there have always been those within an assembly of God, in any age, in any geography, who are not truly regenerate souls, though through all outward indicia, or for a time, thought to be so, does no violence to the glory of the visible Church. The seven

churches of Rev. 2 & 3 had, at various times (right down to the end, as the exhortation of 'he that overcometh' is repeated), those who were not the elect of God in truth. Perhaps to aid in this thinking as to the difference put between the Woman and her (soon to be birthed) man child, Ben reminded us in a recent sermon of the temporal, national election of Israel as God's chosen people (visible); and we know that, from age to age, inside of that visible body is the smaller group who, through belief in Christ, receive the spiritual, individual election to glory.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: - Ro. 9:6

The earnest messengers of God come weeping with Isaiah, that men will not believe their report. And when we look around, the true servants of Jesus are as hard to find as grapes remaining after the vintage, while iniquity abounds everywhere, and false 'churches' everywhere claim to speak for God, vomiting forth vile, oozing, lies and blasphemies that dribble down their gowns; finally reaching the ticklish ears of and meeting with applause by their congregations. But the Church lives nevertheless, and is ever "with child," until the birth.

... and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. Rev. 12:4

In order to better compartmentalize these concepts and to drill down as far as we can into their meanings (at present), I will leave reconsidering the dragon's explicitly-stated attributes in verse 3 and 4 until next Sunday (Lord willing). For now, we know that Satan has always crouched, intently hunkered down and poised to *devour* the man child, or elect souls, as soon as they become completely visible to him – by the birth signified in this revealing (as Satan has no interest in any other, and has no more idea of who God's elect truly are than do you or I – those names are written in the book of life: penned by the Spirit of God from the counsel halls of eternity).

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: - 1Pet. 5:8

At the time of the seventh trump, and therefore the birth of the man-child, the sealed remnant of the Jews will have already been joined to the last existing iteration of the 'visible' church, and so are part of that visible church, or 'Woman.' Then the invisible church within the Woman is revealed, or birthed (with several caveats missing from that

revealing, that we will discuss in a moment) - in both the first resurrection, and in the going up of those true Gentile saints that are part of that last visible iteration of the church.

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. – 1Cor. 15:51-53

This is the birth of the man-child – the revealing of those true saints of God by their ascension to glory.

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. – Rev. 12:5

We see this birth, ascension (being caught up unto God) and enthronement at Rev. 2, where Christ says to the angel of the church at Thyatira, and therefore to all seven of the churches, and by extension all of God’s people alive from the time of this Revelation vision until the last man:

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. – Rev. 2:26-27

While we know that a similar descriptor of our Messiah is also given in scripture at both Psalm 2 and Rev 19, we can have confidence of the momentous occasion of the rapture being signified by the birth of the man child, in that, 1) Christ explicitly bestows this power on his elect (he that overcometh) at Rev 2, and 2) the Church doesn’t give birth to Christ. The visible church, who has been with child throughout the ages, gives birth to that which has been within her – the elect of God. This man-child is different from, but related to, the Woman – though known all along, in a sense, as she has been with child. And a man-child, specifically. A son. The Greek that ‘male’ is put for here is *arsen*.

Seiss: *The word (arsen) which means male, has the peculiarity of being in the neuter gender, and so applies to both men and women, and cannot apply to any one individual. We have a somewhat similar instance in Timothy 3:6, where the apostle speaks of certain perverted religionists, “which creep into houses and lead captive silly women” (Greek = gunaikaria), that is, silly women of the neuter gender, and so women, or womanish ones, of both sexes. Sex, however, is not so much the subject of this arsen as the higher qualities*

of manhood common to both men and women. Such forms of speech lose all propriety except when construed with the implication that a body of persons is meant, and that this body includes women as well as men, and men as well as women. But it is a body at the same time distinguished throughout with a special masculinity, which knows no sex; that is, with the most manly of virtues, and the most vigorous and heroic of characteristics. If we understand here all God's saints, all who have been begotten of the Holy Ghost, of every age, then every letter of the narrative is realized to the full. Here are men and women, in multitudes upon multitudes, "of whom the world was not worthy," alike pervaded with the highest qualities of virtue, courage, self-denial and strength. They are all conquerors. They all have overcome the world, triumphed over the powers of darkness, won the race of faith, and through the grace of God possessed themselves of titles to everlasting crowns and honours. Their masculinity in these respects is unquestionable and most intense, whether they be men or women as to sex. Nor is this so true and characteristic of any people that have lived, or that shall live, as it is of the true children of God of all time. Here we find all the noblest and best of the race, and the embodiment of the highest virtue and wisdom that ever pulsated in the arteries of humanity. Here is the proper "man child," if ever there was or will be one upon earth.

The above-referenced verse out of 1Cor. 15 says: '*...we all shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.*' We know that the word 'all' there doesn't mean everyone – it means all those to whom it has been providentially appointed. I suggest to you, however, beloved, that there are two groups of people who, in that twinkling of an eye, will not be changed – one is a group who aren't to be changed until later (those sealed Jews who will continue in the earth, and who Satan must now turn all his attention to), and the other is a group who have *already* been changed.

I believe that the scripture is clear that there have been several instances of God's saints either being raised from the grave to glory well prior to the sounding of the seventh trump, or being taken up to glory outside of the grave (one instance clearly after death - but not from the literal grave, and others without tasting death).

I.

Elijah was both taken up to God without having died, and was seen in glory at the transfiguration that God shewed unto apostles at the time of Christ's earthly ministry:

And it came to pass, as they (Elijah and Elisha) still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. – 2Ki. 2:11

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. – Matt. 17:1-3

II.

Moses had already died and hit the grave, many years before. But now he was with the Lord, having been taken from the grave (which is also seen, by many, as the subject of the contending between Satan and Michael concerning the body of Moses – which we will get to, Lord willing, next Sunday). Although the scripture above only explicitly states that the Lord was transfigured before them, there is no other scripturally-sound explanation for the appearance of the other two, other than that they were transfigured in glory as well; Elijah being transfigured without corporeal death (as those living, elect Gentiles will be at the sounding of the 7th trump and referred to at 1Cor. 15), and Moses being transfigured from the grave (as those who sleep in Christ will be at the first resurrection, during the same time referred to at 1Cor 15).

III.

Many saints rose from the grave shortly after Christ's crucifixion:

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. – Matt. 27:50-53

They appeared unto many - an adumbration of the resurrection unto eternal life and glory – that salvation which had been accomplished by the blood of the Lamb. They would not have appeared unto many as walking dead, corrupt, vile corpses – appearing to many, in that form, would have been an appearance of what? And after those saints, who had been asleep in Christ, rose from the graves and appeared to many, would they then turn back around and go *back into* their graves and therefore back into corruption? As a showing of what?

***For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
– 1Cor. 15:53***

They were saints, who had risen from their graves – not as a confusing or frightening sign, but as living evidence of the covenant of grace, and of our promised salvation and ascension to glory. *Side note – it is likely that those who were raised, and who appeared to many, would have been recognizable by those to whom they appeared as having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ in their life - as evidence of a resurrection from the grave unto glory. Nothing dispositive here, but it makes sense in the context of the proof, or foretaste, being given.*

IV.

Enoch never tasted death (so no grave), and we don't see anything in scripture of him being on earth at the time of the man-child's birth. It would seem sound to conclude, then, that he was raised to incorruptible glory well prior to that glorious seventh trump's sounding.

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him. – Ge. 5:24

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. – Heb. 11:5

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, - Jude 14

V.

The two witnesses, at Rev. 11, are killed, and then raised after three days (not yet being in a grave) and translated unto heaven, prior to the sounding of the seventh trump:

And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three

days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. – Rev. 11:7-12

These were not saints who were already glorified. They are killed. They are dead for a time. And after three and a half days, the Spirit of God will enter into them, and they will stand to the great amazement and fear of many (think worldwide, live CNN coverage). Then they ascend into heaven. This all happens prior to the sounding of the seventh trump, when the general first resurrection occurs. *Side note – because of some of the language used to describe the two witnesses at Rev 11 (These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: - Rev. 11:6), some expositors suggest Elijah to be one of the two witnesses. But if Elijah had already appeared in his glorified state over 2,000 years before the two witnesses are killed and then rise, that would seem to discount Elijah from consideration.*

VI.

The four and twenty elders who first appear in John's vision at Rev. 4, and appear throughout Rev. 5, 7, 11, 14 and 19, are described initially, like this:

And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. – Rev. 4:4

That white raiment and those crowns of gold are both signs of heavenly glory – incorruption – transfiguration. The four and twenty elders cannot be referring to some vague representation of all of God's elect in heaven, as the seventh trump hasn't nearly sounded at the time of their introduction at Rev. 4:4. They appear in glory, and must be saints and not angels (in the spiritual being sense that Tim referred to in his last sermon). While elders are referred to in scripture as angels (or messengers, one of the other two sense that word is used), the holy angels are never referred to as elders. These are people. They appear in glory. And they first appear in John's vision well before the rapture is indicated at the sounding of the seventh trump. I'm not suggesting anything dispositive of the matter, but the evidence is there, right in God's word, that these are people, who appear in glory, and they cannot be representative of the larger body (all of God's elect), as they appear in glory prior to that general rapture (many expositors have erroneously, I believe, suggested this very thing that it cannot be). Some have intimated that this group

of four and twenty elders is none other than the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 apostles – such candidacy seems viable (representing both the covenant of the law and of grace), but I have no sufficient evidence to bring now, nor room in scope even had I some. Hopefully, some brother will pursue that at a time and ask the Lord for good light on it.

The sealed Jews (who will remain on earth, fed and succored by God during the last 3.5 years and throughout the millennial reign of Christ) will, at that time, become the only visible, true church left on the earth. Whether that number is precisely 144,000, or a larger number that becomes purged down over that following 3.5 years is not clear to me. What is clear is that Christ only communes with that precise number – so perhaps spiritual communion is meant, or perhaps literal. Again, not enough light yet. But she is nourished and succored by God through a period of greatly intense focus by His Majesty the Devil.

And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. – Rev. 12:6

Hopefully, we have drilled down a little further today into the first great wonder and the birth in Rev. 12. It is my hope to reconvene next Sunday to consider a drilling down into the second (another) wonder, the war in heaven, and the proposition that the words which speak to the war in the vision (v. 7-9) and the similarly-phrased descriptive characteristic of Satan found in the sign, or wonder (v. 3,4), are not speaking to the same event – and if true, may help us even further in clarifying the nature of the persecution toward that last iteration of the visible Church leading up to Christ's return in glory.

I hope that something said here today is of an edifying and comforting nature. Please ask if any of it has been unclear. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you on these things.

I love you all.