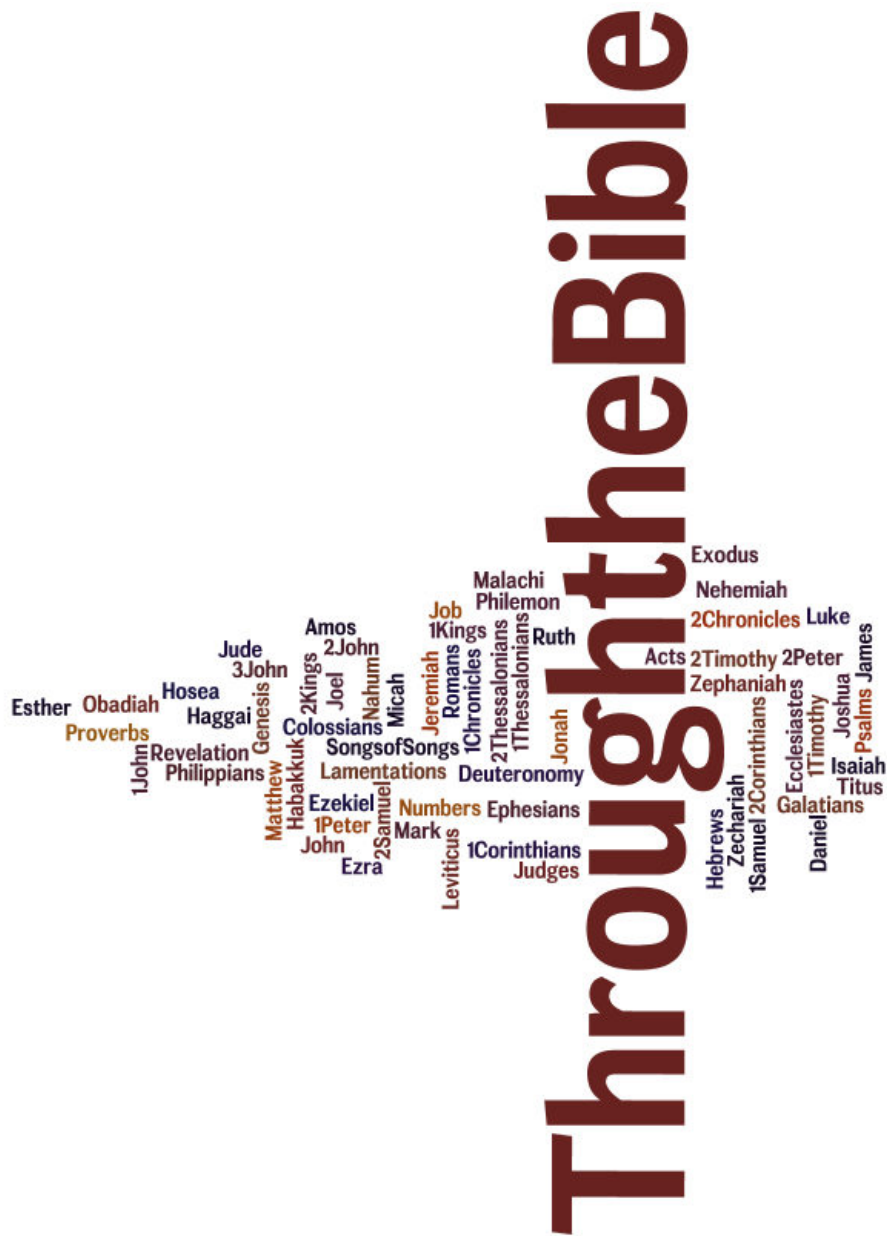




# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton



March 2014

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins. (v.8-9)*

A minister was walking down a street when he noticed a group of boys standing around a dog. Concerned for the dog's safety, he walked over and asked what they were doing. A boy replied, "This is an old stray, and all of us want it. We decided that whoever told the biggest lie would get it."

"You boys shouldn't have a contest telling lies," said the minister. "Don't you know that lying is a sin? Why, when I was your age I never told a lie!" There was silence for about a minute. Then, just as the minister thought he had gotten through to them, one boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, he wins. Give him the dog."

We smile but the truth is we have all told lies...and sometimes we still do. We try and justify them in so many ways – we call them exaggerations rather than lies. A woman said to her pastor, "I'm deeply troubled about a problem I know is hurting my testimony: I exaggerate. I always seem to enlarge a story until it's all distorted. People know they can't trust me. Can you help me?" The minister said, "Let's talk to the Lord about it." She began to pray, "O God, Thou knowest I have a tendency to exaggerate." At this point the preacher interrupted, "Call it lying, ma'am, and you may get over it!" The woman began to weep, because she knew he was right. She had been trying to make "lying" acceptable, and her excuse-making had made praying about it nearly impossible.

John challenges us about our sin in this first chapter of his letter. He says that when we claim to have no sin we are in fact lying. We are all sinners; sinners from when our mothers conceived us (Psalm 51:5). He reminds us that we worship a God who has dealt with our sin through the blood of Christ His Son. God is faithful to forgive our sin when we come and confess it before him. Stop making excuses. Be honest before God.

**Pray:** confessing specific sin in your life.

**Reflect:** do I try to hide or excuse my sin before God?

*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (v.2)*

Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan told of a coal miner who came to him and said, “I would give anything to believe that God would forgive my sins, but I cannot believe that He will forgive them if I just ask Him. It is too cheap.” Morgan said, “My dear friend, have you been working today?” “Yes, I was down in the mine.” “How did you get out of the pit? Did you pay?” “Of course not. I just got into to cage and was pulled to the top.” “Were you not afraid to entrust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?” Morgan asked. “Oh no,” said the miner, “it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink the shaft.” Suddenly the truth struck him. What had not cost him anything - salvation - had not come cheap to God. This miner had never thought of the great price God paid to send His Son so He could rescue fallen humanity. Now he realised that all anyone had to do was to “get into the cage” by faith.

John has begun his letter reminding his readers that Jesus died in their place. And that is a great and glorious truth for us as well. We are all sinners. No matter how much we try to resolve that on our own we cannot. A price had to be paid for sin and only Jesus could do that. The perfect Lamb of God came and took away the sin of the world. Right from Old Testament times there had to be sacrifice offered regularly to atone for sin. Yet each time the people made those sacrifices it would not be long before they sinned again. God decided to deal with sin once and for all – Jesus offered up his life as the perfect sacrifice for sin. It cost God a tremendous amount to save us from our sin – he gave us His one and only Son.

John reminds in verse 2 that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In verse 12 he tells us that our ‘*sins have been forgiven on account of his name.*’ Because of this, he is our advocate before the Father (v.1). Jesus is on our side. He pleads with the Father for us. The lesson is simple: confess your sin, turn from it and put your trust in Jesus Christ.

**Pray:** thanking God for the price he was willing to pay to save us.

**Reflect:** do I trust in Christ’s sacrifice alone for salvation?

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. (v.1)*

George Matheson was a 19th century Scottish pastor. He was born with an eye defect that left him totally blind by age 18. Shortly after this, his fiancée left him, deciding she would not be content to be married to a blind preacher. Years later, at age 40, Matheson was alone on the night of his sister's wedding. Something happened, perhaps the memory of being rejected by his own fiancée years before, that caused him severe mental suffering. Suddenly, the words of a hymn came to him as if dictated by some inward voice. The whole thing was done in five minutes and he never had to edit or correct it.

The first verse is: "O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe that in Thine ocean-depths its flow may richer, fuller be." The third verse reflects Matheson's experience of God's love through suffering: "O joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee; I trace the rainbow thro' the rain, and feel the promise is not vain that morn shall tearless be." In his blindness and loneliness, perhaps feeling forsaken by the love of a woman, Matheson sought and found comfort in the unchanging love of God.

Although human love is wonderful, God's love is far greater. It is the most life changing force in the world. John knew it. He had experienced it. He had lived with Jesus, witnessed all he had done, saw him die on the cross and then be raised back to life. John it was who recorded in his gospel (John 3:16) '*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*' And now John begins the third chapter of his letter by saying '*how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.*' God's love has saved us. God's love has redeemed us. God's love has restored us in relationship with him. It is a love beyond all human love. He goes on to tell us in verse 16 how we know what love is: '*Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.*' Marvel in it. Rest complete in it.

**Pray:** thanking God for his amazing love for us.

**Reflect:** how do I respond to God's love?

**Tuesday 4 March 2014**

**1 John 4:1-21**

*Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  
(v.11)*

I read an amazing story that came out of the Korean War. A young Communist officer ordered the execution of a Christian civilian. When he learned that his prisoner was in charge of an orphanage and was doing much good in caring for small children, he decided to spare his life, but kill his son instead. The 19-year-old boy was shot in the presence of his father.

Later, when the tide of events changed, this same officer was captured, tried, and condemned to death for war crimes. But before the sentence could be carried out, the Christian father pleaded for the life of this Communist who had killed his son. He admitted that if justice were followed, this man should be executed. But since he was so young and blindly idealistic, he probably thought that his actions were right. "Give him to me," he said, "and I'll teach him about the Saviour."

They granted the request. That father took the murderer of his son into his own home. As a result of his self-sacrificing love, that Communist became a Christian pastor.

Thankfully, most of us will never have to go through that kind of ordeal! But, if God so loved us, shouldn't we work at loving one another in our homes and in this church, even when it is difficult? That is the point John has gotten us to in his first letter. He has reminded us of our sin and the price that was paid for our redemption. He has reminded us of God's great love for us that compelled him to send his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. And now he urges us in response to God's great love to love one another. The church father, Jerome, said that John in old age would say those words over and over "Love one another". When asked why he simply said "Because it is the Lord's commandment, and if this only is done, it is enough".

**Pray:** asking God to help us love one another.

**Reflect:** how can I show love for another today?

*This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. (v.2)*

A woman visited a newspaper editor's office, hoping to sell him some poems she had written. "What are your poems about?" the editor asked. "They're about love!" gushed the poetess. The editor settled back in his chair and said, "Well, read me a poem. The world could certainly use a lot more love!" The poem she read was filled with moons and Junes and other sticky sentiments, and it was more than the editor could take. "I'm sorry," he said, "but you just don't know what love is all about! It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night at a sickbed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need your brand of poetical love. It needs some good old-fashioned practical love."

And it is that practical nature of love that John speaks of as he heads to the end of his first letter. He has encouraged his readers about God's great love for them – so great that he was willing to send his Son as an atoning sacrifice for their sin. He has encouraged them to love one another in response to that. And he repeats that here as he finishes. And he says the way we show our love for one another is by loving God above all and by obeying his commands. When we obey God's commands we will look out for one another, help one another, care for one another, support one another, and love one another. The Ten Commandments given to Moses for the people were very practical: love God and love others. And when we love others we will not want to steal from them, lie about them, or kill them.

John has already said in 1 John 3:18 '*let us not love with words or tongues but with actions and in truth.*' We need to take what we know and apply it to life. Loving others out of obedience to God doesn't mean tolerating them with your teeth clenched. It means being patient with them. It means doing good things for them. It means being polite to them. It means being happy for them when they get promoted and you don't. It's very practical.

**Pray:** asking God to help us obey his commands.

**Reflect:** how can I practice love in my home or workplace today?

*I ask that we love one another. (v.5)*

The story is told of a king who had a silver bell placed in a high tower of his palace early in his reign. He announced that he would ring the bell whenever he was happy so that his subjects would know of his joy. The people listened for the sound of that silver bell, but it remained silent. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, and months into years. But no sound of the bell rang out to indicate that the king was happy.

The king grew old and grey, and eventually he lay on his deathbed in the palace. As some of his weeping subjects gathered around him, he discovered that he had really been loved by his people all through the years. At last the king was happy. Just before he died, he reached up and pulled the rope that rang the silver bell.

Think of it - a lifetime of unhappiness because he didn't know that he was warmly loved and accepted by his loyal subjects. Like that monarch, many lonely souls live out their days without the joy of knowing they are loved and appreciated by others. In his second letter, a brief one to a lady who served the wider church, John calls for her and her children to continue loving one another. John begins by reminding them that he loves them and that all who know the truth love them too. Here is real Christian love and affection. John then rejoices in the fact that her children are walking in the truth.

Now John moves on to repeat a command he has offered before '*I ask that we love one another.*' And again he explains that love is shown in walking in obedience to God's commands. He goes on to warn that deceivers will come and we have to be wary of them. The best way to guard ourselves is by continuing to walk in obedience to God's Word. We are to help others too by loving them and helping them remain focused on God.

**Pray:** thanking God for brothers and sisters who we love and who love us.

**Reflect:** how can I remind others of God's love today?

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (v.4)*

I have had the immense privilege and joy of baptising both our children. From the time they were conceived Morag and I prayed that God would help us bring them up well and to know the truth. We prayed that they would grow to know Jesus and love Jesus for themselves. So what a delight when both at different times confessed Christ as Lord and were obedient in publicly declaring that through baptism. I echo John's words that '*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*' We ought to pray for, teach and encourage our children to know Jesus. And the best way we can do that is by setting them good and godly examples to follow. Keep encouraging them to walk in the truth.

John is writing to his friend Gaius here in 3 John to confirm that he is on the right track and is living well for the Lord. He is encouraging him to keep walking in the truth. He calls him to keep at it – to be faithful in loving others and looking after them. Gaius practices hospitality and looks after visiting gospel preachers. John asks that he continue that. And he prays for him that he would keep good health and things would continue to go well for him. It is good to pray for one another and encourage one another.

John then warns Gaius about Diotrephes. Having confirmed Gaius is doing well, he condemns Diotrephes for only being interested in number 1. This man wants to be pre-eminent; he wants to be first. He has no interest in listening to others – not even the apostles, the leaders. He slanders them, talking maliciously of them. He is vindictive stopping others who want to do good and help others. And then John commends Demetrius and urges Gaius to follow his example and pattern of living. He is to imitate what is good and not what is evil.

We have to look out for and after one another. We are to encourage one another to keep walking in the truth.

**Pray:** for others in the church family that they would walk in the truth.

**Reflect:** how can I encourage a brother or sister in Christ today?



*Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. (v.21)*

There's a legend about a rabbi who welcomed a weary traveller into his home for a night of rest. After learning that his guest was almost a hundred years old, the rabbi asked about his religious beliefs. The man replied, "I'm an atheist." Infuriated, the rabbi ordered the man out, saying, "I cannot keep an atheist in my house." Without a word, the elderly man hobbled out into the darkness.

The rabbi was reading the Scriptures when he heard a voice, "Son, why did you throw that old man out?" "Because he is an atheist, and I cannot endure him overnight!" The voice replied, "I have endured him for almost a hundred years." The rabbi rushed out, brought the old man back, and treated him with kindness.

When we treat unbelievers with contempt, we're not serving God. He wants us to love them as he loved us. The call from Jude is not to show contempt to others but to keep showering God's love on them. As we await the Lord taking us to eternal glory, we have a mission to fulfil. We are to be his witnesses here on earth. Jude reminds us that people may well mock our message and ignore the gospel and do their own thing but that should not prevent us from continuing to love them and share the gospel with them.

Jude's call is to show mercy to those who doubt in the hope that by showing them our faith we might lead them to Jesus. His call is that we would snatch others from the fire and save them as we show mercy to them and to point them to Jesus. His encouragement really in verse 23 is to love the sinner but hate the sin. We have to watch that we don't hate the sinner because of their sin. We were once lost sinners but someone shared the gospel with us. Let's keep going and keep sharing the gospel with others that they might know the love of God that we know.

**Pray:** for courage to persevere in sharing the gospel.

**Reflect:** who do I need to persevere with sharing in sharing the gospel? Pray for them now.

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (v.8)*

John Phillips tells the following story, “One of the most stirring pages in English history tells of the conquests and crusades of Richard I, the Lionhearted. While Richard was away trouncing Saladin, his kingdom fell on bad times. His sly and graceless brother, John, usurped all the prerogatives of the king and misruled the realm. The people of England suffered, longing for the return of the king, and praying that it might be soon. Then one day Richard came. He landed in England and marched straight for his throne. Around that glittering coming, many tales are told, woven into the legends of England. (One of them is the story of Robin Hood.) John’s castles tumbled like ninepins. Great Richard laid claim to his throne, and none dared stand in his path. The people shouted their delight. They rang peal after peal on the bells. The Lion was back! Long live the king!

One day a King greater than Richard will lay claim to a realm greater than England. Those who have abused the earth in His absence, seized His domains, and mismanaged His world will all be swept aside. Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the World will return.

The book of Revelation very clearly points to that time. John is given a glimpse of what is to come. Revelation literally means unveiling. The Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfilment of his sovereign purposes on earth. We see Jesus, and whatever else we do as we go through these next days looking at Revelation, I hope you see more of Jesus. We see Jesus ministering to the churches (ch.1-3), then we see him in heaven as the glorified Lamb of God reigning on the throne (ch.4-5), before seeing him as judge of all the earth (ch.6-18), and finally we see his return to earth as conquering King of kings (ch.19-22). Look to Him and look forward to His return one day soon.

**Pray:** asking for help to see more of Jesus in the coming days.

**Reflect:** what’s does it mean for me to look forward to Jesus’ return?

*Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love. (v.4)*

Muynak was once a thriving fishing port on the Aral Sea. But today Muynak sits on the edge of a bitter, salty desert. Sand dunes are strewn with the rusted, hollow hulls of a fishing fleet that once sailed high above on the surface of Central Asia's fountain of life.

Things began changing around 1960 when Soviet government planners began diverting the Aral's water source to irrigate the world's largest cotton belt. No one, however, envisioned the environmental disaster that would result. Weather has become more extreme, the growing season has been shortened by 2 months, and 80 percent of the region's farmland has been ruined by salt storms that sweep in off the dry seabed.

What happened at Muynak parallels the history of the church of Ephesus. Once a thriving spiritual community, the Ephesian believers diverted their attention from Christ to the works they were doing in His name (v.2-4). They had lost sight of what was most important in their relationship with Christ - their love for Him.

The word from Christ to his church begins with commendation. He thanks them for their hard work, their dedication and their perseverance in the faith. Then he brings his complaint against them – they have forgotten their first love. They have forgotten Jesus. Fortunately he offers them words of correction – repent and turn back. And he finishes with words of consolation – there is hope for you, a place in heaven.

And the same happens to us. When we first come to faith in Christ we are enthusiastic in our reading, our praying, and our being together but then somehow over time that passion wanes and we drift. Oh we still do some activities in the church but that is all they are – works. The Lord's call to us is to remember our first love and to recapture it. His call is for us to reignite our passion for him and for him alone.

**Pray:** asking God to help us rekindle our first love for Jesus.

**Reflect:** have I lost my first love and passion for Jesus?

*I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.  
(v.1)*

Astronomers tell us that it takes 33 years for the light from The Polar Star to reach the earth. For all we know the Polar Star might have burned out 20 years ago and we would not know it for another 13 years. It looks like it still there, but it may not be. It could be a dead star.

Many, many churches are in that same shape today. They have all the appearance of life, but the Great Physician, Who has His finger on their pulse, knows they are dead. How do you know a church is dead or dying? A dying church rests on its past accomplishments and is satisfied with its present state. A dying church is more concerned about their rituals and their formalities than they are about spirituality. A dying church is more concerned about social change than they are about seeing people changed by the power of God. A dying church is more concerned with material growth than it is with spiritual growth. A dying church is more concerned with pleasing men than it is with pleasing God. A dying church clings more tightly to its creeds and confessions than it does to the Word of God. A dying church is one that loses its conviction that the Bible is the Word of God.

The contrast to that are the signs of life in a church. The first is a vibrant love for the Lord. This shows itself in the worship and witness of a church. It shows itself in the way we talk about what the Lord is doing in our lives. This is then shown in growth, and not just numerical growth, but spiritual growth – people are growing in their relationship with the Lord. They are growing more like Jesus. It is also shown in healthy relationships – we grow to love one another more and care for one another more. It is shown in activity as well – we are serving the Lord, the church family and the community around us.

The church in Sardis has a reputation for being alive but they are actually dying. They have forgotten the basics. They are challenged to get back to basics: to read and obey God's commands.

**Pray:** asking God to forgive us when we turn from the basics.

**Reflect:** is our church alive or dead?

*They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power." (v.10-11)*

Once during her reign, England's Queen Victoria listened to a chaplain preach a sermon about the second coming of Christ. Those near the royal box noticed that the queen's eyes were filled with tears. When the service ended, she asked to see the chaplain alone. Seeing her great emotion, he asked why she was so moved. She replied, "Because of what you said about the coming again of the world's rightful King, I wish still to be here when He returns that I might lay my crown at His blessed feet!"

So often when we think of heaven we have a picture of what we will get and how we will live. We consider the crown of righteousness that will be awarded to us as Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 4:8; or we think on our mansion (or room) that John speaks of in his gospel (John 14:2); or we dream of the new body we will receive (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). We think on a place where there is no more pain or sorrow or mourning (Revelation 21:4). I've heard people describe heaven as the place where they will be able to play golf forever on golden fairways or fish on the most sublime rivers.

The picture we are actually given of heaven here in Revelation 4 shows something else. John is given a glimpse of heaven's throne room. We see God in all his majesty and glory sitting on the throne. He is surrounded by twenty four elders all seated on thrones. The living creatures are before the throne singing and praising. And then the elders take off their crowns and lay them before God.

Whatever else heaven may be and whatever else it will involve, it is certainly about us laying down our all before the King of kings and Lord of lords; it is about us worshipping God, our creator and sustainer. Why wait for heaven...we can lay our all before him now in worship and praise.

**Pray:** praising God for who He is.

**Reflect:** what will heaven be like?

*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God. (v.9)*

An Indianapolis Superior Court judge made news when she paid \$1 of her own money to post a burglary suspect's bail. The judge became personally involved for several reasons: The suspect had no money. He had no prior criminal record. The jail was overcrowded. And minimal bond had to be set so that a deputy could be assigned to escort the suspect to a work-release centre to wait for trial. The judge's actions, however, were not above criticism. She was accused of losing her objectivity, so she removed herself from the case.

Jesus has also become personally involved in the lives of those who are scheduled to stand before His court. He sacrificed His life and shed His blood as payment for the sins of the world. But His actions cannot be criticised. Instead he receives praise and glory and honour.

Here in Revelation 5 we find God on the throne with a scroll in his right hand. An angel cries out asking who can open it, and none is found...until that is the focus centres on the Lamb. And suddenly the elders and the living creatures fall down and start singing the praise of the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world. Myriad angels then join in the praise. The halls of eternal justice will resound with the voices of angels praising the Judge who is worthy to judge the world - because of the personal price He paid (v.12). And then the scene closes with every creature joining in and giving praise and glory to Jesus.

When we picture the scene in our minds, and remember all that Jesus has done for us personally, all we can do is worship and praise the King above all others. "Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne; hark how the heavenly anthem drowns, all music but its own! Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee, and hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity."

**Pray:** praising God for Jesus, the Lamb of God who took away your sin.

**Reflect:** on the price that was paid for your salvation.

*I looked and there before me was a white horse. (v.2)*

We often think we would not fall for deception on a grand scale, but we so often do. This is nothing new and it happens to the smartest people. Just look at what Hitler did prior to WWII. Hitler had outlined in detail his plans for conquest in his book *Mein Kampf*, which was published more than a decade before WWII began. Yet, the Western Allies, persisted in believing Hitler's false claim to be a man of peace.

They stood idly by as he reoccupied the Rhineland (demilitarised after WWI), thus abrogating the Versailles Treaty. Then he annexed Austria, the Sudetenland, and Czechoslovakia. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met with Hitler at Munich in 1938. Upon his return to England, Chamberlain triumphantly waved a piece of paper that contained a pledge of peace from Hitler, which he claimed guaranteed peace. Winston Churchill rose in the House of Commons to declare that England had suffered a total, unmitigated defeat. He was shouted down by angry members of Parliament. The deception was nearly universal. Only after Hitler invaded Poland in 1939 did the allies acknowledge the truth. By then it was too late.

The anti-Christ will be the same and do the same, only on a world-wide scale. We are introduced to the anti-Christ here in Revelation 6. He comes riding a white horse imitating Christ – he wears a crown and looks to be heading out to conquer evil. Yet we soon learn the colour changes to red and he is bent on taking away peace in the world. Then it changes black and there is famine, before it changes to a pale colour and there is death.

We see here some of what Jesus began to warn about in Matthew 24. A deceiver will come promising so much delight then delivering us into destruction. We are to be on our guard. We are to remain focused on Christ alone. If not, we will face the wrath of God which comes on the evil.

**Pray:** for strength and courage to remain focussed on Christ and to follow him always.

**Reflect:** how can I guard against being deceived?

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (v.17)*

In the comic strip BC, a cave man stood before a rock labelled “Exchanges.” He complained to the person in charge of exchanges, “My calendar watch won’t budge.” The other man replied, “I don’t wonder. I’m not too choked up about moving into the next year myself.”

We can all understand his pessimistic outlook. Tomorrow often does look dark. But the real question is: “What lies beyond midnight?”

John is living in exile as he writes this book. He has been granted a wonderful vision of what is yet to come and so he writes to encourage his readers with this. Those he wrote to were likely being threatened with persecution for their faith. They probably weren’t too keen to move into the future.

To help them John painted a wonderful picture of ultimate future. God is going to call us to himself in glory. We are, v.15, going to be before his throne, serving him forevermore. He will feed and water us such that we will never hunger or thirst again. And he will wipe every tear from our eyes. The pains and struggles of this earthly life will be over. What a comfort this must have been for them.

And what a comfort for us. We in the West have not faced the persecution that other brothers and sisters have across the globe but times are not easy here and the future is not always bright. We see same sex marriage being legalised, we see the secular society try to drive us out of public life, and we see the humanists wanting to remove religious chaplains and services from our schools. Some do not want to hear our Christian voice and we will face persecution on account of our faith and belief. We can take encouragement from these verses that our future is not all doom and gloom – we have a home in glory that awaits us, a place where our Father in heaven will wipe every tear from our eyes.

**Pray:** for strength to keep living God’s way in this dark world.

**Reflect:** do I worry about the future? Lay it all in God’s hands.



*When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (v.1)*

I well remember my first day working in the Bank. I started on the Tuesday following a May Bank Holiday. It all started quietly and serenely. I remember asking after half an hour if it was always like this and was told this was just the lull before the storm. And how true! Within minutes the place filled up, the phones went and that was us flat out for the rest of the day catching up on what people had missed the day before.

Here in Revelation 8 we learn something of a lull before the storm. The seventh seal is opened and there is silence. I often wonder if it is because the heavenly creatures all saw what was written as they broke the seal and the pages fell open – were they simply awestruck at what was revealed. All was quiet.

Seven angels stand with seven trumpets, waiting. Silence reigns, as if all heaven is listening on tiptoe. Then an angel collects the prayers of God's people on earth - all the accumulated prayers of praise, lament, abandonment, despair, petition - mixes them with incense, and presents them before the throne of God (v.1-4). The silence finally breaks when the fragrant prayers are hurled down to earth: setting off a storm of thunder, lightning, and an earthquake (v.5).

Our prayers are important. We might think they have not always been answered but God hears. And in His time He answers. For two thousand years his people have prayed 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth.' For thousands of years the people of God have asked Him to demonstrate His power; avenge His name; and get glory over sin and sinners. Those prayers are about to be answered. And now the scene before us is one of God answering that prayer. He is going to bring in his kingdom rule. Sadly, yet justly, it begins with devastation, destruction, death and darkness.

**Pray:** for God's kingdom to come.

**Reflect:** do I pray for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done?

**Monday 17 March 2014**

**Revelation 9:1-21**

*The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands. (v.20)*

I remember being invited to a special parent's evening for 'Safe Drive, Stay Alive' at the MacRobert a few years back. Andrew was going to see it during the day with his classmates but we were getting to attend so we could see what they saw and could talk about it to him afterwards. It all started with a bit of fun and music, the party was going. Then the main presentation began...and it was heartbreaking. A father came on and spoke of his son and what happened to him as he sat in a friend's car without a seatbelt on. Various other scenes were shown during the show to highlight the many dangers young people face when they get in a car. In the end, having thought the man's son was dead, he was wheeled on to the stage in a wheelchair and spoke to us through a computer as he was paralysed from the neck down and could not speak for himself. His message was a warning to the young people to be careful when they drove.

John's words in Revelation 9 are a bit of a warning for humanity. We do not like to see the picture of what will happen in the days to come as God comes with judgement on the earth. The first four trumpets have been sounded and they brought forth horrible scenes of death and destruction. Now in chapter 9 there is worse to come – plagues and suffering. You would think this would be a wake up call to people and yet as we come to the close of the chapter we find that those left after the plagues still do not see sense and repent.

We have been given this picture as a reminder to believers of what we are saved from, as a warning for those not yet saved of the terrible judgement coming for those who reject Jesus, and as a motivator for us believers to get out there and share the good news with a lost world so that they too can be saved from this impending judgement.

Let's make sure we heed the warning, repent of our sin and turn to the Saviour.

**Pray:** for an unsaved family member of friend.

**Reflect:** am I doing all I can to share the good news with others?

*There will be no more delay. (v.6)*

I heard about these boys one time who were out playing rounders. A man was riding by and stopped and to watch the boys play for a little bit. He looked over there and he said to one of the little fellows, he said, "Son, how's your team doing?" And he said, "Well, we're not doing so good." He said, "Well what's the score, son?" He said, "They're beating us 23 to nothing." He said, "Boy, that is bad, son, that's just real bad." He said, "Aw, yes sir, but it's not too bad, we ain't got in to bat yet."

We often worry that the devil is having a field day in the world. Things are getting worse. There is so much fighting and so many troubles; so many hurting people. Listen, the devil is up to bat right now but one of these days God's half of the innings is going to come up and there'll be no more delay. Look at Hebrews 10:37, *'For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come, and will not delay."'*

John has just seen the results of the first six trumpets and it has been bad. But God reveals to him that the time has come. He is waiting no more. Judgement will come on the world. John hears the voices of seven thunders and was getting ready to write them down but the Lord stops him and tells him to seal them up (v.4). While the voices of the thunders remain a mystery, the next voice John hears brings a message that is crystal clear. The person John saw lifts His holy hands and makes a tremendous promise. He tells John that the days of waiting are finished. God is preparing to consummate His work and complete His Word. God is preparing to bring His work of judgment and redemption to an end.

In case you have forgotten, God does not operate like we do. His timetable is vastly different from ours. We think we are in a period of delay. We think things are moving so slowly. We think God will never fulfil all the promises He has made. Well, we are wrong! God wears a different kind of timepiece than we do, 2 Peter 3:8. It might seem as if sin and Satan are winning...but God is not finished yet!

**Pray:** for courage to keep living for Jesus.

**Reflect:** do I trust that Jesus has the ultimate and final victory?

*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. (v.15)*

I remember David Coffey speaking on this text at the Baptist Youth World Conference held in Glasgow in 1988. He walked on to the stage in front of more than a thousand young people with a copy of that day's newspaper in his hand. As he opened it up he commented on how we can hear all about the troubles of the world over the past. Our newspapers tell us the story of what has happened and is happening. They cannot tell he said what will happen in the future. Then he took his bible and said but this book does. Then he declared verse 15 in front of the crowd and there was rapturous applause. There is a day coming when Christ will rule for ever.

John is given that vision here in Revelation 11. The first six trumpets have sounded and destruction and death have come. Now the seventh trumpet is sounded and we discover that the king is coming to reign. We find out that this world which for so long has lived without acknowledging its maker, has come finally under his complete rule and reign. The kingdom that the devil tried to offer Jesus when he tempted him in the desert has become his now. Paul's words in Philippians 2 are coming to pass – every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And the great news of this proclamation is that it is not time limited and it will not pass. He will reign for ever and ever.

When our Queen Elizabeth was a child, her parents held a garden party at Buckingham Palace, but a rainstorm forced the party to move indoors. Elizabeth and her younger sister wandered into the room where the guests had gathered and were politely bombarded by questions. During a pause in the conversations, Elizabeth pointed toward a nearby wall and a painting of Jesus on the cross. She remarked, "That's the man my papa says is really king."

Let's be in doubt, Jesus is King. One day the whole world will know it.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Reflect:** does Jesus reign in my life right now?

*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. (v.11)*

Radovan Karadzic, once the leader of the Bosnian Serbs and accused of genocide, had been one of the most wanted men in the world. By growing a long, white beard, carrying false papers, and practicing alternative medicine, he fooled everyone - for a while. After 13 years in hiding, he was finally arrested.

The Bible tells us that Satan is also in the business of fooling people with disguises. He started that way back in the Garden of Eden and has carried that on down through the ages. He has avoided punishment and gone about his business for too long. His time is coming. And here in revelation 12 we find him exposed and expelled.

We discover him as the great dragon in verse 9 and find out some of his names and a bit of his nature. He is a dragon. Dragons are usually associated with fierceness, brutality, violence and destruction. Superstitious people in the dark ages lived in fear of fire-breathing dragons. He is also called the ancient serpent and of course this takes us back to when we first came across him in the early chapters of Genesis. The image of a serpent is an image of something that is evil, contemptible, detestable, deceitful, underhanded and sly. What a perfect depiction of the devil! We see him as the devil and Satan too – a slanderer and false accuser who stand opposed to God. His nature is exposed too as the one who leads people astray and also as an accuser of the saints.

However, the great news is that his time will come. In verse 7 and 8 we find him overcome by Michael and the angels. In verse 9 he is hurled to earth. And according to verse 11 he is overcome by the blood of the Lamb. When Jesus died on the cross, shedding his blood for our sin, he dealt with sin and Satan for ever. The devil's time is almost up. Don't give in to him. Keep following Jesus.

**Pray:** thanking God for the victory over sin we have in Jesus.

**Reflect:** how can I continue to resist the devil?

*This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.  
(v.10)*

In Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas there are three great fountains inside a part of the building known as The Forum Shops. This shopping complex has been designed to give the illusion that you are walking down an ancient Roman street. There is even a sky with clouds over head. At the top of every hour two of these fountains come to life. The statues in the fountains begin to move and talk to one another and to the people watching. One of the fountains tells and acts out the story of the fall of Atlantis.

I wrote that to say this: if man in his ingenuity can make statues that will come to life, surely the devil can do that and greater. Here in Revelation 13 we are introduced to two beasts. Added to the dragon that we saw in the previous chapter we now have an unholy trinity. The devil is trying to imitate and mock God. The dragon is the counterfeit Father, the beast of the sea the counterfeit Christ and the beast of the earth the counterfeit Holy Spirit.

These beasts are gruesome. The first demands the wonder and worship of the people and many will fall for it. This has been what Satan has craved all the long – worship. We then see him defy God and destroy the people. The next beast comes and makes an idol for them to worship – and he brings it to life too. This image of the Antichrist will live and it will deceive the world!

These are not good days to look forward to. But verse 10 offers us a reminder of the hope to come. The law of consequences cannot be endlessly evaded. God has not forgotten. It may look like evil has triumphed, everything has gone wrong, but hang in there. '*God cannot be mocked*' (Galatians 6:7). The law of consequences cannot be cancelled. The devil will pay the price for this defiance and destruction. The story ends only one way – God wins!

**Pray:** for patience to endure and the faith to keep trusting God.

**Reflect:** how can I remain strong in the face of persecution?

*They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. (v.4)*

William Borden was born into wealth as an heir to the Borden dairy fortune, but he soon recognised true wealth was to be found in a different inheritance - being a child of God and an heir with Christ. Borden lived a short but high-impact life. He graduated high school at age 16 and quickly decided to become a missionary after seeing the global need for Christ on a trip through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. He memorialised this decision by writing “no reserves” in the back of his Bible.

After revolutionising the campus of Yale University by starting a weekly prayer and Bible study group attended by three quarters of the student body, Borden could have started his career with any corporation he desired. Rather, he stood firm in his decision to become a missionary and enrolled at Princeton Seminary. Once again, he made a record of his decision in the back of his Bible: “no retreats” was his entry.

After finishing Princeton Seminary, Borden studied Arabic in Egypt to reach Muslims in China. He died from spinal meningitis shortly thereafter. Though he never reached his intended mission field, Borden impacted many people during his life. The last entry in the back of his Bible was “no regrets.”

God wants all of His children to live lives of great impact, and He gave us the example of William Borden as inspiration. He was willing to ‘*follow the Lamb wherever he goes.*’ The 144,000 mentioned here are the witnesses mentioned in chapter 7. They have committed themselves to following the Lord, and doing what he called them to do. The question that arises then is are we ready to follow wherever God leads. Are we willing to lay down our own dreams and desires to follow Jesus and obey his commands? Does our walk match our words? Are we able to write in our bibles ‘no reserves, no retreats, no regrets.’

**Pray:** for strength and courage to follow wherever the Lord leads us.

**Reflect:** do I follow Jesus completely and obey his commands?

*They held harps given them by God, and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. (v.2-3)*

A little boy named Philip was walking down the street of a small Pennsylvania town when he heard a sound that had never before reached his ears. It was that of a piano. Ten-year-old Philip Bliss was so enchanted by its sound that he walked right into the house from which it came.

When the woman at the piano saw the boy, she stopped her playing. Philip said, "Oh, please, play some more!" Unflattered by his obvious delight, she ordered him out of her house. She had failed to understand how majestic those notes sounded to that youngster. She had no way of knowing that one day he would become a gifted writer of many well-loved hymns such as 'Man of Sorrows...Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'

Imagine a person with an ear for music hearing for the first time a beautiful composition on the piano with its soaring chords and varieties of sounds. Now imagine hearing another musical sound for the first time - a vast choir of the redeemed in heaven. In Revelation 15 we read that someday in heaven thousands will join their voices with '*harps given them by God*' in singing, '*Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty!*' And what a picture that brings to our minds. And in that moment are we not tempted to join in singing praise to God right where we are?

The scene of course is a temporary one of praise here which foretells a greater scene to come. There are seven angels with seven last plagues to pour out on the evil world and we will think on that tomorrow. But before that happens there is this marvellous scene of praise. We often get that glimpse of heaven in a praise service or a special event like Keswick, and it is a foretaste of things to come. As we look forward to that day when we will join with that heavenly cast before the throne, let us bring our praise and glory to the Lamb of God now.

**Pray:** praising God for all He has done for us.

**Reflect:** what will it be like to sing around the throne of God?



*For they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. (v.6)*

A group of rowdy teenagers spray-painted obscenities on the brick walls of a local high school. The police charged them with malicious destruction of property. The judge sentenced them to probation with no jail time - but only if they could get every bit of paint off the walls, including the cracks between the bricks. It took them days! Another judge gave some vandals the opportunity to learn all about dry walling - by repairing a home they were found guilty of ransacking. I admire judges like these who hand down punishments that fit the crimes!

Our Lord also has a sense of poetic justice - a way of making sure the guilty get paid back in a way that suits what they've done, sometimes in a way they least expect. Think of Haman, who was hanged from the same gallows he built for Mordecai (Esther 7:7-10). In the future, as Revelation 16:6 tells us, those who *'have shed the blood of your saints and prophets'* will be given *'blood to drink as they deserve.'* In these examples, the guilty are punished in a way that fits their crimes.

In verse 7, we read, *'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.'* We can be glad they are not only poetic, but right! God rules righteously and judges righteously. And we can trust in that. As we read chapter 16 we see the final judgement coming on a sinful people. It is horrific as the plague falls on the sinner – sores on the body, blood in the sea and the streams, the scorching sun, the dreadful darkness and the earth-shattering earthquake. We recoil as we read and think that is perhaps harsh – yet God is giving people what they deserve. These plagues are God's judgment on sinners who refuse to come to Him for salvation. These plagues are designed to judge those who have defied a holy God at every turn.

Justice comes to all. Let's thank God for the one who paid our price and has redeemed us.

**Pray:** thanking God for Christ who paid the price for our sin.

**Reflect:** on what Christ has saved us from.

*They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers. (v.14)*

If I was to mention the name “The King” I wonder if you would think of Elvis. The enduring popularity of the singer from Mississippi spans generations and cultures. More than 30 years after his death, sales of Presley’s music, memorabilia, and licensing agreements generate millions of dollars in annual income. Once dubbed “The King of Rock and Roll,” Elvis is often called simply, “The King.”

Whether the “kings” of this world are celebrities, athletes, crowned heads, or tycoons, they come and go. Their influence may be immense and their followers fanatically loyal, but it doesn’t last forever.

The Bible, however, refers to Jesus Christ as the eternal King. Revelation 17 speaks prophetically of earthly kings who will fight to establish their authority at the end of the ages. Biblical scholars have debated the identities of these kings, but there is no mistake about the One they cannot overpower: *‘They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.’ (v.14)*

These two chapters, 17 and 18, give John a glimpse of what will happen to the beast’s worldwide religious system. The picture is of a scarlet lady, a prostitute, who has influenced the world and led them astray. The devil’s scheme is to draw us into a desire for wealth and for power – to look out for self and ignore others; in particular to ignore God and go our own way. It is all going to be banished as Jesus, the King of kings, comes in glory.

However bad we think this world may be in our day there is a day coming when Christ will reign forever and this selfish age will be no more. Jesus Christ the Lord is King, and He will reign forever.

**Pray:** praising Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Reflect:** do I let Christ reign as King of my life?

*Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! (v.19)*

Nothing seems to devastate people more than destitution. Take away a person's money and often you have taken away their reason for living. This was the case in 1929 when the US stock market crashed. October 29, 1929 became known as "Black Tuesday". When the stock market crashed, the world was plunged into "The Great Depression". Over the next few years the economic structure of the U.S. economy was nearly destroyed. Over 9,000 banks closed their doors between 1930 and 1933. Production in U.S. manufacturing plants ground to a halt, leaving millions unemployed. Many thousands lost their homes to foreclosure; many others lost their health to malnutrition. All across this nation, people waited in soup lines for their meals.

These verses in Revelation 18 tell us of an economic collapse that will make the stock market crash of 1929 seem like nothing! This economic disaster will be worldwide in its scope and it will take away mankind's favourite god: money! US currency has the words "In God We Trust" printed or stamped on every piece. For far too many, the "god" they trust is the piece of money they hold in their hands. In this chapter we see everything being taken from the evil world who have ignored God and made money among other things their god.

Often we place a measure of trust in our wealth and possessions. We think if we have a big house, a fancy car, the finest clothes and the latest gadgets then somehow we have made it. What nonsense. These things do not save us or define us. And we can certainly not take them with us either. There is nothing wrong in having and enjoying the pleasures of life...but they must not become our god. As Matthew shares in Matthew 6:19-24 we can not serve both God and money. Our worship must be given to God alone.

**Pray:** asking God to help us store up treasures in heaven rather than to gain treasures on earth.

**Reflect:** do I serve God or money?

*Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. (v.6-7)*

Spontaneous celebrations of freedom erupted all across Eastern Europe in the late 1980s as atheistic and tyrannical governments suddenly disintegrated. One of the more unusual displays of liberty took place in Czechoslovakia on November 27, 1989.

Although church bells had not been heard in that freedom-starved nation for 45 years, at noon that day every church bell in the country began to ring. The pigeons were as startled as the people. A sign placed on the front lawn of a church in Prague summed up the joy of the moment. It read simply: The Lamb Wins.

That triumphant message evokes a picture of the meekness and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the pages of Revelation, He is portrayed as the Lamb who redeems us. Yet despite the gentleness represented by a lamb, Jesus is also the mighty Judge who will defeat all who oppose Him.

The reign of God's Messiah will not come peacefully. The imagery of Revelation 19 is full of God's fierce power and His violent judgment but it is mixed in with the joyful scenes of a wedding feast. The chapter begins with John being given the vision of great celebrations in heaven. Salvation has come. God's justice is being poured out. The Lamb is ready to claim his bride and he is prepared to reign forever. There is a final battle to come in order for all this to happen. In that day the nations will gather for a great rebellion against God (v.19), but they will be destroyed in a moment (v.21).

And so as we look around at the troubles of this world we can rest secure in the hope that this is not how it will be. The Lamb does win, evil is overcome.

**Pray:** praising God that Christ does have the final victory.

**Reflect:** am I looking forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb?

**Friday 28 March 2014**

**Revelation 20:1-15**

*Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (v.12)*

Judy White Edelson, in her Newsweek article “Not All Bridges Can Be Burned,” recalls a remark her mother made whenever Judy did or said something foolish. “That will go into your permanent record,” she would say. Judy admits she laughed at that warning. As a young person she anticipated “a long, full lifetime to make mistakes and explore endless possibilities.”

But in her late forties it dawned on her that a record has been kept. There’s a record in her memory bank, in her character, and in the lives of people she has interacted with.

That’s not the only record being kept. There’s also one being kept by the all-knowing, everywhere-present God. A time is coming when all the dead will stand before the Creator-Judge. His books will be opened, and those assembled in His awesome presence will be ‘*judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books*’ (v.12). This is a frightening thought for us.

I still recoil for a moment every time I watch the Christianity Explored dvd and see the picture of a room where post it notes of all my thoughts, words and actions are placed on the walls – they are covered. All my sin, all my rebellion, and all my rejection of God and His ways. And yet it does not need to be frightening for Christ has died for my sin and it is remembered no more. There is a ‘paid in full’ stamp right across my page.

There is another book that will be opened on that day - the Book of Life. Only the names of those who have trusted in Jesus as their Saviour are written in that Book. ‘*If anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*’ (v.15). Is your name in that book?

**Pray:** thanking God that Jesus has paid my debt in full.

**Reflect:** is my name in the Lamb’s book of life?

*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. (v.3)*

Samuel Morrison was a faithful missionary who served twenty-five years in Africa. In failing health, Morrison returned to the United States. Also travelling home on the same ocean liner was President Teddy Roosevelt who had been in Africa for a three-week hunting expedition. As the large ship pulled into New York harbour, it looked as though the entire city had come out to welcome the President. Music filled the air, banners wafted in the wind, balloons flew to the sky, flashbulbs were popping, and confetti streamed down like snow. As Roosevelt stepped into sight, the crowd exploded in applause and cheers. It was truly a reception fit for a king. While all of the eyes were on the President, Morrison quietly disembarked and slipped through the crowd. None of the applause was for him and nobody was there to welcome him home.

His heart began to ache as he prayed, “Lord, the President has been in Africa for three weeks, killing animals, and the whole world turns out to welcome him home. I’ve given twenty-five years of my life in Africa, serving you, and no one has greeted me or even knows I’m here.” He then felt the gentle touch of God and sensed the Spirit say, “But my dear child, you are not home yet!” What a joyous thought to realise presidential receptions pale in comparison to the heavenly homecoming that awaits every child of God.

Nothing in this world compares him being at home with God forever. Revelation 21 pictures for us the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. It is a place where we will quite simply be with God forever dwelling with him. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. There will be no more sin. And then we are given a wonderful picture of its splendour and majesty. And all whose names are in the Lamb’s book of life will be there. Are you looking forward to being home with the Lord? To be sure of that you have to put your trust and faith in him, turning from your sin and crowning Jesus as Lord of your life.

**Pray:** thanking God for the assurance of your place in glory because of Jesus.

**Reflect:** are you looking forward to going home one day?

*Behold, I am coming soon! (v.12)*

Revelation, and with it the Bible, closes with the Lord's words '*Behold, I am coming soon!*' John has been given a glorious glimpse of what lies ahead. The times in which he lives are tough. Persecution threatens the believers. They might think that it will not end well. But John, having been given this preview of what lies in front, writes it down for them to behold and to keep the faith. The days will become worse, evil will reign but it is only for a time. The Lord will return in glory. The Lamb will overcome Satan. Those who trust in Jesus will be with him in glory for ever and ever.

Life can be a struggle for us at times as well. Life is hard. Times are tough. Evil prospers and good people suffer. We face persecution and are mocked for our beliefs. But this is not the end and this is not the way it will always be. We have been given hope. We have the sure and certain hope of God's perfect eternity. Jesus has promised he is coming soon. We do not know when that will be but the call is to be ready.

In northern Italy, a tourist found this beautiful picture of what it means to be expectant of Christ's return. At the Villa Asconati, along the shore of Lake Como, he was introduced to a friendly older man who cared for the castle's garden. The grounds were immaculate and the gardener was doing everything he could to further improve their beauty. To his surprise, the tourist discovered the owner of this castle had not been on the property in twelve years. He seemed confused by the man's compulsion for perfection when the owner had not appeared in over a decade. So he said, "You keep this garden in such fine condition, just as though you expected your master to come tomorrow." The gardener promptly replied, "Today, sir, today!" That groundskeeper had the expectancy that every believer should possess.

Are you looking for his return tomorrow, or today?

**Pray:** asking God to help us live for him now as we await Christ's return.

**Reflect:** are you looking forward to Christ's return?