

Session 3 Encountering the Knowledge of God

INTRODUCTION

John 17:20-26. We looked at the three different sections of this “Holy of Holies” prayer. This is the kind of prayer that you really want to study and understand. I don’t know of any other prayer in the Word of God that would seem more relevant and have more revelation of the heart of God than the prayer of Jesus right before He went to the garden of Gethsemane to become the offering for sin, giving one last cry before He was offered up to death. Again, this cry, in my understanding, gives a summary of what has been in His heart from eternity as He has waited for His bride, and now it’s the time to purchase her.

“THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE, THAT THEY MAY KNOW YOU, THE ONLY TRUE GOD”

In verse 3 we looked at the statement in which He sums up the whole essence, the purpose, the goal, the power of life, which is found in the discovery and the experience of the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God has power in it. It isn’t neutral information; it’s powerful, living information. It has living understanding that impacts the natural realm.

I have two verses from Revelation that just come to mind right now. Again, you’ll never go wrong studying and meditating on the book of Revelation a lot. I’ll just quote them to you really quickly, because we’re going to get to the latter half of John 17. When Jesus appears again to the natural creation, not only to an individual but actually standing before the earth at the second coming in Revelation 6:12-18, it’s interesting to see what happens when He steps out of eternity into time and addresses it again. The power that’s released at His appearing is staggering. The sun and the moon don’t work. The stars fall from the heavens. Every island and every mountain in the whole earth shakes. This is the power of the knowledge and the presence of God when He returns in His unveiled glory before natural creation. All of creation is actually moved under the impact of the power of His unveiled presence. The first time He came in an open way, at the incarnation, and during His thirty-three years on the earth, He veiled His glory. That’s why they couldn’t see who He was. But the next time He’s coming in His unveiled glory.

JOHN FELL LIKE A DEAD MAN AT THE SIGHT OF THE UNVEILED GLORY OF JESUS

John is the apostle whom the Living Bible called, “John, the Lord’s best friend.” I don’t know if that’s an accurate translation, but I think the idea is interesting, because he put his head on the Lord’s breast. I think that’s where it’s coming from. In Revelation 1:12-18, when John sees his best friend again, he falls like a dead man before Him because Jesus is in His unveiled glory. This is John who laid his head on His breast at the last supper. It’s like Jesus looked at him.

Here’s John sixty years later, because Jesus died in around 30 AD. The book of Revelation is written around 90 AD, when this vision is given to John. John spent sixty years in the Holy Spirit as an apostle. What man in all of redemptive history encountered more of the glory of God than John? The only other possible person I can think of is Moses. He’s no longer a young apostle. Paul spent about thirty years as an apostle. John was an apostle for sixty years. I’m thinking his capacity to experience God would have been so great in terms of human calculations. John is the most mature man of God in the new covenant. John is the most experienced man of God in the Holy Spirit that I can imagine in the New Testament era. He stands before his best friend, the One he was so intimate with, and with one glance at His unveiled glory he falls like a dead man in the presence of Jesus Christ. It’s almost like Jesus could have bent over and said, “John,” and tapped him on the shoulder.

“Remember back in Caesarea Philippi when I asked you, ‘Whom do men say that I am?’ You didn’t really know who I was, did you?”

John really had no understanding of who Jesus was. I mean, he knew that He was the Redeemer, but he didn’t really understand the transcendent majesty that Jesus Christ possessed before the beginning of time. He fell as a dead man. That’s the power of the revelation of the knowledge of God upon a human soul.

“ONE FROM WHOM HEAVEN AND EARTH FLED AWAY”

But it gets even more intensive than Revelation 1 and Revelation 6. In Revelation 20:11, when the Father appears, heaven and earth are no more. When God the Father pulls back the curtain, so to speak, that protects creation from His glory, when God the Father shows who He is in fullness, heaven and earth flee and are no more. That’s the power of the knowledge of God the Father. It’s just awesome who this One is who calls us to Himself. It says in Psalm 104:2 that God the Father clothes Himself in a “garment of light” (Ps. 104:2, paraphrased). These are just verses that are coming to my heart; I don’t have them anywhere on the notes. If you like those verses, jot them down. God clothes Himself in a garment of light. One of the reasons He does that is to protect even the angelic hosts from fully gazing upon Him. I think it would be so overwhelming that they couldn’t ingest it; they couldn’t receive it.

“DWELLING IN UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT, WHOM NO MAN HAS SEEN OR CAN SEE”

It says in 1 Timothy 6:16 that God dwells in light that’s unapproachable. No man has seen God, nor can see God. Again, the reason no man can see God is because of the very, very, very minimal capacity that we have in our natural constitution. We need a glorified body with a correspondingly increased capacity to stand in the presence of God. It’s like putting a thousand volts of electricity into a unit that’s only adaptable to 110 volts. It would totally fry that unit. A person with our natural constitution standing unprotected in the presence of God, by the sheer power and awesomeness of the experience, would be completely destroyed in the flesh. That’s one of the main reasons that I believe no one can see God (Jn. 1:18). People say it’s because God is holy and too sacred. If He’s too sacred, then why can the angels see Him? We’re higher than the angels. I don’t think it’s because God is so sacred; I think it’s because the glory of God is so intense, and it isn’t compatible with our human frame. We’re higher than the angels in the divine economy, and they see God, but God is clothed in light when they see Him as well. God is clothed in the garment of light even when the angels gaze on Him. He dwells in unapproachable light.

I’ve thought on that word, *unapproachable*. I thought, “You were so unapproachable; why would You dwell in unapproachable light?” Again, I think it has nothing to do with God’s desire for intimacy. It has nothing to do with God’s compassion. It has to do with our limited capacity. It’s unapproachable because of our incapacity to receive it, not because of God’s unwillingness to share Himself intimately with His creation.

GOD IS INEXHAUSTIBLE IN THE DEPTH OF HIS GLORY

He dwells in unapproachable light. There are the seraphim, the cherubim, and the four living creatures that fly around the throne of God. When the four living creatures in Revelation 4:8 fly around the throne of God, they gaze into the person of God who still is dwelling in this garment of light. I don’t believe they look directly upon the glory of the Father; I believe they look at Him, even then, protected by the garment of light. They look upon the throne of God and they are so overwhelmed; these are the most exalted creatures in the eternal city until the bride takes her position. They are the most exalted creatures. The bride is in the most exalted position in the divine economy, but the four living creatures gaze upon Him; they are so overwhelmed at what they see, they

are so overloaded, their circuits are blown, if you will. They bow and cover their eyes and cry, “Holy, holy, holy!” until the power of this thing works through them, and then, when that happens, it’s kind of like they come up for air again. Maybe time passes and they have assimilated a new glimpse, a new gazing into the heart of God. They are overwhelmed by it. In Isaiah 6, we learn that they cover their eyes and their feet; they can’t look upon it. And they bow and cry out, “Holy, holy, holy!” And then a little while later, after the power of this goes through their being, they “come up for air” again, and they gaze again, only to be overwhelmed yet another time. There’s an eternal, infinite “quantity” of the glory of God that they never exhaust.

Wherever we are in the eternal city, in that great, 1,500-mile cubed city, whatever we might be doing, whether fellowshiping or worshipping or who knows what else?—I know we’ll do a lot more up there than we do down here. We will be occupied in the Lord’s work, and whatever happens in the administration of His kingdom that continues on with His bride. We’ll look up from whatever we’re doing, and right above the throne of God, however we can see it, wherever we are in the kingdom, we will see those four living creatures bowing for the hundred-billionth time, and we’ll say, “Wow, they’re still overwhelmed.” That’s like a witness throughout the entire city that God is inexhaustible in the depth of His glory. It says in Ephesians 3:18 that the height, the depth, the length, and the width of the love of God—not even any of His other attributes, just that one—is beyond human comprehension.

“CAN YOU SEARCH OUT THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD?”

The vast ocean of the being of God can never be fully understood by God’s creation. I believe that whatever we’re doing in the kingdom in the age to come, we will see those four living creatures as a living testimony that those nearest are still eternally overwhelmed at the new gazes into the glory of God.

There’s a verse in Job that I like: “Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty” (Job 11:7)? Can anyone in God’s creation, whether among the angelic hosts or the redeemed, discern the full limits, the full boundaries of the glory of the Almighty? What a question. “They are higher than heaven—what can you do? They are deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea” (v. 8-9). In other words, according to human measurements, it’s beyond human capacity. He’s talking to the ancient world. They didn’t have spaceships that went into the heavens. He said, “It’s totally out of the realm of human possibility to discover and to comprehend the boundary lines of the glory of the Almighty.” That’s Job 11:7. It’s the same kind of feeling as Ephesians 3:18: the height, depth, length, and width of the love of God. It passes human understanding—who can know it?

GOD’S COMPASSION FOR THE BROKEN IS BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Another verse that comes to my mind is Isaiah 55:8, where it says, “As high as heavens are above the earth, so are God’s ways and God’s thoughts higher than man’s” (Isa. 55:8-9, paraphrased). You know what we often do with that verse? We think of God’s wisdom. That verse isn’t about God’s wisdom. It’s a very well-known verse about how God’s ways aren’t man’s ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so God’s ways are higher than man’s ways. We quote that about God’s mysterious wisdom, and that’s OK. The Lord doesn’t mind that; however, it isn’t about God’s wisdom, though He doesn’t mind us quoting it in such a way. His wisdom is that way as well. It’s about the passion of God for weak people. That’s the context. The verse directly before it, Isaiah 55:7, is about sinners needing mercy. It’s about broken people needing mercy. Then Isaiah 55:8 says, “As high as the heavens are above the earth”—in other words, completely out of the realm of comparison, out of the realm of human comprehension, is God’s desire and passion to give mercy to broken people. There’s no human counterpart. There’s no way creation can comprehend it. So God’s ways being higher than man’s ways, as high

as the heavens are above the earth, means God's passion and love for His creation in its weakness is beyond the grasp of human understanding.

THE BEAUTY OF ETERNAL LIFE IS ENCOUNTERING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

It's the same idea as Job 11:7 and Ephesians 3:18. I wrote a list of the "you can't know how great it is" verses. I like to put them in an order and read them. It really jazzes me, you know—all the verses that say that you really can't know; even if you get up there, you can't really know. The four living creatures are a testimony to that. Whenever they see, they're overwhelmed; time and time and time and time again, they're overwhelmed. Who can know the boundaries, the limits, of the Almighty? He dwells in unapproachable light. He dwells in light that's so intense that even its brightness is greater than our ability to see. Just gaze on the sun at noonday. You can't do it. If you can't gaze on the sun at noonday, a billion times more intense is the human spirit's inability to gaze upon God in His full glory. It's the same concept.

We will have a very exciting eternity, and I'm putting all this under the verse here in John 17:3. The object, the point, the power, the pleasure, the beauty of eternal life is encountering the knowledge of God. That's the point I'm making. The whole essence of why we exist in the mind of God is to partake of the knowledge of God, and in that partaking to be transformed into an equally-yoked partner with Jesus Christ. The Father's plan was always to have an eternal companion for His Son who would be equally-yoked to Him in love. God promised Jesus an eternal companion, an affection-filled bride, and the most amazing thing is that He would be equally yoked to her in love. She would love Him like He loves her. That's where this thing is going. It's the knowledge of God that brings beauty and pleasure to the bride, and that's what empowers her to be the lover that she will be in eternity. It's all summed up right there in verse 3. This is eternal life. This is the whole essence. This is the power of it; this is the purpose of it. The enjoyment of it is being caught up into the experience of knowing God and all that happens in us as the result of the knowledge of God entering into our being, all the wonderful things that happen in us that equip us to be the equally-yoked bride.

NOT ONE OF JESUS' PRAYERS WILL REMAIN UNANSWERED

John 17:20-26. The change of focus here is to the Church throughout history, because He's now talking about all those who believe through those who believe. You believe through someone else who believed. It goes all the way back. There are about fifteen things in these seven verses that Jesus prays. You could number it several different ways, but let's say there are approximately fifteen different, distinctive things here. Here's what's happening: Jesus, the eternal Intercessor, is praying in the will of God by the power of the Spirit. Here's the question: do you think Jesus is praying outside of the will of God in these seven verses? Of course not. Is it possible that He's missing the will of God? No. He's praying in the Father's will, energized by the Holy Spirit, with such a passionate cry before the cross.

My point is that all fifteen of these distinctive petitions, every one of them, will come to pass. Not one of these prayers will go unanswered. They're really heavy duty. When you look at them you say, "Whoa, these are some pretty serious statements." You either have to receive that this is really the Word of God or just assume it's an exaggeration. There's no other option but to be overwhelmed at what these verses mean. When Jesus prays in the will of God, you realize it's a prophetic promise. If He prays something for the future, it has to come to pass, so His prayers become promises as well. All of these are prophetic promises for the Church, and the exciting thing is, if you read verses 21 and 23, they happen in the sight of an unbelieving world. These things don't only happen in heaven; they happen while unbelievers can see it and then become believers—that the world might

know, that the world might believe. These things are going to be witnessed by an unbelieving world as the vehicle to make them believe, to convert them to Jesus.

My point is this: these things will happen in the generation before the Lord returns. They haven't happened very much throughout history, but before the Lord returns, they will take place. They're intense.

“THAT THEY MAY BE ONE JUST AS WE ARE ONE”

Number one: there's a community of unified believers. It's unthinkable that the Church worldwide could be unified, but it will be. It will be unified like the Father and Son. Any of us could go off on that for a while. They will be effective in evangelism. Jesus said in verse 22, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one” (Jn. 17:22). It's the revealing of the glory of God that will produce this impact. It's when God reveals His glory. He's going to reveal what He's like. This is what produces the unity.

GOD LOVES US AS MUCH AS GOD LOVES GOD

These are just the most basic summaries; my intention is to get you started. There's a lot more than I have in this little outline. God has a ravished heart with great desire for His saints. Look at John 17:23b: “That the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”

That's totally awesome! This is just a little introductory thought about the knowledge of God. Jesus says, “Father, the way that You have loved Me.” Stop and think for a minute. How has God the Father loved Jesus Christ? Go back to the eternal counsels of the Godhead as They dwelt together in the fellowship of the Trinity in eternity past. How much does God the Father like His Son? Think about it. We need the Holy Spirit's help to really get our mind around that subject, but just think for a moment. Here they are in the billions of years in eternity past, the uncreated Father and His uncreated Son dwelling together in perfect likeness of each other, totally enjoying each other with the Holy Spirit. The Father likes Jesus so much, at His baptism He bends over the balcony of heaven and says, “That's My Boy, My Beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” and everyone hears this thundering voice coming out of the clouds. He says, “That's My Boy, that's My Son! Listen to Him. I'm so well-pleased with Him.”

That actually happens three times in Jesus' recorded earthly ministry. It happens at the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17. Peter, James, and John are on the mountain, and the voice comes again, “This is My Son, with whom I am so well-pleased. I like Him so much!”

It happens again in John 12. At the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Father speaks again. All the people around said, “What was that?” and some people said, “It's just thundering.”

The others said, “No, that was the voice of God. He said, ‘I'm pleased with my Son.’”

God the Father kept erupting out of heaven talking about how much He liked Jesus during that three and a half years. How many other times He did it, we don't know, but the Father really liked His Son. Jesus says, “Do you know how much My Father likes Me? This is the only accurate measuring rod for how much the Father likes you. The way the Father likes Me, this is how much He likes you.”

That's a staggering idea. I can't even begin to comprehend this. This is some of the knowledge of God I'm talking about that will change you radically on the inside when the Holy Spirit writes it on our heart, even just a little more all the time over the years. Imagine! The way the Father loves the Son is the only accurate measuring rod for Jesus to use to give us an idea of how the Father feels about us. He didn't say He likes us more than the angels. He didn't say He likes us more than the most committed people on the earth. He said, "The only way I can convey it to you, the only accurate way, is to say that He likes you like He likes Me."

The glorious thing that never even crossed Jesus' mind is jealousy. Jesus has been with Him from eternity past. That doesn't make Jesus jealous at all. He doesn't say, "I've been with Him from the beginning and He likes you as much as He likes Me, and you've just been with Him a short amount of time." He says, "That's no problem to Me. I like that. I like the fact that My Father likes you like He likes Me. That makes it perfect."

Go back a page to John 15:9. Jesus says the same thing a little differently. It's the same idea, but with a little different twist to it. We know that the Father likes us as much as He likes Jesus. Jesus says, "Do you know how much the Father likes Me? That's how much I, Jesus, like you."

"AS THE FATHER LOVED ME, I ALSO HAVE LOVED YOU"

He says, "In the same way the Father has loved Me, so also I have loved you" (Jn. 15:9, paraphrased). "I love you like the Father loves Me. The Father loves you like the Father loves Me. Both of Us love you in the way He loves Me. That's the only way I can tell you," He said. "The way the Father loves Me is how He loves you, and the way the Father loves Me is how I love you. It's the ultimate, the infinite, immeasurable; it's this volcanic love in the heart of God. I like you as much as God likes Me, and God likes you as much as He likes Me."

We look at it and we say, "Wow, this is really something."

The most interesting thing is that this is happening at the Last Supper in the upper room. Do you know what He says to them just a few moments later? You find it recorded in Luke 22 and Matthew 26. You can look it up later if you want. This is what John records from the very same conversation. Jesus looks at all of them in the same hour and says, "Every one of you will betray Me tonight" (Mt. 26:31, paraphrased). This wasn't a passion Jesus felt for them because they were mature. This had nothing to do with their spiritual immaturity. Every one of them betrayed Jesus that night, and this is the statement He told them even before they betrayed Him. Don't get some idea that this is how Jesus feels about you once you've attained to some unbelievable spiritual maturity, because these men just a couple of weeks before were fighting about who would be the top man in heaven, and who would be over who. These men were out of control. They're going to deny Jesus tonight. He says, "Before you even deny Me, I want you to know I like you as much as God likes Me. That means I like you a lot, and you're going to betray Me tonight."

A lot of us have an idea that God will enjoy us when we get to heaven. Some of us have an idea that God will enjoy us once we're as mature as Paul the apostle. It's really hard to grasp that God enjoys us while we're still immature, but He does.

"YOU HAVE RAVISHED MY HEART, MY SISTER, MY BRIDE"

Let's go back to John 17. It's the ravished heart of God. The phrase, "ravished heart," is one of my favorite terms from Song of Solomon 4:9 in the New King James Version. I use that term a lot. God says, "My heart is ravished. I'm totally undone by you. My heart is undone with desire at extolling your beauty to Me."

That's what God thinks about His people. Here we are back at the very end of John 17:23. He says, "Father, You have loved them in the way You have loved me. You like them like You like Me" (Jn. 17:23b, paraphrased).

Now look at the phrase right before it, in the middle of verse 23. This is incredible: "That the world may know that the Father loves the Church like the Father loves Jesus" (Jn. 17:23a, paraphrased). Did you know that your neighbors are going to put that together before the Lord returns? Your unbelieving neighbors are going to see the glory of God in the Church. Something is going to happen where your neighborhood will connect with the idea that God likes you like God likes the Messiah. The world will see this. This will be the confession of the unbelieving world. Read that; He prayed that. That has to happen. It can't be a lie. Imagine what will be happening in the Church. I think I have an idea of the theme. It will be God's glory, His knowledge being revealed to His people. It isn't about God making us all millionaires; it isn't about God giving us all new cars. That's not what's going on here. This is about God revealing the glory of His heart to His Church and so beautifying His people and so completely extolling them with His beauty. He's going to magnify and exalt them by putting His beauty upon them and revealing His heart.

The unbelievers are going to see the activity of the Holy Spirit at the end of the age. They're going to look at you and say, "I only have one conclusion. You know the Messiah, 2,000 years ago? We believe in Him because we can see that God likes you as much as He liked the Messiah." That's what they're going to say to you one of these days because of the glory of God in the Church before the second coming. Either that, or Jesus was just getting excited and He didn't really mean to pray that. I think it's the will of God, the true prophetic word of God, that this prayer will come to pass.

Think of the revelation of the Father heart of God that will have to fill the Church to get the unbelieving world connecting with it. The unbelievers are going to put it together. You won't have to tell them, "Oh, guess what? God loves me."

They're going to come to you and say, "We've put it all together. We've been watching you this last couple of years, and God likes you like He likes Jesus. That's what's going on."

"THAT THEY ALSO WHOM YOU HAVE GIVEN ME MAY BE WITH ME WHERE I AM"

Isn't that awesome? OK, verse 24. This is the Word of God. It's right there. You have it right there in your Bibles. He says, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me" (Jn. 17:24).

This is incredible. Jesus says, "Father, I desire." What does the NIV say? Does it say, "I desire?" No, it says, "I want" (Jn. 17:24, NIV). That's too weak. The NIV says, "I want." Scratch it out and write, "I desire." By the way, when He prays this, it's unthinkable that Jesus would desire something so intensely that it would enter into His prayer in His final moments before Gethsemane. You'd think He would be consumed with the fact that He's going to be taken to trial in a few hours. He's consumed with His desire for her, His bride. He said, "I desire one thing right now; I'm in this for one reason: that she would be with me. That's why I'm doing this, that she would be with Me. That when I'm taken back into the full glory of God, I wouldn't occupy the position as the heir of the glory of God as a celibate. I want to occupy the position of the glory of God with a bride at My side forever. I desire that she would be with me in My glory. That's what I want; that's what I came here for.

It's all coming to this crescendo, that she would be with Me. I don't ever want to be away from her again. I don't want to live single anymore. I came to purchase a bride who would be My companion forever, and I don't want to be in My former position alone again. I came that she would be with Me where I am."

“THAT THEY MAY BEHOLD MY GLORY WHICH YOU HAVE GIVEN ME”

That's so moving. He didn't say, "Father, I desire that she would be with Me." He cried out, "Father! I desire!" There was a desire that consumed Him. He said, "There's one desire I have, God." When God desires, stop and pay attention. It's very holy; it's very powerful. It can't be stopped. He cried to His Father, "I desire one thing."

And the Father could have answered, "I know, Son, what You desire. It was My plan to provide this bride, this companion, for You. I know what You desire."

He said, "I want her with Me forever. You like her, You love her like You love Me. I desire her too, Father."

He says, "I know that You want her with You, that she would behold the glory which God the Father gave the Son from eternity past." "Beholding the glory." What does the NIV say? "See My glory" (Jn. 17:24b, NIV). Same idea. It's more than *behold*, more than *see*, more than *know* in our sense. To know the glory of God in that sense is to be a participant in it. It's the idea of entering into a transforming experience in the wake of seeing and beholding.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 3:18. When you behold the glory of God, you're transformed into the image of God. You can't behold God without being changed into God-likeness. It's like there's a power in the seeing, in the beholding, that brings us into the life of it. 2 Corinthians 3:18. We behold the glory of the Lord and we're transformed into His likeness. You can't behold it without being caught up into the life of it, the power of it.

“TO HIM WHO OVERCOMES I WILL GIVE TO SIT WITH ME ON MY THRONE”

The verse I'm thinking of now is one of the most incomprehensible. It's Revelation 3:21. Jesus is speaking to the Laodicean church. Remember the seven churches of Asia; He speaks to each one of them. He rebukes the Laodicean church for their lethargy, right? Then He gives the most incredible promise to the Laodicean church that you can imagine. He says in Revelation 3:21, "Let Me tell you what's going to happen if you overcome. If you overcome like I overcame, you will sit with Me on My throne, as I sit with My Father on His" (Rev. 3:21, paraphrased).

This is unthinkable. There are a number of reasons why that's unthinkable, but it's linked here to John 17: 24: the bride would behold or enter into the experience of the glory of God with Jesus. That's the point. Revelation 3:21 is where it's going. Number one, it's unthinkable that the creation can sit in the presence of God. They're always positioned in the Scriptures in two ways. Either they're positioned as prostrate before God, or else they're positioned as standing in respect. Never is a human being found sitting in the presence of God. The angels would think it impossible that such a thing would happen. Jesus is the only one Who has the right to declare this.

By the way, this is His final prayer before He goes to Gethsemane and the cross. Revelation 3:21 is His final statement to the corporate church. He ends it with the most incredible declaration. "I've been waiting from eternity to say this to you. You'll be the only ones who will sit in the presence of God."

The angels couldn't believe it. Human beings sitting in God's presence? We will be positioned in the most exalted position in the created order. We will forever be the creature; God will forever be the uncreated. That gulf will never be crossed. God will always be the uncreated God. We will never confuse that issue in the impartation of His life to us. We don't ever become God; we're always the redeemed who are lifted up to His right hand by His mercies. Jesus pronounces His final sentence to the Church; it's like this is His final prayer. His final sentence to the Church to close out the New Testament is awesome. "By the way, they'll be sitting in the presence of the majesty of God."

The angels probably said, "What else is He going to say that we can't believe?"

THE MYSTERY OF THE AGES IS THE UNFOLDING OF THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Did you know that you're going to be sitting in the presence of God? Like me, you've never seen the presence of God to know how awesome it would be to sit there. The angels would never think of such a thing. They cover their faces, they bow prostrate, they stand in adoration, but to sit is unthinkable. You're not just going to sit in God's presence; you're going to sit on a throne. You're going to sit in a position of authority. You're not just going to sit on a throne. Jesus said, "You will sit with Me on My throne."

The angels said, "We can't take this anymore. Who are they on the earth? Who are those people down on planet earth? They're going to sit in the presence of God on the throne of the uncreated Son of God. They're going to sit with Him as His eternal companion."

"Who is she?" is what the angels are asking. The mystery of the ages is the unfolding of the Bride of Christ.

That's your story, by the way. This isn't just some unrelated doctrine; this is your testimony. Yes, it's future, but it's as real to God as your past testimony. It can't be stopped. This is where you're going to end. For billions and billions of years you will sit in that position, the most exalted position in the created order in the presence of God. That's what Jesus had in mind when He prayed, "Father. I desire that where I am, on My throne, she would behold and get caught up as a participant in the glory of God with Me, in the glory that You gave Me."

This is unthinkable. This whole thing is built on the fact that God loved Jesus long before the foundation of the world. This whole plan was established in love. This plan to have a people with Jesus in glory was established by the Father's love before the foundation of the world. It was established long before Adam and Eve were ever created.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETERNAL DESTRUCTION AND ETERNAL LIFE

John 17:25. This is so moving. He says, "Oh, righteous Father, we love You. The world has not known You at all" (Jn. 17:25, paraphrased). He's going right to the hot spot again, the issue of the knowledge of God. "They don't have any idea who You are, Father, but I have known You, and these have known You, that You sent me" (ibid, paraphrased). In other words, they have been introduced to the knowledge of God. Do you see how the issue of the knowledge of God is central again? It's all about the issue of the knowledge of God. He says, "The problem with the world is that they don't know You. They don't have the knowledge of God." He says, "The main distinctive about My life as the Messiah is that I know You. That's the thing that's so distinct about Me. I've entered into the depth of the knowledge of God." Of course, He is God. He says, "My disciples have entered into the introduction of it."

Do you know the difference between eternal life and the eternal destruction of hell? It isn't the fact of existence, because in hell they exist forever. The distinction between eternal destruction and eternal life is the knowledge of God, beholding the glory of God. If you live forever and see the knowledge of God, it's called life. If you live forever and you're banished from the knowledge of God, it's called eternal destruction, death. It has nothing to do with existing or not existing. It has everything to do with entering into and being a participant in the knowledge of the glory of God.

That's why Jesus said in verse 3 that knowing Him is the essence of eternal life. The unbelievers in hell exist forever. They don't live, because the definition of life is being a participant in all the different cause-and-effect actions and reactions in the realm of the knowledge of God that take place in our being when we come into contact with the knowledge of God.

“THAT THE LOVE WITH WHICH YOU LOVED ME MAY BE IN THEM, AND I IN THEM”

Verse 26 is where I was headed. This is where I want to go. This has been my life verse for many, many years. If you're looking for a life verse, not that you have to have one, but I encourage you to take John 17:26. Jesus sums up His ministry. He says in verse 25, “Father I have known You, and these have known You, that you sent Me” (Jn. 17:25, paraphrased). If you put a lot of other verses together with this, the idea is that they have known God in a very introductory way.

He goes on in verse 26: “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:26). He says, “I have declared to them Your name, and will continue to declare it.” That's a very interesting phrase. Jesus sums up His earthly ministry in the same way He summed up eternal life. Someone might say, “Give me one sentence on what You did on the earth in Your three and a half years of ministry. How effective was Your ministry, Jesus?”

Someone could say, “Well, He raised the dead.”

Jesus says, “Well, that wasn't the real highlight of what I did. That's not the mountaintop. Certainly I did raise the dead, and I healed thousands of people in mass healing crusades, and I calmed the storm. I multiplied bread and fed the multitudes and gave them all kinds of things, but the summary theme of My ministry is that I declared the name of God to human beings. I made God known to humans. I revealed the knowledge of the Father to them. Not only the love of the Father, but His power over Satan, His power over the ocean, His majesty, His omniscience. If I had one sentence to summarize the theme of My three and a half year ministry, it would be that.”

He gives it right there. He tells the Father, “I did what I love to do and what You sent Me to do. I revealed Your name.” In other words, “The essence of your personality I revealed to them.” If Jesus' ministry is summed up in one sentence, “I have revealed the nature and the personality of God to the human race,” what higher definition or preoccupation could we have than revealing what God is like to the Church or to the world? We can't reveal what God is like if we never have communion with God. We can reveal a little of what He's like by virtue of being born again. That's already a statement. We want to be a voice and not an echo. We want to have internal, experiential knowledge of the person of God. We don't want to read a book and mimic a sermon. We want to experience God in our secret histories, our private lives in God. We want to say something that's resonating within us, not something we memorized from a tape series. That's what I mean by an echo. It's OK to be an echo, but there's more that we have on our hearts as the people of God. We can't declare the name of God

effectively when we've only memorized ideas about God. We want to enter a little into the love and the feel and the revelation of it, even a little in this age. Anyway, all we're going to get in this age is a little.

“Who can discover the limits of the Almighty?” Who can know these things? Jesus said, “I have declared to them Your name.” He was truly a voice, not an echo. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness. It's the same thing. He was revealing what God is like.

It's interesting that the same thing Jesus did for three and a half years, He'll do for 2,000 years at the right hand of God through the Holy Spirit. He said, “I'm going to summarize My next 2,000 years of ministry. I will declare Your name to the human race, both redeemed and unredeemed. I will declare what You are like.”

Someone might say, “How are You going to do that?”

“I'll be at the right hand of the Father, and the Holy Spirit will do everything I want Him to do. I want to reveal what God is like. That's the thing on My heart. If it worked for Me, then it will work for the Church. If it was good enough for Me to focus on this, how good is it for the Church to focus on this same thing?”

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AWAKENS LOVE IN THE HUMAN HEART

Now look at the impact of the knowledge of God upon the human heart. Look at what happens inside the emotional chemistry of people when Jesus declares to them the knowledge of God at the right hand of God through the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Word. Jesus is addressing the Father. He says, “That the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:26). In other words, “Father, they will love Me the way that You love Me. If I reveal the knowledge of God to them, it will so touch their emotional chemistry that they will love Me, Father, like You love Me.”

The knowledge of God awakens love in the human heart. That's why I go back to my premise statement. It's clearly the most powerful aspect of the grace of God—the knowledge of God. It's the thing that Jesus defines as the thing that awakens love in the human heart. I go back to one of my earlier statements: it's the most neglected issue in the Body of Christ. The greatest deficiency in the kingdom of God is the knowledge of God.

Do you think that's an accident to Satan's kingdom? No. His raging accusations have come against God where people haven't caught the vision for how powerful the discovery of the knowledge of God is in their life, in the church, and in terms of world evangelization. This will be, I believe, the distinction of the end-time church. God will reveal God through the Holy Spirit to the human heart, and it will awaken such fiery passion in them. The only way to describe it is to say that the love with which God loved Jesus is the love with which we will love Jesus. Then we will love one another in the overflow of it. We're going to love Jesus like God loves Jesus. Isn't that awesome?

Let's put the three statements together from the upper room discourse in John 14-17. Those four chapters are the upper room discourse. That's the final teaching in the upper room at the Last Supper. I'm going to put the three statements together. He starts in John 15:9. He says, “Hey guys, the way God loves Me, that's how I love you.”

They say, “You like us like God likes You?”

He says, “Yes, the way God likes Me is how I like you.”

Now turn to John 17:23. He says, “Oh, by the way, the way God likes Me is how God likes you, too. The Father likes you the way He likes Me.”

Then He says, “Oh, by the way, the way the Father likes Me, that’s how You’re going to respond back to Me before it’s over. You’re going to love Me like the Father loves Me.”

Three times Jesus uses the phrase, “The way the Father loves Me,” and then He puts a different comparison statement after it. First He says, “The way the Father loves Me, that’s the way I love the Church.” Secondly, “The way the Father loves Me, that’s the way the Father loves the Church.” Thirdly, “The way the Father loves Me, that’s the way the Church will love Jesus.”

God is going to bring us into this whole dimension of the love of God. It takes God to love God, but the agency in the grace of God that awakens love is the knowledge of God itself. When God reveals God in our hearts, our hearts are empowered to be lovers of God.

It’s interesting that Jesus ends His cry, His intercessory prayer for the Church, with, “Father, make sure she loves Me like You love Me. You said she would.” That’s His final statement: “Don’t let her forget Me. Make sure She loves Me like You love Me.”

The Father says, “Don’t worry, Son, she won’t forget You, even though it may look like she has a few times. I promise You, You’ll be equally-yoked in love with this bride at the end of history. She won’t forget You.”

He ends His earthly ministry with the cry that we, the bride, would love Him like the Father loves Him. He ends His revelation to the Church with Revelation 3:21, His final statement. I think these two statements, His statement at the end of His earthly ministry and His final statement to the Church in His resurrected form in the written word of God, that this bride will sit on His throne in glory, correspond directly with the last sentences here.

Jesus had one thing on His mind: a bride that would participate in the glory of the knowledge of God together with Him.

AS CREATURES, WE WILL ENTER INTO THE SUPERNATURAL LOVE OF THE TRINITY

Any questions, any comments? We did John 17 here. If not, we’ll have a prayer time. Did I say anything too quickly, or in a manner that confused you?

John 17:23 is the second one. John 17:26 is the third one. All three of them start with the phrase, “in the way the Father loves Me.” That’s the comparison. That’s the measuring line. It’s the same measuring line every time; then He gives a comparative statement after each one of those three.

The first one is John 15:9: the way the Father loves Jesus is the way that Jesus loves the Church. He’s building a crescendo. He knows where He’s going. “You mean that the way the Father likes You is the way You like us?”

He takes it up another notch in John 17:23. “The way the Father likes Me...” They think He’s going to repeat it again. He turns it on them. “That’s how the Father likes You.”

They say, “This is unthinkable. Not only do You like us that way, but the Father likes us that way.” There’s no breach between the two.

Then in verse 26 He takes it up one more notch: that we as the creatures, the created, would literally enter into that supernatural love. We would love Jesus in the same supernatural love that the Father does. That’s even more incredible to me. The fact that God could love us is one thing. The fact that we could love in the full love of God is just incredible to me, that we would have that kind of capacity, that our capacity would be so enlarged that Jesus could say, “We love Him like the Father loves Him.” I don’t even understand that kind of capacity, but that’s where the bride is going.

WILLING TO BE RISK-TAKERS IN THIS JOURNEY INTO COMMUNION WITH GOD

You guys, as redeemed human beings, are really pretty special after all. I don’t care what the man down the road said, or the person in the church, or the member of your family. This is who you are. You’re really, really special. This is what your life is about. This is who you are. That’s why I think, though we don’t all need to do the eight-hour or the ten-hour-a-day thing, that we need to grow in the knowledge of God. In all of our getting we need to grow in the knowledge of God. We have to be mountain climbers. We have to climb that mountain called the knowledge of God. Mountain climbers are risk-takers. We’re willing to be risk-takers on this journey into communion with God. It’s like I said earlier: I’ve made mistakes and lost out here and did some dumb things there. I’m not afraid to lose comfort and pleasure or opportunity in my quest to know the knowledge of God. I may do some dumb things that aren’t productive, but mountain climbers are risk-takers.

“Well, I want to make sure that I don’t actually lose a little opportunity, or lose a little money here or there, or have to start over.”

Man, we’re going for it. You know what I mean? We have to figure out how to get more of this in our lives. You know, I told the Lord, “I don’t want to be a comfort zone man. I want to ascend whatever mountain, whatever level on this mountain You’ll allow me to ascend in God, and I don’t even know how to do it.” The Lord says, “Here’s the road map, the Word of God.”

I say, “Well, Lord, could You give me just one chapter that’s like a, b, c, d?”

He says, “No, it’s all in there. You’ll figure it out over the years. Here’s the map to the top of the mountain.”

Any more questions or comments? Great question. I never thought about that. It does sound contradictory, because it is; how do we reconcile the fact that God gives on the basis of hunger, but the majority of the end-time church will enter into it? Wise man, I don’t know. No, that’s a great question. I don’t know how to say it. The big picture is that at the end of the age, before the second coming, there’s a generation towards which God will arouse His zeal. It says this in several places in the Scriptures. One of my favorites is in Psalm 78, which says, “The Lord will awaken from sleep, like a mighty man who slumbers” (Ps. 78:65, paraphrased).

I did a study once on the five, maybe seven, passages where God arouses His own zeal because humans won’t do it. There are periods in history when God is astonished that humans beings aren’t responding. Even God is

astonished. Of course, that's a metaphor. Surely He can't be surprised, really, but He's speaking in human language. He's astonished that there are no intercessors. Then God arouses His own zeal. There are maybe seven times; I can't remember where they all are. I did this study on it some years ago, and it was really fascinating. It was a study on the times when God arouses His own zeal because people don't awaken and stir themselves to take hold of God.

This is a verse in Isaiah 64:4. "Won't you arouse yourself to take hold of Me" (Isa. 64:4, paraphrased)? He was challenging them to do this. There are times in history where God says, "They aren't doing it, but I'm going to do it. I'm going to crown this period of history with exceptional glory."

THE THREE SUPERNATURAL GENERATIONS IN HISTORY

I guess the only way I can think to say it is that the rule through 2,000 years has been that God gives to us on the basis of hunger. There are those moments in history, those power surges we call *revivals*, those very brief moments where in small geographic areas for two to three years extraordinary amounts of the manifest presence of God are released sovereignly from heaven. That provides the impetus to move the Church on, to keep it from going extinct or something. I don't know. There are those times when God arouses His own zeal corporately in very, very, very sacred parts of history. The end-time generation is the time when it all comes to full manifestation. That's a great question. I actually never thought about that.

You know, there are three supernatural generations described in the Bible. What I mean by "supernatural generation" is a generation in which the majority of the people saw the supernatural in a regular way, not necessarily every day, but maybe every day. The first supernatural generation was the generation of Moses. If you want to really, really be touched, read the book of Exodus again. Exodus is a serious book. You probably haven't read it. The last time you saw *The Ten Commandments* with Charlton Heston, you thought, "Now I've read Exodus." Just go read Exodus and take Him literally as the God who never changes, because God is going to do that again—not only how He got them out of Egypt, but how He sustained them. There are about seven or eight daily supernatural things: the pillar of fire, the cloud, the manna, and the water. There are a number of them that go on right through forty years.

The second supernatural generation was the generation of Jesus and the apostles, the book of Acts generation. The majority of the people saw the power of God in an ongoing way. The third supernatural generation described by the Bible is the generation of the Lord's return.

Those are the only three, by the way. David's generation wasn't like that. David saw a few momentary releases of the power of God for military victories, maybe ten or fifteen, but it wasn't something all the people saw on a daily basis. There were only two supernatural generations before the final generation. The Bible makes it very clear that in the generation of the Lord's return, the best of Moses' generation and the best of the apostles' generation will combine. That generation is a sovereign time frame in history where God won't do business as usual.

He's arousing His own zeal.

That's a great question. I love that question. Anyone else have a statement?

I have people say that all the time, so I have a pat answer. I had a lady in our church say, "I hope I'm alive."

I said, “Why?” Obviously, it’s a trick question. “You want to see angels in the worship service?”

She said, “Yeah.”

“You want to see the dead raised?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you want to see Jesus appear? Well, don’t worry, If you die, you get all of that times a thousand anyway. Where you’ll be, you won’t have any trouble, believe me. The ultimate of what will happen in the end-time generation will be nothing like the eternal city. You’ll be very happy if you’re not here, believe me. You’ll look down and say, ‘Those poor guys down there.’ Jesus just appears occasionally. You’ll be clothed in the glory of God in a way that will surpass the end-time church.” That’s why I say I don’t think you’ll really care.

“YOUR PEOPLE WILL OFFER THEMSELVES FREELY ON THE DAY OF YOUR POWER”

Any other statement before we go? Is there a part that people play? Yes, there is. God the Father’s zeal will so move on His people. To say yes in the power of God is a lot easier than to say yes when God is restraining His power. There’s a verse in Psalm 110. It’s a very famous psalm, the great messianic psalm of God’s victory. It says in Ps 110:3, “In the day of God’s power, the people freely volunteer obedience” (Ps. 110:3, paraphrased).

For instance, look at Acts 2. If you want to know the reason they did the last four verses of Acts 2, with sharing everything in common and the power and all those great things we all get condemned because we don’t have them in our churches, look at the first four verses of Acts 2. The key to the last four verses of Acts 2 is the first four verses of Acts 2. A mighty rushing wind came on the church, and the fire of God appeared on each one of them (Acts 2:3). It rested on and appeared to every person visibly. The fire of God appeared and rested on every single one of them. The wind of God comes in, the wine of God is released; these human beings are transformed radically. That’s the first four verses of Acts 2. The last four verses aren’t that hard. My point is, it’s easy to freely volunteer when the power of God is manifest, and God knows that. But to try and get people to do the last four verses of Acts 2...