

How Shall We Live (Pt2)

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Date: 09 June 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could turn your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 8, it will also be on the screen, but you may find it helpful to have your Bibles open in front of you as well.

Zechariah chapter 8. We've been going through Zechariah in our, over the past few weeks, Zechariah chapter 8.

In the Word of the Lord of hosts came saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, I am jealous for her with great wrath.

Thus says the Lord, I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of hosts, the holy mountain.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age, and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets.

[1 : 03] Thus says the Lord of hosts, If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the Lord of hosts.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will save my people from the East country shall be my people, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and they shall be my people, and I will be their God in faithfulness and in righteousness.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets, who are present on the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord, that the temple might be built.

For behold, before these days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in.

For I set every man against his neighbour, but now I will not deal with the remnant of this people, as in the former days declares the Lord of hosts.

[2 : 08] For there shall be a sowing of peace, the vine shall give its fruit, and the ground shall give its produce, and the heavens shall give their dew, and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing.

Fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus says the Lord of hosts, as I purposed to bring disaster to you when your fathers provoked me to Roth, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts. So again I have purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah, fear not. These are the things that you shall do, speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true at false oath.

For all these not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath. For all these things I hate declares the Lord. And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, the fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth month and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.

[3 : 23] Therefore, love truth and peace. Thus says the Lord of hosts, people shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, let us go at once to entreat the favour of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts.

I myself am going. Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, in those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew saying, let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

God bless this reading of his word. Well, as I said, we're back in the book of Zechariah and to help us get our bearings, I've got a timeline on the screen that you should hopefully see because I know not everyone have been here for all of Zechariah.

So there's a brief timeline. There's three main events in the calendar that you should keep in mind if you're reading the book of Zechariah. There's the exile in 587 BC where the kingdom of Judah, so Israel was made up of Israel and Judah.

Israel were kicked off into exile a bit earlier, but the kingdom of Judah was sent into exile because of their Babylon in 587 BC. They were sin against God and they were exiled from the land off to Babylon in 587 BC.

[4 : 43] They were then returned in 538 BC and then the whole of Zechariah looks forward to this restoration where all of the promises of everything that God makes of Eden restored, of everything being restored will happen.

The Zechariah is written in that in-between point, chapters 1 to 6 which we looked at over the past few weeks. That takes place when the foundation of the temple is being laid.

Chapter 7 and 8 which we looked at over the past two weeks, that's two years after the temple's midway being built and in the last few chapters which we'll look at over the coming weeks, that takes place just after the completion of the temple.

Hopefully that helps to get your bearings a bit. So you can see that Zechariah is written for a people who are living in-between return and restoration. The whole book begins with a call to return to God.

The book ends with a vision of God restoring all things. The book is written to help Israel get their bearings. As they stumble around the ruins of Jerusalem wondering what's our identity, what's our purpose, what's our future, this book helps to get their bearings about what God is doing in the world.

[6 : 01] The key part of the key thing that they were called to do as they have come back and returned as they await the restoration is to get on with building the temple.

As we've said over the past, because the story of Israel is like it's an immensely relevant and important book for us, because the story of Israel is like a small picture, small story of humanity. There you go. You can tell I've been here for two and a half years because I've made more diagrams like Thomas. So you can see there's that mini diagram. That goes on to the bigger timeline of humanity.

So just like Israel were in the Promised Land, that was a mini picture of Eden where humanity were placed when we were created. And just like Israel were exiled from the Promised Land, that links back to the whole of humanity being exiled from Eden.

Then of course Jesus brings that ultimate return. This was all happening after Zechariah and it looks forward to a restoration when Jesus will come a second time to make all things new.

[7 : 02] And so we're in a similar situation to the people of Zechariah's day. We live between a return and a restoration. We look, Jesus has come, He has rescued us.

If we're trusting in Him, He has rescued us from exile to God. We can be God's people, but we're looking forward to the completion of that when Jesus comes again. And so just like they were to be building the temple in between those times, we're to be building the church.

Now if that's all a bit overwhelming, don't worry, the main thing is orienting ourselves between Jesus' first coming and second coming. And as we go through, we'll see that means that just like Zechariah's people, we need to be building the church.

And our verse that we began with maybe summarizes that nicely in Titus. Jesus' first coming, bringing salvation to his chapter two. For the grace of God has appeared as Jesus' first coming, bringing salvation to all people.

And verse 13, we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of our Lord, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. So those are the kind of two poles that we fix ourselves in between.

[8 : 13] Return, Jesus is bringing, returning us from exile and looking forward to Jesus restoring us. And last week we saw that, we began to look at chapters seven and eight and they focus on life in the gap.

How do we live in this between the return and between the restoration? And Zechariah began with this question, people have acted Zechariah seven, because people were asking that question.

They were asking, okay, should we keep fasting now as we await for the restoration, as we wait for the temple to be built, as we wait for God to make all things new?

And Zechariah didn't answer that question straight away. And to use that as an opportunity to address that bigger question, how do we live life in the gap?

And in chapter seven, we looked back and we saw that the faithful city, God's people, as they look back, they need to learn from their past mistakes.

[9:10] And we saw last week that God cares about our hearts. God cares more about our relationship with Him than about rituals that just give the facade of religion.

And ultimately, Jesus has come to give us new hearts. This week now in chapter eight, we're looking forward. We're looking forward as we see that the faithful, but now we're seeing this week that restoration.

So we learned from the past mistakes, we need a new heart. But now we're seeing this week that we also live in light of this future restoration. And that's what chapter eight is all about.

It's asking that question, are we living in light of what is to come? And we've got one main point, which is, I guess we've got three sub points. You could say that's just three points maybe.

The main point though is that the future is bright. The future is bright. If I said the phrase, the future's bright, I mean, I wonder if kids in the corner, if I said the future's bright, do you know what comes next?

[10:08] Okay, adults, if I said the future's bright, the future is? Orange, there you go. Too fair you guys weren't born there, that's fine. It was actually just after I was born as well.

The future's bright, the future's orange. That was the slogan, wasn't it, for Orange, the mobile telephone company. But the future clearly didn't turn out to be orange because in 2008 they dropped the slogan in 2009, they merged with T-Mobile and now no one's heard of orange.

So the future clearly isn't orange. But the question is, how would we then finish that sentence?

What is our vision of the future? The future's bright, the future is what?

What would you say the future holds? What would you say that characterizes the future? Maybe you look, maybe your bright future is, you think, well, the future's bright, the future's one of, I don't know, marriage, family, building my own house, dream job, travel, retirement, staying in Calaway, leaving Calaway.

Maybe you actually wouldn't say the future's bright. Right future would be. Or maybe you actually wouldn't say the future's bright. Maybe for you right now, you look at the future and you think the future's gray.

[11:21] The future for me looks like, and you worry it looks like loneliness, it looks like suffering, it looks like, no difficult relationships, it looks like heartache maybe, and you're thinking maybe even death.

I wonder what's your vision for the future? Some of us spend a lot of time thinking about the future, others don't. I'm told in some ways it changes with age and life situation.

Theologians use the term eschatology to talk about, in some ways, our vision of what the future holds and how that relates to the present. It's a big word, but you don't have to know the word eschatology to have an eschatology.

The eschatology is just how our conception of what the future holds and its relevance to the present. And we all have that. We all have some idea, some philosophy, some kind of conception of what we think the future's about and that will inevitably affect our identity, what we think our purpose is, what our goals are in life, and our dreams.

I've already done one Q&A; which is unusual. How many people know what yolo means? Do the kids know what yolo means? If you don't, yolo stands for you only live once.

[12:38] In some ways you could say that's the philosophy, that's the eschatology of our age. You only live once. In other words, you only get one of lots of people, maybe the majority of people, maybe the majority of people in this world.

And it might sound like a good mindset in some ways, we want to make the most of life, but actually it has some really tragic consequences. If you only live once, well what happens when your life begins to crumble?

If you only live once and society tells you that fulfillment is found in marriage and sex, then what if you spend your whole life single? Does that mean you failed in life?

Does that mean you're missing out on life? Or if you only live once and your identity are found in all that you're able to do, well what about when your body starts to decay?

What about if you get chronic illness? What if actually you start aging sooner than you want and the aches and pains and everything catches up? Does that mean you're losing vital years that can never be recovered?

[13 : 43] Or if you only live once and if our purpose is found in making the most of the gifts that we have, well does that mean that if we choose the wrong career path or choose the wrong thing or place to live or whatever in life, we're missing out on our potential?

Or if we only live once, then death really is the end and it completely robs us, not just of life but also of future. If you truly believe that you only live once, then that puts on a lot of pressure in life and you can see why people get really anxious.

If you've got to make the most of this life and you only have one shot, then you don't want to make a mistake, do you? It's no wonder that people struggle. As a society, we believe that you're making, but as other tragic implications, if as a society we believe that we only live once, then there's also no room for people who would slow us down.

If there's anyone who's going to stop you reaching your potential or making the most of life just becomes a burden, don't they? People who are either a benefit or a burden, if you only live once is your philosophy, is your eschatology of the future, the biggest concern is to just be happy and healthy.

Does any of that sound familiar? That mindset? It should do because it isn't just a problem out there. It isn't just how people who aren't following Jesus think.

[15 : 10] Many people, whether you're here as a follower of Jesus or not, many people, Christians included, have that mindset. We live as if this world is all there is.

I'd guarantee that a lot of those things are things we struggle with. You can blame the 90s for coining the term Yolo, but that mindset has been around for a long time.

Paul addresses it in his letter to the Philippians. I'm going to get to Zechariah, by the way. He says that we shouldn't. He speaks of people who walk as enemies of the cross, who set their mind on earthly things.

In contrast, Paul says, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus. There's two contrasting mindsets.

Whatever we think our future is, is it one of earthly mindsets? This life is all there is for that.

Because a mindset that there's something to come and that we're living for that.

[16 : 11] What we see is that there's tragic consequences if this life is all there is. Paul and the Bible present us with a much better alternative of living for what is to come.

Part of the reason we struggle to have a heavenly mindset, a mindset that looks beyond this world is we struggle to see what it's like. We struggle to view it when all we see is here and now.

This is where we come to Zechariah, because Zechariah chapter 8 is written to reorient his audience's mind, to reorient our minds, heavenward, to lift our eyes, to see that that is the thing that we should be focusing our hearts and our minds on.

He paints a picture of a glorious future. He paints a picture of a glorious future. There's five things I want to just show us in this passage that make the future so glorious.

First, it's a city of blessing. In verses 1 to 8, do you notice? Do you notice that the picture he paints? People tell me that Lewis is the closest thing to Eden.

[17 : 18] Maybe we don't quite get how wonderful this is, because we experience too much of it now. Imagine that you're a family living in Gaza right now and you read these words, and maybe they'll hit home a bit more, and we see how beautiful a picture it is.

I just love verses 4 to 5. Thus says the Lord of Hosts, Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with earls, playing in its streets, and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

Maybe we take that kind of safety and peace for granted, but Zechariah is painting a picture that would have baffled and surprised and filled his audience with wonder. It's one of complete peace and security.

It's a city that rings with the sound of laughter and joy, where people live to an old age because there's nothing to cut their age short, where children can just run around on the streets because there's no risk, there's no harm.

How will all of this happen? Well Zechariah goes on in verses 9 to 13 to explain that the curse is undone. It's a future where the curse is undone, long before the exile, when God rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt, he made an agreement with them called a covenant.

[18 : 34] He said, I will be your God and you will be my people. Part of making that agreement was saying that he would bless them if they honor their terms of the agreement, if they hold fast to him as their God, but that they would receive curse if they turned away from him.

God wasn't, and it's not that God was just waiting for them to slip up again and again and again. He gave Israel a second chance, a third chance, a hundredth chance, kept calling them back to following him, to being faithful, kept blessing them even when they didn't deserve it.

But in the end, enough was enough. They were sent into exile in Babylon because they kept on disobeying God. They received those curses for disobedience.

But verses 10 to 13 speak of that curse being overturned and unraveled. For neighbors turned against one another, if 10 describes how before there was no money, before neighbors turned against one another, before there was the threat of invasion, there was no peace.

But in verse 12 he says, in the days that are to come, there shall be the sowing of peace. And there's that wonderful picture as peace is sown, there's this bountiful harvest.

[19 : 46] The vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, the heavens shall give their dew. That a day is coming when peace will just be like a bountiful harvest growing up and abounding everywhere as the curse is undone, as all the things that are wrong are made untrue.

And so with a city of blessing, because the curse is being undone, well that means it's a time for feasting. The question that was given, that kicked off all of this discussion in chapter 7 was, should we be fasting or feasting?

That's what the people asked, Zechariah. And so he's now looking forward and saying, well actually as we look forward to what is to come, we are looking forward to a time of feasting with blessing on the horizon, the time to mourn and fast is over.

The time to feast is coming. Let me read from verse 19. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the faster the fourth month, the faster the fifth, and the faster the seventh, and the faster the tenth shall be to the house of Judah, seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.

The future that God is promising, that he's painting, that he's telling us to look at, it's like V.E. tables on the streets, you know, we've got to think of the streets lined with banners, tables on the streets, you know, groaning under the weight of food.

[21 : 08] As people are celebrating, this is victory. There's no more war, there's no more hardship, there's no more pain, there's no more, there's no more hurt, the curse is over.

Never again will nation raise, raise sword against nation. And so they feast, it's a picture of feasting and this blessing that is to come.

And it isn't an exclusive meal either. At the end of chapter eight, we see that everyone is invited. If you notice from verse 20, thus says the Lord of hosts, people shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities, the inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and seek the Lord's hosts.

I am going. There's this excitement, there's this anticipation as the nations gather to feast. That's what is to come. What is to come is, is everyone gathering because they hear what God has done. They hear that blessing is to be found with God. The curse is reversed, the feasting, the nations coming. But all of that can only happen because of one thing. And we see that at the end in verse 23.

[22 : 20] What do people do just before that slide? They gather together, they say, let us go with you because we have heard that God is with you. We've heard that God is with you.

That's the final thing. The fifth thing that Zechariah highlights, all this blessing comes because great. Thus says the Lord I have with his people. It was there at the very start of chapter eight.

Thus says the Lord I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain.

See what was our purpose? Why were we created? We were created to dwell with God. That's what Eden was all about, dwelling with God. But of course that was lost.

That privilege of dwelling with God was lost when people sinned. That privilege of God dwelling with his people Israel was lost when they were sent into exile. But God says I'm returning.

[23 : 18] What made Eden Eden? What makes heaven heaven? What makes the new creation, the new creation? Well more than the curse reversed and the peace and feasting at nations gathering.

It's God. It's God dwelling. Everything else flows out from God making his presence with his people. Everything else is a result of all the blessing is the result of God coming and humanity wants more living with God.

You know that everything was, this world was broken. Our relationship with God was broken because, well because we sinned, everything was broken because our relationship with God was broken.

And so for everything to be restored, our relationship with God must be restored. God must wants more dwell with humanity. And so that's who Zachariah promises that a new city of people, but how is that relevant for us?

That's what is on the horizon where God will dwell with his people. But how is that relevant for us? How is that relevant for us? Well this future blessing is for Christians both our present and our future hope.

[24 : 32] It's our present reality and it's our future hope. Let me just explain what I mean back on the timeline. That future blessing that Zachariah saw as a single event, he saw this single event of God coming to dwell, of blessing, of the nations gathering and he saw that as a single event in the future.

Well from the New Testament perspective now we see that that is actually, you could say it spans two big events. It began with the coming of Jesus and it's completed when Jesus comes again.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus began his ministry by saying the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe. In other words Jesus was saying that kingdom has come.

That city of blessing has come because the King has come. God really did come to dwell with his people when Jesus came to dwell, when God took on flesh when Jesus came to dwell on earth.

Shortly after Jesus said that he was asked by some religious leaders, why don't your disciples fast? And Jesus answered them, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?

[25 : 42] As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. Why was Jesus talking about fasting? Because that's the whole question in Zechariah, that's the whole question, that's the come.

What time for feasting has come? They're asking of fasting or feasting and Jesus says no, the time for feasting has come. That city of blessing that started because the King has come, the time for feasting has come.

Why Jesus says because I have come, I'm the bridegroom, you don't fast at a wedding, you feast. And so Jesus says the age of celebration has begun because when Jesus has come, as Jesus healed the lame and the blind, as Jesus drove out demons, as he raised the dead, he was unraveling the curse in this world.

And he was giving a taste of his kingdom, a picture of that city of blessing when all of those painful consequences of sin will be gone forever. And most of all on the cross, Jesus unraveled the curse forever.

Jesus took the curse of death that we deserve, that we by nature deserve. So if we trust in him, then the doors are open for us to have that, for us to be part of that heavenly kingdom to come.

[27 : 02] The doors are open for every people of every nation. So through Jesus, the kingdom of God, that kingdom of blessing becomes a reality.

But you don't have to live long to realize that Eden isn't restored, is it? We still see so much hurt and pain and death and people hurting one another. And this world isn't how it should be.

And that's because back to our diagram, we live in the overlap of the ages. We live in between. We still experience Jesus, but we still live in this present age.

We still experience both the blessing of being part of Jesus' family, but also the pain of being in this broken world. We live in the already, but the not yet.

Jesus has come, it's already come, but it's not yet come at the same time. But the time will come when restoration is complete. When Jesus returns, the apostle John famously talks about that in Revelation.

[28 : 03] We go back to these verses so many times because it's so vital that we have our eyes fixed on what is to come and when all things will be restored. When God's people are pictured as a

city, ready for a wedding banquet, and in verse four those wonderful words of unraveling the curse forever, he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. The age of blessing has begun through Jesus' work on the cross, and it will be completed when he comes again.

Now very briefly, three implications to go without. There's so much more we could say when we see that that is the reality, when that is our mindset.

There's so much more we could say, but three brief implications, and they go with our head, our hands, and our heart. We need to think about what we need to do and how we need to feel.

First our head, we need to catch the vision. We need to have an eschatology that fixes our minds on what is to come, that fixes our minds on the glorious restoration that Jesus is bringing, and that needs to shape our day-to-day life.

[29 : 24] The chances that whether we call ourselves a Christian or not, that we do live, at least from time to time, if not very often, as if this world is all there is.

As I mentioned earlier on, if we live life as if this life is all there is, we'll be unable to cope with suffering. Not only that, we'll be unable to actually find our fulfillment and joy in the Christian life. If we're trying to just ring our meaning and fulfillment out of this life, and not from Jesus, it's like trying to ring water out of a towel that's dry.

It doesn't work. If fulfillment comes from fixing our eyes on Christ, then what is to come, and where Christ is, and where we will be with Him? If we want identity and purpose and hope and suffering, we need to catch the vision of the age to come.

We need to remember that Jesus' return is like the full stop of history. It's like Christmas season in some ways. I don't know whether you like Christmas. But the whole of Christmas season, you start listening to carols in the car.

[30 : 28] You eat mince pies. You do all these things because in a several weeks' time, Christmas is coming. We need to live for Jesus' return and for the new creation like that. We need to live with one eye on that.

We need to live with that as the constant reality, even like you could think of the football clock that's counting down. We need to live for the end of the year. We need to keep our minds filled with heaven and the new creation.

It's only when those are filled, when we have that expectation of what is better, we'll be able to stop living this life as if that's all we've got. That leads us to our second implication.

Zechariah says to the people, let your hands be strong. In verse 9, it says, let your hands be strong that the temple might be built.

For the people that meant building the temple at that time, they needed to catch the vision and recognizing what was to come meant building the temple in the present. As we've seen in Zechariah, the temple looks forward.

[31 : 32] The temple that they built was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, where God has come to dwell with us and fulfilled in the church, which is where God dwells by his spirit.

Even as we hear that command to build the temple, that's a command to us to build the church. I don't know if you've heard the expression of being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. Well, the opposite is true. Maybe people think about that as someone whose head is stuck in the clouds and isn't actually living in the present, but for us to be of any earthly good, we need to have our minds fixed on what is to come.

When our mind is fixed on what is to come, we'll invest in the only thing that will last, which is the church, which is God's people. There will only be one thing that lasts from this age to the age to come, and that is God's people.

We could talk more about that in verses 16. We don't have time for that though, but Zechariah goes into that in verses 16 and 17 of how fixing our eyes on what is to come transforms our life.

[32 : 42] It's difficult to be heavenly minded as well. If we say that this life isn't all there is, then we're going to be constantly swimming against the flow of the world that says, actually, it is where TV and adverts and conversations and everything say you're missing out on life if you don't live this life as if that's all there is.

Zechariah anticipates that fear, and that's why he says twice in verses 13 and 15, fear not, fear not, fear not, but let your hands be strong.

Setting your mind on heaven and giving your life to serve in Christ might seem crazy to some people, but it makes total sense if the new creation and Jesus are in the equation.

If the heavenly city of joy and peace awaits us, then why else would we do anything but press on for that goal? Why would we live for something that fades when there's something so much better that is lasting?

Life in some ways, this life isn't the destination. We need to think of it as, I don't know, the changing rooms in a football match before we go out and play. This is where we prepare. This is where we call people to get on the pitch with us.

[33 : 56] This is when we get ready for the reality to come. It's the dressing room where we get ready to meet Christ, our bridegroom. Jameleot famously wrote, he is no fool who has killed sharing the gospel to the Orca Indians in South America.

Famously, wrote, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. We cannot keep this life, but we can invest it in eternity.

The future is bright, life with Christ and His new creation, and so we need to catch the vision. We need to set our mind on things above. We need our hands need to be strong as we build the church.

We need to not fear because what is to come is certain and we cannot lose it in Christ. So Christ seven and eight have been all about living in the gap between return and restoration, and Jesus calls us to do that by looking back at His death, where the rescue began, and looking forward to His second coming when He'll restore all things.

To help us to do that, He gives us the Lord's Supper. He gives us communion which we'll celebrate surely. It's a meal that looks back and looks forward. It looks back to Jesus' body broken, His blood shed on our behalf so that we can have new hearts, clean hearts as we saw last week.

[35 : 15] It looks forward to the feasting that is to come. It's a morsel that looks forward to a feast when Christ will return to take us to be with Him in glory.

Let's pray.