

Camelback Bible Church



Dr. Tim Savage, Senior Pastor
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THE FINAL FULFILLMENT

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 10)

Philippians 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2-3

Well, we've come to the end. The last sermon of the series on The Plan, the extraordinary plan of God for this world. And the message of the final sermon is simply this: we're not yet at the end, because we don't yet perfectly image God. Not as individuals, not as a local church, because we're not perfectly self-giving in love. We're not yet completely free from the sin of self-grasping. The Plan finally fulfilled? Not yet.

It's the uniform message of the New Testament. As Christians we are already predestined, called, and justified. But we have not yet been fully glorified, not yet fully reflecting the glory of the self-giving love of the triune God (Romans 8:30). What we are now is not what we shall be (1 John 3:2). We still await the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). Christians, we're waiting still for the redemption of our bodies. We are still waiting eagerly for a Savior (Philippians 3:20).

Why haven't we come to the place of perfectly imaging God? Because there is something wrong with our eyes. We don't see well enough. Paul says we *see only through a glass darkly* [the word in Greek means indistinctly] (1 Corinthians 13:12). Jesus says you have eyes, but you do not see (Mark 4:12).

And what we have trouble seeing is not just fine print; it's the big letters.

You have heard of the Snellen Eye Chart created in 1862 by the Dutch ophthalmologist Herman Snellen to measure visual acuity. When my dad wanted to enlist in the Navy in the latter days of World War II they put him in front of the Snellen Eye Chart and asked him to read the big letter on the top line. You know what's on the top line, don't you? You have it memorized. It's the big letter 'E'.

My dad couldn't see it and the Navy said – "You'll be no use to us. Not if you can't see the top line!" And they sent him home.

Seeing Jesus

Christians, our problem is not dissimilar to my dad's. The reason why we are not as fully useful as we could be, why we don't yet fully image God, is because we can't yet see, not very clearly, the top line. And you know what's on the top line. It's Jesus!

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When we come to see fully *the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*, we are *transformed fully into the same image* (2 Corinthians 3:18). If we are not yet imaging the Lord perfectly, then it can only mean we are not beholding him clearly. We have a problem seeing the top line.

Some might think this is nonsense. Of course we see Jesus. We see him whenever we read our Bibles. We see him in each other, in the self-giving love that marks Christians. Above all, we see Christ in the local church, in the body of Christ – in this group of people whose members give themselves to one another by using their spiritual gifts to bless each other. That is so like Christ. We see Christ in the body that bears his name, in the local church.

Yes we do. But we don't see him perfectly. We see only a pale, yet beautiful, image of him because the local church does not reflect him perfectly, and because he himself is not personally present.

He is now in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1). And we can't see into heaven. But one day that's going to change. And when it does, when we see Jesus face to face, we will, says the apostle John, be fully like him.

Let me give you the exact quote – *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he [Jesus] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2).

We don't yet see him as he fully is. But when we do, when we see him truly, we shall be like him fully.

Paul says the same thing in Colossians 3:4 – *When Christ appears, then you will appear with him in glory*. When Christ is made manifest, when he is revealed – that's what the word means here for 'appear' in Colossians 3:2 – when you see him face to face, his glory will be appear on you, the glory of his infinite self-giving love.

Perhaps the most powerful expression of this truth is found in Philippians 3:20 – *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it [heaven] we eagerly await a Savior*. Hmmm . . . I thought as Christians we were already saved?! We *are* already saved, but there is also a "not yet" to our salvation. We are not yet perfectly imaging the glory of the self-giving love of our Lord. That's why we eagerly await a Savior. And when he arrives or when we go to be with him, when our eyes see Jesus face to face, what happens? Verse 20 – *he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*.

He will complete the process of transformation. No more self-grasping; now we are entirely self-giving. *The good work he began in you will be completed*, will be perfected, will be *teleiosed*, says Paul, *at the day of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 1:6). He gives us a time when this will happen. It will be the day when we see Jesus face to face, either the day we die or the day he returns. This will be the day when God completes, finally and fully, the good work he began in us.

What makes that day so different from today? What will be the qualitative difference in the way we see Jesus then, face to face, compared to how we see him now in the Bible and in the members of his body, the local church?

The qualitative difference is going to be quantitative. It's the difference between seeing a galaxy such as Andromeda from light years away through a telescope and seeing Andromeda from the immediacy of being stuck right in the middle of it, seeing it face to face.

You've seen Andromeda in pictures. That spiral galaxy of pinks and purples. You probably responded by saying, "Ooh that's beautiful!" But what if you were to travel the 2.5 million light years that separates Andromeda from earth and come face to face with the one trillion stars that make up that galaxy, the smallest of which makes our sun look very small and ordinary? I'm sure the quantitative overload of such an experience would render you speechless. You'd be absolutely stunned into silence or, better yet, into the most reverent awe.

How much more awe-inspiring will be your reaction when you personally encounter Jesus Christ! I guarantee you that when you see him face to face you're not going to say, "Ooh he's beautiful." Nor will you say, "He's such a fine teacher!" "What an exemplary life." "My Savior lives, my Savior loves, my Savior's always there for me." Even our best songs in praise of how we see Jesus now will sound like ridiculous drivel compared to what we will sing in praise of Jesus when we see him face to face, the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, who is, quantitatively, exponentially bigger than the entire universe he created.

When we see that Jesus *we will be changed*. Our lowly bodies will instantly be transformed into the likeness of his glorious body. We will suddenly and fully begin to image in our bodies the incandescent radiance, the pulsating glory of the self-giving love of Jesus Christ. When you see him, you will be like him.

And when you can read the top line you will become a useful, fully functional human being as God intended you to be from the beginning, for his glory and your good. Then and only then will The Plan be finally realized.

Seeing into Heaven

But don't you want to know, aren't you dying to discover – how it will work? Will you just see Jesus more clearly and then, presto, become everything God intended you to be, fully imaging the glory of his self-giving love? How does it work? How does a better glimpse of Christ so radically transform us?

There's only one answer to that question. We will need to look into heaven to see how it happens. Oh wonderful, except that's impossible! Who's ever been to heaven and reported back on what he or she saw?!

The apostle John, for one. *I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what is taking place"* (Revelation 4:1).

John was invited to look into heaven. And what he saw was so extraordinary that he could only convey the scene through extraordinary images, apocalyptic images. And so he begins to describe the indescribable, to convey the quantitative overload of experiencing heaven itself; and everything he experiences seems to be centered on, because every eye is directed to, someone who is sitting between the throne and the four living creatures, and also sitting among the elders, someone whom John depicts as, and I quote, *A Lamb standing, as though it had been slain* (Revelation 5:6). And before this Lamb, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down in adoration, each of whom holds a harp, and holds golden bowls full of incense, and sings a new song.

They must have seen something very moving to make them want to come up with a new song. Yes, indeed, and listen to the lyrics of the song. *"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

And, then, *I looked*, says John, *and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped* (Revelation 5:1-14).

Do you understand? I think what we will say when we finally see Jesus is – “At last, I understand!”

When you see the One who is bigger than the one trillion stars of the galaxy of Andromeda, when you see the One who is bigger than each of the 170 billion other galaxies in the observable universe, when you see the One who is bigger than all of the galaxies put together, observable or not yet observable. When you see the One who is bigger than what can be contained in interminable expanse measurable in billions of light years, the One who is bigger than all this because he made it all. When you see this prodigious Jesus sitting on the throne of heaven as a Lamb who was slain, the One who is so big and yet stooped so low, the One whose blood was shed to ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. When you see all this about Jesus, with tears streaming down your face and with your head buried in the sacred ground of heaven you will say – “At last, I understand!”

Understand what? You will know what . . . oh will you know what. At last, you will understand the meaning of infinite self-giving love!

The Lion of heaven condescended to become the Lamb of the world, the Lamb of a tiny planet circling a second-rate star in a lower-class galaxy. Even more, he became *my* Lamb. He shed his blood for me, for one little human being called Tim. This *gigantic* Jesus became a Lamb *for me*. He did not regard his lofty status of equality with God as an opportunity to be used for self-grasping, but instead as a reason to empty himself, even to the point of pouring himself out on a cross *for me*.

Infinite self-emptying love. That's what we will see when we gather around the throne of heaven and behold the Lamb. And seeing him, we'll be like him. In what sense? In the sense that we will become in that instant perfectly self-giving ourselves.

How could we not? There's only one thing holding us back from being completely self-giving right now: *our selves*, which have been and always will be, until we see Jesus, very self-occupied. I will be worried, incessantly, that there will not be enough in life for my self, afraid that something might be lost in life for my self. Egotistically, I will be preoccupied by making a life for my self. Besotted with, absorbed in the dreams of, and the projects of, and the desires of my self. I am hopelessly self-conscious, self-obsessed, self-seeking.

And yet . . . *not* hopelessly. Because when I see Jesus I will forget about myself. Why?

Because I am going to be so taken up by the sight of Jesus *him-self*, so taken with the Lion who became a lamb for me, and who did so for his glory and for my good – that I will forget about myself. Instead, I will be overwhelmed by the infinite dose of self-giving love that rains down on me from Jesus, the infinitely self-giving One.

And when I am being doused, 24-7, throughout the rest of eternity by buckets-full of the living water that gushes from the Lamb who, in infinite self-giving love, permitted himself to be slain for me – at that instant I am transformed.

Suddenly, there is no fear in me. Fear is what happens when I'm worried about myself. How could I be worried about myself when I know for sure, seeing Jesus face to face, that he has given me everything. Suddenly, there is no anxiety in me. There's no insecurity in me. There are no failed dreams for me. There are no lost expectations in me. There's no guilt in me.

There's no hurtful or destructive thing in all my holy mountain, says the Lord Almighty in Isaiah's prophesy of heaven. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion together, the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra because heaven is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). Seeing-eye knowledge, the knowledge borne of seeing Jesus, the Jesus who bathes our now eternal existence in the security of his infinitely self-giving love, which inoculates us forever against anything hurtful – it changes everything about me.

He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Behold, I am making all things new. It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega. I span the breadth of everything, both spatially and temporally, both universally and eternally. There's nothing that

lies outside of me this way or that way. I am the bookends to everything. And in everything everywhere for all time there will be no hurt, no crying, no pain, no tears.

To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life. And the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as a crystal, flowing from the throne of the Lamb and the tree of life yielding its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding every month of the year. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of the Lamb will be among us, and we will worship him (Revelation 22:1-3).

With his love pouring into us, filling us, we become invulnerable, unassailable, uncursable, indomitable, indestructible. We become more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. If he is for us, who can be against us? If he gave up his own life for us how will he not also freely give us everything we need? All things work together for good to the one who loves God and is called according to his purpose. Because nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8).

Do you understand?

What keeps us from understanding infinite self-giving love right now? And what prevents us from imaging that love perfectly right now? It is our continuing pre-occupation with our selves, our well being.

When we see Jesus and see the Lamb whose blood flows eternally like a mighty river into the depths of our heart, we won't worry about our selves any more. We'll forget ourselves and drink in that river of refreshment, and, then, overflow that torrent of love onto each other, just like the love of God into his triune Family.

When we see Jesus, all self-centeredness will be banished forever. We will become perfect images of God . . . and The Plan will be fulfilled finally and fully, and all will be well; yes, and all manner of things will be well.

That We Would See Jesus

And so we cry, "Come Lord Jesus! Hasten the day when we see you and understand that all will be well. When we see you, Lord Jesus, we will be changed."

But until then what do we do? We seek to set our mind on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, having finished the task God gave him to reclaim all things for his glory, the glory of self-emptying love.

Set your mind, says Paul, *on things that are above*, on Christ who is front and center of the things above. Look at Jesus as best our Spirit-opening eyes can see him. *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear like him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

Keep your eyes on Jesus. That we would see Jesus! “Tim, that’s your goal every time you preach,” my Dad used to say. “That we would see Jesus.”

I’d love to be able to ask my Dad right now, “How’d I do?” How’d I do in the most important sermon series I’ve ever preached, the series on The Plan of God. But how could he answer? This is the first sermon series he never heard. How I miss those Sunday afternoon phone messages – “Hi dear ones. Well, I just couldn’t let the sun go down without saying how moving the sermon was this morning, how thrilled I was by what the Lord gave you to say. I’d never seen the Lord in quite the beautiful way in which you presented him, and it brought so many things into better perspective for me, and I pray that the things you preached about would be true of me.”

I’ve received the last of those voicemails.

But maybe the Lord did allowed Dad to listen in. And if so, I imagine the voice message he would have left now would sound a bit different – “Hi dear ones. I’ve seen Jesus. I have seen him nonstop ever since I got here and I can’t take my eyes off him. The Lion is the Lamb slain for me. You were right about the glory of God, the glory of his self-giving love, but you were mistaken on the magnitude. It’s so big, so holy, so good it cannot be compressed into human words, and it’s mine, and it’s changed me. I’m now complete. I’m perfect.

And you should see Mom. You remember how selfless she was in her life on earth, always serving us with so much joy and love. Well, you wouldn’t even recognize her now. Her love for me and for every person around us here and for the Lord Jesus is so perfectly Christ-imprinted that all worry and fear and insecurity have so completely been drained from her being that the glory emanating from her face would be impossible for you to look at with your naked eye.

I finally understand; I understand who Jesus is. The beauty of my Savior has taken a hold of my entire being and there is no longer any of my self holding me back, not with my eyes glued to Christ.

Even the question you wanted to ask me and didn’t know if I could hear it up here, the question, “How’d I do in the sermon series?” – well, you wouldn’t ask a question like that here in heaven. Because with the self-giving love of the triune God flowing through you, as it does here, everything is always and only perfect.”

“Tim, you’re the dearest friend a dad could ever have (which is what he told me a month before he died), please, until you join me, set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.”

“Make it your passion – that you would see Jesus.”

Is that your passion?

Let’s pray together.

[PRAYER]

Oh Father in heaven, we need to ask your forgiveness this morning. We are so easily distracted. Our eyes – they run off in every direction. And we completely miss the top line. We don't see Jesus nearly as well as we should, as we could. Father forgive us for the sin of self-absorption, of being so preoccupied by our own little world that we forget to look heavenwards and see what you allow us to see right now. Father, help us to set our mind on things above, not on the things of earth, where Christ is seated in perfect glory. Help us to set our minds on Christ. And then, Father, transform us into the image of the One at whom we're looking, from one degree of glory to the next, knowing that the little taste of glory we receive now, so delectable, is just a taste of where we're going to enjoy in full when we see Jesus face to face. Oh Father, hasten the day. Come Lord Jesus!

I pray that if there is anyone here this morning who has never seen Jesus at all except as a good moral teacher or someone who got in trouble and died a tragic death, oh Father, open that person's eyes this morning to see their Savior and their Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, open every one of our eyes to who Jesus is. May no one leave this place this morning without entrusting his or her life to the hands of this bleeding Lamb, this Savior from our sins, this Transformer of our hearts. And Father, for all of us may we go out today saying, "I want to see more of Jesus now. Open my eyes to make me more like your Son." May the motto of each one of us be "That I would see Jesus". To me it's very life of life to see Jesus. Give me more of that water, that living water that really refreshes my soul. So much of what I look at only brings me down. I get worried, anxious, frustrated, lustful. I want to see Jesus. More of him. Take me to him, Father. More and more of the things above, we pray. More and more of Jesus, we pray. That we would see Jesus, so that we could more fully image his self-giving love. It's your Plan, Father. And you are fulfilling it in us. We await the final consummation. We want more of it today, but we look forward to that day when we see Jesus perfectly in all the radiance of his incandescent glory. What a day it will be!