

# These Last Days



# These Last Days

A Christian View of History

EDITED BY

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

*and* GABRIEL N. E. FLUHRER



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Kenneth R. Wynne,

brother in Christ  
and exemplary steward in these last days,  
with gratitude



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# Editors' Preface

*“Ours is a religion whose centre of gravity  
lies beyond the grave in the world to come.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Geerhardus Vos

FOR MANY CHRISTIANS, the expression “the last days” refers to the short period of intense activity prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. But according to the apostles, the last days were inaugurated by the first coming of Christ and continue even today. The book of Hebrews thus begins by saying that while God formerly spoke by the prophets, “in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:2). Paul warned Timothy that “in the last days there will come times of difficulty,” and then made it plain that Timothy was living in that very era (2 Tim. 3:1). According to Peter, the last days began with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. This fulfilled the ancient prophecy that said, “In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17). Biblically, for us, the last

1. Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (1922; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 165.

days are *these last days*, as we are those, Paul said, “on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

How do we biblically understand our time as the final age of world history? What does this mean for our faith? These are a few of the questions that were taken up by the thirty-sixth meeting of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology during the spring months of 2010, the addresses of which are published in this book. Reformed Christians have often shunned the field of eschatology, surrendering end-times doctrine to more popular (but less biblical) schemes held by other believers. But eschatology is important! It was their Christian doctrine of history that thrilled the first Christian disciples: they realized that with the coming of the “last days” they had entered into the time of the eschatological kingdom that dawned with the coming of Christ. Our faith will likewise be strengthened by a biblical view of eschatology and a right understanding of what it means to live in “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) by means of “the powers of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5).

This book, like the conference that produced its chapters, attempts to work through biblical eschatology in a more or less chronological fashion. The volume begins with an introductory chapter, “The Christ of History,” by Sinclair Ferguson, which articulates why for Reformed Christians the purpose of history is disclosed in the person and work of Christ. After that beginning, the next two chapters ground the reader in the two dimensions of our present age of history. First, believers live in “This Present Evil Age,” which D. A. Carson explains with an excellent treatment of the book of Revelation, centered on the symbolic history of Revelation 12. (This chapter alone is worth the price of this book, lucidly displaying the riches of the Apocalypse for those with the hermeneutical eyes to see!) Next, Alistair Begg describes our present era as it is experienced by the church in light

of Christ's gift at Pentecost, in "The Age of the Spirit." These two chapters help believers to see the two poles of our current era of history, defined as it is by the struggle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan and the world. Looking forward in time, we are shown the hope that we have in Christ in Michael S. Horton's chapter, "The Resurrection Hope," and J. Ligon Duncan's exposition of "The Eternal Glory" that awaits believers in Christ. Finally, D. A. Carson applies the whole of Reformed eschatology to the believer's present experience in "Partakers of the Age of Come."

Included in this book are some of the outstanding seminars that enriched our conference. All readers will be informed by these chapters, but some of them are likely to be particularly appreciated by different readers. Cornelis P. Venema's lucid comparison of "The Four Main Millennial Views," Richard D. Phillips's presentation of "A Pastoral Guide to Life after Death," and Jeffrey K. Jue's tour of "Evangelical Eschatology, American Style," are likely to be particularly valued. Finally, Paul David Tripp gives us his trademark applied theology in "The Radical Implications of Eternity."

As we were preparing this conference on Reformed eschatology, we were frequently asked which millennial view was being promoted: premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial? At the time, we answered honestly that there was no attempt to promote a single view or isolate the others, and that we did not even know the millennial position of all the participants. Time has shown, however, that the material in this book consistently espouses the amillennial view of eschatology. The fact that this predominance was unintentional shows all the more clearly the growing espousal of this view in Reformed circles. To this effect, the editors wish gratefully to acknowledge the impressive contributions of Cornel Venema, Kim Riddlebarger,

## EDITORS' PREFACE

Samuel Waldron, and especially the late Geerhardus Vos, apart from whose labors Reformed Christians might still be anguishing in fear of “these last days.”

Lastly, the editors wish gratefully to acknowledge Robert Brady and the outstanding staff of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, whose tireless labors enable us to continue the historic legacy of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology; the congregation and session of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where the editors have labored in a shared gospel ministry; and the editors and staff of P&R Publishing, with whom we consider it a privilege to work and publish. Most importantly, we offer these chapters to the Lord of history, the Savior who reigns over both heaven and earth during these last days, and for whose glorious return we join with the apostle John in eager prayer, saying, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Amen.

Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer  
Richard D. Phillips  
November 2010

# 1

## The Christ of History

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SINCLAIR FERGUSON

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*I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring.  
(Genesis 3:15)*

THE CHRIST OF HISTORY—what a grand theme! While there are many, many places we could go in Scripture to expound such a theme, I would like to focus on the well-known fifteenth verse of the third chapter of Genesis. However, before we look at that verse, it may be helpful to be reminded of the context.

Adam and Eve have sinned and eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which God had forbidden them to eat. He has exposed them and is pronouncing a series of judgments on them. In verses 14–19, he begins with the serpent, then moves on to Eve, and then to Adam.

## Starting with Genesis 3:15

God's word to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 is this: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." How does this relate to the Christ of history? To answer that question, we need to turn forward to the New Testament.

For many of us, a favorite passage in the Gospels is Luke 24. There Luke gives us an account of the conversation that our Lord had with the weary and sad disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke tells us that the disciples experienced three things. First, they experienced the Lord Jesus opening the Scriptures to them. Second, they experienced the Holy Spirit opening their minds, so that they could understand them. Third, and finally, they experienced their hearts burning within them as the stranger expounded the Scriptures to them. They exclaimed, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (v. 32). Surely we would love to have been passers-by who could walk five, ten, or fifteen paces behind those three as they went to Emmaus, to listen to the Lord Jesus teaching the whole Bible!

Why do I bring this story up? Because, over the years, I have become more and more convinced that Jesus began with this verse in Genesis 3. The church has historically proclaimed that Genesis 3:15 contains the *Protoevangelium*—the "first gospel," or the first gospel promise. It is a particularly striking promise because it is actually a word of judgment spoken to the serpent, and not in the first instance spoken either to Adam or Eve. And it is also striking because it speaks more of victory than it does of pardon and forgiveness. Now, to be sure, the rest of the Scripture will underscore for us that pardon and forgiveness

are anything but incidental; indeed, pardon and forgiveness are absolutely essential to the conquest that is ultimately ascribed here to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the word in Genesis 3:15 is a word of judgment, enmity, alienation, and opposition. “I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel,” God says.

Let us turn to the New Testament again to see how it views what is so closely related to this event, namely, the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you are sensitive to the language of Scripture and I were to ask you, “What is the reason the Son of God came into the world?” you would immediately quote the words of 1 John 3:8: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” You might also think of the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:14–15, where he speaks about Christ taking the bond of guilt that stood against us and nailing it to the cross, turning the cross, as Calvin said, into “a signal trophy or show of triumph, in which Christ led about his enemies.”<sup>1</sup> Or you might call to mind Hebrews 2:14–15, which speaks about Christ taking our human nature, sharing our flesh in order that he might destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil, and release all those who through fear of death were in lifelong bondage and subjection to the devil.

Thus, there is a sense in which the sentiment of A. N. Whitehead, that the whole of Western philosophy is simply a series of footnotes to Plato, could be applied to the Bible. We could say that it is simply a series of extended expressions, footnotes, and expositions of this word of conflict in Genesis 3:15—and ultimately of Christ’s final victory over the serpent. This theme is dramatically picked up at the end of the book of Revelation,

1. John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*.

where the serpent has grown large through much devouring of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. He has been transformed, as it were, into a giant serpent, a red dragon who sweeps from the sky a third of its stars. He becomes not only the prince of the power of the air, but the god of this age. Here the promise given in Genesis 3:15 is painted in vivid colors to describe the way in which its consummation is found in Jesus Christ, who is the Christ of history and the Lord of time and eternity.

So, in this chapter, I want us to gather some of those biblical footnotes together. This will feel almost as though we were racing through the pages of a study Bible and pausing at texts here and there to see how marvelously, from beginning to end, our Lord Jesus Christ is set before us. I want to do this so that we may see him in his glory. Although we do not yet see everything under his feet, when we read the Bible we are to see Jesus, to learn that God has placed all things under his feet and that one day his triumph and final victory will be visible from the ends of the earth.

## Christ the Meaning of History

Here is the first principle I want us to think about: Genesis 3:15 shows us that Jesus Christ himself is the meaning of history. Perhaps you have heard (what some consider to be) a trite phrase like, “History is HIS story.” I remember hearing that as a young Christian and feeling somewhat creepy about the whole idea that somebody would take a word like *history* and try to turn it into a piece of theology by a form of allegory. And yet I suppose the power of the illustration is evident in the fact that I still remember it so many years later! It is true, you know. Our history really is Jesus Christ’s story. It is not about us—although,



in God's providence and saving grace, he is *for* us. But it is a story written about him, and the story is set up in Genesis 3:15 as the story of world conflict. It is about the conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, which will find its ultimate consummation in a personal conflict. In this battle, the serpent will crush the heel of the seed (plural) of the woman, and the seed (singular) of the woman will himself crush the head of the serpent.

The whole of history is, from the beginning of the book of Genesis to the end of the book of Revelation, a story told through the lens of the struggle between these two antithetical powers. Whether it is Cain versus Abel, or God versus the Tower of Babel, or the Israelites versus the Egyptians, or Goliath versus David, or Babylon versus Jerusalem, or Jesus versus the Pharisees, or the early Christians versus the Roman Empire—in one form or another, the Bible invites us to understand that the basic theme of all human history is, as Augustine famously said, the story of the City of God being built in the context of the City of Man trying to do its best to destroy it.

Here in Genesis, a collective antagonism is revealed, one seed in opposition to another seed. But it is a story that leads to a grand day, a final climax, when the two great protagonists will face off: Satan, who speaks through the serpent, versus our Lord Jesus Christ. But this happens presently until this great climax. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make it absolutely clear that, in this world, we can expect a story of kingdom against kingdom, Jesus against the serpent, the City of God against the City of the World. But injected into that conflict right from the very beginning is this amazing promise of a personal Redeemer, a Savior who is to come. He will come and conquer the one who is the father of all our woes. He will bring such a great deliverance from the power of sin that, from

the very earliest moments following the fall in the garden of Eden, the hope that was injected into the hearts of our first parents still burns brightly and never disappears. No matter how often it is attacked in human history, the hope of the coming Redeemer, whom we know now to be our Lord Jesus Christ, still burns as bright as ever.

I rather think that this is at least part of what Eve says in Genesis 4:1: “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” Was this the promised Redeemer, coming so quickly? Sadly, it was not. But the hope continued. In Genesis 5:28–29, we read that Lamech called his son’s name Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.” Fascinatingly, the theme of rest will continue to loom large over the entire Old Testament. God persists in promising to his people that one day he will bring the rest that was typified in Noah. But it is never actualized in the Old Testament, so that even when the prophet Isaiah looks back on the exodus as a great picture of God’s saving deliverance from the city of this world and victory for the kingdom of God, he speaks about the way in which the people resisted the fact that the Holy Spirit of God had come in that event to give them a measure of rest from the curse.

From Noah, the story continues in the promise given to Abraham. There is that strange scene in Genesis 22, where Abraham’s son Isaac says, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (v. 7). Then Abraham, in a wonderfully prophetic way, assures his own seed—who was himself given supernaturally as a kind of prototype of the supernatural giving of the blessed Son of God—that “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (v. 8). Thus Abraham’s hand was stayed because of the ram, caught in a thicket (v. 13).

So the pictures begin to build up in the Old Testament Scriptures. God gives his people priests and promises that one day there will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, whose priesthood will consummate all priesthood. As God's believing people stand and watch the priests making the daily sacrifices, they are supposed to think, "This cannot possibly be the sacrifice that God has promised to take away sins! Else, why are the sacrifices repeated day after day?" So, year after year, the longings of God's people are drawn out and a deep-seated desire begins to grow that all of this will come to its promised consummation.

They are given kings, and their prophets speak about how the coming King will reign from one end of the world to the other. His reign will bring *shalom*, or peace, a sense of wholeness and completion. They begin to speak about how this coming King will crush all his enemies under his feet, how his reign will be a reign of plentiful joy and pardon and restoration and power and reconciliation and worship.

But it was not just a great King that was promised—a Prophet, greater than Moses, was also promised (Deut. 18:18). The people, since Moses, surely wondered, "Who will speak God's word in power and in truth, as coming from the very presence of God and seeing the face of God and tasting the glory of God?" This burning question also remained to be answered.

Then there were the strange figures that the prophet Isaiah and the prophet Daniel saw in their visions. As Isaiah looks toward the coming day when the people of God will be in bondage in hated Babylon, he sees that geographical restoration is not their deepest need. No, their deepest need is still for the promise of Genesis 3:15 to be fulfilled. So Isaiah speaks of one who would be so exalted that kings would shut their mouths because of him. At the end of Isaiah 52 and into chapter 53—the beginning of the Fourth Servant Song—Isaiah speaks of the one who would sprinkle many

nations, yet would himself be wounded and crushed. He would be crushed for the sins of his people and then exalted and share his spoil with the strong.

Daniel sees the Son of Man, the son of Adam who would come to the Ancient of Days and share his kingdom with the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:13–14). All history is laid in tribute to this single purpose of God—all that takes place among the nations that rise and fall serves his glorious purpose—so that one day he who has spoken in many and fragmentary ways to our fathers through the prophets would in the last days speak through his Son. The whole story of the Bible, then, is the story of Jesus Christ. He is the meaning of history.

Of course, the implication of all this is that, though we may find out many things in this world, if we leave out Jesus Christ, we will ultimately be left in a state of frustration because we lack this world's unifying principle. Isn't this what the scientists and historians discover as they struggle with the basic material of their respective disciplines? The greatest of them have always longed to find something that would unify the whole. The famous physicist Stephen Hawking has been seeking this unifying principle for most of his life. The amazing thing is that the simplest reader of the Scriptures knows the answer! Jesus Christ is the meaning of the cosmos, and Jesus Christ is the meaning of history.

## Christ the Center of History

In the second place, Jesus Christ is not only the meaning of history, but also the center of history. Therefore, the story of Herod's pogrom (Matt. 2:16) is not something to be read in isolation from the promise of Genesis 3:15. Herod is the agent of the serpent who seeks to bruise the heel of the seed of the woman.

This theme is woven deeply into the story of Jesus' life, as it is recorded in both the Synoptic Gospels and John: the goal of his life and ministry is to plant a church in enemy-occupied territory. Therefore, the full force of the enemy is focused upon Jesus himself.

Think of the temptation narratives in Matthew 4:1–11 or Luke 4:1–13. We often read these sections of Scripture with the question in mind of how to relate Jesus' temptations to our own struggles with temptation. We then ask how we can learn to overcome temptation by the way Jesus overcame temptation.

While this is certainly not wrong at all, it is not the point of the narrative to answer these kinds of questions. This is because, interestingly, temptations don't come to Jesus. Rather, Jesus goes to be tempted. He is led there, driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the really significant thing about Jesus' temptations is not the way in which they are like ours, but the way in which they are fundamentally unique.

Arguably the most significant of these unique temptations is the temptation from the devil simply to worship him. In return for this, Satan will give Jesus the kingdoms of this world. Why should this tempt Jesus? Because he came for the kingdoms of this world! He came to undo the disaster and tragedy that Adam had effected. Adam had been set in the garden; it was almost as though God did for Adam what a kind father would do for his own son. God gave him a little start; the whole world was not yet the paradise that God commanded Adam to make it. The garden was demarcated from the rest of the world, but God gave his son Adam a little start. He said to Adam, "Here is a garden. Your task is to tend this garden and to expand this garden until it fills the whole earth." Strikingly, God commanded Adam to do this until, as it were, all the kingdoms of this world were his.

If Adam had done that, just like a child who accomplishes something even though his father gave him a significant start, he would have brought it all back to his Father and said, “Father, look what I have done! I want you to have it all!” So Adam’s fall was not just a matter of personal sin; it was a matter of cosmic disaster. He lost the world and Satan gained it—that’s why the Scriptures insist that Satan is the god of this age, the prince of this world who needs to be cast out.

In his temptation of our Lord, Satan, in effect, says to Jesus, “I will give you exactly what you have come for, only on my terms.” The breathtaking marvel is that Jesus refuses the very thing for which he has come, in order that, in gaining that for which he has come, he might crush the head of the serpent rather than bow down at the serpent’s feet. This is why, when Jesus emerges triumphant from the wilderness, Luke writes this: “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time” (4:13). In other words, much of the early stages of the gospel narratives are about all hell quite literally being let loose against Jesus.

We mustn’t be under the misapprehension that the whole Bible is a book about demons running loose all over the place. The Bible rarely speaks about demons, and demons rarely appear in the thousands of years of Bible history. But they appear in massive force in that little land of Palestine around the year 30 AD. Why? Because the kingdom of darkness is tottering. Think of the Gadarene demonic (Mark 5:1–20). Here is a poor man running around like a maniac, cutting himself with stones, living among the tombs. He is so vicious that no one can bind him, even with chains. When asked for his name, he says it is “Legion, for we are many.” It only takes one demon to destroy a man’s life, so why are there so many tormenting this man? Because

the King has come to reclaim his territory, and the demons are massing to oppose him.

Meanwhile, Jesus is marching forward, having dealt in measure with Satan's first temptations. What is so fascinating in the temptation narrative is that the whole demonic, satanic pressure seems to be employed to keep Jesus away from the cross. Satan is saying, "You can have the kingdoms—just don't go to the cross." He may have reasoned, "Let's expose who Jesus is, and he will never be able to go the cross." Remarkably, it is Simon Peter, of all people, who suggests the latter: "Never to the cross, Lord!" What is Jesus' reply? "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matt. 16:23). I wonder if it is significant that when Peter fails as the instrument of the powers of darkness, Satan changes his tactic. Instead of seeking to divert Jesus from the cross, Satan seeks to put Jesus on the cross in his time and in his way through Judas Iscariot. So much so is this the case that, when Jesus is arrested, he says, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

From every human point of view, it seemed that Satan's victory was consummated when Jesus was crucified. In this respect, the cross seemed to advance the plan of sinful man and Satan, not the plan of God. This would appear to be true—except that Jesus gave little clues as he has fulfilled his ministry. "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests . . . to be mocked and flogged and crucified" (Matt. 20:18–19). "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). And though the very epicenter of history is contained in the few last days of his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ's heel was crushed, as he entered into this dark world of conflict with the power of darkness in a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. Thus, the hymn writer can exclaim, "Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut his glories in, when Christ, the mighty Maker died for man, the

creature's sin!"<sup>22</sup> These words are only fitting as Christ entered into the alienation and agony of Calvary.

How better could Satan have triumphed, given this awful scene at the foot of the cross? There Jesus was, feeling the awful sense of alienation from his heavenly Father and bearing the judgment of God against our sin. His very Father placed sin upon him and then judged him as though he were the sinner! Surely, at the cross, it was Satan more than anyone else who might have cried, "It is finished!"

Satan did not realize that, by tasting death for us and rising again in power and glory, our Lord Jesus Christ would bring about the pardon of our sins according to the righteous judgment of God. Therefore, Jesus removed the power of sin and death that Satan, as it were, held over us. Satan was utterly defeated when he thought he was the most triumphant.

Jesus did not simply die, get placed in a tomb, and rise again from the dead a few moments later. No, he was in the tomb for three days. And this was not just in fulfillment of prophecy—to be sure, it was that, but not only that. It was because he really tasted death (and all that death carries with it) in such a way that his own supporters—if we can call them that—might well have believed that the enemy had won the victory. In fact, however, what was happening was that all the powers of death and hell were being exhausted in Jesus. As he rose again from the grave, he left the symbols of the conflict in the grave itself and rose in majestic glory and in power.

I have always been fascinated by the fact that Mary Magdalene was standing there forlornly in the garden, mourning the death of Jesus. (Now, we should pause here and notice something amazing before we continue. Our story, as human beings, began in

2. Isaac Watts, "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" (1707).



a garden. Adam turned the garden into a wilderness, and Jesus went into the wilderness to deal with the enemy, in order that he might turn the world back into a garden again. Isn't that wonderful to think about?)

To return to Mary in the garden: John, who seems to love double entendres, records that Mary saw Jesus and supposed him to be the gardener (John 20:15). Jesus wanted her to see him like that, but it wasn't just that little space that he was gardening. By his resurrection, he was "gardening" the whole cosmos. Jesus Christ is the center of history.

## **Christ the Lord of History**

Third, we must also see that Christ is the Lord of history. Simon Peter illustrates this well. Isn't it amazing to read about the transformation in Simon Peter after the resurrection? What happens to him? Well, first he receives roughly a six-week seminar on how to read the Bible. Can you imagine Jesus teaching you how to read the Bible? After this, Peter appears on the day of Pentecost, preaching as though all his life he has been meditating on the way in which the Scriptures, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, fit together. Among the many marvelous things he says on the day of Pentecost, this is what I want to focus on: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

According to Peter here, Jesus is Lord. He is the Son of God. Peter doesn't mean that the heavenly Father has exalted the Lord Jesus to deity. Instead, what he seems to mean is that God originally made Adam to be Lord, but Adam failed. Now Jesus has gone into the wilderness, has begun to turn that into a

garden, has defeated the powers of darkness, and has been raised up to the throne of heaven and declared by the heavenly Father to be Lord of this earth. His work is finished, and restoration is absolutely guaranteed.

Because Jesus is Lord, several things follow. First of all, his word of gospel grace is to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Why? Because “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” Jesus says (Matt. 28:18–19). This is the way in which the Father has fulfilled his promise to his Son: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps. 2:8). In the Great Commission, then, Jesus says to his disciples, in effect, “Go and claim my inheritance, continue to garden, spread the seed of the gospel, bring them in, and I who am the Lord of history will be with you till the end of the age.”

In the second place, notice that our Lord Jesus, who has crushed the head of the serpent, has not imagined that the crushing of his head will be the end of the battle. While he is the Lord of history and thus guarantees our victory, it is not the end of the battle. So he says to his disciples, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). But there is still struggle, so that we see the blood of martyrs and even the struggle in our own congregations against the dark powers. This is because, as Paul puts it, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

It is interesting to note how Paul opens Ephesians and closes Ephesians by telling us that we have been raised up in Christ into the heavenly places. And it is precisely in this new order of reality that the battle is fiercest, because we don't wrestle against

flesh and blood. So the Lord of history, our Lord Jesus Christ, sends us to the nations, wearing gospel armor that he himself has tried and proved because he knows that the ongoing battle will be bloody. But he means to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age.

It is Paul, after all, who gives us a most wonderful glimpse into how Jesus Christ will finally show himself to be the Lord of history in that great chapter of his on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15. From verse 20 onward, he gives us, as it were, a little synopsis of the whole story. He tells us that “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). And then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ will be raised with him because he must reign until he has made all his enemies a stool for his feet (v. 25).

And then Paul says something stunning in 1 Corinthians 15:27–28:

For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

What does Paul mean? Does he mean that the eternal Son will, at the end of the day, be subordinated, as a kind of second-order deity, to the heavenly Father, so that God the Father may be the supreme God and the Son a secondary God?

Not at all. Remember the whole context in which Paul is here speaking. The context is the story of the first man and the second man, the first Adam and the last Adam. It’s the story we have been following from Genesis 3:15, about how the first

man was created with the garden to be expanded into the whole world. When he had become Lord of the whole world, he would bring it back to the heavenly Father, presumably with his many descendants, and say: “Here am I, Father, and all the children you have given me, and we have finished the work that you gave us to do. We present this as our thankful love offering to you with the adoration of all our hearts.”

What Paul is saying is that what Adam failed to do, our Lord Jesus Christ has begun to do and will finally accomplish. When every knee is bowed to him, when the lion lies down with the lamb, when the blind see, and the dead are raised, and the dumb speak, and the deaf hear, and the cripples run and dance, and all of the elect of God are gathered together, resurrected, restored, sanctified, and made like Jesus Christ, then the victory will be complete. As the second Adam, he will lead us all to the throne of his heavenly Father and say, “Here we are, Father.” You and I will be hiding behind him, proclaiming that we did nothing to contribute to this. He will be saying, “Here am I and the children you have given me, and in their name I present this glorified world to you as our love offering. Since you have in your good pleasure deemed that I should take their nature and their name, I, on their behalf, bring the whole of history and all its glorious purposes for the salvation of these, my dear ones, to you. Together we bow before you.” That’s at least something that Paul was getting at.

We do not yet see Jesus as Lord of all because we do not yet see all things under his feet. So where are we to look? You have to look at Jesus. Because, you see, he is not only the Lord of all history, but the Lord of my history.

My congregation in Columbia, South Carolina, must think that I do not know how to end sermons. This is because I always end the same way. Let me end that way here: don’t you think it is the greatest thing in the world to be a Christian?