

Living in a Parable (The Signs of the Times)

Matthew 16:1-17

Pastor Peter Hiatt

June 20, 3004

[Children's Sermon]:

I went on a river rafting trip. It was incredible! The river was so powerful I caught it and brought it back. So hang on to the person next to you, because a raging river can sweep you away! [Peter takes the lid off of a jar of water.] Well, it was raging before . . . but it's not raging now.

Well, the mountain was so beautiful I brought some back! [Peter takes the lid off of a jar with dirt inside.] That's weird; it's not as beautiful as it was before. Now it looks more like gravel from my back yard.

The sky was so glorious I got some in a jar. [Peter takes the lid off of a jar with only air inside.] I guess you can't catch a river, a mountain, or sky in a jar. Or if you can, it kind of loses something.

God is way more powerful, beautiful, and glorious than mountains, rivers, and skies. But people try to catch Him all the time. If they catch Him, He's probably not God. We don't catch God; He catches us—with Jesus.

[Movie clip from Bruce Almighty]:

BRUCE [driving in his car]: OK, God. You want me to talk to you? Tell me what's going on. What

should I do? Give me a signal. God, *please*, send me a sign. [A truck hauling road signs pulls in front of Bruce.] Aw, what's this joker doing now? OK, I'll try your way [holding prayer beads]. Lord, I need a miracle. I'm desperate. I need help, Lord. Please, reach into my life . . .

[Bruce accidentally drops the prayers beads onto the floor; he leans over to find them and crashes into a telephone pole. Angry, he throws the beads into the water.]

BRUCE: Fine! The gloves are off, pal! Come on! Let me see a little wrath. Smite me, O Mighty Smiter. You're the one who should be fired! The only one around here not doing his job is you! *Answer me!* [Bruce's pager beeps.]

BRUCE to his pager: Sorry, don't know you. Wouldn't call you if I did.

Well, that was Bruce in the movie Bruce Almighty. He wants signs. In the movie, God shows up as a beggar holding signs. The first sign reads: "R U blind." Those were prayer beads Bruce threw into the river. He got them from his girlfriend Grace.

The movie starts with Grace wanting Bruce to give blood. She gives blood. You see, Grace bleeds for others with joy. But Bruce doesn't: He's wrapped up in himself and miserable. So he can't really see Grace. In fact, he's using and abusing Grace. He wants her body, but he's blind to her heart. He's adulterous and hypocritical. He's

demanding signs, yet he can't read the signs when he gets the signs.

Matthew 16:1-4:

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing [Jesus] asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.

Sky and heaven are the same word in Greek, so translated directly they say, "Show us a sign out of the sky."

He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

This is fully ironic. In the verses immediately preceding these, Jesus goes to a mountain in Gentile territory and heals tons of people and miraculously feeds the multitude.

Before that, He feeds the five thousand, and they take up twelve baskets of fragments. Five is the number of the Torah; twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel. Jesus is more than enough for all of Israel.

Then in Gentile territory, He feeds the four thousand, and they take up seven baskets. Four is the number of the four winds—the whole earth; seven is the number of all creation. He’s more than enough for all creation.

Jesus has taken the Gospel from Israel to the nations, and His ministry is drenched in signs . . . but signs to the wrong people in the wrong places, outside the control of the religious establishment. His ministry is drenched in signs, but the religious leaders can’t read them. Or maybe I should say they *won’t* read them, for they don’t like the meaning.

So the Sadducees and Pharisees ask for a sign “out of the sky.” Jesus responds, “Hypocrites! Actors!”

- “You read the sky when it serves you.”
- “You read the sky, and now you want a sign out of the sky.”
- “You want a sign out of the sky, and the whole sky is a sign.”
- “You want a sign out of creation, and the whole creation is a sign.”
- “If you won’t read the sign, why do you want a piece of the sign?”

So they ask for a sign “out of the sky”: that is, “Jesus, put the sky in a jar and show it to us, and then we’ll believe.” But what would they believe? The sky doesn’t fit in a jar.

Anthony Demello writes:

A group was enjoying the music at a Chinese restaurant. Suddenly a soloist struck up a vaguely familiar tune; everyone recognized the melody, but no one could remember its name. So they beckoned to the splendidly clad waiter and asked him to find out what the musician was playing. The waiter waddled across the floor, then returned with a look of triumph on his face and declared in a loud whisper, "Violin!"

People look at the world and ask, "What is that melody?" Modern man answers with pride, "Carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen." No, stupid! That's not the melody; that's just what it's played on.

People look at a sign and ask, "What is it?" Modern man answers in triumph, "Ink, paper, and aluminum tubing." No, stupid! That's not what the sign *is*; that's just what it's made of. We want to know what it *means*.

You see, if you won't believe in meaning, you can't read a sign. Only people with faith in meaning—faith in a sign maker—faith in something bigger than a sign—can read a sign. For signs always point to something else. And all creation is a sign.

Well, Jesus is the meaning, and Jesus is the melody. Jesus is the logos, the point, the plot, the purpose, the reason. Jesus is the Word of God: "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the Word of the Father."

I'm a father, and sometimes I'll speak words to my kids like, "Becky, you're my sunshine." Becky has to imagine it. It's a metaphor. But when God the Father speaks it, the sun is created! Creation is created. So it's all metaphor—all sign. We don't have to imagine *it* but imagine *Him*, not because He's *less* than creation but *more* than all creation. The question is: Can we discern its meaning?

Can you imagine if Jesus showed up and spoke a parable? We'd hang on every word, for every word would have meaning.

Can you imagine if God the Father spoke a parable? He *is*. It's all around you. And what's its meaning? The Word—Jesus.

Do you see the irony? It's like Jesus says, "You say you discern the face of heaven, and I'm the heart of heaven, and you don't recognize my face . . . or maybe you do. Hypocrites!"

- They wanted a sign that they could control.
- They wanted a sign with their own meaning and so hated *the* Meaning.
- They didn't want to be *part* of the parable but the *author*.
- They wanted to be God without God.

Remember, Adam and Even wanted to be like God but without God, so they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it worked. Then it's like God says, "OK, try to be God with a dead heart." And thus

we produced this fallen, evil world. But maybe it's still the parable, for God is bigger than even our poor choices.

In Bruce Almighty, God says, "OK, Bruce, you try to be God." Bruce has God's powers but not His heart. Jesus is from the bosom of the Father, like the heart of God. He is the love of God poured out. He is Grace who bleeds for us. In the movie, Bruce has power but abuses Grace and is miserable. The power of God without the heart of God is like hell.

Well, we all seek signs. We want the attributes of God without His heart. We want Him to do tricks, but we don't care for His person. We treat Him like a harlot: obey some laws, conjure some faith so God will turn some tricks for us. And then we despise His heart. His heart is body broken and blood shed. His heart is Grace bleeding for us.

Sometimes we come to church hoping for signs and wonders and houses and cars and the way to prosper and warm, fuzzy feelings, and then we leave disappointed thinking, "All I got out of that was some broken bread and cheap wine."

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign." God gives us His heart, and we don't discern the body and the blood. "You know how to discern the face of the sky," says Jesus, "but you can't discern the signs of the times."

What are the signs of the times?

In the Left Behind books, the great Bible scholar Tson Ben Judah sits in a safehouse reading "the signs of the times"; that is, interpreting ancient, biblical prophecy about Israel and the temple, and applying it to global, political events of his day, so that the end times saints will be ready

for Jesus when He comes out of the clouds of the sky, and all will see His face.

Would you recognize His face?

Well, you know that the absolute experts in biblical prophecy in Jesus' day were the Pharisees, and of course, the experts in politics were the Sadducees. The Sadducees and Pharisees demand a sign out of the sky in order to believe in the author of the sky. But you can't put the sky in a bottle. And if you could put the sky in a bottle, how would you know it was the sky?

You can't put heaven in a bottle; you can't put God in a bottle. But *God can*. They wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger.

God wrote Himself into His own story, a character in His story—*History*—the parable. “The word [the meaning] became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace.” But how would people know He was God? You can't know the maker simply by the thing that is made. But maybe you could recognize the maker of the world if He was in the world, by His love for the world. He would be the one who would bleed for the world. That would be the sign.

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Next verse:

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? [It all meant something.] How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

They were worried about bread, but bread is just a sign. Everything in this world is a sign, for we’re living in a parable: marriage, kids, houses, cars, miracles, sickness, good times, bad times, birth, death, all signs. We get so worried about signs because we forget they’re signs, and then we can’t read the signs.

In fear we ask, “What does it mean?” Well, it always means *Jesus*. Jesus is showing you something of Himself. “All things work for the good with them that love God.” Because it’s all sign, and He’s always the meaning, we can find Gospel meaning in everything in this world yet not be enslaved (addicted) to anything in this world.

The disciples stressed about bread because they thought their lives depended on it. They were stressed about bread as they sat in a boat with the Bread of Life. (They didn't know bread, and they didn't know life.)

Any time you worry about a sign, you deny the substance the sign points to: the One who is with you. "The substance belongs to Christ."

A friend wrote me about her longing for marriage and children. I ached for her and then wrote back to her. I kept what I wrote, because I need to be reminded:

We are on a journey. Both kids and marriage function as signs—good signs, but signs. Jesus had neither. Imagine being on a journey to visit the Grand Canyon. We are all tourists on this one quest but traveling in different cars. However, we stop at the same rest stop for snacks and to talk about our journey. Some folks start talking about the incredible sign they saw on the way. It was huge and made out of beautiful wood. It said, "Visit the Grand Canyon." The sign was so beautiful that some folks who didn't know how to read signs just sat down and ended their journey.

These folks at the rest stop know how to read signs, so they keep traveling. However, they can't stop talking about the sign. In fact, they start showing you Polaroid pictures of themselves with the sign. Of course, the sign is supposed to create in them a longing for the Grand Canyon, but still no one can deny—it was an awesome sign. But if they stare at those pictures too long, they'll get bored and start complaining. After all, it isn't the Grand Canyon but only a sign. And by now those that stopped

at the sign are miserable thinking, “The Grand Canyon isn’t all it was cracked up to be.”

Well, anyway, you’re at the rest stop, and for some reason you missed a really cool sign. Who knows what signs there are further down the road? The point is: before you know it, you’ll be standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon, and nobody will be even thinking about the sign. To even worry about it at that point would be absurd.

However, you are not at that point. You are at this point. It seems to me then that the thing we all need to do is nurture a longing. Longings make the thing longed for even better. I just want to remind you that the thing to long for is the Grand Canyon and not the sign pointing to it. Enjoy future signs, but don’t stop for long. When people talk about a sign you don’t have, don’t turn back. Nurture the right longing. Anything really great about the sign will be contained in the substance in ways that make the sign seem obsolete once you arrive.

So then, use the longing for the sign or the experience of the sign, either one, to nurture the right longing—the longing for the substance. I really wonder if you might enjoy the Grand Canyon more if you missed the sign for the Grand Canyon and knew it, than if you experienced the sign for the Grand Canyon and didn’t nurture such deep longings. The folks that enjoy a banquet the most are the ones that are the most hungry, because for some reason they missed the appetizer. That is, sometimes the greatest appetizer is missing the appetizer but smelling it.

Sometimes the greatest sign is the absence of a sign. It was the case on the lake that day in the boat. Jesus says, “Guys, you don’t need to worry about bread. I wasn’t talking about bread.”

Bread isn’t really about bread.
 Wine isn’t really about wine.
 Marriage isn’t really about marriage.
 Family isn’t really about family.
 Work isn’t really about work.
 This world isn’t really about this world.

Stop taking it so seriously. Stop taking it so *literally*. You can’t read the sign because you’re so worried about the sign. You’re addicted to a sign, like ink on a page or paint on a board. Stop worrying about the ink and paint and pay attention to its meaning.

You must die to the sign in order to read the sign.
 You must die to your life to find your life.
 You must die to the parable to receive its meaning.

You must die to the Old Jerusalem to see the New Jerusalem, for the Old Jerusalem is about the New Jerusalem. Bread is about body; wine is about blood. “Every slaughtered lamb is about me. This whole world is about me loving you,” says Jesus.

Harry Blamires wrote: “If there is one word the Christian secretly wants to use to describe the unbeliever’s outlook, it is *literal* . . . like the child who takes the play for reality.”

There are people who say they take the Bible “literally,” and I’m afraid that means they take it by sight and not by faith.

How do you discern the signs of the times?

- Do you read the paper wondering when the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem? Well, according to Jesus, it was rebuilt three days after He was crucified, and *you’re it!*
- Do you calculate when the messianic kingdom will come? Jesus said, “The kingdom is within you.”
- Do you worry about the reconstituted Israel and so study the politics of the Middle East? Well, you *are* the reconstituted Israel (or do you not believe Scripture?).
- Do you correlate prophecy and the geopolitical events of our day to determine when Jesus will return on the clouds of heaven, a sign from out of the sky?

In Matthew 26:64, on the day Jesus is crucified, He says to the religious leaders, “I tell you, hereafter [from now on] you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”—clouds of the sky.

Tonight you may have a heart attack and die. And I believe the room you are in will fade, and you will see Him coming on the clouds of heaven for you, coming to get *you*. And it’s not a dream; it’s not a vision; it’s no longer the sign; it’s the substance—more real than all this world. You really were His temple, nation, and people.

Well, I just wonder if Jesus might say to us:

How is it that you didn't understand I wasn't speaking to you about bread or wine or lambs or stone temples on hills or the politics of the Middle East? I was speaking to you about *me and you*—my beloved: my chosen race, my royal priesthood, my holy nation, my people, my children, my temple, my body, my bride.

Sometimes when Jesus gets too real, we turn Him into a doctrine. We prefer the sign to the substance, the attributes to the heart. We want a provider-protector but not a lover. We're adulterous.

Jesus says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." That is, "Beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees." That's just like saying:

Beware of the doctrine of the conservatives and the liberals.

Beware of the doctrine of the Republicans and the Democrats.

Jesus might as well have said, "Beware of doctrine. Beware of people who form groups and say they have the answer, for I am the answer." Doctrine isn't necessarily bad. Just beware.

It's hard to come up with two more opposed groups in Israel than the Pharisees and Sadducees. But they did have this in common: They took this world very literally; I mean, they took this world very seriously and themselves very seriously and their control very seriously and their

understanding, their responsibility, their knowledge of good and evil very seriously. They were very grown up. They were very wrapped up in themselves and this world.

So they both looked for a political worldly Messiah who would overthrow the Romans and establish the messianic kingdom on earth and make their lives in their world work for them. That's why they were looking for John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. They were the precursors to the Messiah—the Answer—the One who would make their world work for them. Yet they could not read the signs of the times. Next verse:

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Caesarea Philippi was a center for Syrian Baal worship and Roman Caesar worship, and the birthplace of the Greek god Pan. It's like Jesus stands in a lineup with all these gods and asks, "Who bleeds for you? Who do you say that I am?"

Why would He want to know what they think? They're not Bible scholars or politicians. He sounds more like a lover than a prophet or king: "Sweetheart, who do you say I am? I don't want to know what the Sadducees and Pharisees say, what the Greeks or Romans say, what the theologians, politicians, or Miss America would say. I want to know what *you* say."

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Did you get that? Peter discerned the signs of the times. How did he do that? He wasn't a Bible scholar or politician.

You know, Jesus fulfilled prophecy, but it wasn't like He went around saying, "Hey, my mama was a virgin. I was born in Bethlehem, and you watch when they crucify me. They won't rip my robe." No, they didn't see all that stuff until later. How did Peter know?

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

God made Peter discern the signs of the times. And he hadn't even been seeking signs. As if all things were a sign, all things led to this moment, for now the greatest sign—the sign of Jonah—was staring him in the face, and he knew the face. He recognized Him. A voice rose up within him: "You are the Christ, the Son of God." It was the Spirit of God within him testifying to the Word of God in front of him.

What are "the signs of the times"?

There are two words in Greek for time: *kairos* and *chronos*. Chronos is like the squares on my calendar. Kairos is what they get filled with. Chronos is linear time; kairos is God's time, encounter time, relationship time,

eternity. Kairos is the moment we look at chronos and ask if it has meaning.

Jesus fills all our chronos with His meaning—Himself—and makes it kairos. Kairos is *now*, when eternity touches time. Kairos is when you encounter persons.

In Matthew 7:22, Jesus says, “On that day many will say, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not do many mighty works in your name?’ and I will say, ‘Depart; I never knew you.’” They missed their times: *kairōn*. The signs of the times are not the signs of *chronōn*—chronologies; the signs of the times are the signs of *kairōn*—eternal moments.

In Matthew 25, Jesus says that at the last judgment He will turn to the sheep on His right and say, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (You see, they must have discerned the signs of the *kairōn*—the times.) “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

What are the signs of the times?

Hungry,
 thirsty,
 strange,
 naked,
 sick,
 imprisoned *people*.

Hurting people with their bodies broken and blood shed. They are the signs: the face of heaven (“face of the sky”) in this world.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee?’” The righteous read the signs, but they don’t remember seeing signs, for they weren’t seeking a sign. They were worshipping Jesus and loving His people. And Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

The signs of the times must be like moments of grace in this fallen world, which are the very presence of Jesus. In those moments, He invites us to know Him. In those moments, God fills *our* time with *His* time and makes it eternal. Every moment can be eternal, can be a sign and a presence. We can have eternal life now by faith.

He makes every moment His and us His. We are “the fulness of Him who fills all in all”—His body.

The sign of Jonah is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified,” His body broken and blood shed. We have become His body broken and blood shed. When we love, when we bleed grace, we are the signs of the times, the presence of Jesus in this fallen world.

In Bruce Almighty, Bruce gets almighty and gets miserable. He has God’s power but not God’s heart. God’s heart is grace: Jesus “from the bosom of the Father.”

Miserable Bruce uses his power to read some of Grace’s prayers. They’re all for him and not for her. Then he sees one of her prayers. He sees her through God’s eyes. She’s weeping. Grace is broken for Bruce and bleeding for Bruce. When he sees that, he breaks. He doesn’t want any more signs. He wants Grace. And then this happens:

[Movie Clip from Bruce Almighty]:

[Bruce is broken, walking in the rain. He drops to his knees in the middle of the road.]

BRUCE: You win. I'm done. Please . . . I don't want to do this any more. I don't want to be God. I want you to decide what's right for me. I surrender to your will! [A light shines on Bruce and grows, as if Bruce is having a theophany. He smiles. Just then, a truck horn blares a warning. Bruce opens his eyes. The light came from the headlights of a semi. The truck hits Bruce, and immediately he is in a white, cloudy room where God appears.]

BRUCE: Am I . . . ?

GOD: You can't kneel down in the middle of a highway and live to talk about it, son.

BRUCE: Why? Why now? What do you want me to do?

GOD: I want you to pray, son. Go ahead. Use them. [He hands the prayer beads back to Bruce.]

BRUCE: Um, Lord, feed the hungry and bring peace to all of mankind. How's that?

GOD: Great . . . if you want to be Miss America. Now come on. What do you really care about?

BRUCE: Grace.

GOD: Do you want her back?

BRUCE: No. I want her to be happy, no matter what that means. I want her to find someone who will treat her with all the love she deserved from me. I want her to meet someone who will see her always as I do now, through your eyes.

GOD: Now that's a prayer.

BRUCE: Yeah. Yeah. It's good. It's *good*.

GOD: I'm going to get right on it. [God gives Bruce electric shock on his chest.]

BRUCE: That didn't feel very good . . . [God shocks Bruce again, and suddenly he's in a hospital bed with doctors around him reviving him with electric paddles and giving him blood.]

Bruce dies and lives, because of donated blood. He marries Grace. He enters into the covenant of Grace and goes back to his old life with a new heart. So it's the same world, but he can read the signs. And everywhere he reads grace and sees grace—God's grace: mountains, rivers, sky—all a sign of grace. The movie ends with Bruce giving blood . . . in the image of God with the heart of God.

Well, it's a silly, Hollywood movie. But this is real: On the night Jesus—from the bosom of the Father—was betrayed, He took bread and blessed it and broke it saying, "This is my body given for you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

May you discern the signs of the times, for Jesus wants to know, "Who do you say I am?" If you feel an answer rising within you, say this prayer with me:

Jesus, I believe. Help my unbelief. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I surrender to your will.

So in the name of Jesus, may you stop taking this world so seriously, but may you read the signs. May you discern the signs of the times and declare with great joy, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God! You’re my God, the one who bleeds for me.”

And if ever you find yourself in a boat without any bread, don’t take that so seriously. The bread is about something else. And pain is about something else. If worse comes to worst, what will they do? Crucify you. And He’s got that beat too. Because in that moment, you go *home*, and you’re through with all the signs. You are in the arms of the Substance forever.

In Jesus’ name, believe the Gospel. Take the Gospel seriously and not this world. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

Matthew 16:1-4

History consists of parables whereby God communicates in terms that the imagination rather than the mind, faith rather than knowledge, can grasp. You know, there are many pleasures in being old and gaga. One of the greatest of them is to realize that history is largely nonsensical. How does this come about? Because when you get to be into your middle seventies, events and situations and circumstances that you very vividly and clearly remember are already history. Yet when you read them written as history they are completely and utterly unconvincing, with no possible resemblance to what you remember as the original on which they are based. So you have the pleasure of knowing that you need not bother in any way about history. The only reason for studying what goes on is to get at this parable that it conveys. Otherwise it is just like an interminable soap opera whose situations endlessly recur although the characters change.

Malcolm Muggeridge, The End of Christendom

Where a God who is totally purposive and totally foreseeing acts upon a Nature which is totally interlocked, there can be no accidents or loose ends, nothing whatever of which we can safely use the word *merely*.

C. S. Lewis, Miracles

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread." But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you

not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Matthew 16:5-12

To become a Christian is to accept an extra dimension to life. From the Christian’s point of view the notable thing about the unbeliever’s world is how much *smaller* it is. The unbeliever is imprisoned in a decaying universe.

Imagine you took a child to the theater to see some tragedy like, say, *Hamlet*, at the end of which the stage is littered with corpses. And suppose you had difficulty comforting the child afterward, so distressed was he at the spectacle of the deaths. “But the man who played Hamlet is not really dead,” you explain. “He is an actor. He also lives a life outside the theater. He has a wife and family and, far from being dead, he is probably now at home with them enjoying a late supper.”

If there is one word the Christian secretly wants to use to describe the unbeliever’s outlook, it is *literal* . . . like the child who takes the play for reality.

Harry Blamiers, On Christian Truth

The Pharisees were the superspiritual; the Sadducees were the supersecular. Extremes met in their both requiring sensations as proof of the divine. Quest for the sensational is unbelief, and *teaching* this quest is worldliness at its worst.

Dale Bruner, Matthew

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:13-17

If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show

itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe – no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house. The only way in which we could expect it to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way. And that is just what we do find inside ourselves. Surely this ought to arouse our suspicions? In the only case where you can expect to get an answer, the answer turns out to be Yes; and in the other cases, where you do not get an answer, you see why you do not. Suppose someone asked me, when I see a man in a blue uniform going down the street leaving little paper packets at each house, why I suppose that they contain letters? I should reply, “Because whenever he leaves a similar little packet for me I find it does contain a letter.” And if he then objected, “But you’ve never seen all these letters which you think the other people are getting,” I should say, “Of course not, and I shouldn’t expect to, because they’re not addressed to me. I’m explaining the packets I’m not allowed to open by the ones I am allowed to open.” It is the same about this question. The only packet I am allowed to open is Man. When I do, especially when I open that particular man called Myself, I find that I do not exist on my own.

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

The crowd is like an envelope. One receives a large package, thinks it is something important, but look, it is a package of envelopes.

Soren Kierkegaard, Provocations

The decision joins us to the eternal. It brings what is eternal into time. . . . Decision is the awakening to the eternal. . . . In the end, the archenemy of decision is cowardice. Cowardice is constantly at work trying to break off the good agreement of decision with eternity.

Soren Kierkegaard, Provocations

“You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times (kairos).”

Matthew 16:3b

For he says, “At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation.” Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

“Jesus Christ is yesterday and today and forever the same” (Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:17). “Openness to the future is what quite simply and necessarily characterizes the understanding of time in the NT. The goal of the eschatological even is God ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28) In him is described the goal of all times. The time which follows the final predicable event is necessarily unlimited on the basis of that which is said about its content – that from which it gains its quality and by which it is defined: it is simply and solely filled by God (‘God all in all’ can have no temporal limits). It alone is thus utterly and completely filled time, utterly and completely God’s time and thus – eternity.

G. Delling

These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Colossians 2:17

And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:22-23