

Visions Beyond 2-1-04

Upside Down Kingdom pt 4

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV)

Over the past month we've looked at Jesus' way of seeing the world. The Gospel of Matthew will continue on giving us the view of the one man that declared, *"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."* John 6:38 (KJV) He also said, *"These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."* John 14:24 (NIV) We have some folks around Sedona that claim that. I see advertisements that offer to tell me of some hidden wisdom from another realm if I will only pay \$35, or was it \$350, for a special presentation from one that came down from the planet Archturus, wherever that is. The only difference is that these folks don't heal people with their touch (in spite of their claims). I don't see the lame walking and the blind given sight. I don't see the dead raised to life. For all the healing advertisements in Sedona, I don't see a line of sick waiting to be touched by these guys. Not only that, but the words they speak tell me I can be someone or have been someone great. The words of Jesus tell me I'm in deep trouble and need His help. The guru in Sedona offers his service for a price. Jesus offers His life without cost. Hmmm? One shows me absolutely nothing to back his claims. The other raised Himself from the dead after being horribly murdered and then ascended into heaven in front of 500 witnesses.

I'll take Jesus. He gives me nothing to boast about. He offers nothing in this life but difficulty and persecution, but He points me toward an indescribably wonderful eternity and asks me to believe. He invites me to be a soldier in a battle that He claims has been ongoing over the souls of men from the creation of Adam. The only thing He offers me in this life is His presence, and I'm learning more and more every day about what that means. He's opening my eyes to the reality behind what I see. It reminds me of a movie, no, several movies, stories, and myths.

When we began this series, I told you that Jesus was the real hero of which all stories are just a shadow. My sister had just read something similar by John Eldredge and passed it on to me. I want to share that with you from his book, *Waking the Dead*. Let me introduce it with the words of the Apostle Paul, *"... we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)

If you haven't seen the movie, the Matrix, let me give you just a brief background. All human life is wired into a software program. Their only consciousness is of life in the program. They don't realize that their physical bodies are somewhere else, inanimate. A young man named Neo starts to see that something is not as it appears. The few people that have escaped with their bodies are trying to wake others up to reality. Now let's go to the opening scene.

Two men are seated across from each other in a dark room. Outside, a thunderstorm rages in the night, shaking the old house to its foundations. Flashes of lightening are dimmed by heavy curtains that muffle the sound of the rain falling in a deluge, as if it remembers the time it flooded the earth and longs to do it again. The curtains have been drawn because it is a secret meeting. This is the first time these men have ever met, though they have been searching for each other most of their lives. Not a moment too soon, their destinies have crossed. One of them, a tall black man dressed all in black, carries the aura of a spiritual master. The younger man, trying his best to conceal the fact that he is frightened and uncertain, might become his disciple. It all depends on a decision.

MORPHEUS: I imagine that right now you're feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole?

NEO: You could say that.

MORPHEUS: I can see it in your eyes. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he's expecting to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth. Do you believe in fate, Neo?

NEO: No.

MORPHEUS: Why?

NEO: Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.

MORPHEUS: I know exactly what you mean. Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain. You feel it. You've felt it your entire life. There's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is. But it's there, like a splinter in your mind. Driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

NEO: The Matrix?

MORPHEUS: Do you know what it is?

(Hesitantly, Neo nods his assent)

MORPHEUS: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window, or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.

NEO: What truth?

MORPHEUS: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, into a prison that you cannot taste or smell or touch. A prison for your mind. Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You must see it for yourself.

[In each of his open palms, held forth as an offering, the older man is holding two capsules, one red, the other blue. He is offering the younger man a chance at the truth.]

MORPHEUS: This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill – the story ends, you wake up in your bed and you believe...whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill- you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.

When Jesus went up the mountain to speak, he held out a glimpse of another view of what is real. Once you see it, there is no going back. I think sometimes as we hear these blessings and try to understand them intellectually we stop at the point

of letting our heart grab hold of their perspective and declare, "Yes, this is the real world. This is what really matters. This is the life of blessing. I can't go back to my selfish ways, to living for pleasure and self-indulgence. Eternity looms before me, and I have this momentary opportunity to invest in it."

Moses saw it. The author of Hebrews tells us that Moses endured, seeing Him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:27) This world is passing away! It's temporal, but there is an eternal world all around us. In fact, in that chapter about faithful people, the author says that they all had set their eyes on a city in another realm. Listen to how he puts it. ¹³All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:13-16 (NIV) A heavenly city? They saw what they were promised and welcomed them from a distance? What does that mean?

Commented [notes1]: ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.
Hebrews 11:27 (NASB)

"Neo takes the red pill; Lucy steps through the wardrobe; Aladdin rubs the lamp; Elisha prays that the eyes of his servant would be opened (2 Kings 6:17); Peter, James, and John follow Jesus up to the Mount of Transfiguration. And all of them discover that there is far more going on here than meets the eye. The film *The Matrix* is a parable, a metaphor, far closer to reality and to your life than you probably have been led to believe. And the question Morpheus asks of Neo is a question the Scriptures ask of us: 'Do you *want* to see?'" (Waking the Dead pg. 21)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.
2 Kings 6:17 (KJV)

Seeing that being poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking and persecution is truly the blessed way but may cost you dearly. Do you want to see or are you content to believe what you want to believe?

Let's jump to some true stories of those that have seen the world within this world and have been so transformed by the vision that they are willing to be persecuted for seeing it. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The early church was growing by leaps and bounds after the Spirit was poured out on the disciples. There was so much to be done that they needed helpers for the practical matters. The Apostles asked the people to pick out men full of faith and the Holy Spirit to deal with food distribution. Stephen was one such man. Every time he spoke to the Jews he was so convinced them from their own prophecies that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah that they decided they had to stop him. You can read the story in Acts chapters 6 and 7. They tried him, condemning him to stoning.

As he finished telling them the truth one last time, he looked past this world *and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.* Acts 7:55b Furious that he declared to them the reality of the real world they had rejected,

they began stoning him. His last words were a request to the One who he was seeing that God not hold their sin against them.

Jump forward to the year 165 A.D. Carpus and Papyrus were given opportunity by the Roman proconsul to deny their faith in Christ and worship the Emperor. Both refused to do so, testifying that only Christ is worthy of worship. After being hung up and flayed with instruments of torture, neither would recant their faith and instead shouted, "I am a Christian!" Seeing their steadfastness, the proconsul ordered them to be nailed to a stake and burned alive. As the flames leaped up, Papyrus prayed and quietly gave up his soul. Carpus joyfully prayed, "Praise be to Thee, O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, that thou didst deem me, a sinner, also worthy to die a martyr as You did. Then he gave up his soul to heaven.

As Carpus prayed, Agathonica saw the glory of God rollout before him. The heavens opened up to reveal the wedding feast of the Lamb of God, with sumptuous tables spread out before her and Jesus himself standing at its head. Her heart leapt, and she recognized a call from heaven.

She sprang to her feet and shouted, "This meal has also been prepared for me. I must receive the meal of glory." A cry came from the stands, "But what about your son; have pity on him!" Agathonica responded, "He has God to take care of him, for He is the provider of us all. As for me, I will go and be with Him."

She jumped into the amphitheater, threw off her outer robe, and jubilantly allowed herself to be nailed to the stake. Those standing by burst into tears. They cried, "This sentence is cruel and unjust!" In the flames she cried out, "Lord, Lord, Lord, help me, for I flee unto Thee!" Then she gave up her soul and joined her Lord.
Extreme Devotion pgs. 226-228

What did these persecuted see? They were certainly looking at something beyond this world. They believed the unworldly declarations of their Savior, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" They were willing to see, and once they saw, there was no turning back.

Just a few decades ago, Elizabeth Prentiss wept. The loss of two children seemed overwhelming. Even though she had experienced great pain in her life from losing the use of her legs, her faith in Christ had always kept her smiling with a unique ability to encourage others.

This time the grief was too much to bear. She prayed, "God, please minister to my broken spirit." God answered her prayer. One afternoon, moved beyond her deepest sorrow, she penned the words to this familiar, inspiring hymn:

*More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee!
Hear thou the prayer I make on bended knee.
This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to thee...
Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest;
Now thee alone I seek, give what is best...
Let sorrow do its work, send grief or pain;*

*Sweet are thy messengers, sweet their refrain
When they can sing with me: More love, O Christ, to thee...*

Elizabeth never knew the comfort and impact her song would make on modern day Christians. In North Korea when the late Communist leader Kim Il Sung discovered thirty Christians living underground, he had them brought out for public execution. The last words sung by the Christians as they faced death were the words of her song, "More Love to Thee." *Extreme Devotion* pg. 243

¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

A glimpse beyond the here and now can so enrapture our hearts with the glory of Christ that we are able to rejoice and be glad when insulted and lied about. If it is for the One we love, we count it an honor. We can see the reward is more than worth it. We endure as seeing Him who is invisible. (Hebrews 11:27)

Around this globe today there are millions of Christians who face the fear of torture and death because they have seen something worth living and dying for. What drives political powers and false religions to persecute and kill them? They are a threat because their lives so exhibit the transformation to Christ' likeness that a spiritual vision of Him brings. For *we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV) As they look at Christ they are transformed into the same image, and that is a threat to the world.

We need to remember our brothers and sisters that are persecuted as if we were persecuted with them, for we are one body. (Hebrews 13:3) Let me tell you one more story, this time from China. "Me Ling was young when she was arrested for her Christian activities in Communist China. During times of interrogation, the police would torture her to try to force her to betray friends in the underground church.

At first Me Ling was extremely fearful, and she could not see the purpose that God had for her in that terrible place. But then she remembered the teachings of her pastor who had said, 'Real suffering lasts only a minute, and then we spend eternity with our awesome Savior.'

When asked how she was able to keep from going crazy during those terrible times, she replied, 'When I closed my eyes, I could not see angry faces of the men or the instruments of pain they were using. I kept repeating the promise of Christ to myself; 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.' (Matthew 5:8). I also found that when I purified my heart of the fear of men, I learned to really see God. I took courage from all the others who had gone before me and focused on Him until everything else faded away. When the officials learned of my defense, they taped my eyelids open. But it was too late because my vision was secure.'" *Extreme Devotion* pg. 115

Commented [notes3]: ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.
Hebrews 11:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ³Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.
Hebrews 13:3 (NIV)

Me Ling saw what Abraham (John 8:56), Moses, Stephen, Agathonica, and millions of other Christians have seen. They set their eyes on things above, and not on the things of this world. (Colossians 3:2) They endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

Commented [notes5]: ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."
John 8:56 (NIV)

You and I do not face such threats on our lives as millions do in other parts of the world. But our culture is turning so rapidly away from the Bible that when we take our stand in line with God's word, we will be insulted and falsely accused of evil. What should our response be? If we see, if we want to see, we should rejoice and be glad, knowing we are blessed, and that our reward in heaven is great. We join the company of those who were willing to see and be changed. We join those that stand with the Christ who stood up to the world for us. Blessed are you who are, by the grace of God, willing to see! (Luke 10:23)

Commented [notes6]: ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
Colossians 3:2 (NIV)

Now you have a choice. Take the blue pill (unbelief, doubt, self-indulgence), and you can wake up tomorrow and forget you heard this sermon. You can go on believing whatever you want to believe. Or take the red pill (the reality of the unseen world through the eyes of Jesus in His word) you stay in Wonderland and His Spirit will show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. (Romans 11:33)

Commented [notes7]: ²³Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."
Luke 10:23 (NIV)

Communion is a choice. Do you see ordinary bread and juice, or do your spiritual eyes see past the symbols to the body and blood of Christ? Will you partake of Christ and see the world through the lens of His word? Or will you lean to your own understanding?

Commented [notes8]: ³³Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!
Romans 11:33 (NIV)