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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PAROUSIA

We begin this meditation by saying that God's word is not of human creation. We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all scriptures are inspired by God. There is just one author. And even though the instrumentality of men was employed and up to forty authors penned the sixty-six books of the Bible, the Holy Spirit inspired every verse of scriptures. So, we can talk about the verbal inspiration of scriptures. That should convey to our minds that there would be consistency in the message of God's word.

The Bible is internally coherent. That means no part of the written word contradicts the other. And so, any confusion arising from the reading of God's word as may be inferred from the confused voices, the divergent views about the same subjects that we find in the visible church systems, may be traced to man and not to God. And we know that one of the assurance the Lord is giving to His people today is that He will clear the confusion of voices (the Babel of voices) and will restore to his church one pure language; His word. For, there is a close connection between the light of God's word, a true and full response to that light, and the faithful coming into the fullness of the inheritance.

We read in the scriptures, for example, that Jesus Christ is coming to his saints. Yet in the same scriptures, we are told that Jesus Christ is coming for the saints. Then again, we shown that Jesus is coming with the saints. We are told the saints will look for Him. We are also told that the saints will go for Him. We read that the saints will be gathered unto Him. Jesus is shown as coming in the clouds. Jesus is also shown as sitting upon a white cloud.

Again, He is shown as coming as the morning star, suggesting to carnal minds that, perhaps, He will come in the wee hours of the morning. But again, we are told that "in that night, two shall be lying down on the same bed, one shall be taken and the other left" thus conveying to the mind of the casual reader that Jesus Christ will come in the night. This will appear so, some say, since it is said that he will come as a thief in the night.

We are told He will appear to them that look for him. Yet, it is said that all eyes shall see him. Then we are told again that he comes as the sun of righteousness arising with healing in his wings. He comes as the

refiner's fire, but he also comes as fuller's soap. He comes with vengeance, for so we are shown, but we are also told he comes to set up his kingdom over all the earth.

And whereas Christendom has fabricated various doctrinal positions, all of which are powerless to prepare the Lord's people for those things that belong to the Lords coming, nevertheless, like we began to say, we are to watch for a shinning forth of the light of God's word in the midst of this maze of confusion. And so, much error will be swept out of the way as the pure light of God's word will assist the Lord's people to develop a proper character disposition that is required to effectively receive Him when He comes.

In this edition, we will be looking at the characteristics of the Parousia. We have previously established that there are three time periods in the coming of the Lord. These are the Parousia of Christ, His Epiphaneia and the Basilea, His kingdom rules. The Parousia stands for a great time of the Lord's presence among His people completely unknown to the world; majorly unknown to many in the church world but becomes increasingly known with time as the effect of his presence increases. The Epiphaneia is the time of the great unveiling, the manifestation of the sons of God, while the Basilea is the kingdom, the millennial reign of Christ.

And, all of those scriptures cited above showing the different aspects of his coming may be arranged into these three time periods. So, when we are talking about the second coming of the Lord, we should ask ourselves whether the reference is to the time of His Parousia, or to the time of His appearing, his Epiphaneia, or to the time of the Basilea. This is because there is a difference in the way and manner the Lord comes in each of these time periods and the things that are associated with a specific coming.

In this edition, we are concentrating on the first time period: the Parousia of Christ. We want to look at some of the things that are to characterise the Lord's activities among His people in the time of the Parousia. Later in the concluding editions on these series of meditation on the Blessed Hope, we will be focusing on the principal sign of His coming, the principal sign of the Parousia of Christ.

If we go to Acts 3:19-21, we read in the sermon of Peter to the people, the following words

¹⁹Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

The phrase the "presence of the Lord" means the "Face of the Lord". The word presence there is not Parousia. So, the reference here is not to the time of the Parousia, for that is mentioned in the next verse (verse 20). The church has always known times and seasons of refreshing from the face of the Lord at various times when there is genuine repentance, a turning to the Lord and seeking him. There has always being times of revival when men and women seek the face of the Lord. But all that is different from the activities of the Lord in the time of the Parousia, which is the focus in the twentieth and twenty-first verses. So, we read verses 20 and 21.

²⁰And He (that is the Father) shall send Jesus Christ, Which before was preached unto you:

²¹whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouths of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Verse 21 says, "whom the heaven must receive" (and retain, for that is the force of the word "receive" as used here). The reference is to the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ was exalted into glory after his ascension, he was removed, as it were, from the earth's sphere. We can talk about the indwelling Christ, He indwells all believers, and we can talk about the personal Lord Jesus Christ. In the above passage, the reference is to the personal Lord Jesus Christ, the person of the Redeemer. We are shown in other scriptures that after his resurrection, he was exalted and seated at the right hand of majesty on high.

At the time Peter was speaking in Acts 3, the Lord had already ascended to heaven, he had been glorified, he was already seated at the right hand of power. And here in Acts 3, we are being shown that the personal Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrected and Glorified Lord must remain in the heavens of God until a particular time period sets in: the heaven must retain him until the times of the restitution of all things.

So, although, we may talk about the post resurrection ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ from the heavens, that ministry he has been fulfilling towards the church from the time he ascended to heaven. The word "until" in Acts 3:21 introduces another time period in His activities toward His people: the time of His descent from heaven, the time of His Parousia. And we are told that it shall be the time of the restitution of all things.

The word restitution, to the average English reader, hides the meaning of what is meant here and the intent of the inspired author. The right word is "restoration" and that is how it is rendered in many other translations. So, the reference is the "the restoration of all things. Heaven releases him or put in a proper way, he is sent again of the Father unto His people. He comes from the heavenly glory, he comes among his own, He comes to his temple, at the time when the restoration of all things has become due.

Now, what are the things to be restored? Verse 21 of Acts 3 says these are the things that God has spoken by the mouths of all his holy prophets since the world began. The reference is to the restoration of the truth; all that God had spoken concerning man's redemption. But it is not only the restoration of truth that is implied here. There is in addition, the restoration of life, the fulfilment in the Lord's people of the great promises of redemption that God had spoken: the complete fulfilment, in actual experiences of the plan and purposes of God for his people.

Now, that suggests that up till the Parousia, there would much of yet to be fulfilled prophecy. But at the time of the Lord's Parousia there is to be the restoration of the church to the true and complete word of redemption. She will become what Jesus intended her to be. It will be a fulfilment of the prophetic utterances that detail the full redemption that the church is to enter unto.

The greater many believe that things will continue to be like this till the "rapture" takes place. While some await the manifestation of the sons of God, others talk about a great revival that shall wind up this church age. But some say we are already in the great revival, the sons of God are already manifesting and so just tomorrow could be "rapture" day. But is this really so? Are the sons of God already manifesting in the midst of the decay that we behold all over the church world? Is there any revealed who has come into the full stature of the Son of God in all things? Is there really a great revival taking place in the visible church system?

We believe that the prophetic scriptures point to the fact that before the time of the manifestation of the Sons of God sets in, God will first of all clean up the church and ultimately bring her to perfection. He will clean up the stable; he will restore to the church a pure language. There would be a manifestation of the Sons of God. It would be a glorious time. The persons to be revealed as the sons of God are men and

women who are being built up into the fullness of Christ. The great work the Lord is carrying out among them is hidden from the world, and from the view of the carnal minded. These ones, as they grow into fullness, will be unveiled to the nations in the greatest manifestation of power, glory and honour the church has ever known.

This will culminate in a great revival. It will be ministry first to the church world, to wake her up from her stupor, to deliver the willing hearted from the error, darkness and shame of Babylon. There shall also be great conversions of persons from the world to the truth of the gospel. That revival will be so great that it will arrest the attention of all. All the nations of the earth, include the visible church world will be shaken by the power of the gospel of Christ.

But, we are saying that there is a work of restoration, of cleansing and deliverance that the Lord does among His people, in the time of the Parousia, which is to prepare them for that glory that is to be revealed. Let us read Malachi 3:1-3

¹Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: ²Behold, he shall come saith the Lord...

If you look closely at this verse, you will notice that there are two messengers referred to – the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord, and then the messenger of the covenant who is the Lord himself. All serious Bible students are agreed as to the fact that the messenger, the first messenger in verse 1 of Malachi 3, refers in part to John the Baptist. You remember, he began to say “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord”.

The Wilderness, in this connection, is used figuratively to speak of the condition of the nation of Israel at the time John appeared. The people were in a wilderness condition, as it were, far removed from the glorious estate of the city of God. John came to prepare them for a further work the Lord himself (the messenger of the covenant) would do amongst them. So, John preached in the whole of Judea. His baptism was at the outskirts of Jordan.

When we look at a given scripture detailing certain typical events we may, from a consideration of that scripture, see the same events in the antitype. The first coming of Jesus Christ is a type of His Second Advent. And although, one man heralded among the Jews the coming of the Lord in his first advent, we are shown in scripture that thousand of servants, men and women, shall be raised up to herald his Second Advent.

So, let us read verses 2 and 3 of Malachi 3, after which we go to the synoptic gospels to read how this was fulfilled in the type, during the first advent of Christ. Malachi 3:2,3

²But who may abide the day of his coming?

The reference is to the messenger of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the expression of the invisible God who comes to minister the full blessings of so great a redemption. So the prophet asks

²...Who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? (It is those that abide the day of his Parousia that shall stand in the time of his Epiphany). For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. ³And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Now, let us, go to Luke 3, and we will find in the ministry of John a reference to Malachi 3:2,3. We read verse 2 to 9

²The word of the Lord came unto John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness. ³And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Essais the prophet, saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. ⁷Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptised of him O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance and begin not to say within yourselves we have Abraham to our father. For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ⁹And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

You will notice that John's preaching was essentially a call to repentance. In symbolic language he declares that "every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be brought low, the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways shall be made smooth." Of course, it is clear that John the Baptist did not run a construction company. So, we know that the way of the Lord was to be prepared in the hearts of men. And the figures of the valley, the mountain, the crooked and rough places refer to moral conditions in men.

Then we are told that the axe is laid at the foot of every tree. That does not mean that several axes dropped from heaven and each physical tree in Judea had an axe laid at its root. The ministry that John was fulfilling was as an axe, the trees are trees of witness, persons that have come to know the Lord according to the teachings of Moses. The covenant community, all of Israel, is symbolised by the word "every tree". And the tree that does not bring forth good fruits is hewed down and cast into the fire of affliction, the fire of tribulation. And, we are looking at the ministry of John and the ministry of the Lord in his first advent so that we may better understand the things shown us in Malachi 3.

If you go to Matthew 3:11,12, John was speaking and said,

¹¹I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me (that is the messenger of the covenant) is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire: ¹²Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn off the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Now, we notice that John was referring to Jesus when he said "I baptise you with water but he that is coming after me will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire". We are told his fan is in his hands and will thoroughly purge his floor. Now, what constitutes the fan in Jesus' hand? What specific event may be pointed to in the ministry of Jesus Christ in his first advent that answers to verse 12 of Matthew 3? It is said that he would thoroughly purge his floor. What is here symbolised as the Lord's floor?

The Lord's floor is His people. The Lord's floor also will represent in the same imagery that we read of here, the truth of God's word. The Lord is referring both to the wheat of his word and the wheat of His people. His choice people, the faithful among his people are his wheat (John 12:24). The truth of his word may also be symbolised by wheat.

So, He comes to purge his floor. And we are told He will gather the wheat into his garner and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. Whatever there was in the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes that were not in harmony with truth, he burnt, and that which is in full harmony with God's word, he preserved. He also gathered unto Himself the faithful among the Jews while the unfaithful were reserved unto judgement.

Of course, there was practically no teaching of the Jews that did not have some measure of misconception. This chaff of doctrinal errors was burnt off with unquenchable fire.

So, there was no event in Jesus ministry in the days of his flesh in which He gathered literal chaff for burning. No, these things are set forth in figurative language. He cleaned up the ministry of the word in his time. He said, for example, "Ye have heard when it was said in the time of old, thou must not do this, but I say unto you, this is what is indicated"... "It is said you must not commit adultery, but I say unto you, whosoever looks at a woman with an intention to lust after her has committed adultery already in his heart".

And so, He began to refine the word, bringing it forth with greater brilliance, to assist the people to understand God's original intention in giving those words. Then He also by the refined word, cleansed those of the Jews that were gathered to Him. He said unto them "ye are clean by the words which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

We are now better able to understand Malachi 3:2,3. When in his advent the Messenger of the covenant comes, he is like a refiner's fire. He will purify the ministry of the word. Then, he is like a fuller's soap. He will cleanse the church; He will destroy from those who hear him, things in their lives that are contrary to righteousness. The word " fuller's soap" has to do with bleaching, a bleaching agent. Many symbolic garments (garment symbolises character and characteristics) will require a lot of beaching. In fact, because of fixed habits, and the necessity for frequent washing, some clothes will get torn. We all need changes of raiment (Zechariah 3:4,5).

Beloved! He (the Lord) is coming in the power of His word and spirit, to put all things straight. To purify our understanding and the ministry of the word. He comes to change us, burning off elements in our doctrines, and character contrary to Him. And, we will have to shape up or be put aside.

Now since the figure of the temple is already used in Malachi 3:1 (and remember, we are the temple of God, a spiritual house made up of living stones: 1 Peter 2:9) the prophet says in verse 3 of Malachi 3 *He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.* Levi did minister under the Old Testament. And so, in relation to the Second Advent and the New Testament temple, Levi types his servants; all who having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ unto life and are filled with the spirit are able to witness for him in one capacity or the other.

He will purify the Sons of Levi (and remember that the phrase includes you) and purge them as gold and silver that they might offer unto the Lord, an offering in righteousness. So he purges His people to enable them to serve Him better. He purifies the ministry of the word, He restores truth, and He purifies his people that they may take on His moral beauty in all respects. But while He is doing this with the faithful the unfaithful are confined to the outer darkness; cut off from the light of the Lord's day. Daniel 12:10 say *many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly.*

In the last chapter of Malachi (Malachi 4), mention is made of this same work of restoration, cleansing, purification and perfection that the Lord carries out among His people at time of the Parousia, before the Epiphany (the great dreadful day of the Lord). In verses 1-6, we read

¹For, BEHOLD, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven (the reference principally is to the Epiphaneia, even though, some measure of the things revealed here are witnessed also in the time of the Parousia); and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. ²But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. ³And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, said the LORD of hosts. (Now take particular note of verse 4-6). ⁴Remember ye the Law of Moses my servants, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. ⁵Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: ⁶And he shall turn the heart of the father to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

We have said before that the Elijah that shall come to restore all things at the close of the church age is the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember Acts 3:20. The Father shall send again Jesus Christ at the time of the restoration of all things. So, the Lord is both the greater Elijah as well as the Messenger of the covenant. These two ministries reveal two great aspects of the work of restoration He comes to accomplish in the midst of His people.

But, just like we earlier observed, the Lord fulfils the Elijah ministry through a many membered body of servants that He raises up at the end of the age. Thus, the Elijah that shall come can be said to be persons who upon receiving the Parousia of Christ, are anointed to carry the word of the Lord to His people in every place. They will be simple men and women with lamb-like graces, coming forth with a trumpet that will wake the sleeping church.

Notice in verse 6, we are told that this Elijah shall turn the heart of the father to the children and the heart of the children to their father. That speaks of restoration. It speaks of a church standing in the path God has ordained. It speaks of the raising up of the body of Christ, standing in the unity of the faith and of the spirit, having her ministry and practices guided by the truth of God's word; submitting to the headship of Christ, seeking for the fullness of Christ to be revealed in her, and being gradually built up unto that fullness. This will be fully realised before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

In closing, we will read from Matthew 24. We will only mention but not elaborate, on some other characteristics of the Parousia of Christ, hoping to pick up this same meditation in the next edition
Matthew 24:37-38

³⁷But as the day of Noah were, so shall also the Parousia of the Son of man be. ³⁸For as in the days that were before the flood: they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark

So, there will be gross ignorance of his presence. Since, the scriptures reveal that the Lord Jesus Christ will never again take on the human nature, we know that it will be the glorified Lord in the midst of His people carrying out a work, "building" His ark. However, there will be gross disbelief among the churches of the Lord's activities just as we find in the days of Noah.

That is why I Thessalonian 5 refer to some as being the children of the night because the activities of the Lord in his Parousia pass them unawares. They are only awakened to the reality of the second phase of the Lord's presence (the Epiphaneia) through the great judgement that accompanies it. So verse 39 of Matthew 24 says *And (they) know not until the flood came, and took them all away; (in judgement), so shall also the Parousia of the son of man be.* We read on

⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴¹Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken one and other left. ⁴²Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord doth come. ⁴³But know this, that if the good man of the house (and you are the good man of your own spiritual house) had known in what watch the thief would come; he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. ⁴⁴Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. ⁴⁵Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing ⁴⁷verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, ⁴⁹And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So, the Lord in his Parousia judges among his servants with a view to lifting the measurably faithful up and bringing down in judgement those who are decisively unfaithful. Malachi 3:5 says he will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right and have cast away the sense of the fear of the Lord. To the same degree of unfaithfulness shall the judgement be. He will treat those worthy of much stripes with much stripes and those worthy of few stripes with few stripes (Luke 12:42-48). But again, it will be with a view to raising up a new spiritual leadership completely cleansed from the old ways of greed, pride and human worship.

May the Lord cause you to be found faithful and to hearken to his voice at time of the end, in Jesus name.
Amen

12

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PAROUSIA

We are continuing in our series of meditation on the Parousia. We will be addressing forth some basic things that will enable us to understand clearly the purpose of the Lord in this time period.

We saw in our previous meditation that there two dispensations that are of great importance to man and to the outworking of God's plans and purposes in redemption: Christ's first advent of Christ and the time of his second advents. The first was to secure through death our redemption. Before then the Lord Jesus Christ, the pre-existent Logos had been involved in ministry to humanity and had appeared on several occasions to His servants. But a time came when a particular phase of the redemptive plan must be fulfilled. That phase required a perfect sacrifice to be made for the redemption of the human race.

Galatians 4 says when that fullness of time was come, God sent his son, born of a woman, made under the law. John 1:14 says "And the word (the Eternal Logos) was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as of the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". For thirty-three and a half years, the Eternal Word, having taken on full human nature, had a dwelling amongst men.

Now, after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin, he was raised from the dead. And we are shown that in his resurrection, he took on the spirit nature again, returning to the divine estate. Hebrews 4:14 say he passed into the heavens.

But, we are shown in scriptures, there is also to be a Second Advent. Act 3:21 says the heavens must receive and retain Jesus until another particular time period sets in the Father's redemption plans. At that time, the same Jesus who was before preached unto us, is to be sent again to bring to grand conclusion the work of redemption.

So, two great time periods in he human history that are unique and of great importance in the fulfilment of the plan of redemption: the period of the first advent and the period of the Second Advent of Christ. Just as it was necessary for Jesus Christ to be personally here in the first advent to fulfil those things that belong to that time period (proclaiming the word of God, showing example in himself as to what serving God entails, and finally. Laying down his life a ransom for the salvation of humanity) so, it is necessary in

the second time advent for Christ to be among His people carrying out a work. Howbeit, He is present in the glory of His Spirit nature.

Since the Lord, having returned to the divine nature, will never again take on the human nature, it becomes necessary for us to understand, through the word, the various events that belong to his Second Advent.

When the Epiphaneia sets in or when the kingdom sets in no man will be left in doubt that Christ has taken on his great power and has begun to reign over all the earth (Revelation 11:17). The time period that most persons are likely to miss out on is the Parousia, the first of the three time periods that describe the Second Advent. When it is said that Jesus comes as a thief in the night, the reference is to the Parousia. There is so much ignorance even in the church world concerning this time period.

And in this edition, we will be looking briefly at nine characteristics of this time period that will assist us to understand what time we are in. Later, we shall be taking a consideration of the principal sign of the Parousia. May the Lord quicken us as we do this, in Jesus name. Amen.

We will quickly go through these nine elements. There are more, but all of these can be resolved into these nine very distinct characteristics. Many of these elements will be found happening in the church world at the same time. And they show to us that we are in the time of the Lord's Parousia.

We have in previous meditation drawn attention to the fact that in this last hour, God is bringing to an end the rule of man in the church, and the prevalence of the mind of man in the operations of the church. God will bring an end to all of that. That is, in some sense, we are in a transition, and much of what we see in the church world will no longer be there in the years to come. So, you and I must prepare for the tremendous changes that God shall bring about.

The first characteristic is that the Parousia will witness a great restoration of truth to the church. Much of what is taught and preached in the visible church systems may be said to be just carnal projections of men, the teaching of man, out of tune with the word of Lord. Form Acts 3:21 we saw that the Second Advent of Christ will set in just when God is about to restore all things. So, the first characteristic is the restoration of truth. Another way of saying it is that the ministry of the word as fulfilled by the servants of God all over the earth, will be purified. And that includes you, for whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ and is filled with the spirit of God, having the capacity to witness for Christ is, in that sense, a servant of Christ.

God will open the understanding of His people. So much will be swept away that has been held out as truth to the Lord's people. So, there will be the restoration of truth, the purification of the ministry of the word.

The second characteristic is that the Lord will manifest unfaithfulness in the church systems. And, of course, that derives from the restoration of truth. As He open the understanding of His own to the truth of his word, then character failures, ministerial failures within the church will become evident. Erroneous practices, heretical teachings will be revealed for what they are. So, the second characteristic of the time period called Parousia is that the Lord will manifest distinctly unfaithfulness in the church systems. We make bold to say by the Spirit of the Lord that the next few years will witness such tremendous changes that certain places that go by the name of the Lord shall be no more, while there will be a springing forth of something entirely new.

That takes us to the third characteristic. The scriptures show that when He comes, He will test and judge among His servants. The reference in this connection is to those of His servants that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. He will test and judge among them Recall that part of the description of

glory of the Lord is that He is seen holding His ministers (the seven stars) in His right hand (Revelation 1:16).

God fulfils His redemptive promises to the church through the ministry of the principal witness (the Holy Spirit), and the co-witnesses (His servants). So, it is something great in the sight of God for somebody to be raised up into the estate of ministry and be given to the church as a servant. These ones are under clear divine responsibility, and God will judge among them.

So, those among God's people that have come to the estate of ministry are to be tested, judged and manifested for what they are. In Matthew 24 from verse 42 to the end, this is shown to be the case. Those who are measurable faithful... (Now when we use the phrase "measurably faithful" we are admitting in part that when God judges among His servants, there is no one that will be found hundred percent in full harmony with the Lord's mind. But there are some who dispositionally, in their heart's attitude, in the fact that they tremble at God's word and allow the word of God to do their thinking for them that can be said to be faithful to a large extent).

These measurably faithful ones will be cleansed of their faults and admitted to a closer walk with the Lord, while the unfaithful ones will be set aside. In the words of the scriptures, for the unfaithful, there will be the binding of the hands, meaning that their services will become increasingly irrelevant to God. Men may hail them, but in relation to the outworking of God's plans and purposes, and the raising up of a bride for Christ, their ministries will not be relevant. Ezekiel 44:9-end show that there are two kinds of ministry; that which serve God's purpose and that, which serves man's purpose.

We are talking about God lifting up the measurably faithful ones to a closer walk with Him while setting aside the unfaithful as far as His great purposes are concerned. Matthew 24:47 says concerning the faithful He (the Lord) shall make them ruler over all His goods. This shows that the Lord will make known to them all that needs to be known in relation to the truth of God's word which is the principal element in the ministry of the servants of God. God's church moves forward on the wings of the revealed word, which reveals Christ, His saving purpose, his program and His kingdom. The Lord Jesus will commit the great riches of his word, his plans and purposes unto the faithful.

But for the unfaithful there will be the binding of hands and the binding of feet. So, ministerially, they will be irrelevant. You will not need to look too closely to detect the inconsistencies in the moral lives of these ones. Verse 51 of Matthew 24 says they will be appointed their portion with the hypocrite where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:30 say they will be cast into outer darkness. That is no reference to the lake of fire. It shows that they will be shut away from the light of what the Lord is doing at this time of the end. They will not be able to understand or to intelligently respond to truth. They may even find themselves fighting against truth in order that their folly might show forth. They will be consigned to outer darkness in relation to the Father's plans and purpose. Daniel 12:10 say none of the wicked shall understand.

So, the third principal characteristic is that God tests and judges among his servants. An immediate consequence of this is that the Lord Jesus Christ will be raising up unto himself a new spiritual leadership, as He brings down the old order. The word "leadership" is used to stress the fact that the character of those who in ministry serve the interest of God will be altogether different from what we have seen up till now.

There will be persons involved in the old spiritual leadership, who through change, will be brought into the new spiritual leadership. But those who insist on their ways, who will not tremble at God's word, who will

not have their lives cleansed and their eyes washed and their garments changed, will keep doing the same thing, building unto themselves kingdoms, more interested in what they can get out of the gospel rather than what God desires to establish.

So, that is the third characteristic. And we have used Matthew 24:42-51 to illustrate that. You can also look at Zechariah 10:1-4. It shows that there will be a new spiritual leadership symbolised in the phrase "bright clouds". And there will be the judgement of the old spiritual leadership symbolised in the word "goats" and the phrase "idol shepherds" (Zechariah 10:1-3; 11:17). These are ministries that make themselves gods unto the people.

Idolatry is man making another man god and bowing down to worship him. We know the abuse of the image and likeness of God that man stands in when men worship the gods of wood and iron. But, the most terrible assault against God's plans and purposes is when man is set up in God's house as a god and is worshipped by the people. Zechariah 11:17 says woe! To the shepherd. God says He will punish the goats (Zechariah 10:3); person's stubbornly resisting the rebukes of the Lord.

That was the passage the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to in Matthew 9:36 when He said the Lord's people are as sheep without shepherds. Many in those days were found to be servants attending, as it were, to the things of God. But the Lord said God's people were as sheep without shepherd. We trust and rejoice in the fact that the Lord's people will see the emergence of a brand new spiritual leadership, who in the spirit of Christ, will serve and serve and serve. These will hold unto God to minister more effectively unto the Lord's people, not seeking for salaries like hirelings. Not hoping to make merchandise of the Lord's people and of the anointing upon their lives but rather spending their lives and their all for the kingdom.

That brings us to the fourth characteristic of the Parousia. There will be a calling out of the Lord's people from the spiritual environment of the denominational churches neck deep in unfaithfulness. That reminds us of Revelation 18:4, "Come out of her my people and be not partakers of her plagues". The "her" is a reference to church systems, which in their unfaithfulness increasingly approximate to Babylon. Denominationalism in its unfaithfulness is called by the terminal name of Babylon. But there will be ministries raised up by God unto His people across the face of the earth, calling them out of the denominational church systems neck deep in the rule of man. Typical denominational churches are merely religious empires devoid of the characteristics shown in God's word to belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

Closely associated with that is the fifth characteristic: of there being a gathering together of such persons that have been called out of the denominational church systems unto the Lord. In small pockets, scattered all over the world, are to be found groups of persons who have delivered their souls from the shame in the visible church systems, being taught of the Lord to His plans and purpose for this hour. This fifth characteristic is very important. In Psalm 50:5, the Lord says, *gather together my saints unto me those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice*. Again, we are told in 2 Thessalonians 2 that when the time of the Parousia of Christ sets in, there is to be a gathering together unto Him of all who love the Lord.

The formation of the body of Christ is the most powerful spiritual reality in the world. When God has a local ecclesia, a local congregation of His people moving according to His mind and will, then we might be able to witness the raising up of God's army. Central to understanding the New Testament revelation is the raising up of the body of Christ.

So, there will be a gathering together unto the Lord of like-minded people. Malachi 3:16 simply puts it this way. *And they that fear the Lord* (those who are delivering themselves from the unfaithfulness of the times... *they that fear the Lord spake often one to another. And a book of remembrance was open for them...* And so much is said in the verses that follow until we get to the climax in verse 2 of Malachi 4 *“And unto you that fear my name, shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.*

So, that is the fifth characteristic: that there will be a gathering together unto the Lord. Where the "soma of truth" is, there the eagle saints will gather (Luke 17:37). Truth will be a singular factor at this time of the end. The necessity for meat in due season will force those who have a heart towards God to seek where they will be fed with God's word. (We shall take more details when we examine the principal sign of his coming).

That brings us to the sixth characteristic: the moral cleansing of the obedient at heart. As the Lord draws his people from the spiritual environments of the visible church systems neck deep in unfaithfulness, they will come just the way they are: lame, blind, deaf, unclean (all of these terms represent failures and weaknesses in the lives of God's people). So, there will be a whole lot of cleansing. Repentance, consecration and yieldedness will be words that will describe the character of the meetings.

When the people gather unto the Lord, they will be crying out unto the Lord for a change in their being because the light of God's word shine brilliantly on them exposing their weaknesses. Make no mistake about it. Whatever a believer has acquired of evil, he must be purged of it right before the Epiphaneia sets in, or he will have no place in the heavenly kingdom that is to be revealed.

So, the sixth characteristic is that there will be the moral cleansing of the willing ones among His people. It is for this reason that the Lord is shown coming as a fuller's soap and as a refiner's fire (Malachi 3:2).

That leads us to the seventh characteristic. God will build up a prophetic spirit among this body of persons scattered all over the world. The prophetic element is so much missing in the church today, that so many believers do not know what the true character of the church is. But God will build into these people gathered unto Him (cleansed, feasting upon Christ, the meat in due season, having the prophetic word opening their understanding) the prophetic spirit. And one expression of that life is that God will empower local congregations of his people with so much of the anointing of the spirit that they will begin to develop such qualities as are to be found in the Lord's army. So, we can talk about the raising up of the Lord's army (Joel 2:1-11, Ezekiel 37:1-10).

That moves us to the eight characteristics: the revelation of Sonship and the redemption of the body. Roman 8:23, read in the light of verse 14-23 tell us of the redemption of the body. The believer who faithfully makes use of the Lord's Parousia is to break loose from corruptibility and mortality. There will be redemption of the body. Death is never a gateway to glory. Resurrection is the gateway. Death is not a friend. There will be a revelation that God intends that the last members of the church class should break free from all limitations and enter into life. There will be redemption of the body.

But there will also be the revelation of full sonship. Galatians 4 teaches on the difference between spiritual childhood and spiritual maturity. Some of those that have gone all over the world, preaching the gospel, are in some sense, still spiritual babies. But God will raise up among His own, men women fully built up. He will raise us up out of childhood as he makes Christ more and more known to us. Galatians 4:1 says, "the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all. He is placed under tutors and governors until the time appointed".

So, sonship is not something we come into at the new birth when we give our lives to Christ. But the placement of full-grown sons is something yet future. And the Lord will cause us to grow up unto Christ in all things. So the revelation of the redemption of the body, and of full sonship, is a feature of the Parousia.

The last of the nine characteristics of the Parousia, is that, for the habitually faithful, the experience of full experiential deliverance from sin is promised. The feast of atonement practised under Old Testament will be antitypically fulfilled in the church. We call it moral resurrection, moral perfection. This will be granted unto the habitually faithful in the time of the Parousia. And that will qualify them to enter into the bliss and glory of the Epiphaneia.