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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The theme of Bible Week for this summer was to have been:

Grace to Die For: Treasuring Jesus Christ More Than Life

We all understand that we sadly had to cancel Bible Week this year (who knows what may happen in the future!). But, I had already begun to work on the five messages relating to the glorious theme of treasuring Christ more than life itself. What I want to do for these next five Pastoral Letters is present these five messages to you in letter form. These together will bring my years of Pastoral Letters to a fitting close. I trust that these five letters will be of particular blessing to you, and that they will encourage you to joyfully choose Christ everyday above all else.

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Treasuring Christ More Than Life: Jesus Christ, The One Who is Treasured

“Now unto you therefore who believe, He is precious”

(1 Peter 2:7)

Henry Scougal (1650 - 1678) was a Scottish pastor and theologian. He lived a very short, but profoundly significant life. He left the world with a book The Life of God in the Soul of Man, a work as brief as was his life, but one which has gone on to influence millions of believers across the centuries and across the world. Indeed, the great George Whitefield said that he never really understood Christianity until he read that book.

The theme of the book can be summed up in one great sentence, which expresses one great idea:

The health of a soul is determined by the value of what it loves the most.

Just take a moment to consider that truth. You have a soul. It can be to one degree

or another healthy or sickly. Many have mortally ill souls. Some have fit and healthy souls. Scougal's right on observation was that the determining factor here is the object of the soul's affection. If you supremely love base and low things, your soul will suffer. If you supremely love noble things, your soul will be fit and well.

If you love that which is most precious and wonderful of all, then your soul will be truly well and full of life.

The most wonderful and precious "thing" that there is, is none other than Jesus Christ. If He is rightly the object of your affections, then you will prosper, right down to your inner-being, even unto Eternal Life.

Jesus alone is worthy of our highest thoughts, our greatest efforts, and our deepest love.

Why?

What is it about Jesus Christ that makes Him so wonderful and so worthy? Why is it tragic to attempt to love anything in the place of Jesus? Why should it be that Christians treasure Him supremely, even more than life itself?

Why is Jesus "Precious" unto those who believe?

It all has to do with two things:

- 1) Who He *is* (His *person*)
- 2) What He *has done, is doing, and will do* (His *work*)

As for Who He Is, there is simply none like Him. The Bible says of Jesus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers, or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the Church, He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fulness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1: 15-20)

Now, it is *impossible* to think of or imagine a greater being than the one just described. Try to. Try as hard as you can. You cannot. Jesus Christ is superlative in every category. He is God the Son, one with the Father and the Spirit; He is eternal, having no beginning or ending, the Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer of all.

The Apostle Paul, a man who was captivated and gripped by Christ, goes on to say of Him that in Him:

“...are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3)

Imagine that! All learning, wisdom, science, discovery, beauty, intelligence, are somehow sourced in none other than the Carpenter from Nazareth!

Knowing Him is the very highest thing your mind can pursue. Loving Him is the very highest affection your heart can have.

History has known many great men and women. Some of them good, some of them wicked. Line them all up. Survey the great figures of history. You will not find Jesus Christ among them.

He stands alone. He is in a different category. He is the Man who is God, the God who is Man. He is the Lord of History, the Judge of all, and the Saviour of Sinners.

He is precious because of Who He *is*.

But, if that were not enough, He is yet more precious for What He *has done, is doing, and will do*.

This Eternal Creator God:

1) Became a Human Being. He really did. As Charles Wesley said, He “emptied Himself of all but love”.

“Though in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in human appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.” (Philippians 2: 6-8)

Jesus was God walking on earth. He loved the loveless, rebuked the proud, cleansed the filthy, fed the hungry, touched the untouchable, healed the sick, rebuked the storms of nature, defied the devil, and raised the dead. He was Truth in human skin.

2) Died a sacrificial death as a perfect Substitute for the sins of the world.

“God made Him who knew no sin to be a sin-offering for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

“...and became obedient to death, even death on a cross,” (Philippians 2:8)

Wonder of Wonders! Jesus Christ gave “His life as a ransom for many”. Every religion on the earth grapples with the problem of sin and the human heart. But it is Christ who came to bear sin, to offer Himself for sin, to deliver from sin, to pay for sin,

to forgive sin.

3) Rose again in a Glorified Body, thus conquering death itself.

“Therefore God exalted Him to the Highest Place...” (Philippians 2:9)

“...but God raise Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.” (Acts 2:24)

The grave did not have the final say over Jesus, and it will not have the final say over those who trust in Him!. “Vain the stone, the watch, the seal.” People of every culture and time dread death. But death has been roundly defeated in Jesus and His resurrection. You can visit all the tombs of the great and powerful, the graves of the weak and small, but there is an empty tomb and a vacant grave where Jesus Christ is concerned.

4) Ascended into Heaven and grants forgiveness of sin and Life Eternal to all who trust in Him. He owns *all authority* in the entire Universe.

“All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me...” (Matthew 28:18)

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Jesus Christ will hear you when you pray. He lives today and is our way to the Father. The work He did once on the Cross, still speaks a word on our behalf before the very Throne of God. The way to the Father, to Heaven, to Life, is open for all who will come to Christ.

5) Is the final Judge of all men, and is King of King and Lord of Lords.

“For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man [Jesus Christ] whom he has appointed.” (Acts 17: 31)

All Creation has a date set...an appointment...with Jesus Christ. All will appear before His Judgment seat. There is no avoiding Him. He will sort out the tangles of history. He will make sense of it all. He will reign in justice and power. He will save those who tremble and believe, and punish those who refuse. Amazing Jesus Christ!

6) Is the Theme of Heaven and, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the praise of all Redeemed Creation forever.

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God gives it light, and Lamb is its lamp.” (Revelation 21:21)

Will you be bored in Heaven? Not if Christ is your Treasure, for He is the very theme

and focus of Eternity. He wants all that the Father has given Him to be with Him and to behold His unfathomable Glory.

Well, who can compare with this matchless Jesus Christ? Those who have treasured Him supremely have, with healthy souls, lived to transform nations, families, homes, cultures. They have righted wrongs and turned what is upside-down right way up. They have loved the loveless and lived lives of significance and purpose.

May the Lord Jesus Himself be the delight of our souls, the chief aim of our affections, the "Pearl of Great Price", precious beyond all else to us.

Yours,

John Gillespie