

## *The Cast* | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

### *The Cast Party (OR Behind the Curtain)*

*Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 27-28 and 1 Thessalonians 4:9-18*

*April 3, 2016*

*"I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire.<sup>10</sup> "A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.*

*"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. <sup>14</sup> "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed... <sup>27</sup> 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.' <sup>28</sup> "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."*

**1 Thessalonians 4.9** *Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, <sup>11</sup> and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, <sup>12</sup> so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. <sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

We have been looking at the wide array of minor characters who come and go in and out of the Four Gospels. We've looked at how they interact with the Main Character...what these meetings with Jesus Christ show us about human beings and also what we learn about Jesus Christ...revealed in relationship.

Today we end this year's series on the Cast with a Cast Party (seems fitting!) and with a look behind the scenes. We've had a glimpse at what is happening on earth (in human history...Jesus Christ is a historical person...Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are attempting to write a historical record) but today, we look into the spiritual or supernatural realm.

This realm is not physically perceived...but is just as real as the wooden cross on which Jesus died (Schaeffer said if you rubbed your hand on that Cross, you'd come away with a splinter...it was that real.) The other realm is behind what we see and perceive with our senses...it's the realm of meaning and it's just as real. Apocalypse literally means a revelation or unveiling ...looking behind the curtain...that's what we are reading.

We begin with an ancient prophecy (about 600BC) about judgment...about God the King and His dealings with this Fallen Planet...about the governments of this Earth and the Government of God. He uses human rulers but will ultimately assert HIMSELF over all...and "He shall reign forever and ever" (as in Revelation (11)...and Handel's Messiah).

The other passage ALSO is a kind of apocalyptic revelation... It's a letter to one of the earliest Christian Churches...answers a number of urgent issues...and maybe especially a kind of complaint that sounds very...Modern South Florida/American, i.e. "THIS ain't workin'...this message about Jesus may be TRUE... but I'm not sure it works! It's even making my life harder!..." St. Paul answers their question in a way that has huge implications for our modern lives as well. So let's look at:

#1 – The Problem with Visible Results

#2 – The Solution of Invisible Realities

#3 – Making the Invisible VISIBLE in Our Routines

The early Christians lived in a cruddy world. There was a lot of disease and crime...disasters ...filth... no real sewers...over-crowding in the cities (most of the earliest Christians were Urbanites). AND of course, when they believed the Good News that Jesus Christ was indeed the awaited Messiah and that He died for the guilt of His people and that HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD...the sacrifice was accepted by God the Father... and those who believe this...are FREE... when they believed it, it was because they COUNTED it true. They could still find eyewitnesses and the whole message was predicted and prefigured in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures...going all the way back to Abraham. It made sense of the Jewish Scriptures...it was true.

BUT...it didn't always seem to ...WORK. They had hoped that believing this News might also lead to some relief from their cruddy lives...and all this bad stuff people dealt with in the cities of the Empire.

BUT instead...they faced the anger of their Jewish and pagan neighbors and families. Sometimes

that anger turned to violence. They still sinned. Sometimes they still got sick, lost their jobs, lost loved ones...had fires...earthquakes...AND did I mention the sewage?

And being a Christian...didn't always produce the Visible Results they had hoped for...it was true...but it didn't always WORK (at least not in generating the visible results they expected).

But worst of all...it didn't help...with their BIGGEST problem...IT DIDN'T KEEP THEM FROM DYING.

They heard that the resurrection of the dead had begun with ONE MAN...and they expected that death would die. They thought the end of the world had come that Jesus Christ was going to return in their lifetime and they were...disappointed when some of them...died before that happened. Where's the blessing? Where's the victory? Where are the visible results of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Not working!

But behind the scenes...where they couldn't see...on the other side of the curtain that separates this world ...from the world to come there are of Invisible Realities that FOR NOW...cannot be sensed. These invisible realities are only perceived by trust, by faith... "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction/evidence of things not seen." (Heb 11.1)

Eyes, ears and hands...are of no help here. This is evidence not seen...there are not always the VISIBLE results we might expect from a religion or a lifestyle or a program or self-improvement plan.

BUT...we do see...in the ancient writings...if we will TRUST...and receive them...WE DO SEE A GLIMPSE behind the curtain...an apocalypse...an unveiling of invisible realities. Daniel...is shown something that leaves him...weak in the knees...shaken...pale.

The COURT is in session...the jury is (as it were) assembled. The Ancient Judge takes His awful seat...fire like a molten river comes from the throne...wheels of fire...symbols of mystery... of invisible realities we can only relate to by analogy. That's why Daniel...uses words "LIKE white snow... like pure wool... and ONE...like a son of man..."

This is among other things...a revelation...this is OUR FLESH... our humanity taken into the very presence of God. Isaiah went into this Throne Room and KNEW he would be reduced to ashes...saw himself for the sinful man that he was.

BUT here is One of our number without sin...a Human who did not fail the test. This is the Son of Adam...the Son of Man ...a new Adam.

The old Adam surrendered his place over creation and gave up his dominion... but this New and Final Adam...this Son of Man succeeded where Adam failed...He obeyed in the Garden and said, "NOT My will but Thine be done!"

And HE...the Son of Man ... “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” (Rev 5.3-5) and He is given “dominion, glory and a kingdom”. He has reclaimed our place.

And all whom He represents (HE is the Vine, we are the branches...HE is the Head, we are the Body) all who are IN Christ are also (see it in v. 27) are given “to the people of the saints of the Highest One...the Kingdom...” – a new humanity made of every tribe, people, nation and tongue...organs in His Body.

And WITH this and many other ancient visions and prophecies in mind the apostles will say, “We have seen it revealed... by the word of the Lord we have peeked behind the curtain...we may not see the visible results...but the reality stands: behind the Curtain there’s an everlasting Cast Party...”

And our biggest disappointments, even the death of our fellow believers...IF we believe (despite what we see with our eyes) “IF WE BELIEVE that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus”. (14)

The dead in Christ are not somehow disadvantaged... in fact just the opposite...those who remain on planet earth awaiting the return of the New Adam, the Son of Man and the New Earth and Heavens over which this God-Man will rule...we will NOT precede them.

They who have believed and died (actually Paul says, “FALLEN ASLEEP” just to emphasize how short-lived the separation will be...like a nap!) THEY will meet the believers who are alive when the Son of Man returns...the dead will rise first, their bodies made new and indestructible...and then the living will be translated...renewed/resurrected apart from dying.

“Lord, haste the Day...when my faith shall be sight... the cloud be rolled back...as a scroll...the trumpet shall sound and the Lord will descend...even so it is well with my soul...”

NOW, what to DO with this? Well, we admit, we COULD speculate on all the symbols...and it IS good to study the vision of Daniel and the apocalyptic literature of the Bible...as long as we’re modest and maintain “interpretive fluidity” (Joyce Baldwin) i.e. don’t try to sell books and make movies...but understand this is symbolic...and some of the symbols are obvious...some are uncertain (Bible scholars disagree)...but the BIG IDEAS are clear and are powerful helps and comforts to us.

Here are five ways to take this vision or unseen things and make the INVISIBLE VISIBLE in our lives.

ONE - there’s a condition, “IF we believe that Jesus died and rose again...” THIS is a call to

believe. It's an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ DID something in time and space...a call to MAKE that our confidence (I don't trust that I AM a good person but that THE ONE and ONLY GOOD PERSON lived, died and rose again for ME – that's my certainty!) AND THEN it's a call to trace out the implications of that, "Hmmm...IF Jesus Christ died...and rose...and is seated in heaven, that means humanity is IN the presence of God... we are welcomed there because of Jesus, the Son of Man, the obedient Adam... and that means MY LOVED ONES AND FRIENDS (like Ida Campbell who we buried yesterday) they/ SHE is asleep...her body rests...but her true self is ever with the LORD...Jesus was good enough for THEM...and for US!

TWO – we have community. This is the ONE righteous Man who deserves to have DOMINION over all creation...HE IS THE HEAD and WE ARE THE BODY...HE gives the Kingdom to us...He represents US and we are included...if we are IN Him...in His Body, the Church.

That's why the Apostles will say, "YOU yourselves are taught by God to love one another..." The NLT is better, "God Himself has taught you..." i.e. we are not perfect...we let each other down...we still sin and hurt each other but WE ARE A COMMUNITY of redeemed sinners...included in the Body as members or organs...that's why we say, "BE A MEMBER of a Church to take communion (this Church or some other) because God teaches us INWARDLY CONVINCES us that we belong together...so send in the RSVP to the CAST PARTY...take vows...Join us, the misfits and miscreants, people we've met in the Gospels – demoniacs and desperately needy sinners...IN the Body.

THREE – see your life as a series of callings: "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands" (1Th 4.11). We saw on Good Friday: Pilate minded his own business and ended up doing great evil... but to live with a calling is NOT just "I'm just doing my job...just following orders"...it's living in God's presence...

It's taking the hand of our Older Brother and joining Him in His quest to tend the garden...He is reclaiming the world... "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth...", "To Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom... "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom." (Lk. 12.32) The Son of Man is saying, "I will use you as you collect tickets...as you fix faucets...as you manage accounts...as you sit in meetings...YOUR calling...i.e. minding your business is sacred to ME because I go with YOU into that corner of the Garden...and we work together.

Fourth – "That you may respond properly toward outsiders" – i.e. we live surrounded (esp in the city) surrounded by the image of God... many of whom are unaware of this "apocalypse", the revelation of Jesus Christ... I have planted you here, in part, that you may represent ME to THEM...call them IN! A mission to outsiders.

Lastly...live in hope. YOU DON'T see the results... but a seed is growing...a process will unfold...keep believing...to face our future with faith...this is HOPE. "Therefore comfort one

another with these words.”

### **The Communion**

The Apostle Paul warned the Church at Corinth that to NOT regard the Church in the right way...to disregard that THIS BODY is a taste of the New Humanity where the old distinctions no longer define us...that disregard is a reason for NOT taking the Bread and the Wine.

WE THINK (in our Presbyterian way of thinking) we think one way to do this is to keep aloof from the Church...i.e. to say, “I believe in Jesus but am not committed to the church...” So, please, if you're in that situation please heed the apostles warning and don't eat and drink judgment to yourself by eating the bread and wine in the wrong way. (I'm obligated to pass on that warning.)

We are all...probably a lot more pragmatic than we think we are... Pragmatism is an American Philosophy...and while you probably don't identify as a “card-carrying Pragmatist”...we all want results.

And there are results or fruit or consequences of believing the Good News (e.g. we begin to love the brethren)... but mostly what we get...is just grace...received by faith.

We keep humbling ourselves...admitting our sins/wrongs and we keep trusting that Jesus Christ lived the life we failed to live and died that death we deserved to die AND ROSE...represents us in COURT...and He won our case!

We don't SEE the results...but, as it says in the Book of Hebrews “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” (2.9)

AT THIS TABLE we DO get a little break for our senses... we get to use our eyes...our taste...our touch... we don't see the results...our lives are in many ways, still messed up...the world is still messed up... BUT WE DO SEE THE ONE RISEN MAN...the Perfect Adam...the Firstborn in the New Creation ...And here at this Table we see Him...we taste and touch...we repent and believe...Bread comes from the other side of the Curtain and “communicates” – “the Cast Party awaits... what you really want and crave IS yours... Jesus Christ IS YOURS.