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Sermon follow up
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Acts 27-28 A Shipwreck, the Sabbath, and a Snake Bite

This passage seems to be a strange ending to the book of Acts and yet it is also very fitting. On the one hand, the book of Acts has been recording conversions to Christ from Acts 2 right up to this point. But now we come to the final vignettes in the book and there are no conversions recorded on the ship or on the island. It seems anti-climatic. On the other hand, if Acts is (as some believe) a legal brief, written on Paul's behalf, to use in court when he stands before Caesar, these stories make perfect sense. Despite the fact that there are no conversions, Paul is a blessing to everyone around him. His presence serves the common good because (presumably) God is with him. You might read these stories and think: Even if I don't believe what Paul preaches, he might be a good guy to have around since good things seem to follow him. Luke shows that Paul's ministry is a blessing, albeit in a limited way, even to those who do not convert. While the church aims at people's eternal good (salvation in Christ) for the elect, the church also produces a great deal of temporal good (cultural transformation/elevation/maturation) for everyone. This by-product of the gospel in history is a big theme in these twin stories in Acts 27-28.

More broadly, when we understand the symbolism and archetypes in these stories in Acts 27-28, we can discover in these chapters the beginnings of Christian theory of civilization. Paul is a minority figure (1 of 276 on the ship! 1 of many on the island!), yet he is constantly taking charge in a way that serves everyone. He exerts leadership on the boat and on the island and is thus a model for the church in every culture. Paul assumes the center; he plays out his role as God's representative in the microcosms of the ship and island. Paul speaks with common sense wisdom (Acts 27:10) and he also declares God's special revelation (Acts 27:21ff). He is concerned not just with converting those he is around, but with serving even those who do not convert, as seen in his role in saving the sailors and healing the sick. Paul becomes the de facto captain of the ship, and thus everyone onboard is granted to him. The sailors are saved precisely because they yield to his word. He is their "savior," at least in the sense that they are saved and blessed for his sake. They undergo a sort of death and resurrection with him as they go down into the waters and as they rise up to dry ground. Likewise, Paul becomes the de facto "leading man" on the island of Malta, and is honored as a king after healing the island's sick. His presence is a kind of transformed exodus for himself and the inhabitants of the island. Instead of cursing them with plagues, he blesses them with healings. When it is time for his departure, he is no longer viewed as a slave/prisoner, but as a king and is sent off with joy as a hero. He gets to "plunder" the Maltese as he makes his watery journey away from the island with everything he needs to complete the trip to Rome.

This is a foreshadowing of what is to come: The church will take the role as the leader of society, the captain of civilization. She will become the leading institution in the world. She will speak to society as a whole, not just her own members, and will do

so with both natural wisdom (e.g., things everyone should know but often suppress, such as “homosexuality is wrong”) and prophetic revelation (things that can only be known by way of spiritual insight, such as Christ’s death for our sins). God will use his church to bring salvation and healing to all. God will make blessings overflow from his church, even to those on the outside of the church. Of course, cultures and nations that persecute the church will be judged accordingly (see Peter Leithart’s *From Beast to Babel*). But those that are kind and receptive towards the church can receive great temporal blessings, even if many do not come to share in Christian faith (cf. Gen. 12). Of course all of this is borne out in history. God blesses the whole world for the sake of his church, and he blesses the whole world through the presence of his church. God progresses and matures humanity for the sake of his church. God so blesses his church that the blessings overflow to the world, at least in a temporal way. Even through storms that threaten to smash civilizations (as the Roman ship was smashed), God preserves human life and social order, ultimately for the eternal good of his church but also in a way that those outside the church can share in temporal blessings. God often preserves and prospers human societies, both for the sake of humans who bear his image and for the sake of the unique mission given to his people who have been renewed in Christ’s image.

These twin stories of the ship and the island give us a theory of civilization and of history that is thoroughly ecclesiocentric. This ecclesiocentric view of civilization shows that God’s purposes are focused on his people, but it is a view that also addresses life outside the church. These twin stories function as parables at the end of the book, showing that the presence of the church serves the common good. In the redemptive community of the church, “natural “life comes into its own and finds its true fulfillment, providing a pattern for society as a whole. In Paul’s defense in Rome, these stories would show Caesar that he’d be foolish to attack the church (even though he eventually did so). And he would be wise to spare Paul (even though he eventually beheaded him). Further, these stories also show that when Rome falls (that is, when the Roman ship of state runs aground), it will not be the end of human civilization or of the church. In Augustine’s *City of God*, he described some who watched Rome crumble with an apocalyptic fear and he criticized their folly: “The clouds roll with thunder, that the House of the Lord shall be built throughout the earth: and these frogs sit in their marsh and croak - We are the only Christians!” We have nothing to fear. The shaking down of the world’s kingdoms in history can only serve to advance the kingdom of God.

These stories come to life when we start to ask questions about why they unfold the way they do. We have to ask: Why did God spare the other sailors? Why not just spare Paul? Why “grant” to Paul his non-Christian sailing companions? Why were the godless sailors saved for the sake of godly Paul? Likewise, why spare the father of Publius? Why heal all the sick on the island of Malta? Why give these pagans such amazing blessings? I pointed towards an answer in the sermon with texts like Matt. 5:45, Gal. 6:10, 1 Tim. 4:10, and so on. But I want to develop that answer further here. It is certainly true that God’s saving purposes are limited to his elect (though the elect is a great multitude beyond numbering, drawn from every nation/people

group). But God is also concerned with the rise and progress of civilization, with the maturation and glorification of the human race, and within history this means many non-elect persons will experience temporal blessings and both share in and contribute to human flourishing in various ways and to various degrees. God has a general love for all he has made, especially the human race. God has shown he will spare whole cities, even nations and empires, if only a few righteous are present (see Sodom in Genesis). And when God does judge a nation, he raises up another from the rubble so that the human story can continue marching onwards.

The world is a new place now that Christ and the Spirit have come. The world is continually growing better in every way. Satan is defeated. The world is being flooded with grace and mercy. God has a love for all men. God has purposes that focus on his church, but go beyond the church to include non-Christians. God cares about everyone and everything.

Just as God is good to non-Christians, we should be also. We should love and serve all humans, as bearers of God's image. Yes, our ministry is directed first to brothers and sisters in Christ, but our ministry does not stop there. We minister in word and deed to those who do not know God because God himself does. We do not just evangelize non-Christians; we also help them in tangible, practical, material ways.

Paul wanted to take on the risky task of preaching to Caesar because he wanted to see not just individuals convert, he wanted to see civilization convert. A. A. Van Ruler once said, "We become Christian in order to become truly human." The Christian faith is true humanism. The Christian way of life is the most fully and truly human way to live, in accord with God's design for human life. God's commandments fit our humanity like a hand in a glove. And the more a civilization or culture conforms to God's standards, the more it will ultimately thrive.

Why did God spare the sailors for Paul's sake? Why did he heal the Maltans? We might as well ask: Why does God fill the world with so many good things down to the present day? Why does God preserve and grow civilizations? Why does God seem to give ever increasing prosperity to the world? Acts 27-28 help us understand God's historical and eschatological purposes. These stories give us a big picture "view from a spaceship" take on reality. And they show us the overwhelming goodness of God. They show us God pouring out mercy upon the whole world in ever greater ways. They give us a philosophy of history and culture. In short: *Life is awesome and it keeps getting better. The world is growing better all the time. Today is the best day there's ever been, and tomorrow will be even better. The year 2018 is the best year there's ever been in the history of the world and most likely next year will be even better.* Certainly this is true Spiritually. The church continues to grow rapidly at a rapid pace, especially in Asia and Africa. We live in an era of unprecedented growth for the church. But it is true in other ways as well. It is true socially, politically, and economically. The whole book of Acts is about the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. The opening two chapters of Acts frame the whole narrative in terms of the Spirit's work. And so the Spirit is responsible not just for the growth of

the church (as we see recorded in much of the book of Acts) but also for the salvation and healing of human civilization at large (as these twin stories in Acts 27-28 show us). The perseveration of the sailors is the work of the Spirit. The healing of Malta is the work of the Spirit. All of this, whether inside or outside the church, is attributed to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is confessed in our creeds as “the Lord and Giver of life.” He creates life and sustains life. He brings new life and eternal life. He gave life to Adam and he gives life to the new Adam, who he raised from the dead. The Holy Spirit stands behind all human life and culture; he is the driving energy and force behind all human creativity and ingenuity. The Holy Spirit stands behind all human work and wisdom and achievement. The Holy Spirit preserves, sustains, matures, and glorifies human life. The Holy Spirit gives human different vocations and abilities which (when freely and rightly used) serve the common good and enable the whole human race to flourish. The Holy Spirit’s ministry, of course, is especially directed to Christians. His saving work takes place in and through the church. But the Holy Spirit also works outside the church, in a non-saving way that can still serve the overall development of the human race. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the arts and sciences, the Spirit of politics and economics, the Spirit is sailing and soldiering. He is the Lord and Giver of culture. Of course, Christians are responsible for disciplining their cultures and bringing them in alignment with God’s overall designs. Unbelievers cannot do this on their own, and they certainly cannot do it in the way that Christians can and should (the Great Commission includes this task of cultural transformation). But God equips and empowers unbelievers to do various things that, from a limited perspective, can be considered good and valuable.

This is not the place for a discussion of what has often been called “common grace” but certainly every good thing unbelievers experience is a form of God’s grace, mediated through Christ. I would point you to Peter Leithart’s concept of “middle grace” for a cogent explanation of how unbelievers are able to contribute to human flourishing in spite of their unbelief.

But the important thing for our purposes in looking at the end of the book of Acts is to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit [1] for Paul’s sake, [2] in the wider world outside the church. Again, the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of all life, of all civilization, of all culture, of all glory and wisdom. The Holy Spirit is the source of all the human craftsmanship, creativity, and ingenuity that keep civilization marching forward. He drives all human innovation and ingenuity. The Holy Spirit is the source of all the resources and potentiality within the creation that we use to solve our problems and improve our lives. Non-Christians do not thank or acknowledge the Spirit, but they are very much the beneficiaries of his work, at least in this life. From Acts 27-28, we can derive the principle that the Holy Spirit preserves, protects, and prospers; wherever these blessings are found in the world, they are due to his work. The Holy Spirit brings peace and prosperity into the world. Again, because of the Holy Spirit, *today is the best day there’s ever been, and tomorrow will be even better.* And, again, this is not just true in some spiritual or ecclesiastical sense. It is true comprehensively. *By every objective measurement of human flourishing, life is better*

today that it has been ever since the fall of man into sin. The world is better – objectively better – than it ever has been, and it is getting better all the time. Consider some random facts:

- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life. Usually we mean he is the giver of life in creation, and the giver of life in the new creation in Christ. He is the giver of temporal life to all, and of eternal life to the elect. But he is also the giver of all that enriches, enlivens, and extends life in this world. The Holy Spirit maintains and sustains life in this world. One thing we see the Spirit doing as the Lord and giver of life is extend life expectancies. He gives life and in recent times he continually increased life expectancy. No, we are not back to those crazy long lifetimes seen early in the book of Genesis (not yet anyway!), but life expectancy has been steadily increasing across the globe for a long time now. Global life expectancy has more than doubled in the last 100 years. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, ultimately. See <https://humanprogress.org/dwline?p=298&r0=82&r1=13&r2=17&r3=11&r4=12&r5=15&r6=16&r7=14&yf=1960&yl=2015&high=1>.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of prosperity. Those who do not account for the Spirit see economics as a zero sum game, and so those who get rich must do so at the expense of the poor. But the Spirit allows us to enrich one another. The Spirit is the Lord and Giver of wealth, which is why global wealth can continue increasing. Wealth is not a fixed sum, to be divided up like slices of a pie. The Spirit enables us to create new wealth in such a way that a “rising tide lifts all boats.” The pie keeps getting bigger; the Spirit keeps bringing more and more wealth into the world for humanity to share. The Spirit keeps proceeding from the Father through the Son into the world, bringing greater and greater life, maturation, and glory to humanity. The Spirit creates a dynamic economy. Those who deny the reality of the Spirit’s ongoing creation of wealth, are likely to fall into the traps of envy and statism, thinking the state needs to control the distribution of wealth and “equalize” riches. But this when tries to play God, when the state tries to take over the role of the Spirit and become the lord and giver (or taker?) of life, disaster always follows. The free market system actually allows the economy to mimic the body of Christ. In the body of Christ, we have Spiritual gifts that we use for the good of others; as we use our gifts to serve, the body as a whole become greater than the sum of its parts. A political economy that imitates the structure and freedom of the body of Christ will likewise find ever-increasing prosperity. In the body of Christ, service = glory (cf. Mark 10). In the economy, service = profit. All things being equal, profit is a way of measuring how well you are using your gifts to serve others. Profit is Spirit given glory to reward those who use his gifts to serve others. (We have to note here that not all profit can be looked at this way because most of our economic systems, even in more capitalistic countries, are rigged, so that the government is continually interfering with the market, picking winners and losers, etc. Plus, sometimes, truly gifted and hardworking people will fall on hard times through no fault of their own. What I have said here should not be interpreted along the lines of the “health and wealth” teaching found among

the “prosperity gospel” teachers. The real world situation is always much more complex. Many times, the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. We should also note that some goods and service are not lawful to profit from {e.g., the sex trade}, so they must be bracketed out of this discussion. But the point made here still stands, when properly qualified: In terms of longer-term trends, what I am saying here is really no different than the message Proverbs. It is proverbial wisdom, drawn from and reflective of the way God made and sustains his world. Those who serve the best rise to the top. Those who serve receive glory. Those who serve will prosper. The free market captures this Spiritual dynamic, described by Jesus in Mark 10, and applies it to economic life.)

- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of food. Fewer people in the world are hungry than in any time in modern recorded history. Fewer people live in dire poverty. In fact, the rate of dire poverty has gone from 85% in 1800 to less than 10% today. Some project that by 2030, dire poverty will be eradicated altogether (with the possible exception of socialist and communist countries, where government tyranny quenches the life giving, life sustaining work of the Spirit). Fewer people and less land is needed proportionally to feed the world than ever before. The Spirit is the Lord and Giver of technology, including agricultural technology, that allows us to keep feeding more and more people with greater and greater efficiency.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of wealth. The wealth of virtually every nation that participates in the modern economy has exploded, starting with Western nations after the Reformation (and especially the Industrial Revolution), but now that same wealth explosion is happening in Africa and Asia and South America. Sometimes tyrannical, socialist, and communist governments quench the work of the Spirit; indeed, most famines in the modern world are due to centralized “control” leading to mismanagement and misallocation of resources. But the main thing to see is that Holy Spirit allows the human race to continue creating new wealth. Total world wealth keeps increasing virtually every year. While we might want to see the wealth of the world spread around more equitably in some cases, the most important thing to note is that even the world’s poor are growing in wealth. See <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=849> and <https://www.cato.org/blog/what-19-20-americans-dont-know-about-world-poverty> and <https://humanprogress.org/dwline?p=98&c0=6&yf=1990&yl=2013&high=1> and <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=251> and <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=1210>.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of money. Global prosperity continues to increase. The Holy Spirit has brought about a global economy – it is the work of the Spirit to unite and bond, after all. In the global economy, more people are experiencing financial freedom and the benefits of industrialization/technologization than ever before. Over 300,000 people get electricity and clean drinking water every day. Most of the world is connected via mobile phones and the Internet so we can communicate with

one another anywhere in the world cheaply and instantaneously. See <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=1247> and <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=845>. See also Herman DeSoto's *The Mystery of Capital*, which argues that the most prosperous places in the world are places where the gospel has penetrated, and this is no coincidence. The "western legal property system," the foundation of the success found in Western civilization, is the fruit of the Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of technology and health care. More people are vaccinated than ever before. More people receive effective medical care than ever before. More people have more comforts and conveniences and luxuries than ever before. Even the poorest people in Western countries live and eat and are cared for better than kings were just a couple centuries ago.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of education and literacy. More people are educated and a lower percentage of the world is illiterate than ever before in recorded history. More girls are educated than ever before. Much of the progress in education, rising standards of living, access to health care and technology, parallels the growth and expansion of the church. Where the church goes, blessings for all follow, especially literacy (since we are the "people of the book" and the Spirit who inspired the book certainly wants people to be able to hear it and read it).
- The Spirit is the Lord and Giver of culture. Art, music, craftsmanship, the culinary arts, etc., are all the result of the Spirit's work within the human race. Brian Mattson's little book *Cultural Amnesia* demonstrates there really is such a thing as Christian architecture, Christian plumbing, Christian cooking, etc. These are gifts of the Spirit, given in greater measure to cultures where the Spirit presence is more manifest. If we do not see this it is only because we have come to take the Spirit's work in our midst for granted. The Spirit is the source of all human culture and the Spirit transforms and elevates the products of human culture, especially when the church is at work discipling a culture. Cultures that have more of the Spirit's work are going to be superior to those that have less. Cultures that have the Spirit's work in greater measure are going to be both freer and better structured than those that have less.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of environmental stewardship. While the Industrial Revolution temporarily caused the environment to suffer in some places, the Holy Spirit led us to creative solutions to the problems of pollution. The earth is now cleaner and greener than it ever has been in modern recorded history. There is wide ranging evidence that man's cultivation of the earth has actually made the world a far greener, more productive planet. The earth produces more food now than ever, using fewer workers and less land. Overall, the earth is better shape than at any time in recorded history. See <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=415> and <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=420>.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of natural resources. When you consider that we have never run out any needed resource in the history of humanity,

you might consider that the human race is being sustained by some kind of miraculous provision, ala the oil in the widow's lamp in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4. Think about that: *In the history of the human race, we have never run out of a single resource. What a breathtaking miracle of the Spirit!* We are constantly told the earth is running out of natural resources. But is this really the case? These scares never actually come to pass. I can remember when I was growing up, there were constant scares about "peak oil." And there were occasional oil shortages. But these were caused by political events and mismanagement, not by an actual shortage. Today, no one talks about peak oil because we have so much oil available it's a non-issue. In the 1970s and 1980s, the thought that America would ever export oil seemed impossible, but today it is a reality. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of oil, and other forms of energy. The Holy Spirit keeps giving us cheaper and cheaper forms of energy. Not only that, the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of precious metals. New supplies of once "rare" metals have been discovered that will give the human race a "semi-infinite" supply, as one scientist put it. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of yttrium and dysprosium. The Holy Spirit gives and keeps on giving. Indeed, even when we seem to be facing shortages, the Holy Spirit helps us innovate our way out of them. How long until the Holy Spirit leads us to find even better sources of energy, clean water, etc. than we have now? See

<https://seekingalpha.com/article/4060990-peak-oil-peak-gold-peak-anything-peak-nonsense> and

<https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=1268>. Consider this also, although I admit I do not know enough to argue that oil is actually a renewable resource but certainly some scientists believe it is:

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/plugged-in/oil-might-be-a-natural-resource-and-other-things-you-did-not-know/> and

<http://321energy.com/editorials/bainerman/bainerman083105.html>. On new discoveries of lithium being made all time, see:

<http://321energy.com/editorials/oilprice/oilprice050518.html>. One scientist described these newly discovered deposits as providing a "semi-infinite" supply of these metals! For weak attempts at refuting the points made here about abundance vs. scarcity, see <https://futurism.com/how-long-do-we-have-until-we-exhaust-all-of-our-resources/> and

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2011/oct/31/six-natural-resources-population?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other and

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2010/10/has_the_earth_run_out_of_natural_resources.html.

- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of the environment. This means the environment is not nearly as fragile as we have sometimes been led to think. I remember when the BP oil spill happened in the Gulf of Mexico. At the time, we were told the beaches might be damaged for a generation, and indeed might never recover. And yet, within just a few years the beaches were as good as ever and the spill a distant memory for most. Now, certainly we should advocate care so that such spills are avoided whenever possible –

- they *are* damaging to wildlife. And we should also thank those played a role in cleaning up after the spill. But the fact is that earth's environment has proven to be far tougher and more resilient than many believed possible.
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of hope. Yes, it is true, we are constantly bombarded with doomsday scenarios, such as Paul Erhlich's *Population Bomb* (which predicted we would have all died of mass starvation years ago) and Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* (which was wildly wrong on the changing environmental conditions and their civilizational impact). The fact is apocalyptic scenarios almost never come to pass. And even when they do – even when the ship of a civilization crashes (e.g., the fall of Rome; a hurricane wiping out a city; etc.) – the Spirit saves many people alive to go on to build an even better civilization in its place. In the history of the world, this has never not happened. The end of one era gives way to a better era, even if it takes some time. The earth is not overpopulated. The earth is not fragile. There is no reason to be pessimistic. See <https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=1269> and https://fee.org/articles/a-lot-of-people-on-earth-share-thanoss-misguided-ideas-on-population-and-scarcity/?utm_campaign=FEE%20Daily&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=62720904&hsenc=p2ANqtz--vxLC8d6mIstt4jMxOS4GIJ2CXPxoGPM8xKy0LdMrH7Uphp3XDlj87iTmG9_HlAfv0bQFl6mX8QPH0lMZjcgFhuWW1nQ&hsmi=62720904.
 - The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of people. People are actually the Spirit's greatest resource. This is why the over-population myth is so dangerous. It's one reason why forms of artificial sterility, like abortion and homosexuality, are so problematic and destructive. The Holy Spirit is no doubt grieved when countries drop below replacement level birth-rates. To the degree that these declining birth rates are caused by tyranny (e.g., China's enforced one child policy) and by pessimism about the state of the world, they completely avoidable. The good news is that God's people are, generally speaking, more faithful in having children. If we cannot convert the world, perhaps we can outbreed the world in the next generation. Having babies and raising them up as "godly offspring" is the most important key to future prosperity for humanity.

None of this is intended to diminish the reality of human suffering. There are certainly personal and societal storms and set backs. Some of you may be in tremendous pain, from the loss of loved one or the reality of a deadly disease that is afflicting you. Some of you may be suffering economically and do not find it particularly consoling to hear that standards of living are rising in Africa and China. What I am talking about here is not intended to address those concerns (I have talked about how we grapple with suffering in our own lives and those around us elsewhere, and I heartily recommend Tim Keller's book *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*.) But do not let anecdotes about terrible things reported on the news overshadow the brightness of the Spirit's good work in the world. The future is always as bright as God's promises. Do not ever let your own suffering and

struggles blind you to the reality that we live in a good world sustained and cared for by a good God. Our suffering is part of his design as well. God may put individuals and societies through terrible times of tragedy and pain. But in terms of the big picture, his sustaining hand is clearly on the human race. His providence reveals he is a God who delights to do good to us, in spite of our sin and folly. He loves and provides for all he has made, as the psalmist declares again and again.

Further, none of this intended to make us think that temporal prosperity is the most important measure of human flourishing. The real key to human flourishing is always worship of the living God since we were made to thank and glorify him. We flourish in the deepest sense even when we have almost nothing (cf. Phil. 4, 1 Tim. 6). But humans are aspirational creatures by design and material abundance is certainly a sign of God's favor, all things being equal. There is nothing wrong with desiring prosperity for oneself and one's children, provided it is kept in its proper place, relative to God's calling on our lives. It is fully and perfectly human to desire "the good life." We should never be embarrassed by the privileges God gives us. Instead, we should rejoice and give thanks. If the world is growing richer, this should be regarded as good news, even as we remember that riches bring certain dangers.

Further, none of this is intended to make us careless about assessing and addressing real world problems. We should not be presumptuous or wasteful. The fact that the environment is not as fragile as is often thought does not mean we can be careless in polluting the world. We should do all we can to beautify the world – certainly the Holy Spirit would want us to. Nor should we be careless about potential geo-political threats. Taking steps to keep nuclear warheads out of the hands of Iran and North Korea is certainly wise. Personally and societally, suffering are real realities that we must deal with. The world can be a very difficult and dangerous place. Paul's own story reminds us of that (cf. 2 Cor. 12).

Likewise, none of this should make us assume that *our* particular nation or civilization could never collapse in on itself. It is easy for Americans, like Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians, etc. before them to think theirs is an "eternal empire" of some sort. No, it will not be. But this "big picture" does give us hope that even after the ship of America crashes, the Spirit will lead some new generation of people to build upon the ruins and another civilization will emerge.

And certainly none of this is intended to downplay the reality of persecution against the church. Paul himself suffered persecution, and would finally die at the hands of the Romans. But when the Jews and Romans attacked the first followers, they sealed their own civilizational fate (Jews in 70 AD, Romans a few centuries later). There is no room for a "health and wealth" kind of message that perverts the gospel into a system of gaining this-worldly blessing. I am certainly not saying every individual who serves God will enjoy health and wealth, peace and prosperity. Far from it. In fact, often God's people have to suffer to bring the kingdom into a new phase of growth. The life of the church corporately and the Christian individually is a life if

sacrificial service, often full of pain and trial. The blessed hope of the Christian lies on the other side of the resurrection, in the final new heavens and new earth. But what I am pointing out is that God does shower us with good things in this world quite often, that those blessings are increasing through the ages overall as the church grows, and keeping this picture in view is crucial to understanding the breadth of God's purposes.

The point of all of this is simple. Here's the bottom line: Thanks to the Holy Spirit, life has never been better. The world has made spectacular progress in virtually every area in which human flourishing can be measured. We have the Spirit to thank. Why are all these good things happening? Because God cares. Because God is good. Because God loves planet earth and those who inhabit it. Because God gives and never stops giving. Because God is a God of overflowing abundance. Because God is not a God of scarcity but a God of generosity, a God of abundance and abundant life, a God of infinite resources, a God who delights to share with creatures who bear his image. Our God is the true humanist. Our God delights to see our race enjoy his gifts and grow in prosperity and peace. Why does God do these things? Because even as God granted Paul his shipmates and then granted him the Maltans, so God has granted us many people. Because of us God not only spares many cities and nations, but fills them with gifts and causes them to prosper. For our sake, God causes human civilization to continue on, to mature and flourish. For our sake, God led men to discover how to make the wheel and fire, how to make musical instruments and ploughs, how to harness electricity and turn sand into computer chips, how to fly planes and send up satellites, how to build microscopes and telescopes, how to vaccinate and operate, how to send out radio waves and develop the internet. It's all for our sake – though many who are not part of God's church also benefit and even play a role in these things. Because the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life, because he keeps on giving, life keeps on getting better. The Holy Spirit keeps sustaining and improving our wonderful lives on this wonderful planet in this wonderful universe. This is all good news. It's not the gospel per se – but in a world that seems to focus on the bad news, it's wonderful to be reminded of how much more good news there is than bad news. As people of *the* good news, we should recognize and be thankful for every kind of good news there is. Every bit of good news points to the One who is good.

The story of Paul at the end of Acts reminds us that nothing – absolutely nothing – can interrupt or impede the ultimate progress of God's purposes. God shakes down empires and civilizations to build something new and better. And we need to keep this big picture in view. God's grace and goodness are everywhere around us. Again, these stories in Acts 27-28 are parables of God's care for the whole world, and they remind us that God's goodness is poured out on the whole of humanity ultimately for the sake of his church. God especially blesses his people, in history and ultimately in eternity.

Since God has blessed us, we should seek to be a blessing to others, we should seek to be God's means of blessing the whole world. We should seek to lead and serve

like Paul did. We should seek to trust and obey as Paul did. We should seek to save, transform, and heal as Paul did, spreading the blessings of God far and wide in every way possible. We should recognize that even when we are not the captains of the ship so to speak (even when we do not have political and economic dominion in a particular culture), we are still called upon to act as society's leaders, speaking words of wisdom and prophecy to all. Even when we find ourselves misunderstood and marginalized, we should seek to bring healing in word and deed to any and to all.

You will note in my bullet points above that several articles from humanprogress.org are linked. This is a secular website, but it provides a lot of fascinating information about global trends, many of which are very positive. These encouraging statistics don't make the evening news as much as the anecdotal disasters that grab headlines and eyeballs, but they paint a very hopeful vision of human history. This website tends to attribute human progress to the market – when humans are unleashed to pursue their own gain through the market, we all end up benefitting. Freedom yields prosperity. This is true but it is not the whole truth. The fact is, what they call “market forces” (or what Adam Smith called the “invisible hand”) is really the work of the Holy Spirit. And the market is effective precisely because it allows society as a whole to model itself after the body of Christ, in which the various members serve the good of the whole by using their particular gifts for the good of others. The “secret” of the market is the secret of the body of Christ: those who serve lead, those who serve will be glorified. Culturally and historically, the free market is largely the product of the Reformational doctrine of vocation, which simply extends the work of the Spirit from the church into society as a whole. The Spirit gifts us with various vocations, and as each of us fulfills his or her vocation, we serve the good of society as whole, leading to ever greater prosperity.

For a book length treatment from a secular perspective, see Matt Ridley's *The Rational Optimist*. None of the good news presented here is intended to minimize the reality of human suffering. Nor am I denying that there are some downward trends that ought to be very concerning (e.g., the rise of suicide among certain groups in America, the rise of the LGBT movement and the privileging/legalizing of same-sex “marriage” and transgenderism, etc.). But these negative trends tend to be more localized. They do not represent what is happening globally.

An interesting little exercise is to google “2017 best year ever,” “2016 best years ever,” “2015 best year ever,” etc. You will find that towards the end of each calendar year, some brave soul will trot out reasons why the most recent year was indeed the “best year ever.” And, basically, they're right. Every year is better than the last. The dips are only temporary and the rises are long term trends. The bad news is anecdotal, but the goods news is pervasive.

Another way to think about this: If you had to choose a year to be born in, not knowing where in the world you would be born, what year would you choose to give yourself the best possible chance of a happy life? The best year to be born is 2018. But 2019 will probably be even better. And so on.

Some examples:

<https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/global-data-shows-2017-is-shaping-as-the-best-year-ever-20171010-gyxyv3.html>:

Barring a global catastrophe, 2017 is shaping as best year ever for the world's average person... That doesn't mean everyone is better off, of course, but the positive trend in international wellbeing data since 2000 is striking. [Global life expectancy](#) at birth sums it up pretty well. It rose by 5 years between 2000 and 2015 to 71.4 years, the fastest increase since the 1960s... If that's not enough to convince you then consider the prevalence of child deaths, perhaps the most powerful indicator of global progress. Last year six million fewer children under the age of five died compared with 1990. And the good news doesn't stop there. The share of people living below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 a day has been slashed from 35 per cent to 9 per cent; the rate at which women die in childbirth has fallen; the prevalence of stunting due to malnutrition is in decline; and more children are learning to read and write.... International development expert and former World Bank official Charles Kenny [argues](#) that 2016 was "the best year ever to be alive for the average human being".

And so long as we can avoid a calamity this year – such as nuclear war on the Korean peninsula – 2017 is shaping up to be even better for the typical global citizen.

"Despite all of the real problems and remaining tragedies, if I had to choose the year to be born to ensure my highest chance of living a long and good life, it would still be 2017," Kenny told me.

A [report](#) released last month by philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates asked why people "aren't more aware of, and more proud of" accomplishments such as the decline in child mortality.

Researchers have found those in wealthy nations tend to assume the world is more poverty stricken, sickly and desperate than it actually is. Polls show many believe the rate of extreme poverty is on the rise, not in retreat.

There's little space in the news cycle for stories about the steady improvement in global health and wellbeing.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/06/opinion/sunday/2017-progress-illiteracy-poverty.html>:

We all know that the world is going to hell. Given the rising risk of nuclear war with North Korea, the paralysis in Congress, warfare in Yemen and Syria,

atrocities in Myanmar and a president who may be going cuckoo, you might think 2017 was the worst year ever.

But you'd be wrong. In fact, 2017 was probably the very best year in the long history of humanity.

A smaller share of the world's people were hungry, impoverished or illiterate than at any time before. A smaller proportion of children died than ever before. The proportion disfigured by leprosy, blinded by diseases like trachoma or suffering from other ailments also fell.

We need some perspective as we watch the circus in Washington, hands over our mouths in horror. We journalists focus on bad news — we cover planes that crash, not those that take off — but the backdrop of global progress may be the most important development in our lifetime.

Every day, the number of people around the world living in extreme poverty (less than about \$2 a day) goes down by 217,000, according to calculations by Max Roser, an Oxford University economist who runs a website called [Our World in Data](#). Every day, 325,000 more people gain access to electricity. And 300,000 more gain access to clean drinking water.

Readers often assume that because I cover war, poverty and human rights abuses, I must be gloomy, an Eeyore with a pen. But I'm actually upbeat, because I've witnessed transformational change.

As recently as the 1960s, a majority of humans had always been illiterate and lived in extreme poverty. Now fewer than 15 percent are illiterate, and fewer than 10 percent live in extreme poverty. In another 15 years, illiteracy and extreme poverty will be mostly gone. After thousands of generations, they are pretty much disappearing on our watch.

Just since 1990, the lives of more than 100 million children have been saved by vaccinations, diarrhea treatment, breast-feeding promotion and other simple steps.

Steven Pinker, the Harvard psychology professor, explores the gains in a terrific book due out next month, "[Enlightenment Now](#)," in which he recounts the progress across a broad array of metrics, from health to wars, the environment to happiness, equal rights to quality of life. "Intellectuals hate progress," he writes, referring to the reluctance to acknowledge gains, and I know it feels uncomfortable to highlight progress at a time of global threats. But this pessimism is counterproductive and simply empowers the forces of backwardness.

President Trump rode this gloom to the White House. The idea "Make America Great Again" professes a nostalgia for a lost Eden. But really? If that was, say, the 1950s, the U.S. also had segregation, polio and bans on interracial marriage, gay sex and birth control. Most of the world lived under dictatorships, [two-thirds of parents had a child die](#) before age 5, and it was a time of nuclear standoffs, of pea soup smog, of frequent wars, of stifling limits on women and of the [worst famine in history](#).

What moment in history would you prefer to live in?

F. Scott Fitzgerald said the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts at the same time. I suggest these: The world is

registering important progress, but it also faces mortal threats. The first belief should empower us to act on the second.

Granted, this column may feel weird to you. Those of us in the columny gig are always bemoaning this or that, and now I'm saying that life is great? That's because most of the time, quite rightly, we focus on things going wrong. But it's also important to step back periodically. Professor Roser notes that there was never a headline saying, "The Industrial Revolution Is Happening," even though that was the most important news of the last 250 years.

I had a visit the other day from Sultana, a young Afghan woman from the Taliban heartland. She had been forced to drop out of elementary school. But her home had internet, so she taught herself English, then algebra and calculus with the help of the Khan Academy, Coursera and EdX websites. Without leaving her house, she moved on to physics and string theory, wrestled with Kant and read The New York Times on the side, and began emailing a distinguished American astrophysicist, Lawrence M. Krauss. [I wrote about Sultana in 2016](#), and with the help of Professor Krauss and my readers, she is now studying at Arizona State University, taking graduate classes. She's a reminder of the aphorism that talent is universal, but opportunity is not. The meaning of global progress is that such talent increasingly can flourish.

So, sure, the world is a dangerous mess; I worry in particular about the risk of a war with North Korea. But I also believe in stepping back once a year or so to take note of genuine progress — just as, a year ago, [I wrote that 2016 had been the best year in the history of the world](#), and a year from now I hope to offer similar good news about 2018. The most important thing happening right now is not a Trump tweet, but children's lives saved and major gains in health, education and human welfare.

Every other day this year, I promise to tear my hair and weep and scream in outrage at all the things going wrong. But today, let's not miss what's going right.

<http://leoniedawson.com/more-evidence-2012-was-the-best-year-ever/>:

I've written before that [the world is good](#). Not in just a hippy-dippy Pollyanna-optimism way, but certifiably + statistically in a big ole range of ways.

And you know I ALWAYS love being proven right.

So here's this bloody fantastic article: [Why 2012 Was The Best Year Ever](#).

SO much so it deserves a whole blog post devoted to bringing your attention to it.

- Never has there been **less hunger, less disease or more prosperity**.
- Most developing countries are charging ahead, and **people are being lifted out of poverty at the fastest rate ever recorded**
- **Global inequality is at its lowest** in modern times.
- **Extreme poverty was halved** seven years ahead of schedule

- The world's **not just getting richer, but fairer too.**
- Fossil fuel consumption... **fell by 4 per cent.** This remarkable (and, again, unreported) achievement has nothing to do with green taxes or wind farms. It is down to **consumer demand for more efficient cars and factories.**
- Advances in medicine and technology mean that **people across the world are living longer.**
- The average life expectancy in Africa **has increased by FIVE YEARS** in the last decade.
- The number of people dying from AIDS has been in **decline for the last eight years.**
- Deaths from malaria have **fallen by a fifth in half a decade.**
- Nature can still wreak havoc, but as countries grow richer, they can **better guard against devastation.**
- **There have been fewer war deaths in the last decade than any time in the last century.**

The way the article finishes too **brought full on goosebumps to me:**

Fifty years ago, the world was breathing a sigh of relief after the Cuban missile crisis. Young couples would discuss whether it was responsible to have children when the future seemed so dark. But now, as we celebrate the arrival of Light into the world, it's worth remembering that, **in spite of all our problems, the forces of peace, progress and prosperity are prevailing.**

Yes, there is still work to be done.

Yes, there are things to be changed.

But never, ever doubt that your efforts aren't making a difference.

They are.

A whole world of them.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2012/12/glad-tidings/>:

Never in the history of the world has there been less hunger, less disease and more prosperity

To listen to politicians is to be given the impression of a dangerous, cruel world where things are bad and getting worse. This, in a way, is the politicians' job: to highlight problems and to try their best to offer solutions. But the great advances of mankind come about not from statesmen, but from ordinary people. Governments across the world appear stuck in what Michael Lind, [on page 30](#), describes as an era of 'turboparalysis' — all motion, no progress. But outside government, progress has been nothing short of spectacular.

Take global poverty. In 1990, the UN [announced](#) Millennium Development Goals, the first of which was to halve the number of people in extreme poverty by 2015. It [emerged this year](#) that the target was met in 2008. Yet

the achievement did not merit an official announcement, presumably because it was not achieved by any government scheme but by the pace of global capitalism. Buying cheap plastic toys made in China really is helping to make poverty history. And global inequality? This, too, is [lower now](#) than any point in modern times. Globalisation means the world's not just getting richer, but fairer too.

The doom-mongers will tell you that we cannot sustain worldwide economic growth without ruining our environment. But while the rich world's economies grew by 6 per cent over the last seven years, fossil fuel consumption in those countries [fell](#) by 4 per cent. This remarkable (and, again, unreported) achievement has nothing to do with green taxes or wind farms. It is down to consumer demand for more efficient cars and factories. And what about the concerns that the oil would run out? Ministers have spent years thinking of improbable new power sources. As it turns out, engineers in America have found new ways of mining fossil fuel. The amazing breakthroughs in 'fracking' technology mean that, in spite of the world's escalating population — from one billion to seven billion over the last two centuries — we live in an age of energy [abundance](#).

Advances in medicine and technology mean that people across the world are living longer. The average life expectancy in Africa reached 55 this year. Ten years ago, it was 50. The number of people dying from [Aids](#) has been in decline for the last eight years. Deaths from [malaria](#) have fallen by a fifth in half a decade.

Nature can still wreak havoc. The storms which lashed America's East Coast in October proved that. But the speed of New York City's recovery shows a no-less-spectacular resilience. Man cannot control the weather, but as countries grow richer, they can better guard against devastation. The average windstorm kills about 2,000 in Bangladesh but [fewer than 20 in America](#). It's not that America's storms are mild; but that it has the money to cope. As developing countries become richer, we can expect the death toll from natural disasters to diminish — and the same UN extrapolations that predict such threatening sea-level rises for Bangladesh also say that, in two or three generations' time, it will be as rich as Britain.

War has historically been humanity's biggest killer. But in most of the world today, a generation is growing up that knows little of it. The Peace Research Institute in Oslo says there have been fewer war deaths in the last decade than any time in the last century. Whether we are living through an anomalous period of peace, or whether the risk of nuclear apocalypse has proved an effective deterrent, mankind seems no longer to be its own worst enemy. We must bear in mind that things can fall apart, and quickly. Germany was perhaps the most civilised nation in the world in the 1920s. For now, though, it is worth remembering that, in relative terms, we have peace in our time.

Christmas in Britain will not be without its challenges: costs are rising (although many children will give quiet thanks for the 70 per cent increase in the price of [Brussels sprouts](#)). The country may be midway through a lost

decade economically, but our cultural and social capital has seldom been higher — it is hard to think of a time when national morale was as strong as it was during the Jubilee and the Olympics. And even in recession, we too benefit from medical advances. Death rates for both lung and breast cancers have [fallen](#) by more than a third over the last 40 years.

Fifty years ago, the world was breathing a sigh of relief after the Cuban missile crisis. Young couples would discuss whether it was responsible to have children when the future seemed so dark. But now, as we celebrate the arrival of Light into the world, it's worth remembering that, in spite of all our problems, the forces of peace, progress and prosperity are prevailing.

<https://fee.org/resources/actually-life-is-pretty-awesome/>:

Life is awesome. In fact, it's so awesome so constantly that we've gotten used to it, and whenever one thing goes wrong, we start complaining and thinking that everything is suddenly terrible.

Thus we have the phrase "First World problems." Naturally we also complain about things that are genuinely bad, but often, those bad things are not as bad as we think they are, or as bad as they used to be.

Even Andrew Carnegie, one of the richest men of his time, could not prevent his mother-in-law from dying of tuberculosis. Today, people don't even get tuberculosis. Take firearm deaths, for example. Firearm deaths are a terrible thing, and even just one is too much. But most people believe, and are led to believe by the media, that firearm deaths are increasing every year. However, firearm deaths have actually decreased by 50 percent over the last generation. They're not at zero, so we still have a ways to go, but it's a lot better now than it used to be. Not only that, but felonies committed with a firearm have declined by 75 percent.

Even war itself is more peaceable than it used to be. In World War Two, 300 out of every 100,000 people died in war. By the Korean War, only a few years later, only 20 out of every 100,000 people died in war. Today, only one person out of every 100,000 dies in war.

The same is true for poverty as well: in 1900, 70 percent of the world's population lived in poverty. Fifty years later, that number had dropped to 50 percent. In the 1990s it had dropped to 30 percent. Today, less than 10 percent of the population lives in poverty. Never in the history of humanity has that number been so low.

This is not to say that every single person on earth is richer today than they were before – there are still many that struggle, and this cannot and should not be ignored. But, as a whole, the general population and individual classes are better off now than they used to be.

In fact, we can even afford more than Andrew Carnegie, one of the richest men of his time and possibly ever: even he, with all his wealth, could not prevent his mother-in-law from dying of tuberculosis. Today, people don't even get tuberculosis.

The poor are getting richer, and life is getting better.

<https://humanprogress.org/article.php?p=1084>

At the end of last year on CapX, I [documented](#) the constant stream of technological, scientific and medical breakthroughs that are improving the lives of billions of ordinary people. Given all this good news, the real question is why people are so unbelievably pessimistic.

Judging by a 2016 poll of close to 20,000 people in some of the world's richest countries, you could barely overstate the extent of the gloominess. In response to the question "All things considered, do you think the world is getting better or worse, or neither getting better nor worse?", just 10 per cent in Sweden, 6 per cent in the US, 4 per cent in Germany and 3 per cent in France thought things were getting better. Why? Because, it turns out, we are pessimists by nature.

Over the last 200 years or so, the world has experienced previously unimaginable improvements in standards of living. The process of rapid economic growth started in Europe and America, but today some of the world's fastest growing countries can be found in Asia and Africa – lifting billions of people from absolute poverty. Historical evidence, therefore, makes a potent case for optimism. Yet, pessimism is everywhere. As the British author Matt Ridley noted in [The Rational Optimist](#):

The bookshops are groaning under ziggurats of pessimism. The airwaves are crammed with doom. In my own adult lifetime, I have listened to the implacable predictions of growing poverty, coming famines, expanding deserts, imminent plagues, impending water wars, inevitable oil exhaustion, mineral shortages, falling sperm counts, thinning ozone, acidifying rain, nuclear winters, mad-cow epidemics, Y2K computer bugs, killer bees, sex-change fish, global warming, ocean acidification and even asteroid impacts that would presently bring this happy interlude to a terrible end. I cannot recall a time when one or other of these scares was not solemnly espoused by sober, distinguished and serious elites and hysterically echoed by the media. I cannot recall a time when I was not being urged by somebody that the world could only survive if it abandoned the foolish goal of economic growth. The fashionable reason for pessimism changed, but the pessimism was constant. In the 1960s the population explosion and global famine were top of the charts, in the 1970s the exhaustion of resources, in the 1980s acid rain, in the 1990s pandemics, in the 2000s global warming. One by one these scares came and (all but the last) went.

Ridley raises a more specific point that general pessimism: Why are we as a species so willing to believe in doomsday scenarios that virtually never materialise?

The Chairman of the X Prize Foundation, Peter H. Diamandis, offers one plausible explanation. Human beings are constantly bombarded with information. Because our brains have a limited computing power, they have to separate what is important, such as a lion running toward us, from what is mundane, such as a bed of flowers. Because survival is more important than all other considerations, most information enters our brains through the

amygdala – a part of the brain that is “responsible for primal emotions like rage, hate and fear.” Information relating to those primal emotions gets our attention first because the amygdala “is always looking for something to fear.” Our species, in other words, has evolved to prioritise bad news.

The Harvard University psychologist Steven Pinker has noted that the nature of cognition and nature of news interact in ways that make us think that the world is worse than it really is. News, after all, is about things that happen. Things that did not happen go unreported. As Pinker points out, we “never see a reporter saying to the camera, ‘Here we are, live from a country where a war has not broken out.’” Newspapers and other media, in other words, tend to focus on the negative. As the old journalistic adage goes, “If it bleeds, it leads.”

To make matters worse, the arrival of social media makes bad news immediate and more intimate. Until relatively recently, most people knew very little about the countless wars, plagues, famines and natural catastrophes happening in distant parts of the world. Contrast that with the 2011 Japanese tsunami disaster, which people throughout the world watched unfold in real time on their smart phones.

The human brain also tends to overestimate danger due to what psychologists call “the availability heuristic” or a process of estimating the probability of an event based on the ease with which relevant instances come to mind. Unfortunately, human memory recalls events for reasons other than their rate of recurrence. When an event turns up because it is traumatic, the human brain will overestimate how likely it is to reoccur.

Consider our fear of terror. According to John Mueller, a political scientist from the Ohio State University, “In the years since 9/11, Islamist terrorists have managed to kill about seven people a year within the United States. All those deaths are tragic of course, but some comparisons are warranted: lightning kills about 46 people a year, accident-causing deer another 150, and drownings in bathtubs around 300.” Yet, Americans continue to fear terror much more than drowning in a bathtub.

Moreover, as Pinker also points out, the psychological effects of bad things tend to outweigh those of the good ones. Ask yourself, how much happier can you imagine yourself feeling? And again, how much more miserable can you imagine yourself to feel? The answer to the latter question is: infinitely. Psychological literature shows that people fear losses more than they look forward to gains; dwell on setbacks more than relishing successes; resent criticism more than being encouraged by praise. Bad, in other words, is stronger than good.

Finally, good and bad things tend to happen on different timelines. Bad things, such as plane crashes, can happen quickly. Good things, such as the strides humanity has made in the fight against HIV/AIDS, tend to happen incrementally and over a long period of time. As Kevin Kelly from Wired has put it, “Ever since the Enlightenment and the invention of Science, we’ve managed to create a tiny bit more than we’ve destroyed each year. But that few percent positive difference is compounded over decades in to what we

might call civilisation ... [Progress] is a self-cloaking action seen only in retrospect.”

In other words, humanity suffers from a negativity bias or “vigilance for bad things around us.” Consequently, there is a market for purveyors of bad news, be they doomsayers who claim that overpopulation will cause mass starvation, or scaremongers who claim that we are running out of natural resources.

Politicians, too, have realised that banging on about “crises” increases their power and can get them re-elected. It may also lead to prestigious prizes and lucrative speaking engagements. Thus politicians on both Left and Right play on our fears – whether it is a worry that crime is caused by playing violent computer games or that health maladies supposedly caused by the consumption of genetically modified foods.

The negativity bias is deeply ingrained in our brains. It cannot be wished away. The best that we can do is to realise that we are suffering from it.

<https://fee.org/articles/the-world-is-getting-better-and-nobody-knows-it/>:

A couple of years ago, I commissioned a study in which 1,000 Swedes were asked eight questions about global development. On average, every age group and every income group was wrong on all eight questions – because they all thought the world was in bad shape and getting worse. Large majorities, for example, thought that hunger and extreme poverty have been increasing, when they have in fact been reduced faster than at any other point in world history. And those who had been through higher education actually had less knowledge than the rest.

“The truth is that unhappy people, living in profoundly unhappy places, make for good stories.”

It’s not just Sweden. In Britain, only 10 per cent of people thought that world poverty had decreased in the past 30 years. More than half thought it had increased. In the United States, only 5 per cent answered (correctly) that world poverty had been almost halved in the last 20 years: 66 per cent thought it had almost doubled.

Bad News and the Media

Why do we make these false assumptions? Many of them are formed by the media, which reinforces a particular way of looking at the world – a tendency to focus on the dramatic and surprising, which is almost always bad news, like war, murder and natural disasters.

A study from Baltimore, where crime has been falling rapidly, showed that 73 per cent of those who watched the news every day were careful not to stay out too late in the city, compared to 54 per cent of those who watched it no more than twice a week. Almost everybody thought that crime was prevalent – but they all thought it occurred somewhere other than where they lived. The environment they had first-hand knowledge of felt safe, but the places they heard about on the news seemed very risky.

Many journalists and editors acknowledge this tendency. The American public radio journalist Eric Weiner says: “The truth is that unhappy people, living in profoundly unhappy places, make for good stories.” When the Swedish TV journalist Freddie Ekman was asked about the biggest news stories during his half a century in the trade, he responded by listing the murder of Prime Minister of Palme in 1986, the sinking of the cruise ferry Estonia in 1994, and the terror attacks of 9/11. When asked about any positive stories during this period, he answered, “One doesn’t remember them, because they never get big.”

Data vs Emotion

From a broadcaster’s perspective, this makes sense. If a plane crashes, we want to hear about it. But this also means that we shouldn’t be content with getting our information from the news alone; we need background and context, history and statistics. What is really impressive is the fact that 40 million planes take off every year, and almost every one of them lands safely. Since the 1970s, the number of passengers has increased more than ten-fold, and yet the number of accidents and fatalities has halved – but you would never know it from following the news.

Max Roser, an economist at Oxford University who collects data on the world’s development, puts it this way: “Things that happen in an instant are mostly bad. It’s this earthquake or that horrible murder. You’re never going to have an article on the BBC or CNN that begins by saying: ‘There’s no famine in south London today’ or: ‘Child mortality again decreased by 0.005 per cent in Botswana’.”

We notice the new things, the strange and unexpected. It’s natural. We have been hardwired this way by evolution.

There are many benefits to the kind of instant news that global TV networks and the internet have brought us. At last we have learned about the conditions under which people live in other parts of the world. But it also makes it easier for someone, somewhere to find something truly shocking to report on. There is always a war, and there is always a child murderer on the loose, and that is what will top the news cycle – all the time. And, of course, political parties, campaigners and pressure groups always exploit our fear to promote their own ideologies.

It is our own fault. If we didn’t want to read about, listen to and watch bad news, journalists would not report it. Indeed, when something terrible happens anywhere, two billion smartphones will nowadays make sure that we find out, even if no reporters are on the scene.

It's Evolution

This obviously has long-term consequences. The psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have shown that people do not base their estimates of how frequent something is on data, but on how easy it is to recall examples from memory. This “availability heuristic” means that the more memorable an incident is, the more probable we think it is, so we imagine that horrible and shocking things, which stay in our thoughts, are more frequent than they are. We are built to be worried. We are interested in

exceptions. We notice the new things, the strange and unexpected. It's natural. We have been hardwired this way by evolution. Fear and worry are tools for survival: the hunters and gatherers who survived sudden storms and predators were the ones who had a tendency to scan the horizon for new threats rather than those who were relaxed and satisfied. If the building is on fire, we need to know about it immediately.

Complaining about problems sends a signal that you care about something, so critics are seen as more morally engaged.

Steven Pinker mentions three particular psychological biases that make us think that the world is worse than it really is. One is the well-documented fact that "bad is stronger than good" – we are more likely to remember losing money, being abandoned by friends or receiving criticism than we are to remember winning money, gaining friends or receiving praise.

Another emotional bias is the psychology of moralisation. Complaining about problems is a way of sending a signal to others that you care about them, so critics are seen as more morally engaged. A third bias is our nostalgia about a golden age when life was supposedly simpler and better. As the cultural historian Arthur Herman observed: "Virtually every culture past or present has believed that men and women are not up to the standards of their parents and forebears."

The fact that things have in fact been getting better – overwhelmingly so – does not guarantee progress in the future. After years of easy money and debt financing of companies and governments, a large-scale financial crisis is possible, when all the bills come due. Global warming may threaten ecosystems and affect the lives of millions. Large-scale war between major powers is possible. Terrorists could wreak havoc on a massive scale if they get access to our most powerful technologies, but they could also co-ordinate a large number of smaller attacks on civilians.

But more than that, people led by fear might curtail the freedom and the openness that progress depends on. When Matt Ridley, author of *[The Rational Optimist](#)*, is asked what he is worried about, he usually responds, "superstition and bureaucracy," because superstition can obstruct the accumulation of knowledge, and bureaucracy can stop us from applying that knowledge in new technologies and businesses.

Yet in our era of globalisation, more countries, in more places, now have access to the sum of humanity's knowledge, and are open to the best innovations from other places.

In such a world, progress no longer depends on the whim of one emperor. If progress is blocked in one place, many others will continue humanity's journey.

<http://www.breakpoint.org/2017/09/breakpoint-importance-good-news/>:

It's been a summer of rough news for America. Racism, riots, and political violence. Communities on the Gulf Coast continue wading through the devastation of hurricane Harvey, and now another storm is bearing down on

Florida. We have plenty of reasons to be praying and doing all we can to alleviate suffering. There's cause for grief about the news—but not for pessimism.

Writing at *The Guardian*, Oliver Burkeman suggests that despite a dragging civil war in Syria, heart-rending photos of drowned refugees, North Korea's nuclear saber-rattling, disasters, terrorist attacks, and racial violence, the world is objectively better now than it's ever been.

Hard to believe? Well, here are the facts: Swedish historian Mark Norberg breaks down global indicators of human flourishing into nine categories: food, sanitation, life expectancy, poverty, violence, the state of the environment, literacy, freedom, equality, and the conditions of childhood. And in nearly all of these categories, we've seen vast improvement in my lifetime.

Despite the fact that [nine out of ten Americans](#) say worldwide poverty is holding steady or worsening, the percentage of people on this planet who live on less than two dollars a day—what the United Nations defines as “extreme poverty”—has fallen below ten percent, which is the lowest it's *ever* been. The scourge of child mortality is also at a record low. Fifty percent fewer children under five die today than did thirty years ago.

Worldwide, 300,000 more people gain access to electricity *every day*. In 1900, global life expectancy was just 31 years. Today, it's an impressive 71 years. And violent crime rates in the United States are the lowest they've been in half a century.

Nicholas Kristof wasn't too far afield when he called 2016 “the best year in the history of humanity.” This year may see even more progress.

So why do these cheery pronouncements strike us as inaccurate—even outrageous? Why—according to a recent poll by YouGov—do a vanishingly small six percent of Americans think the world as a whole is becoming a better place?

Burkeman lays much of the blame on the press. Thanks to a 24-hour news cycle that actively seeks out and overplays the worst stories, our perception of the world is skewed. “We are not merely ignorant of the facts,” he writes. “We are actively convinced of depressing ‘facts’ that aren't true.” And no wonder! It's hard to sell papers and get Web traffic with good news. No one reports when a plane takes off. They only report when they crash.

But a great deal of the blame for our unjustifiably gloomy view of the world also falls on *our* shoulders. Quite simply, we often enjoy being angry about the state of the world, especially when it allows us to blame someone else. We are addicted to news-induced anger.

That's why it's so important—while acknowledging the desperate evil and suffering around us—to appreciate the good news, the progress, and the things we have to celebrate. After all, how can we truly comprehend what's wrong with the world if we don't recognize when something is going right? War, famine, disease, and hatred should all remind us that God's world, which He created and pronounced “very good,” is broken, and it's our fault. But here's the real comfort: It's still—as the hymn says—our Father's world.

Let us therefore never forget that “though the wrong seems oft so strong God is the ruler yet.”

As Christians, we know where history is headed, and we know how the story ends—with the redemption and restoration of all things. We who have *the* good news should be the first to recognize *all* good news, not in spite of, but in the midst of the bad.

See also <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/08/why-cant-we-see-that-were-living-in-a-golden-age/>, which argues, “there has never been a better day to be alive.”

Then there is funny and crass but still insightful clip from Louis C K from several years back: “Everything’s amazing and nobody’s happy.” This clip reminds us what ‘first world problems’ really are and reminds us how grateful we should be:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8LaT5liwo4>

On the expansion of the church, see Peter Leithart:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2015/10/the-era-of-christian-expansion/>

Protestants look back longingly to the Reformation as one of the great periods of church history, and it was in many respects. In terms of the global reach of Christianity, though, the sixteenth century was a low point. Since its beginning, Christianity has rarely been confined to so contracted an area. In the fourth century, Christianity encircled the Mediterranean. It was still strong in Palestine, in the Middle East, and further east. Jerusalem was a largely Christian city for many centuries. Christianity was dominant in North Africa, from Egypt to Carthage and beyond. It was taking hold in Northern Europe. Christian missionaries were being exported from Ireland, the out-back of Europe.

Islam pushed Christianity into Europe, and during the second half of the fifteenth, it “became increasingly a European religion. Islam had launched a jihad against Christianity several centuries earlier. By about 1450 [Constantinople fell – 1453], as a direct result of its military conquests, Islam was firmly established in the southwestern and southeastern parts of Europe. Although Christian communities continued to exist outside Europe (most notably in Egypt, Ethiopia, India, and Syria), Christianity was becoming geographically restricted” (Alister McGrath, [Historical Theology](#), 214). It is old news now, but it is news that we should be reminded of regularly: Over the last several centuries, the church has witnessed unprecedented growth and expansion. We are living in the greatest era of Christian expansion.

McGrath summarizes: “One of the most dramatic developments to take place during the last few centuries has been the recovery of Christianity from this crisis. By the twentieth century, Christianity was firmly established as the

dominant religion in the Americas, Australasia, southern Africa, and throughout many of the island nations of the South Pacific.”

This is the thrust of Philip Jenkins’s well-known book, [The Next Christendom](#). Jenkins observes, “Over the past five centuries or so, the story of Christianity has been inextricably bound up with that of Europe and European-derived civilizations overseas, above all in North America. Until very recently, the overwhelming majority of Christians have lived in White nations, allowing theorists to speak smugly, arrogantly, of ‘European Christian’ civilization. . . . It is self-evidently the religion of the haves” (1).

This is no longer the case, “

Over the past century, however, the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to

Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America. If we want to visualize a ‘typical’ contemporary Christian, we should think of a woman living in a village in Nigeria or in a Brazilian favela. As Kenyan scholar John Mbiti has observed, ‘the centers of the church’s universality [are] no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, New York, but Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa, and Manila” (2).

Jenkins predicts that this trend will continue, and that the Christian population of the Southern hemisphere will continue to grow while the Christian population of the Northern hemisphere will decline: “In 1950, a list of the world’s leading Christian countries would have included Britain, France, Spain, and Italy, but none of these names would be represented in a corresponding list for 2050” (p 2).

The numbers are staggering: “According to the respected [World Christian Encyclopedia](#), some 2 billion Christians are alive today, about one-third of the planetary total. The largest single bloc, some 560 million people, is still found in Europe. Latin America, though, is already close behind with 480 million, Africa has 360 million, and 313 million Asians profess Christianity. North America claims about 260 million believers. If we extrapolate these figures to the year 2025, and assume no great gains or losses through conversion, then there would be around 2.6 billion Christians, of whom 633 million would live in Africa, 640 million in Latin America, and 460 million in Asia. Europe, with 555 million, would have slipped to third place. . . by 2050, only about one-fifth of the world’s 3 billion Christians will be non-Hispanic Whites. Soon the phrase ‘a White Christian’ may sound like a curious oxymoron, as mildly surprising as ‘a Swedish Buddhist.’”

Pentecostalism in particular has risen from literal non-existence to become one of the largest groups of Christians in the world: “Since there were only a handful of Pentecostals in 1900, and several hundred million today, is it not reasonable to identify this as perhaps the most successful social movement of the past century? According to current projections, the number of Pentecostal believers should surpass the one billion mark before 2050. In terms of the global religions, there will by that point be roughly as many Pentecostals and Hindus, and twice as many as there are Buddhists. And that

is just talking of the of the diverse currents of rising Christianity: there will be even more Catholics than Pentecostals” (8).

David Field wrote this in 2007:

Evangelical defeatism is a failure of historical perspective. After all, the statistics are out there. It took 1400 years for 1% of the world's population to become Christians, and then another 360 years for that to double to 2%. Another 170 years saw that grow from 2% to 4%, and then between 1960 and 1990 the proportion of the world's population made up of Bible-believing Christians rose from 4% to 8%. Now, in 2007, a third of the world's population confesses that Jesus is Lord and 11% of the world's population comprises 'evangelical' Christians. The evangelical church is growing twice as fast as Islam and three times as fast as the world's population. South America is turning Protestant faster than Continental Europe did in the sixteenth century. South Koreans reckon that they can evangelize the whole of North Korea within five years once that country opens up. And then there's the Chinese church, consisting of tens of millions of Christians who have learned to pray, who have confidence in Scripture, who know about spiritual warfare, have been schooled in suffering and are qualified to rule. One day in the next century that church (tens of millions of Christians trained to die) will be released into global mission and our prayers for the fall of Islam will be answered.

This optimistic view of the spread of the gospel is captured well in this 19th century anecdote:

On June 23rd 1833 Princeton Seminary graduate James Eckard was about to set sail for Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He took with him a letter written by ten year old Archibald Alexander Hodge and his sister Mary Elizabeth. The letter was addressed to the "heathen." It said:

Dear Heathen,

The Lord Jesus Christ has promised that the time shall come when all the ends of the earth shall be his kingdom. And God is not a man that he should lie nor the son of man that he should repent.

And if this was promised by a Being who cannot lie, why do you not help it to come sooner by reading the Bible, and attending to the words of your teachers, and loving God, and, renouncing your idols, take Christianity into your temples?

And soon there will be not a Nation, no, not a space of ground a large as a footstep, that will want a missionary. My sister and myself, by small self-denials, procured two dollars which are enclosed in this letter to buy Bibles and tracts to teach you.

Archibald Alexander Hodge and Mary Elizabeth Hodge,
Friends of the Heathen

I especially recommend the book by Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, which not only shows the modern missionary movement was driven by a kind of evangelical postmillennialism, but also shows that these missions knew that converting institutions was just as important as converting individuals. The only way to truly disciple a nation would be to aim the transformation of culture – indeed, the Great Commission requires nothing less than the creation of Christian cultures and nations.

I recently had an email discussion about some these themes with a friend. He suggested a stance of short-term pessimism joined with long-term optimism. I agreed. Here is part of what I wrote:

The Great Depression, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc., all prove to be but minor setbacks along the way for the human race. That's not to overlook the real and horrific suffering that goes on -- these events are truly tragic -- but that suffering usually paves the way to something even better. Humanity is pretty resilient...

I think short term pessimism and long term eschatological optimism is probably the permanent stance of the Christian. But even our short term pessimism can be skewed by missing what's really happening all around us even in the present moment. It is easy to be pessimistic because bad news grips our attention more than good news. We're prone to be blind to the amazing developments that surround us constantly. Are you familiar with the website <https://humanprogress.org/?> It's a pretty interesting, as it tracks all kinds of positive global developments that get overshadowed by the negative anecdotes that fill our news feeds. In other words we have a tendency to let negative particulars obscure our view of the positive big picture trends. The world has made spectacular progress in virtually every area in which we can measure human well-being. The negative, apocalyptic scenarios, e.g., Paul Ehrlich's Population Bomb or Al Gore's predictions on climate change, almost never come pass. And even when they do, they are quickly overcome. I remember when peak oil was a real topic of conversation, and a real fear. Hardly anybody talks about it now because we keep finding new ways to get oil; peak oil kept getting pushed out so much that most folks have quit making projections because they are useless. Just the other day I saw an article about how new supplies of "rare" metals had been found that could supply the human race for the next 500 years. We keep innovating our way out of shortages. I remember when people thought the gulf coast would be ruined forever by the BP oil spill. But within just a few years, there were almost no signs it had ever happened. Amazing. The point is not that we can care less about geopolitics (e.g., we should be vigilant about keeping nuclear weapons out of the hands of Iran and N Korea), nor that we can be indifferent to the environment (there is no doubt we can harm the planet and ourselves if

we are not careful), but that the global system is amazingly resilient. I say it all the time: "Today is the best day there's ever been. And tomorrow is going to be even better." Indeed. This is true in eternity, of course, but it is also true (albeit in a limited and qualified sense) in history as well. If God is continually flooding the world with an ever greater measure of his Spirit, how could it be otherwise? [Every year articles come out](#) saying, "this was the best year ever." [And every year, they are right.](#)

If you could be born at time in history, what year would you choose to be born in to give yourself the best possible chance of a prosperous and happy life? This year would be the best choice. And in 2019, 2019 will be the best choice. And in 2020, 2020 will be the best choice. Etc. More and more of the world is coming to share in prosperity. By every objective measurement of human flourishing, more people are enjoying more prosperity today than at any point in recorded history. The headlines don't reflect that, but the headlines are aimed at maximizing viewership/readership, and bad stories get far more attention than good ones. Only a tiny percentage of planes crash compared to those that take off and land safely, but the crashes are all you will ever read about...

On the same lines, I think I've mentioned the book *The Rational Optimist* to you. It makes the same kinds of arguments, based mostly on the power of markets to increase human peace and prosperity. It's also secular, but a pretty powerful refutation of the doomsday prophets. Then you have Scott Adams who, granted has all kinds of crazy ideas, is saying we are on the cusp of a golden age. And perhaps we are....

Of course, these secular accounts of progress cannot really account for what is happening. We know that behind all of this is the Holy Spirit, who is the Lord and Giver of life — he gives and keeps on giving and giving. The Holy Spirit is the one who powers the progress of history and he is not going to stop....

On the way the story of Paul's snake bite on the 14th day relates to the OT texts I read (Exodus 35, Numbers 15), see the brilliant study by Jim Jordan, *Sabbath Breaking and the Death Penalty*. Hers is a taste of Jordan's argument:

Paul the Woodgatherer

We can close with a curious event recorded in Acts 27 and 28. In the providence of God, the events that happened to Paul and his fellow travelers are filled with theological meaning.

One of the interesting contrasts between the Old and New Testaments is that in the Old Testament we are constantly on the land; it is land animals like

sheep and oxen that are in view; the main characters are shepherds or herdsmen called to be prophets; and so forth -- while when we come to the New Testament suddenly the main characters are fishermen; much time is spent on the Sea of Galilee; and people are constantly eating fish. The larger typology here is that the land is a figure for Israel, and the sea for the nations, or the world. The New Covenant, being universal, is brought about and played out in the context of sea, not of land.

An image agreeable to this is the "ship of state." Tyre is compared to a ship in Ezekiel 27. In Acts 27, we are on board a Roman ship, certainly an appropriate image for Roman power and dominion. The captain of the ship chooses to ignore Paul's advice -- the advice of the church -- and the ship is wrecked as a consequence. A great wind comes up, and the ship founders at sea for many days.

For fourteen days. Surely the number is not insignificant -- it is repeated twice (Acts 27:27, 33). During the fourteenth night, disaster almost strikes, and it is Paul (the church) whose word (the gospel) saves the lives of all on board (the world). As day dawns, it is called the fourteenth day (v. 33), not the fifteenth. Whether this was a sabbath or a Lord's Day, or some other day of the week, is immaterial. The point is that clearly sabbatical imagery is being used by the Divine Author and Predestinator of events. Francis Nigel Lee writes: "It is perhaps significant that during the shipwreck, Paul noted the passage of fourteen days or two weeks, to him measurable from one weekly sabbath to another; that the book of Acts mentions midnight as an important turning point in this period; and that Paul broke bread (!) at the end of this period 'while the day was coming on' (Acts 27:27, 33, 35)."

Thus the imagery piles up: a sabbath period, a proclamation of good news of safety to the gentiles, and the breaking of bread on the morning of the fourteenth day. Indeed, Acts 27:34 uses the eucharistic formula exactly: "And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat." What follows on this "sabbath" is even more remarkable.

28:1 And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.

2. And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.

3. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out from the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4. And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they were saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."

5. However, he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

6. But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

7. Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.

8. And it came about that the father of Publius was lying afflicted with fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

9. And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

All of this is very interesting, and it is hard to avoid seeing it as theologically significant and revelatory. Whether the natives started a new fire, or simply kindled up a preexisting one, the passage takes note of the stoking up of a human fire on the "sabbath." By itself we might pass over this fact, but the text goes on to show Paul gathering wood on this "sabbath"!

In line with the death penalty of the Old Covenant, a snake strikes Paul. The snake comes from the fire, and out of the very bundle of sticks Paul had gathered. Thus the death penalty is applied to the man who gathered sticks to stoke up his fire on the Lord's Day. The poison proves ineffective however. The power of the curse of the Old Covenant has been broken.

We see from the Old Testament that God has established agents in the world to punish His people. God raised up the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians for this purpose. Ultimately, God used Satan, the serpent, to inflict punishment upon His sinning people. Now, however, these forces are rendered powerless, because God's people have, in Christ, become sanctified once and for all. God's fire no longer consumes man's fire, because man's fire is, in Christ, no longer strange. Man's fire is now wholly sanctified, in Christ.

Thus, there is no longer any death penalty for sabbath breaking.

The passage goes further, and shows that not only did Paul survive the death penalty, and not even become sick, he also went on to heal others. In the New Covenant, man is not only delivered from the threat of judgment, he is also sent out positively to bring life and salvation to the world.

The way Luke ties all of this together is incredibly profound. Consider:

- Paul and his shipmates arrive on shore on the 14th day. Whether this is the Sabbath day, the Lord's Day, or a generic 14th day, doesn't much matter. What matters is that it is symbolically associated with the Sabbath.
- Stoking up a fire on the Sabbath was a capital crime. Picking up sticks to stoke up a hearth fire was a so a capital crime.

- When Paul does both, the law appears to sting him with venomous poison in the form of the viper. The law seeks to mete out the death penalty to a lawbreaker. Will Paul receive the curse of the law? No, because he is a man in Christ, the curses of the law cannot stick. He is freed from the law. The serpent cannot harm him (cf. Mark 16). He has victory over the serpent, and shakes it off into the fire.
- The pagans on the island jump from one extreme conclusion to another. At first, they think the viper bite means that the goddess Justice has caught up with Paul: He must be a murderer, who escaped the shipwreck by sheer luck, but now will receive what he really deserves. But then when Paul is not harmed by the snake bite, they think that Paul must be a god himself. To have power over serpents is to have a kind of divine power.
- So far from getting sick and dying, Paul heals others, rescuing them from death. Malta has become a new creation, a miniature Eden, by the time Paul leaves.
- Paul's departure is reminiscent of the exodus. Instead of harming the Maltans with plagues, he has healed them. When he leaves, he "plunders" them with all he needs for watery escape. He leaves a freeman, at least in the sense that is clearly not in bondage to the law or its curses.

On the growth of civilization as a product of the gospel, I suggest reading David Chilton's brilliant work on biblical hermeneutics and eschatology, *Paradise Restored*.

Some samples:

The whole rise of Western Civilization - science and technology, medicine, the arts, constitutionalism, the jury system, free enterprise, literacy, increasing productivity, a rising standard of living, the high status of women - is attributable to one major fact: *the West has been transformed by Christianity*. True, the transformation is not yet complete. There are many battles ahead. But the point is that, even in what is still largely an early Christian civilization, God has showered us with blessings. Many Christians do not realize it, but the Hope is the basis for many of the great old hymns of the faith, written before the modern era of evangelical despair and pessimism. Think about that the next time you sing Martin Luther's "A mighty Fortress is our God," Isaac Watts's "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run," or George Duffield's "Stand up, stand up for Jesus." Do you really believe that Jesus is *now* leading us "from victory unto victory ... till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed"? That is what the Church has historically believed. That is what they sang in their hymns. This can be seen most clearly in the traditional Christmas carols, which, like Athanasius's reflections on the Incarnation, are unabashed expectations of Christ's triumph over the world through the gospel. Carols such as "Come, thou long-expected Jesus," "O come, O come,

Emmanuel," "Hark! the herald angels sing," "God rest you merry, gentlemen," and many others

are written from the same basic perspective as the present book. The conviction that - as a result of His *first* advent - Christ is now reigning from heaven and conquering the earth underlies

the message of "Joy to the world!":

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;

He comes to make his blessings flow Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove

The glories of his righteousness

And wonders of his love.

The same is true of that great victory-oriented carol, "It came upon the midnight clear":

For , the days are hast'ning on, By prophet bards foretold,

When with the ever-circling years Comes round the age of gold; When peace shall over all the earth Its ancient splendors fling,

And the whole world give back the song Which now the angels sing....

When God created Adam, He placed him into a land, and gave him dominion over it. Land is basic to dominion; therefore, salvation involves a restoration to land and property. In announcing His covenant to Abram, the very first sentence God spoke was a promise of land (Gen. 12:1), and He completely fulfilled that promise when He saved Israel (Josh. 21:43-45). This is why Biblical law is filled with references to property, law, and economics; and this is why the Reformation laid such stress on this world, as well as the next. Man is not saved by being delivered out of his environment. Salvation does not rescue us from the material world, but from sin, and from the effects of the Curse. The Biblical ideal is for every man to own property- a place where he can have dominion and rule under God.

The blessings of the Western world have come because of Christianity and the resultant freedom which men have had in the use and development of property and the fulfillment of their callings under God's dominion mandate. Capitalism-the free market - is a product of Biblical law, in which a high priority is placed upon private property, and which condemns theft of all kinds (including theft by the State).

To unbelieving economists, professors, and government officials, it is a mystery why capitalism cannot be exported. Considering the obvious, proven superiority of the free market in raising the standard of living for all classes of people, why don't pagan nations implement capitalism into their social structures? The reason is this: Freedom cannot be exported to a nation that has no marketplace for the Gospel. The blessings of the Garden cannot be obtained apart from Jesus Christ. The Golden Rule- which sums up the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:12)-is the inescapable ethical foundation for the free market; and this ethic is impossible apart from the work of the Holy

Spirit, who enables us to keep the righteous requirements of God's law (Rom. 8:4).

All heathen cultures have been statist and tyrannical, for a people who reject God will surrender themselves and their property to a dictator (1 Sam. 8:7-20). Ungodly men want the blessings of the Garden, but they attempt to possess them by unlawful means, as Ahab did with Naboth's vineyard (1 Ki. 21:1-16), and the result is, as always, destruction (1 Ki. 21:17-24). The genuine, free possession of land is the result of salvation: God brought His people into a land, and divided it among them for an inheritance (Num. 26:52-56); and, as He had done in Eden, He regulated the land (Lev. 25:4) and the trees (Lev. 19:23-25; Deut. 20:19-20).

As we have seen, when God banished Adam and Eve from their land, the world began to become a wilderness (Gen. 3:17-19). From this point the Bible begins to develop a Land-vs.-

Wilderness theme, in which the redeemed, obedient people of God are seen inheriting a land that is secure and bountiful, while the disobedient are cursed by being driven out into a wilderness. When Cain was judged by God, he complained: "Today You are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from Your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:14). And he was correct, as Scripture records: "So Cain went out from the Lord's presence, and lived in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16). Nod means Wandering: Cain became the first nomad, a wanderer with no home and no destination.

Similarly, when the whole world became wicked, God said: "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land" (Gen. 6:7), and He did so, by the Flood-leaving only Noah and his household alive in the ark (which God brought to rest, incidentally, on a mountain; Gen. 8:4). The ungodly were driven out of the land, and the people of the covenant repopulated it.

Again, the ungodly tried to build their own "Garden," the tower of Babel. They were seeking to make themselves a name - to define themselves in terms of their own rebellious standards - and to prevent themselves from being scattered from the land (Gen. 11:4). But man cannot build the Garden on his own terms. God is the Definer, and He is the only One who can give us security. The very attempt of the people of Babel to prevent their destruction actually brought it about. God confused their languages-so much for "naming" anything!-and scattered them from their land (Gen. 11:8-9).

In marked contrast, the very next chapter records God's covenant with Abram, in which He promises to bring Abram into a land, and to make his name great (Gen. 12:1-2). As a further guarantee and reminder of His covenant, God even changed Abram's name to Abraham, in

terms of his predestined calling. God is our Definer: He alone gives us our name, and "calls into being that which does not exist" (Rom. 4:17). Thus, as we are baptized into God's Name (Matt. 28:19), we are redefined as God's living people, free in Christ from our death in Adam (Rom. 5:12-6:23). Circumcision performed the same function in the Old Testament, which is why children officially received their name when they were circumcised (cf. Luke 2:21). In salvation, God brings us back into Eden and gives us a new name (Rev. 2:17; cf. Isa. 65:13-25).

When God's people became disobedient as they were about to enter the Promised Land, God punished them by making them wander in the Wilderness, until the entire generation of the disobedient was wiped out (Num. 14:26-35). Then God turned and saved His people out of "the howling waste of a wilderness" (Deut. 32:10), and brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey (another subtle reminder of Eden, by the way: milk is a more nourishing form of water, and honey comes from trees). God's obedient people have never been nomads - instead, they are marked by stability, and have dominion. True, the Bible does call us pilgrims (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11), but that is just the point: we are pilgrims, not hobos. A pilgrim has a home, a destination. In redemption God saves us from our wanderings, and gathers us into a land (Ps. 107:1-9). A scattered, homeless people cannot have dominion. When the Puritans left England, they did not wander over the earth; God brought them into a land and made them rulers, and though the foundation they built has greatly eroded, it is still very much with us after 300 years. (What will people 300 years from now say of the accomplishments of today's shallow, retreatist evangelicalism?) People become nomads only through disobedience (Deut. 28:65). As the Curse functions in history, as civilization apostatizes, nomadism becomes widespread, and the wilderness increases. And, as the Curse spreads, the water dries up. Since the Fall, the ground is no longer watered primarily by springs. God sends us water by rain instead (rain is much easier to turn off and on at a moment's notice than springs and rivers are). The withholding of water-turning the land into a parched wilderness - is very closely related to the Curse (Deut. 29:22-28). The Curse is also described in terms of the disobedient people being uprooted from the land (Deut. 29:28), in contrast to God's planting of His people in the land (Ex. 15:17). God destroys the roots of a land and people by cutting off the water supply: drought is regarded in Scripture as a major (and effective) means of national punishment. When God shuts off the water, He turns the land into the very opposite of Eden.

The history of Sodom and Gomorrah is a sort of capsulized history of the world in this regard. Once described as being like the Garden of Eden in its beauty and abundance (Gen. 13:10), it became through God's judgment "a burning waste of salt and sulfur-nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it" (Deut. 29:23). Sodom and Gomorrah were in the area now known as the Dead Sea- and it is called Dead for a very good

reason: nothing can live in it. Chemical deposits (salt, potash, magnesium, and others) make up 25 percent of the water as a result of God's judgment upon the land. Except for where water flows into it (and a few isolated springs in the area), the land is completely arid. It is now the furthest thing imaginable from Eden, and it serves as a picture of the world after the Curse: Eden has become Wilderness.

But that is not all we are told about this area. In Ezekiel's vision of the restored Temple (also on a mountain; Ezek. 40:2), he sees the Water of Life flowing eastward from the threshold toward the Dead Sea and healing its waters, resulting in "a great multitude of fish" and luxuriant growth (Ezek. 47:8-12). We must not look upon the world with eyes that see only the Curse; we must look with the eyes of faith, enlightened by God's Word to see the world as the arena of His triumph. History does not end with the Wilderness. World history will be, on a massive scale, that of Sodom: first a Garden, lovely and fruitful; then corrupted into a Wilderness of Death through sin; finally, restored by God's grace to its former Edenic abundance. "The wilderness and the solitary place will be glad; and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isa. 35:1).

The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; Their tongues are parched with thirst.

But I the LORD will answer them;
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

I will make rivers flow on barren heights, And springs within the valleys.
I will turn the desert into pools of water, And the parched ground into springs.

I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, The myrtle and the olive.
I will set pines in the wasteland,
The fir and the cypress together,

So that people may see and know,
May consider and understand,
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
That the Holy One of Israel has created it. (Isa. 41:17-20)

This, then, is the direction of history, in what may be called "the First Rapture" - God gradually uprooting unbelievers and unbelieving cultures from the land, and bringing His people into a full inheritance of the earth.

I am not denying, of course, the Biblical teaching that God's people will someday meet the Lord in the air, at His return (1 Thess.4:17); but the modern doctrine of the "Rapture" is too often a doctrine of/light from

the world, in which Christians are taught to long for escape from the world and its problems, rather than for what God's Word promises us: Dominion. How common it is to hear Christians say, when confronted with a problem: "I sure hope the Rapture comes soon!" - rather than: "Let's get to work on the solution right now!" Even worse is the response that is also too common: "Who cares? We don't have to do anything about it, because the Rapture is coming soon anyway!" And worst of all is the attitude held by some that all work to make this a better world is absolutely wrong, because "improving the situation will only delay the Second Coming!" A good deal of modern Rapturism should be recognized for what it really is: a dangerous error that is teaching God's people to expect defeat instead of victory.

Indeed, a very common evangelical worldview is that "the earth is the devil's, and the fulness thereof" - that the world belongs to Satan, and that Christians can expect only defeat until the Lord returns. And that is exactly the lie that Satan wants Christians to believe. If God's people think the devil is winning, it makes his job just that much easier. What would he do if Christians stopped retreating and started advancing against him? James 4:7 tells us what he would do: he would flee from us! So why isn't the devil fleeing from us in this age? Why are Christians at the mercy of Satan and his servants? Why aren't Christians conquering kingdoms with the Gospel, as they did in times past? Because Christians are not resisting the devil! Worse yet, they're being told by their pastors and leaders not to resist, but to retreat instead! Christian leaders have turned James 4:7 inside out, and are really giving aid and comfort to the enemy - because they are, in effect, saying to the devil: "Resist the Church, and we will flee from you!" And Satan is taking them at their word. So then, when Christians see themselves losing on every front, they take it as "proof" that God has not promised to give dominion to His people. But the only thing it proves is that James 4:7 is true, after all, including its "flip side" - that is, if you don't resist the devil, he won't flee from you.

What we must remember is that God doesn't "rapture" Christians out of the world in order to escape conflict - He "raptures" non-Christians! The Lord Jesus prayed, in fact, that we would not be "raptured": "My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). And this is the constant message of Scripture. God's people will inherit all things, and the ungodly will be disinherited and driven out of the land. "For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be uprooted from it" (Prov. 2:21-22). "The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land" (Prov. 10:30). God described the land of Canaan as having been "defiled" by the abominable sins of its heathen population, saying that the land itself "vomited out its inhabitants"; and He warned His people not to imitate those heathen

abominations, "so that the land may not vomit you out also" (Lev. 18:24-28; 20:22). Using the same Edenic language, the Lord warns the church of Laodicea against sin, and threatens: "I will vomit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). In His parable of the wheat (the godly) and the tares (the ungodly) - and note the Edenic imagery even in His choice of illustrations - Christ declares that He will gather first the tares for destruction; the wheat is "raptured" later (Matt. 13:30).

"The wealth of the sinner is stored up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). That is the basic pattern of history as God saves His people and gives them dominion. This is what God did with Israel: in saving them, He brought them into already-settled lands, and they inherited cities that had already been built (Ps. 105:43-45). God does bless the heathen, in a sense - just so they can work out their own damnation, in the meantime building up an inheritance for the godly (cf. Gen. 15:16; Ex. 4:21; Josh. 11:19-20). Then God smashes them and gives the fruit of their labor to His people. This is why we need not fret over evildoers, for we shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37). The Hebrew word for salvation is *yasha*, meaning to bring into a large, wide, open space - and in salvation God does just that: He gives us the world, and turns it into the Garden of Eden.....

The Great Commission to the Church does not end with simply *witnessing* to the nations. Christ's command is that we *disciple* the nations - *all* the nations. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of Christ. They are to be disciplined, made obedient to the faith. This means that every aspect of life throughout the world is to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ: families, individuals, business, science, agriculture, the arts, law, education, economics, psychology, philosophy, and every other sphere of human activity. Nothing may be left out. Christ "must reign, until He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. 15:25). We have been given the responsibility of converting the entire world.

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, St. Paul outlined *a strategy for worldwide dominion*:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty in God for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ; and we are ready to punish all disobedience, once your obedience is complete (2 Cor. 10:3-6).

As Paul observes, the army of Christ is invincible: we are not fighting in mere human power, but with weapons that are "mighty in God" (cf. Eph. 6:10-18), divinely powerful, more than adequate to accomplish the job. With these weapons at our disposal, we are able to destroy everything the enemy raises up in opposition to the lordship of Jesus Christ. "We are taking *every thought* captive to the obedience of Christ": Christ is to be acknowledged as Lord everywhere, in every sphere of human

activity. We are to "think God's thoughts after Him" at every point, following His authoritative Word, the law-book of the Kingdom. This is at the root of any genuine program of Christian reconstruction.

Paul tells us that the goal of our warfare is total victory, complete dominion for the Kingdom of Christ. We will not settle for anything less than the entire world. "We are ready to punish all disobedience, once your obedience is complete," Paul says. The Moffatt translation renders it this way: *I am prepared to court-martial anyone who remains insubordinate, once your submission is complete.* Paul's goal is universal obedience to our Lord.

But it is important to note the order here. Paul does not begin his work of reconstruction by fomenting a social revolution. Nor does he begin by seeking political office. He begins with the Church, and will move out to bring the rest of the world under Christ's dominion "once the Church's obedience is complete." *The center of Christian reconstruction is the Church.* The River of Life does not flow out from the doors of the chambers of Congresses and Parliaments. It flows from the restored Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Jesus Christ. Our goal is world dominion under Christ's lordship, a "world takeover" if you will; but our strategy begins with the reformation and reconstruction of the Church. From that will flow social and political reconstruction, indeed a flowering of Christian civilization (Hag. 1:1-15; 2:6-9, 18-23).

This has always been the case. When Moses sued Pharaoh for the freedom of the Israelites, he did not say: "Let us go start a Christian Republic." He said: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, "Let My people go *that they may celebrate a feast to Me* in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1; cf. 7:16).

Certainly, God was planning to create His people a new nation. The law He was to give them would provide the foundation for a social order and judicial system. Important as all that is, however, what is infinitely more important is *God*. And what is basic to our ongoing relationship to Him and service for Him is our *worship* of Him. The fundamental issue between Egypt and Israel was the question of worship. Everything else flowed from that...

I'd also recommend an older book by Gary DeMar and Peter Leithart, *The Reduction of Christianity*. Leithart later developed and matured his ecclesiology in *The Kingdom and the Power* and *Against Christianity*. But the *Reduction* book gives a wealth of information on traditional Christian views of eschatology and civilization. It demonstrates modern evangelicals really do run the risk of "reducing" the Christian faith to a plan of individual salvation, when really the gospel includes much, much more.

One interesting feature of Acts is that some of the more prominent Christian leaders in the book actually mimic the ministry of Christ. These parallels are one way Luke shows us what union with Christ means: as the Savior so the saved. There are links

between how Jesus died and how Stephen died. Peter's experiences and works seem to track with Jesus'. Most clearly, Paul's ministry and trials run along the same tracks as Jesus' (both journey to Jerusalem with disciples, face opposition from Jews, receive favorable assessments from Gentile rulers at least at first, make predictions about their own coming sufferings, must deal with false witnesses/accusers, slapped in the face in court, faced a series of 5 trials with a mix of Jewish and Gentile judges, both challenged the temple system, etc.). Of course, Paul's final journey is in the opposite direction, from Jerusalem to Rome, whereas Jesus' final journey is from Galilee to Jerusalem. Paul's mission is to Gentiles in a way that Jesus' was not. But even in these final stories in Acts 27-28, there are crucial parallels so much so that some have regarded Paul a kind of alter-messiah in these stories. Paul receives a vision from a heavenly messenger on the boat, then enjoys something of a "last supper" before going down into the "death" of the sea. Of course, Paul in some sense is responsible for all those who are with him and who undergo "death" with him. Union with Paul brings salvation. Paul then survives a snake bite (much as Jesus overcomes the serpent on the cross) and carries out various healings reminiscent of Jesus' miracles. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law whereas Paul heals Publius' father – and both healings are from a fever.

Leithart notices exodus imagery in Acts 27-28:

The book of Acts ends with a sailor's yarn. Paul has appealed to Caesar, and is sailing toward Italy when the ship hits a squall. Luke gives a detailed account of the efforts to save the ship and the final shipwreck at Malta, during which all 276 people on board are saved (Acts 27). It's one of the most action-packed passages in the Bible.

A water-trial like this can't help but remind a Bible reader of the exodus from Egypt. In both, water is a deadly threat. The Roman soldiers plan to kill the prisoners, including Paul, as Pharaoh pursued Israel in order to destroy them. Everyone who remains in the ship passes safely to the land, as Israel passed safely out of Egypt into the wilderness.

The big difference, of course, is the direction of movement. In the exodus, Israel was escaping their Gentile master in order to covenant with Yahweh at Sinai and eventually to enter the promised land. Paul is heading in the opposite direction. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and passes through the water to get to the "Egypt" of his day, where he will have an audience with "Pharaoh." He's a Moses, rescued from the waters, but he retraces Moses' steps.

The entire book of Acts, in fact, moves in a counter-exodus direction, starting from Jerusalem and Judea and moving through Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. Under orders from Jesus rather than Cyrus, the apostles do not "go up" to build Jerusalem but "go out" to make disciples of all nations.

Leithart also sees conquest imagery:

Traveling by sea to Rome, Paul encounters a storm, plunges into the sea and then arrives at Malta. He is an unreluctant Jonah, cross the sea westward to call a Gentile empire to repentance.

But why the unusually detailed travelogue in Acts 27? Sidon, Cyprus, Cilicia, Pamphylia, Myra in Lycia, Cnidus, Fair Havens, and on and on: Luke provides a step-by-step record of the trip. The closest analogy is Numbers 33: “the sons of Israel journeyed from Ramses, and camped in Succoth. And they journeyed from Succoth, and camped in Etham . . . And they journeyed from Etham, and turned back to Pi-hahiroth . . .” Paul is not only Jonah but Israel journeying to the promised land of . . . Rome!

There are a couple of ways to view this analogy.

First, from the perspective of creation: Adam is created in the garden, but the promise is held out that he will someday ascend to the land, to the source of the river that flows from the garden and splits to the four corners of the earth. Israel journeys from Egypt to a land, and occupies the land as a quasi-royal nation. Paul is like a new Adam and new Israel who is journeying toward the crown land of Rome. A Jewish apostle arrives in Rome to announce that Jesus, the new Adam, has ascended to the land and rules over the nations.

Second, if Paul’s sea voyage is a repetition of the journey from Egypt to the land, his plunge into the sea is not only a Jonah episode but new exodus. Yet, it is an exodus ironically reversed. In Exodus/Numbers, the sea crossing comes first and then the 40 years of wandering. In Acts, the travelogue comes first, and then the shipwreck. The deeper reversal is, of course, that Israel moves from a Gentile nation, through water and wilderness, to the land promised to Abraham, while Paul moves from Jerusalem, through wild water, to the capital of a Gentile empire.

That reversal repeats on small scale the larger reversal of Luke-Acts; in Luke, everything moves toward Jerusalem, but in Acts everything moves away (after chapter 8). But the reversal is not entirely reversal: When Israel entered Canaan, they entered a land occupied by Gentiles in order to conquer it. Paul, apostle of a new Israel, enters Rome to cast down altars and begin building the Lord’s house among the nations.

Following Victor Wilson, Leithart sees the ways Acts ends as actually quite satisfying and in line with the gospels, when read properly:

Victor M. Wilson’s book, [*Divine Symmetries*](#), studies literary and numerological patterns in the Bible. He has a chapter on Luke-Acts, and includes some fairly standard material about the structural parallels between the two books, but draws some interesting conclusions. Here is a reproduction of his page summarizing the parallel plot of Luke and Acts:
Luke Introduction and Preparation Acts

1:1-4 preface, with dedication to Theophilus 1:1-5

1:5-3:21 time of preparation 1:6-26

3:22 baptism with HS 2:1-4

4:16-30 inaugural sermon 2:14-40

Local Ministry

4:31-8:56 Galilee/Jerusalem 2:41-8:3

5:17-25 Lame man healed 3:1-10

5:29-6:11 conflicts with leaders 4:1-8:3

9:9 martyr: John and Stephen 7:54-8:1

7:1-10 centurion sends for Jesus/apostle 10:1-48

7:11-17 widow's son and resurrection 9:36-43

Journey

9:51-53 resolve to journey to Jerusalem 19:21

9:51-19:27 missionary journey 13:1

9:31, 51; 12:50 passion journey 20:3, 22-24

9:45; 18:34 friends and disciples 21:4, 12-13

13:22 ready to die in Jerusalem 21:13

Jerusalem, Arrest, Trial

19:37 joyously received in Jerusalem 21:17-21

19:45-48 visit to the temple 21:26

20:27-39 dispute re resurrection 23:6-9

22:14-38 farewell address 20:17-38

22:14-20 last meal 27:33-38

22:47-54 seizure by a mob 21:30

22:63-64 slap before high priest 23:2

22-23 four trials before 3 courts 24-26

23:4, 14, 22 declarations of innocence 23:9; 25:25; 26:31

23:6-12 sent to Herod for questioning 25:13-26:32

23:16, 22 opportunity for release 26:32

23:18 "away with this man?" 21:36

23:47 centurion with a favorable opinion 27:3, 43

24 fulfillment of Scripture 28

24:46-49 to nations/Gentiles 28:28

The most interesting thing that Wilson makes of this structure comes out in his interpretation of the shipwreck in Acts 27. He raises the question that many commentators on Acts have raised: Why does the book end before Paul's trial and death, when the whole narrative trajectory is leading in that direction? He suggests that the shipwreck of Paul, parallel to the passion of Jesus, is in fact a death and resurrection experience, a Jonah experience. Paul "dies" in the water (Rom 6) and is raised up to eat a meal on the shore of Malta on the next day. As Wilson says, "With this interpretation, for which the text offers some intriguing support, the troublesome ending of Acts is stripped of many of the problems that have plagued it. The parallel events of Luke's Gospel and Acts and the interpretation thus laid upon the storm scene tell us that Paul's "death" has already passed. The early morning gathering

on the Maltese shore has the feel of a resurrection morning. The old has passed away; the new has come.