

## God's Divine Order

When I started college in 1958, one of the courses I signed up for was biology. I will never forget a lecture the professor gave on the cell--the basic building block of all forms of life. He compared a cell to a chicken egg: the cell had a nucleus like the yolk of an egg, a fluid surrounding the nucleus called the cytoplasm like the white of an egg, and a cell wall like the shell of an egg. There were tiny organisms within the cell that had exotic names like ribosomes and chromosomes and a Golgi apparatus and an endoplasmic reticulum. Biologists understood what some of these organisms did, but had no clue as to what the others did. The cell reproduced itself by dividing in two through a process called mitosis. All in all the cell seemed like a fairly simple thing. Since then, however, scientists have learned a lot more about the cell. They have developed microscopes that are far more powerful than the ones they had in 1958, including electron microscopes which can discern things as small as molecules. Through these microscopes and other research biologists have discovered that a cell is vastly more complex than they had imagined. In fact the complexity of a single cell has been compared to the complexity of a factory the size of Detroit--a factory which can reproduce itself in a matter of seconds. And there are over 30 trillion cells in a human body. As the psalmist wrote, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." God's creation displays an intricate design, a divine order in things that are as small as a cell and as large as a galaxy. In today's three Bible lessons, Jesus, Isaiah and Paul all describe various aspects of this divine order and use them as analogies to explain how God works spiritually in the lives of his children. We'll start with Isaiah. "as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, providing seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (*Isaiah 55:10-11*) Just as God sends down rain and snow to engender organic life on the earth, so he sends down his word to engender spiritual life in his children. And just as organic life bears fruit that contains seeds which engender new organic life, so do his children bear spiritual fruit which engenders spiritual life in others. As life begets life in the organic realm, life begets life in the spiritual realm as well. And when God's word has done its work, it returns to him just as water evaporates and returns to heaven--to be sent forth again and again. The divine cycle of nature mirrors the divine cycle of salvation. Finally--and this is a note of warning--when God's word returns to him from doing its work, it has always achieved his purpose in sending it. God's word is a sharp, double-edged sword which divides people into two groups: those who believe it and those who don't. Those who believe it receive spiritual life while those who reject it remain spiritually comatose--spiritual eunuchs who in the end die and are no more. For the fruit-bearers of the Spirit, there will be eternal joy and celebration.

**“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” For those who reject spiritual life, there awaits a very different fate. Divine order, divine mission, divine accomplishment and divine celebration. A perfect cycle in God’s divine order. Paul takes up the theme in *chapter eight* of his *Letter To The Romans*: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Under the tyranny of sin, all creation is in bondage to decay. This bondage is described in Newton’s second law of thermodynamics which states that the universe is in a state of deterioration as all things move from order to disorder. Electricity and light and mechanical energy all dissipate into heat. Organic life dies and decomposes. Roads deteriorate, cars wear out, engines fail. [Pete Tivtze’s saying about rotary motors] This deterioration is evident not only in physical things like motors, but in human society as well. Governments are corrupted by lust for more and more power, companies fail from inept management, the social fabric frays as moral and spiritual decay set in. Sooner or later, everything falls apart because all creation is in bondage to decay. We’re seeing a close-up of this process right now in what the Covid virus is doing to our country. As infection and disease continue to spread, depression and despair grow. Political factions point fingers at each other as unrest and anger grows. We’re beginning to wonder: will anything ever be the same? But as the hymn goes, “God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.” He brings strength out of suffering, health out of sickness and life out of death. So Paul compares the suffering of creation to the suffering of a woman in labor. “all creation groans as in pains of childbirth....” Like a woman whose labor pains end with the arrival of new life, the suffering of creation will one day end with the birth of a new heavens and a new earth. On that day, God will reverse the 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics and restore creation to its original pristine order. A new Garden of Eden will be born, where the soil will no longer grudgingly yield up its fruit and man will no longer live by the sweat of his brow. Even now, we who have placed our faith and our hope in the savior of mankind can taste the firstfruits of that new creation in our faith and hope. Finally we come to Jesus’ parable about a farmer who goes out to sow grain. “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.**

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear." This is one crazy farmer! Instead of sowing his precious seed only on good, fertile soil, he scatters it all over the place with no regard as to where it lands, so that most of it is wasted. But is it really wasted? Let's see. First he scatters it on a path. Paths are walkways where the soil has been trodden down by many feet and its surface is hard. Seed that falls on it lies on the surface and is exposed to the heat of the sun and the attention of birds. Between the sun and the birds, the seed is either scorched or eaten and nothing comes of it. He also sows seed where the soil is rocky. Some of it comes up, but, since the soil is full of rocks, the plants can't develop healthy roots, and when the sun comes out they wither and die. He sows seed among thorny weeds--probably what we would call "thistles. "Now I am not only an expert on thistles, I am president of the thistle-haters club. They are big, horrid, nasty, prickly things that you can only handle with heavy gloves. And when you try to pull them out, they break off at the ground level, leaving the roots to shoot up another thistle. Some thistle haters claim they can even hear the weed laugh as it comes loose from its root. The only thing that will kill them is roundup and I bless the day it came into being. In any case, the thorny weeds choke out the good plants and they die. Finally, some of the seed falls on good soil and produces an abundant crop. Jesus explains the meaning of the parable. The seed is the Gospel--the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It is sown everywhere just as the Gospel is preached everywhere—to people in all nations. God does this, knowing that fewer people will believe the Gospel and be saved than those who will not. Jesus said, "...wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction...but small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and only a few find it." Some people are like the hard dry path: they have hardened their hearts against God and have no use for anything he has to say to them. Others are like the rocky soil: initially they receive the Gospel with enthusiasm, but they put down no roots and when opposition or persecution arises, they abandon it and return to unbelief. Then there are people who are like the seeds sown among thorny weeds. The weeds represent worldly attractions like wealth and power and prestige, and the love of them chokes out the desire to follow Christ. They choose mammon over God and you cannot serve both God and mammon. Finally, like the seed that falls on good soil there are those who hear and believe and persevere in their faith and are saved. Then they are able to discern God's divine order behind the deterioration of a sin-distorted world. Faith sees where eyesight and reason fail. There is an order to things—God's divine order. It isn't always visible to us because our seeing and our thinking are impaired by sin. But the order is there—in the growth cycle of nature, in the annual dying and rebirth of creation, and in the sowing and growing of the Gospel seed. It just takes faith to see it. Amen.