

043: A Cog in God's Plan for the Ages (based on Ch. 1 in *The Savior of All Men*)

Most trains have flat steel wheels that ride on flat steel tracks.

- In fact, when I was a kid, I lived about half a block from one of the railroad lines that went in and out of Chicago.
- As kids, we loved to put coins on the train tracks and then wait for trains to come along and flatten the coins out like pancakes.
- That's one of the ways city kids have fun.
- But not all trains have flat wheels.
- Some have a rack and pinion system.
- They are typically called cog railways.
- A cog is a wheel (or a gear) with a series of projections (or teeth), on its edge.
- Those projections transfer motion by engaging with projections on another wheel (think of the cogs, or teeth, on the gears of a watch), or on a bar or track, such as with cog railway trains.

In the U.S. we have two cog railroads.

- One that climbs Pike's Peak in Colorado and the other that climbs Mt. Washington in New Hampshire.
- Because those heights are so steep, regular flat train wheels would slip on the flat tracks.
- So nineteenth century engineers came up with the idea of cog railways for steep climbs.
- Tourists are still thanking them today.
- By way of analogy, God's plan for the ages is like a railroad train, chugging away along the track of the ages.
- The wheels represent the movement of time.

- When we as believers are fully aware of God's plan for the ages and in cooperation with Him in the fulfillment of His plan, we are productive saints.
- We are then like the cogs, or we could say, the "teeth" of the pinion, meshing perfectly with the rack or track of God's plan for the ages.
- But when we are not cooperating with God in the fulfillment of His plan, then we are non-productive or even counter-productive.

God launched His plan for the ages by creating this world, and the universe, and mankind.

- He carved out of eternity a space-mass-time continuum.
- Why did God do that, seeing He is self-existent and eternal?
- We know from the Scriptures that God is love (1 John 4:16).
- True love demands expression toward others.
- That is why God created man *in His image* — so He could manifest His love toward us, and we could reciprocate His love and share it with others also.
- Of course, for man to demonstrate genuine love — as opposed to being pre-programmed to love as an automaton — he must have a will, the ability to choose freely.

Just as God is a volitional Being, so He created man as volitional.

- Having free will, man could just as easily choose *not* to love, defy the Creator, and live disobediently.
- That is what happened in the Garden of Eden, after Eve was deceived by the serpent and Adam chose to disobey God.

- Man's disobedience necessitated that God bring judgment upon His creation, with the consequence of *death*.
- Rom. 5:12 Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.
- Nevertheless, the Scriptures are clear that God already had a plan of redemption formed prior to His creation of all things.
- The plan involved His Son, who would come to Earth, born of a virgin, as a human being, live a sinless life, and offer Himself to be crucified, giving His life-blood as the payment for man's sin.

John refers to Him as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

- The Bible is quite clear that He did this out of love.
- Rom. 5:8 God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- 2 Cor. 5:21 For He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus Christ, the Son) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (parentheses mine)
- All God asks of mankind is that we believe Him, love Him, and live righteously. He is thereby glorified.
- Given God's great love for His creation and all of the trouble He has gone through to redeem mankind, it would seem out of character for Him to either annihilate evildoers in the end or consign them to a place of eternal conscious torment where they will burn forever and ever, i.e., endlessly.
- Not only would that seem unloving, it would also seem like an abysmal failure.

Allowing His creation to be eternally lost would not be a victory for God, but for His archenemy Satan.

- In this episode and several that follow I intend to demonstrate that the traditional view of unbelieving man's eternal destiny is incorrect, for it has ignored the overarching theme of Scripture, not to mention, God's heart of love and purpose for creating man.
- Not only does the creation of mankind *begin* in love, it also *ends* in love.
- The end is happy and joyous for all, not merely for a tiny minority.
- We must return now to God's creation of man, Earth, and the universe, and take a closer look at His plan for the ages.

God is spirit, not a material being with a body, per se.

- He doesn't function in space, mass, or time.
- But God has anthropomorphized Himself in the Scriptures so we can understand Him better.
- In other words, although God is a spirit-being, He describes Himself as having human characteristics.
- For example, we read of God's face and hands and arms and eyes and ears and feet, etc.
- That is to help us to relate to Him in a personal way.
- But God is Spirit, nonetheless.
- He certainly doesn't need space or mass or time to function, but we do.
- God created the space-mass-time continuum so we can glorify Him in this natural world.

Think about Space. We live in a three-dimensional world of length and width and height, where everything is measured with a ruler of some sort.

- Supernatural beings presumably dwell in higher dimensions, where space is not a consideration.
- While every creature on Earth is confined by space, God is not confined by space — He is a spirit-being.
- We know about space considerations when we have to clean out the closet or basement or garage.
- We have too much stuff but not enough space for it all.
- So we throw away stuff we don't use so we can make space for what we do use.
- Why did God create man with *space* limitations?
- I personally believe it was to demonstrate that man is finite and limited, and our world is temporary.
- Indeed, we are subject to God and His sovereign plan.

Think about Mass. If space is measured by a ruler, then mass is measured by a scale.

- On Earth, everything weighs something, even the tiniest atom, even the air we breathe.
- For example, barometric pressure is the weight of air bearing down upon us.
- When you get on the scale in the morning you are weighing your mass (some of us have more mass than others).
- How does *mass* limit man? Think about it.
- We are connected to this earth.
- We cannot fly off into the universe, but only wonder about it. Gravity holds us down.
- God doesn't "weigh" anything at all.
- That doesn't mean He is a mere force like something from a Star Wars movie.
- No, He is a personal being, yet metaphysical.
- He is *supernatural*, and therefore a spirit-being.
- So He doesn't have weight as we do.

- It seems that mass, like space, also demonstrates that we are subject to God and His sovereign plan.

Think about Time. Time is linear and measured by a clock or even a calendar.

- We refer to past, present, and future.
- Incidentally, we don't believe in cyclical time, as the eastern mystics who believe in reincarnation.
- Rather, we believe in linear time.
- We are born at a point in time, we live so many years, then we die at a point in time.
- Our entire history fits on a timeline.
- Nobody transcends time; we are all subject to it.
- Of course, God — who is eternal — transcends time; time has no control over Him.

Time is subject to God, for He created it.

- He is past, present and future simultaneously.
- Like space and mass, time points to man's limitations.
- We are not spirit-beings, destined to roam the universe.
- We are physical beings, attached to Earth.
- In fact, most do not realize that our future destiny is also tied to Earth.
- The millennial reign will be on Earth, and God will ultimately create a new earth on which man will dwell.
- These limitations should cause us to glorify our God and learn His plan for man and planet Earth.

In consideration of our time limitations, God has segmented time and His plan for man into ages.

- Of course, God transcends the ages. He is not bound in the least by time.
- 2 Pet. 3:8 With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

- But that's not true of us — a thousand years seems like an infinitely-long time, because we typically only live seventy or eighty years, give or take.
- But God segments long periods of time into *ages* for our benefit, so we can see Him at work progressively in the world.
- That is one of the reasons why Christians should be students of history — so we can see God at work throughout the history of mankind back to the very beginning of creation.
- We should also be students of eschatology, which is the study of Bible prophecy, future events, for God *continues* to work.
- In fact, God is working progressively — through long periods of time called *ages* — to bring His salvation to every person on Earth.
- That is the thesis of this episode and those that will follow.

From our perspective, sin seems to be a monkey wrench to God's progressive working through the ages.

- But sin is no monkey wrench from God's perspective.
- He will bring His salvation to the whole world but, according to the Scriptures, He will do so *incrementally*, over time, progressively — in stages, we might say.
- As dispensationalists, we believe in progressive revelation, which is the understanding that in every age God gives additional revelation about Himself and His interaction with man, and how He wants us to live.
- For instance, in our era of the church age, we are privileged to know so much more of the plan of God than people did in Old Testament times.
- We know more than Abraham, for example, and King David.

- Not because we are smarter, but simply because we live in a later age and have, therefore, benefitted from God's progressive revelation over time.

Abraham lived four thousand years ago, King David three thousand years ago, and the apostle Peter two thousand years ago.

- In the long periods of time, called *ages*, that have transpired since the times of those Bible characters, God has revealed to mankind more and more about Himself and His plan for the ages.
- Sometimes we say that God's revelation is complete, because we have the completed Word of God.
- But that is technically not correct, for more ages are forthcoming, and we don't know everything about those ages.
- In time, God will reveal more to us as He sees fit.
- Now why do I take the time to share all of this?
- These thoughts may seem random to you as the listener.
- However, I am going somewhere with all of this, if you will bear with me.

We have the tendency to think that everything rises and falls on our generation.

- Probably every generation has thought this, but that is far from the truth.
- Our lives are merely one small speck of time in the grand scheme of things.
- We are mere cogs in God's wheel that moves onward, age by age.
- That doesn't mean we are insignificant, for God cares for each one of us personally and individually.
- He has a plan for every one of His children.

- He makes promises to each one of us, for we have meaning and purpose.
- But seeing that we are merely one small speck of time in the grand scheme of things, we should never become haughty; rather, we should be humble and submissive.
- For there are plenty more generations to come after us, if not in this age, then in the ages to come.

There are at least two more ages to come, probably more.

- Eph. 2:7 That in the ages (plural) to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- Those who hold to a dispensational interpretation of Scripture – and I am in that group – believe in the millennial age, a period of one thousand years during which Jesus will reign.
- But the Bible implies there will be at least one additional age after the Millennium.
- It is the age *after* Satan is released from prison and extends until Jesus puts down all enemies.

Rev. 20:7-10

- 7-8 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.
- 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.
- 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are.

How long is this age of Satan's final rebellion?

- We do not know, but it follows the Millennium and precedes the new heaven and new earth age (called *the Perfect Age* by Clarence Larkin, a dispensational Bible prophecy teacher of the early 20th century).
- Thus the new heaven and new earth age does not begin immediately after the Millennium.
- There is an intervening period of time, during which Satan will stir up a rebellion of the nations on Earth.
- Jesus will put down the rebellion with fire from Heaven.
- Then Jesus will resurrect all those who are still in the graves — the unbelievers from all ages.
- They will stand before Him in judgment.

Those who are not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

- Then, there is apparently another period of time — how long we do not know — while Jesus deals with the enemies, bringing them to the point of repentance.
- For He is not willing that *any* should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).
- Once all the enemies have repented and bowed the knee to King Jesus, then we read in 1 Cor. 15:

1 Cor. 15:24-26

- 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.
- 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.
- 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
- The lake of fire is called the second *death* so, presumably, the lake of fire will also be destroyed.

- How is death destroyed? There are two possible options:
- 1. Either those in the lake of fire are annihilated when Jesus destroys it (referred to as “terminal punishment”)
- or, 2. Those in the lake of fire are resurrected when they repent and bow to King Jesus as Lord (called “universal reconciliation”).

Death is always defeated (destroyed) by resurrection in the Scriptures!

- Consequently, which is more scriptural?
- a. Eternal (unending) conscious torment in the lake of fire (the dominant view of Christianity since Augustine),
- or b. The ultimate resurrection of all from the lake of fire (the second death) to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.
- I believe the latter view is more scriptural, and my objective will be to present the scriptural evidence in the next few podcasts

Notice what follows 1 Cor. 15:26:

- 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
- 27 For “He has put all things under His feet” ...
- 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.
- Once all men have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, He will destroy the last enemy — the second death, which is the lake of fire.
- All in the universe will then be subject to Jesus, and God will be “all in all.”
- At that point, God will create a new heaven (universe) and new earth, and He will come to dwell with men for perpetual ages thereafter.

Rev. 21:1, 3-4

- 1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.
- 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.
- 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”
- Most Christians tend to think God will wipe away all tears and remove all death and sorrow and crying *before* the Millennium. But that is not correct!
- He does so *after* the Millennium, when He creates the new heaven and new earth, *after* all have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and all enemies have been subjected (submitted to God).
- “For the former things have passed away.”

We know very little about the ages to come, other than what we learn at the end of the book of Revelation.

- Undoubtedly, it will be grand — far beyond our imagination.
- So God’s plan for the ages is far from over.
- His plan certainly does not rise or fall on us.
- His plan marches on long after we are gone.
- But He will include all mankind in His future plan — that is the purpose for resurrection!
- What is the point in all of this?
- We need to stop thinking narrowly, that is, merely thinking about our own age as an end in itself.

- We need to think about the ages to come and what God has in store for those ages, based on what He tells us in His Word.
- Then we need to live out *now* — in our present age — God’s ultimate purpose for the ages.
- In other words, we need to understand what God is doing through all the ages, and find our place in His plan, then cooperate with Him in what He is working to accomplish.

That is the spirit of 2 Cor. 4:18:

- 2 Cor. 4:18 We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
- The things we cannot see transcend our age and continue on into future ages.
- Having said this, what is God’s purpose for the ages?
- Most say: “That He be glorified.”
- That’s not wrong, but it’s too vague.
- The real question is: *How* is He glorified?
- The answer is found in Psalm 67:2:
- Ps. 67:2 That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.

Do all the nations know of God’s salvation?

- No! The nations do not presently know (understand) God’s salvation either *soteriologically* — that is, in a *salvation* (regeneration) sense — or *misthologically* — that is, with regard to salvation of the soul, reward at the coming Judgment Seat.

- For that matter, the nations also do not presently know of God’s salvation *experientially* — that is, in a delivering and healing sense.
- Think how astounding this is!
- God’s purpose for carving out a space-mass-time continuum and creating man is that His salvation may be known among all nations.
- But unbelieving mankind knows nothing about it, and only a small percentage of believers of His church know about the fullness of His salvation and His plan for the ages.
- How many Christians know about *misthological* salvation (inheritance at the Judgment Seat)?

How many Christians know that God intends to save *all* mankind?

- 1 Tim. 2:4 (God) desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- Eph. 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.
- Eph. 3:8-11 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose (the age-during purpose) which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's purpose — over a very long period of time, incrementally —

- is to bring mankind along progressively, so that in every age His purpose of saving all the nations is made known in greater and greater measure, so that by the end of the ages all of creation becomes reconciled to God in Christ Jesus.
- What a marvelous plan!
- Each of us is merely one cog in the wheel on God's track of time, one little cog in His plan for the ages, but we must see our purpose in His grand plan and fulfill it, nonetheless.
- Ps. 67:2 That Your way (purpose) may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.
- We need to live in such a way that His purpose is manifested in this age, but how?

The answer is in the preceding verse:

- Ps. 67:1 God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us.
- God only blesses and causes His face to shine upon those who are living for Him.
- Jesus emphasized this in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matt. 5:3-10

- 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.
- 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
- 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

- 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ps. 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

- Against this backdrop, let's combine Ps. 67:1 with v. 2:
- Ps. 67:1-2 God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.
- God's way — His purpose to save all nations — is made known to the whole world when believers are living out the principles in the Sermon on the Mount by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, so that God is blessing and His face is shining upon us.

Is that happening on a widespread basis?

- Tragically, no! Why is it not happening?
- One reason is that believers do not understand God's purpose for the ages.
- Another reason is that believers do not think past the here and now, their focus is *not* on the ages to come, but merely on their present existence, the very thing Christ condemned in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Christians seem to be more concerned with the value of their retirement portfolios than they are with God's purpose for the ages.
- But Jesus admonishes:
- Matt. 6:19-21 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where

thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- Are you truly focused on God's plan for the ages?
- Or are you caught up with your own agenda, your own plans and expectations?

Oftentimes, Christians get discouraged because they think all need to be saved in this present age, or else there is no hope.

- They see that is not happening and wonder: "How can we ever win the world for Jesus?"
- But remember, God's plan is bigger than our present age.
- By way of illustration, I was on the staff of a large church years ago where one of the pastors believed that we can get the gospel to every person on the planet – nearly eight billion people.
- He believed that a great revival would take place on Earth if only Christians would get on fire for God and spread the gospel to all eight billion.
- In light of the whole of Scripture, I don't think that is correct teaching.
- In fact, I think that teaching does more harm than good.
- For it promotes a spirit of false optimism that can never be realized in our age alone.
- Once people come to grips with the error of this teaching they get discouraged, for it is overwhelming and unachievable.

Most evangelicals teach that our objective in this age is to get as many people saved as possible, because they will otherwise go to Hell and never have opportunity to be saved.

- That philosophy shapes the nature of evangelism and missions and, for that matter, most ministry.

- That is why so many preachers think they have to preach a salvation message every Sunday.
- But the Scriptural purpose for this age is to help as many believers as possible mature *unto* firstborn sons, so they can become sons *to* glory, thereby qualifying to become part of Christ's bride (His consort queen) in the coming kingdom.
- Once I came to realize this truth, my discouragement faded away, because the goal is now attainable, by God's grace.
- The Scriptures are abundantly clear that all will *not* be saved by the end of this age.
- In fact, only a tiny fraction will. Nevertheless, all hope is not lost.

God has more ages, and His plan continues to move forward even after our age.

- In the next age, the millennial age, Jesus will advance His purpose in great measure toward the goal:
- Ps. 67:2 That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.
- It is important to understand that, even in the Millennium, God's purpose will not be fully accomplished.
- Jesus will rule with a rod of iron.
- Also, the end of Isa. 66 indicates that Gehenna judgment will continue to be used in the millennial reign.
- Furthermore, multitudes will side with Satan and rebel against God even *after* the Millennium when Satan is released from prison.

Jesus will judge Satan and his rebels severely ...

- but it's *after* that when Jesus puts down all insubordination, and it's *after* that when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
- It's also *after* that when Jesus — the ultimate conqueror — finally fulfills His plan for the ages and turns the kingdom back over to God the Father.
- God's plan of bringing salvation to all the nations continues long after our time.
- We're not near the end of the ages by any stretch of the imagination.
- We may be near the end of *our* age, but there are at least two more ages to follow, perhaps more.
- So don't get disillusioned with some hyper-optimistic objective to reach all eight billion people on Earth, and then get discouraged when you don't see it happening.
- Rather, find your place in God's plan for the ages, understand what He is doing, and fulfill your mission and calling on His behalf.

What is your mission and calling? Once again, it is found in Ps. 67:

- Ps. 67:1-2 God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.
- Live for Jesus, as He outlined in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Depend upon the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to do so. He will be merciful to you and bless you and cause His face to shine upon you.
- What good will that do in the world?
- What do you think will happen when your face is aglow with the glory of Jesus Christ?

- Other folks will be pointed to Him, and not merely unbelievers.
- Other believers will be impacted and will come to see their calling in Christ Jesus

God's plan in earlier ages was for Israel to fulfill this purpose.

- But God knew that Israel would sin and fail miserably to fulfill her national calling.
- So God planned another age — the church age — to pick up where Israel left off.
- Throughout the church age God is bringing forth many sons unto glory (Heb. 2:10), that is, believers who are preparing to rule with Jesus.
- The next age — the millennial age — will come about in a short matter of time.
- In that age, Israel will be restored to a place of rulership on Earth with faithful saints elevated to positions of rulership in the heavenly New Jerusalem, the ruling realm of the kingdom.
- Psalm 67 will be advanced much further than it is being advanced in our age.
- However, even in the Millennium God's plan for the ages will not be completely fulfilled, for multitudes will rebel.
- Another age or two will be required after the Millennium for His plan to be completely fulfilled.
- Only then will God be all in all.

What should you take away from this episode?

- Don't get discouraged! Don't set unrealistic goals for the church that Christ never intended.
- Don't make evangelism the end goal for your church or your personal life.
- It is merely a *means* to the end.

- The end goal for this age is making disciples — helping believers to go all the way in Christian growth and maturity, so they become firstborn sons who will hear “well done!” at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- Find your place in His plan for the ages, and live it out to the fullest extent.
- Live for Him, let His blessing fall upon you and His face shine upon you.
- Fulfill the spirit of 2 Cor. 3:18:
- 2 Cor. 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Reflect God’s glory in this present age, so that some believe and become sons to glory.

- It is not your duty to get the whole world saved.
- That is *not* the goal of this age.
- Rather, you are to disciple as many as possible — making sure you are on the same path of discipleship — so that Jesus has a bride and co-ruler when He rules in His coming kingdom.
- It is your duty to impact the sphere of influence that God has given you, as the face of God shines upon you and you let Him shine through you to the world.
- If a few are impacted by your life, so that they come to know and understand God and learn His plan for the ages and become sons to glory, then you will have accomplished your God-given mission and calling.
- And you will be rewarded when you meet Him.

Don’t worry about reaching everyone.

- It won’t happen, and you can beat yourself up trying, always feeling guilty that you’re not doing enough.

- That is not God’s will.
- God wants you to be a cog in His plan for the ages, along with others of the church.
- What you are unable to accomplish, He will be sure to accomplish in future ages.
- Everything is rolling in that direction.
- The key is being a faithful cog in God’s plan.
- If you do your part, you will be handsomely rewarded by Him one day.
- But if you get off track, you will regret that you did not fulfill your God-given role.
- So, get busy being a divine reflector for Jesus!