

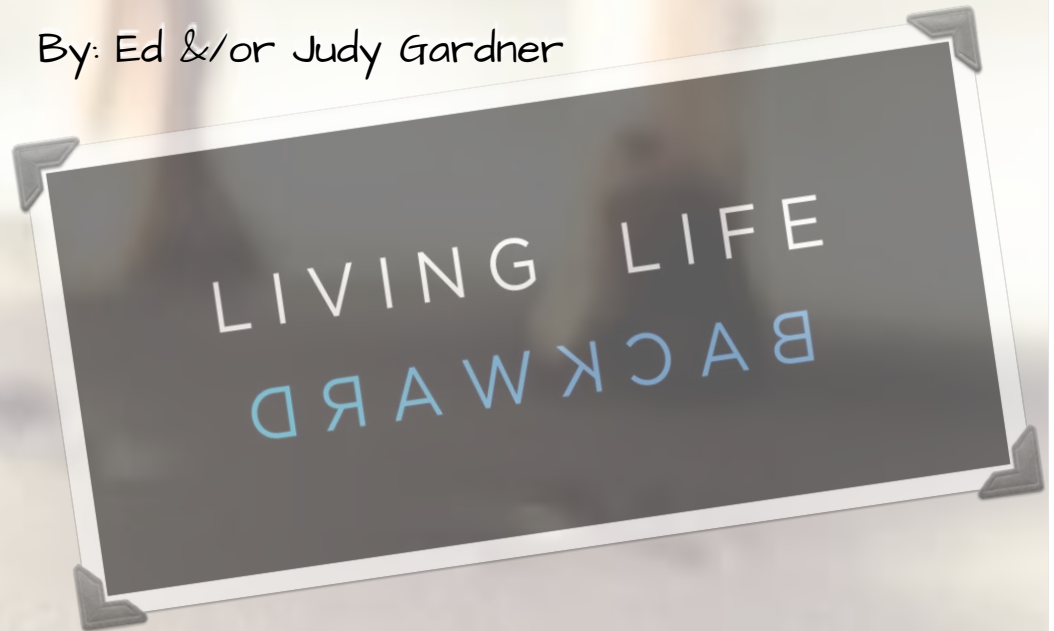
August 25-29, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 191

Living Life sdrawkcaB

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August 30/31, 2025



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to spend talking about something most of us never really consider- what does it look like to live my life backwards. No I'm not talking Benjamin Buttons syndrome here- this is more like live with the end in mind. But we'll figure all of that out as we go through the second half of Luke chapter 12 together.

So let's start off talking about home renovations. We've all seen those HGTV shows about families doing renos on their homes. There's lots of levels to these shows and the least invasive (to the home owners and the home too I suppose if it had feelings) of these shows are the single room makeovers. A designer will come into someone's house and take one room to transform. They don't do any actual construction but they mostly move around what's already there (sometimes they steal a piece of artwork or furniture from another part of the house). Maybe they slap a coat of paint on the walls. Those are by far the least invasive in terms of overwhelm.

But there's another kind of HGTV show on the other end of the reno spectrum- the whole-house-makeover. These usually involve taking out walls and sometimes even building additions or a second floor. These renovations usually take months and leave the homeowner (and the house) in a constant state of overwhelm.

Jesus is very much like the second kind of show we talked about- the whole-house renovation. We might think we're only inviting Him in to "help" us with one room of our lives. Maybe we need help with finances or relationships or our health or some challenge we're facing. We'll pray and ask Jesus to come into our lives and help redo that room but we're not picturing a whole-house renovation. But Jesus is. It's the only kind He does. You ask Jesus to "help" you with one area of your life and He will get right to work- on all of you. You'll come home from work one night expecting maybe He's finished because it was only one little area you asked for help in but when you pull into your driveway you see cranes and bull dozers out in front of your house. And when you go inside you see He's working on every area of your life- not just the area you asked specifically for His help in.

Why does He care so much about the condition of our lives? Why would He be constantly doing an extreme makeover in you? Because He's building a home fit for the King. If you're a follower of Jesus then He dwells in your heart and He doesn't want to live in a hovel that's falling apart. He had enough of that during His 33 years on this earth. No He wants to turn your life into a home fit for Himself. And how does He do that? By asking us to take steps that will lead us into the image of Jesus. As the years go by we should be reflecting His glory to the world in ever increasing measure:

And all of us... can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)

See what I mean? His plan is that as you go through this life you reflect His glory and image in ever increasing measure. And how do we do that? Well, (spoiler alert!) He does it by turning us into people with a servants heart. Why is that so important to Him? Because at His core Jesus is a servant. There are several ancient hymns sprinkled throughout the New Testament. These are hymns that were being chanted (this was before people sang in

harmony with a catchy melody and rhythm) in the churches of the first century before any of the books of the New Testament had been written. So from time to time one or another of the authors of the New Testament would drop one of these hymns into their letters. You'll find them in Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-18, Ephesians 2:14-26, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and then there's the one we're going to finish up today's reading looking at. These hymns mostly focus on Jesus- who He is, what He was like and what He is asking for from us. With that in mind let's finish our reflection for today with an ancient Christian hymn:

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 (NLT)

Tuesday Reflection: Ok so Jesus wants to do a total makeover of your life- an extreme makeover: Jesus edition. In order to help us wrap our minds around how He will achieve this we're going to spend this week looking at the marks of Jesus' Kingdom and the first mark is that it's already-but-not-yet. By that I mean that all of Jesus' promises are already ours. But (and as a friend of mine likes to say "and it's a REALLY big but), those promises are not yet all that they will be when Jesus returns and once and for all sets everything right in this world. That means that Jesus' Kingdom is already-but-not-yet:

It gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. Luke 12:32 (NLT)

Now that word, "give you" (and it is one word in Greek- the language in which the New Testament was written) is an interesting one. You see in the Greek language (and I'm guessing this is true with other languages that aren't setting out to confuse you as much as is humanly possible) verbs like "to go" can have their meaning changed simply by changing the ending of the verb. There's of course past tense verbs, future tense verbs and present tense verbs. But there is another tense that the Greek language has but English doesn't- aorist tense. Aorist tense verbs bring to mind a strange mixture of meaning- kind of past tense (well, mostly past tense but also...), kind of future tense and kind of present tense. That means that the Father has given you the Kingdom, will give you the Kingdom and oh yeah, you're currently living in the Kingdom. Already-but-not-yet. And that means that the new life that accompanies the Kingdom is already yours, will be yours and oh by the way- you're living out that new life right now.

No place in all of the gospels does a better job of illuminating what Jesus thought the Kingdom was going to do than this verse right here:

Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne... everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters

or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:28-29 (NLT)

We just got done talking about the weird verb from the first verse we read and now it seems I need to point out another weird word that Jesus uses in this verse. Did you see it in English? If you did you're amazing because I don't see how one could notice it if reading only in English (which is why I wanted so desperately to learn Koine Greek- so I would be able to figure out things I never could have if I was reading in my native tongue) because it's more about the unique word Jesus uses when He talks about the world being "made new". That's the weird word in this verse- "made new". Jesus uses the Greek word *palagenesia* which is translated as "made new" here. But it's not the idea of being made new that's so strange- it's the Greek word/concept Jesus used to describe it.

The Greeks believed that the world was always spiraling towards destruction. Each generation is worse than the one before it in Greek philosophy. You can find comments Aristotle made some 2,300 years ago where he points out the obvious- that this younger generation doesn't respect anything that made Greece great and they're going to hell-in-a-hand-basket (my brother in law Jeff Martin used to always say, "where am I going and why am I in this hand basket? ;o)

Obviously not much has changed over the last 2,300 years. Each generation believes the one following them doesn't have respect for anything important and points out everything they are doing wrong. So anyways, the Greeks believed that every once in a while the spiral of this world would hit bottom and the universe would be consumed by fire and then after the old was completely destroyed the universe would be remade. Not the old made new but the old destroyed and something completely unrelated created. New world, people, animals, trees, etc. That event was what the Greeks called the *palagenesia*. Yes it technically means "new life" or "made new" but knowing that's the word Jesus uses (and that it only appears one other time in the entire New Testament) sheds a lot of light on what Jesus thinks about His Kingdom that's already here but also coming one day.

Why does Jesus choose that word in this verse to talk about being made new? I think because there is a *palagenesia* coming but Jesus' *palagenesia* is different than the *palagenesia* of the Greek philosophers. Because while the Greek philosophers believed the *palagenesia* happens over and over (about every 6,000 years according to their way of thinking), but Jesus' *palagenesia* is once for all time. That's one difference between the Greek definition and Jesus'. But the other one is even more important- Jesus' *palagenesia* doesn't completely destroy the old and start over from scratch. No, Jesus' *palagenesia* takes the old and redeems it and transforms it and renews it.

We'll spend tomorrow talking about how Jesus is going to achieve that but for today maybe let's spend some time reflecting on the concepts of the Kingdom of God and the *palagenesia*. Do you understand why Jesus wants to turn your life into a house fit for a King? Do you realize the *palagenesia* has already begun in you? It's just not yet what it will be when Jesus returns to set everything right- including you and your life.

Wednesday Reflection: Ok so we talked about a lot about the Kingdom and the *palagenesia* yesterday (are you furrowing your brow and wondering why I'd think you

already know about the palengensia because you have no idea what I'm talking about? Then you should probably go back and read Tuesday's reflection then come back here for more on the palengenesia). Today I want to talk about what that's going to look like when Jesus returns. So real quick, you'll remember that the Greeks believed the palengenesia happened over and over and when it came it completely destroyed everything in the entire universe. Then the universe was recreated but there is nothing left of the old world in their minds. Jesus' palegenesia will happen only once (although if you remember it's already-but-not-yet so it's also ongoing in the hearts and souls of every follower of Jesus). The Greek palengenesia has the universe being destroyed with fire. And in this case Jesus agrees- the end (or the new beginning if you prefer) will indeed come in fire. I remember when I was a 20 year old young man who was trying to recover his life. I gave all of my life to Jesus and did my best to follow Him and He saved my life. When people ask me why I believe the Bible it's not because the story just makes so much sense- it doesn't.

I mean think about it for a minute- you've got an all powerful God who somehow has no beginning- He's just always existed. He speaks the universe into existence and settles on us humans as the focus of His love. He puts the first two humans in a garden and when they eat the forbidden fruit they're expelled from Eden. Then one day (after an entire Old Testament filled with unbelievable stories about what God has done in the lives of His people) God decides to send His only Son. He's born of a virgin, grows up just like us, seemingly does everything He can to make His mission a success and then dies on a cross. But He doesn't stay dead- after 3 days He's resurrected by God. 40 days later He ascends to His throne in heaven and now He reigns from there but one day He'll return to set everything right accompanied by angels. Oh yeah and anytime we want we can bow our heads in prayer and He hears us and always answers us (even if sometimes that answer is no). That story makes zero sense. But Paul did say that the message of Jesus was complete foolishness to the Greeks.

No the reason I believe as strongly as I do is because when I had no place else left to turn I decided to try living according to the principles Jesus taught us. And do you know what? That saved me. And now I'll spend the rest of my life telling anyone that will listen that if God could work a palengenesia in my life then He can do it in anyone's life. But when I was 20 I didn't really know much about the Bible. I mean, I had lots of factoids and knew all kinds of trivia about the Bible but it had never occurred to me that Jesus' teachings could somehow transform my life. So when I realized that I decided I needed to know more about how all of this worked in a human's life. And the first thing I wanted to understand was the end times. Judgement day. The end of the world. I knew that fire was going to play a part in the end of the world but I had no idea what was coming. So I decided to study the topic and create a flow chart showing everything that would happen and what order it would occur in.

So I got out my concordance (a massive tome that must've weighed 20 pounds all by itself), a few Bibles and a legal pad. The concordance had every word in the Bible and where it could be found. I found every reference to the end times or judgement day and started trying to harmonize the accounts. And guess what? I couldn't do it. It was making me crazy. But do you know what I learned over the years? I learned that nobody can harmonize the order of events on judgment day. There are a lot of preachers out there who will tell you they've done it- they cracked the code. But read 20 books by authors who claim to have cracked the code

and you'll find that none of them agree with each other. And they all point to the other guys whose flow chart of judgment day is different than theirs and say they're all wrong and I'm right. Lucky we've got such confident preachers completely certain of their own proper interpretations of the Bible. But I noticed that if someone claims to have cracked the code what they've done is omitted verses that throw a wrench into their timeline and if they even mention those other verses it's only to point out that those verses have nothing to do with the end of the world.

Anyways, the reason I was so interested in learning about the end times is I knew that at the end the universe would be subjected to fire. That made me a tad nervous so I wanted to know where we would be when that fire came. I was worried about being burned up in the palengenesia (not that I had any clue what that word meant or even that it existed at the time). But sadly I was not able to figure it out. I finally decided that if I was too slow witted to understand a concept as simple as the end times (that's what I really thought- that it was a simple concept) then maybe the best thing that remedial followers of Jesus like me could hope for was a more practical approach. Instead of understanding everything in the Bible (which I figured preachers did have it all figured out) maybe my best bet was just to stick close to Jesus. To try and become more and more like Him as my life went along. I figured the best place I could be when the end came was as close to Jesus as I could get.

But soon I would learn something that set my mind at ease about the fire of judgment day. It turns out Jesus' fire is a consuming and destroying fire- it's a refining fire.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold- though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. 1 Peter 1:6-7 (NLT)

Peter uses the imagery of an ancient goldsmith to explain the Jesus' refining fire. You see in the ancient world they didn't have all the fancy gizmos and gadgets that will tell us how pure gold is- 14 carat, 18 carat or 24 carat. So how did the goldsmith know that the gold they were refining was pure enough to make something beautiful and useful? Well they would heat the gold ore in a crucible at intense heat and as it got hotter and hotter the gold ore went through a fascinating transformation. The intense fire would burn off the impurities in the gold ore but it didn't burn the gold up- it only melted the gold. While the ore is being refined it puts off sparks like 4th of July. To tell if the gold was ready the smith would pull the crucible out of the fire and peer into the pool of molten gold. You know what he was looking for? His reflection. Because he knew that if he could see his reflection in the pool of molten gold then he knew it was pure enough to be removed from the fire and cooled so that he could begin making beautiful and useful things with it.

But if he couldn't see His reflection then it was back into the refining fire where the gold would continue it's refining process. Peter is saying that's how Jesus' fire would work at His palengenesia (a process that has already begun in the lives of Jesus' followers but will be finalized completely at The Palengenesia). The fire Jesus brings doesn't destroy and doesn't

consume. Well, I guess I should clarify that it does destroy and consume- it just doesn't destroy and consume you. It only destroys the things that are blurring up the Master's reflection in us. That's right- just like the goldsmith who looks into the pool of gold to see if it's ready by looking for his own reflection Jesus is looking for all of us to be mirrors that brightly reflect His glory and image. Right now we are subjected to "fire" of the palengenesia in the form of trials and pain. Peter tells us that these trials and pains seem like a bad thing but he points out that if we are handling them in partnership with Jesus then they are burning away the nasty stuff we pick up in this world that blurs the image of Jesus in us. Yes, they are painful. Peter doesn't sugarcoat that (and neither does the rest of the Bible by the way). He points out that the new Christians he's writing to are indeed suffering. He just tells them that the suffering does have a silver lining.

We'll continue looking at the marks of Jesus' kingdom tomorrow but for today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on the refining fire of Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus' fire isn't consuming or destroying but rather is refining. Does that change the way you view your trials? Yeah, I know it's hard but Jesus can help you.

Thursday Reflection: So the first mark of the Kingdom is that it's already-but-not-yet. The second mark of the Kingdom I'd like to look at today is that the Kingdom of God means an entirely new character arc for you. Some of you who are older (like me) might not know what a character arc is but it's all the rage with the whipper snappers these days. Here's what a character arc is:

A character arc is the internal journey of a character throughout a story, marked by a significant transformation in their beliefs, values, or personality as a result of the events they encounter. This transformation shows who the character is at the beginning of the story versus who they are at the end, and it is driven by the obstacles, conflicts, and experiences they face, leading to changes in their actions, thoughts, and overall worldview.

There are so many examples of extreme character arcs in TV and movies. When I was a kid Charles Bronson was in all of these revenge movies where he'd be a nice, normal person until his family is killed and then he completely transforms into a merciless vigilante. And on TV you don't have to go any further than Walter White from the show Breaking Bad- now there was an extreme character arc.

That's what the Kingdom of God in your life is supposed to do to/in you- it's supposed to impact your character arc. On Monday we talked about Jesus' unique path to greatness. He went from King of the Universe to a peasant baby. Jesus' story arc was pretty impressive. But what did He come to this earth for? What was so important that He left the comfort of Heaven and traded it for the pain and misery that so often can accompany this life? Because He was the King who would become a servant. We've all heard stories of paupers becoming princes or slaves becoming kings but I've never read about a king who willingly abdicated His throne just so He could become a servant. And in this section of Luke chapter 12 Jesus kind of explains where His character arc was going and where ours should be going as well:

Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. Like 12:35-36 (NLT)

What does this have to do with our character arcs? Well when Jesus says what He says in the verse we just read He's continuing his explanation of what the marks of His Kingdom would be. And one of the marks of the Kingdom is that its citizens dress themselves for service. And He doesn't mean that we will dress ourselves in preparation of being served (although tomorrow we'll see that's kind of the final result)- He means to dress ourselves to serve the King and the other citizens of His Kingdom. And He doesn't mean that we should dress ourselves for service and then lie down and take a nap. It means staying prepared for the Master's inevitable arrival. And Jesus points out that the servants have no clue when their master will return so they have to stay alert watching and waiting his return. That's our charge now. We are charged with keeping our lamps burning while we await the return of our Master. And what does it look like to watch and wait? Well like just about everything else in the Bible it all comes down to love:

We will lovingly follow the truth at all times- speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly- and so become more and more in every way like Christ. Ephesians 4:15 (NLT)

For Jesus it's all about love. Loving God, loving others and loving ourselves (not a narcissistic love for yourself but a love that moves you to take really good care of yourself so that you'll have the energy to love God and love others as we love ourselves. And we do that by serving them in love. Every time Jesus was asked what the most important command in the Old Testament and every time He unflinchingly pointed to two commands in the Bible that were the most important- the first was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is like it which is that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Why is that so important to God? Because He's all about love. Always has been:

Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that. Ephesians 5:2 (MES)

Love like that. It's so simple and yet it's so difficult. We either make things much more complicated than they need to be or we just kind of ignore the idea of dressing ourselves for service and keeping our lamps burning and choose an "easier" path. I put easier in quotations there because it's not really easier. In the end it will make things much more difficult than they need to be but so few of us humans are actually proactive about our faith. We'll stop here for the day so maybe for the rest of the day you and I can spend some time reflecting on what it means that we are to be "dressed for service" and "keeping our lamps trimmed". What does that look like in your own life? What do you think it's supposed to look like?

Friday Reflection: Today we're going to look at the third mark of the Kingdom according to Jesus and it turns out it's more than just a new character arc- it's a brand new life that we are given. It's supposed to change things for us (and for the people all around us that God has entrusted into our lives):

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)

The old life is gone? A new life has begun? What does that mean? See this isn't just some bandaid that you use to cover over the booboo. This is a radical new identity where instead of dressing ourselves to climb the ladder of success we dress ourselves for service. And Jesus says that for those servants who are embracing this new life with its new set of priorities does have its benefits:

The servants who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will seat them, gird himself for service, and serve them as they sit and eat... whenever he comes, he will reward the servants who are ready.

Luke 12:37 (NLT)

This is absolutely unprecedented. The people of the first century world would have been hard pressed to imagine such a scenario. Masters never ever served their servants. That was why masters had servants- to do the stuff that they didn't want to do. Although I shouldn't speak too quickly in saying they would have had no basis for finding something at least a tad familiar in this scenario Jesus is setting up where the master dresses himself for service and then puts the servants in the place of honor while he serves them. Because there was a Roman holiday called Saturnalia. Every year on Saturnalia the people of the Roman culture switched places. Once a year the masters would dress themselves for service and the servants would recline at the table while their own master served them. The servants would boss around their boss (up to a point because the servant knew that for the next 364 days the master would be back in charge).

See life in the Kingdom isn't just some minor refresh of your life. It's not a remake or remodel but rather an entirely new identity and character arc (where the new character arc is informed by the new identity. And this is kind of typical for Jesus' parables- although He's presenting a story with themes that the people would have understood (the dynamic between servants and masters) He's also completely upending the present status quo in the Roman Empire. When the master arrives he undergoes a complete reversal of status. Demonstrating to us that in the Kingdom of God there are no hierarchies- all will be blind in regards to status and pedigree. But that is so contrary to the way we see the world (and the way everyone around us sees the world as well) because our human nature would generally guide us into a whole other way of doing things:

What if the servant thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? Luke 12:45-46 (NLT)

So Jesus is saying that this kind of behavior isn't what the King wants from us. In fact it's the opposite of who the King is Himself. The King as it turns out is a servant at heart. And so the power of the Kingdom in us will be demonstrated by a complete disregard for how society normally views hierarchies. With this story Jesus is telling us that He took all of His infinities and all of His omnis (you know omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient) and He is going to bring all of that to bear on one thing. When you enter the Kingdom of God at Jesus' palengenesia Jesus is going to inflict such joy and peace and love and mercy and grace and

glory upon us that all the of the pains and all of the hurts that you experienced in this life will be healed. It's pretty much the theme of the Lord Of The Rings trilogy. When the king returns he would have healing in his hands to undo the work of evil in this world.

At the end of the Lord Of The Rings books (this isn't in the movies unfortunately) after Samwise has carried Frodo into Mt. Doom and after the ring has been destroyed and after he's carried Frodo back out of an erupting Mt. Doom he passes out next to Frodo on an island of rock surrounded by flowing lava. And as he slipped into unconsciousness he assumed he had arrived at the end of his story. But he was wrong. The eagles came and carried the unconscious Samwise back to Rivendale where he awakens in a bright, ethereal room with Gandalf looking him right in the face. The last time Sam had seen Gandalf he had fallen from the bridge in Moria with a Balrog tied to his leg. So Sam is looking at someone he thought was dead. Heck, Sam thought he was dead. Look at what Sam says to Gandalf:

"Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?" "A great Shadow has departed," said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count."

That is hands down one of my favorite lines from the movie. Is everything sad going to come untrue? He doesn't ask if now he's going to get such cool parting gifts that the terrible things that happened to him and his friends on the road to Mordor won't seem like such a big deal. That's not what the "new life" or palengenesia is about. Somehow- and I have no idea how He's going to do this- Jesus will make everything sad come untrue. Not just make Heaven so unbelievably awesome that we don't even think about the rotten stuff that happened down here. No, the rotten stuff will be made unrotten. And everything that you've lost you will get back. But it can only happen with the refining fire of Jesus. We talked about this on Wednesday. The fire that Jesus will bring at the palengenesia isn't a consuming fire meant to destroy us. It's a refining fire meant to burn away all the sad that we have accumulated over the years of our lifetimes. That fire will turn everything sad untrue. And I can't wait.