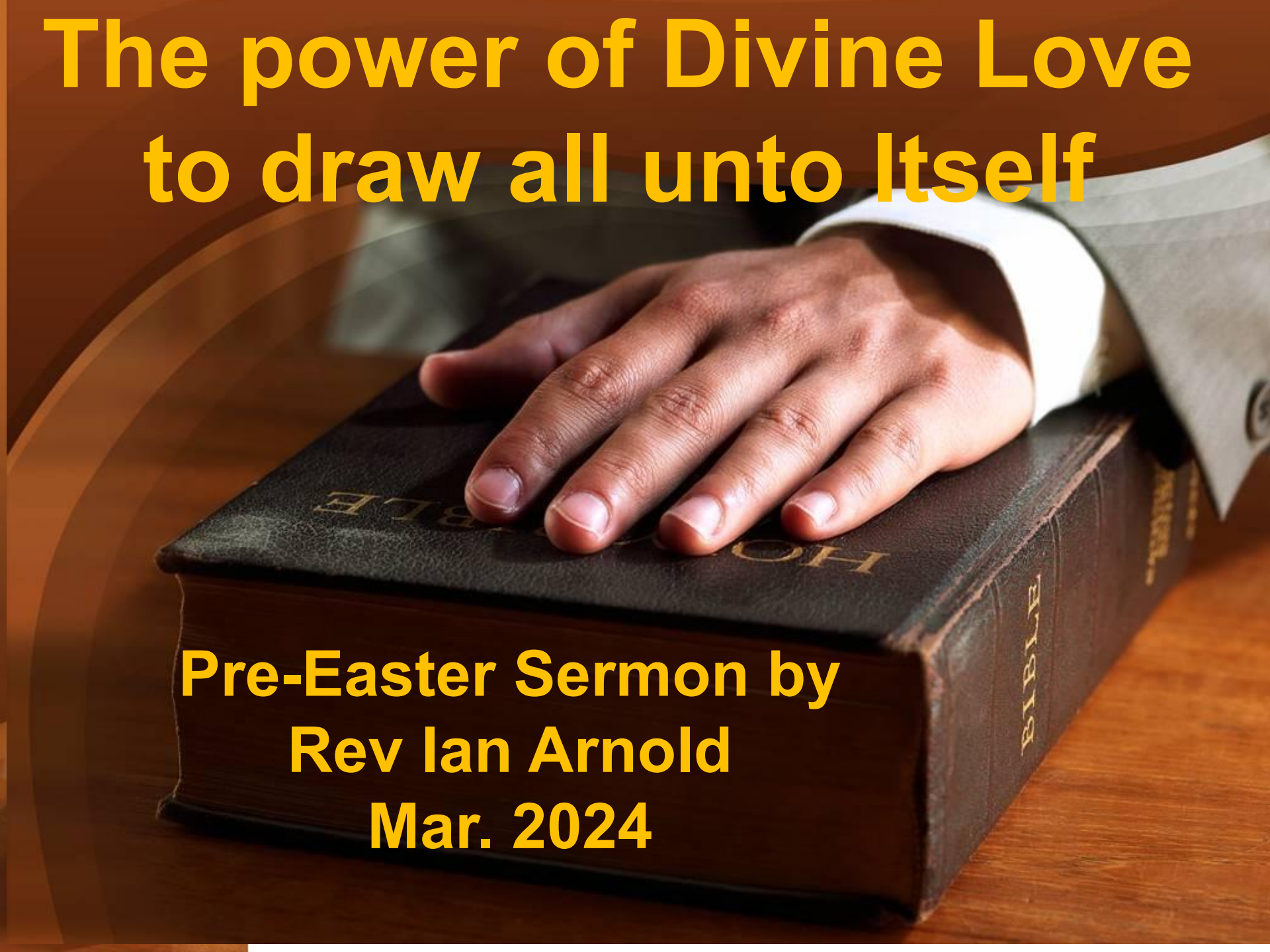
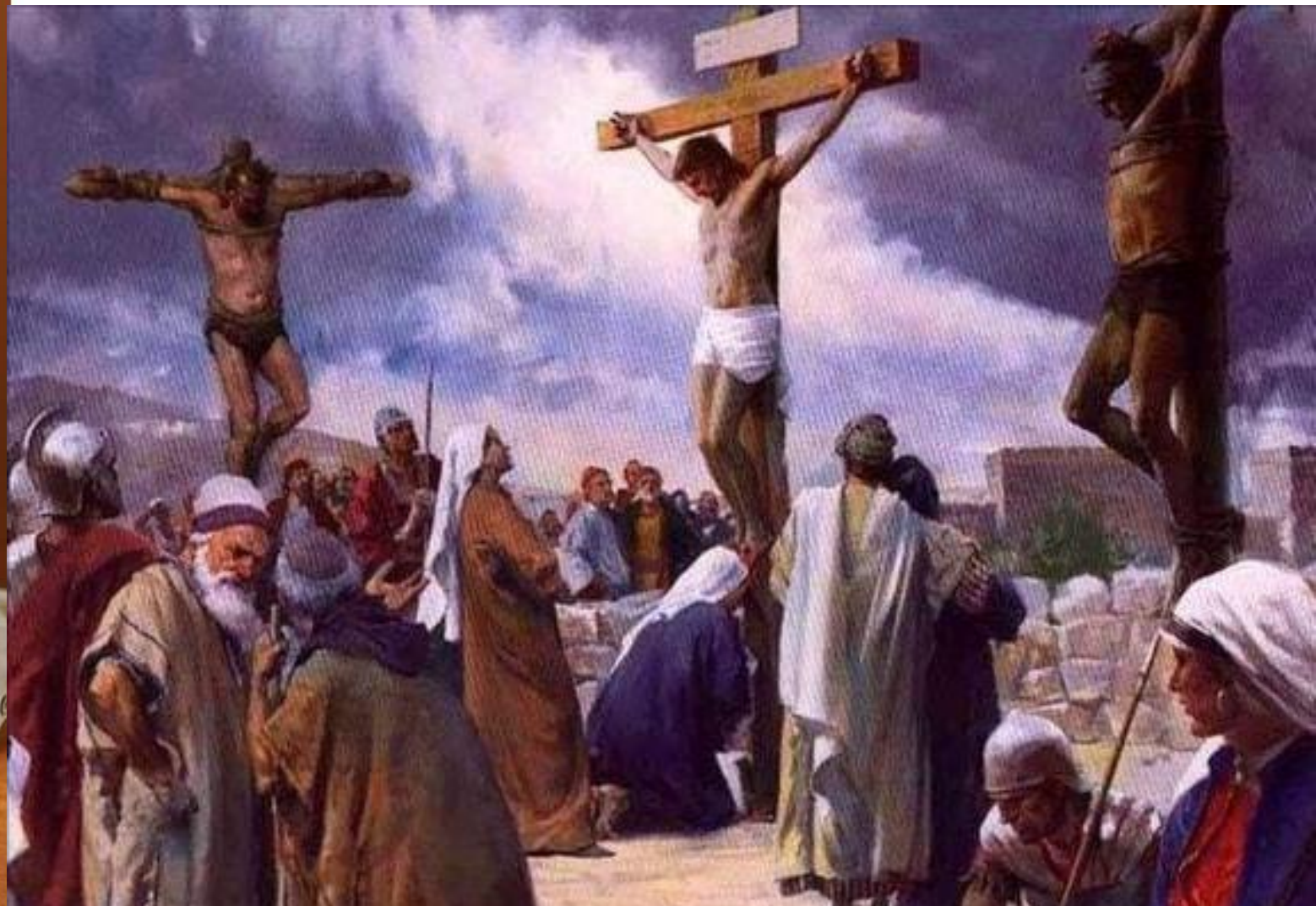
The power of Divine Love to draw all unto Itself



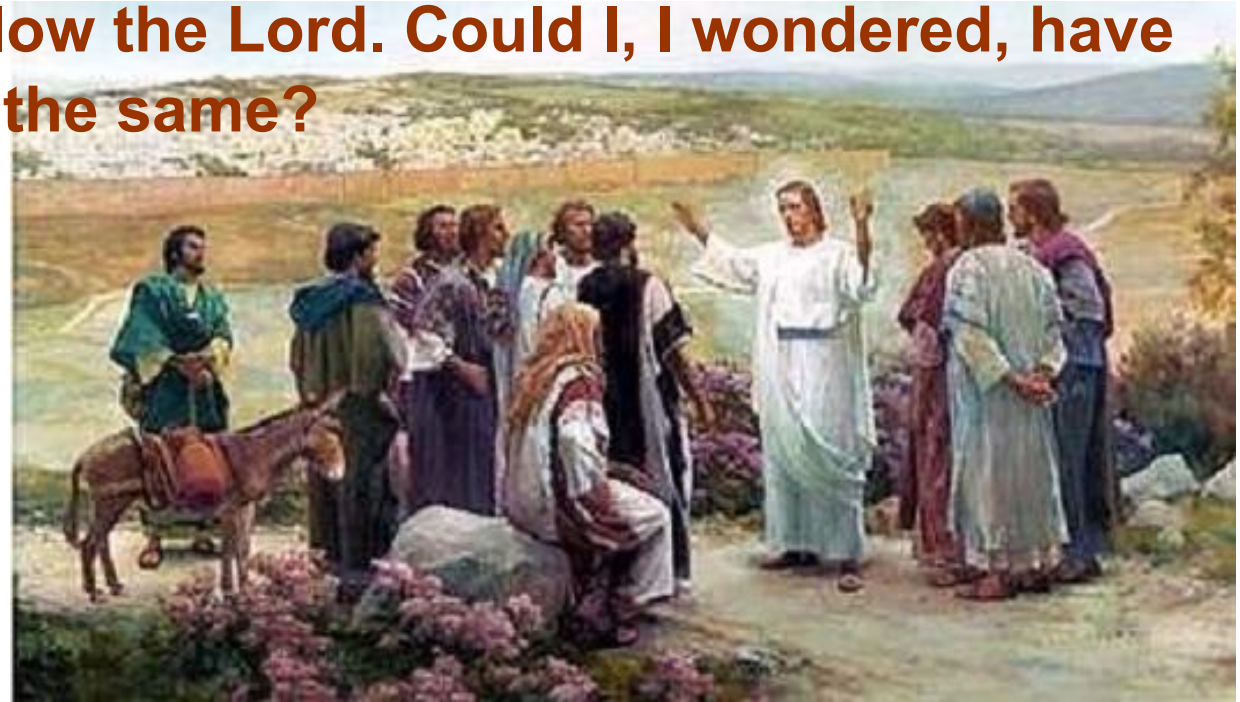
Pre-Easter Sermon by
Rev Ian Arnold
Mar. 2024

John12:31-32 **"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.**

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples unto Myself."



Perhaps it was with you, as it most certainly was with me, that as a boy attending a local Church “Sunday School” (Children’s Church) I had a totally idealistic picture in my mind of the disciples - though, when I learnt about him, not about Judas. Until then, and in my ignorance, I admired them all. I saw them as being without fault. And I had them on a pedestal. It deeply impressed me that they had given up everything to follow the Lord. Could I, I wondered, have done the same?



"Now Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Then they immediately left their nets and followed Him." Matthew 4:18-20

As an adult, whilst I continued to admire the disciples, I came to slowly see that, in fact, they were flawed people and had their shortcomings and blind spots. Even reassuringly so. They were not the perfect people I had imagined them to be.

What is for sure is that the disciples were caught up in the popularly and widely-held mind-set of their people, about the Messiah, that He would be a Deliverer in a worldly sense; that He would raise an army; fight battles; drive out the Romans and establish a Kingdom here, in this world, even as it had been in the time of David. Even until after His resurrection this is what the closest followers of Jesus.

It was a mindset that bedeviled the Lord throughout His ministry. It was at the heart of the accusations finally brought against Him. It was the basis on which He was brought to trial. And it was something Pilate was so keen to get to the bottom of. "Are you the King of the

Though bedeviled by this mindset, we know that Jesus did His best to challenge it, indeed, to shatter it. Except on Palm Sunday, He invariably shunned public acclaim, resolute at times to get away from crowds. He declined an earlier attempt to make Him a king. (See John 6:15). And from early on He warned and counseled His disciples of an outcome so different, as it would be, from what they had set their hearts on. “And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Luke 9:21, 22)

As it is with us sometimes, there was – however - no meeting of minds between them. They were not speaking the same language. They were thinking and talking at cross purposes. It says it all where, again in Luke's Gospel we read, "But they understood none of these things." (Chapter 18:34). And this, by the way, was towards the very end of His public ministry. Only afterwards, did it begin to fall in place for them.

I ask myself, 'Would we have done better? Seen it all more clearly? Understood from the outset? The answer has to be, 'almost certainly, 'No'. Mindsets blind us. Once locked into a mindset it seems impossible to us, at the time, that it could be otherwise. And no amount of

As we have already noted, it had always been promised that the Messiah, when He came, would do battle and be a Deliverer. No one is quarreling with this. It is a promise implicit in the most famous of prophecies, *“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, (or, “God, Hero”), everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* Isaiah 9:6. Again, *“For he has broken the gates of bronze, and cut the bars of iron in two.”* Psalm 107:16. This, as you can see, is about battle, it is about warfare, and it is about breaking down defenses.

What happened, however, is that **these promises came to be externalized** and read at the wrong level, in terms – in other words – of this external world. **BUT THIS WAS NEVERE THE GOAL AND NEVER THE INTENTION.** Jesus set out to get people to see this. But, and like we've seen, **He was up against an impenetrable mindset.** On the very first Easter Sunday afternoon two of His disciples were returning to a village called Emmaus a few miles from Jerusalem and as they walked along they gave voice to dashed hopes and their bewilderment that He hadn't fulfilled what their mindset had told them He would. "But we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem

The reality is that the Lord's objective in coming into the world was so much more inclusive and far reaching. It wasn't one small nation in the Middle East which was His focus but the whole of the human race; in other words, people everywhere. Here is what mattered to Him. He had seen darkness rolling in and settling over the minds of people of all races and in all countries. He had seen self interest swallowing people up. And it was this darkness; this self-interest; these influences bearing down on people; He came to do battle with.

In those battles and in that warfare Jesus knew from the outset that He would be challenged, tested and tempted to the limit – even, by our standards, far, far beyond it. But He

Standards of goodness and justice and decency and fair play would be re-instated; and compassion, concern and thoughtfulness towards others would be re-awakened – the channels through which influences from heaven reach us being re-opened.

And, re-instated, re-awakened and those channels re-opened, these qualities and values and standards – the very things which the Lord is – would again be a magnet; a renewed means of drawing people to higher things and spiritual living.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."

Jesus, God on earth, rescued Divine Truth and teaching from the damage and mistreatment and rejection of it by the then Jewish Church.

Notwithstanding our mindsets and misunderstandings and the mistaken hopes we have; His over-riding purpose – in us - remains the same.

Like the disciples, we incline at first to focus on the world, in which the Lord has but secondary and passing interest. We focus on the world; He focuses on what is eternal with us and for us.

* He also knows that to get there will at times be tough and difficult.

* He knows that His Presence in our lives will be challenged and mightily tested.

* He knows that it has to be, even severely and agonizingly so.

The thing is, it is via such testing times that His goals are accomplished. The Lord does not give in and pander to what is externally pleasing and of passing worth and value and He is passionate that we should not do so. The apostle Peter knew this to be true. Before the Jewish Court (the "Sanhedrin") and his life in danger, he said, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

And, as we make it possible for the Lord to sustain us in love and obedience, so life begins to be focused and have a new, elevated, different, over-riding goal and purpose. All within us becomes drawn to one Centre. As His Love and Truth is lifted up on high so all facets and

We forget sometimes how fragmented and departmentalized life is so long as we live it on an external, self-interested level. So often we feel pulled and torn, not just by our commitments or the demands of other people, but by conflicting motives and uncertainties of this kind. We have a fractured view of things; one eye on the Lord, one eye on self, one eye on others, one eye on the world and how our choices and decisions will affect our progress in that area. But as we work through the meaningfulness of some truth in our lives, even to it being tried severely in the fire, the outcome is a lovely unity and centering of our being. The Lord is lifted up and all within us is drawn unto Him.

Take trust in the Lord as an example.

So many times it is urged on us. So many Psalms speak of it. Jesus Himself advocated it. Live in the day and trust that all will be well in the morrow. (See Matthew Chapter 6, verses 25 to 34). But do we? Dare we? And then come the crunch times. Things don't go well or turn out as we hoped. We run into disappointments and set backs. The unexpected happens. And trust is tempted, sometimes even agonizingly so. We go into despair. And voices within us mock us and jeer at us. But with patience and steadfastness prevailing, the outcome is an insight into trust that you can scarcely share with others. What we say we've seen and now come to understand, can seem to them like "idle tales". (Luke 24:11)

To hold to truth even in the face of the most persuasive inducements to abandon and forsake it! This is what the crucifixion of the Lord means in our lives. And His resurrection is the break through; the breaking of a new morning; that follows.

This breaking of a new morning is beautifully captured in the first verse of John's Gospel Chapter 20,. where we read: “On the first day of the week, Marry Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was yet dark.” In the spiritual sense, this describes how it is following dreadful temptation (the Crucifixion). The first light of dawn rises over everything.

One of the most widely quoted statements in The Heavenly Doctrines, or Writings for The New

This is all about new insights; new levels of calmness and courage and peace; about new appreciation and new experience of the Lord; of what He teaches and does for us.

And it is all won through the pain and distress and – yes – the doubt which is part and parcel of temptation.

"*Every day, even every moment*". What a thought! How incredibly reassuring! A truth held on to, even in the face of opposition flung at it; a truth that emerges more real than ever; a truth that is then filled with new power to draw us to itself.

And again, from the Writings: "The Lord emerges and rises again with man when He is acknowledged. Previously He is enveloped in

“Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world is cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw (all peoples) to Myself.”

Amen

Readings:

Luke Chapter 24, verses 1 to 12
John Chapter 12, verses 10 to 21

Arcana Caelestia 8604, which reads -

"The Lord flows in with every person through Divine Truth emanating from Himself. Through it He brings life to the person, for the light which comes from the Lord is Divine Truth, and is life (John 1:4). This Divine Truth coming from the Lord flows into the good residing with the person and by means of it He draws the person to Himself. For life which comes from the Lord is attractive or draws others to itself because it springs from love, and all love holds a power of attraction because of its desire to be joined to another so that they may be one. When therefore a person is governed by good, and from good is guided by truth, he is drawn by the Lord to Himself and joined to Him. This is what looking upwards to the Lord is used to mean. The person who is not governed by good, and thus is not guided by truth from good, is also drawn by the Lord, but he cannot be raised up, because evils and falsities are averse to Him. This is what looking downwards, or towards self and the world, is used to mean. The truth that the Lord

Also, True Christian Religion 652:

"The Lord imputes good to everyone and evil to none, and consequently His judgement sends no one to hell, but raises all to heaven in so far as a person allows (chooses to co-operate). this is established by His own words:

Jesus said, And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples unto Myself.

Prayer for after the sermon:

Risen Lord Jesus Christ, what comes through to us, strongly, is Your sense of purpose that was always there throughout Your life and ministry in this world. We now know that You were steadfast and totally unwavering, to withstand the testing and temptations, even to the most agonizing of them all, that You might win through and so re-invigorate the power of Your Love and Light to draw people to You.

And so, Lord, as has also been brought home to us, such is Your goal and purpose *with us*; the unalterable goal of Your life and ministry in our very own lives; that You should win through times of testing and temptation, painful as these can be, so that Your Love and Light be

THE END