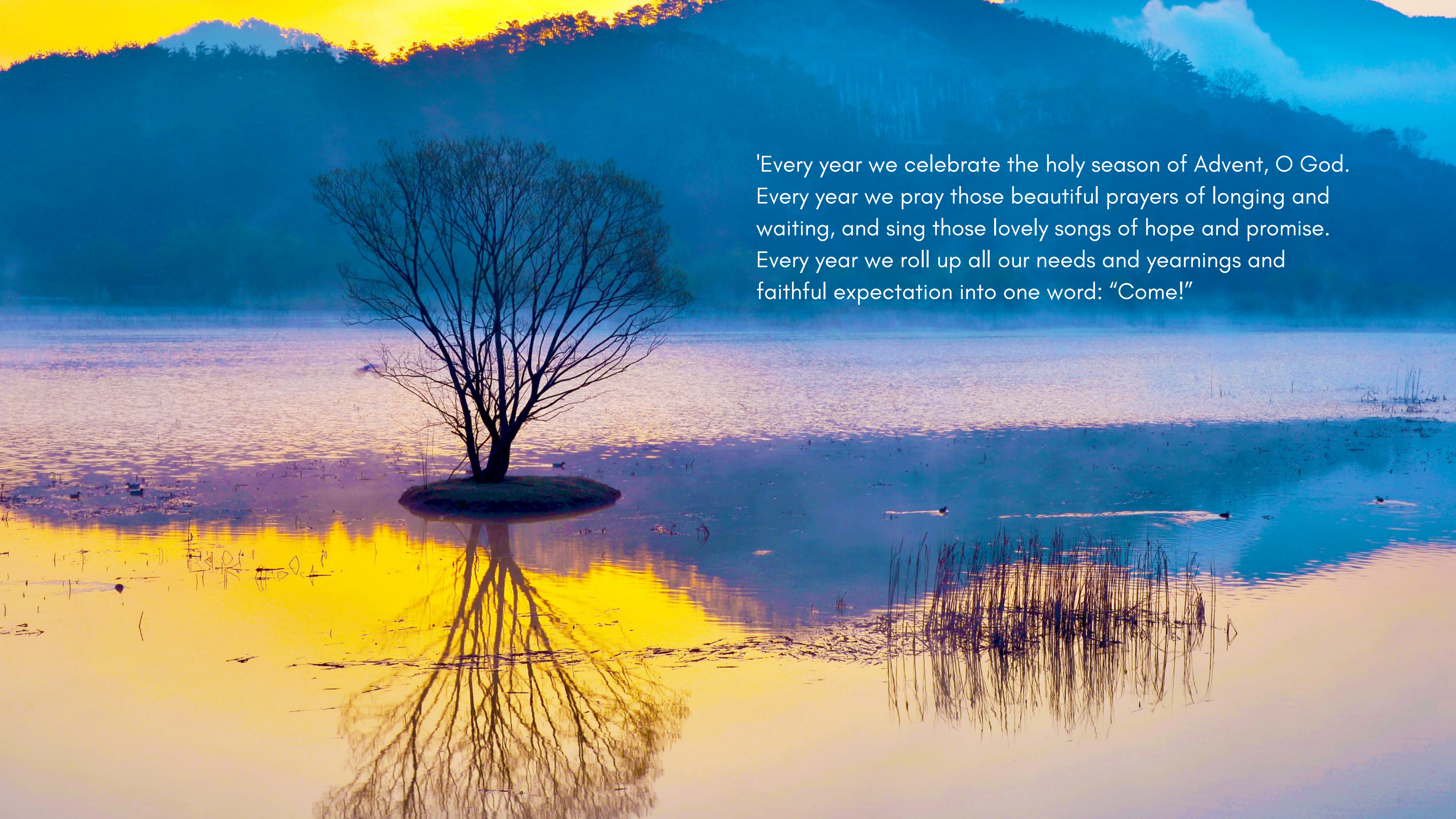




ADVENT MEDITATION: THE DIVINE DAWNING

BY KARL RAYNER



'Every year we celebrate the holy season of Advent, O God. Every year we pray those beautiful prayers of longing and waiting, and sing those lovely songs of hope and promise. Every year we roll up all our needs and yearnings and faithful expectation into one word: "Come!"

And yet, what a strange prayer this is! After all, You have already come and pitched Your tent among us. You have already shared our life with its little joys, its long days of tedious routine, its bitter end.
Could we invite You to anything more than this with our "Come"?
Could You approach any nearer to us than You did when You became the "Son of Man," when You adopted our ordinary little ways so thoroughly that it's almost hard for us to distinguish You from the rest of our fellow men?



In spite of all this we still pray: "Come." And this word issues as much from the depth of our hearts as it did long ago from the hearts of our forefathers, the kings and prophets who saw Your day still far off in the distance, and fervently blessed its coming. Is it true, then, that we only "celebrate" this season, or is it still really Advent?

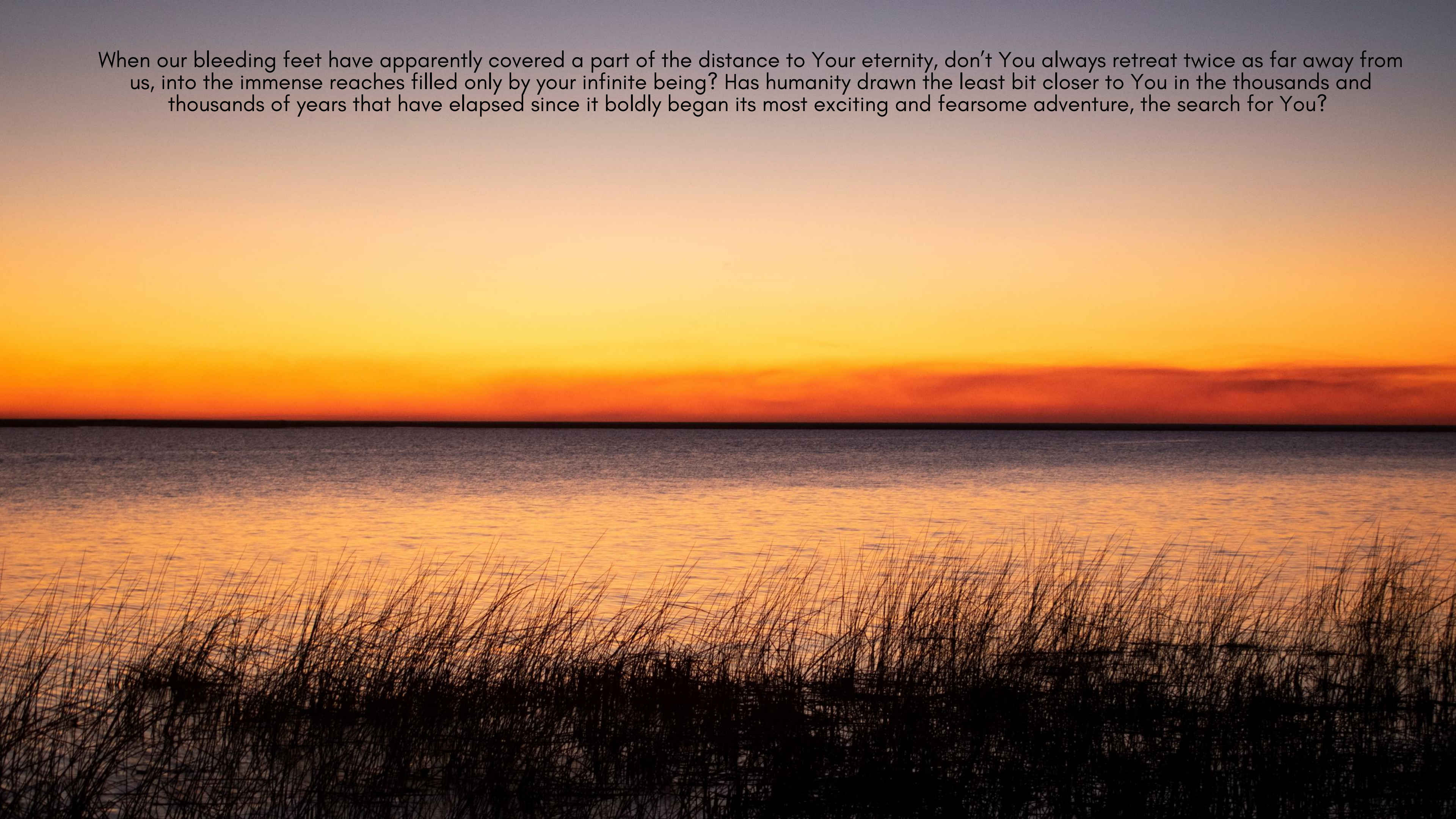
Are You the eternal Advent? Are You He who is always still to come, but never arrives in such a way as to fulfill our expectations? Are You the infinitely distant One, who can never be reached?





Are You only the distant horizon surrounding the world of our deeds and sufferings, the horizon which, no matter where we roam, is always just as far away? Are You only the eternal Today, containing within itself all time and all change, equally near to everything, and thus also equally distant?

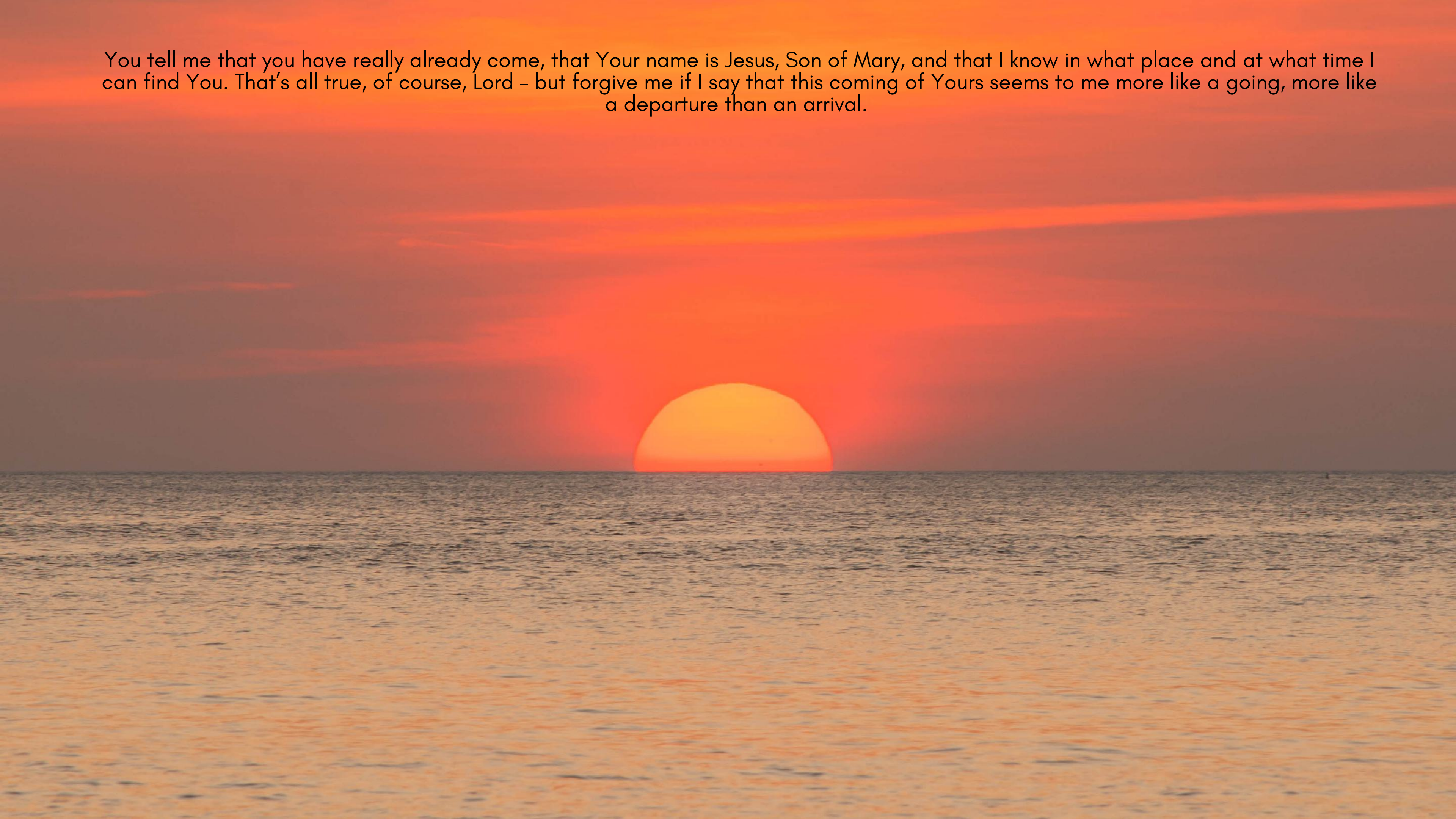
When our bleeding feet have apparently covered a part of the distance to Your eternity, don't You always retreat twice as far away from us, into the immense reaches filled only by your infinite being? Has humanity drawn the least bit closer to You in the thousands and thousands of years that have elapsed since it boldly began its most exciting and fearsome adventure, the search for You?



Have I come any nearer to You in the course of my life, or doesn't all the ground I have won only make my cup all the more bitter because the distance to You is still infinite? Must we remain ever far from You, O God of immensity, because You are ever near to us, and therefore have no need of "coming" to us? Is it because there is no place in our world to which You must first "find your way"?



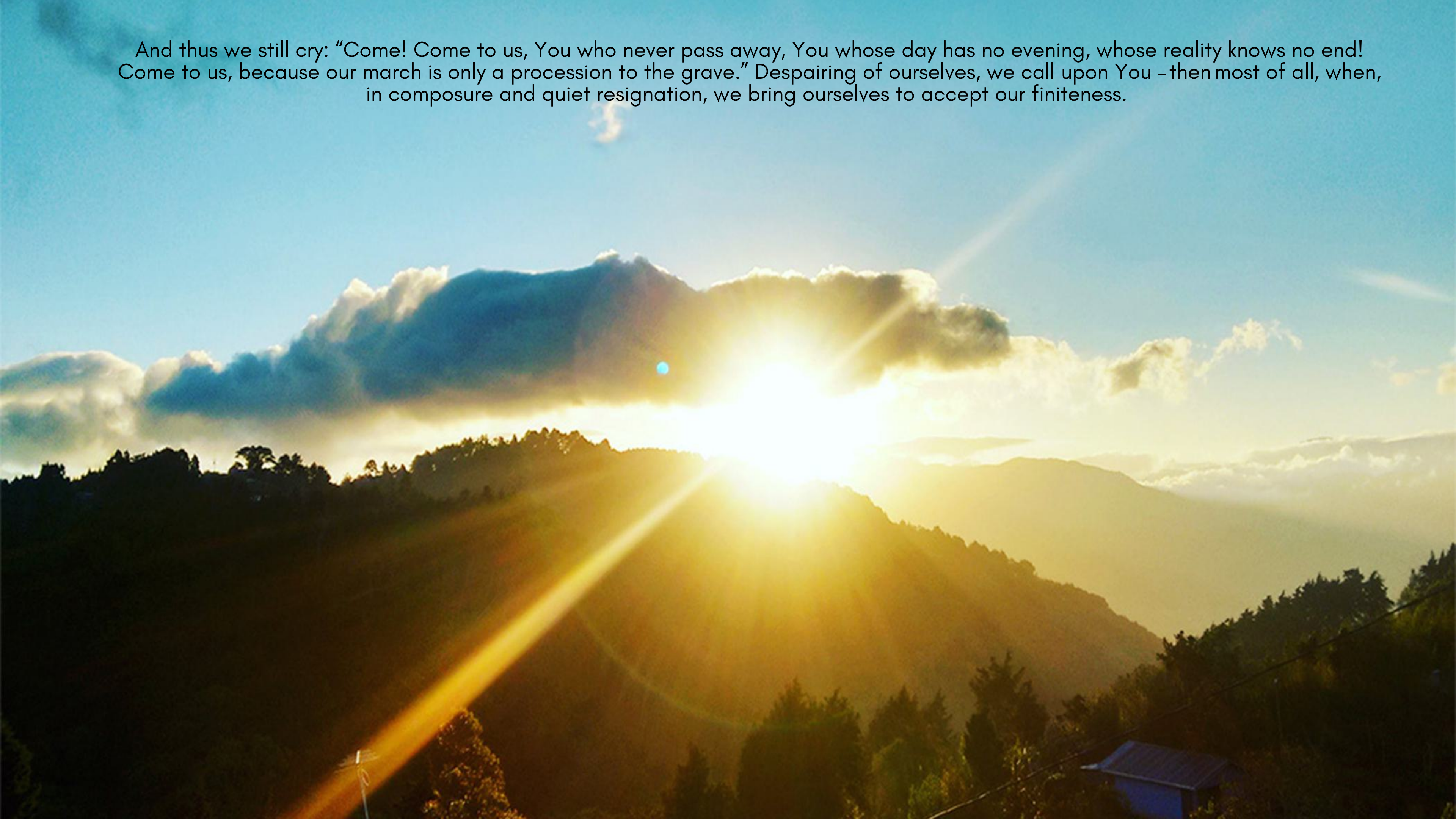
You tell me that you have really already come, that Your name is Jesus, Son of Mary, and that I know in what place and at what time I can find You. That's all true, of course, Lord - but forgive me if I say that this coming of Yours seems to me more like a going, more like a departure than an arrival.





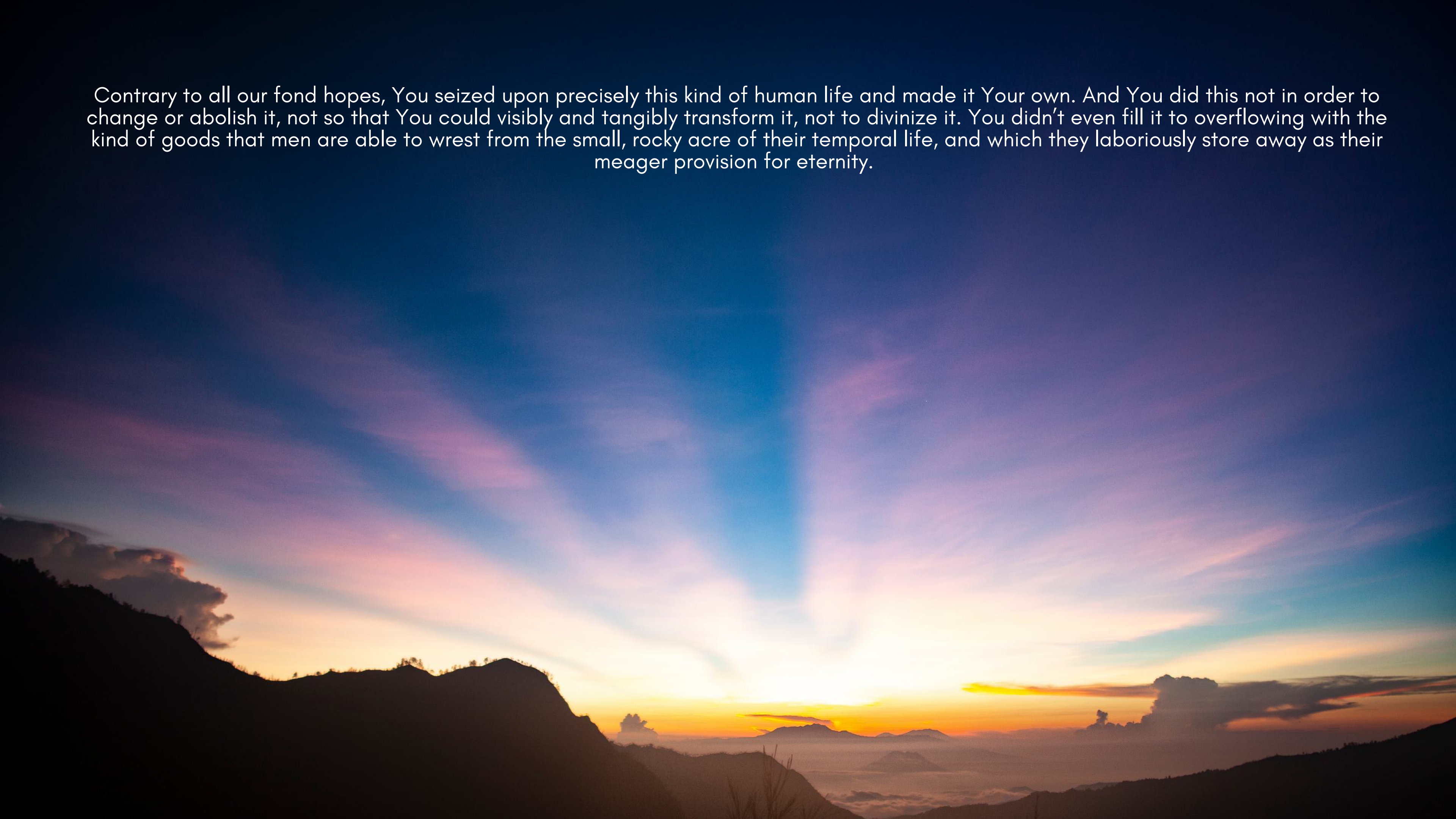
You have clothed Yourself in the form of a slave. You, the hidden God, have been found as one of us. You have quietly and inconspicuously taken Your place in our ranks and marched along with us. You have walked with us, even though we are beings who are never coming, but rather always going, since any goal we reach has only one purpose: to point beyond itself and lead us to the last goal, our end.


And thus we still cry: "Come! Come to us, You who never pass away, You whose day has no evening, whose reality knows no end! Come to us, because our march is only a procession to the grave." Despairing of ourselves, we call upon You - then most of all, when, in composure and quiet resignation, we bring ourselves to accept our finiteness.



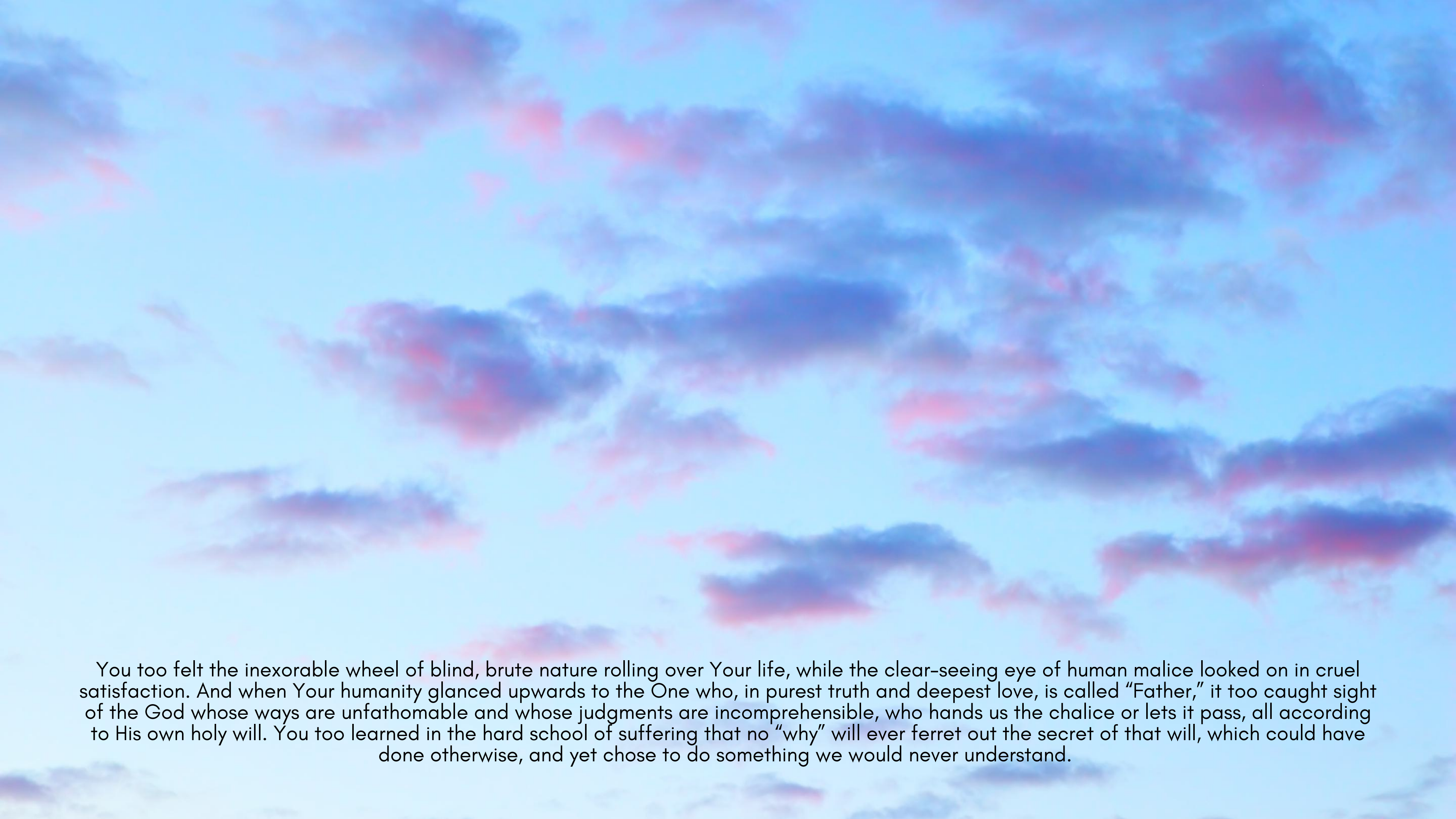
You promised that You would come, and actually made good Your promise. But how, O Lord, how did You come? You did it by taking a human life as Your own. You became like us in everything: born of a woman, You suffered under Pontius Pilate, were crucified, died, and were buried. And thus You took up again the very thing we wanted to discard. You began what we thought would end with your coming: our poor human kind of life, which is sheer frailty, finiteness, and death.

Contrary to all our fond hopes, You seized upon precisely this kind of human life and made it Your own. And You did this not in order to change or abolish it, not so that You could visibly and tangibly transform it, not to divinize it. You didn't even fill it to overflowing with the kind of goods that men are able to wrest from the small, rocky acre of their temporal life, and which they laboriously store away as their meager provision for eternity.





No, You took upon Yourself our kind of life, just as it is. You let it slip away from You, just as ours vanishes from us. You held on to it carefully, so that not a single drop of its torments would be spilled. You hoarded its every fleeting moment, so You could suffer through it all, right to the bitter end.

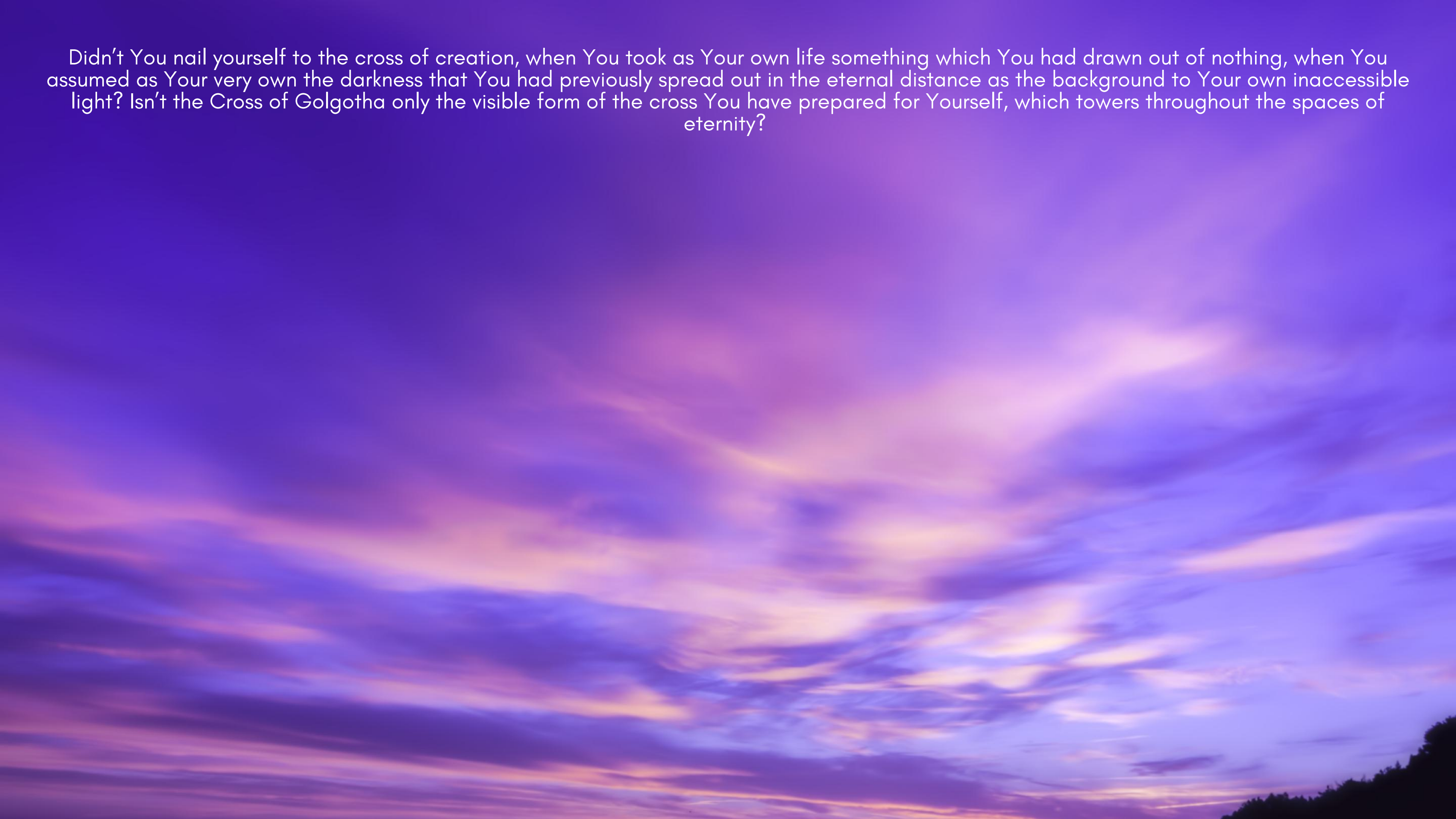


You too felt the inexorable wheel of blind, brute nature rolling over Your life, while the clear-seeing eye of human malice looked on in cruel satisfaction. And when Your humanity glanced upwards to the One who, in purest truth and deepest love, is called "Father," it too caught sight of the God whose ways are unfathomable and whose judgments are incomprehensible, who hands us the chalice or lets it pass, all according to His own holy will. You too learned in the hard school of suffering that no "why" will ever ferret out the secret of that will, which could have done otherwise, and yet chose to do something we would never understand.

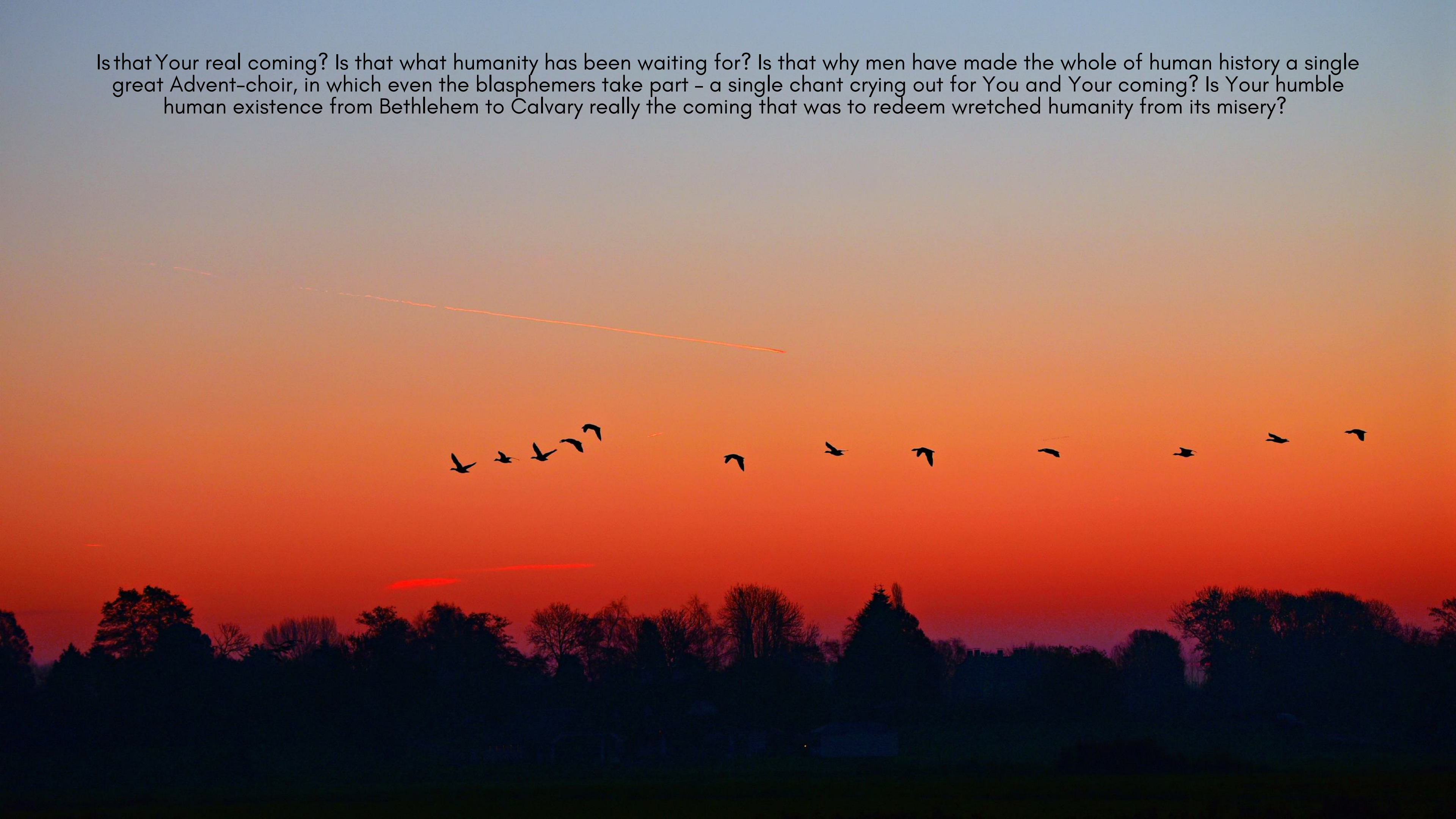


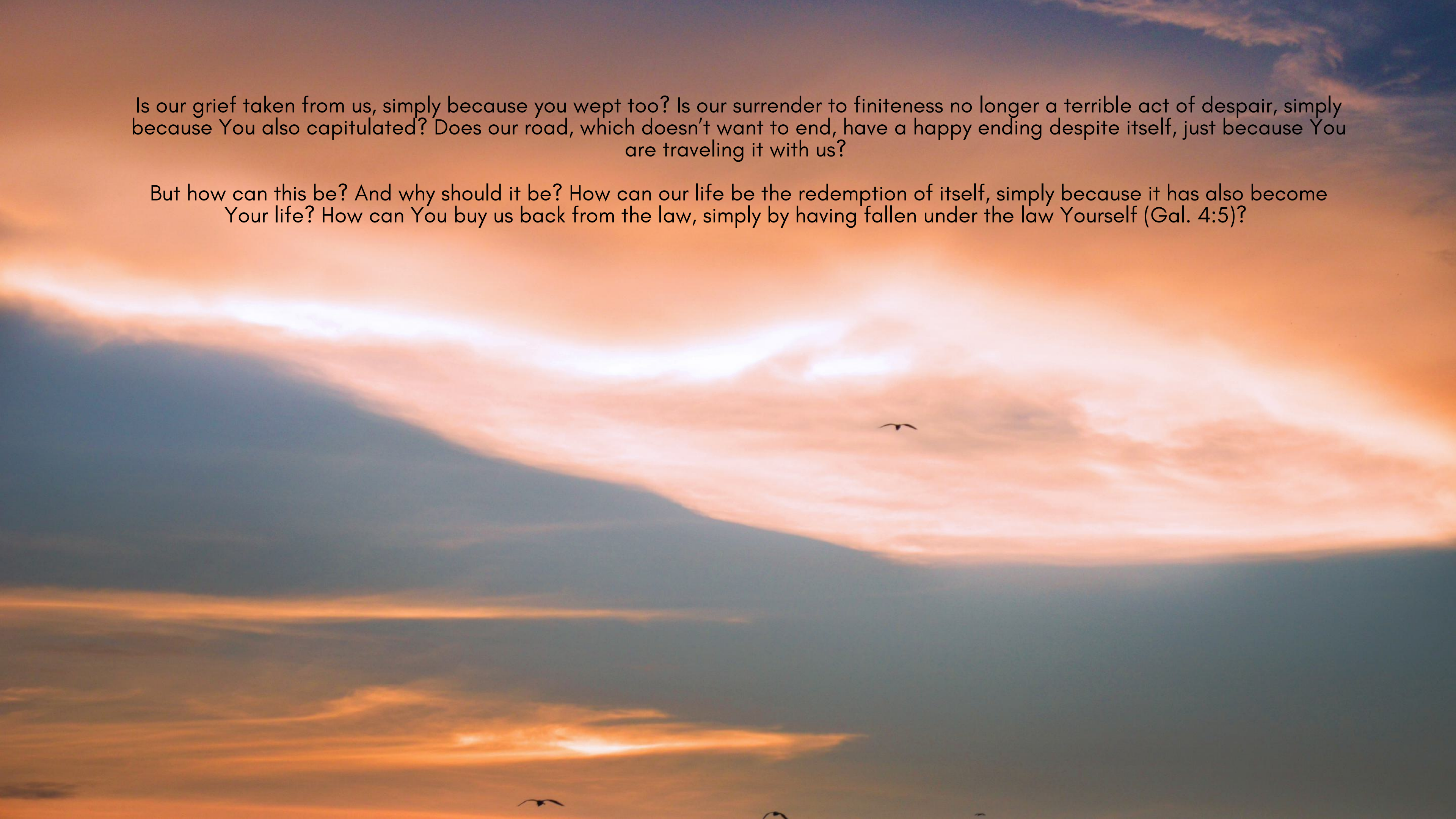
You were supposed to come to redeem us from ourselves, and yet You, who alone are absolutely free and unbounded, were “made,” even as we are. Of course, I know that You remained what You always were, but still, didn’t our mortality make You shudder, You the Immortal God? Didn’t You, the broad and limitless Being, shrink back in horror from our narrowness? Weren’t You, absolute Truth, revolted at our pretense?

Didn't You nail yourself to the cross of creation, when You took as Your own life something which You had drawn out of nothing, when You assumed as Your very own the darkness that You had previously spread out in the eternal distance as the background to Your own inaccessible light? Isn't the Cross of Golgotha only the visible form of the cross You have prepared for Yourself, which towers throughout the spaces of eternity?



Is that Your real coming? Is that what humanity has been waiting for? Is that why men have made the whole of human history a single great Advent-choir, in which even the blasphemers take part - a single chant crying out for You and Your coming? Is Your humble human existence from Bethlehem to Calvary really the coming that was to redeem wretched humanity from its misery?



A dramatic sunset or sunrise over a mountain range. The sky is filled with soft, glowing clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. Several birds are seen flying in the sky, their silhouettes against the bright light. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Is our grief taken from us, simply because you wept too? Is our surrender to finiteness no longer a terrible act of despair, simply because You also capitulated? Does our road, which doesn't want to end, have a happy ending despite itself, just because You are traveling it with us?

But how can this be? And why should it be? How can our life be the redemption of itself, simply because it has also become Your life? How can You buy us back from the law, simply by having fallen under the law Yourself (Gal. 4:5)?

Or is it this way: is my surrender to the crushing narrowness of earthly existence the beginning of my liberation from it, precisely because this surrender is my "Amen" to Your human life, my way of saying yes to Your human coming, which happens in a manner so contrary to my expectations?

But of what value is it to me that my destiny is now a participation in Yours, if You have merely made what is mine Your own? Or have You made my life only the beginning of Your coming, only the starting point of Your life?

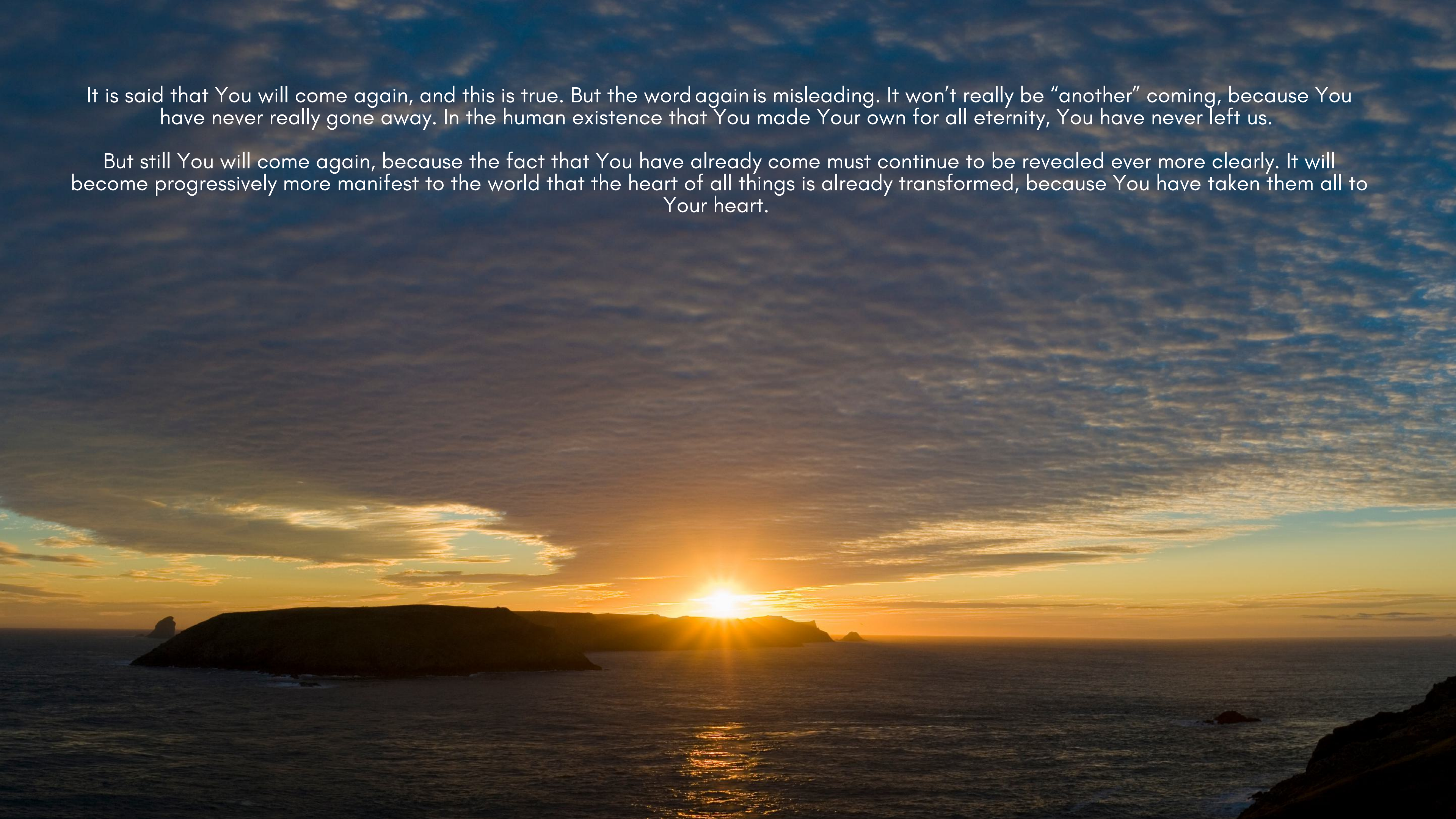


Slowly a light is beginning to dawn. I've begun to understand something I have known for a long time: You are still in the process of Your coming. Your appearance in the form of a slave was only the beginning of Your coming, a beginning in which You chose to redeem men by embracing the very slavery from which You were freeing them. And You can really achieve Your purpose in this paradoxical way, because the paths that You tread have a real ending, the narrow passes which You enter soon open out into broad liberty, the cross that You carry inevitably becomes a brilliant banner of triumph.



It is said that You will come again, and this is true. But the word again is misleading. It won't really be "another" coming, because You have never really gone away. In the human existence that You made Your own for all eternity, You have never left us.

But still You will come again, because the fact that You have already come must continue to be revealed ever more clearly. It will become progressively more manifest to the world that the heart of all things is already transformed, because You have taken them all to Your heart.



Behold, You come. And Your coming is neither past nor future, but the present, which has only to reach its fulfillment. Now it is still the one single hour of Your Advent, at the end of which we too shall have found out that You have really come.

O God who is to come, grant me the grace to live now, in the hour of Your Advent, in such a way that I may merit to live in You forever, in the blissful hour of Your eternity'.

