



The Portrait of Jesus

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The Portrait of Jesus

Forward

The splendor of God's heavenly beauty shines from his face, and he gives us a perfect picture of God, which he really is.

He holds the whole universe in its place by his powerful word.

What a striking portrait!

He has washed away all our sins. He sat down at God's right hand in heaven. He is as beautiful and artistic as any portion of God's Word.

Many aspects of the ministry of Jesus will be seen as you visit the word of God and discover or renew in your spirit the powerful manifestation of the glorious portrait of Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 1

Jesus, the Creator

When God created, he made something from nothing. Because we are created beings, we have no basis for pride. Remember that you exist only because God made you, and you have special gifts only because God gave them to you. **With God you are something valuable and unique; apart from God you are nothing, and if you try to live without him, you will be abandoning the purpose for which you were made.**

Do you ever feel that your life is too complex for God to understand? Remember, God created the entire universe, and nothing is too difficult for him. God created you; he is alive today, and his love is bigger than any problem you may face.

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] The same was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Although Christ created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him (John 1:10). Even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him (John 1:11), although the entire Old Testament pointed to his coming.

John 1:10-11

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. [11] He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

“The administration of this mystery” refers to the way God's great plan is carried out through the church and to Paul's work to demonstrate and teach God's great purpose in Christ (see Ephes. 3:2).

Ephes. 3:9

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

Col. 1:16-17

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: [17] And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

This is one of the strongest statements about the divine nature of Christ found anywhere in the Bible. Jesus is not only equal to God (Phil. 2:6), he *is* God (John 10:30, 38; John 12:45; John 14:1-11); as the image of the invisible God, he is the exact representation of God. He not only reflects God, but he reveals God to us (John 1:18; John 14:9); as the firstborn over all creation, he has all the priority and authority of the firstborn prince in a king's household. He came from heaven, not from the dust of the earth (1 Cor. 15:47), and he is Lord of all (Romans 9:5; Romans 10:11-13; Rev. 1:5; Rev. 17:14). He is completely holy (Hebrews 7:26-28; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and he has authority to judge the world (Romans 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1).

Therefore, Christ is supreme over all creation, including the spirit world. We, like the Colossian believers, must believe in the deity of Jesus Christ (that Jesus is God) or our Christian faith is hollow, misdirected, and meaningless. This is a central truth of Christianity. We must oppose those who say that Jesus was merely a prophet or a good teacher.

In the Colossian church there were several misconceptions about Christ that Paul directly refuted:

(1) Believing that matter is evil, false teachers argued that God would not have come to earth as a true human being in bodily form. Paul stated that Christ is the image—the exact likeness—of God, and is himself God, and yet he died on the cross as a human being.

(2) They believed that God did not create the world, because he would not have created evil. Paul proclaimed that Jesus Christ, who was also God in the flesh, is the Creator of both heaven and earth.

(3) They said that Christ was not the unique Son of God, but rather one of many intermediaries between God and people. Paul explained that Christ existed before anything else and is the firstborn of those resurrected.

(4) They refused to see Christ as the source of salvation, insisting that people could find God only through special and secret knowledge. In contrast Paul openly proclaimed the way of salvation to be through Christ alone. Paul continued to bring the argument back to Christ. When we share the gospel, we too must keep the focus on Christ.

The false teachers believed that the physical world was evil, they thought that God himself could not have created it. If Christ were God, they reasoned, he would be in charge only of the spiritual world. But Paul explained that all the rulers, powers, thrones, and authorities of both the spiritual and physical worlds were created by and are under the authority of Christ himself. This includes not only the government but also the spiritual world that the heretics were so concerned about. Christ has no equal and no rival. He is the Lord of all.

God is not only the Creator of the world, but he is also its Sustainer. In him, everything is held together, protected, and prevented from disintegrating into chaos. Because Christ is the Sustainer of all life, none of us is independent from him. We are all his servants who must daily trust him for protecting us, caring for us, and sustaining us.

Hebrews 1:2-3 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

The book of Hebrews describes in detail how Jesus Christ not only fulfills the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, but how Jesus Christ is better than everything in the Jewish system of thought. The Jews accepted the Old Testament, but most of them rejected Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. The recipients of this letter seem to have been Jewish Christians. They were well-versed in Scripture, and they had professed faith in Christ. Whether through doubt, persecution, or false teaching, however, they may have been in danger of giving up their Christian faith and returning to Judaism.

The authorship of this book is uncertain. Several names have been suggested, including Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, Priscilla, and Paul. Most scholars do not believe that Paul was the author, because the writing style of Hebrews is quite

different from that of his letters. In addition, Paul identified himself in his other letters and appealed to his authority as an apostle, whereas this writer of Hebrews, who never gives his or her name, appeals to eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry for authority. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews evidently knew Paul well. Hebrews was probably written by one of Paul's close associates who often heard him preach.

God used many approaches to send his messages to people in Old Testament times. He spoke to Isaiah in visions (Isaiah 6), to Jacob in a dream (Genesis 28:10-22), and to Abraham and Moses personally (Genesis 18; Exodus 31:18). Jewish people familiar with these stories would not have found it hard to believe that God was still revealing his will, but it was astonishing for them to think that God had revealed *himself* by speaking through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment and culmination of God's revelation through the centuries. When we know him, we have all we need to be saved from our sin and to have a perfect relationship with God.

Not only is Jesus the exact representation of God, but he is God himself—the very God who spoke in Old Testament times. He is eternal; he worked with the Father in creating the world (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). He is the full revelation of God. You can have no clearer view of God than by looking at Christ. Jesus Christ is the complete expression of God in a human body.

The book of Hebrews links God's saving power with his creative power. In other words, the power that brought the universe into being and that keeps it operating is the very power that removes (provides purification for) our sins. How mistaken we would be to ever think that God couldn't forgive us. No sin is too big for the Ruler of the universe to handle. He can and will forgive us when we come to him through his Son. That Jesus *sat down* means that the work was complete. Christ's sacrifice was final.

Hebrews 1:10

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 102:25-27. In the quotation, he regards God as the speaker and applies the words to the Son Jesus. The earth and the heavens rolled up like a robe reveals that the earth is not permanent or indestructible (a position held by many Greek and Roman philosophies). Jesus' authority is established over all of creation, so we dare not treat any created object or earthly resource as more important than he is.

Rev. 3:14

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities, known for its banking industry, manufacture of wool, and a medical school that produced eye salve. But the city had always had a problem with its water supply. At one time an aqueduct was built to bring water to the city from hot springs. But by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cool—only lukewarm. The church had become as bland as the tepid water that came into the city.

Chapter 2

The Divinity of Jesus Christ

Isaiah 40:3-5

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: [5] And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Preparing a straight highway means removing obstacles and rolling out the red carpet for the coming of the Lord. The desert is a picture of life's trials and sufferings. We are not immune to these, but our faith need not be hindered by them. Isaiah told people to prepare to see God work. John the Baptist used these words as he challenged the people to prepare for the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:3).

Matthew 3:3

For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

The prophet quoted is Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3), one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament and one of the most quoted in the New. Like Isaiah, John was a prophet who urged the people to confess their sins and live for God. Both prophets taught that the message of repentance is good news to those who listen and seek the healing forgiveness of God's love, but terrible news to those who refuse to listen and thus cut off their only hope.

John the Baptist *prepared* the way for Jesus. People who do not know Jesus need to be prepared to meet him. We can prepare them by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ's teachings by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can "make straight paths for him" by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from approaching Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. What can you do to prepare the way for this person?

Jehovah of glory

Psalm 24:7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

Who is this King of glory? The King of glory, identified also as the Lord of hosts, or the commander of heaven's armies, is the Messiah himself, eternal, holy, and

mighty. This psalm is not only a battle cry for the church, but it also looks forward to Christ's future entry into the new Jerusalem to reign forever (Rev. 19:11-21).

This psalm, often set to music, was probably used in corporate worship. It may have been re-enacted many times at the temple. The people outside would call out to the temple gates to open up and let the King of glory in. From inside, the priests or another group would ask, "Who is this King of glory?" Outside, the people would respond in unison, "The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle," proclaiming his great power and strength. The exchange was then repeated (Psalm 24:9-10), and the temple gates would swing open, symbolizing the people's desire to have God's presence among them. This would have been an important lesson for children who were participating.

1 Cor. 2:8

Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Jesus was misunderstood and rejected by those whom the world considered wise and great. He was put to death by the rulers in Palestine—the high priest, King Herod, Pilate, and the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus' rejection by these rulers had been predicted in Isaiah 53:3 and Zech. 12:10-11.

James 2:1

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith: (1) Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with Biblical facts (James 2:19). **You must commit your mind and heart to Christ.** (2) **Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (James 2:18).** (3) **Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless (James 2:14-17).** James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith—to bring salvation. James emphasizes the results of faith—a changed life.

James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their

impressive life-style at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame? Are you partial to the “haves” while ignoring the “have nots”? This attitude is sinful. God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

Jehovah Our Righteousness

Jeremiah 33:5-6

They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city. [6] Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.

Jeremiah contrasted the present corrupt leaders with the coming Messiah, the perfect King who would come from David’s line to reign over Israel. The King is called a righteous Branch because he will sprout up from the stump of David’s fallen dynasty (Isaiah 11:1). This new growth will have God’s own characteristics. Like the Creator, the Branch will be righteous.

1 Cor. 1:30

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Paul continues to emphasize that the way to receive salvation is so simple that *any* person who wants to can understand it. Skill and wisdom do not get a person into God’s kingdom—simple faith does—so no one can boast that his or her achievements helped him or her secure eternal life. Salvation is totally from God through Jesus’ death. There is *nothing* we can do to earn our salvation; we need only accept what Jesus has already done for us.

God is the source of and the reason for our personal and living relationship with Christ. Our union and identification with Christ results in our having God’s wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), possessing right standing with God (*righteousness*, 2 Cor. 5:21), being holy (1 Thes. 4:3-7), and having the penalty for our sins paid by Jesus (*redemption*, Mark 10:45).

Jehovah above All

Psalm 97:9

For thou, Lord, art high above all the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods.

John 3:21

But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Jesus' testimony was trustworthy because he had come from heaven and was speaking of what he had seen there. His words were the very words of God. Your whole spiritual life depends on your answer to one question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" If you accept Jesus as only a prophet or teacher, you have to reject his teaching, for he claimed to be God's Son, even God himself. The heartbeat of John's Gospel is the dynamic truth that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Messiah, the Savior, who was from the beginning and will continue to live forever. This same Jesus has invited us to accept him and live with him eternally. When we understand who Jesus is, we are compelled to believe what he said.

Jehovah the First and the Last

Isaiah 44:6

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

Rev. 22:13

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

As the Roman government stepped up its persecution of Christians, John must have wondered if the church could survive and stand against the opposition. But

Jesus appeared in glory and splendor, reassuring John that he and his fellow believers had access to God's strength to face these trials.

If you are facing difficult problems, remember that the power available To John and the early church is also available to you (see 1 John 4:4).

Our sins have convicted and sentenced us, but Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades. He alone can free us from eternal bondage to Satan. He alone has the power and authority to set us free from sin's control. Believers don't have to fear Hades or death, because Christ holds the keys to both. All we must do is turn from sin and turn to him in faith. When we attempt to control our lives and disregard God, we set a course that leads directly to hell. But when we place our lives in Christ's hands, he restores us now and resurrects us later to an eternal, peaceful relationship with him.

Isaiah 48:12-13

Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. [13] Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.

Jehovah of hosts

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. [2] Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. [3] And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

The year that King Uzziah died was approximately 740 B.C. He remained leprous until he died because he tried to take over the high priest's duties (2 Chron. 26:18-21). Although Uzziah was generally a good king with a long and prosperous reign, many of his people turned away from God.

Isaiah's vision was his commission to be God's messenger to his people. Isaiah was given a difficult mission. He had to tell people who believed they were blessed by God that instead God was going to destroy them because of their disobedience.

Isaiah's lofty view of God in Isaiah 6:1-4 gives us a sense of God's greatness, mystery, and power. Isaiah's example of recognizing his sinfulness before God encourages us to confess our sin. His picture of forgiveness reminds us that we, too, are forgiven. When we recognize how great our God is, how sinful we are, and the extent of God's forgiveness, we receive power to do his work. How does your concept of the greatness of God measure up to Isaiah's?

The throne, the attending seraphs or angels, and the threefold *holy* all stressed God's holiness. Seraphs were a type of angel whose name is derived from the word for "burn," perhaps indicating their purity as God's ministers. In a time when moral and spiritual decay had peaked, it was important for Isaiah to see God in his holiness. Holiness means morally perfect, pure, and set apart from all sin. We also need to discover God's holiness. Our daily frustrations, society's pressures, and our shortcomings reduce and narrow our view of God. We need the Bible's view of God as high and lifted up to empower us to deal with our problems and concerns. God's moral perfection, properly seen, will purify us from sin, cleanse our minds from our problems, and enable us to worship and to serve.

Jehovah

Psalm 110:1.

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

This is one of the most-quoted psalms in the New Testament because of its clear references to the Messiah. In Matthew 22:41-45, Jesus recited the words of this verse and applied them to himself. Psalm 110:1, 6 look forward to Christ's final and total destruction of the wicked (Rev. 6-9); Psalm 110:2 prophesies of Christ's reign on the earth (Rev. 20:1-7); Psalm 110:3-4 tell of Christ's priestly work for his people (Hebrews 5-8); and Psalm 110:5-6 look forward to the final battle on earth when Christ will overcome the forces of evil (Rev. 19:11-21).

Many people have a vague belief in God, but refuse to accept Jesus as anything more than a great human teacher. But the Bible does not allow that option. **Both the Old and New Testaments proclaim the deity of the One who came to save and to reign.** Jesus explained that this psalm spoke of the Messiah as greater than David,

Israel's greatest king (Mark 12:35-37). Peter used this psalm to show that Jesus, the Messiah, sits at God's right hand and is Lord over all (Acts 2:32-35). You can't straddle the fence, calling Jesus "just a good teacher," because the Bible clearly calls him Lord.

Jehovah the Shepherd

Isaiah 40:10-11

Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. [11] He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

God is often pictured as a shepherd, gently caring for and guiding his flock. He is powerful (Isaiah 40:10), yet careful and gentle. He is called a shepherd (Psalm 23); the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14); the great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20); and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

Note that the shepherd is caring for the most defenseless members of his society: children and those caring for them. This reinforces the prophetic theme that the truly powerful nation is not the one with a strong military, but rather the one that relies on God's caring strength.

Jehovah for whose glory all things were Created

Col. 1:16

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

This is one of the strongest statements about the divine nature of Christ found anywhere in the Bible. Jesus is not only equal to God (Phil. 2:6), he *is* God (John 10:30, 38; John 12:45; John 14:1-11); as the image of the invisible God, he is the exact representation of God. He not only reflects God, but he reveals God to us (John 1:18; John 14:9); as the firstborn over all creation, he has all the priority and authority of the firstborn prince in a king's household. He came from heaven, not from the dust of the earth (1 Cor. 15:47), and he is Lord of all (Romans 9:5;

Romans 10:11-13; Rev. 1:5; Rev. 17:14). He is completely holy (Hebrews 7:26-28; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5), and he has authority to judge the world (Romans 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1).

Therefore, Christ is supreme over all creation, including the spirit world. We, like the Colossian believers, must believe in the deity of Jesus Christ (that Jesus is God) or our Christian faith is hollow, misdirected, and meaningless. This is a central truth of Christianity. We must oppose those who say that Jesus was merely a prophet or a good teacher.

As the Eternal God and Creator

Psalm 102:24-27

I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations. [25] Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. [26] They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: [27] But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

The writer of this psalm felt rejected and tossed aside because of his great troubles (Psalm 102:9-10). Problems and heartaches can overwhelm us and cause us to feel that God has rejected us. But God our Creator is eternally with us and will keep all his promises, even though we may feel alone. The world will perish, but God will remain. Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes these verses to show that Jesus Christ, God's Son, was also present and active at the creation of the world.

Hebrews 1:10-12

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: [11] They shall perish; but thou remainest;

and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; [12] And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Because the readers of Hebrews had experienced the rejection of their fellow Jews, they often felt isolated. Many were tempted to exchange the changeless Christ for their familiar old faith. The writer of Hebrews warned them not to do this: Christ is our *only* security in a changing world. Whatever may happen in this world, Christ remains forever changeless. If we trust him, we are absolutely secure, because we stand on the firmest foundation in the universe—Jesus Christ. A famous hymn captures this truth: “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

What does it mean that Christ is changeless (“you remain the same”)?

It means that Christ’s character will never change. He persistently shows his love to us. He is always fair, just, and merciful to us who are so undeserving. Be thankful that Christ is changeless—he will always help you when you need it and offer forgiveness when you fall.

The Mighty God

Isaiah 9:6

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

This child who would become their deliverer is the Messiah, Jesus. Matthew quotes these verses in describing Christ’s ministry (Matthew 4:15-16). The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali represent the northern kingdom as a whole. These were also the territories where Jesus grew up and often ministered; this is why they would see “a great light.”

The apostle John also referred to Jesus as the “light” (John 1:9). Jesus referred to himself as “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

In a time of great darkness, God promised to send a light who would shine on everyone living in the shadow of death. He is both “Wonderful Counselor” and

“Mighty God.” This message of hope was fulfilled in the birth of Christ and the establishment of his eternal kingdom. He came to deliver all people from their slavery to sin.

The Great God and Saviour

Hosea 1:7

But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

The power to live as a Christian comes from the Holy Spirit. Because Christ died and rescued us from sin, we are free from sin’s control. God gives us the power and understanding to live according to his will and to do good. Then we will look forward to Christ’s wonderful return with eager expectation and hope.

It is not enough to renounce sin and evil desires; we must also live actively for God. To fight against lust we must say no to temptation, but we must also say yes to active service for Christ.

God the Judge

Eccles. 12:14

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

All people will have to stand before God and be judged for what they did in this life. We will not be able to use life’s inconsistencies as an excuse for failing to live properly. To live properly, we need to (1) recognize that human effort apart from God is futile; (2) put God first—now; (3) receive everything good as a gift from God; (4) realize that God will judge both evil and good; (5) know that God will

judge the quality of every person's life. How strange that people spend their lives striving for the very enjoyment that God gives freely, as a gift.

1 Cor. 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

It is tempting to judge fellow Christians, evaluating whether or not they are good followers of Christ. But only God knows a person's heart, and he is the only one with the right to judge. Paul's warning to the Corinthians should also warn us. We are to confront those who are sinning (see 1 Cor. 5:12-13), but we must not judge who is a better servant for Christ. When you judge someone, you invariably consider yourself better—and that is arrogant.

Chapter 3

Jesus is Saviour

Acts 13:33

God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Paul began where his listeners were and then introduced them to Christ. Because Paul was speaking to devout Jews, he began with the covenant, Abraham, David, and other familiar themes. Later, when speaking to the Greek philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:22-32), he would begin by talking about what he had observed in their city. In both cases, however, he centered the sermon around Christ and emphasized the resurrection. When you share the Good News, begin where your audience is—then tell them about Christ.

Romans 1:3

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

Paul states that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and the resurrected Lord. Paul calls Jesus a descendant of King David to emphasize that Jesus truly

had fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures predicting that the Messiah would come from David's line. With this statement of faith, Paul declares his agreement with the teaching of all Scripture and of the apostles.

Here Paul summarizes the Good News about Jesus Christ, who (1) came as a human by natural descent, (2) was part of the Jewish royal line through David, (3) died and was raised from the dead, and (4) opened the door for God's grace and kindness to be poured out on us. The book of Romans is an expansion of these themes.

Romans 8:3

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Romans 9:5

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

The Jews viewed God's choosing of Israel in the Old Testament as being like adoption. They were undeserving and without rights as natural children. Yet God adopted them and granted them the status of his sons and daughters.

2 Cor. 5:16

Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Everything that Paul and his companions did was to honor God. Christ's love controlled their lives. Because Christ died for us, we also are dead to our old lives. Like Paul, we should no longer live to please ourselves; we should spend our lives pleasing Christ, who died for us and rose from the grave.

Galatians 3:16

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

God kept his promise to Abraham (Genesis 17:7-8)—he has not revoked it, though thousands of years have passed. He saved Abraham through his faith, and he blessed the world through Abraham by sending the Messiah as one of Abraham's

descendants. Circumstances may change, but God remains constant and does not break his promises. He has promised to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ, and we can be sure that he will do so.

Galatians 4:4

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

When the time had fully come,” God sent Jesus to earth to die for our sins. For centuries the Jews had been wondering when their Messiah would come—but God’s timing was perfect. We may sometimes wonder if God will ever respond to our prayers. But we must never doubt him or give up hope. At the right time he will respond. Are you waiting for God’s timing? Trust his judgment and trust that he has your best interests in mind.

Jesus was born of a woman—he was human. He was born as a Jew—he was subject to God’s law and fulfilled it perfectly. Thus Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because, although he was fully human, he never sinned. His death bought freedom for us who were enslaved to sin so that we could be adopted into God’s family.

Philip. 2:7-8

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

These verses are probably from a hymn sung by the early Christian church. The passage holds many parallels to the prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. As a hymn, it was not meant to be a complete statement about the nature and work of Christ. Several key characteristics of Jesus Christ, however, are praised in this passage:

- (1) Christ has always existed with God;
- (2) Christ is equal to God because he *is* God (John 1:1ff; Col. 1:15-19);
- (3) though Christ is God, he became a man in order to fulfill God’s plan of salvation for all people;
- (4) Christ did not just have the appearance of being a man—he actually became human to identify with our sins;
- (5) Christ voluntarily laid aside his divine rights and privileges out of love for his Father;

(6) Christ died on the cross for our sins so we wouldn't have to face eternal death;

(7) God glorified Christ because of his obedience;

(8) God raised Christ to his original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as our Lord and Judge. How can we do anything less than praise Christ as our Lord and dedicate ourselves to his service!

1 Tim. 3:16

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

In this short hymn, Paul affirms the humanity and divinity of Christ. By so doing he reveals the heart of the gospel, “the mystery of godliness” (the secret of how we become godly). “Appeared in a body”—Jesus was a man; Jesus' incarnation is the basis of our being right with God. “Was vindicated by the Spirit”—Jesus' resurrection showed that the Holy Spirit's power was in him (Romans 8:11). “Was seen by angels” and “was taken up in glory”—Jesus is divine. We can't please God on our own; we must depend on Christ. As a man, Jesus lived a perfect life, and so he is a perfect example of how to live. As God, Jesus gives us the power to do what is right. It is possible to live a godly life—through following Christ.

1 John 4:2-3

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: [3] And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits” means that we shouldn't believe everything we hear just because someone says it is a message inspired by God. There are many ways to test teachers to see if their message is truly from the Lord. One is to check to see if their words match what God says in the Bible. Other tests include their commitment to the body of believers (1 John 2:19), their life-style (1 John 3:23-24), and the fruit of their ministry (1 John 4:6). But the most important test of all, says John, is what they believe about Christ. Do they teach that Jesus is fully God and fully man? Our world is filled with voices claiming to speak for God. Give them these tests to see if they are indeed speaking God's truth.

Chapter 4

Jesus is your Lord

Philip. 2:9-11

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: [10] That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; [11] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

At the last judgment even those who are condemned will recognize Jesus' authority and right to rule. People can choose to regard Jesus as Lord now as a step of willing and loving commitment, or be forced to acknowledge him as Lord when he returns. Christ may return at any moment. Are you prepared to meet him?

“Put to death the misdeeds of the body” means to regard as dead the power of sin in your body (see Romans 6:11; Galatians 5:24). When we regard sin's appeal as dead and lifeless, we can ignore temptation when it comes.

Romans 10:9

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Have you ever been asked, “How do I become a Christian?” These verses give you the beautiful answer—salvation is as close as your own mouth and heart. People think it must be a complicated process, but it is not. If we believe in our hearts and say with our mouths that Christ is the risen Lord, we will be saved.

Romans 6:13-16

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members

as instruments of righteousness unto God. [14] For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

[15] What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. [16] Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

“Put to death the misdeeds of the body” means to regard as dead the power of sin in your body (see Romans 6:11; Galatians 5:24). When we regard sin’s appeal as dead and lifeless, we can ignore temptation when it comes.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

When sacrificing an animal according to God’s law, a priest would kill the animal, cut it in pieces, and place it on the altar. Sacrifice was important, but even in the Old Testament God made it clear that obedience from the heart was much more important (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24). God wants us to offer ourselves, not animals, as *living* sacrifices—daily laying aside our own desires to follow him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal and trusting him to guide us. We do this out of gratitude that our sins have been forgiven.

God has good, pleasing, and perfect plans for his children. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey him. Because he wants only what is best for us, and because he gave his Son to make our new lives possible, we should joyfully give ourselves as living sacrifices for his service.

Christians are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are usually selfish and often corrupting. Many Christians wisely decide that much worldly behavior is off limits for them. Our refusal to conform to this world’s values, however, must go even deeper than the level of behavior and customs—it must be firmly planted in our minds—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is possible to avoid most worldly customs and still be proud, covetous, selfish, stubborn, and arrogant. Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed (see Romans 8:5).

1 Cor. 6:19-20

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Many people say they have the right to do whatever they want with their own bodies. Although they think that this is freedom, they are really enslaved to their own desires. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit fills and lives in us. Therefore, we no longer own our bodies. "Bought at a price" refers to slaves purchased at auction. Christ's death freed us from sin, but also obligates us to his service. If you live in a building owned by someone else, you try not to violate the building's rules. Because your body belongs to God, you must not violate his standards for living.

Isaiah 50:7

For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

If we walk by our own light and reject God's, we become self-sufficient, and the result of self-sufficiency is torment. When we place confidence in our own intelligence, appearance, or accomplishments instead of in God, we risk torment later when these strengths fade.

Chapter 5

Jesus is Your Forgiveness

Ephes. 1:6-7

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. [7] In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

God graciously accepts us (though we don't deserve it) now that we belong to his dearly loved Son. His death points to two wonderful truths—redemption and forgiveness. *Redemption* was the price paid to gain freedom for a slave (Leviticus 25:47-54). Through his death, Jesus paid the price to release us from slavery to sin. *Forgiveness* was granted in Old Testament times on the basis of the shedding of animals' blood (Leviticus 17:11). Now we are forgiven on the basis of the shedding of Jesus' blood—he died as the perfect and final sacrifice. (See also Romans 5:9; Ephes. 2:13; Col. 1:20; Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:19.)

Grace is God's voluntary and loving favor given to those he saves. We can't earn salvation, nor do we deserve it. No religious, intellectual, or moral effort can gain it, because it comes only from God's mercy and love. Without God's grace, no person can be saved. To receive it, we must acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves, that only God can save us, and that our only way to receive this loving favor is through faith in Christ.

2 Cor. 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Christians are brand-new people on the *inside*. The Holy Spirit gives them new life, and they are not the same anymore. We are not reformed, rehabilitated, or reeducated—we are re-created (new creations), living in vital union with Christ (Col. 2:6-7). At conversion we are not merely turning over a new leaf; we are beginning a new life under a new Master.

Psalms 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

East and west can never meet. This is a symbolic portrait of God’s forgiveness—**when he forgives our sin, he separates it from us and doesn’t even remember it. We need never wallow in the past, for God forgives and forgets.** We tend to dredge up the ugly past, but God has wiped our record clean. If we are to follow God, we must model his forgiveness. When we forgive another, we must also forget the sin. Otherwise, we have not truly forgiven.

1 John 2:1

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

John uses the address “dear children” in a warm, fatherly way. He is not talking down to his readers but is showing affection for them. At this writing, John was a very old man. He had spent almost all his life in ministry, and many of his readers were indeed his spiritual children.

To people who are feeling guilty and condemned, John offers reassurance. They know they have sinned, and Satan (called “the accuser” in Rev. 12:10) is demanding the death penalty. When you feel this way, don’t give up hope—the best defense attorney in the universe is pleading your case. Jesus Christ, your advocate, your defender, is the Judge’s Son. He has already suffered your penalty in your place. You can’t be tried for a case that is no longer on the docket. United with Christ, you are as safe as he is. Don’t be afraid to ask Christ to plead your case—he has already won it (see Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 7:24-25).

Isaiah 55:7

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

God is not planning to move away from us, but we often move far from him or erect a barrier between ourselves and him. Don’t wait until you have drifted far away from God to seek him. Later in life turning to him may be far more difficult. Or God may come to judge the earth before you decide to turn to him. Seek God now, while you can, before it is too late.

Isaiah 1:18

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Scarlet, or crimson, was the color of a deep-red permanent dye, and its deep stain was virtually impossible to remove from clothing. The bloodstained hands of the murderers are probably in view here (see Isaiah 1:15, 21). The stain of sin seems equally permanent, but God can remove sin's stain from our lives as he promised to do for the Israelites. We don't have to go through life permanently soiled. God's Word assures us that if we are willing and obedient, Christ will forgive and remove our most indelible stains (Psalm 51:1-7).

Psalm 32:1-2

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. [2] Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

God *wants* to forgive sinners. Forgiveness has always been part of his loving nature. He announced this to Moses (Exodus 34:7); he revealed it to David; and he dramatically showed it to the world through Jesus Christ. These verses convey several aspects of God's forgiveness: forgives transgression, covers sin, doesn't count our sins against us. Paul quoted these verses in Romans 4:7-8 and showed that we can have this joyous experience of forgiveness through faith in Christ.

Chapter 6

Jesus is Your Fulfillment

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Jesus began his sermon with words that seem to contradict each other. But God's way of living usually contradicts the world's view. If you want to live for God you must be ready to say and do what seems strange to the world. You must be willing to give when others take, to love when others hate, to help when others abuse. By giving up your own rights in order to serve others, you will one day receive everything God has in store for you.

There are at least four ways to understand the Beatitudes. (1) They are a code of ethics for the disciples and a standard of conduct for all believers. (2) They contrast kingdom values (what is eternal) with worldly values (what is temporary). (3) They contrast the superficial "faith" of the Pharisees with the real faith Christ wants. (4) They show how the Old Testament expectations will be fulfilled in the new kingdom. These beatitudes are not multiple choice—pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as a whole. They describe what we should be like as Christ's followers.

Each beatitude tells how to be *blessed*. "Blessed" means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate or enviable state of those who are in God's kingdom. The Beatitudes don't promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. To Jesus, "blessed" means the experience of hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

With Jesus' announcement that the kingdom was near (Matthew 4:17), people were naturally asking, "How do I qualify to be in God's kingdom?" Jesus said that God's kingdom is organized differently from worldly kingdoms. In the kingdom of heaven, wealth and power and authority are unimportant. Kingdom people seek different blessings and benefits, and they have different attitudes. Are your attitudes a carbon copy of the world's selfishness, pride, and lust for power, or do they reflect the humility and self-sacrifice of Jesus, your King?

[Psalm 37:4](#)

[Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.](#)

David calls us to take delight in the Lord and to commit everything we have and do (our "way") to him. But how do we do this? To *delight* in someone means to experience great pleasure and joy in his or her presence. This happens only when we know that person well. Thus, to delight in the Lord, we must know him better. Knowledge of God's great love for us will indeed give us delight.

To *commit* ourselves to the Lord means entrusting everything—our lives, families, jobs, possessions—to his control and guidance. To commit ourselves to the Lord means to trust in him (Psalm 37:5), believing that he can care for us better than we can ourselves. We should be willing to wait patiently (Psalm 37:7) for him to work out what is best for us.

Psalm 107:9

For he satisfieth the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

Lost, hungry, thirsty, and exhausted, these wanderers typify the Israelites in exile. But they also typify anyone who has not found the satisfaction that comes from knowing God. Anyone who recognizes his or her own lost condition can receive the offer of Jesus to satisfy these needs. Jesus is the way (John 14:6), the bread from heaven (John 6:33, 35), the living water (John 4:10-14), and the giver of rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

Psalm 103:5

Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

David's praise focused on God's glorious deeds. It is easy to complain about life, but David's list gives us plenty for which to praise God—he forgives our sins, heals our diseases, redeems us from death, crowns us with love and compassion, satisfies our desires, and gives righteousness and justice. We receive all of these without deserving any of them. No matter how difficult your life's journey, you can always count your blessings—past, present, and future

Joel 2:26

And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

This is part of the “blessings” section of Joel's prophecy. Only if the people truly repented would they avoid a disaster like the one Joel had described. God's blessings are promised only to those who sincerely and consistently follow him. God does promise that after the final day of judgment, his people will never again experience this kind of disaster (Zech. 14:9-11; Rev. 21).

Isaiah 58:10-11

And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

We cannot be saved by deeds of service without faith in Christ, but our faith lacks sincerity if it doesn't reach out to others. Fasting can be beneficial spiritually and physically, but at its best fasting helps only the person doing it. God says he wants our service to go beyond our own personal growth to acts of kindness, charity, justice, and generosity. True fasting is more than what we don't eat; it is pleasing God by applying his Word to our society.

Psalm 145:15-16

The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Sometimes our burdens seem more than we can bear, and we wonder how we can go on. David stands at this bleak intersection of life's road and points toward the Lord, the great burden-bearer. God is able to lift us up because (1) his greatness is unfathomable (Psalm 145:3); (2) he does mighty acts across many generations (Psalm 145:4); (3) he is full of glorious splendor and majesty (Psalm 145:5); (4) he does wonderful and awesome works (Psalm 145:5-6); (5) he is righteous (Psalm 145:7); (6) he is gracious, compassionate, patient, and loving (Psalm 145:8-9); (7) he rules over an everlasting kingdom (Psalm 145:13); (8) he is our source of all our daily needs (Psalm 145:15-16); (9) he is righteous and loving in all his dealings (Psalm 145:17); (10) he remains near to those who call on him (Psalm 145:18); (11) he hears our cries and saves us (Psalm 145:19-20).

Psalm 63:5-6

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: [6] When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

The night was divided into three watches. Someone aware of all three would be having a sleepless night. A cure for sleepless nights is to turn our thoughts to God. There are many reasons we can't sleep—illness, stress, worry—but sleepless nights can be turned into quiet times of reflection and worship. Use them to review how God has guided and helped you.

Romans 8:32

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Do you ever think that because you aren't good enough for God, he will not save you? Do you ever feel as if salvation is for everyone else but you? Then these verses are especially for you. If God gave his Son for you, he isn't going to hold back the gift of salvation! If Christ gave his life for you, he isn't going to turn around and condemn you! He will not withhold anything you need to live for him. The book of Romans is more than a theological explanation of God's redeeming grace—it is a letter of comfort and confidence addressed to you.

Chapter 7

Jesus is Your Guardian

Isaiah 43:2

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walks through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

God created Israel and made it special to him. God redeemed Israel and summoned them by name to be those who belong to him. God protected Israel in times of trouble. We are important to God, and he also summons us by name and gives us his name (Isaiah 43:7)! When we bear God's wonderful name, we must never do anything that would bring shame to it.

Going through rivers of difficulty will either cause you to drown or force you to grow stronger. If you go in your own strength, you are more likely to drown. If you invite the Lord to go with you, he will protect you.

2 Chron. 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.

Judah and Israel never learned! Although God had delivered them even when they were outnumbered (2 Chron. 13:3ff; 2 Chron. 14:9ff), they repeatedly sought help from pagan nations rather than from God. That Asa sought help from Aram was evidence of national spiritual decline. With help from God alone, Asa had defeated the Cushites in open battle. But his confidence in God had slipped, and now he sought only a human solution to his problem. When confronted by the prophet Hanani, Asa threw him in prison, revealing the true condition of his heart. It is not sin to use human means to solve our problems, but it is sin to trust them more than God, to think they are better than God's ways, or to leave God completely out of the problem-solving process.

Deut. 1:30

The Lord your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes;

We become fearful and immobile when we focus on the negative aspects of a situation. How much better it is to focus on the positive. God's direction and promises. When confronted with an important decision and you know what you should do, move out in faith. Focus on the positives while trusting God to overcome the negatives. Problems don't have to rob you of the victory.

Canaan was a land with giants and imposing fortresses. The "Anakites" may have been seven to nine feet tall. Many of the land's fortified cities had walls as high as 30 feet. The Israelites' fear was understandable, but not justified, for the all-powerful God had already promised them victory.

2 Thes. 3:3

But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

Beneath the surface of the routine of daily life, a fierce struggle among invisible spiritual powers is being waged. Our main defense is prayer that God will protect us from the evil one and that he will strengthen us. (See also comments on Ephes. 6:10-19 concerning our armor for spiritual warfare.) The following guidelines can help you prepare for and survive satanic attacks: (1) take the threat of spiritual attack seriously; (2) pray for strength and help from God; (3) study the Bible to recognize Satan's style and tactics; (4) memorize Scripture so it will be a source of help no matter where you are; (5) associate with those who speak the truth; and (6) practice what you are taught by spiritual leaders.

1 Samuel 2:9

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

Hannah praised God for his answer to her prayer for a son. The theme of her poetic prayer is her confidence in God's sovereignty and her thankfulness for everything he had done.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, modeled her own praise song, called the Magnificat, after Hannah's prayer (Luke 1:46-55). Like Hannah and Mary, we should be confident of God's ultimate control over the events in our lives, and we should be thankful for the ways God has blessed us. By praising God for all good gifts, we acknowledge his ultimate control over all the affairs of life.

Zeph. 3:17

The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

The Lord himself will remove his hand of judgment, disperse Israel's enemies, and come to live among his people. He will give them gladness. We sin when we pursue happiness by cutting ourselves off from fellowship with God—the only person who can make us truly happy. Zephaniah points out that gladness results when we allow God to be with us. We do that by faithfully following him and obeying his commands. Then God rejoices over us with singing. If you want to be happy, draw close to the source of happiness by obeying God.

1 Peter 3:12-13

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

[13] And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

Rather than fear our enemies, we are to quietly trust in God as the Lord of all. We must believe that Christ is truly in control of all events. When he rules our thoughts and emotions, we cannot be shaken by anything our enemies may do.

Deut. 33:27

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

Moses' song declares that God is our refuge, our only true security. How often we entrust our lives to other things—perhaps money, career, a noble cause, or a lifelong dream.

But our only true refuge is the eternal God, who always holds out his arms to catch us when the shaky supports that we trust collapse and we fall. No storm can destroy us when we take refuge in him. Those without God, however, must forever be cautious. One mistake may wipe them out. Living for God in this world may look like risky business. But it is the godless who are on shaky ground. Because God is our refuge, we can dare to be bold.

Psalm 91:7

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

God is a shelter, a refuge when we are afraid. The writer's faith in the Almighty God as Protector would carry him through all the dangers and fears of life. This should be a picture of our trust—trading all our fears for faith in him, no matter how intense our fears. To do this we must “dwell” and “rest” with him (Psalm 91:1). By entrusting ourselves to his protection and pledging our daily devotion to him, we will be kept safe.

Psalm 91:11

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

One of the functions of angels is to watch over believers (Hebrews 1:14). There are examples of guardian angels in Scripture (1 Kings 19:5; Daniel 6:22; Matthew 18:10; Luke 16:22; Acts 12:7), although there is no indication that one angel is assigned to each believer. Angels can also be God's messengers (Matthew 2:13; Acts 27:23-24). Angels are not visible, except on special occasions (Numbers 22:31; Luke 2:9). Psalm 91:11-12 were quoted by Satan when he tempted Jesus

(Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11). It is comforting to know that God watches over us even in times of great stress and fear.

Chapter 8

The Compassion of Jesus Christ

Isaiah 40:11

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

God is often pictured as a shepherd, gently caring for and guiding his flock. He is powerful (Isaiah 40:10), yet careful and gentle. He is called a shepherd (Psalm 23); the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14); the great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20); and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Note that the shepherd is caring for the most defenseless members of his society: children and those caring for them. This reinforces the prophetic theme that the truly powerful nation is not the one with a strong military, but rather the one that relies on God's caring strength.

Isaiah 53:4

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God's chosen servant as that Lamb. But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah's day look ahead to

the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

Isaiah 63:7-9

I will mention the loving kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.

[8] For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. [9] In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

In Jesus' day, the Greek word for *leprosy* was used for a variety of similar diseases, and some forms were contagious. If a person contracted the contagious type, a priest declared him a leper and banished him from his home and city. The leper was sent to live in a community with other lepers until he either got better or died. Yet when the leper begged Jesus to heal him, Jesus reached out and touched him, even though his skin was covered with the dread disease.

Sin is also an incurable disease—and we all have it. Only Christ's healing touch can miraculously take away our sins and restore us to real living. But first, just like the leper, we must realize our inability to cure ourselves and ask for Christ's saving help.

Matthew 8:3

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Matthew 8:16-17

When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: [17] That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

Matthew continues to show Jesus' kingly nature. Through a single touch, Jesus healed (Matthew 8:3, 15); when he spoke a single word, evil spirits fled his presence (Matthew 8:16).

Jesus has authority over all evil powers and all earthly disease. He also has power and authority to conquer sin. Sickness and evil are consequences of living in a fallen world. But in the future, when God removes all sin, there will be no more sickness and death. Jesus' healing miracles were a taste of what the whole world will one day experience in God's kingdom.

Matthew 9:36

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

The good news of the kingdom was that the promised and long-awaited Messiah had finally come. His healing miracles were a sign that his teaching was true.

Jesus needs workers who know how to deal with people's problems. We can comfort others and show them the way to live because we have been helped with our problems by God and his laborers (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

Ezekiel also compared Israel to sheep without a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:5-6). Jesus came to be the Shepherd, the One who could show people how to avoid life's pitfalls (see John 10:14).

Matthew 18:11-13

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. [12] How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? [13] And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Our concern for children must match God's treatment of them. Certain angels are assigned to watch over children, and they have direct access to God. These words ring out sharply in cultures where children are taken lightly, ignored, or aborted. If their angels have constant access to God, the least we can do is to allow children to approach us easily in spite of our far too busy schedules.

Mark 8:2-3

I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: [3] And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.

Just as Jesus was concerned about these people's need for food, he is concerned about our daily needs. At another time Jesus said, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need them" (Matthew 6:31-32). Do you have concerns that you think would not interest God? There is nothing too large for him to handle and no need too small to escape his interest.

Matthew 14:14

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Jesus sought solitude after the news of John's death. Sometimes we may need to deal with our grief alone. Jesus did not dwell on his grief, but returned to the ministry he came to do.

Jesus performed some miracles as signs of his identity. He used other miracles to teach important truths. But here we read that he healed people because he "had compassion on them." Jesus was, and is, a loving, caring, and feeling person. When you are suffering, remember that Jesus hurts with you. He has compassion on you.

Luke 19:41-42

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, [42] Saying, If thou had known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.

The Jewish leaders had rejected their King (Luke 19:47). They had gone too far. They had refused God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ when they were visited by God himself ("the time of God's coming"), and soon their nation would suffer. God did not turn away from the Jewish people who obeyed him, however. He continues to offer salvation to the people he loves, both Jews and Gentiles. Eternal life is within your reach. accept it while the opportunity is still offered.

Chapter 9

Jesus is Your Everything

Philip. 4:19

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

We can trust that God will always meet our needs. Whatever we need on earth he will always supply, even if it is the courage to face death as Paul did. Whatever we need in heaven he will supply. We must remember, however, the difference between our wants and our needs. Most people want to feel good and avoid discomfort or pain. We may not get all that we want. By trusting in Christ, our attitudes and appetites can change from wanting everything to accepting his provision and power to live for him.

Philip. 4:13

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Can we really do everything? The power we receive in union with Christ is sufficient to do his will and to face the challenges that arise from our commitment to doing it. He does not grant us superhuman ability to accomplish anything we can imagine without regard to his interests. As we contend for the faith we will face troubles, pressures, and trials. As they come, ask Christ to strengthen you.

Romans 8:37

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

No matter what happens to us, no matter where we are, we can never be lost to his love. Suffering should not drive us away from God, but help us to identify with him further and allow his love to reach us and heal us.

These verses contain one of the most comforting promises in all Scripture. Believers have always had to face hardships in many forms: persecution, illness, imprisonment, even death. These could cause them to fear that they have been abandoned by Christ. But Paul exclaims that it is *impossible* to be separated from Christ. His death for us is proof of his unconquerable love.

Nothing can stop Christ's constant presence with us. God tells us how great his love is so that we will feel totally secure in him. If we believe these overwhelming assurances, we will not be afraid.

John 15:7

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right. But Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him, like a branch attached to the vine. Apart from Christ our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the vine? If not, you are missing a special gift he has for you.

John 16:23-24

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you". [24] Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Jesus is talking about a new relationship between the believer and God. Previously, people approached God through priests. After Jesus' resurrection, any believer could approach God directly. A new day has dawned and now all believers are priests, talking with God personally and directly (see Hebrews 10:19-23). We approach God, not because of our own merit, but because Jesus, our great high priest, has made us acceptable to God.

2 Cor. 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Christians are brand-new people on the *inside*. The Holy Spirit gives them new life, and they are not the same anymore. We are not reformed, rehabilitated, or reeducated—we are re-created (new creations), living in vital union with Christ

(Col. 2:6-7). At conversion we are not merely turning over a new leaf; we are beginning a new life under a new Master.

Ephes. 3:20-21

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, [21] Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

In these verses, God is not talking about loss of salvation but rather about physical death. If the people back in Judah continued in their sins, they and their land and cities would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. If, on the other hand, the people would turn to God, God would spare them. God would hold Ezekiel responsible for his fellow Jews if he failed to warn them of the consequences of their sins. All people are individually responsible to God, but believers have a special responsibility to warn unbelievers of the consequences of rejecting God. If we fail to do this, God will hold us responsible for what happens to them. This should motivate us to begin sharing our faith with others—by both word and deed—and to avoid becoming callous or unconcerned in our attitude.

2 Cor. 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

People may hesitate to give generously to God if they worry about having enough money left over to meet their own needs. Paul assured the Corinthians that God was able to meet their needs. The person who gives only a little will receive only a little in return. Don't let a lack of faith keep you from giving freely and generously.

Our attitude when we give is more important than the amount we give. We don't have to be embarrassed if we can give only a small gift. God is concerned about *how* we give from the resources we have (see Mark 12:41-44). According to that standard, the giving of the Macedonian churches would be difficult to match (2 Cor. 8:3).

Psalm 68:19

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.

Chapter 10

Jesus Christ, Our Example

A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox or oxen. It is attached to a piece of equipment the oxen are to pull. A person may be carrying heavy burdens of (1) sin, (2) excessive demands of religious leaders (Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10), (3) oppression and persecution, or (4) weariness in the search for God.

Jesus frees people from all these burdens. The rest that Jesus promises is love, healing, and peace with God, not the end of all labor. A relationship with God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into spiritual productivity and purpose.

Matthew 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Mark 10:43-45

But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: [44] And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. [45] For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

James and John wanted the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom. But Jesus told them that true greatness comes in serving others. Peter, one of the disciples who had heard this message, expands the thought in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Most businesses, organizations, and institutions measure greatness by high personal achievement. In Christ's kingdom, however, service is the way to get ahead. The desire to be on top will hinder, not help. Rather than seeking to have your needs met, look for ways that you can minister to the needs of others.

John 10:4

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

At night, sheep were often gathered into a sheep pen to protect them from thieves, weather, or wild animals. The sheep pens were caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones or branches. The shepherd often slept in the

pen to protect the sheep. Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, Jesus, the good shepherd, cares for his flock (those who follow him). The prophet Ezekiel, in predicting the coming of the Messiah, called him a shepherd (Ezekiel 34:23).

John 13:34

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

John describes these few moments in clear detail. We can see that Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew about Judas and about Peter, but he did not change the situation, nor did he stop loving them. In the same way, Jesus knows exactly what you will do to hurt him. Yet he still loves you unconditionally and will forgive you whenever you ask for it. Judas couldn't understand this, and his life ended tragically. Peter understood, and despite his shortcomings, his life ended triumphantly because he never let go of his faith in the One who loved him.

To love others was not a new commandment (see Leviticus 19:18), but to love others as much as Christ loved others was revolutionary. Now we are to love others based on Jesus' sacrificial love for us. Such love will not only bring unbelievers to Christ; it will also keep believers strong and united in a world hostile to God. Jesus was a living example of God's love, as we are to be living examples of Jesus' love.

Jesus says that our Christlike love will show we are his disciples. Do people see petty bickering, jealousy, and division in your church? Or do they know you are Jesus' followers by your love for one another?

John 17:21-22

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. [22] And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

Jesus' great desire for his disciples was that they would become one. He wanted them unified as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love. Are you helping to unify the body of Christ, the church? You can pray for other Christians, avoid gossip, build others up, work together in humility, give your time and money, exalt Christ, and refuse to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Jesus prayed for unity among the believers based on the believers' unity with him and the Father. Christians can know unity among themselves if they are living in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the vine is united with all other branches doing the same.

Romans 13:14

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

How do we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ? First we identify with Christ by being baptized (Galatians 3:27). This shows our solidarity with other Christians and with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, we exemplify the qualities Jesus showed while he was here on earth (love, humility, truth, service). In a sense, we role-play what Jesus would do in our situation (see Ephes. 4:24-32; Col. 3:10-17). We also must not give our desires any opportunity to lead us into sin. Avoid those situations that open the door to gratifying sinful desires.

Romans 15:7

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

To accept Jesus' lordship in all areas of life means to share his values and his perspective. Just as we take Jesus' view on the authority of Scripture, the nature of heaven, and the resurrection, we are to have his attitude of love toward other Christians as well (have a "spirit of unity"). As we grow in faith and come to know Jesus better, we will become more capable of maintaining this attitude of loving unity throughout each day. Christ's attitude is explained in more detail in Phil. 2.

Ephes. 4:32

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

This is Christ's law of forgiveness as taught in the Gospels (Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:35; Mark 11:25). We also see it in the Lord's Prayer—"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." God does not forgive us *because* we forgive others, but solely because of his great mercy. As we come to understand his mercy, however, we will want to be like him. Having received forgiveness, we

will pass it on to others. Those who are unwilling to forgive have not become one with Christ, who was willing to forgive even those who crucified him (Luke 23:34).

Ephes. 5:2

And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

Just as children imitate their parents, we should imitate Christ. His great love for us led him to sacrifice himself so that we might live. Our love for others should be of the same kind—a love that goes beyond affection to self-sacrificing service

Rev. 3:21

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

At the end of each letter to these churches, the believers were urged to listen and take to heart what was written to them. Although a different message was addressed to each church, all the messages contain warnings and principles for everyone. Which letter speaks most directly to your church? Which has the greatest bearing on your own spiritual condition at this time? How will you respond?

Chapter 11

Jesus is Your Fellowship

1 John 1:3

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

As an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry, John was qualified to teach the truth about him. The readers of this letter had not seen and heard Jesus themselves, but they could trust that what John wrote was accurate. We are like those second and third-generation Christians. Though we have not personally seen, heard, or touched Jesus, we have the New Testament record of his eyewitnesses, and we can trust that they spoke the truth about him. See John 20:29.

John writes about having fellowship with other believers. There are three principles behind true Christian fellowship. First, our fellowship is grounded in the testimony of God's Word. Without this underlying strength, togetherness is impossible. Second, it is mutual, depending on the unity of believers. Third, it is renewed daily through the Holy Spirit. True fellowship combines social and spiritual interaction, and it is made possible only through a living relationship with Christ.

1 Cor. 1:9

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul guaranteed the Corinthian believers that God would consider them "blameless" when Christ returns (see Ephes. 1:7-10). This guarantee was not because of their great gifts or their shining performance, but because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for them through his death and resurrection. *All* who believe in the Lord Jesus will be considered blameless when Jesus Christ returns (see also 1 Thes. 3:13; Hebrews 9:28). If you have faith in Christ, even if it is weak, you *are* and *will be* saved.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

The Laodicean church was complacent and rich. They felt self-satisfied, but they didn't have Christ's presence among them. Christ knocked at the door of their hearts, but they were so busy enjoying worldly pleasures that they didn't notice that he was trying to enter. The pleasures of this world—money, security, material possessions—can be dangerous, because their temporary satisfaction makes us indifferent to God's offer of lasting satisfaction. If you find yourself feeling indifferent to church, to God, or to the Bible, you have begun to shut God out of your life. Leave the door of your heart constantly open to God, and you won't need

to worry about hearing his knock. Letting him in is your only hope for lasting fulfillment.

Jesus is knocking on the door of our hearts every time we sense we should turn to him. Jesus wants to have fellowship with us, and he wants us to open up to him. He is patient and persistent in trying to get through to us—not breaking and entering, but knocking. He allows us to decide whether or not to open our lives to him. Do you intentionally keep his life-changing presence and power on the other side of the door?

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Because the disciples were still expecting Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom and overthrow Rome, they found it hard to understand why he did not tell the world at large that he was the Messiah. Not everyone, however, could understand Jesus' message. Ever since Pentecost, the gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed in the whole world, and yet not everyone is receptive to it. Jesus saves the deepest revelations of himself for those who love and obey him.

Zech. 2:10

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord.

Judah had been taunted and mocked by the neighboring nations, Moab and Ammon, but God reminded them that he had “heard the insults. . . and the taunts” (Zeph. 2:8), and that the taunters would be punished for their pride (Zeph. 2:10). At times the whole world seems to mock God and those who have faith in him. When you are ridiculed, remember that God hears and will answer. Eventually, in God's timing, justice will be carried out.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Jesus looked ahead to a new day when he would be present with his followers not in body, but through his Holy Spirit. In the body of believers (the church), the sincere agreement of two people is more powerful than the superficial agreement

of thousands, because Christ's Holy Spirit is with them. Two or more believers, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, will pray according to God's will, not their own; thus their requests will be granted.

John 15:4-5

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. [5] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Many people try to be good, honest people who do what is right. But Jesus says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him, like a branch attached to the vine. Apart from Christ our efforts are unfruitful. Are you receiving the nourishment and life offered by Christ, the vine? If not, you are missing a special gift he has for you.

Philip. 2:1-2

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, [2] Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Selfish ambition can ruin a church, but genuine humility can build it. Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves (see Romans 12:3). It does not mean that we should put ourselves down. Before God, we are sinners, saved only by God's grace, but we *are* saved and therefore have great worth in God's kingdom. We are to lay aside selfishness and treat others with respect and common courtesy. Considering others' interests as more important than our own links us with Christ, who was a true example of humility.

Chapter 12

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

[Genesis 3:15](#)

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Satan is our enemy. He will do anything he can to get us to follow his evil, deadly path. The phrase “you will strike his heel” refers to Satan’s repeated attempts to defeat Christ during his life on earth. “He will crush your head” foreshadows Satan’s defeat when Christ rose from the dead. A strike on the heel is not deadly, but a crushing blow to the head is. Already God was revealing his plan to defeat Satan and offer salvation to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.

[Genesis 12:3](#)

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Abram, acting out of fear, asked Sarai to tell a half-truth by saying she was his sister. She *was* his half sister, but she was also his wife (see Genesis 20:12).

Abram's intent was to deceive the Egyptians. He feared that if they knew the truth, they would kill him to get Sarai. She would have been a desirable addition to Pharaoh's harem because of her wealth, beauty, and potential for political alliance. As Sarai's brother, Abram would have been given a place of honor. As her husband, however, his life would be in danger because Sarai could not enter Pharaoh's harem unless Abram was dead. So Abram lost faith in God's protection, even after all God had promised him, and told a half-truth. This shows how lying compounds the effects of sin. When he lied, Abram's problems multiplied.

Genesis 22:18

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Abraham received abundant blessings because he did not hold back, but obeyed God. First, God gave Abraham's descendants the ability to conquer their enemies. Second, God promised Abraham children and grandchildren who would in turn bless the whole earth. People's lives would be changed as a result of knowing of the faith of Abraham and his descendants. Most often we think of blessings as gifts to be enjoyed. But when God blesses us, his blessings are intended to overflow to others.

Psalm 2:7

I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

God is all-powerful. He created the world, and knew about the empires of the earth long before they came into being (Daniel 2:26-45). But pride and power cause nations and leaders to rebel against God and try to break free of him. Our world has many leaders who boast of their power, who rant and rave against God and his people, who promise to take over and form their own empires. But God laughs because any power they have comes from him, and he can also take it from them. We need not fear the boasts of tyrants—they are in God's hands.

Psalm 80:17

Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.

“The man at your right hand” is probably not the Messiah, but Israel, whom God calls elsewhere his “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22). The psalmist is making a plea that God would restore his mercy to Israel, the people he chose to bring his message into the world.

Isaiah 9:6

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

This child who would become their deliverer is the Messiah, Jesus. Matthew quotes these verses in describing Christ’s ministry (Matthew 4:15-16). The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali represent the northern kingdom as a whole. These were also the territories where Jesus grew up and often ministered; this is why they would see “a great light.”

Jeremiah 23:5

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

Jeremiah contrasted the present corrupt leaders with the coming Messiah, the perfect King who would come from David’s line to reign over Israel. The King is called a righteous Branch because he will sprout up from the stump of David’s fallen dynasty (Isaiah 11:1). This new growth will have God’s own characteristics. Like the Creator, the Branch will be righteous.

Acts 3:22

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

The time when God will “restore everything” refers to the second coming, the Last Judgment, and the removal of sin from the world.

Most Jews thought that Joshua was this prophet predicted by Moses (Deut. 18:15). Peter was saying that the prophet was Jesus Christ. Peter wanted to show them that

their long-awaited Messiah had come! He and all the apostles were calling the Jewish nation to realize what they had done to their Messiah, to repent, and to believe. From this point on in Acts, we see many Jews rejecting the gospel. So the message went also to the Gentiles, many of whom were open to receive Jesus.

Acts 13:23

Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:

Paul began where his listeners were and then introduced them to Christ. Because Paul was speaking to devout Jews, he began with the covenant, Abraham, David, and other familiar themes. Later, when speaking to the Greek philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:22-32), he would begin by talking about what he had observed in their city. In both cases, however, he centered the sermon around Christ and emphasized the resurrection. When you share the Good News, begin where your audience is—then tell them about Christ.

Chapter 13

The Voluntary Death of Jesus Christ

Isaiah 50:6

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

Isaiah 53:12

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

In the Old Testament, people offered animals as sacrifices for their sins. Here, the sinless servant of the Lord offers himself for our sins. He is the Lamb (Isaiah 53:7) offered for the sins of all people (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6-14). The Messiah suffered for our sakes, bearing our sins to make us acceptable to God. What can we say to such love? How will we respond to him?

“My righteous servant will justify many” tells of the enormous family of believers who will become righteous, not by their own works, but by the Messiah’s great work on the cross. They are justified because they have claimed Christ, the righteous servant, as their Savior and Lord (see Romans 10:9; 2 Cor. 5:21). Their life of sin is stripped away, and they are clothed with Christ’s goodness (Ephes. 4:22-24).

Matthew 26:39

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

How does Jesus’ blood relate to the new covenant? People under the old covenant (those who lived before Jesus) could approach God only through a priest and an animal sacrifice. Now all people can come directly to God through faith because Jesus’ death has made us acceptable in God’s eyes (Romans 3:21-24).

The old covenant was a shadow of the new (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:1ff), pointing forward to the day when Jesus himself would be the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. Rather than an unblemished lamb slain on the altar, the perfect Lamb of God was slain on the cross, a sinless sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven once and for all. All those who believe in Christ receive that forgiveness.

Again Jesus assured his disciples of victory over death and of their future with him. The next few hours would bring apparent defeat, but soon they would experience the power of the Holy Spirit and witness the great spread of the gospel message. And one day, they would all be together again in God’s new kingdom.

Matthew 26:42

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

Jesus used Peter’s drowsiness to warn him about the kinds of temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to keep watch and pray. Watching means being aware of the possibilities of temptation, sensitive to the subtleties, and spiritually equipped to fight it. Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can’t resist it alone. Prayer is essential because God’s strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan’s power.

Matthew 26:53-54

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

The man who cut off the servant's ear was Peter (John 18:10). Peter was trying to prevent what he saw as *defeat*. He didn't realize that Jesus had to die in order to gain *victory*. But Jesus demonstrated perfect commitment to his Father's will. His kingdom would not be advanced with swords, but with faith and obedience.

Mark 14:39

And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.

In times of great stress, we are vulnerable to temptation, even if we have a willing spirit. Jesus gave us an example of what to do to resist:

- (1) Pray to God (Mark 14:35);
- (2) Seek support of friends and loved ones (Mark 14:33, 37, 40-41);
- (3) Focus on the purpose God has given us (Mark 14:36).

Luke 9:51

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

Although Jesus knew he would face persecution and death in Jerusalem, he was determined to go there. That kind of resolve should characterize our lives too. When God gives us a course of action, we must move steadily toward our destination, no matter what potential hazards await us there.

John 10:17-18

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. [18] No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Jesus' death and resurrection, as part of God's plan for the salvation of the world, were under God's full control. No one could kill Jesus without his consent.

Chapter 14

Jesus is your Brother

Matthew 12:50

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Jesus was not denying his responsibility to his earthly family. On the contrary, he criticized the religious leaders for not following the Old Testament command to honor their parents (Matthew 15:1-9). He provided for his mother's security as he hung on the cross (John 19:25-27). His mother and brothers were present in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Instead Jesus was pointing out that spiritual relationships are as binding as physical ones, and he was paving the way for a new community of believers, our spiritual family.

Hebrews 2:11

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

We who have been set apart for God's service, cleansed, and made holy (sanctified) by Jesus now have the same Father he has, so he has made us his brothers and sisters. Various psalms look forward to Christ and his work in the world. Here the writer quotes a portion of Psalm 22, a Messianic psalm. Because God has adopted all believers as his children, Jesus calls them his brothers and sisters.

Romans 8:29

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

God's ultimate goal for us is to make us like Christ (1 John 3:2). As we become more and more like him, we discover our true selves, the persons we were created to be. How can we be conformed to Christ's likeness? By reading and heeding the Word, by studying his life on earth through the Gospels, by being filled with his Spirit, and by doing his work in the world.

Galatians 3:26

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

In Roman society, a youth coming of age laid aside the robe of childhood and put on a new toga. This represented his move into adult citizenship with full rights and responsibilities. Paul combined this cultural understanding with the concept of baptism. By becoming Christians and being baptized, the Galatian believers were becoming spiritually grown up and ready to take on the privileges and responsibilities of the more mature. Paul was saying that they had laid aside the old clothes of the law, and were putting on Christ's new robe of righteousness (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Ephes. 4:23-24).

John 1:12

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family (John 1:13). Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family (John 1:12). Have you asked Christ to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in Christ.

Ephes. 2:19

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

A church building is sometimes called God's house. In reality, God's household is not a building, but a group of people. He lives in us and shows himself to a

watching world through us. People can see that God is love and that Christ is Lord as we live in harmony with each other and in accordance with what God says in his Word. We are citizens of God's kingdom and members of his household.

1 John 3:1

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council (called the Sanhedrin). The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders whom Jesus and John the Baptist often criticized for being hypocrites (see the note on +Matthew 3:7 for more on the Pharisees). Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority and challenged their views. But Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well educated you are, you must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach you the truth about God.

Nicodemus came to Jesus personally, although he could have sent one of his assistants. He wanted to examine Jesus for himself to separate fact from rumor. Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid of what his peers, the Pharisees, would say about his visit, so he came after dark. Later, when he understood that Jesus was truly the Messiah, he spoke up boldly in his defense (John 7:50-51). Like Nicodemus, we must examine Jesus for ourselves—others cannot do it for us

Galatians 4:6-7

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. [7] Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The “basic principles of the world” are the elementary stages of religious practice, whether in the Jewish or pagan religion. Paul uses the illustration of slavery to show that before Christ came and died for sins, people were in bondage to the law. Thinking they could be saved by it, they became enslaved to trying—and failing—to keep it. But we who were once slaves are now God's very own children who have an intimate relationship with him. Because of Christ, there is no reason to be afraid of God. We can come boldly into his presence, knowing that he will welcome us as his family members.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

he Christian life is a process of becoming more and more like Christ (see Romans 8:29). This process will not be complete until we see Christ face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 3:21)

Chapter 15

Jesus is your Companion

Psalm 119:63

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

Proverbs 18:24

A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Loneliness is everywhere—many people feel cut off and alienated from others. Being in a crowd just makes people more aware of their isolation. We all need friends who will stick close, listen, care, and offer help when it is needed—in good times and bad. It is better to have one such friend than dozens of superficial acquaintances. Instead of wishing you could find a true friend, seek to become one. There are people who need your friendship. Ask God to reveal them to you, and then take on the challenge of being a true friend.

Hebrews 13:5

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

How can we learn to be content? Strive to live with less rather than desiring more; give away out of your abundance rather than accumulating more; relish what you have rather than resent what you're missing. See God's love expressed in what he has provided, and remember that money and possessions will all pass away. (See Phil. 4:11 for more on contentment, and 1 John 2:17 for the futility of earthly desires.)

We become content when we realize God's sufficiency for our needs. Christians who become materialistic are saying by their actions that God can't take care of them—or at least that he won't take care of them the way they want. Insecurity can lead to the love of money, whether we are rich or poor. The only antidote is to trust God to meet all our needs.

John 15:15-16

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. [16] Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Because Jesus Christ is Lord and Master, he should call us servants; instead he calls us friends. How comforting and reassuring to be chosen as Christ's friends. Because he is Lord and Master, we owe him our unqualified obedience, but most of all, Jesus asks us to obey him because we love him.

Jesus made the first choice—to love and to die for us, to invite us to live with him forever. We make the next choice—to accept or reject his offer. Without *his* choice, we would have no choice to make.

Isaiah 54:10

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.

God made a covenant with Noah that he has never broken (Genesis 9:8-17). Likewise, God made a covenant of peace with the people of Israel that the time would come when he would stop rebuking them, would restore their wealth, and would personally teach their children.

John 15:12-14

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. [13] Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. [14] Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

We are to love each other as Jesus loved us, and he loved us enough to give his life for us. We may not have to die for someone, but there are other ways to practice sacrificial love: listening, helping, encouraging, giving. Think of someone in

particular who needs this kind of love today. Give all the love you can, and then try to give a little more.

1 Cor. 1:9

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul guaranteed the Corinthian believers that God would consider them “blameless” when Christ returns (see Ephes. 1:7-10). This guarantee was not because of their great gifts or their shining performance, but because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for them through his death and resurrection. *All* who believe in the Lord Jesus will be considered blameless when Jesus Christ returns (see also 1 Thes. 3:13; Hebrews 9:28). If you have faith in Christ, even if it is weak, you *are* and *will be* saved.

1 John 1:3

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

As an eyewitness to Jesus’ ministry, John was qualified to teach the truth about him. The readers of this letter had not seen and heard Jesus themselves, but they could trust that what John wrote was accurate. We are like those second and third-generation Christians. 20:29.

John writes about having fellowship with other believers. There are three principles behind true Christian fellowship. First, our fellowship is grounded in the testimony of God’s Word. Without this underlying strength, togetherness is impossible. Second, it is mutual, depending on the unity of believers. Third, it is renewed daily through the Holy Spirit. True fellowship combines social and spiritual interaction, and it is made possible only through a living relationship with Christ.

John 14:18

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

When Jesus said, “I will come to you,” he meant it. Although Jesus ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in believers, and to have the Holy Spirit is to have Jesus himself

Chapter 16

Jesus is Your Righteousness

Romans 8:3-4

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: [4] That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Jesus gave himself as a *sacrifice* (“sin offering”) for our sins. In Old Testament times, animal sacrifices were continually offered at the temple. The sacrifices showed the Israelites the seriousness of sin: blood had to be shed before sins could be pardoned (see Leviticus 17:11). But animal blood could not really remove sins (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifices could only point to Jesus’ sacrifice, which paid the penalty for all sins.

Paul summarized what Christ does for us when he saves us. We move from a life full of sin to one where we are led by God’s Holy Spirit. *All* our sins, not merely some, are washed away. Washing refers to the water of baptism, which is a sign of salvation. In becoming a Christian, the believer acknowledges Christ as Lord and recognizes Christ’s saving work. We gain eternal life with *all* its treasures. We have *renewal* by the Holy Spirit, and he continually renews our hearts. None of this occurs because we earned or deserved it; it is all God’s gift.

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in these verses because all three participate in the work of salvation. Based upon the redemptive work of his Son,

the Father forgives and sends the Holy Spirit to wash away our sins and continually renew us.

Romans 5:17

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

What a promise this is to those who love Christ! We can reign over sin's power, over death's threats, and over Satan's attacks. Eternal life is ours now and forever. In the power and protection of Jesus Christ, we can overcome temptation. See Romans 8:17 for more on our privileged position in Christ.

Romans 3:22-26

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: [23] For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [24] Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: [25] Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

After all this bad news about our sinfulness and God's condemnation, Paul gives the wonderful news. There is a way to be declared not guilty—by trusting Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Trusting means putting our confidence in Christ to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he taught us. God's solution is available to all of us regardless of our background or past behavior.

Galatians 3:6-7

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. [7] Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

The main argument of the Judaizers was that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to become Christians. Paul exposed the flaw in this argument by showing that real children of Abraham are those who have faith, not those who keep the law. Abraham himself was saved by his faith (Genesis 15:6). All believers in every age and from every nation share Abraham's blessing. This is a comforting promise to us, a great heritage for us, and a solid foundation for living.

Philip. 3:9

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

No amount of law-keeping, self-improvement, discipline, or religious effort can make us right with God. Righteousness comes only from God. We are made righteous (receive right standing with him) by trusting in Christ. He exchanges our sin and shortcomings for his complete righteousness. See 2 Cor. 5:21 for more on Christ's gift of righteousness.

1 Cor. 1:30

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

God is the source of and the reason for our personal and living relationship with Christ. Our union and identification with Christ results in our having God's wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), possessing right standing with God (*righteousness*, 2 Cor. 5:21), being holy (1 Thes. 4:3-7), and having the penalty for our sins paid by Jesus (*redemption*, Mark 10:45).

2 Cor. 5:21

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

When we trust in Christ, we make an exchange—our sin for his righteousness. Our sin was poured into Christ at his crucifixion. His righteousness is poured into us at our conversion. This is what Christians mean by Christ's atonement for sin. In the world, bartering works only when two people exchange goods of relatively equal value. But God offers to trade his righteousness for our sin—something of immeasurable worth for something completely worthless. How grateful we should be for his kindness to us.

Chapter 17

Jesus is Our Saviour

Titus 3:5-6

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; [6] Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

Paul summarized what Christ does for us when he saves us. We move from a life full of sin to one where we are led by God's Holy Spirit. *All* our sins, not merely some, are washed away. Washing refers to the water of baptism, which is a sign of salvation. In becoming a Christian, the believer acknowledges Christ as Lord and recognizes Christ's saving work. We gain eternal life with *all* its treasures. We have *renewal* by the Holy Spirit, and he continually renews our hearts. None of this occurs because we earned or deserved it; it is all God's gift.

2 Tim. 1:9

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

God loves us, called us, and sent Christ to die for us. We can have eternal life through faith in him, because he broke the power of death with his resurrection. We do not deserve to be saved, but God offers us salvation anyway. What we must do is believe in him and accept his offer.

1 John 4:14

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit. God's presence in our lives is proof that we really belong to him. He also gives us the power to love (Romans 5:5; Romans 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:22). Rely on that power as you reach out to others. As you do so, you will gain confidence. See also Romans 8:16.

Jesus is our Security

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The term *new birth* refers to spiritual birth (regeneration)—the Holy Spirit’s act of bringing believers into God’s family. Jesus used this concept of new birth when he explained salvation to Nicodemus (see John 3).

Do you need encouragement? Peter’s words offer joy and hope in times of trouble, and he bases his confidence on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We’re called into a *living* hope of eternal life (1 Peter 1:3). Our hope is not only for the future; eternal life begins when we trust Christ and join God’s family. No matter what pain or trial we face in this life, we know that it is not our final experience. Eventually we will live with Christ forever.

Philip. 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

The God who began a good work in us continues it throughout our lifetime and will finish it when we meet him face to face. God’s work *for* us began when Christ died on the cross in our place. His work *in* us began when we first believed. Now the Holy Spirit lives in us, enabling us to be more like Christ every day. Paul is describing the process of Christian growth and maturity that began when we accepted Jesus and continues until Christ returns.

John 6:37

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

Jesus did not work independently of God the Father, but in union with him. This should give us even more assurance of being welcomed into God’s presence and being protected by him. Jesus’ purpose was to do the will of God, not to satisfy Jesus’ human desires. When we follow Jesus, we should have the same purpose.

Jude 1:24-25

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, [25] To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

To be sinless and perfect (“without fault”) will be the ultimate condition of the believer when he or she finally sees Christ face to face. When Christ appears, and we are given our new bodies, we will be like Christ (1 John 3:2). Coming into Christ’s presence will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine!

The audience to whom Jude wrote was vulnerable to heresies and to temptations toward immoral living. Jude encouraged the believers to remain firm in their faith and trust in God’s promises for their future. This was all the more important because they were living in a time of increased apostasy. We too are living in the last days, much closer to the end than were the original readers of this letter. We too are vulnerable to doctrinal error. We too are tempted to give in to sin. Although there is much false teaching around us, we need not be afraid or give up in despair—God can keep us from falling, and he guarantees that if we remain faithful, he will bring us into his presence and give us everlasting joy.

Psalm 23:6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, at a banquet it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. Hosts were also expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with God. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us through life to bring us into his house forever.

Chapter 18

The Return of Jesus Christ

1 Thes. 4:13-18

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope

The Thessalonians were wondering why many of their fellow believers had fallen asleep (died) and what would happen to them when Christ returned. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to understand that death is not the end of the story. When Christ returns, all believers—dead and alive—will be reunited, never to suffer or die again.

[14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

What does Paul mean when he says, “according to the Lord’s own word”? Either this was something that the Lord had revealed directly to Paul, or it was a teaching of Jesus that had been passed along orally by the apostles and other Christians.

[15] For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

[16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. [18] Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Because Jesus Christ came back to life, so will all believers. All Christians, including those living when Christ returns, will live with Christ forever. Therefore, we need not despair when loved ones die or world events take a tragic turn. God will turn our tragedies to triumphs, our poverty to riches, our pain to glory, and our defeat to victory. All believers throughout history will stand reunited in God’s very presence, safe and secure.

As Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the promise of the resurrection, so we should comfort and reassure each other with this great hope.

Acts 1:11

Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

After 40 days with his disciples (Acts 1:3), Jesus returned to heaven. The two men dressed in white were angels who proclaimed to the disciples that one day Jesus would return in the same way he went—bodily and visibly. History is not haphazard or cyclical; it is moving toward a specific point—the return of Jesus to judge and rule over the earth. We should be ready for his sudden return (1 Thes. 5:2), not by standing around “looking into the sky,” but by working hard to share the gospel so that others will be able to share in God’s great blessings.

1 Cor. 15:51-57

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

We all face limitations. Those who have physical, mental, or emotional disabilities are especially aware of this. Some may be blind, but they can see a new way to live. Some may be deaf, but they can hear God’s Good News. Some may be lame, but they can walk in God’s love. In addition, they have the encouragement that those disabilities are only temporary. Paul tells us that we all will be given new bodies when Christ returns and that these bodies will be without disabilities, never to die or become sick. This can give us hope in our suffering.

[53] For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. [54] So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. [55] O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? [56] The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

Satan seemed to be victorious in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and at the cross of Jesus. But God turned Satan’s apparent victory into defeat when Jesus Christ rose from the dead (Col. 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). Thus death is no longer a source of dread or fear. Christ overcame it, and one day we will also. The law will no longer make sinners out of us who cannot keep it. Death has been defeated, and we have hope beyond the grave.

[57] But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“We will not all sleep” means that Christians alive at that day will not have to die but will be transformed immediately. A trumpet blast will usher in the new heaven and earth. The Jews would understand the significance of this because trumpets were always blown to signal the start of great festivals and other extraordinary events (Numbers 10:10).

Luke 21:25-28

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; [26] Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

[27] And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [28] And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

The picture of the coming persecutions and natural disasters is gloomy, but ultimately it is a cause not for worry but for great joy. When believers see these events happening, they will know that the return of their Messiah is near, and they can look forward to his reign of justice and peace. Rather than being terrified by what is happening in our world, we should confidently await Christ's return to bring justice and restoration to his people.

Matthew 24:27

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Jesus' warnings about false teachers still hold true. Upon close examination it becomes clear that many nice-sounding messages don't agree with God's message in the Bible. Only a solid foundation in God's Word can equip us to perceive the errors and distortions in false teaching.

In times of persecution even strong believers will find it difficult to be loyal. To keep from being deceived by false messiahs, we must understand that Jesus' return will be unmistakable (Mark 13:26); no one will doubt that it is he. If you have to be told that the Messiah has come, then he hasn't (Matthew 24:27). Christ's coming will be obvious to everyone.

Matthew 24:29-31

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: [30] And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. [31] And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The nations of the earth will mourn because unbelievers will suddenly realize they have chosen the wrong side. Everything they have scoffed about will be happening, and it will be too late for them.

John 14:1-4

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. [4] And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

We may wish we could perform a miraculous act that would convince everyone once and for all that Jesus is the Lord. But we see here that even if we could perform a miracle, it wouldn't convince everyone. God gave these men power to do great wonders as confirmation of the message of grace, but people were still divided. Don't spend your time and energy wishing for miracles. Sow your seeds of Good News on the best ground you can find in the best way you can, and leave the convincing to the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 19

Jesus Christ is Rejected

Psalm 118:22

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

Jesus referred to this verse when he spoke of being rejected by his own people (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17). Although he was rejected, Jesus is now the "capstone," the most important part of the church (Acts 4:11; Ephes. 2:20;

1 Peter 2:6-7). The capstone is the center stone in the top of an arch, holding the whole arch together.

Isaiah 8:14

And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Isaiah, along with most of the prophets, was viewed as a traitor because he did not support Judah's national policies. He called the people to commit themselves first to God, and then to the king. He even predicted the overthrow of the government.

Isaiah 53:1-4

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

This chapter continues to speak of the Messiah, Jesus, who would suffer for the sins of all people. Such a prophecy is astounding! Who would believe that God would choose to save the world through a humble, suffering servant rather than a glorious king? The idea is contrary to human pride and worldly ways. But God often works in ways we don't expect.

[2] For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic in the physical appearance of this servant. Israel would miscalculate the servant's importance—they would consider him an ordinary man. But even though Jesus would not attract a large following based on his physical appearance, he would bring salvation and healing. Many people miscalculate the importance of Jesus' life and work, and they need faithful Christians to point out his extraordinary nature.

[3] He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

This man of sorrows was despised and rejected by those around him, and he is still despised and rejected by many today. Some reject Christ by standing against him. Others despise Christ and his great gift of forgiveness. Do you despise him, reject him, or accept him?

[4] Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

How could an Old Testament person understand the idea of Christ dying for our sins (our transgressions and iniquities)—actually bearing the punishment that we deserved? The sacrifices suggested this idea, but it is one thing to kill a lamb, and something quite different to think of God’s chosen servant as that Lamb. But God was pulling aside the curtain of time to let the people of Isaiah’s day look ahead to the suffering of the future Messiah and the resulting forgiveness made available to all mankind.

Matthew 8:34

And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

Why did the people ask Jesus to leave? Unlike their own pagan gods, Jesus could not be contained, controlled, or appeased. They feared Jesus’ supernatural power, a power that they had never before witnessed. And they were upset about losing a herd of pigs more than they were glad about the deliverance of the demon-possessed men. Are you more concerned about property and programs than people? Human beings are created in God’s image and have eternal value. How foolish and yet how easy it is to value possessions, investments, and even animals above human life. Would you rather have Jesus leave you than finish his work in you?

Matthew 26:31-35

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. [32] But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. [33] Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. [34] Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. [35] Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

All the disciples declared that they would die before disowning Jesus. A few hours later, however, they all scattered. Talk is cheap. It is easy to say we are devoted to Christ, but our claims are meaningful only when they are tested in the crucible of persecution. How strong is your faith? Is it strong enough to stand up under intense trial?

Mark 5:17

And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

After such a wonderful miracle of saving a man's life, why did the people want Jesus to leave? They were undoubtedly afraid of his supernatural power. They may have also feared that Jesus would continue destroying their pigs. They would rather give up Jesus than lose their source of income and security.

Luke 11:23-26

He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. [24] When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. [25] And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. [26] Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

A similar and possibly separate event is reported in Matthew 12:22-45 and Mark 3:20-30. The event described by Luke happened in Judea while the other took place in Galilee. According to Luke, Jesus spoke to the crowds; in Matthew and Mark, he accused the Pharisees.

Luke 17:25

But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

Many will claim to be the Messiah and many will claim that Jesus has returned—and people will believe them. Jesus warns us never to take such reports seriously, no matter how convincing they may sound. When Jesus returns, his power and presence will be evident to everyone. No one will need to spread the message because all will see for themselves.

Life will be going on as usual on the day Christ returns. There will be no warning. Most people will be going about their everyday tasks, indifferent to the demands of God. They will be as surprised by Christ's return as the people in Noah's day were by the flood (Genesis 6-8) or the people in Lot's day by the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). We don't know the time of Christ's return, but we do know that he is coming. He may come today, tomorrow, or centuries in the future. Whenever he comes, we must be morally and spiritually ready. Live as if Jesus were returning today.

Chapter 20

The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Psalm 88:18

Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.

Mark 16:19

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the disciples (Acts 1:9). Jesus' sitting at God's right hand signifies the completion of his work, his authority as God, and his coronation as King.

Luke 24:50-51

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. [51] And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

As the disciples stood and watched, Jesus began rising into the air, and soon he disappeared into heaven. Seeing Jesus leave must have been frightening, but the disciples knew that Jesus would keep his promise to be with them through the Holy Spirit. This same Jesus, who lived with the disciples, who died and was buried, and who rose from the dead, loves us and promises to be with us always. We can get to know him better through studying the Scriptures, praying, and allowing the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus.

Jesus' physical presence left the disciples when he returned to heaven (Acts 1:9), but the Holy Spirit soon came to comfort them and empower them to spread the gospel of salvation (Acts 2:1-4).

Today Jesus' work of salvation is completed, and he is sitting at God's right hand, where he has authority over heaven and earth.

Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus as the perfect example of a life lived according to God's plan—as a child living in obedience to his parents and yet amazing the religious leaders in the temple, as an adult serving God and others through preaching and healing, and finally as a condemned man suffering without complaint.

This emphasis was well suited to Luke's Greek audience, who placed high value on being an example and improving oneself, and who often discussed the meaning of perfection. The Greeks, however, had a difficult time understanding the spiritual importance of the physical world. To them, the spiritual was always more important than the physical.

To help them understand the God-man who united the spiritual and the physical, Luke emphasized that Jesus was not a phantom human but a real human being who healed people and fed them because he was concerned with their physical health as well as the state of their souls.

John 14:28

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

The end result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is deep and lasting peace. Unlike worldly peace, which is usually defined as the absence of conflict, this peace is confident assurance in any circumstance; with Christ's peace, we have no need to fear the present or the future. If your life is full of stress, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with Christ's peace (see Phil. 4:6-7 for more on experiencing God's peace).

Sin, fear, uncertainty, doubt, and numerous other forces are at war within us. The peace of God moves into our hearts and lives to restrain these hostile forces and offer comfort in place of conflict. Jesus says he will give us that peace if we are willing to accept it from him.

As God the Son, Jesus willingly submits to God the Father. On earth, Jesus also submitted to many of the physical limitations of his humanity (Phil. 2:6).

Ephes. 2:8-10

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: [9] Not of works, lest any man should boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

When someone gives you a gift, do you say, "That's very nice—now how much do I owe you?" No, the appropriate response to a gift is "Thank you." Yet how often Christians, even after they have been given the gift of salvation, feel obligated to try to work their way to God. Because our salvation and even our faith are gifts, we should respond with gratitude, praise, and joy.

We become Christians through God's unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or act of service on our part.

However, out of gratitude for this free gift, we will seek to help and serve others with kindness, love, and gentleness, and not merely to please ourselves. While no action or work we do can help us obtain salvation, God's intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service. We are not saved merely for our own benefit but to serve Christ and build up the church (Ephes. 4:12).

We are God's workmanship (work of art, masterpiece). Our salvation is something only God can do. It is his powerful, creative work in us. If God considers us his works of art, we dare not treat ourselves or others with disrespect or as inferior work.

Hebrews 4:14

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

Christ is superior to the priests, and his priesthood is superior to their priesthood. To the Jews, the high priest was the highest religious authority in the land. He alone entered the Holy of Holies in the temple once a year to make atonement for the sins of the whole nation (Leviticus 16). Like the high priest, Jesus mediates between God and us. As humanity's representative, he intercedes for us before God. As God's representative, he assures us of God's forgiveness. Jesus has more authority than the Jewish high priests because he is truly God and truly man. Unlike the high priest who could go before God only once a year, Christ is always at God's right hand, interceding for us. He is always available to hear us when we pray.

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Among references to priests, tabernacles, sacrifices, and other ideas unfamiliar to us, we come to this description of Christ as our mediator, appearing in God's presence on our behalf. We can relate to this role and be encouraged by it. Christ is on our side at God's side. He is our Lord and Savior. He is not there to convince or remind God that our sins are forgiven, but to present both our needs and our service for him as an offering (see Hebrews 7:25).

All people die physically, but Christ died so that we would not have to die spiritually. We can have wonderful confidence in his saving work for us, doing away with sin—past, present, and future.

He has forgiven our past sin—when he died on the cross, he sacrificed himself once for all (Hebrews 9:26); he has given us the Holy Spirit to help us deal with present sin; he appears for us now in heaven as our high priest (Hebrews 9:24); and

he promises to return (Hebrews 9:28) and raise us to eternal life in a world where sin will be banished.

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