

2019



MCLEAN BIBLE CHURCH



*JOIN US
CHRISTMAS EVE
AT A LOCATION
NEAR YOU*



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24

LOUDOUN | 4 pm, 5:30 pm
44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, VA

MONTGOMERY COUNTY | 4 pm, 6 pm
12440 Parklawn Dr, Rockville, MD

PRINCE WILLIAM | 4:30 pm, 6 pm
10002 Battleview Parkway, Manassas, VA

TYSONS* | 2 pm, 4 pm, 6 pm, 8 pm
8925 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA

Live Translations:

ASL: 6 pm | Chinese: 4 pm, 8 pm | Korean: 6 pm | Spanish: 4 pm

**Are you a part of MBC Arlington? Join us at MBC Tysons.*

mcleanbible.org/christmas



HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. (Ruth 1:22)

This is how the first chapter of Ruth ends, and it's one of the most tragic chapters imaginable. An Israelite named Naomi had left Bethlehem with her husband because of a famine there, and the couple had taken their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to Moab. If you look at the history of the Moabites in the Old Testament up to this point, it's clear that Moab was a despised place.

While in Moab, Naomi's husband and her two sons died, and she is left alone with the wives of her two sons. These two Moabite daughters-in-law are named Orpah and Ruth, and Naomi urges them to stay in Moab while she goes back to Bethlehem with the hope that maybe God will provide for her. Orpah stays, but Ruth "clung to her" (Ruth 1:14).

When Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, everyone takes notice. "It's Naomi. You're back." But Naomi tells them not to call her Naomi but to call her Mara (a Hebrew word that means bitter), "for," she says, "the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (20).

Naomi feels empty and barren. In a sense, she's hopeless, and this is what I love about today's verse. It says that Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem "at the beginning of barley harvest" (22). It's not

a time of famine anymore in Bethlehem. This is a time of harvest, and not just any harvest, but a harvest that will lead to unimaginable blessing for Ruth and Naomi, and, as we'll eventually see at the end of this story, for generations to come, ultimately culminating in Jesus.

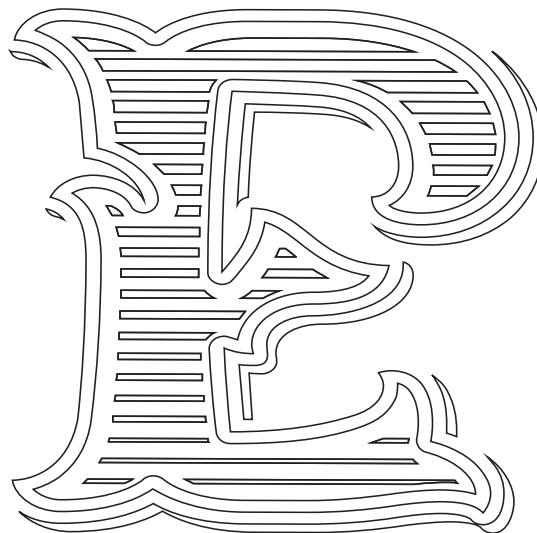
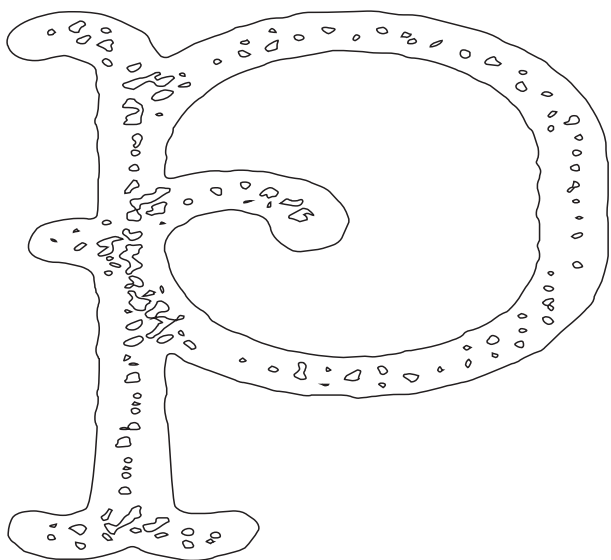
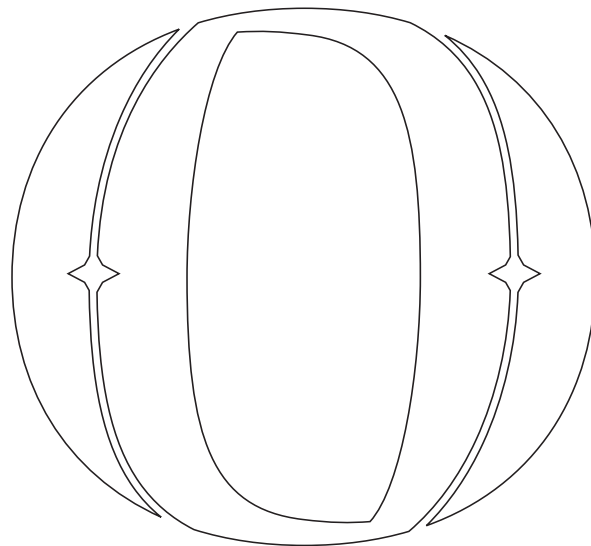
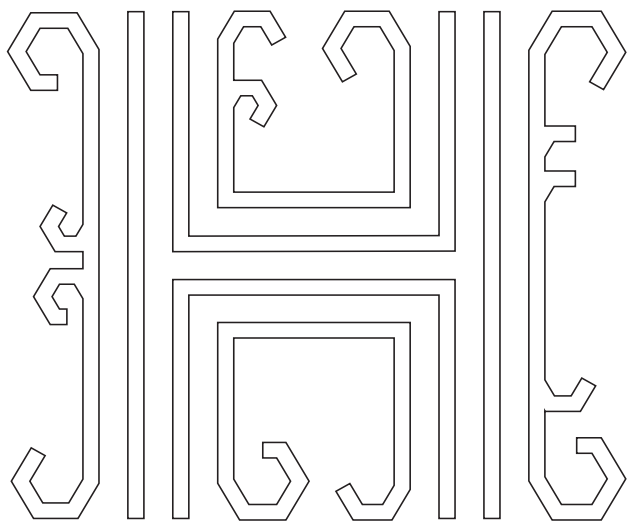
You, or someone you know, may be walking through dark, difficult times. You may feel hopeless or tempted to despair. Hear this good news: Our God has a track record of taking the darkest days and shining light in the brightest ways. He takes the most hopeless situations and totally transforms them by His grace into the most hopeful situations.



PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Based on the promises God has given to those who are in Christ, pray that He would grant you (and those you know) the grace to persevere in faith and hope, even through the darkest of days.

COLORING PAGE



H A P P E N S

WALKING BY FAITH

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
(Genesis 12:1–3)

As we read about God’s astounding promise to Abram—his name was later changed to Abraham—try to put yourself in his shoes. At this point in the story, nothing had actually changed, practically speaking, in Abraham’s life. He still had to get up the next day and decide whether to take his family to this new land without knowing exactly where it was or what the journey would involve. The question was, *Would he trust God’s promise?*

Throughout the rest of Abraham’s life, and throughout Scripture (see Romans 4 and Galatians 3), Abraham is known as a man who did trust God. In fact, Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham “believed the Lord, and he [the Lord] counted it to him as righteousness.” From the very beginning of the Bible, then, we see a pattern for those who have a right relationship with God and walk in obedience to Him. They do so by faith.

Now, to be clear, biblical faith is not a blind faith where you just close your eyes, step out into nothingness, and hope that someone catches you. No, Abraham trusted in promises that God had

clearly given, which is what we see throughout the Bible when people put their faith in God. This is what faith should look like in our lives as well.

We are saved from our sins by trusting in the promises of God. God says that if you “confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). So in order to be saved and enter into a right relationship with God, we must trust that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead as Lord of all.

So as we think about Christ’s first coming, or advent, and the anticipation of His second coming, let’s remember those like Abraham who went before us. They didn’t have all the details of what God’s redemption would look like, but they had His promises. And that was enough.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Thank God that He is faithful and trustworthy, and ask Him to strengthen your faith in His promises so that you might walk in glad obedience to His Word.



SOME OF GOD'S PROMISES

- The Lord my God will be with me wherever I go. (Joshua 1:9)
- God will keep me in perfect peace if my mind is “stayed” on Him. (Isaiah 26:3)
- “I (the Lord) will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)
- “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)
- He cares for me. (1 Peter 5:7)
- If I remain in Him and His words remain in me, whatever I ask will be given to me. (John 15:7)
- If I seek to live godly in Christ Jesus, I will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)
- I am justified freely by His grace. (Romans 3:24)
- I have peace with God because I've been justified by faith in Jesus. (Romans 5:1)
- I have access to God's grace. (Romans 5:2)
- There is no condemnation for me because I am in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)
- The Holy Spirit will help me to pray. (Romans 8:26-27)
- All things work together for my good. (Romans 8:28)
- Nothing will separate me from the love of Christ. (Romans 8:35)
- I shall bear the likeness (and resurrection body) of Jesus, the ‘man from heaven.’ (1 Corinthians 15:49)
- My labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)
- God has created good works for me to walk in today. (Ephesians 2:10)
- I am being transformed into His likeness. (2 Corinthians 3:17)
- God comforts the downcast, including me. (2 Corinthians 7:6)
- God is able to make all grace abound to me, so all my needs will be met. (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- I am worth (to God) more than the birds that He feeds. (Matthew 6:26)
- God will supply all my needs. (Philippians 4:19)
- God's grace will be sufficient for me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- I have an inheritance. (Ephesians 1:14)
- I have been brought near by the blood of Jesus. (Ephesians 2:13)
- I may approach God with freedom and confidence. (Ephesians 3:12)
- The Father has qualified me to share in the inheritance of the saints. (Colossians 1:12)
- Christ now lives in me! (Colossians 1:27)
- God is faithful and will sanctify me. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)
- God will repay with trouble those who trouble me. (2 Thessalonians 1:6)
- God has given me a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)
- I have a crown of righteousness awaiting me, because I long for His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8)
- God won't lie to me, because God cannot lie. (Titus 1:2)
- Jesus will help me when I'm tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)
- Varied trials will lead to my maturity. (James 1:2)
- If I ask for wisdom from God, He will give it to me. (James 1:5)
- If I resist the devil, he will take a hike. (James 4:7)
- If I draw near to God, He will draw near to me. (James 4:8)
- Prayer is effective. (James 5:16)
- After I have suffered for a little while, He will strengthen, confirm and establish me. (1 Peter 5:10)
- A new heaven and earth await me, called the “home of righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:13)
- He forgives and cleanses me as I confess my sins to Him. (1 John 1:9)
- When Jesus re-appears, I'll be made like Him. (1 John 3:2)
- God has given me eternal life. (1 John 5:11)

*10 WAYS I
WILL BE MORE
GENEROUS THIS
CHRISTMAS*

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

LOOKING AND LIVING FOR OUR FUTURE REWARD

*And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.
(Genesis 47:29-31)*

Near the end of the book of Genesis, we get to listen in on a significant exchange between Joseph and his father, Jacob, who was about to die. Jacob, who is also known as Israel, had settled in Egypt with his sons. The family had great possessions, and they were fruitful and multiplying greatly in Egypt as a result of God's provision. But when Jacob got near the end of his life, he said, "I don't want to be buried here."

So why would Jacob not want to be buried in Egypt? Remember, God had promised long ago to give His people a land where they would dwell (Genesis 12:1-9), and in that land He would display His glory and shower His blessing on His people for the spread of His glory to all peoples. And Jacob essentially says, "That's where I belong."

Jacob's refusal to be buried in Egypt is even more remarkable when you consider that Egypt was a place of prosperity at this time, largely due to

God's work through Joseph, Jacob's son. Yet Jacob wanted to be buried in Canaan. He trusted in what God had promised. Here's how the author of Hebrews describes the forward-looking faith of God's people:

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."
(Hebrews 11:13-16)



May we too lift our eyes from this world and all that it offers and look to the promises of God, for He has called us to another world, a heavenly country, a new heaven and a new earth.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Ask God to give you an eternal perspective on your circumstances so that you might live for His kingdom rather than the temporary possessions and pleasures of this world.



10 WAYS TO SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY THIS CHRISTMAS

1. PAY FOR LOADS AT THE LAUNDROMAT

- Grab your spare change and head to your local laundromat!
- Pay for the cleaning and drying of others' clothing.
- Use your generosity as a means to share God's generosity to us on the cross.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. (Proverbs 11:25)

2. CREATE CHRISTMAS CARE PACKAGES TO KEEP READY IN YOUR CAR

- Create care packages with fun Christmas snacks/socks/gloves.
- Include tracts and/or Bibles.
- Offer them to others, especially homeless people, with invites to MBC Christmas services.

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40)

3. ASK NEIGHBORS OR COWORKERS HOW YOU CAN SERVE THEM

- Holidays can be tough for many. Ask people how they are doing and be intentional about listening.
- Perhaps someone has physical needs and could use a helping hand - offer them your time!

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. (James 1:19)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

4. THROW A HOLIDAY BLOCK PARTY

- Open your home to others for a warm meal and friendly conversation.
- Invite people that you want to get to know better perhaps even your next-door neighbors.
- Use the opportunity to share Christ.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14:13-14)

5. BRING A MEAL TO NEW PARENTS

- Having a newborn changes your life in a great, yet chaotic way. Busy parents would be so blessed by you cooking or buying them food/groceries.

Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)



6. CALL A NEIGHBOR OR OLD FRIEND - PRAY FOR THEM

- Take time from the busy-ness of life and the season to call an old friend or neighbor. Ask the Lord to bring someone to mind that may need some holiday cheer.
- Use the conversation to share the love of Christ through the gospel.
- For those who already are saved by grace, use this as an opportunity to encourage them with what the Lord has been teaching you or Scripture you've been reading lately.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

7. BAKE OR BUY COOKIES, AND TAKE THEM TO A LOCAL POLICE OR FIRE STATION

- Bringing homemade cookies or even a bag of caramel popcorn could really brighten their day.
- Brainstorm with your family which police or fire station you might pay a visit!

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

8. GO CAROLING

- Our forgiveness and relationship with God through Christ cause us to want to sing His praises.
- Grab the family and some friends, and sing some carols in your neighborhood. Protip: Use songs that share the gospel message!

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! (Psalm 98:4)

9. CLEAN UP YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

- This world belongs to the Lord. It is a gift from Him, on loan. Let's be good stewards of everything God has.
- Create a group text, and just as the Son of man came to serve and not be served, invite some buddies to pick up litter in your neighborhood. If people walk by, tell them WHAT you're doing, WHY you're doing it, and WHO is the one this earth belongs to!

If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. (Psalm 50:12)

10. OFFER A FREE CLASS OR COMMUNITY GATHERING

- Get creative! How has the Lord gifted you? Are you an excellent photographer? Baker? Card-maker? Home decorator? Tool-shed builder? What could you teach others?
- Invite people from your community for a time of fellowship, fun, and bonding this holiday.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

THE PRIVILEGE OF HIS PRESENCE

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.
(Exodus 40:34–38)*

Imagine seeing and experiencing what these Israelites saw. God was visibly leading them with a cloud that settled on the tabernacle by day and then with a fire filling the tabernacle by night. So as the cloud moves, you move. As the cloud stops, you stop. As the fire moves, you move. As the fire stops, you stop. God is taking you, collectively as a people, by the hand and guiding you every step of the way. His glory is on display right in front of you at all times.

This theme of God dwelling with us is particularly relevant as we think about the coming of Jesus. We're reminded of the words of the apostle John:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Jesus is the Word made flesh, the One who came to dwell among us. In the original, the word for

"dwelt" is an allusion to God's dwelling among His people in the tabernacle. Today, God's dwelling is not merely a building. In Jesus, the glory of God has come to us.

We often think that we're at a disadvantage because Jesus is no longer physically present with us. However, Jesus told His original disciples that it was to their "advantage" that He go away, for only then would He send them the "Helper," or Holy Spirit (John 16:7). God has done so much more than give us a cloud or a fire to follow.

We have the Holy Spirit of God, the glory of God, dwelling inside us right now, and He's leading us, guiding us, directing us, and transforming us into the image of Christ.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Praise God that He has come to us in Jesus Christ and that Christ's Spirit now dwells within us.



LOOK AND LIVE

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (Numbers 21:4-9)

God prescribed an interesting solution for the problem of His people's sin in today's passage. Due to their rebellion and grumbling in the wilderness, the Lord sent fiery serpents among the Israelites to bite them! When Moses interceded for the people, God provided a way for them to be saved. But this was no ordinary means of salvation.

God told Moses to set a fiery serpent on a pole so that anyone who had been bitten could simply look at the serpent on the pole and live. Now, looking at a snake may sound like the last thing you would want to do after being bitten by a snake. However, as God did throughout the Old

Testament, He was ultimately setting the stage for the advent, or coming, of Jesus. Notice the connection Jesus makes between this story in Numbers 21 and the purpose of His own coming:

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14)

When Jesus talks about being "lifted up," He's talking about being lifted up on a cross. Like the Israelites, we too deserve death for our sin, and the only way we can be saved is by lifting up our eyes and looking at a man dying on the cross.

Here we have a powerful picture of how we're saved, and it's not by doing good works or checking off boxes of religious duties. It's by looking and living. It's by believing and finding life. It's the familiar yet gloriously good news of

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Thank God that He has saved you based not on your own righteousness or efforts but rather on what He has accomplished by sending His Son to die for your sins.



I WILL PUT MY WORDS IN HIS MOUTH

I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (Deuteronomy 18:18)

God promised that He would raise up from among His people a prophet greater than Moses. This prophet would have the words of God in his mouth and would speak all that God commanded him. This was the responsibility of prophets throughout the Old Testament, as men sent by God announced, “Thus says the Lord.” Their job was to relay exactly what God had said.

When we think of faithful prophets, we think of men like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. Yet we know that none of these men were perfect. They all struggled with sin. Moses, the one to whom God made this promise of a coming prophet, was not even able to enter the Promised Land because he “did not treat [the Lord] as holy in the midst of the people of Israel” (Deuteronomy 32:51).

Gratefully, Deuteronomy 18:18 speaks of a greater prophet who would come. This prophet would have no sin, and He would speak God’s words and reveal God’s truth perfectly. As we read the New Testament, we see this promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see Acts 3:22; 7:37). He revealed the truth of God without any hint of error, sin, or impurity.

We don’t need someone who will claim to speak for God and then go and deliberately teach

contrary to His Word. Nor do we need someone who will claim to speak for God, put forth his best effort, but still be flawed. No, we need One who perfectly reveals the truth of God. As the author of Hebrews reminds us, Jesus is that perfect and final Word: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . .” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Pray that God would open the eyes of unbelievers around you to understand and embrace the truthfulness of Scripture concerning who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for our salvation.





**OUR FAMILY
CHRISTMAS
TRADITIONS**

FOOD

ACTIVITIES

SHARING GOD'S LOVE & GIVING

BOOKS & MOVIES

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SIN

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress.
(Judges 2:11-15)

Today's passage sets the stage for the rest of Judges, a book that grimly depicts the sinfulness of God's people and the distress that all of us find ourselves in as a result of our sin. Horrible, heinous things happen in this book, things that make you cringe. In addition to highlighting the consequences of sin, this book also gives us a recurring pattern in terms of the way Israel and God dealt with sin.

God's people are made to see over and over again that their suffering is a result of their sin, and so they turn back to God . . . for a little while. Then, in a relatively short amount of time, they start turning back to sin. And the cycle continues.

In the end, the book of Judges leaves us longing for One who will stop the cycle, for One who has no sin, for One who will ultimately deliver His people from sin. And the good news of the Bible is that this One has come.

Back in the beginning of the story of Scripture, as early as Genesis 3, Adam sinned, and this one sin affected all of us: ". . . one trespass led to condemnation for all men . . ." (Romans 5:18). As a result of Adam's sin, all of us sin against God, for we inherited Adam's sinful nature and we stand under condemnation. From a human standpoint, the story seems hopeless.

Yet in the middle of this story, there came another Man who was unlike the first man. In fact, He was (and is) unlike anyone else because He did not succumb to sin and He lived in purity and holiness and obedience to His heavenly Father. And even though He had no sin for which to die, He chose to die so that our sin could be forgiven and so that we could be freed from its power in our lives.

Now, because of Christ, the sinless Son of God, we are free to live in righteousness and holiness, for we are declared righteous in Him. Sin's dominion over our lives has been broken, and we are now free to live in communion with God.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Thank God for forgiving your sin and for freeing you from its tyranny through Christ, and ask Him to overcome the remaining sin in your life through the power of His Spirit.



FIND REFUGE UNDER HIS WINGS

The Lord repay you for what you have done. And a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. (Ruth 2:12)

As we continue with the story of Ruth (see Day 1), we now hear Boaz speaking to Ruth as she is working in his field. Ruth has returned from a hopeless situation in Moab back to a barley harvest in Bethlehem. In order to provide for her mother-in-law (Naomi) and herself, Ruth “happened to come” to the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s husband (Ruth 2:3).

Boaz has heard about Ruth’s loyal service to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and he wants the Lord to “repay” her. He speaks of the Lord as the One “under whose wings you [Ruth] have come to take refuge” (Ruth 2:12). This is a beautiful picture of what it means to trust in the Lord, and it is just as true for us today as it was for Ruth.

Those who trust in Christ for salvation find refuge under God’s wings. This reality should bring great comfort, regardless of what’s going on in your life or what the world is bringing against you. There is no need for anxiety or fear under the wings of the God of the universe. He is your protector and provider, your refuge and strength. Through Christ, you can make the prayer of Psalm 57:1 your own prayer to God:

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.”

As you pray this prayer for yourself, consider also praying it on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world. In the midst of trials and danger, these brothers and sisters need to know that God is their refuge. Regardless of whether they are rescued from temporal harm, they are safe from the storm of God’s eternal judgment because of Christ’s death on the cross.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Ask the Lord to sustain you as you find refuge under His wings, and pray that He would sustain Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ.





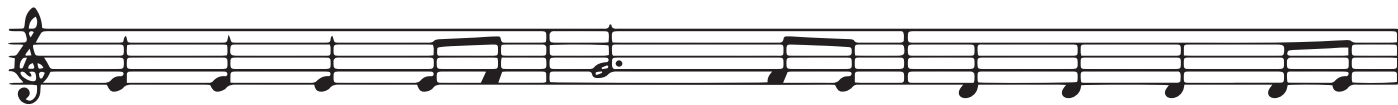
JOY TO THE WORLD



Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let earth re - ceive her King; ___
Joy to the World, the Sa - vior reigns! Let men their songs em - ploy; ___
No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in - fest the ground; ___
He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the na - tions prove ___



___ Let e - very he - art pre - pare ___ Him ___ ro - om, And
___ While fie - lds and ___ flo - ods, rocks, hi - lls and ___ plai - nms Re -
___ He co - mes to ___ ma - ke His ble - si - ngs flow ___ Far
___ The glo - ries ___ of ___ His right - teous - ness ___ And



Heaven and na - tu - re sing, And ___ Heaven and na - tu - re
peat the soun - di - ng joy, Re - peat the soun - di - ng
as the curse is ___ found, Far ___ as the curse is ___
won - ders of His ___ love, And ___ won - ders of His ___



sing, And ___ Hea - ven and Hea - ven and na - ture sing.
joy, Re - peat ___ re - peat ___ the soun - ding joy.
found, Far ___ as ___ Far as ___ the curse is found.
love. And won - ders. And won - ders of His love.

KISS THE SON

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:10–12)

The psalmist tells us to “Kiss the Son,” a reference to a coming heir from the royal line of David. This “Son” deserves worship, homage, and praise, which means that He is more than just a human king. This is a divine king who is worthy of all worship. He will be the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the One to whom all the kings and rulers and peoples of the earth will bow in worship.

Based on the entirety of Scripture, we know that this “Son” is none other than Jesus Christ. As a result of Christ’s humble obedience unto death, God has declared Christ’s supremacy over all. Here’s how Paul puts it in Philippians 2:9–11:

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This means that, one day, at the name of Jesus, President Xi in China, Prime Minister Modi in India, Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel, Chancellor Merkel in Germany, and President Trump in the United States, are all going to bow and worship King Jesus.

The question is not whether they are going to bow and worship Him. The question is whether they will do it now or do it when it’s too late. And that’s not just a question for them. It’s a question for each of us as well. Have you bowed the knee to King Jesus and called Him Lord over all and Lord over your life? Have you taken refuge under His rule?

Psalm 2:12 says, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” If you’ve never trusted in this King who died on the cross and rose from the dead in victory over sin and the grave, then you can do that now. Turn from your sin and bow to His lordship. Believe in Him and find refuge.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Pray that God would give you a heart that gladly submits to Christ’s lordship, either for the first time or (if you’re already a Christian) in increasing measure by the power of the Spirit.



A SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE

In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.
(Psalm 40:6-10)

God set up a system of sacrifices and offerings for His Old Testament people, Israel, in order to atone for, or cover over, their sin. These sacrifices and offerings paid the price for sin, which is death (Romans 6:23), and thereby averted the wrath and judgment of God. However, we know from the book of Hebrews that these Old Testament sacrifices were ultimately insufficient to pay the full price for people's sin against God. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

Knowing this Old Testament background helps us see the beauty of today's passage. Psalm 40 talks about one who delights to do the will of God, someone with the law of God written on his heart. This is a description of the One who came to be a perfect sacrifice, a perfect offering for our sin. And we know from the rest of Scripture that only Jesus Christ fits this description.

Christ's delight was to do the will of God perfectly, and He in fact did God's will without sinning (Hebrews 4:15). The law of God was written on His heart and He obeyed the Father completely during His earthly ministry. Therefore, Christ alone could be a sacrifice for sinners by offering His life on the cross to pay the price for our sin.

The author of Hebrews cites today's passage in order to show that Christ's sacrifice is superior to all the sacrifices and offerings that came before (Hebrews 10:5-14). Those sacrifices had to be offered repeatedly, but not so with the sinless Son of God. He was, as Hebrews 10:14 tells us, a sufficient sacrifice: "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified"

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Give thanks to Christ that He perfectly obeyed God and died in order to atone for your sins.



THE GOD WHO REMEMBERS

O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage! Remember Mount Zion, where you have dwelt. Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary! (Psalm 74:1-3)

This is a powerful, heartfelt prayer born from a painful, hurting situation. God's people are crying out for Him to remember them. Maybe you can relate to this feeling of abandonment. Have you ever felt forgotten by God? If so, what did your prayer sound like?

When you stop and consider the words of Psalm 74:1-3, they sound a little bold. To essentially say to the omniscient God of the universe, "Do you even remember us?" is quite surprising. However, the issue is not whether God has literally forgotten His people. Rather, this is God's people calling on God to be faithful to the promises He has made. That's what the term "remember" means.

As God's people, we know that God is faithful and that He will keep His promises. When we pray, we are bringing those promises before God and asking Him to show Himself faithful in a particular way. This kind of prayer is pleasing to God, and it's found throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Exodus 2, when God's people were slaves in Egypt, they cried out to God for rescue and it says that God "remembered":

"And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." (Exodus 2:24-25)

God had not forgotten His covenant promises made through Abraham. No, this is a reminder that God does not forget His people, that He will be faithful to His promises. We're reminded of what Mary said when she learned that God would send the promised King in David's line through her:

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. (Luke 1:54-55)

God's people are right to call on Him to keep His promises, for He is faithful. How much more should we pray this way today, since we have seen God's promised redemption fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Christ. Regardless of how abandoned we feel, we can be confident that God will never forget us.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Pray on behalf of the persecuted church across the world, that they would rely on God's promises when they feel forgotten and abandoned.



LONGING FOR HIS JUSTICE

Let the sea roar and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98:7-9)

On the night of Jesus' birth, the light of God's glory shone around the shepherds as they were watching their sheep. It was as if this child had attracted the attention of all creation. And this wouldn't be the last time that creation would be affected by His coming.

As we await the second coming of Christ, Scripture says that creation has been "groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:22). Creation is waiting for the fullness of time to come, when Jesus returns and makes all things right, when He ushers in a new creation, when He brings about perfect and final justice. This is what the psalmist cries out for in today's passage—God's righteous judgment.

The world doesn't like to hear about God's judgment. People pretend that their sins will not be called to account. However, we all long for an end to injustice in the world. When we think about something as tragic as human trafficking, with boys and girls being sold into slavery for evil purposes, we naturally long for God's kingdom to come and for His justice to reign. As Christians, we rejoice with creation because the Lord will "judge the world with righteousness" (Psalm 98:9). And so we cry, "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

At the same time, we know that, apart from God's grace, we too would be condemned by God's justice due to our sin. This is what makes Christ's coming such good news. He has lived the perfect life that we could not live and died to take the punishment that we deserve. We are declared righteous in Him, for God is both "just" and the "justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). In Christ, we long for and rejoice in God's justice.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

In light of the injustice and evils in the world, such as human trafficking, genocide, and various forms of oppression and persecution, pray for God's justice and mercy on behalf of those who are most vulnerable.





***TAKE A MOMENT TO REMEMBER
WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU
THIS PAST YEAR.***

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

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19. _____

20. _____

HE CAME TO SET US FREE

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD: that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, that they may declare in Zion the name of the LORD, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the LORD. (Psalm 102:18–22)

We need to feel the depth of God's grace in this passage. Although God is holy and exalted, He looks down from His "holy height" in heaven to help those who are in desperate need. He hears the "groans of the prisoners"; He sets free those who were "doomed to die."

What a picture of despair and bondage and hopelessness for God's people. And yet God on high promised to a "generation to come" that He would look down and hear them and set them free. We're reminded of the way Christ described His mission during His first coming:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18–19)

From his holy height, God has come to us in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has taken on human flesh and lived among us—a

Savior who is both fully human and fully divine. He has died for us so that we might be free from our bondage to sin and death, and He has been raised from the dead to give us life. Prisoners doomed to die are pardoned and set free through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And the psalmist tells us why God wants His people to know these truths: "... that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise, when peoples gather together, and kingdoms, to worship the Lord" (Psalm 102:21–22). Praise and exaltation have always been the proper response to God's unfathomable grace. How much more now that His grace has been made known in Christ!



PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Praise God for His unfathomable grace to you—that He has set you free from the bondage of sin and death and given you new life through Christ.

A DESIRE FULFILLED

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. (Proverbs 13:12)

What God offers us in Jesus Christ is the very thing that people have longed for throughout human history. The longing for One who would save us from our sins. The longing for One who would give us eternal life and reconcile us to God. And as today's proverb reminds us, it can make the heart "sick" to have to wait for this kind of desire to be fulfilled. But when it is fulfilled, the beauty, the joy, the exhilaration that results is like "a tree of life"!

This proverb is a picture of the advent season. After much waiting and anticipation, we rejoice that the hope of God has come! All our desires for peace and joy—the kind of peace and joy that outlasts and overcomes the suffering and circumstances of this world—have been fulfilled in Jesus. Christ Himself said to the crowds,

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35)

In Christ, God has come to save us from our sins, to satisfy our souls, and to restore us to a right relationship with Him. Our hearts are not "sick" (Proverbs 13:12). Instead, we are like trees of life. No matter what happens to us, we have life and peace and hope and security in Jesus. Our desires are fulfilled in Him. And yet, we have not yet seen the ultimate fulfillment of what Christ came to bring us.

We look forward in hope to the day when we will see Christ face to face and sing His praises. We will enjoy His peace and security and intimacy for all of eternity and experience unhindered communion with Him. Our eternal hope will no longer be deferred and our desires will finally be fulfilled.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Ask God to fill you with the hope that is found in Jesus Christ so that you might rejoice in His grace and live faithfully until Christ returns.



REDEEMED BY GOD

He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." (Ruth 3:9)

We're now in the third chapter of the book of Ruth (see Days 1 and 8), and it's here that we find one of the key words in this book—"redeemer." In fact, you could argue that the entire Bible, from cover to cover, is a story of redemption. So what does it mean to redeem someone?

Basically, to redeem someone means to bring them under your care by paying the required price for them. This is what Boaz does for Ruth in response to Ruth's request, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." Boaz essentially takes responsibility for providing for Ruth and her family, and he was uniquely able to do this because of his relationship to Naomi's family. According to Leviticus 25:48-49, a redeemer (in the sense spoken of here) must be a close relative.

The book of Ruth is giving us a picture of God as the Redeemer, the One who pays the price to provide for us under His care. He does this by sending His own Son, Jesus, to die on a cross for our sins. He restores us to a relationship with Him so that we can experience His provision of eternal life. What Boaz did for Ruth, God has done for us in a much greater way through Christ.

If you're a follower of Christ, then you have been bought by a Redeemer. His name is Jesus, and He's made it possible for you to live under the

protection and provision of God Himself. Now, regardless of our sinful background or, like Ruth, the desperate circumstances we find ourselves in, we have hope through the gospel. And God has done this "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Thank God for the redemption He has provided in Christ, and ask Him to redeem friends, family members, and neighbors who have not yet believed the message of the gospel.



CHOOSE AN UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUP AND WRITE THREE WAYS TO PRAY FOR THEM.

(Go to joshuaproject.net)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Long ago, when God promised His people a child, a son who would rule and reign over them forever, He said that one of the titles for this child would be “Wonderful Counselor.” Whether we realize it or not, counsel is something we all need.

When we walk through difficulties and challenges in life, we seek counsel from people around us (or at least we should). We do this because we’re looking for help and for wisdom in the decisions we make. Seeking counsel involves humility because we are admitting that we are prone to do things that are not wise. We are prone to act in ways that we later regret. We need help.

However, when it comes to seeking human counsel, even from those we greatly respect, their advice is not always perfect. We’ve all experienced this—a trusted friend or mentor tells us to do something, and then we realize later that this was not the best decision. Now, that’s not to say that we can blame our problems on those who counsel us, but the reality is that even the best counsel (humanly speaking) is still not perfect. Which is why Isaiah’s prophecy is so comforting.

Isaiah promised a wonderful, beautiful, glorious, perfect, reliable Counselor, whom we know as Jesus. He helps us as we humble ourselves before

Him. As God in the flesh, He counsels, leads, guides, and directs our lives according to that which is good and right. At the core of our sinful hearts is our tendency to choose our own ways over God’s ways, our own wisdom over God’s wisdom, as if we know better than He does. But thanks be to God, we have a Wonderful Counselor whose wisdom is higher, better, and more beautiful than our own.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Ask God to give you a heart that is submissive and receptive to the wisdom of His Word.



MIGHTY GOD

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Yesterday we saw that Isaiah's prophesied child would be called "Wonderful Counselor." Today we consider the second title given to this child, this son who was given for the redemption of God's people. His name shall be called "Mighty God."

Clearly this is not a normal son or a normal child. This is God in the flesh. This is the astounding miracle of Christmas. In fact, I would argue that this is the most astounding miracle in all of the Bible, even greater than the resurrection from the dead, greater than calming wind and waves, or turning loaves of bread and fish into enough food for thousands of people.

Of course Jesus can calm the wind and the waves; of course He can conquer death. He's God. The most astounding miracle is that God took on human flesh and came to dwell among us. This child born to Joseph and Mary was both fully man and fully God. Talk about a mystery!

But even in the midst of the mystery, we see the beauty of the gospel, for this is the only way we can be saved from our sins. We need One who can fully identify with us, One who knows what it's like to be tempted yet without giving in to sin (Hebrews 4:15). At the same time, we need One who can fully identify with God, who is God, who can bear the divine judgment due our sin.

The only person who fits that description is Jesus, for He is fully man and fully God. Other religions deny this truth, but for followers of Christ, this is our hope and peace. Christ is the Son given to us, the child born for our salvation. He is rightly called "Mighty God."

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Pray that God would open the eyes of people from other religions, such as Islam, who deny that Jesus is the fully divine Son of God.



EVERLASTING FATHER

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Today we come to the third title Isaiah gives for this child, this son upon whose shoulders the government would rest. His name will be called “Everlasting Father.” We naturally wonder how someone prophesied as a son and a child can also be a father. However, Isaiah is using the title “Everlasting Father” to point to this child’s role as the provider and protector of His people. This child would be the ideal King.

Other passages of Scripture use the term “father” in similar ways. Later in Isaiah, a high-ranking official named Eliakim is given authority, and the Lord says that he shall be a “father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” (Isaiah 22:21). Job uses the term to emphasize His care and provision for those in need: “I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know” (Job 29:16).

A good father wants to take care of his children. I want to do this for my kids, even though I know I am an imperfect father with imperfect love. But Jesus is the “Mighty God” (see Day 17) and the “Everlasting Father” who is able to care for us, provide for us, and love us perfectly. He is, in this sense, a perfect father.

Even the best earthly fathers are imperfect, and I know that many people do not have a good relationship with their dad. If that’s you, I want to encourage you to lift your eyes and see that you have a perfect Father in heaven. And Jesus, the Son sent by God the Father to save you from your sins, cares for you as a dad cares for his children. And He will do this forever and ever, for He is our “Everlasting Father.”

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Praise God for His gracious provision and protection through Christ’s wise and gracious rule over your life.



THE PRINCE OF PEACE

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

The fourth and final title given to the promised child of Isaiah 9:6 is "Prince of Peace." This is good news: in a world of turmoil, wars, strife, division, enmity, hatred, hurt, pain, and sorrow, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He is the ruler whose reign brings peace in the hearts of all who trust in Him.

Earthly kings cannot be trusted to bring perfect righteousness, perfect justice, and perfect peace, but Jesus can. There is no king like Him. This Son, this child born to Joseph and Mary, is the Prince of Peace. And one day He will bring perfect peace to all who trust in Him. Revelation 21:5 paints a beautiful picture of this peace:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

It almost seems too good to be true. But it is true. No more war with sin; no more sorrow in our hearts; no more hurt; no more pain; no more despair; no more strife; no more enmity between God and man. The Prince of Peace will bring all who trust in Him into perfect communion with God, and they will experience peace, joy, justice, and righteousness with Him forever.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Pray that God would bring peace to war-torn regions of the world and that the peoples who are affected by these wars would have an opportunity to hear about the redemption of the Prince of Peace.



WORD SEARCH

E V R Y C R I M Q W H E J Z P
M V B E E H B Q O N A L U M E
I C E H D O I N J P R G G G A
W H T R R L D L M T X O Q H C
F A I N L E U F D F S V L K E
F D F B R A G O O I G E O L I
Q P O F W V S C H N N R U S N
F W U G F Y F T J S N N U V J
I L P R I N C E I J K M W G Y
N O S I K O F S W N O E P Q T
W L L U Q S D M O G G N V U H
Q E Y D A Z V V B T Y T D I G
R O L E S N U O C X C J Z V I
S N P C Z U U S P Q P V D W M
R I M H C E T F E O E O N N K

BORN
CHILD
COUNSELOR
EVERLASTING

FATHER
GOD
GOVERNMENT
MIGHTY

PEACE
PRINCE
SON
WONDERFUL

*Can you find the
hidden word not listed?
Hint: It's another word
from Isaiah 9:6.*

THE SPIRIT SHALL REST ON HIM

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

This is a promise written hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus. Isaiah spoke of a “shoot from the stump of Jesse,” which is another way of saying that Jesus would be a king from David’s line (since Jesse was David’s father). As a “branch” from this royal line, Jesus would “bear fruit.” So what fruit do we see from Jesus’ coming?

We see the fruit of sinners, countless multitudes of sinners, saved from their sin by God’s grace. Men and women who have been redeemed, transformed, and restored to a right relationship with God. And the fruit of that relationship with God includes the fruit of the Spirit: “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). This same Spirit is the One who will rest on Jesus, for He is the “Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2).

We see the fulfillment of this promise as Jesus is baptized and the Spirit comes to rest on Him (Matthew 3:16). In this sense, Jesus is unique, gloriously unique. He possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and so we worship and praise Him. At the same time, because Jesus died on the cross for

our sins, rose from the grave in victory over sin, and ascended on high to the right hand of the Father, He has made it possible for all who trust in Him to be forgiven of their sins and indwelt by His Spirit.

So if you’re a Christian, that means the Spirit of the Lord—“the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”—dwells in you. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. Not only that Jesus came but also that He lives in us by His Spirit. We should live in light of that reality each and every day.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

Praise God for sending us His Spirit through Christ, and ask Him for the grace to depend on the Spirit rather than on your own wisdom and strength.



HIS MERCIES NEVER END

Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3:19-24)

This is one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament, yet it's written from a place of hurt and with a real sense of longing for hope. Lamentations is a book of laments, and this particular lament expresses pain and suffering and confusion as the people of God are experiencing the effects of sin. Yet in their "affliction and their wanderings," in the pain and bitterness, the "wormwood and the gall," as their souls are "bowed down" within them, they call something to mind that gives them hope. What is that hope?

They hope in the reality that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never, ever come to an end. They are new every morning, and the faithfulness of the Lord is great. We too need to be reminded of these truths, especially when we go through affliction or a season when our souls are bowed down within us. We should be able to pray with the psalmist,

"As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!" (Psalm 40:11)

If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then be encouraged: God's mercies are new for you every morning. His steadfast love for you never ceases. He is faithful to you, Christian. Even in the midst of tragedy, you have hope in Jesus.

As we think about advent, consider where we would be without the hope of Jesus, without the faithfulness of God, without the new mercies and steadfast love of the Lord. We would indeed be hopeless. But God is faithful, and Christ has paid the price for our sin and reconciled us to God, opening up for us a fountain of new mercies for each new day. We are never without hope.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Thank God for His ceaseless love and mercy, and ask Him to sustain your hope in the midst of both tragedy and triumph.



FROM BITTERNESS TO BLESSING

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a Redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel.” (Ruth 4:14)

You may remember from the beginning of Ruth (see Day 1) that this Israelite woman named Naomi was barren. In fact, she did not want to be called Naomi but rather Mara, which means bitter, because of how the Lord had dealt bitterly with her. So Naomi is bitter and barren, and her husband and sons have died. All she has is a daughter-in-law from a cursed people known as the Moabites.

Now, three chapters later, the Lord is being blessed for the way He has dealt with Naomi. In His grace, the Lord has blessed her with a redeemer (Boaz) and her life is entirely new. Through the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, Naomi has a son, a daughter-in-law, and a grandson. And this grandson will be the father of Jesse who will be the father of David.

That makes Naomi's grandson the grandfather of King David, Israel's most famous king, and, more importantly, from whose line King Jesus will come (Matthew 1:1). You could not write a better script!

You may feel at times like Naomi did in Ruth 1—bitter, barren, hurt, despairing, and hopeless. But if you're trusting in Jesus, you can persevere in hope because bitterness will not have the last word; bareness will not be the end of the story; hopelessness and despair will not be the final refrain. Through His death and resurrection, Christ has conquered death itself. Those who hope never need to despair.

In this fallen world, times of mourning will come. But “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), and He will have the last word. There is coming a day when sorrow and death will be no more (Revelation 21:1–4). God has the power to turn mourning into dancing, bitterness into blessing.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Pray that your hope will be fixed on Christ so that you might persevere in the midst of trials and suffering.



HE HAS SPOKEN TO US BY HIS SON

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4)

This passage is a powerful summary of who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do. He is God's final word, the One all the prophets in the Old Testament were looking forward to. In this advent season, a season marked by anticipation, we ponder the Old Testament passages that the author of Hebrews speaks about. The promise of a Savior is first seen all the way back in Genesis 3:15, when God promised to crush the head of the serpent through the seed of the woman. Though Adam and Eve sinned, God made known His plan to redeem them. The rest of the Old Testament anticipates the fulfillment of this promised plan of redemption.

Amid sin, ruin, and exile, prophets like Isaiah encouraged the people of God by telling of a Messiah who would come to rule and reign forever. However, after the prophecy of Malachi, there were four hundred years of silence. Then, at just the right time, God sent His Son. The One who is "the radiance of the glory of God," the sovereign

King who upholds the universe "by the word of his power," came to us.

Jesus came and accomplished our redemption, or as the author of Hebrews puts it, He made "purification for sins." Through His work on the cross, Christ delivered us from sin, self, and the wrath of God, and then He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." His work was finished.

As we celebrate Christ and all that He accomplished at His first coming, we also look forward to His second advent. We anticipate the day when the One seated at the right hand of the Father comes again to bring His church into the presence of God for all eternity.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Thank God for keeping His promises of redemption by sending His Son for our salvation.



LOVE ON DISPLAY

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

When the apostle John wants to point us to the love of God, he does so by highlighting the very truth that we celebrate at Christmas: “. . . the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” That simple yet profound truth should give us confidence in God’s love.

One of the primary purposes of 1 John is to give genuine believers confidence that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13), and one of the primary ways John does this is by reminding us of the character of God and His saving work in Christ. Gratefully, our assurance is not ultimately based on our own obedience or faith, which is always imperfect, but rather on God’s sacrificial love:

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

The fact that God has demonstrated His love reassures us that Christmas is not merely wishful thinking or a blind hope. It is grounded in the reality that God Himself has come to dwell with us. As the old Christmas hymn says,

“Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see,
Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.”

God demonstrated His love through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and He did not wait for us to earn that love. He did it “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). And if we received such love while we were sinners, how can we doubt that God will stop loving us now that we have been reconciled to Him (Romans 5:9-10)? Along with the apostle John, we should be able to testify with confidence that “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY’S PASSAGE

As you praise God for the love that He has demonstrated in Christ, pray that He would open the hearts of family members who are not Christians so that they might receive this good news in repentance and faith.



GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Go, tell it on the moun-tain, O - ver the hills and ev - ery - where;

Go, tell it on the moun-tain, That Je - sus Christ is born!

Harmony

1. While shep - herds kept their watch-ing O'er si - lent flocks by night, Be -
2. The shep - herds feard and trem-bled When lo! a - bove the earth Rang
3. Down in a low - ly man-ger The hum - ble Christ was born, And

hold through-out the heav - ens There shone a ho - ly light.
out the an - gel cho - rus That hailed our Sav - ior's birth
God sent us sal - va - tion That bless - ed Christ-mas morn.

GOD WITH US, FOREVER

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5)

As we celebrate the coming of Christ on Christmas day, we remember all that He accomplished in His first coming. His death and resurrection have provided the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. We even get a taste of this new life now through His Spirit who lives in us. In fact, it's the Spirit who reveals these things to us:

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

The blessings that flow from Christ's first coming are glorious beyond description. And yet, there's more to the story.

Jesus is coming back, and when He does, He will not be a child in a cradle. He will be a King on

a horse. The trumpet will sound and Christ will return to right all wrongs, to bring judgment on His enemies, to put an end to injustice. But for those of us who are relying on Him as our Savior and Lord, His return will mean the consummation of our redemption.

Christ will usher in a new heaven and a new earth where, according to today's passage, we will "see his face." We will experience unhindered worship, worship that is not affected by sin, and the Lord Himself will be our light. We will reign with Him "forever and ever." This is the end goal of our salvation. This is why Jesus came. Immanuel, God with us, forever.



Let this Christmas day remind you to hope in that day, to live for that day. It may seem far off. You may even have trouble believing that it will ever come. But like Israel of old, our doubts are unfounded. God will keep His promises. The Messiah will come . . . again.

PRAYING IN LIGHT OF TODAY'S PASSAGE

Pray for Christ's return, asking Him to put an end to sin and injustice and to use you to bring the message of His redemption to those who have never put their trust in Him.









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