



CALVARY ENGLISH CHAPEL

Lenten Devotional Guide

INTRODUCTION

God has revealed himself to man throughout history. God appeared to Moses through a burning bush. God appeared to the Israelites as thunder and lightning and a thick cloud at Mount Sinai. God appeared to man in Jesus Christ. And now, God has chosen to reveal himself through the Bible. The season of Lent is 40 days leading up to Easter (excluding Sundays) when Christians devote time to the reading of Scripture and prayer. It is a time of self-examination and reflection.

R.C. Sproul writes, “It takes determination to lay hold of the riches of God’s grace. It takes diligent discipline, devotion to prayer, and a serious reading of Scripture. Nobody gets sanctified with five minutes of Bible reading a day. The Word has to be our meat and drink if we want to grow in grace. We don’t get sanctified by going to church once every six weeks and neglecting corporate worship or fellowship or service. Through all of these means of grace, the Holy Spirit works with us to bring us to spiritual maturity.”

The pastoral staff at CEC has prepared a devotional booklet. It’s our prayer that as we turn to our God in humility, the Holy Spirit will lead us to genuine repentance and the strengthening and renewal of our spirit. We pray the Apostle Peter’s words that you will “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

— *Pastor Michael*

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Week One

¹ “Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. ³ ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. ¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. ¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

According to this passage, it is possible to fast (i.e., seek God) in a way that will be very displeasing to the Lord and spiritually destructive to ourselves. (We'll see this again in Matthew 6.) God confronts His people about their sins (vv. 1–3). What are His accusations against His people? *Why was their fast not accepted by God?*

Their spiritual disciplines, like fasting, were covered with religious veneer. In other words, they were not sincere. They wanted God to intervene in their lives, they worshipped, they talked about God's nearness, but something was wrong. Their lives did not reflect God's heart; they did not look out for the poor, widows, and hopeless (vv. 6–7).

Fasting is for the purpose of humbling our hearts (v. 5), aligning our hearts with God's, and searching for sins in our lives. But these Israelites used their fasting for self-indulgence, to build credit with God for benefits in the future. If your fasting leaves you harsh toward other people, irritable and contentious (vv. 3–4), then your fasting is not acceptable to God. Hypocrisy is the furthest thing from God. As you devote time to reading God's word and praying during this Lent season, how does this passage help you?

Someone once said, "Monday's work proves Sunday's Worship." How we treat people on Monday is the test of the authenticity of our worship on Sunday. Discuss with your friends or family what this means.

In verses 10–12, what does God promise? How are God's people restored in strength? Obeying God and meeting the needs of the poor will renew one's spirit. Ask God how you and your brothers and sisters around you can carry out this command during this Lent season.

Jesus knew of our hopelessness spiritual condition, our poverty in spirit. Jesus humbled himself and became one of us. He lived a perfect life of obedience so that he could be a

perfect and acceptable offering of sacrifice to God. Jesus was crucified on the cross and bore our sins. Jesus stayed. He became spiritually poor so that we could become spiritually rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). This is the good news. This is the gospel. †

FOR PARENTS Explain to your children the purpose of seeking God (i.e. worship, prayer, word, fasting, etc). Discuss with each other how the family can serve those who are less fortunate. Have the children participate. Close the devotional by praying for the family.

— *Pastor Michael*

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

This psalm is categorized as a penitential psalm that captures king David's prayer after he was confronted by prophet Nathan regarding his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25). Prayer contains an honest look into man's heart dealing with sin. There is no trace of justifying his sin. Only contrition, a deep awareness of sin, a desperate plea for mercy, and a cry for restoration.

READ Psalm 51:1-17. Study the psalm and ask yourself these questions. What are some effects, physically & spiritually, that sin had on David? How would you summarize godly repentance? Examine the content of David's restoration prayer. What does he ask for?

The variety of words (transgressions, iniquity, sin) used for sin is for poetic reason, as they express the seriousness of sin. The effects of sin can be traced to what David asks for: ‘dirtiness or uncleanness’ (v. 2 “wash,” v. 7, “purge,” “wash,” v. 9, “blot out,” v. 10, “clean heart”), loss of joy (v. 8 “let me hear joy and gladness,” v. 12, “restore to me the joy of your salvation,” v. 14, “my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness,”), and physically ailing (v. 8, “let the bones that you have broke rejoice). Broken fellowship with God due to sin affects believers emotionally, physically, and spiritually. But conviction of sin is always the work of God’s grace, for it leads to Christ.

How would you summarize godly repentance? First, there is acknowledgment of sin. There is no blaming others or circumstances. David emphasizes “I” have transgressed and sinned. There is ownership. David highlights his depravity from birth (v. 5). David is not using his depravity as an excuse for his sin but to heighten the distance between God and himself. Second, David acknowledges God is just to punish (v. 4b, “so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment”). There is affirmation of God’s justice: God is just and man is depraved. Third, what David pleads for is restoration of his fellowship with God (vv. 10–12).

Satan reminds man of their sin in order to drive them to despair. God convicts sin in man in order to drive them to His Son, Jesus Christ. Satan highlights shame & guilt. God shows mercy and restores. It is not due to God not taking sin seriously. He does. Look at the cross!

Ravi Zacharias writes, “Only in the admission of sin is there a genuine restoration, because guilt is first a vertical problem before it is horizontal one. God is the one who has been violated before humanity has been wronged. That is why only God has the ultimate prerogative to forgive.”

What does a restoration prayer look like? First, David falls on the mercy of God (v. 1) because only God can forgive. To fall on God's mercy is to recognize God's steadfast love and abundance of his mercy. Christians' return to God is not based on our 'good' but God's goodness. Second, David prays for renewal of joy (vv. 8, 10, 12). A Biblical understanding of joy is not mere emotional expression. It is a contented resting in God. Biblical joy declares that God is my all in all. Therefore I am okay with punishment as long as the relationship is restored. Sin scorches us most after we receive the grace of forgiveness, not before. The forgiven one realizes the gravity of the sin more when he or she is genuinely repentant and has been forgiven. God beckons our crying hearts to come to Him in repentance. This makes our sin forgivable.

What is the evidence or fruit of a forgiven heart? What is the evidence of a Christian who is convicted of sin and restored to the sweetness of God's grace through forgiveness? READ vv. 13–14, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.” It is proclaiming to others how great God is. It is worship! It is missions!

Spend some time in prayer. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss how sinning against others ultimately is sinning against God. How does sin make us feel? Talk about what it means to repent. Praise God for the good news that He doesn't treat as our sins deserve, but forgives and restores us into joy.

— *Pastor Michael*

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you... ¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Why do you pray? Why do you give to the poor? Why do you fast? These are very important questions to ask ourselves. For according to Jesus’ teaching, it reveals whom we are living for. Reading & studying the Bible, praying, fasting, being generous to the poor are all essential parts of the Christian life.

READ Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-21. What stands out? To whom is Jesus addressing his teachings? As you read & study the passages, look for a common point Jesus is making.

What is the accusation Jesus is making? Some people follow God's commands to be noticed by man (vv. 3, 5, 16). God calls them hypocrites (i.e. actors who wore masks in cinema) pretending to be someone they are not. What is the reward of hypocrites? The applause of men and that's it. They actually get what they were seeking, because they were not seeking God. Do you have the tendency to toot your horn? Do you drop hints to your peers about your spiritually disciplined life? Or do you go out of your way to honor God only? How do you feel when you are not recognized for your labor?

Christians are commanded: when giving to the poor, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (v. 3), when praying, "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (v. 6), and when fasting, "anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret" (vv. 17-18). Christians are mandated to be generous to the poor, to fast, and to pray but to do all of them in secret. Christians live for the audience of one: God through Jesus Christ. Christians serve and pray for the Kingdom whether the church, our peers, or the world recognizes us, because our audience is God who sees all things. But living for God alone does not mean "I am right and all are wrong!" Living for God alone leads to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Why? Because that is what the Holy Spirit is up to, the Holy Spirit who wants to exalt God the Son in everything.

False asceticism (severe self-discipline & avoidance of all forms of indulgence): makes the goal of fasting, praying, reading God's word, etc., the receiving of praise from people (in good standing, wanting personal request). True spiritual disciplines make the goal of fasting, praying, reading God's word, to be the giving of praise to God. In other words, prayer and word is means not the goal.

This is a daily battle for Christians for our hearts are deceptive. We crave attention. Human hearts are mixed with different motivation. What we must strive for is longing to hear the very voice of God saying to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21 & 23).

What is the promise God offers to those who do things to be seen by God alone? “And your Father who see in secret will reward you” (verses 4, 6, 18). What is the reward God promises? “Jesus does not discuss the locale and nature of the reward; but we will not be far from the NT evidence if we understand it to be the ‘both in time and in eternity, both in character and in felicity.’” (D.A. Carson).

Spend some time in prayer. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the desire to be noticed for the things that we do. Discuss the goal of spiritual disciplines—do we want to receive attention from people or do we want to give praise to God?

— *Pastor Michael*



Week Two

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Passages like this sound cryptic, and as result we may like to gloss over it, but here's an opportunity to make profound connections in the Bible. Notice a number of things: first, the mention of all three members of the Trinity at Jesus' baptism (vv. 9-11). Notice also that Jesus was baptized, even though he was without sin. In so doing, he identifies with the sins of his people. Further, notice the words by God the Father regarding the Son, and the part God the Spirit has in descending on Jesus and driving him out into the desert—all of this together point to the united mission that Jesus will undertake to bring the good news to the world, namely forgiveness of sins through his life and death.

The number 40 has many connections to what comes earlier in the Bible. In our passage we see the Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness in order for him to be tested for 40 days. Another place in Scripture where we see that number is in the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness due to their disobedience. So Jesus comes now and obeys the Father perfectly in the midst of trials and temptations—in other words, Jesus does what his people did not do. As you read the gospel accounts, it'll be made

clear that Jesus will go on to take upon himself the sins of his people so that what they're supposed to bear—the consequences of their sins—will be placed on Jesus himself. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the significance of Jesus accomplishing what we cannot—that is, when it comes to our sin problem. Take some time thinking through this, and give thanks and praise to God for the wonderful gospel.

— *Pastor Seiichi*

DAY 2 / GENESIS 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

DAY 3 / **PSALM 25:1-10**

¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ² O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. ³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. ⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. ⁶ Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! ⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

DAY 4 / **1 PETER 3:18-22**

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The letter of 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter to believers, displaced throughout Asia Minor (current day Turkey), who were being falsely accused and marginalized by society on account of their faith in Jesus Christ. This was not always the case. For the most part, the church was protected by the Roman Empire, at least for the first half of the first century, because Christianity was seen as another Jewish sect and Judaism was recognized as a legitimate religion by the state.

Everything changed, however, on July 19, AD 64. That night, Rome caught fire for three days and three nights consuming everything in its path, including ancient temples and historic landmarks, much like the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Consequently, the citizens of Rome were angry at Nero, the emperor, for rumor had it that Nero intentionally burned down the city so that he could rebuild it to his liking. To squelch any rumors concerning his part in the fire, Nero chose a scapegoat. He blamed the fire on Christians. In so doing, Nero introduced the church to widespread persecution.

To suggest Christianity was unpopular at this time would be a colossal understatement. Strong anti-Christian sentiment was the backdrop in which Peter wrote his letter. So how were Christians to conduct themselves in the midst of such strong opposition? How were Christians to live by faith in a world hostile to the Christian Faith?

Peter's general exhortation to these distraught believers was to "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). In other words, through the honorable conduct of their lives, the watching world will take notice and eventually come to realize that the false allegations circulating in society about Christians are baseless. In addition, the watching world may even ask what makes them tick, so to speak, and cause unbelievers to take seriously the truth claims of Christianity.

Having foresight of this potential opportunity, Peter advised, “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). In other words, when believers are given a green light to make a defense/apologetic for the hope that they possess in light of their transformed life, they are to step up to the plate, so to speak, and share the content of the gospel as clearly and coherently as possible.

So what is the gospel? According to Peter, the gospel is best summed up in verse 18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). The chief reason Jesus came to our world was to suffer for sins; that is, to die on the cross in order to make full payment and restitution for the moral debt we have incurred on account of our rebellion against God. And unlike the insufficient temple sacrifices that had to be offered repeatedly in the Old Testament, Jesus’ sacrifice was qualitatively different, for Jesus’ death was a perfect, final, and sufficient payment—a once for all payment! Jesus’ death was equally a substitutionary transaction, involving a double transfer, whereby God accepted the imputation/crediting of our unrighteousness to Jesus and the imputation/crediting of Jesus’ righteousness to us. The net result was that we, who were once estranged from God, have now been reconciled to God, whereby our acceptance before God is forever secure, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us! Praise the Lord!

What follows in 1 Peter 3:19-22 is one of the most difficult and debated portions of Scripture in all of the New Testament. As such, we would do well to employ a level of humility and charity when it comes to interpreting these verses. While there are two equally legitimate interpretations of vv. 19–22, I’ll present the one I think is more likely. Three questions of clarification are in order to understand the author’s intent.

(1) Who are the spirits in prison? The “spirits in prison” (v. 19) likely refer to unbelievers in Noah’s day who have died. They are the wicked generation that “formerly did not obey...in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared” (v. 20) on whom God sent judgment on the earth through a universal flood.

(2) When did Christ proclaim? Christ, in Spirit, proclaimed through Noah to unbelievers “in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared” (v. 20). Peter is not saying that Jesus descended into hell during the three-day time span between Christ’s death and resurrection to make a proclamation to unbelievers residing in hell so as to validate the potential of postmortem conversion (a position that is biblically untenable and the reason we omit this clause in the Apostles’ Creed). Instead, Peter is saying that Christ proclaimed through Noah to unbelievers who were living on the earth then (“in the days of Noah”), but who are now “spirits in prison.” The idea that the pre-incarnate Christ preached through Noah in Noah’s day is argued for by referring to 1 Peter 1:11 where Peter speaks of the “spirit of Christ” speaking through the Old Testament prophets.

(3) What did Christ proclaim? If Christ in Spirit proclaimed through the lips of Noah to the disobedient generation of Genesis 6, then, with the reference to Noah as a ‘herald of righteousness’ (2 Peter 2:5), we can conclude that his message was a proclamation of repentance to avoid divine judgment.

If this interpretation is Peter’s original intent, namely that Christ’s proclamation of the gospel was done in the Spirit through Noah, then Peter is encouraging these suffering believers to continue to do good despite suffering and when people ask “for the reason for the hope that is in you,” to proclaim the gospel with confidence knowing that when you speak, Christ is speaking through you! Consequently, we should be bold in our witness despite opposition, just as Noah was in his generation. We should also be mindful that while the final judgment of God is coming,

we, like Noah, who are suffering for doing good will assuredly be spared, ultimately because Christ has triumphed by His death and resurrection, thereby placing a deathblow to the serpent of old and securing our redemption as God promised in Genesis 3:15! †

FOR PARENTS Ask your children to explain 1 Peter 3:18 in their own words. Why is our salvation in Jesus Christ secure? Pray together and thank God for the gospel of Jesus Christ!

—Pastor Mark

DAY 5 / ISAIAH 42:1-9 + PSALM 2

ISAIAH 42:1-9

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

PSALM 2

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³ “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² 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.

The concept of kingship is, at best, foreign to us (since we live in a republic), and at worst deeply suspicious, for it evokes heavy-handed rule and oppression. This is understandable, since the most cherished tenet in our country is one’s freedom.

Yet when we look into God’s revelation of himself in his word, the notion of king plays no small part. From the start of Scripture, humanity lives under the rule of God—they are explicitly created in order to do God’s bidding, and they are accountable to God as his creatures; that is, they are held responsible for living in a way that reflects their maker. And in no way was it tyrannical or repressive: we get a picture of perfect harmony between mankind and God, with no hint of anything other than pure goodness.

Of course the picture is quite different today. Today we see freedom as paramount, so much so that even God—the maker of our beings and the sustainer of our very existence—is held at bay so as to keep from intruding in our lives. Moreover, freedom is paraded as the highest virtue even when the use of that freedom

leads to bondage. What we see in this psalm from a few millennia ago is still true today.

Vv. 1–3 tell us what life is like without God as king. But before we look there we need to look at the message of Ps 1. There the psalmist lays out two ways of living: the way of the righteous—those who are attentive to God’s instruction—and the way of the wicked—those who are unwilling to submit to God’s instruction. Ps 1 ends, “⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Then we read in Ps 2:1–2, “¹Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.” Thus the psalmist rightly wonders how absolutely futile mankind’s machinations are even as they cry out against God’s rule over them, “³Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (v. 3). How far indeed mankind has strayed from the living God.

Yet God’s reaction is striking (vv. 4–6). God is pictured here as laughing. This is a picture of God we often don’t encounter. God is laughing here in mockery of humanity. This is miles apart from the way in God is envisaged in contemporary culture: a half-blind, pathetic, senile figure in the clouds whose happiness is directly proportional to how much human beings approve of him. Instead God, in the midst of humanity’s rebellion, sees everything, is not fooled by anything, and laughs mockingly as he holds the future of the entire universe under his sovereign rule. V. 5 tells of God’s wrath, another truth that deserves fuller mention. God is not a tame God. He is not to be toyed with. His wrath is real, and it hangs over those who live their lives with themselves as the final authority.

Vv. 7–9 speak of the real king. Notice, the person speaking here is the king, and we know that God has promised that this

Davidic line will continue (2 Sam 7). But the language here goes way beyond what an earthly king is able to do, thus pointing to a kind of king who is beyond merely a king, but, as it were, a king above all kings. And in the New Testament we read that someone is called by the similar Son language. In fact, at one point the heavens open, and God speaks regarding him, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). This king is none other than Jesus Christ.

Notice how the psalm concludes (vv. 10–12). The language sounds paradoxical: serving with fear, rejoicing with trembling. This seems to speak of proper boundary; for instance, rejoicing is experienced within proper bounds. Just as a teenager is given curfew so that they might be shielded from unnecessary harm, or a fish that thrives when in water—not outside it—God’s rules are meant to be life-giving, and we experience joy when we live rightly within God’s loving rule. This is why the psalmist can say in various places that he loves God’s law (Ps 119:97).

In discussions surrounding kingship, what often fails to be recognized is that we all have a king in our lives; it’s not a matter of if but what or who. We certainly don’t have a physical kingly figure ruling over us, but we all have functional kings—call them idols—who in practice do exert the same force: whatever or whoever whose absence in our lives would strike at our core sense of worth and identity; someone or something whose approval we’re after to the degree that it directs our lives. In that way, we all share the common condition of the rebellious in Ps 2.

What is the hope for rebellious mankind that is so blind that they deem freedom to be bondage, and bondage as freedom? Their hope is Christ. He invites people to put him on, as it were, for he is “gentle and lowly in heart,” and in whom “you will find rest for your soul,” whose yoke is easy, and load (NASB) is light (Matt 11:28–30). There is no such thing as absolute freedom from a yoke—we are either yoked to Christ, or we’re necessarily yoked

to something else. Let's thoughtfully spend some time heeding the psalmist's warning (vv. 10–12) and asking the Lord to remind us—or to change our hearts and minds for the first time to see—that there is indeed real life when Christ is king. †

FOR PARENTS Talk with your children about what a king is. What does it mean that Jesus Christ is our true King? How should we live if Jesus is our King? Pray together and tell Jesus that He is your King.

— *Pastor Seiichi*



Week Three

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

It's easy to look back on history with 20/20 vision and look down on Peter's lack of faith when he rebuked Jesus. The reality is that we're cut from the same cloth as Peter. The core of the rebuke is that Peter set his mind on the things of man as opposed to the things of God. In particular, it seems that Peter was elevating comfort and safety over the guaranteed suffering that comes from following Jesus.

Do we understand that following Jesus comes at a cost? Do our lives reflect the cost that Jesus describes as taking up our cross and following him? Do we share in his sufferings? Or are we caught up in gaining the whole world? Are caught up in our personal, worldly agendas?

The gospel (good news) is that although we don't gain the world, we gain eternity with Christ. Although we will face persecution, reviling, and all kinds of disgrace for Christ's sake,

God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and dwell with us intimately as we enjoy him forever (Revelation 21). Would this season of Lent be a time when we meditate on the suffering of our savior and ask ourselves whether we are setting our minds on the things of God rather than the things of man. †

FOR PARENTS What does following Jesus look like in our family? What are some sacrifices that we make as a family because of Jesus?

— *Pastor Joe*

DAY 2 / **GENESIS 17:1-7, 15-16**

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you..." ¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

²³ You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. ²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. ²⁸ For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. ³⁰ Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; ³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

Psalm 22 opens with the phrase, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is the phrase that Jesus quoted on the cross in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 as he experienced the penalty for our sin. Some Christians read Psalm 22 as a prophetic writing specifically about Jesus. However, it may be better to read Psalm 22 as a general song of grief (lament) for the innocent sufferer, and recognize how the New Testament, especially Matthew 27:35, 39, 46 and Hebrews 2:12, uses this psalm to identify Jesus as the ultimate innocent sufferer. It is the sinless, innocent Jesus who is the answer to the psalmist’s cry for salvation in verses 19–21.

Verses 22–31 of this Psalm outline our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The magnitude of Christ’s love and sacrifice for us leads us to the very ordinary response of praising Jesus and telling of his name to all the world. Jesus Christ, the innocent sufferer, saved us from the ultimate suffering of a life separated from God. Let’s reflect on Jesus’ sacrifice and love today and respond in worship. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss our sinfulness (original sin) and the innocence of Jesus Christ. Discuss how Jesus suffered in our place. How should we respond to the good news of Jesus saving us from an eternity separated from God?

— *Pastor Joe*

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” ²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.
¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Notice the upending that happens in this passage. In verses 4–6, Paul lists all the outward signs of devotion that he, and others like him, considered to be spiritual “gains.” But Paul now sees all these outward signs of devotion as loss compared to the worth of knowing Christ Jesus. It is the gospel of Jesus that is gain. Jesus dying on the cross was a symbol of loss for many; how could the Messiah die like a common criminal? But Paul sees what might be perceived as loss to be in fact the greatest gain.

There is no way we can earn our way to God. It is not possible for finite beings to reach an infinite, perfect being, no matter how many good works we might be able to accumulate in a life time. But praise God that the infinite reached down to the finite and saved us.

The gospel shifts our paradigm. The gospel shows us that there is no gain in trying to earn our righteousness with good works. The gospel shows us that it is only through the great loss of Jesus dying on the cross that we can truly gain righteousness because Jesus' righteousness is now ours. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the idea of doing good things to be right with God and how that is impossible. Discuss the gospel of God reaching down to save us.

— *Pastor Joe*



Week Four

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Many have heard the words of Psalm 19, probably in a chorus somewhere in church. In fact, there is a song titled, “Psalm 19”! When we read this psalm we are hit with the grandeur of who God is—in his creation and in his holy Word. First we see creation shouting God’s praises. But notice the paradox: their voice “goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (v. 4), but it can’t speak as one who has an audible voice (v. 3). As result people can—and do—misinterpret nature (for example, regarding how the world began to exist and where it’s headed). But the Bible tells us rather straightforwardly that nature exists to glorify God and to show who he is (vv. 1–2).

The psalmist goes on to speak of all the benefits of God’s law (vv.7–11). Often when we hear the word “law,” we hear it negatively, as something forced upon us. But as we read how the psalmist describes God’s law, it makes sense that the Hebrew word Torah is sometimes translated “law” but can also be translated “instruction.” Moreover, if God is the loving, heavenly father that he is, then his laws can be equated with “loving instruction” for those who know him through Christ. With that understanding, we are able to look a little deeper into the heart of our heavenly Father.

Even more than that, in the fullness of time, God sent into this world his one and only son who is the truest embodiment of God’s laws in order to save mankind. God the Son preached repentance from sins and trust in him—his life, sacrificial death, and resurrection—so that those who look to him as their Savior and Lord can have eternal life.

This week, we can meditate on the following: In what way do our lives reflect the glory of God? What does it say about God, that he would show himself to us through nature generally, then specifically through his Word, and going even as far as to show himself most precisely through his Son? †

FOR PARENTS One author has written that a clam glorifies God better than mankind. What she means by this is that things in nature are doing what they’re supposed to do, whereas mankind—the only ones made in God’s image—shouts the praises of all things other than God. This week, we can meditate on the following: In what way do our lives reflect the glory of God? What does it say about God, that he would show himself to us through nature generally, then specifically through his Word, and going even as far as to show himself most precisely through his Son?

— *Pastor Seiichi*

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying, ² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ “You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³ “You shall not murder. ¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ “You shall not steal. ¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The temple in the time of Jesus was first and foremost a place to meet with God. Yet as Jesus enters the outer court of the temple, he finds a "house of trade" instead. In response, Jesus drives the animal merchants out and pours out the coins of the money changers. His actions seem harsh and uncharacteristic of the kind and compassionate nature of Jesus, but he was motivated by a great concern to maintain the purity and holiness of his Father's house. The people of God who came to find a place of rest and solitude were likely distracted by animal noises and jingling coins as they sought to encounter God through prayer and repentance. He condemned them not necessarily for their business practices but rather for their inability to recognize that the temple area was primarily a place for worship.

We should ask ourselves if we are more aligned with the animal merchants and money changers or with those who earnestly seek to experience God. Often times when we come to church, and even more so when we are at home or at work, there are so many thoughts running through our minds and motivations wrestling in our hearts. It is challenging to genuinely seek the presence of God and give him the dignity and respect that he deserves. We must follow Jesus' example and fight to make worship the central focus in our lives.

In response to clearing the temple, Jesus' authority was questioned by Jewish leaders. When asked to provide a sign to prove that his actions were credible, Jesus claims that he could raise up the temple that took years and years to build in just three days. Fortunately, John gives us insight that Jesus was referring to his body rather than the physical temple structure. Here we see that Jesus is the true temple and fulfills all that the temple represented. In the temple, sacrifices were made to atone for people's sins so they could be accepted by God. These bloody sacrifices were replaced by the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and his death and resurrection reconciled our broken relationship with God. Christ is the center of all worship, and because of what Christ has done for us, we respond in obedience and with a life devoted to him. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss Jesus' reaction to the merchants and how you would have responded in a similar situation. How can we genuinely meet with God on a daily basis? What are ways in which we can rightly worship God through our lives?

—Pastor Danny

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

What a gift family is! Despite the occasional grief family dynamics engender, all in all what a blessing to have those who stand by our side through life's difficulties and through many failures; those who stick with us through thick and thin; those who love us simply because. We nostalgically reflect when we realize our resemblance to someone in the family—whether our mannerisms, or simple physical likeness.

The Bible tells us God made us in his image (Gen 1:26-27), and in so doing he endowed us with the highest dignity and worth one could dare dream of. Yet we know that after the Fall

this image was marred, and as result mankind gives the lie to their maker. Rom 1 paints the dark, sober reality about mankind's sins and its progressively degenerating nature. It speaks of human beings burying the truths about God and turning to created things in reverence. What should be done to a rebellion of this caliber?

John's gospel begins likewise by painting the plight of the world: the world and everything in it was made through Christ (v. 10), yet the very ones who were made by him rejected him (v. 11). Imagine coming home one day and instead of your family welcoming you (as they would normally), they fail to acknowledge you. Say this recurs, and over time your family not only fails to acknowledge your presence, but begins to overtly despise you; and perhaps one day they tell you they want no part with you. What an awful situation that would be!

Jesus faced such a situation, but on a grander scale. Notice the world's rejection and failure to recognize the one through whom they were made (vv. 10–11)! Instead of a heralded welcome, Jesus was met with the opposite. Even more, Jesus' own family didn't believe him (Jn 7:5). This is how much darkness was and still is in man. Thus when we come later to John 3:16 and John writes, "For God loved the world in this way, that he gave his only Son" (my translation), we need to keep in mind that in no way was Christ's coming due to the world's *lovableness*—this is simply not the picture we get of humanity in the Bible. Rather, what's highlighted is that *despite* the world's darkness, God still sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice (thus showing the magnitude of this love), so that "to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (v. 13). What grace and mercy—and privilege!—that God would call us his children!

God didn't give up on mankind despite its darkness. He knew that in and of themselves they have absolutely no desire—and

hence no chance—to have life beyond the grave. He gave his Son to bear his wrath so that we might live through the Son.

Lastly, notice the description of Christ’s descent as John describes for us: the Word existed in the beginning, in relationship with God, and the Word was God. That this Word is also divine is shown by the way in which God is similarly described in the very beginning: “In the beginning God...” (Gen 1:1). As God in human form, the Son could have been called anything. Yet John records him as being the “Word,” understandably so since “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has *made him known*” (my emphasis, v. 18); that is, in the sense of explaining and interpreting who God is. In our placement in history, the way we learn about this “explainer” of God is through recorded eyewitness testimony of his life and teaching. That’s why the Word of God is still so important today. During this season, may we attentively reflect on Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. †

FOR PARENTS Talk together about the gospel – what is it? What is the good news about Jesus? Why is it good news? Thank God for sending Jesus who came to give us the right to become children of God.

— *Pastor Seiichi*



Week Five

DAY 1 / JOHN 3:14-21

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

DAY 2 / NUMBERS 21:4-9

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.” ⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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.

If you remember from yesterday's passage in John 3, Jesus uses the image of the serpent that Moses lifted in the wilderness as an image of himself being lifted up. There is a double meaning behind being lifted up—Jesus is literally lifted up on the cross to die, but Jesus is also lifted up back into life.

In Numbers 21, we see that the Israelites complain against God and Moses. God sends fiery serpents and many people die. We ought to read this passage in light of the larger context of Numbers where God has told the Israelites that they will wander in the wilderness until the unbelieving generation dies off because they did not trust that God would give them the promised land. As we read through the narrative in Numbers we see that the previous generation is dying out through various means including the fiery serpents from today's passage. This is a matter of God's justice and judgment being fulfilled.

And yet, in the midst of God's justice, we see his rich mercy displayed through the bronze serpent that was lifted up on a pole. Those who looked upon it would live. We can grasp the gospel connection here. Because we are born in sin and continue to walk in sin, we are dead. We are separated from God. Our destiny, as sinners, is eternal separation from God. Yet God chose to give us life through Jesus Christ. Praise God that he has given us eyes to see our savior so that we might live! †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the gospel of God choosing to give us life through Jesus Christ. God is perfectly just and perfectly merciful. On the cross Jesus experienced the perfect justice of God that we were to pay which translates to God's perfect mercy given to us.

— *Pastor Joe*

DAY 3 / PSALM 107:1-3, 17-22

¹ Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble ³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south...

¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; ¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction. ²¹ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ²² And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

DAY 4 / EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in othe passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The most striking aspect of this passage is the transformation that happens to a sinner from verse 1 all the way to verse 10. The linking word here in this section, as well as the book of Ephesians, is the word “walk” found in verse 1 and 10 (the ESV translation preserves the original word here). We were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once “walked.” We followed Satan and all he stands for. We were children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ. It is by grace that we have been saved, through faith. And so now that we are saved, we are God’s workmanship created to “walk” in good works that God prepared for us to do.

Notice the transformation. Before salvation in Christ we were walking in trespasses and sins. That is, all our choices were leading us away from God. And we could try to do all types of things to get right with God, but they were meaningless because we were still walking in sin. But God made us alive. And now that we are alive with Christ, we can walk in the good works that we were created to do.

Praise God that there is no striving to earn God’s favor! God has given us his favor through Jesus Christ. And he has given us the privilege to walk in newness and live the life he created us to live. †

FOR PARENTS Discuss the transformation that happens when we are saved. Emphasize that salvation is God’s work (vv. 8-9). Discuss verse 10 together.

— *Pastor Joe*

¹ 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 ² 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.

³ 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.

The author of the book of Revelation is the apostle John. At the time of his writing, John had been exiled by the Roman authorities to the tiny Island of Patmos (the southern part of the Aegean Sea)—a place where condemned criminals were sentenced to slave labor in the mines of Patmos—all this because of his teachings and faith in Jesus Christ.

While John could have easily been overcome with sorrow and self-pity due to his depressing situation, God didn't allow it, for on the island of Patmos, at the very lowest point of John's life, God gave him one of the most glorious visions in all of Scripture concerning the world, not as it is, but the world, as it will one day be. Revelation is the by-product of John's best attempt of conveying in human words the majestic vision he was granted concerning the ultimate destiny and destination that awaits those whose hearts have been captured by Christ. Just as the vision given to John was meant to encourage him to persevere in hope, so Revelation is written to encourage us, as God's people, to persevere in hope irrespective of how unfavorable our circumstances may appear.

What becomes immediately obvious in the book of Revelation, the final consummation of God's work of redemption, is that God will make everything new, including a New Heavens and a New Earth. And everything that is wrong with our world will

be a thing of the past, as God will one day declare, “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” (Revelation 21:2-4).

Revelation 22 then speaks of “the river of the water of life... flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1). While the image of this river is certainly reminiscent of the prophecies spoken of in Zechariah 14:8 and Ezekiel 47:1-9, this river described as “bright as crystal” is actually most reminiscent of the river spoken of in the garden of Eden. In Genesis, we are told that “A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden...where there is gold...bdellium and onyx stone” (Genesis 2:10-12). While Ezekiel 47:1-9 pictures this living water flowing from the temple, John pictures God and the Lamb as the temple.

Like the original garden of Eden, Revelation 22:2 speaks of the future abode of God’s people as a permanent fertile garden, where winter never comes, with “the tree of life” that will always yield fruit, twelve months out of the year, to provide sustenance and whose leaves will have healing properties for all peoples. The language used here certainly harkens back to Ezekiel 47:12, “And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of tress for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” What is noticeably absent in this new garden, as opposed to the old garden, is that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is nowhere to be found, for this new garden will never know sin or ever be touched by evil again.

Just in case we may have missed the point that John was seeking to drive home through his use of images, John comes

out and states his case plainly, “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” (Revelation 22:3). The point John is making is clear. God will one day make the end like the beginning—before our world was cursed—restoring Paradise Lost into Paradise Regained, where we, who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, will live forever in God’s presence and do what we were made for; that is, “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever” and ever and ever and ever and ever... I can only imagine! †

FOR PARENTS Ask your children to share what makes them sad. Then ask them to imagine what life will be like when Christ returns and brings about paradise restored. Remind them that “He (Jesus) 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.” Jesus promises “Surely I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20). Pray together “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

—Pastor Mark



Week Six

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

When the newly-delivered Israelites entered into a covenant (a special promise) with God, they vowed together, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). They heard God’s commands and promised obedience. However, such obedience was not possible! Their promise to obey would be broken again and again. Though God was a husband to them, leading them “by the hand” from their enslavement in Egypt, they soon broke the covenant in disobedience, as did the generations after them.

In light of the continued disobedience of God’s people, the prophet Jeremiah’s message to the nation of Judah was often one of judgment. He was called “to pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow.” But God also called Jeremiah “to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10), delivering the ultimate message of hope—that God himself would make a new covenant with his people, dependent not on the obedience of people, but the work of God. This new covenant rests utterly on God’s willingness to make and accept the perfect atoning sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ for the forgiving and forgetting of our sins. And God

promises, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” He promises to do a transformative work in his people, putting his law within them and on their hearts, thereby radically changing their relationship with Himself and even with one another (v. 34). †

FOR PARENTS Because God loves us, he wants to have a close relationship with his people, a relationship that would never be broken. In the Bible, we learn that people made special promises with God, called covenants. They promised to always love and obey God. If we promised to always love and obey God, do you think we could keep that promise always and forever? No, we couldn't and they couldn't either. But if God promised to love us, always and forever, would He be able to keep his promise? Yes! God could keep His promise always and forever! Thank God for sending his Son Jesus to take away our sins so that we can be God's people forever.

— *Pastor Peggy*

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ¹² Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! ¹³ With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. ¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

In verse 10, the psalmist writes, “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!” Psalm 119 reminds us that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationship with His Word. In yesterday’s reading, God promised, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Somehow, our relationship with God is dynamically linked with God’s word in us.

Jesus echoed this same idea when He taught, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). While Jesus’s life, death and resurrection do indeed make the believer right with God, it does not end there. Right relationship with God is not simply a position or state of being before the Lord. Psalm 119 reminds us that by God’s work of salvation and regeneration, our relationship is one of love, delight, and purposeful seeking—all of which are tied to knowing and obeying the Word of God. †

FOR PARENTS Talk together about ways that we can store up God’s word in our hearts. As a family, how might you help one another do this? Why is it good for us to remember, think about, talk about and delight in God’s word?

— *Pastor Peggy*

¹ For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The Israelites had a high priest who was called by God to serve in a two-fold manner: to act on their behalf before the Lord and to minister in solidarity with God’s people. God appointed His Son, Jesus, to be and become the ultimate and eternal high priest for His people. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus did not exalt himself, but it was God the Father who called and ultimately glorified him.

This calling enters time and place and history in the physical life of Jesus, “the days of his flesh.” It is in the outworking of Jesus’s obedience that He is made perfect or complete. That is not to say that Jesus was somehow disobedient or imperfect by any means! But authentic obedience is a practiced obedience, and the earthly life of Jesus shows that he, too, was beset with human weakness, yet was gloriously without sin—thanks be to God! (Hebrews 4:15) And his perfect obedience culminated in his atoning death on the cross.

God’s glorious plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus, was not some abstract, cosmic change in human fate. His salvation was worked out in the bodily life of Christ, in the reality of his loud cries and tears, and in the reality of Jesus’s suffering and death. Yet it was through Christ’s death and resurrection that God would glorify Himself. And through Christ’s ultimate victory over sin and death, He became our unique, perfect, and eternal high priest, “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (v. 9). Hallelujah! †

FOR PARENTS Brainstorm together—what are some things that we have in common with Jesus when he lived on the earth? Now try to think about things that are unique about Jesus, that are only true of Him. Would anyone else have been able to die to take away our sins? Praise God for making a way through Jesus to save His people. Praise Jesus for being perfectly obedient to God his Father.

— *Pastor Peggy*

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. ²⁷ "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.



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