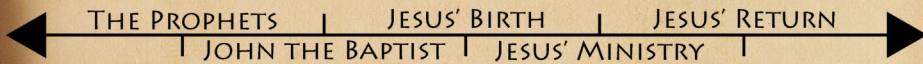


ADULT CONNECTION



DECEMBER 2017

PROCLAMATION



Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” No more important words have ever been uttered than these by the prophet Isaiah about the coming of the Messiah. It was in His coming that the redemption of mankind was set in place. As the sacrifice and offering for the sins of all humanity, God demonstrates His love toward us through Him. We celebrate the birth of Christ because His coming set the stage for His offering that gives a second birth to anyone and everyone who responds.

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own method for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for each one’s own personal study and encouragement.

As we celebrate the coming of Christ, may we use this subject as a topic of conversation to share the reason for His coming. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” This is why He came!

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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December 3, 2017

Written by: Brack Buckles



Proclamation of the Prophets

Isaiah 7:1-16 & 9:1-7

Focal Verse:

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

Introduce

When my family lived in Tennessee, we resided on a small cul-de-sac where some of the neighbors' yards backed up to each other. Our back deck was raised, so I could see the whole neighborhood and I became known for going out and screaming, "Rebekah, Caleb, Hannah, time for dinner!" Our neighbors really got a kick out of it, but I had something important to say—even my children thought so. It was time for dinner and



everyone wanted to eat. Just as I had an important message to deliver to my children, the prophets in the Old Testament had something important they needed to proclaim as well. Even more important than dinner, they were proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah, in particular, proclaimed the coming of the Messiah by declaring God's holiness as the center of his message and demonstrating the need for restoration in Israel because of her sinfulness ([Isa 6:1-7](#)). Because He is holy, God desires to redeem people through the coming of His chosen Messiah, Jesus, who would pay the penalty for our sins through His death on the cross and guarantee eternal life through His resurrection when a wayward person turns from his sins and surrenders his life to Him.

In our day and time, we have lost sight of what proclamation means. According to [dictionary.com](#), the word proclamation refers to "a public or official announcement, especially one dealing with a matter of great importance." Although the word proclamation should designate something of great importance, in today's society because of social media

Introduce

all kinds of mundane and useless “proclamations” occur. People tell you what they are having for dinner or that they are sitting on the couch bored. Who cares?! Make a proclamation about something that is important just like Isaiah did when he proclaimed the coming of the Messiah! Now that is important news worth repeating.

In [chapter 6](#), God reveals His heart to Isaiah as the one and only holy God who desires that people repent and turn back to Him. Having a plan of redemption in place since the creation of the world, God demonstrates how He wants to use His people to proclaim the coming of this Messiah who offers salvation to all. For this reason, God asks Isaiah, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” This is an interesting way to ask because God (singular) is wanting to send someone for Us (plural). God’s plan is to send His Son to redeem the world, so the “Us” (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit) is collectively in agreement with the plan set in motion from the beginning. Already having the plan, God now has someone willing to proclaim it in Isaiah who has volunteered to be sent. Therefore, the prophet’s job is to proclaim God’s truth. As people of God, we are called to do the same—to proclaim His truth. Christmas is a great time to talk to people about Christ and the redemption He has for everyone, so don’t waste the opportunities God given you to proclaim Him to the secular world around us!

Key
Question

How can you proclaim the truth of God this week in your daily life?

Isaiah 7:1-9

Proclaiming Shalom (God's Peace):

In [Isaiah 7:1-9](#), Ahaz has only been king about one year. Taking the throne when he was around twenty years old, he reigned for about sixteen years in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. As a young king, Ahaz did not have the wisdom or experience to lead the nation of Judah and, in the end, history considers him a failure. He allowed the land to be filled with idolatry, sacrifices to foreign gods, and incense burning—partly resulting from his father Jotham not expelling false worship from the land ([2 Kings 16:1-6](#)). Even though Jotham followed God, he still allowed idol worship and altars to other gods, so subsequent generations, like that of his son, wandered even further from the Lord.

Jotham is like a parent who brings his or her children to church, but then does nothing else throughout the week to teach them about the Lord or reinforce the principles found in God's Word. Such a parent fails to discuss with his or her children how God is at work on a daily basis, leaving them totally vulnerable to their own devices to be influenced by a society which stands in opposition to God. Because Jotham didn't teach Ahaz the value of worshipping the Lord alone and allowed idolatry and secularism



Instruct

to fill the land, his son was left to his own wisdom which drove him further from the Lord.

What can you do as a parent or grandparent to ensure your children are following the Lord as outlined in the Bible?

Question
1

In the midst of these troubling times when the king and people had forsaken the Lord and were surrounded on all sides by their enemies, God tells Isaiah to **go** and **meet** him **on the highway** to proclaim a word of encouragement to him (v. 3). Ahaz was scared at this point because Israel, also referred to as **Ephraim**, has just made an alliance with **Syria** who **deployed** its **forces in Ephraim** (v. 2). Hoping to withstand the assault of the Assyrians, Judah feels pressure with Jerusalem surrounded and fears that Israel will join in the attack—leaving them without hope and their community devastated. Instead of looking to the Lord for wisdom, guidance, and protection, however, Ahaz and the Southern Kingdom of Judah turned to her own resources and became consumed with fear and despair. How often do we see the potential of problems coming in our lives and then allow them to consume what we are doing? One January when Catholene and I lived in Dothan, Alabama, the meteorologists predicted snow, so the grocery stores were flooded and shelves were emptied. With all the schools and many businesses closed, one



would have thought a blizzard was coming. Being from Tennessee and seeing snow regularly, we were not concerned as much, but the people in Dothan were frantic. Although there was about a 60% chance of precipitation, the low temperature was only 36 degrees! Consequently, the people were consumed with the potential of a problem rather than seeing the solution. In the same way, God did not want Ahaz to fear, but to trust Him.

Therefore, God sent Isaiah with a message of comfort and hope if only Ahaz would heed it; Isaiah proclaimed, “**Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted**” (v. 4). God wanted to reassure Ahaz that He is in control of what is happening because this alliance will only be as strong as members—which apart from God is nothing. In addition, Isaiah goes on to show Ahaz that the alliance is weak and will ultimately fall apart. He then reminds the king, “**If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established**” (v. 9). The Lord was making it clear that if Ahaz doesn’t trust in Him, then he will fail just like this alliance. In every situation, we must focus on God rather than the circumstance, trusting Him to meet our needs and deliver us through times of peril. If we fail to trust God, we will often make a larger mess and incur greater struggles; therefore, we must learn to turn to God first and seek His wisdom and guidance before all else.

In what or whom do you trust so that you can be successful?

Question
2

Isaiah 7:10-16

Proclaiming Immanuel (God’s Presence):

After God challenges Ahaz to trust Him, He takes it a step further and tells him to **ask** for a **sign** that He will fulfill His promise (v. 11). God does not

Instruct

want us to have any doubts that He will do what He says and will keep His promises. Because He is a faithful and true, the Lord desires His people to worship, trust, and respect Him alone. In the same way, He wants to reassure Ahaz, but Ahaz is too stubborn to do what the prophet had commanded by requesting **a sign** from the Lord (v. 12). Through Isaiah, God offers **a sign** to **Ahaz** who refuses to ask, stating that he **will not test the Lord** God (see [Deut 6:16](#)). Because He desires to have a relationship with us, God welcomes our questions and wants to establish a dialogue with us so that He can demonstrate His love and provision for us. Although we shouldn't question God through an unbelieving and condescending attitude, we can bring our honest questions and concerns to Him and seek further understanding so that we may know His will for our lives. Through prayer, we ought to seek to communicate with the Lord—not by merely making demands, but by asking questions and seeking His wisdom.

In-Depth Information



Is testing or asking for a sign from God wrong? When we test God for our own need and benefit with an unbelieving and obstinate spirit—yes ([Deut 6:16](#), [Matt 16:4](#)). If we are asking so that it can be a way of increasing our faith and understanding—no ([2 Kings 20:8–11](#); [Mal 3:10](#)).

How often do you have a dialogue with the Lord when you pray—seeking to hear His reply instead of merely listing a set of requests?

Question
3

God wants to confirm to Ahaz that He has a plan which no one can thwart—not even the Assyrians in alliance with Israel; therefore, the wayward king can trust the Lord and have confidence in Him. Yet, the plan to which God refers here goes well beyond any mere physical confrontation that Ahaz may immediately face; in fact, it deals with the salvation of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, through the Messiah who would come in the line of David. Therefore, God wants Ahaz, Isaiah, and the people to know how He will deliver them—not from any human alliance or even the Assyrians, but how He will restore the broken relationship between Him and His creation caused by sin; thus, God desires for Ahaz to **ask for a sign** so that He can show His sovereign power by proclaiming the work of the Messiah.

By refusing to listen to Isaiah and **ask for a sign**, Ahaz seems to be so far removed from trusting God that he cannot even see the what God is attempting to do. He erroneously believes, therefore, that God will not do anything to save Judah and he sees imminent destruction looming because of this alliance. The king had such little faith that even **a sign** would not cause him to believe. In his unbelief, Ahaz fails to hear the Lord speak through the prophet and refuses to do what He has commanded directly. Even though Ahaz feels he is honoring God by not testing him, in reality he is doing the exact opposite and is testing God's patience by being stubborn and refusing to obey. Thus, Isaiah asks, "**Will**



Instruct

you weary my God also?" (v. 13). In other words, Isaiah condemns him for testing God's patience by believing He is so small and powerless that He will not be able to fulfill that which He has said. We must be willing and ready to trust in the Lord at all times; we need to take time to listen to what He says through Scripture and apply it in our lives.

In what ways have you tested God's patience at times? How can you show your willingness to the Lord to do what He asks of you?

Question
4

Because Ahaz refuses to obey God and **ask for a sign**, God gives him one through the prophet; **a virgin will conceive** and give birth to **a Son** who shall be called **Immanuel** (v. 14). The name **Immanuel**, which means God with us, is **a sign** for both Ahaz and for us (see [Matt 1:23](#)). For Ahaz, it has immediate ramifications by demonstrating that God is with the king and will not let this ungodly alliance between Assyria and Israel overthrow Judah and Jerusalem. Yet, an even greater sign would occur nearly 750 years later with the birth of the Messiah. When Jesus became flesh and made His dwelling among us ([John 1:14](#)), we literally saw God among and with us in a way never before experienced. The one who created us had taken on the body of a man in order to save us from our own iniquity and sin.

Through Jesus, God has revealed Himself in a unique way and has fulfilled a promise made at the dawn of creation to redeem a wayward mankind. Just as Ahaz stubbornly refused to ask for **a sign**, many today refuse to accept the **sign** which is Jesus Christ who is the only way to have salvation and eternal life. Isaiah had an unparalleled proclamation

to announce to the world—salvation will come through the Messiah for God is literally with us. Because of the importance of this news, we should proclaim it boldly without ceasing. We must be prepared every day to seize the opportunity to share the gospel. If we talk about so many pointless things on Twitter, Facebook, and social media in general, shouldn't we be much more passionate about proclaiming the good news?

In what ways can you seize the opportunity through conversations in person and on social media to proclaim the gospel?

Question
5

Isaiah 9:1-7

Proclaiming the King (God's Preservation):

As we fast-forward to [chapter 9](#), we observe more commentary and description about God's plan and personality. If people fail to turn to Him, they will have nothing but despair and devastation because outside of Him there is no hope at all. For this reason, [chapter 8](#) concludes with a dire warning: "Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness" ([v. 22](#)). Yet, chapter 9 opens on a



positive note with a chance to have hope in the Lord if Judah would only repent and turn to Him. This hope will become manifest or apparent when the King Himself comes. God will not send an emissary or someone else in His place, but He Himself will come. In verses 2-4, therefore, Isaiah offers

Instruct

three primary descriptions about the coming King. First, the King will be **a great light** which will show the way to salvation for all people (v. 2). Although people have walked in the **darkness** of sin, they have seen **a great light** which has come to offer them hope by setting them free from the oppression of sin and providing the one and only sacrifice through which they can have forgiveness for their sins and fellowship with the Father (see [John 8:12](#)).

How can we stay focused on Christ in our lives and not let the dark and gloomy storm clouds of doubt distract us?

Question
6

Second, the coming of the King will bring great **joy** to the nation because they will have reaped the benefits of the salvation that He establishes (v. 3). Isaiah likens the salvation that the King offers to a great **harvest** in which people **divide the spoil** (i.e. the crops produced) joyously. Through this salvation, God will bless His people beyond measure; this blessing doesn't necessarily mean something financial or tangible, but rather God will bless His people with a Savior and King—One who will restore their relationship to Him so that they can spend eternity with Him. In addition, the concept of **dividing the spoil** means also that the people of God will share this salvation and blessing with others so that they too may reap the benefits of having their sins forgiven and



being made righteous through the Messiah.

Finally, Isaiah makes explicit why this salvation will bring so much joy—God will free His people from **the yoke of his burden** which is the oppression of sin (v. 4). Literally, this freedom refers to the physical bondage of the Assyrians who have surrounded Jerusalem, but it has a deeper connotation of being free from the sin which entraps us (see [Rom 6:18](#); [Heb 12:1](#)). As the **light**, Jesus shows us the way unto salvation, offers us a great blessing through salvation which we did not deserve, and removes the stain of sin freeing us from its addictive power so that we might have an abundant life in Him.

What yoke (bondage) are you under today? How will Jesus remove that yoke from your life if you would only trust Him and turn it over to Him?

Question
7

Although through the New Testament we know who this coming King will be, Isaiah provides more details about His identity in 9:5. Born of a virgin ([Isa 7:14](#)), this child will be **given to us** as an indescribable gift which will bear the sin of mankind squarely upon His shoulders, dying for the guilty even though He Himself was perfectly innocent (v. 6). For this reason, Paul exclaims, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift” ([2 Cor 9:15](#); see also [John 3:16](#)). Even though Jesus is sovereign over human governments, He voluntarily gave His life for our sakes so that He could restore us into a right relationship; thus, He will still have authority because the **government will rest upon His shoulders**—for no one can take His life from Him, not even Rome, but He will gladly lay it down for our sakes (v. 6; see also [John 10:18](#)).

Isaiah then describes our Lord and Savior as **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace**. In brief, as a

Instruct

Wonderful Counselor Jesus is always there to guide us and provide wisdom in living a life that honors Him. As a **Mighty God**, Jesus is all-powerful and, though He died, was resurrected as a testament to His victory over life and death and assurance that He will offer it to those of us who accept His sacrifice. As an **Everlasting Father**, He is eternal and will never let us down—as some of our earthly fathers may have—but continually cares for our every need. Finally, as the **Prince of Peace**, He provides forgiveness for our sin and **peace** from the wrath of God against our sins so that we might be in right standing with Him (see [Rom 5:1](#)). This **peace** that He provides will last forever as Isaiah notes that **of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end** (v. 7). His reign, therefore, will last forever so we do not need to fret or stress about the future and we can have assurance that God will fulfill His promise of eternal life to us.

Understanding these titles of Jesus, which one is most comforting to you and which one is the hardest for you to trust?

Question
8

Inspire

As we have seen, God used Isaiah in a mighty way to proclaim not only hope during a stressful situation in Ahaz's day, but also the good news of a coming Messiah who would deliver the world from its sin. God used Isaiah because He was obedient and responded to the call saying, "Lord, here am I send me" ([Isa 6:8](#)). Too often today when God asks us the same question, our response tends to be: "Here I am, send me, but I need to

get this done first” or “Here I am, send me, as long as it does not get in the way of my current life.” When we study the book of Isaiah, we can see how his commitment to God totally changed his life. Although Isaiah had a difficult life and suffered much persecution, we can see how following God’s plan will always be the best path for our life—no matter how much it may change our own plans.

All the prophets looked forward to this coming Messiah which is clearly fulfilled in Jesus, even though He did not come as the Jews at the time expected. They were seeking more of a political ruler to overthrow the Romans rather than a spiritual leader who would forgive sin and provide life for both Jew and Gentile alike! Thus, Jesus came to restore the broken relationship with God the Father which is an even greater triumph than defeating the Romans. Now it is our turn to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and point back to what the Messiah has done for us just as the Old Testament prophets looked forward to His coming! We, as His church, have the privilege and the responsibility to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. Christmas is perhaps the best time of time of year to proclaim the coming of Jesus and share the greatest gift that has ever been given in throughout all humanity. As you think about giving and receiving gifts this time of year, remember to give the greatest gift of life in Christ Jesus which is free to all who will accept it.

Incorporate

In a world that is hectic, where natural disasters happen, people's lives end tragically, and life seems so busy you can't catch your breath, how can we rest in the peace of God? In what ways do you take time to rest in Him daily?

In what ways has God shown His promises to you through His presence in your life? How can you share those to encourage others to trust Christ?

As part of God's plan, He has chosen His people to be the ones who proclaim who He is. Where are you currently proclaiming Him and where can you proclaim Him in the future?

December 10, 2017

Written by: Mike Neal



Proclamation of John the Baptist

John 3:22-36

Focal Verse:

"He must increase, but I must decrease."

John 3:30

Introduce

Since the first week of November, the media has bombarded us with advertisements for must-have gifts and “holiday sales.” Many of these ads feature a rotund elderly man with rosy cheeks and a long white beard dressed entirely in red who has an infectious laugh that has become known throughout the world. We have become so familiar with this iconic image that even by this brief description we can easily identify him as Santa Claus, but the man behind this myth and legend is relatively obscure with little historical documentation. Because of this lack of historical information, Ted Olsen summarizes well what we can know about the real Saint Nicholas: “All we can say is that he was *probably* the bishop of Myra (near modern Finike, Turkey) sometime in the 300s” (emphasis his). So how did this relatively unknown man become the quintessential image of giving at Christmas?



Some have postulated that Nicolas inherited a large family fortune which he gave entirely away in support of philanthropic causes. Nicholas himself may have had the right motivation to serve Christ by pointing others to Him as attested by the fact that history has very little to say about him factually. Regardless of how the legend of Santa Claus came into existence, it has served to distract from Jesus and the reason that He came to earth. Lost in the midst of all this secularism and commercialism at Christmas is

Introduce

the real reason that we celebrate: the arrival of our Savior who has taken away the sting of death by dying for our sins. Although Nicolas didn't outwardly promote himself in a way that detracts from Christ, it still highlights the propensity of man to glorify himself rather than the Savior. Certainly, the giving of gifts at Christmas is noble and should be practiced, but when these gifts and legends overshadow Christ we must re-evaluate how we proclaim the message of our Savior.

John the Baptist, as the forerunner to the Messiah, serves as a great example of how we ought to proclaim Jesus in such a way that honors and glorifies Him rather than self-centeredly focusing on us. Throughout his God-given ministry, John the Baptist pointed people to the coming Messiah in such a way that he acknowledged Jesus' majesty and greatness above his own personality and achievements. In fact, he proclaimed, "He must increase, but I must decrease" ([John 3:30](#)). During the holiday season, if we are honest with ourselves, many of us let tradition, family, personal preference, and a host of other things overshadow Christ, becoming caught up in the moment and losing focus on Him.

Instead, all these activities and functions at Christmas should seek to "increase" and exalt Christ, giving him a prestigious place and platform by which the gospel can be presented so a dying world can hear the truth about how salvation has come. Certainly, we can spend time with family on Christmas opening gifts and laughing about funny antics during past holidays, but if Christ is not proclaimed or we relegate Him to a few minutes after eating, opening gifts, and sports then we must re-evaluate our priorities. To put it in perspective, we as Christians often criticize the secular world for saying "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas,"

but how often do we ourselves take time to emphasize and proclaim the gospel to a lost and dying world by elevating Christ?

Key
Question

In what ways do you proclaim and exalt Christ at Christmas?

In Reference



[*Ted Olsen, "The Real Saint Nicholas: The Story of Santa Claus's Namesake," Christianity Today, August 2008.*](#)

Instruct

John 3:22-26

Proclaim with Cooperation not Competition:

After meeting with Nicodemus the inquisitive Pharisee who came at night to seek an answer to the question about how to have eternal life, Jesus traveled to **Judea** where He began to minister and teach more publicly that a relationship with the Father comes only by repenting from sin and completely submitting to Him as the Messiah who would die on their behalf (v. 22). Likely moving further south to find more ample **water** to baptize by immersion, Jesus finds **John** the Baptist already in the region continuing his ministry of baptizing people when they "repented for the remission [forgiveness] of sins"



Instruct

(v. 23, see also [Mark 1:4](#)). **John** would continue this ministry in which he pointed others to the Christ until Herod the Tetrarch had him imprisoned and beheaded for preaching against his “unlawful” and sordid relationship with his brother’s wife, Herodias—for as the writer of the Gospel points out he **had not yet been thrown into prison** (v. 24, see also [Matt 14:3-11](#)).

Because they were in close proximity to each other, **John’s disciples** began to notice that Jesus attracted more followers than they did which developed within them a spirit of bitterness and competition. This idea of competition was likely spurred on by the **dispute** that **arose** between them and **the Jews about purification** (v. 25). Although we don’t know the exact nature of the **dispute**, we do know that it prompted **John’s disciples** to return to their leader and complain that Jesus, the man **who was** with him **beyond the Jordan**, is now **baptizing** more than they are (v. 26). For whatever reason, **John’s disciples** had not understood either his role as the one who points to the Christ or his message, but instead they felt insecure and threatened by the fact that Jesus’ ministry was flourishing more than theirs.

In-Depth Information



*The issue here in this passage does not center on **purification** because it could refer to a number of first-century practices among the **Jews** based on their tradition. On the other hand, the response of **John’s disciples** is more revealing. Likely, the **Jews** who came to them questioned which baptism was most effective—Jesus or John’s;*

In-Depth Information—continued



therefore, **John's disciples** took offense and became jealous because **all** were **coming to** Jesus instead of them which seemed to devalue or invalidate their work in their eyes (v. 26).

In what ways do we need to take precaution so that we don't become arrogant in our ministries and areas of service and the focus is upon Christ and not us?

Question
1

We live in a society rife with competition. On [November 4, the Star-Telegram featured the headline "Fights Break out among Parents, Refs at Youth Football Game in Fort Worth"](#) corresponding to an article

highlighting that police were dispatched to a brawl at a twelve-and-under football game—not

between the players, but amongst their parents over the outcome of the game. Although offering only this one example, most of us can list many instances in which this spirit of competition pervades our society and can even identify some

ways that it has infiltrated the church; so rather than working together to glorify Christ and share the gospel with the world, we compete against each other and often leave the most essential elements of the message missing.

Instead of exalting our personal preferences and emphasizing our



Instruct

differences, let us work together to point people to Christ. We shouldn't compromise our morality or the truth contained within the Bible, but we must work together to share the gospel with like-minded individuals. For denominations and individuals who have perverted the truth and proclaim something different than the Bible teaches, we need to pray for them and seek opportunities to point them to the truth in God's Word in a loving, yet corrective way. However, with those who adhere to the Bible, we must join forces because the majority of the world is lost and on a direct course for destruction when their lives end; for such a large task, we need everyone empowered by Christ with God's truth to work toward the common goal of exalting the Savior and pointing people to Him for eternal life.

In what ways do we see competition in the church today which removes the focus from Christ and places it upon individuals?

Question
2

John 3:27-36

Proclaim the Christ:

In response to his disciples' envious attitude, John reveals the true source of his ministry and redirects their focus upon the Lord—not a mere mortal such as he. Just as Jesus had earlier explained to Nicodemus that no one could enter heaven unless he were born from above (i.e. "born again"), John tells his disciples that **a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven** (v. 27, see also [John 3:3](#)). In other words, John's ministry is one that has been given to him by the Lord;

therefore, he is just a mere messenger of a supernatural message—one that is far greater than he. Consequently, he only points to the One, that is Jesus, who has come from above to offer a permanent solution to sin through the salvation He offers to all mankind ([John 3:31](#)). For this reason, John has emphasized from the beginning of his ministry that “He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose” ([John 1:27](#)).

In-Depth Information



The word that Jesus uses in [John 3:3](#) when talking to Nicodemus often translated as “born again” can also mean “born from above.” Nicodemus misunderstands what Jesus has said and cannot fathom how a person can enter his mother’s womb for a second time. However, Jesus is actually referring to the source of salvation which comes from God (i.e. from above) through the indwelling of the Spirit.

Why should we continually remind ourselves and others that the source of our ministry comes from the Lord (i.e. heaven)?

Question
3

vv. 27-28

The Uniqueness of the Christ:

John further reminds his disciples that he has already told them he **is not the Christ** (v. 28). In fact, he chastises them for their haughty and prideful attitude by reminding them that they themselves **bear witness** to what he has already **said**. One could almost imagine John with exasperation telling his disciples, “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times.”

Instruct

In essence, not only has John the Baptist told his disciples that he is **not the Christ**, but so has Scripture in the Old Testament. Approximately 400 years earlier, the prophet Malachi tells of one who would prepare the way for the Messiah and announce His coming: “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. ‘Behold, He is coming,’ says the Lord of hosts” ([Mal 3:1](#)). For this reason, John reiterates that **he has been sent before** the Messiah.

Even before this clear reference in Malachi to John the Baptist, the prophet Isaiah speaks of “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” ([Isa 40:3](#); see also [John 1:23](#)). In both Isaiah and Malachi, we can clearly see the uniqueness of the Messiah as distinguished from John the Baptist. The One for whom John prepares the way is none other than the Lord Himself—that is Jesus the promised Messiah. John merely functions as a human messenger preparing the world for the One who created it to enter as her Savior. Similarly, we are human agents of the message who point back to that monumental day when Jesus began His three-year ministry and journey toward the cross so that He might redeem us. Consequently, we must exercise extreme caution so that people will see Jesus in us rather than our own personalities and achievements.

How can you explain the uniqueness of Christ?

Question
4

The Superiority of the Christ:

John further clarifies his purpose in ministry by using an illustration that describes Jesus' superiority. Using imagery from the Old Testament, John refers to Jesus as the **bridegroom** and himself as the **friend of the bridegroom**—which today we would call the best man. At wedding receptions today, the best man announces the arrival of the bride and groom; he is not the focus of the event, but merely one who receives **joy** from seeing his friend with his bride. If the best man, or **friend of the bridegroom**, brings attention upon himself not only does he dishonor the **bridegroom**, but his foolish and impetuous actions bring shame upon himself. The best man, therefore, is not superior to the **bridegroom**, but in actuality the opposite is true—the bridegroom is superior to the best man and the focus of the ceremony. In the same way, Jesus is the focus of the message that John the Baptist bears; Jesus, being God in the flesh who has come to redeem His people, is far superior to John.



In-Depth Information



In the Old Testament, the relationship between Israel and the Lord is frequently described as one between a bride and groom; Israel is often seen as the unfaithful bride, but here in John the metaphor has a more positive meaning concerning Jesus' relationship with His people. See [Isaiah 50:1](#); [54:5-8](#); [Jer 31:32](#); and [Hosea 2:7](#). Jesus uses that imagery of a bridegroom Himself which we will discuss further in week five concerning the Proclamation of His Return.

Instruct

For this reason, John continues to emphasize that he **must decrease** while Jesus as the Messiah **must increase** (v. 30). In the same way, we are not to draw attention to ourselves, but we are to highlight and point others to Christ. Imagine someone giving a eulogy at a loved one's funeral, but the person only talked about himself rather than the one being laid to rest; the person never mentioned anything about the accomplishments or the life of the person in the casket, but merely talked about his own achievements in a braggadocious way. To our ears, this would seem inappropriate and dishonorable; yet, some Christians have this type of attitude with Christ. Instead of honoring Him by exalting what He has done, some people speak of their own accolades. However, we need to follow John's example and **decrease** ourselves and **increase** the focus on our Savior.

What are some things that we can do to exalt Christ in our lives while making ourselves less of the focus?

Question
5

John **increases** the focus on Christ by reiterating that Jesus has come **from above** and He has a divine message for His creation. Jesus is superior, therefore, because He is the Lord God who has come down from **heaven** to save His creation. Again, using similar teaching to that of Jesus when He met with Nicodemus, John explains that **he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth**; it's another way of saying, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (see [John 3:6](#)). Jesus doesn't have a message which is simply man-made, but He has a message from the Lord—and the Lord

through Jesus has delivered it personally; therefore, John exclaims that **He who comes from heaven is above all** (v. 31). In the same way, the gospel message that we have is not one merely concocted by mankind, but it is a message of salvation from the Lord Himself. As a result, it is far superior to any man-made religion or philosophy and it is the only way through which we can attain life.

In what ways is Jesus superior to any other religious leader? In what ways is the gospel superior to any other human religion?

Question
6

vv. 32-35

The Truthfulness of the Christ:

After describing the uniqueness and superiority of the Christ, John addresses how His **testimony is true**. He begins by demonstrating how many people will not believe or **receive** Jesus' **testimony** (v. 32). Coming from **heaven**, Jesus knows the only way to have eternal life because the Father has revealed it to Him according to His plan; therefore, Jesus is speaking about the things that **He has seen and heard**—in other words, He is speaking about the things which He knows with certainty. Even so, however, some men will **not receive** His **testimony** because they have their own agenda, follow their own wisdom, and seek their own pleasure apart from the Lord. On the other hand, those who receive His testimony certify that it's the truth that comes from the Lord Himself (v. 33). Since Jesus has come from **heaven**, the message that He speaks is divine and contains **the words of God** (v. 34). Thus, it's not some fictional message containing myths and legends, but it's the very word of God Himself which is true and without error for all time ([2 Tim 3:6](#)).

Instruct

Like Jesus, God has given us the Spirit to help us communicate and defend His Word. God does not give the Spirit in little **measure** (i.e. only a small amount), but He gives of Himself fully to each one of us who have a relationship with Him (see [Acts 1:8](#)). God has given us His Spirit because He **loves His Son** and given **all things into His hand** (v. 35); Jesus, therefore, has bestowed the Spirit upon us in full **measure** so that we might continue the work of the ministry that He Himself has started—sharing the gospel and communicating with people how to have life through the true word of the Messiah who came from heaven and fulfilled God’s promises to redeem mankind.



How can we help the world through the empowerment by the Spirit to understand the truth about the gospel today?

Question
7

vv. 36

The Salvation the Christ Offers:

Finally, John explains the culmination of the truth in black and white terms very succinctly and clearly: **He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him** (v. 36). We cannot state the gospel any more clearly than John the Baptist has. Eternal life only comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ; if we don’t have a relationship

with Christ, then we face eternal condemnation and separation from Him. Through His Son, God has graciously given us a way to have eternal life. Although we must respond to the gift by repenting or turning from our sins, this gift cost us nothing, but it cost Jesus His life in dying for our sakes. As a loving God, He has given us a way to remove His **wrath** from our lives, but many people choose to continue in defiance of the boundaries which He has established for us; therefore, they will face His **wrath** in full which is directed at their sinfulness and their rejection of His gift of life. Like John the Baptist, we must proclaim the message of the gospel—not worrying about how people may respond, but giving them a chance to hear and respond to the truthfulness of God’s Word through a unique and superior Messiah who offers us salvation by grace through faith through His finished work on the cross.

How would you respond to someone who says that a loving God would not send someone to hell?

Question
8

Inspire

After climbing a rickety old ladder and pulling dust-covered Christmas decorations from the attic or storage, we begin the hours-long process of untangling lights and sorting through the mess that we were in such a hurry to take down last Christmas. In the piles of lights and decorations, we have a gigantic Frosty the Snowman which will be filled with air and set on the brown, snow-less lawn here in North Texas. Next, we have a Santa with his sleigh filled with brightly colored boxes that will be placed in the center of our lawn as a monument to giving during the holidays.

Piles of outdoor lights of various colors to line the shrubs, eaves of the house, and the driveway lay there waiting to be hung. The Christmas tree is laying inside the house with garland and ornaments waiting to be assembled and hundreds of sparkling lights that dance to music waiting to be wrapped around the branches. In the corner is a small nativity set in the box with figurines about three inches high—it's dwarfed by all the other ostentatious Christmas displays.

Although the reason that we celebrate Christmas, the nativity scene—that is the birth of Christ—is overshadowed by all the other secular decorations. We've gotten it all backwards; Christ should be the focus of the season, not all these other things. There is nothing wrong with being festive and decorating for the holidays, but we can't let it overshadow the real reason that we celebrate. We must boldly proclaim the birth of our Savior and exalt Him alone. None of these other things will matter. The Christmas lights will be thrown into the garbage when one light goes out because we don't want to check the whole string for the bad culprit, but Christ and the decision we make for Him will last forever. As we draw closer to Christmas, honestly evaluate your life. How important is Christ to you? Is He one among many things or is He the sole focus of your life? If you can't say that He has been the sole focus of your life, spend time in prayer asking for forgiveness and direction for how you need to re-focus. If you don't have a relationship with Him, what better way to spend Christmas than to accept the greatest gift that has ever been given in the history of this world—the life that Jesus Christ offers.

Incorporate

How can you be more intentional about sharing the gospel and incorporating it into your holiday plans with friends and family? In other words, how can you make Christ the focus of your Christmas and not just an after-thought?

Who do you know that exalts Christ in their lives—not drawing attention to themselves but placing it solely upon Christ? How can you encourage others to do the same?

Incorporate

In what ways have you experienced the uniqueness and truthfulness of Christ in your life? How can you share it with others this holiday season?

Journal: Document God's Work

December 17, 2017

Written by: Mike Neal



Proclamation of His Birth

Luke 2:8-20

Focal Verse:

"Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child."

Luke 2:17

Introduce

Several years ago before the demise of pay phones, the insurance company GEICO had a commercial that parodied making a collect call with a fake name so that it saved money by communicating a message without having to accept the charges. The advertisement opens with a man standing in a hospital lobby at a pay phone calling his parents to relay information about the birth of his son. He tells the operator on the other end of the line that his first name is “Bob” and his last name is “We-otta-baby-it’s-a-boy.”

After dialing the parents’ phone number, the operator announces that they have a collect call from “Bob We-otta-baby-it’s-a-boy.” Quickly, the elderly father denies the charges saying, “Sorry, wrong number,” and hangs up the phone. Inquisitive, his wife asks, “Who’s that dear?” To which



he casually replies, “Bob, they had a baby; it’s a boy.” For those of us old enough to remember the expense of collect calls before cell phones, we can identify with Bob in this commercial. He had a grand announcement and wanted to share the news with everyone, but didn’t have the finances to pay for the calls or family members who would accept the exorbitant charges; however, he didn’t let this deter him from proclaiming the news of his son’s birth.

In the decades since this commercial aired, technological advancements have enabled us to share the announcement of a child’s birth relatively quickly and easily. Within seconds, texts can go out in a group message

Introduce

and literally dozens of people can immediately know about the birth of a child—along with pictures of the tiny package. In a matter of minutes, proud parents, grandparents, and siblings can upload pictures and post announcements about the arrival of a newborn on social media, including the size, weight, and health of both the mother and the baby. Most people don't wait weeks to announce the birth of their child or to snap pictures on their cell phones and post them online. On the contrary, people react immediately because they are both excited and proud about the birth of their child—especially if he or she is a first-born.

On a night approximately 2,023 years ago, the greatest birth announcement ever told was received in a most unexpected way to a most-peculiar group. As shepherds laid in the field watching their flocks, the night sky suddenly became alive with a host of angels proclaiming the birth of the long-awaited Messiah. Just as quickly as our technological advancements could relay the information, the shepherds sprang into action, making “widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child” ([Luke 2:17](#)). In the form of a human baby born of a virgin, God had become flesh and made His entrance into the world that He created in order to save us from our sins by paying the penalty through His death. The excitement and joy the shepherds felt were recounted in their repetition of the story to everyone they met. If we have a relationship with Him, we ought to have this same response to sharing the good news of the Savior's birth and we ought to make it “widely known” by proclaiming it to everyone we meet.

Key
Question

In what ways do we proclaim the birth of the Savior?

Luke 2:8-12

Proclamation about the Savior:

Near the town of Bethlehem as **shepherds** went about their daily duties, it began like any ordinary **night** in which they stayed **in the fields, keeping watch over their flock** (v. 8). At the time,

shepherds were considered blue-collar workers who lived humbly within the means that God had given them; while working hard through physical labor to provide for their families, at the same time



these **shepherds** also apparently revered the Lord and waited patiently for Him to reveal the Messiah. At the birth of such an important child, one would expect God to announce His arrival to the religious, especially to the prophets and priests, and political leaders of the day so that they could then proclaim the event to the rest of society, but instead He chose to reveal it common people—hard-working, faithful **shepherds**.

In-Depth Information



Often, **shepherds** are depicted in sermons and lessons as being disenfranchised or rejected by the rest of first-century society because they were regarded as sinful and loathsome individuals; however, this view did not arise until a much later period than for which the New Testament

In-Depth Information—continued



*accounts or in which it was even written. Although Jesus did come on behalf of the most-vile sinner, the **shepherds** in this passage were not hated or even seen as sinful, but they merely represented the common, hard-working individual, like many of us, who sought to remain faithful to the Lord and to wait patiently for the fulfillment of His promises.*

Throughout the Bible, God has used ordinary people to do His extraordinary work so that He might be glorified and exalted. For instance, God used a stuttering **shepherd** to communicate to Pharaoh and lead the people from slavery in Egypt toward the Promised Land (Moses). He empowered a scrawny red-headed **shepherd** to slay a giant and guided him to become one of the greatest human kings that Israel would ever have (David). In the New Testament, He chose fishermen, a zealot, and a tax collector as His disciples through whom He would spread the message of the gospel throughout the world and see manifold lives changed. In the same way, God utilizes ordinary people like us to proclaim the birth of His Son and demonstrate how this Child would transform the world through His sacrifice. God can certainly use well-educated people, like Paul, but He uses every one of us to share the gospel. Although we should study God's Word, He will still use us even if we're not scholars,

Question
1

Why does God often use ordinary people to do His work? How is God using you?

we don't hold a PhD, or we're not great orators. If the Lord can use **shepherds** to communicate His message to everyone, He can use us regardless of what our occupation may be.

As they watched **their flock**, suddenly the stillness of the **night** was broken with the presence of **the angel of the Lord** who had the most glorious announcement (v. 9). With the **glory of the Lord** shining **around them** like a bright light, they became **greatly afraid**. Most of us would have this same startled reaction as the **shepherds** if something appeared unexpectedly in the middle of the **night**. In our day, we may not experience fear because of an unexpected angelic visitor in the **night**, but nonetheless we still have areas in our lives in which fear manifests itself. Some Christians fear the unknown even though we may know that God is right here with us. For people who don't have a relationship with Christ, we can easily understand why they fear; they have no hope beyond what they see physically around them. To remind us of our security in Christ, Paul encourages believers about death and resurrection writing, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, *lest you sorrow as others who have no hope*" ([1 Thess 4:13](#)).

We live in a fallen world dominated by tragedies that occur both to the redeemed in Christ and those who have rejected Him. Over the past few weeks, we have experienced incidents that have brought mass casualties both to the young and old—all innocent victims in the eyes of the world. We have seen people murdered and wounded attending a country music concert in Las Vegas, we have seen a terrorist in a rented truck run over innocent pedestrians on a bicycle path, and we have seen a delusional

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psychopath kill children, a pregnant woman, and an entire family in a Baptist church. When senseless tragedies like this happen, many people fear. After 9-11, people feared flying; after the church shootings dating back to Wedgewood and



now with First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, people may fear attending church and be highly apprehensive about their safety. Although we should be vigilant and take steps to protect ourselves, we must not fear because Christ is right here with us through His Spirit; even though we cannot physically see Him, we can be reassured of His presence in our lives by the comfort and peace that He offers, so that we don't have anything to fear. Jesus reassures us, "And *do not fear* those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). For those of us who have a relationship with Christ, we have nothing to fear because our Savior has come into the world and has offered us eternal life through His death and resurrection. Consequently, we have a Savior who has delivered the truth and paved the way so that we might have spiritual and eternal life regardless of what may happen to us physically while we sojourn on earth.

How would you respond to someone who has become gripped by fear over recent events? In what ways by using Scripture can you offer them reassurance?

Question
2

The angel tells them that they should stop being **afraid** because he **brings good tidings of great joy which will be to all people** (v. 10). The word translated good tidings is from where we get our word “gospel”—that is good news. As we see in verse 11, the **angel** has literally brought the good news of the gospel about **a Savior who is Christ the Lord**. The gospel that he announces is **for all people**—not just the Jews or even the elite and powerful among the Jews. The gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles from every nation, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. Certainly, God has worked through the Jewish people to bring forth the Messiah, but the Messiah has come to deliver **all people** from sin and offer **all people** eternal life through Him.

In verse 11, we arrive at the actual announcement: “**For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**” Teeming with theological significance, we can briefly make two primary points about this announcement. First, it demonstrates the long-awaited fulfillment of God’s promises in the Old Testament. The prophets clearly foretold that the birth of the Messiah (i.e. **Christ**) would occur in Bethlehem—the city of David (see [Micah 5:2](#)). Subsequently, this means that the Messiah would be from the lineage of David and the house of Judah (see [Gen 49:10](#); [2 Sam 7:16](#); and [Isa 11:1-4](#)). Second, the Messiah who came was not merely a human being whom God would use politically to free Israel from Rome, but rather it was the **Lord** Himself who came to free people from the bondage of sin. Thus, the



Instruct

Savior who has come offers something greater than a mere temporary political peace; He offers permanent forgiveness for sin and eternal life.

In what way does Jesus as the Savior offer hope despite tragedies in this fallen world?

Question
3

After announcing the birth of the **Savior**, the **angel** instructs the **shepherds** where they could find Him (v. 12). The humble imagery of our Savior's birth stands in stark contrast to what one would expect if the Lord were to come to earth in all His glory and majesty as the King of kings. The **angel** tells them that they would find the **Babe wrapped in rags and lying in a manger** which would be a **sign** for them to distinguish Him from any other baby that may have been born in Bethlehem that night. No other baby would have been found in a stall designed for animals, but would have been born in the best possible place at the time; consequently, they could be assured that this was the Messiah when they did indeed find Him. Although God in the flesh, Jesus came of humble means to emphasize that He cares for all His creation and will provide salvation for **all people** regardless of their ethnicity or even what they have done. He did not come in the way that the Jews of the time expected through political means, but He came to spiritually renew our hearts through the righteousness He gives to those who repent of their sins and turn to Him.

Why was it important that Jesus came through humble means rather than through royal pomp and circumstance?

Question
4

Proclamation of Salvation:

After the initial announcement, **suddenly** an angelic **host** filled the heavens **praising** the Lord (v. 13). The multitude of angels ascribe praise to God (i.e. **glory**) for the birth of the Savior and the fulfillment of His promise and plan from the foundation of the world (v. 14). The praise is directed to **God** in heaven (i.e. **in the highest** place) for what He has done on earth below. On earth, God has established **peace** with men upon whom His favor rests (i.e. His **goodwill toward men**). In other words, God through Jesus Christ has given **peace** to people who will accept the free gift of His salvation. Because of our twenty-first century understanding, the interpretation of **peace** is often misunderstood in this passage. At face value, people erroneously regard this as a physical **peace**—in other words the absence of physical conflict. In reality, at no time on earth have the people of God had total physical **peace** in which they were not persecuted in some fashion or did not face some type of problem because of the fallen world.

In this context, the word **peace** has much more significance and can be almost synonymously used with the word salvation. The **peace** that God offers comes through the salvation offered by Christ; therefore, it depicts the removal of God's wrath from us because of our sin. It's not a feeling which we have of "comfort" or "satisfaction"—though salvation does produce that type of **peace** as a by-product in our lives. Rather, the **peace** that the angels announce here is the restoration of our relationship with the Lord through the Messiah that He has sent. In Romans 5:1, Paul states, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we

Instruct

have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (see also [Isa 26:2-4](#); [Acts 10:36](#)). Therefore, the good news is that Jesus has taken the enmity of our sin upon Himself and offered us justification (i.e. being made in right standing) and forgiveness so that we might have a relationship with God.

The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—

Acts 10:36



Based on Scripture, in your own words, how can you describe the peace that salvation offers to a non-believer?

Question
5

Luke 2:15-20

Proclamation by the Shepherds:

As the angelic **host** departed, the **shepherds** discussed amongst themselves and proposed that they **go and see the thing which has been made known** to them (v. 15). Just as they had been told, they arrived in Bethlehem to find **Mary and Joseph** and the **Babe lying in a manger** (v. 16). While witnessing this miraculous event, the **shepherds** responded in two distinct ways: 1) they immediately told others what they had experienced (v. 17) and 2) they glorified and praised God **for the things that they had heard and seen** and what had been **told to them** (v. 20). First, the **shepherds** were excited about what they had witnessed, so they **made widely** that which they had experienced. As they left the stable, they told everyone that they met. The good news

had impacted them greatly and they had to share it with everyone because it was a message of salvation **for all people** (see v. 10). Imagine if they were like many of us who attend service on Sunday mornings and leave to return to our daily lives without ever sharing the gospel. As they gathered outside of the stable, they might have had a discussion like this: “Where would you guys like to go and eat? I know a little café down the road a bit that has some great lamb chops. Eh, I’m tired of looking at lamb chops all day. Let’s go somewhere else. Well, I’m fine eating where everyone else wants to eat.” As they walked, they passed people and said nothing, but instead kept conversing amongst themselves: “You know, I get really tired fending off those corporate wolves every day. I need to start looking for a job with less stress. I can’t believe that I gave up my ‘Sunday’ to come and hear this preaching when I could have been on the Sea of Galilee.” If we have been transformed by the power of the gospel through a relationship with Jesus Christ, shouldn’t we have excitement and enthusiasm in which we are compelled to share?

On the contrary, the **shepherds** did not return to business as usual, but they shared immediately. The message that the **shepherds** shared also had a great impact upon the people whom they **told**. The text tells us that everyone **who heard** their testimony **marveled** about the things which they had been **told** (v. 18). We have a message of good news of salvation for all people, but how excited are we to share? Too often, we let fear seize our tongues and political correctness silence our mouths, but the only message that



Instruct

the world desperately needs to hear is about the hope that Jesus Christ offers. Not only have we been commanded to share the gospel, but we should have a passion to share simply because of what Jesus has done for us and through us. Most of us announce to others all the time great things that have happened to us, such as the birth of a child, graduation from college, a job promotion, and the list could go on; however, we need to have this same enthusiasm and same love for Christ to announce to the world the arrival of our Savior and the source of our salvation.

How do you express your enthusiasm for the things that the Lord has done for you? How often do you share the gospel?

Question
6

Finally, as the shepherds went on their way, they continued **glorifying and praising** the Lord for what **they had seen and heard** (v. 20). Frequently, we may overlook the significance of this verse, but it provides deep theological insight into how every one of us has been called to share about the things we have experienced in the Lord. Luke takes great care to point out that the **shepherds** spoke about **the things** which they had witnessed. Often, people will give an excuse that they cannot evangelize because either they don't know Scripture well enough or don't know the answers to questions that someone may ask. Although failing to read to and knowing what Scripture says is problematic in many ways, God never asks us to speak about that which we don't know or haven't experienced. Instead, He asks us to speak about that which we have experienced through His loving transformation. Although we could leave this unstated, it will emphatically help us to understand the

proclamation of God’s Word: no one on earth can speak about the things they do not know nor can they address the things that they have not experienced lest they look foolish and create more problems for themselves. On the contrary, if we have a relationship with God and He is at work in our lives, then we have something that we can share to the world around us—it need not be technical or mind-boggling, but it needs to correspond to Scripture and relate in concrete ways how we have seen God working in our lives.

To what in your life can you testify about God’s goodness and provision as well as give Him glory and praise?

Question
7

Inspire

As you’re sitting at home, suddenly you hear the doorbell ring accompanied by a loud knock on your front door. Peering through the peephole, you see a man dressed in a suit with a microphone in his hand along with two ladies in dresses with one holding an oversized check and the other a bunch of balloons. With a big smile and joyful spirit, you open the door and gaze at the check to see that you’ve just won 10 million dollars from Publishers Clearing House. Before the man can even say congratulations, you begin jumping up and down with excitement—nearly fainting from both the shock and the commotion—but somehow you re-gain your composure enough to allow the emcee to present the check and give further instructions about collecting the unexpected



prize. How many of us would take the oversized check indoors and throw it on the coffee table like junk mail waiting to be discarded and then simply return to what we were formerly doing as though nothing happened?

On the contrary, this wonderful announcement that we just experienced with our own eyes and ears would become the center of our conversation. Whatever we had been doing in our house prior to the announcement would become a distant thought because with 10 million dollars our lives would be changed forever. Consequently, we would pick up the phone, log-on to Facebook, or send texts to announce to the world what just occurred. We couldn't wait to tell everyone—our family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Why is it often different with our life-changing experience with Christ? Unfortunately, too often, we go about our daily routines as though nothing miraculous had occurred.

We may have excitement immediately after we begin a relationship with Christ, but it may soon wane unless we fan the flame and intentionally continue to communicate the gospel with others. Therefore, like the shepherds and the disciples as well as countless Christians through the ages, we need to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ boldly, passionately, and intentionally every day because only Christ can give hope and change lives permanently. How excited are you to share the gospel and what burden do you have for the world around us to give hope to the hopeless? May we be like the shepherds and tell everyone that which we have experienced through the life-changing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Incorporate

What are some of the most-important events in your life that you excitedly announced to others? In what ways did you announce these events?

Based on your response above, how can you announce to the world around you about the birth of the Savior?

Incorporate

List some things that you have seen God do in and through your life. Throughout this Christmas season, how can you use these things to testify about God and open a dialogue with others about salvation through Christ?

Journal: Document God's Work

December 24, 2017

Written by: David Worley



Proclamation of His Ministry

Luke 2:39-52

Focal Verse:

"And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

Luke 2:49

Introduce

Over the years, I have had the privilege of working for four family-owned businesses which ranged from ten to three hundred employees. One of those employers took me in as family for a while, helping me to understand the intricacies of their business. It was during those years that I saw how a family business operated—much differently than corporate America because they had more pride, motivation, and dedication. The business that bears the name of the family is personal to its owners. Family-owned businesses, therefore, measure their success through their accomplishments and not in mere dollars and cents. Moreover, the quality of their work also reflects upon their family name and their character, so the owners may have specific standards and guidelines for both the production and packaging of their products. Because they have pride, the owners dedicate long hours to overseeing the growth and development of their business, making decisions on concepts from marketing strategies to product delivery.



*R. W. Stewart, Owner
Stewart Delivery, INC.*

While pride is a good motivator, perception in the community is even more important because their expectations and experiences dictate whether they will repeat as customers. Consequently, the customers' experience not only reflects upon the family's name, but it also generates reviews which are discussed in the community; hence, the success of the company always depends on attention to detail and constant improvement. For this reason, the owners are always on call after working long hours, even though they may go home at a certain time or even attempt to take a

Introduce

vacation. They are intentional about how they market their product, test the quality, and negotiate deals so that they will retain current clients and attract new ones.

This week we will examine a unique family business found in [Luke 2:39-52](#) which has world-wide implications. As a twelve-year-old boy, Jesus attended the Passover at the temple in Jerusalem and began to teach the Jewish leaders. At one point, He asserted, “I must be about my Father’s business” (2:49). Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus focused on representing His heavenly Father by doing His will and fulfilling His promises by dying for His lost creation. Although Jesus’ ministry was not like an earthly business either in marketing or finances, it does share some of the same characteristics as the family-owned businesses discussed above. Jesus was dedicated to fulfilling the Father’s will; He also equipped His disciples to share the good news throughout the world in order to expand His Kingdom.

Key
Question

How would you characterize the nature of Jesus’ ministry in relation to His heavenly Father?

Luke 2:39-40

Preparation for the Proclamation:

After performing all the rituals for a newborn son, such as circumcision, **according to the Law of the Lord**, Joseph and Mary returned home to the **city of Nazareth** to raise their child in a manner that any parent of the day would (v. 39). Like any other child had the opportunity, Jesus **grew** and **became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom** (v. 40). We don't often think of Jesus as a child, but He grew as any other, learning to walk and talk, learning to read and write, learning His earthly father's trade, studying Scripture, asking questions, and playing games. He ate, slept, and did chores just as all the Jewish boys were expected to do.

However, the Gospels mention very little about His childhood and development, focusing primarily upon His three-year ministry prior to His death on the cross. Yet, Jesus' childhood development and preparation played a key role in the undertaking of His ministry. Jesus, as God, **grew** and faced the same challenges as any other child so that He might be an example to us. Jesus dedicated and applied Himself to being **filled with wisdom** which comes by studying Scripture and maintaining a close relationship with His Father (i.e. having **the grace of God upon Him**). Although the Bible clearly delineates responsibility to



Instruct

parents to raise their children in the **wisdom** of the Lord, here Luke focuses on the responsibility of the child to receive that instruction and apply it in his life by showing how Jesus used that which He was taught to prepare Himself for His future ministry.

How should we prepare for ministry?

Question
1

Luke 2:41-47

Perception of the Proclamation:

Customarily, Jesus' **parents** attended **the Feast of the Passover every year in Jerusalem** (v. 41). Prescribed by the law, the **Passover** celebration reminds the Jewish people how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land which flowed with milk and honey (see [Exod 12](#); [Deut 31:20](#)). **When Jesus was twelve**, they took Him to **Jerusalem** to celebrate **the custom of the feast** (v. 42). Although it may sound strange to our ears to leave a child, traveling in a large caravan of **relatives and acquaintances** Joseph and Mary did not realize that Jesus had remained in **Jerusalem** as they **returned** to Nazareth—supposing that He was in the safety of **the company** of the caravan (vv. 43-44). After His parents recognized that He was missing, they **returned** to Jerusalem to search for Him (v. 45); when they finally located Him **three days** later, they **found Him sitting in the temple listening and asking questions to the teachers** (v. 46).



Although He did not disobey His earthly parents, Jesus recognized as He searched the Scriptures that He had an important calling to fulfill the will of His heavenly Father—He remained in Jerusalem so that He could have a dialogue with the Jewish leaders who purported to be self-experts and well-educated in Scripture. Because Jesus had studied Scripture and was **filled with wisdom** (v. 39), He not only asked **questions**, but He answered them in a way that **amazed all who heard** (v. 47). Because of His youth and perceived inexperience, the well-educated men of the day took notice and were **amazed** at His level of **understanding**. Knowing truth contained within God’s Word, Jesus wasn’t corrupted by man-made traditions or religions, rather He was equipped to share the right **understanding** of Scripture. For this reason, He focused upon proclaiming the Scripture and correcting misconceptions that many at the time may have had.

Following Jesus’ example, we must base our calling upon Scripture—not on a feeling, desire, or self-perceived goal. In His Word, the Lord has given us **wisdom** and **understanding** for all situations and He has provided His Spirit to help guide us and fulfill our calling to live according to His will. Like Jesus, we have the responsibility to teach the truth and correct any misunderstanding that someone may have. We can’t do this on our own, but we need the grace of God upon our lives giving us the words to say and the **wisdom** by which to live.

What misconceptions do people hold today about God’s Word? How can we help to correct those misunderstandings in love?

Question
2

Provenance (Source) of the Proclamation:

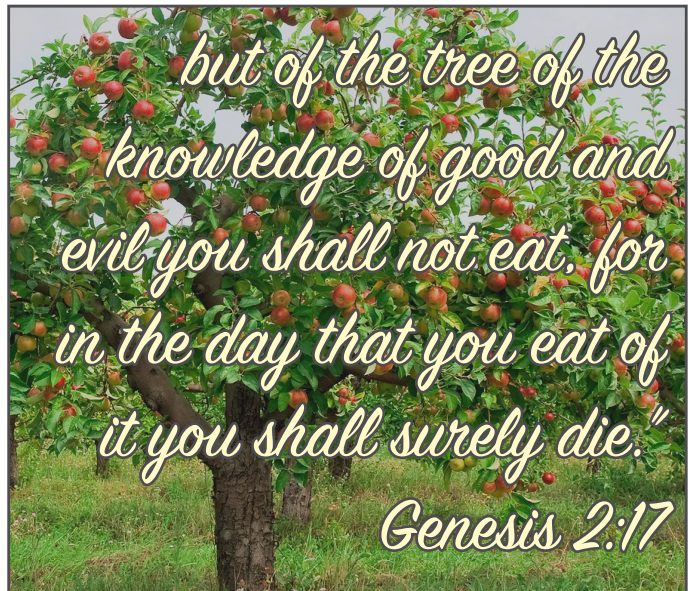
When Jesus' parents found Him, **they** too **were amazed**. Just as any **mother** would, Mary asked her Son **why** He **had done this to them** and then explained how they **anxiously** had **sought** Him (v. 48). Although **they did not understand** what Jesus would say, He answered them with two questions: "**Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?**" (vv. 49-50). In other words, Jesus explained the provenance (source) of His calling. In [John 6:38-40](#), Jesus later clarifies what His Father's business or will is: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Although God in the flesh, Jesus submits to the Father as an example for us to follow; therefore, we should seek to fulfill His will for our lives which He has clearly outlined in the Bible.

As we look at Jesus' ministry in the Gospels, we can observe five areas which reflect the Father's business to which He had called Jesus: 1) reconciliation through crucifixion, 2) renewal through resurrection, 3) reverence through obedience, 4) responding to human needs through good deeds, and 5) revelation of the good news through proclamation. Obviously, we can only participate in the first two of these categories because of what Jesus when we begin a relationship with Him has

already done. Nonetheless, the last three areas reflect ministries to which God has also called us through the authority and empowerment of His Son.

God the Father called Jesus to reconcile humanity through His death on the cross. In [2 Cor 5:11-21](#), the Apostle Paul describes Jesus' "ministry of reconciliation." This ministry of reconciliation goes back to the foundation of the world because God desired to restore the fellowship

He had with man even before the broken relationship caused by the sin of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Throughout the generations, we all have participated in sin and separated ourselves from the Lord; we all need restoration and forgiveness which can only be found in the perfect sacrifice which Jesus offered (see [Rom 3:23](#); [John 1:29](#)).



How does God show the sinfulness of man in both the Old and New Testaments?

Question
3

As a result of his sin, man was separated from God and ultimately paid the penalty through both his spiritual and later physical death, but God desired to restore man into a right relationship with Him, so He sent His Son to die on our behalf and pay the penalty of sin for us (see [John](#)

Instruct

[3:16](#); Rom 6:23). None of man's works could fix this broken relationship. For Ephesians 2:8-9 states, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." As God, Jesus became flesh so that He might be the required sacrifice for our sins and pay a debt we couldn't pay. Consequently, Jesus by living a perfect life became the only acceptable sacrifice that would cleanse us from our sins—the One who knew no sin became sin on our behalf so that we might have life through Him ([2 Cor 5:21](#); see also [Heb 4:15](#); [Lev 19:2](#)).

Thankfully, the gospel doesn't end with Jesus' death, but offers us hope with the renewal of life through His resurrection. Not only did Jesus die for our sins, but God raised Him from the dead as an example of the type of resurrection that we would have when we confess our sins and trust in Him ([1 Cor 15:23](#)). The resurrection of Christ, which we have studied in [Acts 2:30-35](#), separates Christianity from any other man-made religion because all the other religious founders and leaders remain



in their graves until this day; however, the borrowed tomb in which Christ was laid was vacated three days after His death when God victoriously raised His Son from the grave to demonstrate His power over life and death ([Rom 1:1-4](#)). Consequently, Jesus'

ministry is one that not only reconciles us to God and places us in right standing with Him, but it is one that gives eternal life to those who share

in His inheritance by accepting His gift (see [John 3:16; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 5:11-12](#)).

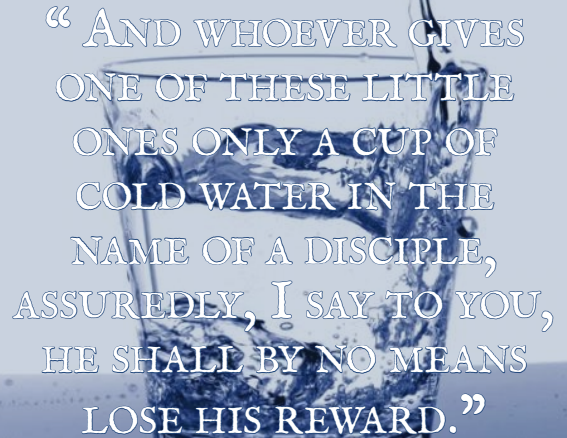
Through Jesus' sacrificial death, we also observe an example to replicate in our own lives whereby Jesus demonstrates reverence to the Father through His obedience. The New Testament expressly states that Jesus was obedient to the Father in both His life and calling ([Phil 2:8](#))—for Jesus willingly gave His life in obedience to the Father's plan for reconciliation. In [Hebrews 10:3-10](#), the author emphatically stresses the difference between Jesus' sacrifice and all the previous animal sacrifices. God does not delight in mere sacrifices without a contrite and transformed heart, but He delights in obedience. For this reason, Hebrews 10:9 states, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God"; thus, Jesus gave His life voluntarily to fulfill the will of the Father which the other animal sacrifices did not do (see also [John 10:17-18; Matt 26:39](#)). In the same way, we too must surrender our lives wholly unto the Lord, obediently following the boundaries which He has instituted and seeking His will which He has revealed through His Word and taught to us by His Spirit.

In what ways should our lives emulate Jesus' obedience to the heavenly Father?

Question
4

In addition, Jesus' ministry was characterized by responding to human needs through good deeds. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus performing miracles of compassion on the sick, demonstrating His love for mankind by raising Lazarus from the dead, showering blessings upon those who hungered for God's Word, and revealing Himself to the world by opening the eyes of a blind man. Jesus caused the mute to speak and

“unlearned,” ordinary men to speak beyond their abilities. Not only did these miracles and good deeds show who Jesus is, but they also pointed to the benevolence and kindness of the Father to meet human needs. Today, when we serve others by responding to human needs, we must intentionally and consistently point them to Christ so that they may know the true source of their blessings and the only source of eternal life.



“AND WHOEVER GIVES ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES ONLY A CUP OF COLD WATER IN THE NAME OF A DISCIPLE, ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, HE SHALL BY NO MEANS LOSE HIS REWARD.”

Matthew 10:42

What good deeds can we do that point to the righteousness of Jesus within us?

Question
5

Finally, we see that Jesus’ ministry reveals the good news through the proclamation of the gospel. From the very beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus equipped His disciples to participate in this ministry of proclamation. In [Matthew 4:19](#), He declares to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” As His disciples today, we too must be involved in the Father’s business of proclaiming the good news of salvation to all the world. Through His sacrificial death, Jesus has made a way for us to be reconciled to the Father; as a result, we should continue to spread the good news of what Christ has done and walk worthy of our calling ([Eph 4:1](#)). Just as Jesus walked among men and was seen as a righteous man, we also ought to walk in righteousness as His

ambassadors and messengers, teaching and pointing others to the one true and living God.

In what ways can we be involved in the proclamation of the gospel?

Question
6

Inspire

John 1:12-13 declares, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” For those of us who have a relationship with Jesus, we are part of God’s family and, therefore, should work in the family business to which He has called us—proclaiming the gospel through our obedience and service to Him in complete surrender. Just as owners of a family business are dedicated and hard-working, we should follow Christ’s example by being dedicated to fulfilling the will of the Father in our lives so that He may be glorified in everything that we do. We shouldn’t point people to our own achievements or accomplishments, but we must point them to what Christ has done in and through us. As you reflect upon your relationship to Christ as a member of God’s household or family, evaluate yourself according to Jesus’ standards since we are joint-heirs with Him and have received the same inheritance of eternal life which He has granted. When we truthfully look at our lives in relation to Christ, we will all fall well short of the goal, but it shouldn’t stop us from striving for perfection. Indeed, Jesus admonishes us, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” ([Matt 5:48](#)). In what ways has God through His Spirit already transformed

Inspire

our lives and helped us to honor Him and in what areas do we still need to seek His guidance to improve? Just as the quality of the work in a family-owned business reflects upon their family name and character, those of us who call ourselves “Christians” reflect upon the name and character of our Savior. We must represent Him well and fulfill the mission and ministry to which He has called us.

Incorporate

How should we prepare our families for ministry?

Incorporate

In what areas do you need wisdom and understanding in your life? Spend time in prayer asking God to give you wisdom to meet those needs (see [James 1:5](#)).

Out of the three areas of Jesus' ministries which we can repeat (i.e. reverence through obedience, responding to human needs through good deeds, and revelation of the good news through proclamation), which do you find the easiest to fulfill and which do you find the hardest? Why?

December 31, 2017 Written by: Dave Rutherford



Proclamation of His Return

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:6

Focal Verse:

“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”

1 Thessalonians 5:2

Introduce

As I am writing this lesson, the news has bombarded us with images and information about the tragic mass-shooting in Las Vegas; with at least fifty-nine killed and over 500 injured, it has become the worst mass-shooting in US history. Fixated on this event, both media and politicians have called it evil, senseless, and horrific while at the same time trying to answer questions about who's responsible and how this could happen. Whether we are involved directly or indirectly, most of us are inundated by the news with a constant barrage of information; therefore, it brings into perspective our own mortality by demonstrating how quickly our lives can end—whether by a tragedy such as this or through natural means—and causes us to think about what happens to us after we die.

Although the news was filled with images of carnage, it has also shown the heroism, generosity, and compassion of people who desire to help their fellow man in times of difficulty and tragedy. People at the concert had hope in first responders to protect them as well as average citizens who stopped and rendered aid or pulled them to safety even despite their own peril. Thousands stood in lines to give blood while doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to save the wounded. Others, however, looked within themselves to find hope because they regarded humanity as flawed and hopeless; therefore, they withdrew from reality

and put their hope in what they can do to defend and change their own personal circumstances. Trying to find comfort and hope in anyone or thing other than Christ is impossible. We only have hope because of



Introduce

Christ and His resurrection in which we can participate if we have a relationship with Him.

Just sixteen years ago three planes were flown into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon and passengers of another airplane overpowered the hijackers and forced it to crash in a Pennsylvania field, preventing another terrorist attack. Since that time, people seemed to have “moved on” or, worse, have forgotten what happened. At the time, it seemed that most of the world gathered together and cried out: “Where is God?” Individuals gathered in groups and cared for each other. Even other countries joined forces with the US and vowed to correct the wrong that had been done. For a brief time, people cared for one another without prejudice and churches of all denominations saw an increase in attendance. What happened to all of this “togetherness,” “caring for each other,” and “seeking God?” Simply put, most individuals did not place their faith and hope in Jesus Christ; they placed their faith in the government, in coalitions of their fellow men, in religious traditions, and even in themselves.

Whether it is a national crisis or a mass-shooting, we see unity where people render both aid and comfort to those afflicted. It would appear that “hope” in humanity is restored and that a brighter and better future is ahead. However, all one must do is simply wait. It does not take long until this “false hope” reveals what humanity really is—people that need “true hope” found only in Jesus. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes to offer hope and assurance to persecuted believers. Just as the Apostle wrote to the Thessalonians, our hope comes in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Whether we or our loved ones have died in the Lord before His return or we will be caught up in the air at the sound of the

trumpet, we can have hope and assurance of eternal life in no other person, but Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior because we know for certain that one day He will return to establish His Kingdom in full.

Key
Question

In what people, institutions, or things does our society place their hope and trust?

Instruct

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

THE PROCLAMATION OF HOPE:

From [Acts 17:10](#), we know that Paul and Silas faced such severe persecution by the Jews in Thessalonica that they had to leave their missionary work and flee to Berea by night. Not wanting to leave the Thessalonians **ignorant** about the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, Paul pens this first letter inspired by God to remind the believers about the **hope** we have in Christ. For this reason, Paul wrote

to them so they might have **hope** and **not** grieve or **sorrow** over **those who have** died or **fallen asleep** (v. 13).

Because of His love for us, God has given us His Word contained within the Bible so



that we may know how to have eternal life through His Son and how to live life to the fullest by conforming to His will; therefore, we must read and study Scripture daily so that we can remind ourselves of the true and everlasting **hope** that we have in Christ.

Like a teacher showing concern for his students, Paul desired the Thessalonians to know the truth about Jesus' **coming** (return) and the resurrection of believers because they were being influenced by secular religions and worldly philosophies. The Thessalonians weren't struggling with understanding salvation by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Christ, but with false teaching about those who have died in Christ before He returned. Believing that Jesus would come again during their lifetime, those who **remained alive** worried about their loved ones who preceded them in death. They surmised that if their loved ones passed away before Christ returned, then they had missed participating in eternal life. Paul, however, explains, that we can have confidence in eternal life because just as we **believe that Jesus died and rose again** in that same manner God would also **bring**, or resurrect, those who have died, or **fallen asleep**, in Christ (v. 14).

Today, we see this type of mindset held among the Thessalonians by non-believers because they don't have the assurance of where they or their loved one will go after death. As they pass by their beloved's casket, they have doubt and uncertainty whether they will see them again. They mutter expressions through tears that they "hope" to see them one day or they grieve uncontrollably, thinking this life is all there is. As Christians, however, we have a greater hope because we have confidence in Jesus Christ who offers both proof and a pattern for our own resurrection. Although He died a horrendous physical death and was buried, three days later the tomb was empty because God had raised Him from the dead. Appearing to His disciples, He offered proof that He had risen which gave them **hope** for their own resurrection as a pattern that God

would one day raise them (see [1 Cor 15:23](#)). Therefore, for those of us who have a relationship with Christ, we can know with certainty that we will be resurrected to live bodily with Him forever (see [1 John 5:11-13](#)).

When you see someone struggling with a tragedy, in what ways can you share the truth of the gospel with them that offers real hope?

Question
1

At death, our fate is sealed and the decision that we have made here on earth about Christ affects where we will spend eternity. If people die without confessing their sins and having a relationship with Christ, they have no hope and they will spend eternity in hell separated from the Lord. On the other hand, when we as believers die, we will spend eternity in heaven because we have accepted the cleansing power offered through the blood of Christ.



Consequently, in verse 15, Paul reassures them that whether they are **alive** or have died that when Jesus comes again they will spend eternity with Him in heaven. Paul reminds them of Jesus' teaching (**the word of the Lord**) and expounds upon it to help the Thessalonians understand. In verses 15-17, therefore, he describes the two-fold order of the return of Christ to validate that both the dead and living will participate. Thus, those **who are asleep** in Christ will rise first and join those who **remain alive** to meet our Savior **in the clouds in the air**. In order to facilitate

comprehension, we will discuss first the resurrection of the dead and then the “rapture” of the believers.

Why should you have a sense of urgency to tell people, including friends and family, about the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Question
2

For those who have died in Christ, we can have **hope** because Scripture teaches that immediately upon taking our last breath we will depart our physical body and be present with Him in heaven. Hence, Paul can write in 2 Cor 5:8, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” Although our physical bodies may be in the grave, our spirits will be with Christ. At Christ’s return, just as God raised Him bodily from the dead so also shall our physical bodies be raised and reconstituted (i.e. put back together from the decay) to meet Him **in the clouds**. For those believers who **remain alive** at the time of Christ’s **coming**, Paul describes them as being **caught up to meet Him in the air** (v. 17). We get our term “rapture” from the Latin translation of this Greek word—**caught up**. Therefore, imminently and suddenly, God will call His church—both the living and the dead—to meet His Son **in the clouds in the air** so that we can spend eternity with our Savior while He judges the wickedness and evil that pervades the world.

The return of Christ will happen suddenly and without warning which Paul describes elsewhere as “in the twinkling of an eye” ([1 Cor 15:52](#)). In these verses in Thessalonians, Paul uses the imagery of a bridegroom who comes to collect his bride unannounced at a moment’s notice. After

finalizing the dowry and making arrangements with her family, the bridegroom leaves to return to his father's home in order to prepare a place to receive his bride (see [John 14:2-3](#)). Upon finalizing preparations, the bridegroom will assemble his entourage and lead them to the home of his bride. When the wedding party arrives, the best man (**archangel**) **shouts** and sounds a **trumpet** to announce the presence of the bridegroom, calling the bride and her party to come and meet him and return home to consummate and celebrate the marriage (see [Matt 25:1-13](#)). Jesus, as the bridegroom, will one day return to collect His bride, the church, and call us home to heaven to celebrate our relationship with Him for eternity (see [Rev 19:17](#)). Because Jesus will return and gather both the living and the dead as His people to live with Him for eternity, we can proclaim and **comfort** others with confidence and assurance by **these words** that Paul has written (v. 18).



Why is it important for us to be prepared for the "rapture" or the return of Christ when He calls us home to heaven?

Question
3

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

THE PROCLAMATION OF JUDGMENT:

Continuing to discuss the suddenness of Jesus' return, Paul explains that we will not know the day or the time of His return. He begins by telling them that he has **no need to write to** them about the day (**season**) or

Instruct

the **time** because Jesus could return at any moment, so they must be prepared at all **times** (v. 1). Even during His ministry here on earth, Jesus taught His disciples that the day of His return would come suddenly: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” ([Matt 24:36](#)). Just as a **thief** comes suddenly and unannounced **in the night**, so will **the day of the Lord**—that is the return of Jesus (v. 2). Although we do our best to prepare our property and protect our family to deter thieves through alarm systems, dogs, and even neighborhood watches, a **thief** still comes as a surprise and never we are waiting at the door to greet him with our dog or gun. If we knew when the thief would come, we certainly would have been better prepared. Because Jesus will return **like a thief in the night**, we must be vigilant and ready to meet Him. Therefore, we should seek to live in holiness in conformity to His will and doing that to which He has called us.

In what ways should we prepare ourselves for Jesus’ imminent return at any minute?

Question
4

If God would have specified a day and time, we as humans would tend to “goof off” and still be unprepared; therefore, Paul urges the Thessalonians to fight that tendency and be prepared at any minute to welcome their Savior back to earth. During my early college days while taking Business Statistics, the professor told us on the first day of class that only a certain percentage would make an “A,” a larger percentage a “B,” the largest a “C,” and only a small number would fail. Knowing I was not the smartest in the class, I thought why should I even strive for an “A?” The odds were

stacked in my favor that I would at least pass the class and not be among the smallest percentage that failed. Feeling very comfortable as the semester began, I devoted more of my time to preparing and studying for other classes because I had reasoned



that I would not fail the class—after all, I had some intelligence and was not a “party student.” After failing all of the previous tests, I calculated that I could make a 94 on the final and would still make a “C” in the course overall. Indeed, I scored my highest grade of the class on the final, but it was only a 79 which meant that I had failed the course.

The moral of this embarrassing story is that God knows exactly how sin has affected humanity. We tend to procrastinate or not prepare to the best of our ability when we know an exact time when something will happen or have a deadline—especially when we think we have all the skills needed to accomplish a task. God has not told us of the day or time because He wants us to look toward this event with great anticipation and not “lollygag.” At the same time, He also desires that we warn everyone of the impending judgment that will accompany His return. We shouldn’t be like society and be caught off guard and unprepared because they are complacent and not looking for the return of the Lord. When people become complacent and feel comfort, saying **safety and peace** has come, they will experience **travail**, or trouble, as a woman giving birth and **they will not escape** (v. 3). In other words, they feel carefree and unconcerned with the things of life because they are satisfied and secure with where they are, but they are wholly apart from

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the Lord which means that they will one day face judgment if they have not repented. For this reason, Paul utilizes the metaphor of childbirth for two reasons. First, it reminds us of the curse that God placed upon the first family after they sinned and ate of the tree which He forbade them ([Gen 3](#)). In the same way, people who do not turn to God will also experience the “curse” which is eternal separation from Him through a second death. Second, the image also signifies the rapidity with which the judgment will come.

For women who have given birth as well as men who have experienced it vicariously through their wives, labor pains come upon a woman suddenly and without warning. For this reason, metaphorically, we need to have our bags



packed and be ready to go when the Lord returns—being found faithful in sharing the gospel to our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and everyone whom we meet, warning them of the impending judgment so that through their relationship with Christ they may **escape** this His wrath by turning to Him.

If Jesus came back tonight, who do you know that would not be joining Him in the air?

Question
5

THE PROCLAMATION OF PREPAREDNESS:

Highlighting the transformation that has taken place in the lives of the Thessalonian believers, Paul reminds them that they no longer live in **darkness**, but that they **are sons of light**. In other words, they are not ignorant or unaware of the Christ's return as those who live in sin; therefore, the **day** of the Lord should not **overtake** them by surprise like a **thief** in the night (vv. 4-5). Unlike those who have rejected Christ and will experience the suddenness of His return like a **thief** and like **labor pains** during childbirth, believers have Jesus' word which promises His return so we should be ready to greet Him in the air by being found doing what He has called us. Because we have been transformed from darkness into light, we must live like children **of the light** ([Eph 5:8-13](#)). This means that we should live according to God's Word, have fellowship with Him by living in righteousness and avoid sinful activities. When we do sin, we ought to turn back to Him immediately by confessing our sin and asking Him to guide us to live according to His holy purpose for our lives. Those who live in **darkness** try to hide their actions because they bring shame and dishonor to themselves, but we as Christians who live in the **light** walk openly because it brings honor and glory to Christ. Imagine if Jesus returned suddenly and you were caught in the midst of sin like a child with his hand in the cookie jar. Although we wouldn't lose our salvation in Christ ([John 10:28-29](#)), we would bring dishonor and shame upon ourselves because we weren't ready to receive our Savior and were caught doing that which had been forbidden. Instead of living for Christ and sharing the gospel with others, we would have lived ignorantly and unprepared despite Jesus' teaching that Paul clearly

Instruct

reiterates here. Therefore, he stresses that we need to watch and be prepared for the day Christ returns, so that we may be in right standing when He comes again (v. 6).

Why do we often live as if we forget that Christ could return at any minute? How can we keep focused on His return so that it shows daily in our lives?

Question
6

Inspire

As 2017 ends, we tend to look back and evaluate our lives over the past year. We critique our accomplishments and what we failed to accomplish that we set out to do; we recall both good and bad personal events as well as national tragedies, such as the massacre in Las Vegas. We see the worst in humanity at times, but, in some cases, we see humanity come together and help their neighbor, such as in the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma—even risking their own lives at times. Some of us may be celebrating a new edition in our family through marriage or the birth of a child. Others of us might even be celebrating loved ones graduating college or getting their first job—hopefully becoming responsible adults and a productive part of our society. Still others of us might even be celebrating our retirement and moving into a new phase of our lives. Many of us will gather at New Year’s Eve watch parties with friends and families and celebrate the arrival of 2018 while others of us have seen many new years come and go and will be fast asleep in our beds—even though we are grateful and even reflective on the past one. Whether we are celebrating with friends and family or in bed asleep or doing a myriad

of activities in between, are we ready for the return of Christ if He were to come suddenly on that night?

If Jesus were to return during on New Year's Eve while we celebrate and look forward, would it catch you off guard or would you be prepared to meet Him? We don't know the day or time that Jesus will return nor do we know the day and time of our death, but we do know that our time is limited and ultimately short in the perspective of eternity. Consequently, we need to be prepared at any moment to receive our Savior. Just as we anticipate and countdown the dropping of the Waterford Crystal ball in New York City in Times Square, we must have as much anticipation for the return of our Savior. We must warn people of the impending judgment and the danger of rejecting Christ, sharing the gospel with them every opportunity that the Lord gives. In addition, we need to live our lives in holiness in a way that pleases the Lord and brings honor and glory to Him—not hiding in the darkness in which we formerly lived, but living in the light of the righteousness of the Lord. One day when Christ returns there will be an even greater celebration than New Year's Eve or any of the holidays here on earth. Think of how exciting this celebration will be if you looked around in Heaven and every person you knew on earth was there and we were all worshipping Jesus Christ forever! Let us not waiver in our duties, let us not procrastinate to make a decision to accept the salvation Jesus offers, and let us be diligent to share the gospel with everyone we know. Are you prepared to meet Christ and do you have assurance that you will be part of the greatest celebration ever known to mankind when Jesus returns to gather His followers and take us to live with Him in heaven forever?

Incorporate

Make a list of all the people you know who are unprepared if Christ were to return suddenly. Make an intentional effort to share the gospel with them this week and invite them to church.

Take a moment to examine your life. In what ways are you ready to meet Jesus if He were to return today? In what areas do you need to be more prepared?

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