



RELATE

ADULT CONNECT CLASS CURRICULUM

DONALD J. WILLS
SENIOR PASTOR



DECEMBER
2020

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,

Before the Messiah stepped into time and on the stage of humanity, there were prophecies to be fulfilled with specific requirements to be met. One that comes to mind this time of year is that which was spoken by the prophet in Micah 5:2 that there would be one who would come forth From, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." We know this refers to the Messiah and that He would be born in Bethlehem. This is confirmed in Matthew 2:5. Many other prophecies were fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ who is the Messiah. Therefore, we can celebrate the birth of our Lord with confidence that He is the foretold Savior of the world.

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 methods 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 their own personal study and encouragement.

In closing, I am reminded of Simeon's story who was told he would not see death until he saw "the Lord's Christ." Luke records this in chapter two that when Mary and Joseph brought the Child Jesus to him he declared "My eyes have seen Your salvation." Jesus was born so that through His life, death, and resurrection we could be born again. We have reason to rejoice. We know He is the reason for the season.

-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 6, 2020



The Messiah as Firstborn Part 1

Psalm 89:1-27

Focal Verse:

"Also I will make him My firstborn."

Psalm 89:27a

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Introduce

As we begin the month of December, we look forward with great anticipation to the 25th when we celebrate the birth of our Savior. In the curriculum this month, we will take somewhat of a different approach. We won't primarily focus on the traditional passages in the Gospels, or even the Old Testament, that tell this grand story, but we will examine it through the eyes of the psalmist who celebrated God's faithfulness to His children through His covenant with them. Therefore, the psalmist reminds us of the One whose royal reign in the lineage of David would continue forever. He would be exalted over all the kings of the earth! Throughout the New Testament, we see these same promises revealed and ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah—Jesus.

Why should we search Scripture carefully and thoroughly instead of hastily skimming the same stories we hear every year? We must do so for two reasons. First, all Scripture from Genesis to Revelation points to God's redemptive plan in Jesus. We need to hear the entire story; we need to hear God speak! Although not every event or prophecy is an explicit or even implicit reference to Christ, each one does indeed point to His purpose and why He came. If we don't scrutinize and read Scripture from the beginning to the end, we can overlook many of these crucial details.

Second, as humans, we tend to take things for granted as commonplace and we begin to miss the main point when we think we've heard and know the story. For instance,

we tend to skim things that we've read before or fast forward and pay closer attention to the parts of movies we've seen before and like the best. We cannot take this approach with Scripture. We need to hear and read the stories of Christ's birth in the Gospels every year, but we can't allow them to become so commonplace that we overlook and miss the main point



along with the details which God has communicated to us through them!

Let's illustrate by examining the secular approach to Christmas. As I am writing this introduction in the middle of October, I've already seen Christmas trees, lights, and holiday displays for sale in major retail chains. Typically, commercials targeting gift-

Introduce

buyers start immediately after Halloween on the first day of November only to intensify as we approach the 25th. Around Thanksgiving, radio stations start playing Christmas music and many people begin to decorate their homes. However, with COVID this year, some people have already begun to decorate out of boredom! Many of us may sigh and say, “That’s too early.” We probably tune out the commercials and don’t pay attention to radio stations which predominately play Christmas music throughout November and December because we get tired of it. We may even complain about the “same ole” Christmas movies dominating the airwaves.

We cannot allow this to happen to Scripture. We cannot allow it to become so commonplace that we say, “I’ve heard that story before.” Most people don’t know the origins of the Christmas tree, lights, candy canes, and many other holiday traditions. They simply participate without ever thinking or reflecting. This is a dangerous precedent to establish for the Scripture—the very communication that God Himself has spoken to mankind. Scripture requires us to think, reflect, and participate! Not only do we need to know the stories and events of the Bible, but we also need to live by the principles which God has clearly dictated to us! Let us hear the Christmas story anew and afresh even though we may have heard it hundreds of times. God is faithful to His covenant in that He sent Christ as the “firstborn over all creation” to rescue, redeem, and restore us!

Key
Question

How do we see the unmerited favor of God in the birth of the Messiah?

Psalm 89:1-4

THE UNENDING FAITHFULNESS OF GOD:

We may briefly skim the Hebrew headings—if we even pay attention to them at all—added to the psalms when these hymns were collected and assembled into the book we have today. Sometimes these headings identify the earthly author, such as **Ethan the Ezrahite** in this case, whom God used to pen His Word. They also provide information about the setting and content of the psalm as well as how Israel utilized it in their worship—such as a song or prayer. For instance, [Psalm 89](#) identifies it as a **contemplation** or reflection. The entire psalm paints a vivid picture of God’s **faithfulness** and steadfast love for both Israel, through whom He would send the Messiah, and the entire world. As we embark upon our study, let us ask ourselves: How often do we truly contemplate and reflect upon the **faithfulness** of the Lord? Let us spend time contemplating and meditating upon His **faithfulness** so that we may worship and praise Him with great devotion rather than only having a momentary thought which quickly fades as we focus on other issues in our lives which may seem more pressing at the time.

The psalmist bursts into joyous praise as he reflects upon **the mercies** and **faithfulness** of the Lord which last **forever!** As we have learned in our past studies of the Psalms, the word **mercies** captures the idea of God’s **faithfulness** to His covenant which stems in part from His love for people. One could say that God’s **faithfulness** is the result first and foremost of His holy and righteous character. Because He cannot lie ([Heb 6:18](#)) and He is the source of absolute truth having no sin and darkness in Him ([1 John 1:5](#)), He must always be faithful to His Word based on His character. On the same token, God’s love for us also motivates Him to respond with grace and mercy despite our disobedience and unfaithfulness toward Him. With this understanding,



Instruct

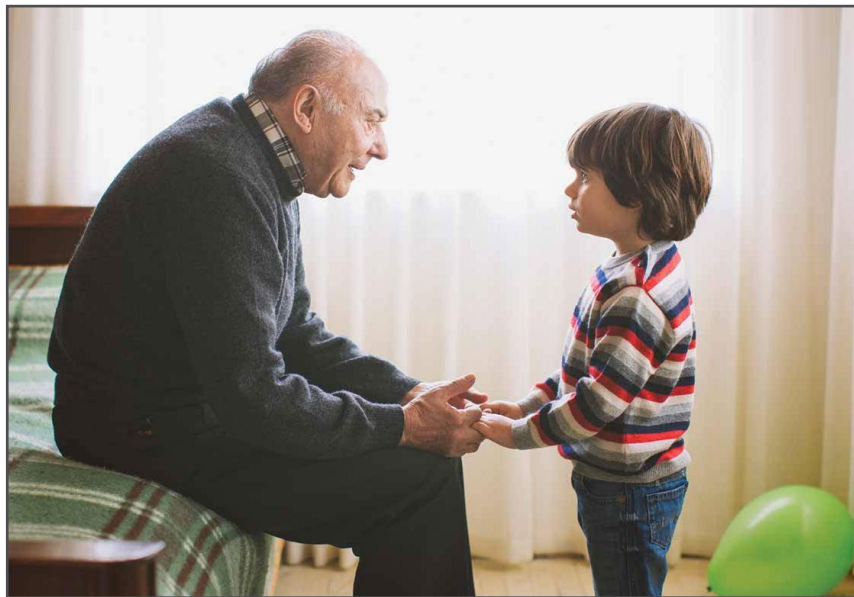
we can see why the psalmist sings praise to the Lord. And we also ought to lift our voices in unison to declare our praise for His **mercies** and **faithfulness** which He continues to show us today!

How has God shown you love and mercy this week? We should remember the ways God has acted in the past, but let's not miss God at work here and now—today!

Question
1

As a natural response to God's love and **faithfulness**, the psalmist wants to tell others! **With his mouth**, he will declare praise for God's **faithfulness to all generations**. In other words, he tells everyone he meets. Most of us probably enjoy(ed) spending time with our grandparents. To some extent, our joy was primarily centered around the shared experiences of doing things together. In general, we most likely remember and cherish what we did together more than what was said—even though some of what they said probably made an impression too. As younger children, for instance, we would much rather play than listen to stories about their personal experiences, life lessons learned, and our family history. We simply valued and appreciated what they did with us more than what they said. In some ways, however, many of us may look back with regret that we didn't spend more time listening to their stories and learning from their experiences.

As we grew older, we may have become more interested in hearing them, but then the hecticness of life became an obstacle as other events increasingly demanded our



attention. We then failed to make time to stop and listen, taking for granted that we would always have the opportunity to do so. For some of us, we can never go back and hear their stories this side of heaven. We missed a critical opportunity to hear and share in their stories! Hopefully, however, this has taught us a valuable lesson. We must seize the moment

while we still have the chance! On the other hand, our grandparents may have often

wanted to share their stories, but felt like no one would listen and no one truly would appreciate them. So, they remained silent. Yet, what is said can often make a profound impact whether or not we perceive someone to be listening!

As believers, we cannot afford to miss the opportunity to tell **all generations** about **the mercies** and **faithfulness** of the Lord! If we don't declare His **faithfulness**, then who will? In many ways, for those of us who didn't take the time to listen to our grandparents, we have lost a tremendous amount of history and perspective! In the same way, we cannot risk having future **generations** ignorant about the goodness and greatness of the Lord. We must tell others! Their salvation and eternal life depends upon knowing Christ. Therefore, we, like Ethan, must **make known** and declare God's **faithfulness to all generations** so that all people everywhere might come to know Him!

How can we share the gospel cross-generationally? Why is it important that all people in every generation—whether young or old—share the gospel?

Question
2

Nine times over the course of the psalm, the word **forever** appears in connection with God's promises. As a result, the psalmist interjects that God's **mercy** and **faithfulness** will last **forever**. In fact, the creation of the universe (literally **the very heavens**) demonstrate or **establish** God's **faithfulness** (v. 2). Despite man's disobedience and the wickedness of his heart, he was never abandoned by the Lord! God didn't set the world into motion and then leave it up to fate and chance. He came! He didn't send mere prophets to restore and rescue man through the mere proclamation of a word. He Himself came as the incarnate Word born of a virgin in humble means. The King of glory left His heavenly throne to don flesh and ultimately die to save us! He has demonstrated His **faithfulness** since even before the dawn of creation through the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world ([Rev 13:8](#)).

Nothing in the world lasts **forever** except the promises of God. Many of us may buy Christmas gifts that require a battery. One popular brand of battery features a bunny continually parading around various venues to the slogan: "it keeps going and going and going." Truthfully, we know even that bunny would wear down and stop functioning if the batteries were never changed. Even if it had "rechargeable" batteries, over time the cells would no longer hold a charge. And even if the batteries were changed, one day it would cease to work due to the mechanical failure of its parts



wearing out. We cannot depend on earthly things **forever!** It is not so with Christ! We can always depend upon Him, for He never fails and never breaks a promise; He always responds faithfully according to His plan and He always abides by His Word. For this reason, God has made His **covenant** with His **chosen servant David** to whom He has promised

to **establish** his **seed forever** and **build up** his **throne to all generations** (v. 3). God has faithfully accomplished this feat through One born into David's lineage who has no end and lives **forever**. Clearly, Scripture indicates the Messiah will fulfill this role being born into the line of David ([Micah 5:2; Isa 11:1](#)). Although no physical human descendant currently sits in succession of David's **throne** reigning from Jerusalem, God has not abandoned His promises; He has not failed. On the contrary, One born of David's lineage still reigns from an even more impressive position in heaven. Even though we don't physically see Him at this time, Jesus is still seated on His **throne** sovereignly reigning over His creation. One day, however, we will see Him face to face and encircle His **throne** in praise! God has kept His Word. He is faithful.

Psalm 89:5-14

THE UNSHAKABLE FOUNDATION OF GOD:

Because of God's **faithfulness**, both **the heavens** and **the assembly of the saints will praise** His **wonders** (v. 5). At Jesus' birth, we see this very thing occur! The angelic host appeared in the heavens to proclaim **praise** to the Lord Most High and the shepherds rejoiced in what they had seen and heard, excitedly declaring that great news to everyone they met. The universe came alive with **praise** at the sound of Jesus' name that night. In all, God designed the universe to join in a harmonic chorus to **praise** Him and give glory to His name. Our **praise**, at this time, is voluntary. We have a choice to make in freely and obediently giving Him **praise** right now. If we fail to do so, the universe will become that very source of **praise** when the rocks cry out ([Luke 19:37-](#)

40). One day, however, even those who have refused to worship the Lord here on earth will bow in reverence and fall prostrate in worship at the declaration of Jesus' great and mighty name ([Phil 2:10-11](#)). Thus, the whole universe will sing of His **wonders!**

How do we see praise directed toward the Lord through His inherent design we find in nature?

Question
3

After noting that all creation will **praise** the Lord, the psalmist details four reasons why we should render that **praise** to Him. First, we ought to **praise** God for His superiority. Nothing in the **heavens** or here upon the earth can compare to His greatness and majesty (v. 6). Because God is unique in His matchless superiority, **saints**—those who have a relationship with Him—should **fear** or respect Him (v. 7). Yet, as we have learned, one day everyone will hold Him in **reverence** even though they may have rejected Him in this life. All creation, therefore, will acknowledge the superiority of our Creator because no one **is mighty like** Him and **faithfulness** continually **surrounds** Him (v. 8).



Second, we should **praise** God for His strength. Regardless of the situation, God remains at the helm and retains control. Nothing catches Him off guard. Nothing can overwhelm or overcome Him. The psalmist uses the **raging sea** to reassure us of God's ability to navigate and govern the difficulties we face. He rules **the sea** and calms **the waves** when the storms of life assail us (v. 9). Biblical authors often use **the sea** as a figurative illustration of the chaos, confusion, and corruption of living in a fallen world. In Christ, God has overcome sin, conquered death, and promised to help us endure and persevere whatever trials and suffering we may face.

This promise to overcome and help us endure is pictured by the psalmist as the fictitious sea-monster **Rahab**—not to be confused with the woman from [Joshua 2](#). **Rahab** was no match for the Lord as He broke her **in pieces** and **scattered** His **enemies** with His **mighty arm** (v. 10). No difficulty is too great for the Lord. And no person who lives in wickedness and opposes His righteousness will stand in the end. They are no match for God in His holiness and righteousness. Thus, we can praise the Lord because

Instruct

He has **a mighty arm**, a **strong hand**, and firm **right hand** which judges, delivers, and saves those who will call upon His name (v. 13)!

How do we see the strength of God in our lives in terms of overcoming sin and suffering (trials)?

Question
4

Third, we ought to **praise** God for His sovereignty. God can rightly exercise such strength and maintain sovereignty over the universe because He designed and created



it. The Creator is always greater than His creation. And He always reserves the right to act with authority over it according to His righteous character. For this reason, the psalmist reminds us that **the heavens** belong to Him as well as everything in **the world** because He **founded them** (v. 11). God created the cardinal directions (**North and South**) in addition to the

mountains (**Tabor and Hermon**) which **rejoice** in His **name**. Whatever may happen in life, God is greater! He is always sovereignly in control; nothing in the universe escapes His attention—not even the smallest detail.

Finally, we should give God **praise** for His sanctity or holiness. In His **righteousness**, we see **the foundation** of the Lord from which all His other attributes emanate (v. 14). His holiness or **righteousness** leads Him to exercise justice. God can judge rightly with flawless accuracy because He alone is perfect and holy, seeing the heart. Moreover, God's holiness also leads Him to extend **mercy**, remain faithful, and dispense **truth**. God never misleads; He has clearly set forth boundaries that we must follow and has detailed the exact plan by which we will find life through His Son!

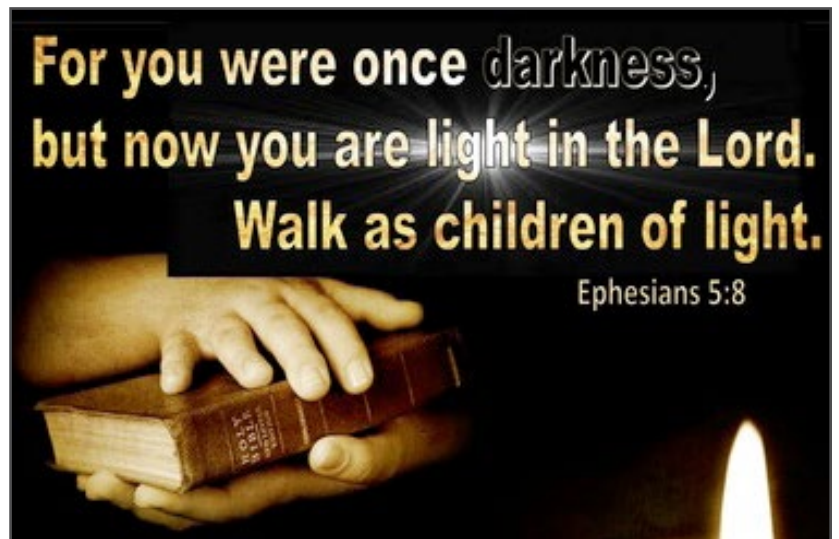
We also see these four attributes mentioned from this psalm perfectly embodied in Christ. According to God's plan, He came into the world to smash sin **in pieces**. He alone has the strength to accomplish this feat and overcome the grip that sin has upon us. At Christmas, we celebrate this literally perfect gift. Only a holy, righteous, and perfect God could die as a sacrifice for all mankind's sin. He freely offers the sacrificial gift which leads to life, but many unwisely choose to reject it. Therefore, Christ in His

sovereignty and **righteousness** will judge the world and overcome all those who oppose Him, sentencing them by their own choice to a life of eternal torment and separation.

Psalm 89:15-18

THE UNMERITED FAVOR OF GOD:

Those who have experienced the blessings and mercies of the Lord have manifold reason to rejoice. Consequently, the psalmist describes **the people who know the joyful sound** as **blessed** (v. 15). The word translated **joyful sound** in this context refers to the cry of victory in war. We **know** such victory in two primary ways: experientially and cognitively. First, we **know** something because we have personally experienced it. We can only **know** victory, therefore, when we have a relationship with the One who guarantees it and we have followed His plan to attain it. Hence, victory comes only when we **walk** with the Lord **in the light of His countenance**. Our faith doesn't stem from, depend upon, or validate our personal experience or the way we view the world. Rather, our faith leads us to depend upon Christ and abide by His plan. In this way, our faith will become sight as we personally witness how God works according to His Word! To **walk** implies that we have fellowship with Him according to His **righteousness** by which we **are exalted** when we abide by the boundaries in His Word (v. 16). It's not our own self-righteousness or goodness for which we receive blessing. Rather, we must **walk** in *His righteousness* which means that we must be in right standing with Him. Consequently, when we have a relationship with Christ, our **walk** changes; our **walk** becomes evidence of our new life in Him. Therefore, we will **walk** as He Himself walks. For this reason, John writes, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). We can only attain such a **walk** when we have a relationship with Jesus!



How has the victory of the Lord affected your walk or the way you live?

Question
5

Instruct

Second, we must also cognitively understand the Source of our victory. This psalm, thus, helps us to recognize that Israel's victory only comes from the Lord by announcing that He is **the glory of their strength** and their **horn** (i.e. power) **is exalted** by His **favor** (v. 17). Additionally, the psalmist reinforces this idea by reminding the people that both their **shield** and their **king** belong **to the Lord** (v. 18). In reality, they depend upon Him for everything they have in life—all their possessions and land they have acquired, everything they have accomplished as a nation, and everything they have become as a people.

What victories have you experienced in life?
How do you remind yourself that the Lord is
always the source of those victories?

Question
6

Apart from Christ, victory in life is a mere mirage. But those who have a relationship with Him then have a real reason to rejoice in the victorious life He brings! God, not the people or their human leader, should be glorified because He alone has given them success. On their own, they could have never achieved this power or attained victory. Israel didn't deserve this status God bestowed upon them; they didn't earn it. At times, the majority of the nation abandoned these very promises through their unfaithfulness and disobedience. Yet, God in His infinite love, grace, and mercy continued to act benevolently and offer restoration through His unmerited **favor** for those who would turn to Him and follow His plan.

In the same way, we too can have victory through Christ who frees us from the grip of

But God, who is rich in mercy,
because of His great LOVE with
which He loved us, even when we
were DEAD in trespasses, made
us ALIVE together with Christ
(by grace you have been saved)

~ Ephesians 2:4,5 ~

sin and death. We don't deserve life; we are not entitled to it. On the contrary, we deserve death because of our disobedience and sin, for we all fall short of God's glory. On our own, we cannot do anything to circumvent our death sentence or earn eternal life. God in His love and because of His great mercy—unmerited **favor**—sent His Son to die in our place

and redeem us through His blood. Oh, how we must celebrate and praise Him for that merciful Gift bestowed upon us because of His unmerited **favor!**

Psalm 89:19-27

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE FIRSTBORN OF GOD:

Now, the psalmist reminds the people of one concrete way which they have experienced the blessing and faithfulness of the Lord through the covenant He made with David. During the search conducted by Eli for the next king, God spoke in a vision to announce whom He had called, empowered (i.e. **given help**), and **chosen from** among **the people** to fill this position (v. 19). God **had found** His **servant David** and **anointed him with holy oil**, dedicating and setting him apart for the specific purpose of leading the nation of Israel on His behalf (v. 20). To affirm the fact that He had called David as king, the Lord promises to **strengthen him** (v. 21), grant him wisdom so the **enemy** should **not outwit him** (v. 22), embolden him so that **the son of wickedness** could **not afflict him**, and protect him by beating **down his foes** and plaguing **those who hate him** (v. 23).

In all, God promises to be present in David's life to work through His chosen vessel. Thus, God declares that His **faithfulness** and **mercy shall be with** him and he will **be exalted** because of His **name** (v. 24). God will empower David by giving him authority (i.e. exalting his **horn**) over the **sea** and **rivers** (v. 25). He can accomplish these things through David because he has a personal relationship with Him as **Father** and **God** wholly depending upon Him as **the rock of his salvation** (v. 26). God, not David, has brought **salvation** to Israel and He will do the same for anyone who trusts in Him. Moreover, God gave David the special status as **firstborn**, the preeminent and **highest of the kings** on **earth** (v. 27). In Exodus 4:22, Israel received that same designation: "Thus says the Lord: 'Israel is My son, My **firstborn**.'" **Firstborn**, in this sense, doesn't mean chronological order of birth as we most often use it. Rather, it connotes a status. God has designated both David and Israel as His people through whom He would work to bring **salvation** to the world through the chosen Messiah. This is what sets both Israel and David apart and will be the focus of our study in Colossians next week!

How has God chosen and called you to bring the proclamation of salvation to the world?

Question
7

As we see in the New Testament, Jesus fulfills these promises in a much greater way than David ever could. Whereas David figuratively had power over the **sea** and **rivers**,

Instruct

Jesus, the One through whom all creation came into existence, literally has power over them. When He stilled the boisterous Sea of Galilee, the disciples marveled, “Who can this be, that even the winds and **sea** obey Him” (Matt 8:27)? As God’s **firstborn** in status, Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords—not merely **the highest king** on **earth** but the sovereign God in control of the entire universe ([Rev 19:6](#)). And, even more important, Jesus Himself is **the rock of** our **salvation**. For this very reason, Jesus came to earth two millennia ago—to bring **salvation** to all people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. To God be the glory for His unmerited **favor** found in His Messiah—Jesus who brings **salvation** to all who will call upon His name.

Inspire

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation tells a single, unified story which we should never grow tired of hearing. This story communicates God’s love for us through the redemption and salvation He freely offers. Thus, there is only one protagonist of this story through whom we can find salvation and eternal life. Every book in the Bible points to Him! He perfectly fulfills God’s plan orchestrated prior to the creation of the world. Christmas doesn’t really tell the beginning of this story, but rather actually shows the climax and resolution. In Christ, God made Himself flesh for the sole purpose of dying in our place and conquering sin. By His grace and through His mercy, He freely grants salvation to all who will repent and surrender to Him.

God worked through a people who obediently and faithfully served Him to bring about the conclusion to His plan. None of these people, however, could provide salvation for themselves or the entire world—not the patriarchs, kings like David, the prophets, or the nation of Israel herself. Only someone greater than these people and the nation could accomplish this feat. Israel, as a people, merely served as the vehicle which God used to fulfill His promise of sending a Messiah who could fully restore and redeem. Praise God that He didn’t leave salvation up to us as an individual or collectively as a nation—although each of us must respond to His benevolent offer. He Himself came—One greater than David and One who would rule and reign forever. Let us celebrate Jesus as the fulfillment of that plan—the King of kings and Lord of lords who has come to seek and save the lost.

Incorporate

How has God shown His faithfulness to us as a church? How should we respond to His faithfulness? In what ways can we declare it to all generations?

Why can we have confidence in the Lord? What character traits or qualities make God's foundation unmovable or unshakable?

In what ways does Jesus uniquely fulfill the promises God made to David and Israel in these verses? How do we see them specifically fulfilled in the New Testament?

December 13, 2020



The Messiah as Firstborn Part 2

Colossians 1:9-18

Focal Verse:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”

Colossians 1:9-18

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Introduce

As we draw closer to Christmas, many presents probably have already been purchased, meticulously wrapped and topped with a bow or carefully inserted into a gift bag and adorned with colorful tissue paper, and then placed under the Christmas tree—particularly if you have young children or grandchildren. Children will excitedly survey the gifts in anticipation—even jostling them gently to determine what they may contain. As children grow and adults mature, it becomes tougher to find a meaningful gift that they will both enjoy and use. Adults, for example, typically have everything they need and often their tastes become more refined and more difficult to determine. Some will drop hints about what they want while others will remain mum—hoping that those who get them a gift can figure out what they desire most. In all, the search for the perfect gift can be challenging and time consuming.



Therefore, many people take the easy way out and give money or gift cards rather than buying something which will lay buried in a closet and unused. For gifts exchanged among family members, money and gift cards may be the best option to ensure that people can get what they want, but they are also impersonal and, like many gifts, are soon forgotten even though they may be used often. If honest, we most likely won't remember how much money or what type of gift cards someone gives us. They simply don't make a lasting impression. We use them and then forget about the source from which they came. However, this doesn't excuse ingratitude or mean that we should trivialize such gifts.

On the contrary, this illustration helps us to underscore how much more value we find in a personalized gift as well as how much more joy we receive when we are reminded of the giver. Think for a moment about what you consider the best or most memorable gift someone has ever given you. Why do you consider that the most memorable gift? Although I cannot presume to speak specifically for you, most likely you found it the best because the person who gave it to you knew you, knew what you needed, and

Introduce

knew what would bring you the most joy. They had you in mind when they picked it out! It was a gift that they uniquely and distinctively tailored to you. Even now as you think about that gift or even physically look at it or use it, you probably remember the one who gave it to you. Not only does it remind you of their generosity, but it also reminds you of their personality and character. It undoubtedly reminds you of them! In Christ, “the firstborn over all creation,” we find such a memorable and personalized gift given by our heavenly Father. He knew what we needed, so He sent His Son as that sacrifice who could offer us reconciliation and redemption through Him. As Jesus hung upon that cross in agonizing pain shedding His blood, He thought of you and me! He had us on His mind. When we accept His gift and gaze upon Him, we should always see and be reminded of the Giver! We will see His character and personality. Christ, “the image of the invisible God,” shows us who the Father is, how much He loves us. It enables us to have a relationship with Him! Therefore, this Christmas let us not merely go through the motions and the celebration of tradition. Let us recognize the Giver and what He has given us. Make this Christmas the most memorable ever by celebrating God who made Himself flesh to give us eternal life!

Key
Question

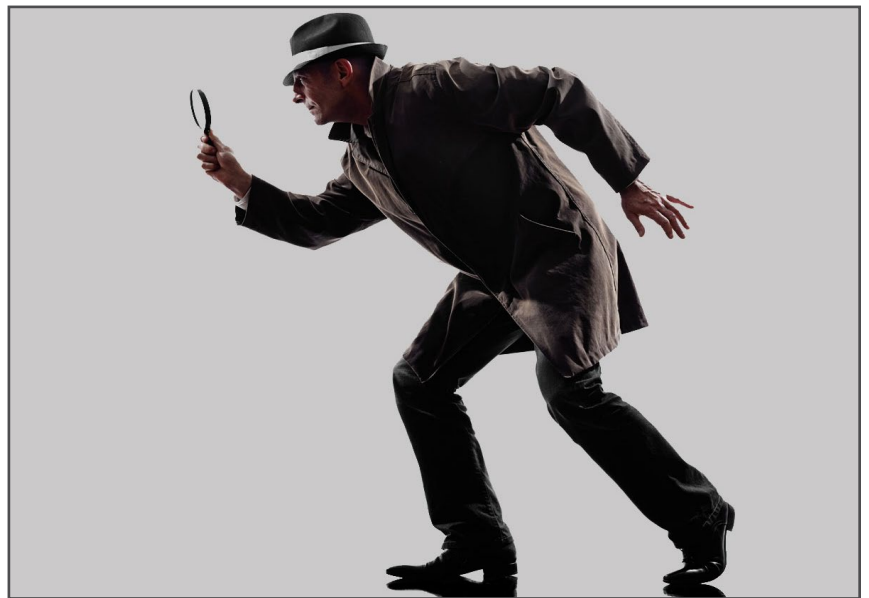
What makes a gift memorable?

Colossians 1:9-12

THE FRUITFULNESS OF KNOWING GOD:

After giving thanks to the Lord for the Colossians' sincere faith in Jesus and their ministry through which they have spread the gospel, Paul acknowledges that he has not ceased **to pray for** them (v. 9). In fact, he has prayed for them from the very beginning—**since the day** he and Timothy had first **heard of it**. From verse four, we see that Paul is referring to the time when they first **heard** of their "faith in Christ Jesus" and their "love for all the saints." Paul then expressly communicates how they have interceded on the Colossians' behalf that they might grow and mature in their faith, being **filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding**. To have **knowledge**, in this sense, requires an intimate, personal relationship.

In life, we can *know about* someone or something which differs drastically from actually *knowing* someone or something. For example, we can say that a detective *knows* the case which he is investigating. He knows all the details and facts. He has surveyed the evidence, interviewed the eyewitnesses and suspects, ascertained the means, motive, and opportunity, and developed a timeline of events. He is intimately involved with the case! Whereas those on the outside simply *know about* the case based upon what they have heard secondhand or through the media. They haven't visited the crime scene, physically examined the evidence, or listened to the unredacted testimony of those involved—no matter how much they think they may actually know. This poses a grave danger because it can lead to assumptions and even the misinterpretation of evidence. They don't truly *know* the case, but are merely *acquainted* with it.



Those who have a relationship with Christ can truly know Him because the Holy Spirit indwells them, giving them insight and **wisdom** which comes from the Father alone.

Instruct

When Paul prays for **spiritual understanding**, he means the **understanding** which comes through the Holy Spirit. This is not some spiritual exercise through human enlightenment and philosophy or a personal quest to discover truth through one's own "religious" journey or moral endeavors. This **wisdom and understanding** only come from God! For this reason, the Spirit helps us when we pray because "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" ([Rom 8:26-27](#)). Conversely, the world cannot ever understand these things because they do not have a relationship with the Spirit who imparts this insight. As a result, Paul elsewhere explains that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). Thus, they may *know about* "religion," Scripture, and Christ, but they don't truly *know* Him. To have **understanding**, therefore, we must have an intimate relationship with Him and be in right standing through submission to the Holy Spirit who guides us.

In what way(s) does the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and understanding? What other Scriptures talk about the wisdom the Spirit gives?

Question
1

Next, we see the result of that **knowledge** or what it produces. We will **walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him** (v. 10). The **knowledge** that God gives isn't meant to be filed away as trivia only to be pulled out to impress people about how many obscure facts we know; it is to be applied, practiced, and used daily. This **knowledge** then transforms the way we live or **walk**. We will no longer selfishly seek our own desires in an attempt to please ourselves; we will **walk** in righteousness to please the Lord. We even saw this last week when the psalmist declared, "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They **walk**, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance" (Psalm 89:15). In other words, they, and we for that matter, **walk worthy** of Him, representing Him in holiness and righteousness.

Personally, I hate playing the popular board game Trivial Pursuit because around half of the questions deal with pop culture, such as movies, music, and famous people, of which I have little to no knowledge. These questions irk me because they have little value and don't truly add anything significant to our lives. Yet, most other people love such questions because they are immersed in the culture. They look forward to pop

culture questions more than science and history—from which we can actually learn something and apply it to our lives. Let us ask ourselves: What movie, song, or famous person has ever truly changed our lives for the better? If anything, the subjects of most movies and songs have a negative impact to draw us away from Christ if we don't exercise caution and guard ourselves.



If playing a trivia game, would you know more about Scripture or pop culture? What does that say about your priorities and the value you place upon knowledge from the Lord?

Question
2

Unlike trivia games, the **knowledge** which comes through Scripture produces results and has a life-changing impact if we would only study it, internalize it, and apply it. Consequently, **the knowledge of God's will** bears fruit in our lives through **every good work**. It produces something tangible. We can observe it and experience it! It provides evidence that we have a relationship with Him and belong to Him. When thinking of **good works**, we tend to view them as kind acts done to others. But they include so much more! The **will** of God which leads to righteousness ought to be reflected in everything we do, say, think, believe, and the attitudes with which we interact with the world around us.

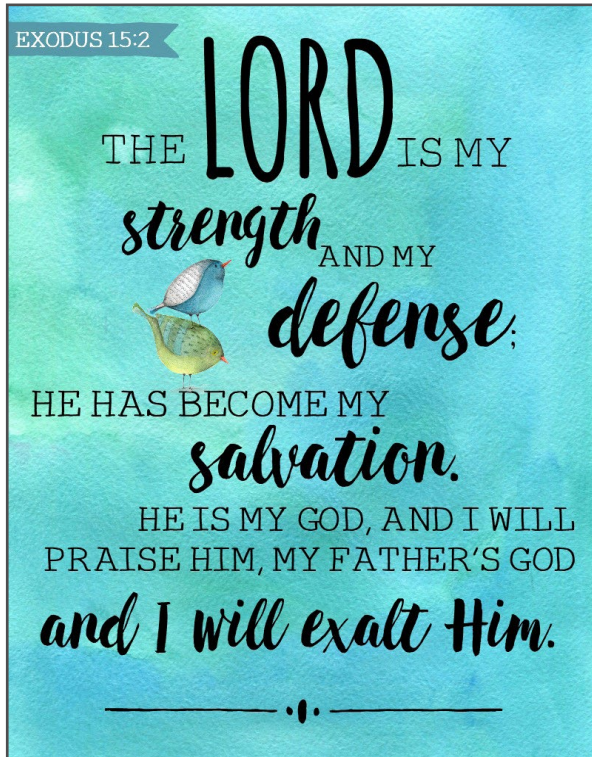
Every good work then means that we must follow God's boundaries in His Word and abstain from even the appearance of impropriety and evil ([1 Thess 5:22](#)). We must base our beliefs on what He Himself has said and not how the culture around us proposes and even pushes us to think. It means that we must see the world through the eyes of Christ and respond to every situation in a manner that reflects His character. We must not only act benevolently to people by meeting their physical needs when we have the ability or performing some act we regard as kind, but we must always share the gospel to introduce them to the One who can change them from the inside out and meet all their needs. **Every good work**, therefore, means everything in our lives should have changed; everything in our lives should seek to glorify the Lord; everything in our lives

should exhibit the imprint and handiwork of the Lord at work in and through us!

To what evidence in your life can you point to that exhibits God's knowledge?

Question
3

We should continually seek to increase in **the knowledge of God** every day. As we



seek His **knowledge**, He Himself will supply the strength and **power** we need to **walk worthy** and be **fruitful**. God will strengthen us **with all might according to His power** (v. 11). He doesn't leave us to fend for ourselves; He doesn't send us out to face life's challenges alone. He provides all we need. He gives us the strength it requires when we obediently submit to Him. Once again, we see God's ever-present faithfulness at work in the lives of His people. Just as He did for Israel and David, so also does He for the Colossians and us, strengthening us to remain **patient** and endure. In Psalm 89:21, God pledges to David: "With whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall

strengthen him."

Paul then lists two specific ways that God strengthens us: to exercise **patience** and maintain endurance (i.e. **longsuffering**) **with joy**. Two character traits that many of us may lack today are **patience** and endurance. Besides wanting instant results, we tend to lose interest when things fail to meet our expectations or we simply grow weary and want to try something new. Many may also throw in the towel and resign themselves to defeat when difficulties arise. When we look to the Lord for our strength, however, we will never grow weary and He will never let us fail. In fact, we already have victory in Him. Our confidence and our contentment come not through our personal accomplishments. They come from knowing the Lord and trusting in Him!

How does knowing the Lord give us patience and the ability to endure?

Question
4

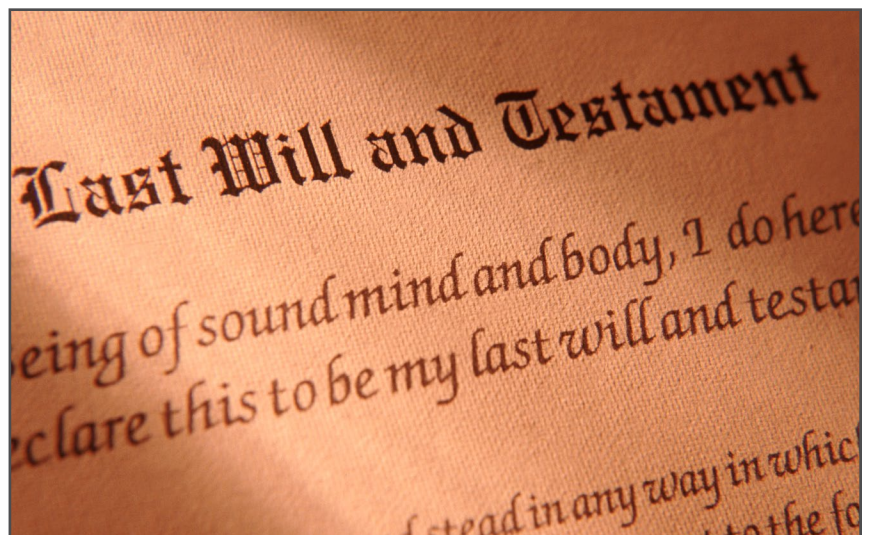
For this reason, we should give **thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be**

partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light (v. 12). The term **qualified** connotes an act of grace. We can't "qualify" ourselves for this **inheritance**. God did it for us through His Son! For those of us who have a last will and testament, a share of the inheritance typically goes to members of the family or the next of kin. Still, a "family" member isn't automatically "**qualified**" based upon physical descent. They too must be designated or named in the will. In this way, those not physically related to the testator can also receive a portion of the **inheritance** if named in the will—an act of grace by the testator. Through Christ, as we will see in the next two verses, we can receive this **inheritance** of eternal life!

Not all Israel, however, has or will receive this **inheritance** because it is not based purely upon their physical genealogy. Like us, they too must follow God's plan in Christ and have their names written in

the will. For us, although we don't physically descend from those in the Old Testament who looked forward to Christ and obediently followed God's plan, God has graciously given us a share in that **inheritance** if we too accept Christ and surrender to Him. Together, both those in the Old Testament

(i.e. **saints in the light**) who had a relationship with the Lord along with those in the New Testament era, including **us**, qualify to receive this **inheritance** because we surrendered to Christ who died upon the cross and designated us as heirs in His "will" when we confessed our sins and repented.



How would you explain to someone what qualifies us for receiving the inheritance of eternal life?

Question
5

Colossians 1:13-14

THE FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE BLOOD:

Last week, we learned how God established a covenant with David to empower his descendants to reign on the throne forever and to make him "the highest of the kings of the earth" ([Psalm 89:4, 27](#)). Yet, no mere earthly **kingdom** or lineage of human rulers

Instruct

could fulfill God's plan fully. A greater **kingdom** and a superior Ruler were needed. In Colossians, we see the faithful fulfillment of that promise to David through **the kingdom** established by **the Son** (v. 13). Over the course of Israel's history and David's own reign, God **delivered** them from numerous human enemies and saved them from countless physical dangers. A tiny nation would have never stood a chance against formidable foes like the Egyptians and Philistines without the help of the Lord. As much as God had rescued them from such danger, He also **delivered** them from an even greater danger. He repeatedly **delivered** them from their poor and sinful choices. David knew this firsthand! God forgave, redeemed, and cleansed David just as He will all those who called upon His name for **forgiveness** for their sins.

Just as He has **delivered** David and Israel from their sin, so also **has He delivered us!** He has rescued **us from the power of darkness** (i.e. sin) and given us an inheritance **in the kingdom of the Son of His love**. This **kingdom** isn't only open to a select few elite people, but the entire world. The invitation to join is open to anyone as long as he or she accepts the terms and finds **redemption** and **forgiveness of sin through the Son's blood**. Christ paid our entrance fee so to speak by shedding His **blood** upon the cross. And He has invited us to join the greatest **kingdom** in all the world apart from anything we have done or could do! We simply must accept the gift He has given us by seeking **forgiveness** for our sins and submitting to Him.

Hopefully, none of us has ever had to do business with a pawn shop because we've found ourselves in a financial bind. Two options exist for conducting business. We



can either outrightly sell an item for quick cash or we can pawn it. To pawn something means that we put it up as collateral and borrow money against it. We can then redeem the item by repaying the loan along with the accrued interest. Technically, the item still belongs to us, but it's in the possession of another until we redeem it. Although God has always

maintained sovereign ownership over us as His creation, sin has enslaved us in its possession. In life, we have willfully pawned ourselves by our own choices and sin has

taken us into its possession. We have pawned our lives for what we consider pleasure, happiness, and contentment which only last for a moment. In His grace and infinite love, however, Christ has paid the price to redeem us through His death. We must simply accept this **redemption** offered **through His blood** and God will take us back into His possession, clasping His hands securely around us forever as we walk with Him—no longer enslaved to sin, but indebted to Christ and enslaved to righteousness.

Colossians 1:15-18

THE FIRSTBORN WHO GIVES LIFE:

To redeem the world, God didn't just send a trusted emissary or form a human coalition to resolve the problem, He came Himself! He sent His Son. This is the real reason we celebrate Christmas. Jesus isn't just some charismatic spokesman who can motivate people to think positively and overcome. Mere positive thinking can never lead to such divine victory. Jesus isn't just a prophet who has come to impart divine words which can encourage and inspire. He isn't just a good teacher who can relate through stories and everyday examples to impress upon us how we should live. Jesus is the exact **image of the invisible God** (v. 15). He is God in the flesh who came to dwell among His creation to save us from sin and death. No mere man, teacher, philosopher, or committee could have done this job. God had to come Himself to accomplish it. Many movies and television shows often have a disclaimer to protect themselves from lawsuits, stating that any resemblance of the characters to an actual person is purely coincidental. This is not so with Jesus, however. When the text identifies Jesus as **the image of the invisible God**, it doesn't mean that He merely represents God as an ambassador or speaks on His behalf as a press secretary. He is God! The **image** is the exact representation and it is intentional. Jesus makes this clear when He chastises Phillip who demanded that He show them the Father. To which Jesus responds, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Phillip? He who sees Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'" (John 14:9)? Through Jesus, we see the very nature and character of God. We can see His authority, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, perfection, goodness, mercy, grace, and love. Jesus doesn't just embody or encapsulate these qualities; He is these very things because they emanate from God's perfect being.

In what tangible ways does Jesus show us who God is?

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6

Instruct

The text also identifies Jesus as **the firstborn over all creation**. Much confusion can exist over the phrase **firstborn** because many view it apart from the current context as well as regard it as primarily in reference to the chronological order of a physical birth. We must be clear. Jesus was *not* the first created being! As God, He has existed infinitely. He has no beginning or end. He is neither confined to time and history or by the physical principles of the universe that He created. **Firstborn**, therefore, does not refer to His physical creation; it refers to His status as preeminent. Preeminence simply means surpassing all others—superior to everything. In other words, Jesus is superior to any and everything in creation because He created it. That’s the whole point of the next two verses! Not only were **all things** in the universe **created by Him**, but **all things were created for Him** to bring Him honor and glory (v. 16). Apart from Him nothing would have existed (v. 17). He gave life to everything through His vastly superior power and divine sovereignty.

At Christmas, we may celebrate His physical birth by supernatural means through a virgin. Indeed, He was the **firstborn** (chronological) child by Mary through the Holy



Spirit (not the physical seed of Joseph). But let’s not forget the status of who He is and how vastly superior He is over His creation. Let’s not become so wrapped up in our traditions and gatherings that we forget who we worship and serve—the very God who created the universe made Himself flesh and subjected Himself to the sinful curse of His creation so that

He could conquer it on our behalf ([2 Cor 5:21](#)). To Him be all glory because He has the strength and superiority needed to bring life from death and redeem us from our own sinful choices!

In the Christmas story found in the Gospels, how do we see the “preeminence” of Jesus?

Question

7

Not only did Jesus bring about physical life through creation, but He also bestows

spiritual life to those who look to Him to overcome sin. As a result, Paul now describes Jesus as **the firstborn from the dead** (v. 18). Jesus certainly has superiority over death because the grave could not hold Him and in three days He was raised bodily from that borrowed tomb. But **firstborn** here in this context also carries with it the typical idea of chronology—being first in a line of succession. This is why Paul clarifies it with the phrase **who is the beginning**. No one ever before had bodily risen from **the dead** never to die again. Anyone who had ever been resuscitated **from the dead**, including Lazarus, died again. Their graves still house their remains as they await that Day which the Lord will call both the living and **the dead** together to join Him in heaven. Consequently, Jesus is the first bodily resurrection which serves as an example and guarantee of what those of us who have a relationship with Him will one day experience.

As we conclude this two-part study of the Messiah as **firstborn**, let us recall the superiority of God's perfect plan which only Jesus could enact and fulfill in full. In the Old Testament, God called a people to serve Him obediently, He used a nation to make His name known among the whole world, and He established kings and a kingdom that would display His power and represent His righteousness. Even though God called and used a nation (Israel) and individuals (like David), they, like we, needed someone much greater than themselves who could redeem them and bring life. Through them, God sent the only One who could save the world—the Messiah who is Jesus. In the New Testament, God continues that very same plan and process. But the Messiah has already come. God still calls a people to serve Him obediently and has established **the church** to make His name known and represent Him in righteousness. Let's join God in this plan and allow Him to mold us into the people we ought to be as we seek to know Him more intimately every day.

How are you part of God's plan? How do you allow Him to use you?

Question
8

As we end this lesson, are you still thinking about that personalized gift which you have received that has brought you the most joy? If so, undoubtedly it has probably brought a smile to your face and joy to your heart as you reminisce. In two weeks, as you give, receive, and unwrap the gifts under your tree, don't forget the most personalized Gift ever given. Hopefully, you have already received that Gift and haven't rejected Him. If you're reading this and haven't, it's still not too late to reach out and accept Him! Receive the greatest Gift in Christ Jesus today! God in His infinite wisdom tailored it specifically to fit both you and me. It's not a generic, one-size-fits-all kind of a Gift, however. God gave it with us in mind.

Christ thought of us as He hung upon that cross. His faithfulness and love for us were on full display that very day as He shed His blood for us. He knew how wretched and despicable both you and I are. And yet He still personally came to earth and willingly gave His life! His blood covers anything that we have ever done or ever will do. We simply must respond to that Gift by giving our lives to Him. God knows us intimately and gave us the perfect Gift in His Son. How intimately do you know Him?

Incorporate

According to this passage, what is the fruit produced by knowing God? How do we see the fruitfulness of knowing God as individuals and as a community (i.e. the church)?

If God has redeemed us through Christ, why should sin no longer dominate our lives? What should we do if we do sin? How can we keep sin from getting a foothold in our lives and distracting us?

When you think about Jesus' birth, what do you recall the most? According to Scripture, how should we think of Jesus' birth? Why should we ponder His preeminence and what He came to do?

December 20, 2020



The Messiah as King

Part 1

Matthew 2:1-15

Focal Verse:

“Saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.’”

Matthew 2:2

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Introduce

In years gone by, scavenger hunts became a popular way to engage others and pass the time. Although some simply presented a list of items to find, other scavenger hunts consisted of a series of clues that led to the discovery of a larger prize. Today, a similar concept exists in “escape rooms” where individuals cooperate to find the means of exiting an otherwise sealed room. In either case, the ultimate goal has been identified for us, but we



must look for clues along the way to arrive at the correct conclusion. A failure to pay attention or correctly analyze the information could lead to the forfeiture of the game. Nonetheless, we can identify three principles that would typically lead to success in these ventures.

First, we must look for clues in the right places; we must be methodical and organized in our search so we won't miss a critical detail. Randomly running around the room or venue helter skelter won't produce the best results. We may “happen” to discover a clue, but that is only by chance. Most likely, we will end up searching the same places more than once and overlooking others, becoming frustrated and distraught in the process. Second, we must draw the correct inferences about the clues when we do find them. It's not what the clues mean to us or even what we want them to mean; we must listen to and infer what they actually say or otherwise we will never get to the next step! When rightly interpreted, these clues will give us further insight and point us in the direction of the goal.

Third, we must listen to people who have wisdom and experience. In one sense, we need to heed the advice of an expert who has the pertinent knowledge to help us. We shouldn't attempt to guess our way to the goal. Neither should we just listen to anyone's advice or receive anyone's opinion without critical evaluation of the evidence. We need discernment and help to know the right way! When we do these three things collectively, they will greatly increase our chances of arriving at the goal.

The “wise men” who sought Jesus weren't on a scavenger hunt or a wild goose chase.

Introduce

Although their search for Him wasn't a "game," but a serious quest, it involved these same three principles illustrated here. They knew the final goal: to find the King of the Jews so they could worship Him. They had to look in the right place: Bethlehem as guided by the star they had seen in the East. They had to interpret the information they received correctly. It wasn't what it meant to them, but what the evidence actually said. Finally, they also had to turn to the right source for help: Scripture. Certainly, the experts upon whom Herod called provided the information, but it ultimately came from Scripture rather than their own tradition or wisdom. This Christmas and throughout the year let us diligently search Scripture so that we too might come to know this King of kings better and we might worship Him as He alone deserves.

Key
Question

How carefully do you search Scripture to determine who Jesus is so that you can worship Him as He deserves?

Matthew 2:1-6

THE SEARCH FOR THE KING:

This week we return to the Gospel of Matthew for part of the story associated with Jesus' birth. The events in this second chapter probably didn't happen in a few hours after His birth and more than a few weeks likely had passed before the "wise men" from the East arrived since it would have taken them some time to travel there. We often confuse this because every nativity set includes these "**wise men**" assembled along with the shepherds to worship the **King** at the stable. Based upon the fact that Herod the Great slew every male child two years of age and under in Bethlehem, Jesus could have been as old as two ([Matt 2:16](#))! Hence, His family had already moved from the stable where He had been born to reside in a house ([Matt 2:11](#)). Yet, Matthew gives us no real timeframe for how long it took these events to unfold. He simply states that **after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea the wise men came to Jerusalem** (v. 1). Naturally, the **wise men** began conducting their search for the **King** in the royal city or capital of the region: **Jerusalem**. The translation **wise men**, however, can be somewhat misleading. It doesn't refer to philosophers or cast them as particularly highly-educated sages of their society even though they would have likely had some substantial intelligence. Rather, it refers to astrologers—those who study the stars, planets, and cosmic events for signs of information. This would be something akin to those who make and read horoscopes today. Consequently, much disinformation exists about this group of individuals based upon details added to the story over the years by tradition. We do not know how many there were. The plural only indicates it had to be two or more. Scripture also never calls them kings as the popular Christmas carol begins nor does it ever give them names or identify their country of origin. It simply refers to them as **men from the East**. By that cardinal direction designation, however, we can deduce



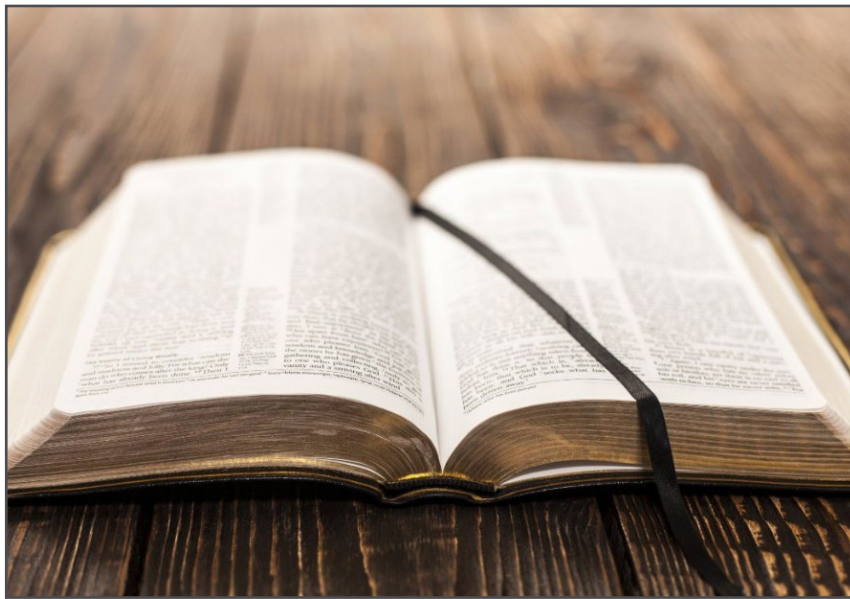
Instruct

they were Gentiles and not Jews. Interestingly, apart from the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth, the Gentiles, not the Jews, were among the first group to **worship** Jesus as **King** (v. 2)!

Why must we be cautious to separate tradition when it differs and hear Scripture speak for itself? What is the danger in merely relying on tradition?

Question
1

After they arrived in town from their long journey, these Gentile astrologers then begin inquiring more details from the locals to find the exact location by asking, "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?**" We may not pay too much attention to this statement and read it quickly, focusing simply on the word **King**. But we've missed a crucial point. The phrase **has been born King** indicates Jesus' present status. He



is **King** right now. He does not need to wait to become **King**; He is already **King** from even before His physical birth. And this greatly threatens Herod. Although Jesus did leave His position in heaven to come to earth, He never gave up His status as **King**! Again, the Christmas carol, "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne," can be somewhat misleading if we don't exercise

caution to recall the scriptural context: "Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, when Thou camest to earth for me." Scripture never indicates that Jesus ceased being **King**! He did come in the form of man and assume the role of a servant. But He has always been and will always continue to be **King**!

These men genuinely sought to pay homage to and **worship** Jesus. Although the text doesn't indicate who they asked, we know the answer itself came directly from Scripture prophesied some seven centuries earlier through Micah as indicated by the response that **the chief priests and scribes** gave Herod when summoned ([Matt 2:4-6](#)). God gives us enough evidence in creation and general knowledge to point us to Him and know that He exists. But this general knowledge always leads to Scripture

which in the end reveals His exact plan in Christ. God gave these astrologers enough information to know the **King** had been born which led them to **Jerusalem**. But they needed further information revealed and confirmed by Scripture to complete their task. Still, they believed and came in obedience **to worship the King**.

At this point, all attention turns to King Herod when he learns of their search for this newborn **King**. As a paranoid and power-hungry individual, this news **troubled** Herod and by extension **all Jerusalem with him** (v. 3). He felt threatened because he was not a king by birth, but rather he was appointed by the Romans. Herod, therefore, had two strikes against him which challenged his legitimacy as king: first, he was not Jewish by birth because his father was Idumean (Edomite) and his mother Arabian; second, he was not a king by royal descent but by appointment. In Jesus, we find a legitimate **King** by birth in the lineage of David who had the right to assume the throne! The very concept which we mentioned in our study of Psalm 89 last week and which we will study more in-depth next week. Consequently, Herod flew into a rage and sought to eliminate his competition, for he had even killed some of his own sons whom he perceived as a threat to the throne. So, Jerusalem was indeed uneasy and **troubled** by his response because they had seen his murderous rage first-hand.

Having summoned these **men from the East**, now Herod actually helps them to achieve their goal of locating this **King**. He calls **together all the chief priests and scribes** to inquire **where the Christ was to be born** (v. 4). These religious “experts” and “scholars” of their day knew Scripture and immediately recited **the prophet** Micah who had foretold of Jesus’ birth in the city of David, specifically **Bethlehem in Judea** (v. 5)—not to be confused with another Bethlehem in Galilee ([Josh 19:15](#)). Although **Bethlehem** was a small, seemingly insignificant hamlet some six miles south of Jerusalem, Micah reminds us not to overlook this town because Someone superior to all others and something more extraordinary than we could ever fathom would come from this place! In [Micah 5:2](#), he announces that this city would **not** be **the least among the rulers of Judah**, but **out of** it would **come** the greatest **Ruler who** would **shepherd** God’s **people—Israel**.

What is the danger of overlooking the “small” things in our lives according to a human perspective? What is God’s purpose in working through these “small” things at times?

Question
2

Through the actions taken by these individuals, we can observe the danger of

Instruct

thinking that we know the truth when we are in actuality distorting, misapplying, and reshaping it to fit our own personal beliefs and opinions. In reality then, we don't truly understand the truth because we haven't heard God speak; we've projected upon Him what we ourselves think and want to hear. Therefore, knowing where to go to find the truth and even cognitively knowing it provides no benefit if we don't seek to understand and apply it properly. For example, both Herod and the "experts" knew exactly where to go to find the truth about this miraculous and long-foretold birth: Scripture.

To some extent, Herod "cognitively" believed the truthfulness of the information and didn't dismiss it. However, he responded with murder rather than **worship** as we shall learn. Like many, Herod didn't seek to ascertain the whole truth, but jumped to conclusions and made his own assumptions about what this baby had come to do. So, he acted upon his own desires and impulses without truly knowing all the details. Similarly, the "experts" also had the right knowledge about the Messiah, but they rejected that truth as the rest of Scripture bears out because Jesus did not meet their expectations or fit their definition of what the Messiah would be and what He would do.

To put this into perspective, let's look at a practical example. If we suffer from some



type of illness or physical ailment, we all *know* where we should go to acquire the knowledge of how to overcome it: a medical professional with the proper training to diagnose the cause of the condition. Leaving aside the occasional misdiagnosis or the possibility of error with any human being, a doctor is the best source of information to diagnose the

problem over against our own self-diagnosis which seems to be growing in popularity today among many people who don't have the expertise! Even so, we *know* the source which we should use to ascertain the truth.

After assessing the problem, the doctor will tell us the truth and prescribe a treatment

and plan of action for overcoming what ails us. We now have the *knowledge*; we know the truth. But we must act upon it to make it effective! We can respond to the truth in one of three ways: 1) we can accept it and follow the plan to overcome the illness as prescribed, 2) we can decide the information doesn't apply to us and we can formulate a better plan to overcome it with the knowledge we have, or 3) we can take the information and do nothing. Most people in life will do one of the latter two options. For instance, we can know what ails us and what to do overcome it, but we can decide that plan just isn't for us; it doesn't meet our expectations. We can even go as far as filling the prescriptions at the pharmacy, but simply leave them on a shelf and never take them. In this way, knowledge doesn't do us any good. Knowledge must be obtained from the right source, correctly assessed, and then applied in life. This is especially true of Scripture which gives God's perfect plan for overcoming an illness which leads to death—sin!

What is the danger of having knowledge and failing to use it properly? How would you assess your knowledge of Scripture? How do you apply it in your life daily?

Question
3

Matthew 2:7-8

THE SECRET INQUIRY ABOUT THE KING:

Herod next secretly met with the **wise men** because he had an ulterior motive for finding out more specific information to determine the approximate age of the **Child**. So, he began asking them at **what time the star had appeared**, presumably because he realized that it would have taken some time to observe it, determine what it meant astrologically, and then travel to **Jerusalem**. He then gave these **men** the directive to **search carefully for this young Child** and report back to him (v. 8). By his choice of words, Herod wanted them to leave no stone unturned and not give up their **search** until they had definitively found the **Child**. Then, he outrightly deceived them as he falsely declared his intentions. He wanted them to bring back word so that he too might **come** and **worship Him!**

Notice the difference between the response of those who lived in **Jerusalem** and the visitors who had journeyed **from the East**. When Herod learned of the news of this royal birth **all Jerusalem was troubled with him**. They knew what kind of man Herod was from first-hand experience. They had seen his character, observed his personality, and witnessed his actions. In contrast, at this point in the account, the **wise men** seem



indifferent to Herod's request. Scripture doesn't record any other response than that they merely go on their way to find **the Child** and apparently fulfill Herod's request since God must warn them in a dream not to return to him (v. 12). Being on the outside, they probably didn't know much about Herod's reputation or have any real reason to doubt his sincerity in

wanting to **come** and **worship the Child**.

Still, we can learn a valuable principle from this brief encounter. What we think, do, and say in private will always be revealed no matter how careful we may believe we have concealed our motives or covered our tracks. Much of Herod's exploits, however, were public. People knew about them. He had done very little to conceal them other than to use his authority and power to coerce and frighten people. But here was a group of men whom he could attempt to deceive and manipulate. [Numbers 32:23](#) cautions us, "Be sure your sin will find you out." As believers, we must act honorably at all times and be above reproach by avoiding even the appearance of sin. At the same time, however, we also need to know the character of the people with whom we associate or deal even in casual acquaintances lest we become deceived, manipulated, misguided, and drawn away from the Lord. As we will see, God steps in to prevent this from happening with the **wise men** who had come with the sincere desire to **worship** Jesus.

Why is it important to know with whom we associate? How can that ultimately affect our relationship with Christ if we're not careful?

Question
4

Matthew 2:9-12

THE SERVICE TO THE KING:

After meeting with Herod, the men departed for **Bethlehem**. And, just as the Lord had done from the very beginning of their journey, He continued guiding them by **the star they had seen in the East** (v. 9). As they arrived in the city, **the star stood** still

over the house where Jesus was. Upon seeing this miraculous sight and realizing they had found **the King**, the group began to rejoice greatly (v. 10). Having entered into **the house**, they found Jesus along **with His mother Mary** and immediately **fell down** and **worshiped Him** (v. 11). The text is clear who rightly received their worship: Jesus. Undoubtedly, the men respected Mary, but they did not worship her at all. To worship Mary, as some denominations teach, is nothing less than idolatry. This takes us back to the idea of understanding and rightly applying knowledge and truth which we mentioned in the very first section. Many in such denominations may think that they know the truth and have comprehended it, but in reality they haven't. Most likely, the people in those denominations have never even read Scripture; they rely upon man's misguided beliefs cloaked in religious vestments rather than hearing the inerrant Word of the Lord actually speak. We need to help them see and understand the truth of Scripture.

In a culture which purports to be highly intellectual, how can we help people to understand and rightly apply the truth of Scripture?

Question
5

As they **worshiped** the Christ, they presented Him with three different types of **gifts** which they had brought: **gold**, **frankincense**, and **myrrh**. Collectively, these **gifts** had enormous value and were worthy of presenting to a **King**. But the focus should not primarily be upon the nature of the gift, its value, or even its "theological" significance as proposed by later commentators. It should be upon the act of **worship** and devotion of these **wise men** to Jesus. Like today, **gold** was a highly sought-after precious metal with great value. Both **frankincense** and **myrrh** had a variety of uses as aromatic perfumes from Arabia from where these men had traveled. **Frankincense**, for



example, was used as a medicine and widely in religious ritual. **Myrrh** shared many of these same uses, but was also used as perfume in burial ([John 19:39](#)). Some ancient commentators along with some modern ones have attempted to connect these gifts

Instruct

with special significance to Jesus' royalty, divinity, and death. Matthew, however, makes no such connection here in the text. Instead, he correctly focuses on their **worship**. Let's not miss the main point. These **wise men** rightly recognized and **worshiped** Jesus for who He is: **King**.

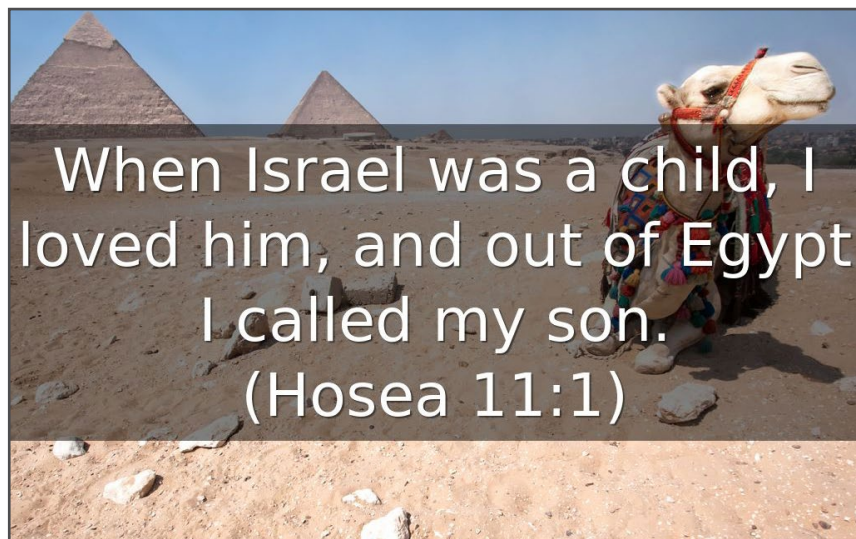
In what ways do you obediently worship and serve the King?

Question
6

Too often, we can become distracted by non-essential things in our worship which cause us to focus on inconsequential matters. The Jews and Samaritans were in Jesus' own day as indicated by His response to the Samaritan woman at the well when she asked the proper location where worship must be conducted. In response, Jesus corrects her misunderstanding, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" ([John 4:21-23](#)). We certainly must pay attention to the theology and content of our songs, sermons, and supplications (prayers). How we worship is important. But who we direct our worship to is paramount. We must worship our God and Father and His Son Jesus alone! Let's make sure that we have the proper perspective when we worship and focus on giving of our lives wholly to Him as that sacrificial act of worship which He desires ([Rom 12:1-2](#)).

Matthew 2:12-15

THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE KING:



As we conclude our study this week, we see the divine safeguarding of **the King**. Nothing catches God by surprise. Nothing is hidden from His eyes. He has thought of everything. He works in such a way to safeguard and bring the plan which He devised before the foundation of the world to fruition. We see evidence right

here when God moves to protect His Son. The **wise men** had no inkling of Herod's motives or his unscrupulous and wicked plan, but God did. First, God **divinely** warns the men **in a dream not to return to Herod** (v. 12). They obediently heeded God and **departed for their country** by a different route. Second, God sends **an angel** to speak to **Joseph in a dream** (v. 13). He instructs him to get out of the bed (**arise**) and **flee to Egypt with the young Child and His mother**. They would **stay there until** God gives explicit instruction for them to return. For the first time in the text, God reveals Herod's plan to **destroy the Child**. Just like the **wise men**, Joseph immediately responded and left **for Egypt by night** to escape this imminent threat.

The family resided there in the refuge of Egypt **until** Herod died (v. 15). Matthew then details how this fulfilled [Hosea 11:1](#) in which **the Lord** declared: "**Out of Egypt I called My Son.**" Through this, we see how Jesus fulfills the exodus in an even greater way than Moses and Israel ever could. Initially, God referred to Israel as His son, that is a way of describing the relationship He has with them, in His declaration to Pharaoh requesting that he free the people. Through Moses and eventually Joshua, God led the nation of Israel from literal enslavement at the hands of the Egyptians to freedom in the land which He had promised their forefathers. Now, Jesus in a greater way fulfills that ultimate journey of enslavement to freedom. He doesn't free merely from physical enslavement and lead to an earthly promised land, however. He frees from the bondage of sin and gives eternal life. He accomplishes something that no human could ever do!

Through Jesus, we see the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan which He orchestrated in the beginning. God called and used an obedient people to bring the Messiah to save the world from sin and death. Only God could do this Himself. He had to come into the world to dwell among sinful man. Eventually, Christ would have to die, but not by the hand of a maniacal king named Herod. Around thirty years later, Jesus would willingly lay down His life and die on the cross at the request of the Jews and under the supervision of the Romans. God's plan still did not end in the death of His Son, but it brought permanent victory when He triumphantly rose from the grave, conquering sin and death forever for anyone who would turn to Him in sincere faith through repentance. Therefore, let us celebrate, honor, and praise the King of kings and Lord of lords who willingly came to earth, faced adversity, and gave His life in our place so that we would not have to die!

In the introduction, we used scavenger hunts or escape rooms to discuss principles that would apply in our relationship with Christ. Although there are many principles we can use, there is one significant difference between searching for Christ and a scavenger hunt. God hasn't hidden clues that we must decipher or used some biblical code that only a few people can comprehend. God has spoken plainly to us and provided clear evidence in Scripture to reveal His exact plan. We don't have to guess. We don't have to hope we can figure things out and find the right way. We can know these things confidently if we listen to the Lord and hear Him speak through His Word.

This Christmas season let us make sure that the tradition we celebrate and the things that we believe align perfectly with Scripture. God has given us all the knowledge we need; He has told us the truth. But we must take care to understand correctly what God has said and actually apply it in our lives. Let us worship the King and celebrate His coming to earth to provide the only way that we can have life. Let us not merely cognitively know the truth in our minds, but let us internalize that truth and apply it in our lives so that we can have a relationship with Christ which leads to eternal, abundant life in Him. Let us worship Him for the God, Savior, and King that He has been from the beginning and will continue to be throughout eternity.

Incorporate

Why is it important to point people to Scripture and let them read and hear what God says for themselves? How must/should we use Scripture to help people find the King?

Why is corporate Bible study as a church important? How can we encourage to be involved in personal daily Bible study as well as be involved in corporate Bible study in the church?

What does Scripture say our devotion and service to the King should be?

December 27, 2020



The Messiah as King

Part 2

Psalm 89:27-52

Focal Verse:

"The highest of the kings of the earth."

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Psalm 89:27b

Introduce

As Americans, we have enjoyed unparalleled freedom and the peaceful transition of power in government for over 240 years. We have a Constitution that affords us unalienable rights as well as outlines our responsibilities as citizens. In the United

States, most typically resist people who want to make themselves life-long national leaders with unilateral power since that type of power always leads to corruption. As a nation, therefore, we frown upon the despotism of most monarchies and anything



that attempts to take away our individual freedoms. Following the tradition of our first official president, George Washington, our Congress established the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution which limits the office of president to ten years or essentially two terms.

Whether we live in a republic like the United States, under a monarchy as in other countries, or under a totalitarian despotic government, we cannot truly understand the concept of “forever” because things change, people fail, and governments are toppled. No human government ever stays the same its entire existence! Monarchs can abdicate the throne preparing a way for another family to reign. Totalitarian governments can be overthrown—and factions constantly seek to do so. Even the United States which selects leaders through a democratic process safeguarded by the Constitution will one day fail! No longer will people abide by the Constitution and its principles, leaving a lawless and chaotic society. The Constitution is only as good as the people willing to follow it and adhere to its tenets.

Even Israel had a difficult time grasping the concept of “forever” since her human leaders died and power exchanged hands, the nation experienced a divided kingdom after Solomon, both Israel and Judah faced exile, and the people were fickle in their faith. At times, Israel was conquered by other nations, like Assyria and Babylon, as well as at other times annexed under Greece and Roman rule. Things changed. Nothing remained the same because the people often failed to look to God who alone could

Introduce

offer permanence. God, however, never changes; He never goes back on His Word, but is always faithful to His covenant and promises. When selecting and installing David as king, God promised that his house and lineage would rule forever ([2 Sam 7:11-13](#)). In His faithfulness, God has fulfilled that promise—not through a mere earthly succession of kings, but One who would live and reign forever: Jesus the Messiah. Jesus has indeed come once in the flesh and declared His kingdom to be at hand ([Matt 4:17](#)). One day, He will return and establish His kingdom in full where He will continue to reign forever. Nothing has or will be able to prevail against Him—neither death, sin, nor the powers of evil! Praise God for the permanence of His Messiah who is King of kings and Lord of lords!

Key
Question

What security is there in knowing God is faithful to His Word and His kingdom will last forever?

Psalm 89:27-32

THE REIGN WHICH CONTINUES:

In our study the first week of December, we focused on the first half of Psalm 89 and particularly the first part of [verse 27](#) which asserts: “Also I (the Lord) will make him My firstborn.” Our studies of both [Psalm 89 and Colossians 1](#) led us to conclude that **firstborn** in these contexts refers to his status as the preeminent or highest authority. Verse 27 makes this clear when God explains that this means he will be **the highest of the kings of the earth**. The immediate historical context of this psalm refers to the coronation of David as king. David acquires this preeminence and **highest** position because he submitted to the Lord. His authority, consequently, comes from His relationship with God rather than his own achievements. David trusts the Lord, depends upon Him, and obediently follows His directives; he seeks Him in everything! But God still had something greater in mind when He established this covenant—something that far exceeded David and any mere earthly kingdom. Over the next two verses, the Lord reveals His plan for this eternal kingdom not limited by the frailties of man—a kingdom which would last **forever**. Every line of these verses then champions the permanence of both the **covenant** and the kingdom. God, not David, bears the burden of ensuring their success. He will not let them fail! Thus, God **will keep** His servant **forever** according to His **mercy** or faithfulness. If this **covenant** depended upon anything other than God’s **mercy** and faithfulness, it would have failed miserably. God, however, has guaranteed His **covenant** will **stand firm** regardless of any force that may come against it. External, powerful nations cannot prevail against it. Human sin and wicked leaders, even within Israel herself, cannot derail His plan (vv. 30-32). It will come to fruition based upon God’s power, sovereignty, and faithfulness!

God, therefore, reassures us of the permanence of this kingdom by announcing that He **will make** David’s **seed** (i.e. descendants) **endure forever**. As a result, **his throne** will be as **the days of heaven**—infinite and eternal! With this declaration, God shows that



Instruct

He envisions more than just an earthly kingdom. Although God accomplished great things through His servant and Israel as a nation, the physical aspect of the kingdom was limited. For example, the kingdom was limited in scope to the land which God had given them. But even then, Israel never fully possessed the land as God had specified during the conquest under Joshua. They became complacent and did not drive out all the inhabitants as He had instructed them ([Num 33:55](#); [Josh 17:12](#)). In addition, God also forbid establishing covenants with these people, but Israel did with the Gibeonites, further complicating their status in obtaining the land completely ([Judg 2:2](#))! Still, God's covenant was not hindered by human ignorance, disobedience, and complacency. He continued to act with **mercy**!

How does complacency hinder our relationship with the Lord? In what areas have we become complacent in our lives?

Question
1

This physical kingdom was severely fraught with human frailty and wickedness which also limited its scope. At times, Israel looked more like a soap opera than a holy people called by the Lord. Their "kingdom" then became a nightmare rather than idyllic. David's sin with Bathsheba, even though he repented and God forgave him, trickled down into the rest of his family. Absalom, his own son, tried to overthrow and kill him ([2 Sam 15](#)). Even as a wise man who sought the Lord, Solomon's heart was turned away from Him by his many wives and relationships ([1 Kings 11:4](#)). After Solomon, Israel's leaders vacillated between those who followed the Lord and those who refused to serve Him which often sent the nation spiraling into chaos and ending in retribution and exile.



In fact, God anticipates this very problem even before He establishes His everlasting **covenant** with David. God foresees that some of David's descendants will **forsake** His **law**, refuse to **walk** in obedience to His principles (i.e. **judgments**), **break** His **statutes**, and fail to **keep** His **commandments** (vv. 30-31). For this reason, He explains that He will **punish their transgression with the rod** and their **iniquity with stripes** (v. 31). Fortunately, this eternal kingdom doesn't depend upon any one, single human being to validate it or keep it going. Like we all do, all Israel—

including Moses, David, Solomon, or any of the prophets—needed someone to save her! Therefore, we cannot view this eternal kingdom so narrowly as to identify it only with the physical kingdom established with the nation of Israel. God’s kingdom is universal and world-wide open to all who will accept it! It overcomes human and moral deficiencies to conquer death and bring life to everyone who has a relationship with the One sitting on **His throne**.

How does our stubbornness and sin hinder God’s work in our lives?

Question
2

Therefore, a greater Ruler than David or any of his human kin had to come in order to establish such a permanent and world-wide kingdom. This Ruler is perfect, free from any moral defect whereas every other human leader has fallen woefully short. These leaders, along with all of us, deserve punishment for our deeds. We deserve **the rod** and **stripes**. But this perfect Ruler who deserved no such things took our **stripes** upon Himself. In His infinite **mercy**, Jesus “was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). Jesus has invited us to participate in His kingdom. He has cleared any obstacles which would hinder us from joining. We simply must repent of our sins and surrender to Him by accepting the work He did for us upon the cross.

How does Christ overcome our limitations and weaknesses to work through us to accomplish His will? Why is this not an excuse to live sinfully and abuse grace?

Question
3

Psalm 89:33-37

THE RELIABILITY OF THE LORD:

God now emphatically states that this covenant depends squarely upon Him and not our own human endeavors and actions. If we sin, God will certainly punish and correct us when we have a relationship with Him; however, sin does not nullify His **covenant**. We shouldn’t abuse God’s grace and **mercy** though, thinking He’ll just forgive us so we can live however we want with no penalty. On the contrary, those of us who have a relationship with Him will experience transformation in our lives. And if we sin, we will not only experience His conviction, but we also receive His restoration when we confess and repent. Hence, the same God who promised to **make David’s seed endure forever**

is the same God who has promised to deliver us from temptation and see us through trials. We can rely upon Him! He will do what He says which is the psalmist's point in this section.

How has God remained faithful to His Word even when you were unfaithful? How did God's faithfulness bring restoration to your life?

Question
4

In verse 33, God interjects a caveat by drawing a sharp distinction to what He has just said about sin and punishment. He wants to make clear that He will not forsake His promise even when people sin. God draws a contrast to human faithlessness and His **faithfulness**. He will not remove His **lovingkindness** (the same word translated earlier as mercy) or **allow** His **faithfulness to fail**. Unlike humans who **break** His

statutes, God will flawlessly keep His covenant (v. 34). He will not amend or **alter** what He has said depending upon any earthly event or any human response. Rather, we can completely trust Him to fulfill His promises in full—both the punishment of sin and the bestowal of life!

**GOD IS NOT A MAN,
THAT HE SHOULD LIE, NOR A SON OF MAN,
THAT HE SHOULD REPENT; HAS HE SAID, AND
WILL HE NOT DO IT? OR HAS HE SPOKEN,
AND WILL HE NOT MAKE IT GOOD?**
NUMBERS 23:19

In His **holiness**, God cannot **lie**. So, based upon His character, God will definitively accomplish what He has **sworn** or promised (v. 35). Once again, therefore, He reiterates that David's **seed** will **endure forever**. Just as we can rely upon **the sun** to rise and travel the course of the sky every day as well as count upon **the moon** to appear every night, we can count on the **faithfulness** of the Lord to fulfill His promises—in particular in this context to establish **the throne** of David **forever** (vv. 36-37).

In a few days, we will turn our calendars to 2021 and close out a tumultuous year that by all accounts many of us may like to forget. Many new years bring a sense of expectant hope and optimism, but this particular new year seems to bring with it much of the same that we have already had to endure. From a human perspective, we can do nothing to change course. In fact, Job even laments, "Man who is born of woman is few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). We can respond to such events in one of two ways.

We can wallow in self-pity and dread, focusing on everything bad that has happened or that may happen next year. With such a perspective, we look to what we can do to overcome obstacles and deal with uncertainty and turmoil. Or, we can respond by turning to the Lord who has already overcome any obstacle that we may face through His spoken Word—through the promises He has made! We can trust Him and fully rely upon what He has said. We can depend upon Him wholly and look beyond our circumstances, realizing that it's not about what we can do but what He has already done through His Son!

Why should we look optimistically to next year despite current uncertainty? How does God help us to overcome when we seek Him?

Question
5

Psalm 89:38-45

THE RENUNCIATION OF THE COVENANT:

To the outsider, events may look as if God has reneged upon His covenant and abandoned His people. From the inscription, the human who transcribed this psalm is identified as Ethan the Ezrahite. A man by this name served as a Levitical musician under David. If this is the same person, his remarks in verses 38-45 could be a historical reference to the collapse of the united kingdom whereby the nation became politically divided into two entities: North (Israel) and South (Judah). If not the same person, it could refer to the people's exile under either Assyria or Babylon. In either case, the events that have transpired around them cause people to wonder if God has given up on them and forgotten His promise to David.

The psalmist brings a litany of charges against the Lord to show from a human perspective how God has "failed." Such accusations, however, fail in themselves to consider that God's larger plan is not tied to mere humans or the succession of a physical aristocracy, but it depends entirely upon His coming in the flesh to establish an even greater kingdom through the lineage of David fulfilled via the Messiah! Hence, from a human perspective, a descendent of David



Instruct

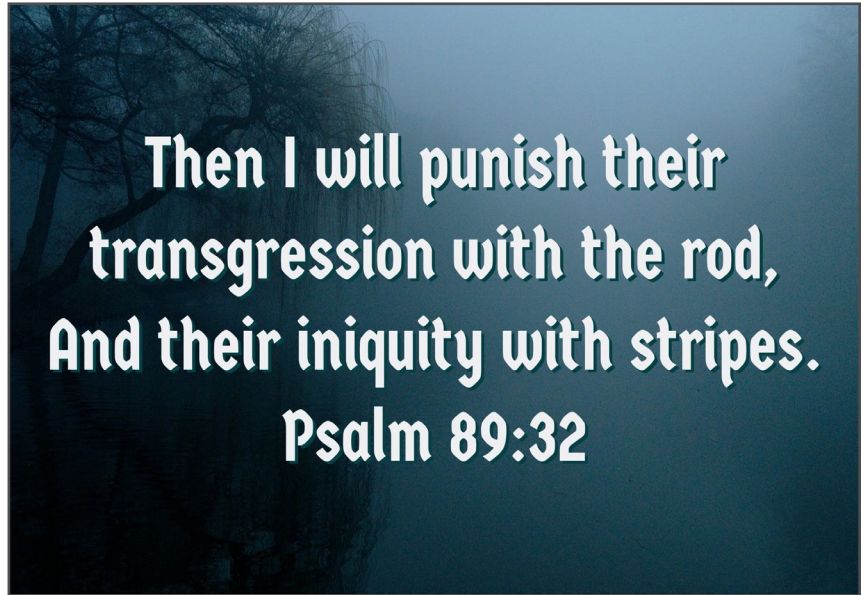
may not be physically on **the throne** as Jerusalem lay in ruins, but from the divine perspective One greater rules from His **throne** and never can be vanquished. The psalmist decries that God has **cast off, abhorred**, and become **furious** with His **anointed** or chosen vessel—that is the nation of Israel collectively as a people (v. 38). He accuses God of renouncing **the covenant with** David since He has allowed the kingdom to be sacked and his **crown** profanely cast **to the ground** (v. 39). It seems, therefore, God hasn't protected and prospered him as He had promised; instead, He has broken **down his hedges** (i.e. defenses) and **brought ruin to his** fortifications (v. 40). God had previously pledged to “beat down his foes and plague those who hate him” (v. 23). But the very opposite has seemed to have happened. Rather than make him and his descendants **the highest king**, he has been abused by all the nations. He has become a despised laughingstock. He has been bullied and plundered, becoming **a reproach to his neighbors** (v. 41). As a result, **the right hand of their adversaries** has been **exalted** and their enemies take delight and **rejoice** at their downfall (v. 42). Furthermore, God seemingly hasn't protected them from their warring neighbors. He hasn't stifled their attacks or quelled their **sword** (v. 43). In fact, not only have they encroached upon Israel's territory, but they have conquered them as a nation and triumphed against them. Instead of God manifesting His **glory** through the favor He has bestowed upon them (v. 17), He has made David's **glory cease** and allowed his **throne** to be trampled to **the ground** (v. 44). In all, God had repeatedly affirmed His promise to make David's descendants to rule continuously from **the throne forever**, but even this looked in doubt from the outsider's perspective. Instead of instituting an infinite kingdom, God has appeared to shorten **the days of his youth** and cover **him with shame** (v. 45). Thus, the reign of David and his descendants ended prematurely from this perspective.

How do you deal with disappointment in your life? How should God's promises help us overcome that disappointment even though it may look as if He has failed?

Question
6

As we know from history, God repeatedly warned the people of Israel and gave them numerous chances to repent and turn to Him, but they refused. They persisted in their sinfulness. So, in accordance with His Word, God punished them by allowing nations to rise against them and defeat them. This didn't change or cancel God's plans nor

did it mean that He had lied or failed to keep His promises. On the contrary, He did exactly what He said He would do. In fact, God did what He had said in the very verses that precede these: “**punish their transgressions**” (v. 32). In all, this was all part of His larger plan to establish a greater kingdom which would permanently defeat sin and death. His plan involved someone much greater than David himself! Thus, we see the resolution in the final section of this psalm where the psalmist pleads with the Lord to remember His children.



Psalm 89:46-52

THE REMEMBRANCE OF HIS CHILDREN:

The psalmist now seeks to make sense of what has transpired. So, he asks a series of rapid-fire questions directed at the Lord: **How long** will You allow these things to continue?; **How long will you hide Yourself?**; **How long will Your wrath burn like fire** (v. 46)? These are fair questions if uttered with the right attitude in seeking clarification and comfort from the Lord rather than demanding He act immediately according to our expectations. The psalmist, however, demands God act now because his **time is short** (v. 47). He wants an immediate response and resolution which shows he has failed to grasp God’s ultimate plan and purpose. Many times, we too become impatient with God and demand immediate results and restitution. In doing so, we selfishly look at the world from our narrow-minded perspective. Rather than look at the bigger picture of what God is doing for the world, we want God to upend His divine plan and work in the way we see best. This is the very definition of arrogance and selfishness!

In what ways have you at times acted impatiently with God? In His response to you, what has this revealed about His plan and character?

Question # 7

Again, the psalmist questions how God has responded and contemplates what purpose He has in allowing these things to happen. Although he cognitively knows that God

has a purpose for man, it seems as if He has merely created us for **futility**. Herein lies the problem of understanding the way God works from a mere human perspective. Man can only see the evidence that's right in front of him rather than the larger picture. The psalmist's next two questions capture this very struggle in understanding the magnitude of God's plan according to this viewpoint: **What man can live and not see death?; Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave** (v. 48)? The answers from our finite perspective to these questions are no one and no. None of us can save our lives; none of us can live forever by our own volition and willpower. We indeed have no hope apart from the Lord; all is truly futile when we exclude Him from our lives. God had always intended His plan to be fulfilled through David's lineage, but in Someone greater who could defeat death and overcome the grave—not simply to establish an earthly kingdom whose leaders come and go and whose glory can fade. From a mere human perspective that looks at current events and draws assumptions based on them, we may overlook the evidence of God's work which may then appear as if He has failed and there is no hope. This isn't what has truly happened, however. It's merely our narrow-minded human perspective that has made it appear that way. For Israelites like Ethan, they looked around at their nation in turmoil and ruin. They saw what was happening right around them. Where was God in all this they asked? Rather than wait upon the Lord for His response, they demanded immediate action based upon their understanding. Unlike this, we must seek the Lord earnestly, hear from Him, and ask Him to help us understand His larger purpose in everything He does. Indeed, Scripture bears out this larger purpose as we shall see.

How can our current circumstances obscure our understanding of God's work?

Question
8

Fast forward several centuries later when God sent One in the lineage of David. To the outsider, however, this too seemed as if God had abandoned His plan and resigned Himself to defeat when looking at the circumstances of His, birth, life, and death. The Messiah experienced the very same things outlined in these verses at the hands of the very people He had come to save! The One who should have received glory and honor as King was **a reproach** to man. Men despised and rejected Him. They mocked and ridiculed Him as King. They dressed Him in a purple robe and shoved a crown of thorns onto His brow. They even derisively placed a sign in three languages above His head

which read: “King of the Jews.” Through all this, it can leave one asking, “Is He truly the solution to our problems and the One who will establish an eternal kingdom?” Jesus had promised to establish an eternal kingdom which would result in eternal life. But this too seemed in doubt to those who watched in horror as He hung upon the cross. Jesus’ enemies had



risen up against Him and successfully lobbied for His death! God did not spare even His own Son from the **sword**. His **adversaries** put Him to death and thought this would be the end of their problems. To most, something cannot be established **forever** if the person dies and is buried—but not to God! The disciples themselves had even forgotten Jesus’ teaching and the events of that early Sunday morning caught them by surprise. But God had won despite the way things appeared! He had done exactly what He had said He would do. Jesus was exalted and vindicated through His bodily resurrection from the grave as a sign to all that He remains upon the throne in power just as He has from the beginning. His reign is indeed **forever**! God has remembered His people! Therefore, we can join the psalmist in proclaiming: “**Blessed be the Lord forevermore! Amen and Amen**” (v. 52).

We live in a world of corruption and decay. Things constantly change—sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worst. At times, promises are made and kept. But at other times they are renounced and broken. Everything in the grocery store, for example, has an expiration or best-if-sold-by date to guarantee the freshness of the product and that it hasn't become rancid or unusable. God, however, doesn't have an expiration date on His promises so to speak. He does have a firm date that He will fulfill His promises though. Therefore, God's promises are always valid and He always keeps them. He will fulfill them at the right time, through the right means according to His plan, and in the right way so they achieve His goal of producing permanence. Consequently, we shouldn't get in a rush for God to fulfill His promises, but patiently wait upon Him. When we grow impatient, we fail to see how God is working and miss what He's currently doing in the world around us. Through Christ, we've seen the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise—long foretold by the Old Testament. We still yet look forward to the complete fulfillment of that promise when God sends His Son to collect His bride, the church, and calls both the living and the dead to reside with Him forever in the new heaven and new earth. We may long for that day with great anticipation. And it has drawn closer with every passing day. As we wait for the King of glory to return, let us focus on what He is doing in the world around us so that we can join Him in His work in 2021! We certainly must be ready for His return, but we can't miss what He's doing now in preparation. He continues to reign from His heavenly throne and work to accomplish His purpose as we await His return to establish His kingdom in full. Let us worship and serve Him as our King, joining Him to accomplish His plan and purpose for all humanity.

Incorporate

Despite the chaos and disorder around us, how can we still see God at work in the world? What does this tell us about His plan and character?

As a church, why should we anticipate His return and the establishment of His kingdom in full at the end of this age? What steps, however, can we take to avoid overlooking what God is doing right now and miss joining Him in His work?

In 2021, how can we join together as a church to remember the promises God has made, but also impact the community by demonstrating how God is working now?

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