

OVERCOME



DECEMBER 2021

ADULT CONNECT CLASS CURRICULUM

DONALD J. WILLS
SENIOR PASTOR

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

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

With the Christmas season having once again arrived, may we enjoy the time that we have to celebrate with our families through all our traditions and the exchange of gifts, but may we also remember the obstacles and adversity which our Savior overcame to be born among us as the greatest gift of God's presence. The One who created the world came into a world that did not understand or recognize Him. They rejected Him! John 1:10 reminds us, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him." This baby announced as God the Savior by angels, adored by shepherds, and lauded as King by wise men from the East would face resistance, conflict, persecution, and death on the cross, so that He might bring the hope of eternal life into a world darkened by sin.

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.

We fill our Christmas season with parties and family gatherings. We watch holiday parades which promise sights and sounds that bring joy and happiness to those who see them. We enjoy the decorations of many displays which have thousands of twinkling lights that reflect the beauty of the season. But let us most of all focus on the true Light who has come into the world to overcome sin and death, bringing life to all who accept Him. May we too reflect the righteousness of this true Light in our lives and point the world to Him this Christmas season—Jesus Christ our Lord.

-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 5, 2021

The Adversity Faced
by the Overcomer

[John 1:1-14](#)

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December 12, 2021

The Announcement
of the Overcomer

[Matthew 1:18-25](#)

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December 19, 2021

The Arrival
of the Overcomer

[Luke 2:1-21](#)

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December 26, 2021

Follow the One
who Overcame

[Matthew 4:12-25](#)

December Schedule

SUNDAY, 12/5

- The REALLY BIG Show—Church-Wide Fundraiser • rsvp.fbcfw.org

SUNDAY, 12/12

- Following Worship Service—Church-Wide Business Meeting

WEDNESDAY, 12/22

- 6:30 pm—Candlelight Lord's Supper Service
- No other Evening Activities

THURSDAY, 12/23

- Church Offices closed, regular hours resume Monday, December 27

SUNDAY, 12/26

- 11:00 am—Unified Worship Service (children will attend with parents)
- No Connect Classes, Extended Care, KAZ Kids Church, or BeTWEEN

TUESDAY, 12/28 - FRIDAY 12/31

- TNT Fireworks Stand open
- Church-Wide fundraiser for Pre-Teen & Student Scholarships
- Volunteer at students.fbcfw.org

WEDNESDAY, 12/29

- No Wednesday Evening Activities

THURSDAY, 12/30

- Church Offices closed, regular hours resume Monday, January 3

2021 Contribution Deadlines

Contributions received after these deadlines will go toward 2022 tax year

SUNDAY, 12/26

- Last Sunday to give during Unified Worship Service

TUESDAY, 12/28

- Last Tuesday to give during First Worship Tuesdays

WEDNESDAY, 12/29

- Last day to drop-off during Office Hours, 9:00am-4:30pm

FRIDAY, 12/31

- Last day to mail, must be postmarked on or before 12/31

TO VIEW ALL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES GO ONLINE TO
[OPPORTUNITIES.FBCFW.ORG](https://opportunities.fbcfw.org)

Join us March 4-6, 2022
Extraordinary Women Conference in Tulsa, OK



Featuring Speakers:

Kayleigh McEnany
Katherine Wolf
Mandisa
Chonda Pierce
Liz Curtis Higgs
Julie Clinton

With Music by:

Natalie Grant & Michael O'Brien

Please use this as an outreach opportunity by inviting friends & family that don't attend church or may not know Christ!



Total cost per person includes ticket, lodging (2 nights), boxed-lunch Saturday & breakfast Saturday & Sunday:

1 Per Room: \$380 2 Per Room: \$230/ea*
3 Per Room: \$180/ea* 4 Per Room: \$155/ea*

\$80 non-refundable deposit due Sunday, January 9

Balance due in-full no later than Sunday, February 6

Lodging at SpringHill Suites by Marriott Tulsa at Tulsa Hills

* Please select your own roommate(s) & list them when you register at

women.fbcfw.org

December 5, 2021



*The Adversity Faced
by the Overcomer*

John 1:1-14

Focal Verse:

"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John 1:5

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Introduce

On February 12, 1809, in a one-room log cabin near the hamlet of Hodgenville, Kentucky, a baby boy was born to a well-respected couple who had made a fairly good living farming. Despite the father having a renowned reputation in Central Kentucky and holding several esteemed positions in the community, the family lost all their wealth and properties in legal disputes over their land deeds. This necessitated the family to constantly move Westward on the ever-expanding frontier. Upon losing the titles to their land in Kentucky, they moved to Southern Indiana to start afresh, but they remained destitute and could never regain their status in the community. The boy, now nine, performed the typical chores on the family farm like any other child at the time, including splitting rails for fencing—upon which he often reflected later in life. Eventually, his family settled in Central Illinois where, as a young adult, he became a raft operator on the Sangamon and Mississippi Rivers for a short stint.

As a young adult, he looked ordinary and nothing about his appearance or demeanor would have indicated the stature he would eventually achieve. As a frontiersman, he had rugged and well-worn hands. His skin had become wrinkled and cracked like dry leather baked in the sun. He left his hair, which he often referred to as his “mane,” uncombed and unkempt like a wild stallion. His tall, but slender and lanky appearance did not sufficiently separate him from any other man from his day. He looked just like any other ordinary man who had eked out a living to provide for his family.

During his early twenties, any venture which this young man attempted would end in disaster or defeat. Uneducated, untrained, and poorly skilled as a businessman,

his endeavor to run a general store in New Salem, Illinois, utterly failed and forced him to sell all his shares of the business. At twenty-three, he experienced a humiliating loss when he ran for the Illinois General Assembly. By all appearance, this man would amount to nothing; he lacked charisma and was plain-spoken with a flair for underwhelming his audience in his speeches. Yet, this man would become the sixteenth president of the United States—and is now one of the most recognized faces and admired men in the



Introduce

entire world: Abraham Lincoln.

Although we don't usually recognize [John 1:1-14](#) as part of the Christmas story, it actually explains why Jesus became flesh—born in a humble stable to an ordinary family whose occupation was carpentry. To the undiscerning human eye not in tune with the promises of God's Word, Jesus did not look like He would ever amount to much. Accordingly, Isaiah reports, "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" ([Isa 53:2b-c](#)). Jesus did not meet the expectations of the world—albeit wrongly—as to what they believed the Messiah should look like. Consequently, this caused conflict and confrontation. Jesus, therefore, constantly had to deal with much adversity throughout His earthly life because, as "the Light," He shone "in the darkness," but "the darkness did not comprehend [or could not overcome]" Him ([John 1:5](#)). As we enter this Christmas season, let us reflect on why Jesus came and how He overcame great adversity to save us!

Key
Question

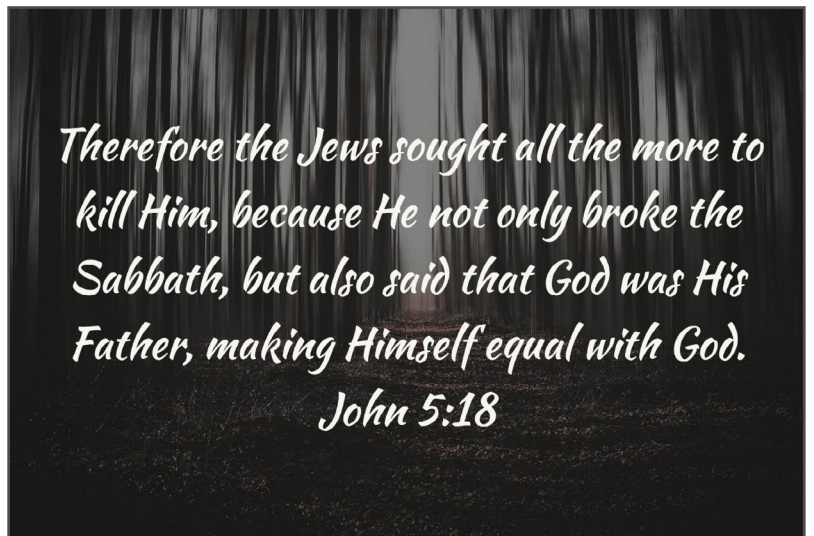
What adversity have you had to overcome through Christ in your life?

John 1:1-2

THE PERMANENCE OF THE WORD:

Referring to the opening sentence of [Genesis 1:1](#), John declares **in the beginning was the Word**. Instead of focusing on the act of creation itself, John describes the permanence of the One who created it. In the first two verses, he outlines two characteristics about **the Word** (Jesus): He is both eternal and divine. First, John describes the eternal nature of the second person of the Trinity (Jesus). Twice, he notes that **the Word** existed **in the beginning** along with **God** the Father. **The Word**, therefore, is not a created being; He didn't begin to exist upon His physical conception whereby He became flesh, but rather He has always existed even before the creation of the universe.

Second, John expands upon the eternal nature of **the Word** by demonstrating that He **was** not only **with God**, but He **was** [and is] **God**. Many people ignorantly believe that Jesus was merely a good man or a good teacher, but this contradicts Scripture and what Jesus Himself taught. Moreover, some wrongly claim that the disciples or the early church elevated Jesus to the status of "God" on their own accord apart from His own self-designation.



Quite oppositely, Jesus Himself rightly demonstrated and declared His divine nature as God. Jesus is not just "a god" nor did He become "god," but He is the one true and living God—the Creator and Savior of the entire universe who has existed eternally.

In what ways did Jesus demonstrate His divine nature as God in Scripture?

Question
1

Throughout His ministry, Jesus often caused controversy because people misconceived His identity as God and merely regarded Him as a man; however, Jesus clearly identified Himself as divine. To the Pharisees in John 8:58 He declared, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Here, Jesus affirmed not only His eternality, but also

Instruct

His identification as God by using the Old Testament name the Lord had given to Moses at the burning bush ([Exod 3:14](#)). In John 10:30, Jesus further expressed His equality with God the Father by asserting, “I and the Father are one.” Upon His utterance of both statements, the people led by the Pharisees sought to kill Jesus for blasphemy because He claimed to be equal with God ([John 5:18](#)). Just before His death, Jesus again revealed His identity to His disciples when He told them, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:7). Through these references, we clearly see Jesus demonstrating His divine identity which John makes explicit in the opening to His Gospel where He emphasizes that **the Word was God**.

John 1:3-5

THE PURPOSE OF THE WORD:

Next, we observe two of the principal purposes of **the Word**, particularly for mankind, as **life** and **light**. John commences by detailing how **the Word** is the sole source of both physical and everlasting **life**. With respect to Genesis, he demonstrates how **the Word** orchestrated the physical act of creation. When we recall the act of creation, we are reminded that God spoke it all into existence—with the exception of man whom He formed from the dust of the ground and breathed **life** into his nostrils ([Gen 2:7](#)). John’s point in connecting **the Word** with **life** is that everything—both animate and inanimate—owes its existence to Him. For this reason, John emphasizes that **all things were made through Him** (v. 3). If something exists, **the Word** created it! **Without Him**, we would have no **life** and no universe. In Colossians 1:16, Paul reiterates this same perspective: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . All things were created through Him and for Him.” John underscores the fact that **life** itself owes its very origin to Jesus in verses 3-4a, but the modern punctuation sometimes obscures this meaning. In the earliest Greek manuscripts, scribes did not use punctuation or separate words with spaces in order to conserve room and reduce cost by using less material on which they wrote; therefore, the reader, and in our case the translator, must understand the larger context in order to divide the words and sentences properly so that he doesn’t distort the original meaning. For example, most translations of 1:3-4a read: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life . . .” However,

an alternative way of punctuating these verses used by the RSV and many ancient theologians helps us to understand more clearly what John intended: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made. That [which] was made in Him was life.” Throughout his Gospel, John desires his readers to recognize that Jesus is the source of **life**: both



One of the earliest copies of the Gospel of John: Notice the lack of space between the words and the lack of punctuation.

the physical **life** which He created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) as well as eternal **life** which He enabled through His sacrificial death.

Just as John explains that all physical **life** owes its existence to Jesus, so also does any of us who has eternal **life**. Although John focuses on the Word’s creation of physical **life** in his introduction, the rest of his Gospel stresses that Jesus is the source of eternal **life**. In reassuring His disciples before His death, Jesus proclaims, “I am the way, the truth, and the **life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). By no other means can we attain eternal life except by the gift that Jesus Christ offers in His sacrificial death on our behalf. Even though people may be living, breathing animate beings, apart from Christ they truly do not have **life** because they are dead in their sins and trespasses ([Eph 2:1-3](#)). John develops this theme of **life** throughout his Gospel in which Jesus is shown to be the source of everlasting **life** ([John 3:15-16](#); [5:21 & 24](#)), the living water ([John 4:10 & 14](#)), the bread of **life** ([John 6:33, 35, & 48](#)), the light of the world that gives **life** ([John 8:12](#)), and the resurrection and the **life** ([John 11:25](#)). What a great gift that Jesus offers us—**life** in Him.

What evidence is there that you have been made spiritually alive in Christ?

Question
2

In addition to **life**, John also reveals Jesus’ purpose as **light** (v. 4). **Light** has three specific characteristics that we can discern from this context: 1) it enables **life**, 2) it enlightens the truth, and 3) it exposes wickedness (or **darkness**). John starts by showing the close connection between **life** and **light**: **life was the light of men**. With the connection to Genesis already established, we can recognize how **light** enables **life**.

Instruct

When God began His creative work on the first day, He spoke **light** into existence—separating it from **darkness** ([Gen 1:3-4](#)). Without physical **light**, we would have no **life**; plants depend upon it for photosynthesis, the entire planet depends upon it for warmth, and humans depend upon it for Vitamin D—to name a few essential uses. In the same way, Jesus, as the **Light** of the world, enables eternal **life** through His sacrifice. Just as if we did not have the sun for physical **life**, we will never have everlasting **life** if we don't have a relationship with God's Son. In his first letter, John writes, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). In addition to enabling **life**, **light** also enlightens people to the truth by metaphorically expelling **darkness** which represents ignorance. When announcing that **the Word** has come into the world, John simply notes that the **light shines in the darkness** (v. 5). **Light** helps us to understand the truth because it enables us to see clearly so that we can judge right from wrong. At some point, most of us have probably arisen while it was still dark to begin dressing for work or school. In the dark or even in a dimly lit closet, we tried to find the clothes that matched. Unfortunately, if many of you are



like me, we think that we have matching clothes, such as a navy-blue suit, only to get out in the bright sunlight to learn that we have navy-blue trousers with a black suit coat. In the dark, they looked almost identical and we wore them with confidence that they matched, but when the **light** expelled the **darkness** the truth was revealed—our clothes, shoes,

or even socks didn't match. Today, truth and error can look almost identical. Errors may sound good and they may even appear logical, but when held up to the **light**, it reveals their flaws and shows people the truth.

Creation is naturally drawn to things that appear to emit **light**, but only one source naturally produces **light** that leads to **life** (the Son). All other sources may look attractive and appealing, but they ultimately distract from the truth and end in death. If we have spent any time outdoors, we know the peril that those pesky insects

pose. Because they are attracted by **light**, we employ a variety of sources, such as artificial lights in electric bug zappers. They look appealing to the insects, and in great pleasure to us they work, but they end in death rather than **life**. People, in a similar fashion, are also attracted to **darkness** which parades itself as **light** under the guise of enlightenment. For example, the neon lights of a vibrant city like Las Vegas promise excitement, entertainment, elation, and contentment. But we need only look at the city's nickname to see the true result of those lights: Sin City. Sin, or **darkness**, always distracts and leads to death no matter how attractive it may look to us. Therefore, we must carefully examine what we may see as **light** so that we might know the true source of **life** and prevent ourselves from being fooled by **darkness** masquerading as **light**!

What are some things in our culture that may appear like light, but are really harmful? What tests do you apply to determine their validity or truthfulness?

Question
3

We can't differentiate the truth from error if we don't know where to find it. Jesus, as we have seen in [John 14:6](#), is truth; therefore, to recognize and **comprehend** truth we must have a relationship with the One who is the source of truth (v. 5). The world doesn't **comprehend** the **Light** because it doesn't have a relationship with Him and, like the Ethiopian Eunuch, it often doesn't understand the message unless someone takes time to explain it to them ([Acts 8:31](#)). Scripture, as the written Word, is truth because it reveals God's plan for humanity in the person and work of Christ who came to redeem humanity. Therefore, Jesus points out, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). To test whether something is true, we must have the standard ingrained within us—both through the presence of the Holy Spirit who indwells us as well as the written Word of God which we have internalized through memorization.

When bank tellers are being taught to identify counterfeit bills, they only deal with real currency. They visually identify the watermarks on the bill and the counterfeit strip inside; they even grasp it with their fingers so they know how it should feel. In their training, they are never exposed to a counterfeit bill whatsoever—they only handle the real thing. Because they know what real currency looks and feels like, they can then spot the fakes. To avoid the deception of the evil one, therefore, we must know the truth and have a relationship with Him. In this way, Jesus expels the **darkness** in our lives by being the truth visibly demonstrated for us. Therefore, we must look to the

Instruct

truth rather than allowing the counterfeit truth of the culture to infiltrate our minds and influence our paths.

Finally, **light** also exposes sinfulness. Paul even challenges the Ephesians to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph 5:11). When people sin, they usually try to conceal it like a thief who picks the darkest place to enter a home. Most thieves wouldn’t break a window or kick in a door directly under a porch light; instead, they try to find bushes to obscure their activity or go around to the backyard where they cannot be seen from the street. Today, people who sin try to cover their tracks by lying or distracting others from the truth; they don’t want their sins exposed—even though some now blatantly sin in public not caring who may see! Jesus also affirms, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). When we reflect the **light** of Christ in our lives, it distinguishes us from the rest of the world and marks us as His child. But more importantly, it gives us the platform to testify about Him—which we will discuss in the next section.

In verse 5, we see the adversity that Jesus faced originating from two primary sources. First, it stemmed from misunderstanding. People misunderstood who Jesus is which caused conflict when He challenged what they believed and what they saw as important. Second, it also stemmed from the opposition created by man’s sinfulness. People do not like being told they’re wrong. When Jesus revealed the truth and it exposed their sinfulness, many people, especially the religious leaders, became defensive and belligerent. They tried to save face by justifying themselves and concealing their errors. Jesus, however, overcame this adversity because He diligently sought the Father and remained focused on His plan ([Luke 9:51](#)). He put aside all His personal desires and surrendered to the Father’s will—even when that meant death on the cross ([Luke 22:42](#); [Phil 2:8](#)).

When adversity comes in your life, how truly effective are you in dealing with it? Why?

Question
4

John 1:6-8

THE PROCLAMATION ABOUT THE WORD:

The Apostle John somewhat shifts gears from revealing the purpose of the **Light**

Himself to the proclamation about the **Light** by His followers. **God sent a man** named **John** (the Baptist) who **came** to point people to the true **Light** (v. 6). He **came to bear witness** about **the Light that all might believe through Him** (v. 7). As the text makes abundantly clear, **John was not that Light, but sent to bear witness to Him** (v. 8). Like John the Baptist, God has called us **to bear witness to** His Son; we are to proclaim His gospel. We must be beacons that stand sentinel, reflecting His character and proclaiming His Word, to a darkened and depraved generation without hope. May we never allow our personalities, pursuits, or pleasures to overshadow and distract from Him. But let us declare to the world boldly the hope of salvation we have in Him, using the gifts which He has given us to point others clearly into a relationship with Him.

What are some things that we might do that could distract others from the gospel?

Question
5

God has called us to be people of the **light** rather than people of **darkness**; we are to live transformed lives that reflect His righteousness. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds His disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:14-16). Often, if we live the way we ought around others, the **light** in our own lives becomes a testimony and witness for Christ; this does not relieve us from verbally sharing the gospel, but it serves as a precursor because people will be able to observe the transformation in our lives. May we be a people who put the spotlight on Jesus rather than selfishly focus it upon ourselves as does the world.



In what specific ways do you function as light in your daily life?

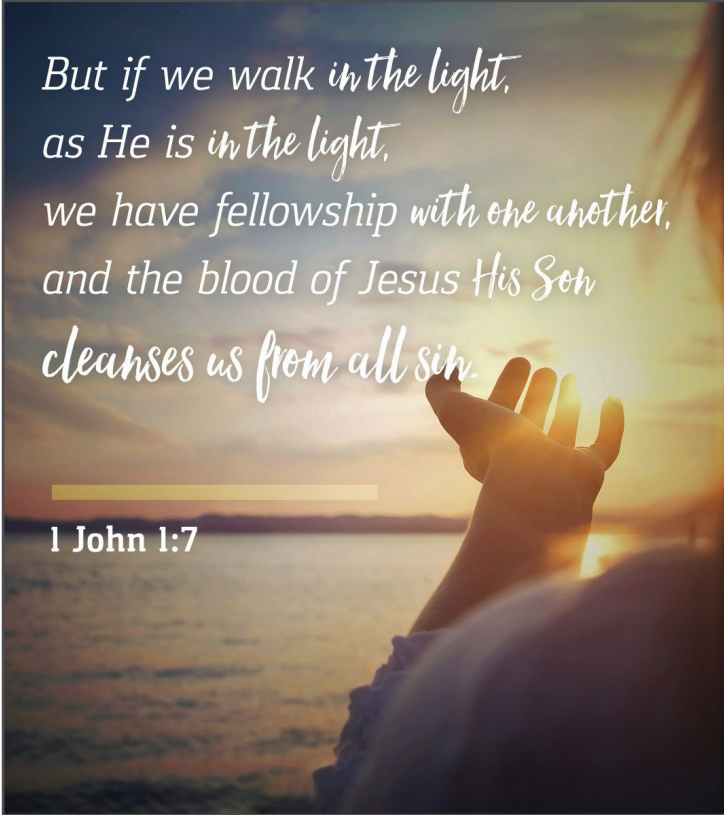
Question
6

John 1:9-14

THE PRESENT TO THE WORLD:

In Christ, God has presented us with the grandest gift that effectively deals with the adversity we have brought upon ourselves because we have chosen to sin. As the **true Light**, Christ **gives light** or knowledge **to every man**, alerting us to our sinful condition (v. 9). But **the Light** that Jesus has come to provide doesn't just tell us the truth about how bad we are, it also illuminates the path to attain eternal **life** through Him! His **light** gives us hope. To anyone who has **received Him** has He given **the right to become children of God** when they **believe in His name** (v. 12). Through Christ, we receive forgiveness of our sins and are engrafted into the family of God when we **believe in Him**. In other words, we become His **children!** The world wrongly teaches that "we are all God's children." We were all created by God, but we are not all His **children** because not everyone has believed in Him!

John makes this point explicitly clear in this passage. Although Jesus **made the world** and had come into it, they **did not know Him** (v. 10). **The world** didn't have a relationship with Him! In fact, Jesus **came to His own** and they rejected Him—**they did not receive Him** (v. 11). To those who did receive Him, however, He granted



*But if we walk in the light,
as He is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus His Son
cleanses us from all sin.*

1 John 1:7

status as God's **children** through His personal sacrifice. To be designated as a child of God and attain **life** as our eternal inheritance cannot come through our own efforts. We cannot **will** it by our own strength or put our mind to it and achieve it through our own intellect. We cannot work for it nor can we attain it by practicing religious rituals. We cannot obtain it through our service or any monetary donation. We do not receive it based on our physical lineage. It is a gift from God through His Son!

For this reason, John asserts that we **were born not of blood, nor of the will of the**

flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (v. 13). Whereas we cannot truly have **life** through our own human bloodline and flesh because they become a conduit for sin, we can have **life** through His. In His sinless perfection, the **blood** of Jesus shed on our behalf cleanses all our unrighteousness and puts us into right standing as **children** of God. Herein lies the heart of the Christmas story and why it brings so much hope. The God who created us came to us. He came to remove our sin and restore **life** if only we would trust in Him and not in ourselves! Thus, John ends with a poignant picture of **the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us** so that we could see the **glory, grace, and truth of the Father** on full display (v. 14). In His love for us, Christ overcame adversity to enact the sole plan which God had established from the foundation of the world to bring **life** and **light** to all who **believe** in His only begotten Son.

How has Christ provided wisdom and understanding in your life to overcome adversity when you trusted Him?

Question
7

To the world, Jesus does not look like the Savior they expect or even want because they falsely rely upon their perceived self-sufficiency. Apart from Jesus, however, life itself would not exist—neither physical life nor eternal life. As a world, therefore, we owe everything to Him, especially the eternal life which He came to establish through His blood. Still, He faced tremendous opposition even though He came to show mankind the truth and graciously cleanse us from our sin if only we would accept His gift. Despite this magnanimous reason for coming, people rejected Him; they refused His gift because they misconceived His identity, failed to understand His purpose, and became defensive because of their sinfulness. Even though He faced much adversity when He came, He remained focused and overcame it to accomplish the will of the Father which would bring eternal life to His rebellious creation who would accept it. Let us, therefore, be grateful for such a Savior who endured the cross so that we might have life in Him.

Incorporate

During times of adversity in your life how do you or have you pointed people to Christ?
How did you reflect the truthfulness of the Word in that situation?

How does the Lord use you to dispel darkness in the world? What adversity have you faced because you have taken a stand on an issue based on Scripture rather than the world's view?

How does the understanding that Jesus made Himself flesh to dwell among us give you the courage and strength to do right regardless of what the world may say or do?

December 12, 2021



The Announcement of the Overcomer

Matthew 1:18-25

Focal Verse:

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Matthew 1:21

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Introduce

In our modern society with all its technological advancements, we have several ways that we can receive information. In fact, we have so many ways that it can become a sensory overload where we no longer pay attention even to alerts or announcements of vital importance. On our phones, for example, we have all kinds of sounds alerting us to an incoming call, a text message, a social media post, an Amber Alert, a severe weather bulletin, and so much more. On our computers, we may allow our inboxes to become just



as overwhelmed with advertisements announcing sales in stores, important directives from work, and events at church or other social obligations. Despite some of the beneficial uses for the US mail, we are constantly bombarded with junk mail with solicitations for us to buy or use certain products—whether homeowner’s insurance, realtors wanting to buy our houses, or information about political candidates or upcoming social events. We, therefore, choose to ignore the information because we have become desensitized to it or find no value in it.

Nowhere in our lives can we find a respite from announcements! In restaurants, they scroll a number on a screen or perhaps may even yell out an order number when our food is ready—requiring constant vigilance. At the airport, announcements about security, flight changes, and passenger information fill the speakers in the terminals. On television, some channels have information continually scrolling across the bottom of the screen which may be both relevant and important to the person watching, but we often train ourselves not to pay attention to it. At church, announcements play weekly prior to the service, are listed in the bulletin, and audibly given during Bible study and, at times, in the service. Unfortunately, many people tune them out because they simply don’t pay attention, they don’t take the time to read them, or they become overwhelmed and easily dismiss them in the frenetic pace of life.

Regardless of how people may receive the message, we still have the responsibility to get the word out about important things that have a great impact upon life. Therefore,

Introduce

we make these announcements in as many ways as we can—through social media, e-mail, texts, advertisements, and most important through word of mouth. Moreover, we repeat them with frequency and regularity in as many venues as possible to ensure that people have the chance to hear them. We may communicate the same content, but vary the wording slightly so as to grab the audience’s attention and let them know the importance of the announcements they’re about to receive. Even so, some people may choose to close their ears and reject the message while others may allow things to distract them from paying attention. Still, others may hear them and willingly participate.

God has made an important announcement to us. He has repeated it over many years of history. He has used various spokesmen to deliver the same message through a variety of ways in many different settings. We study the announcement every year and are reminded of it the rest of the year in both the Old and New Testament as we read them. The life-changing announcement that God wants us to know is this: The Messiah has come and through Him we can have deliverance or salvation. Let us not tune out this important message because we’ve heard it so many times. But let us renew our acquaintance with it with excitement and vigor so that we might not miss what God wants to communicate to us!

Key
Question

How careful do you pay attention to announcements? How does this characterize your study of God’s Word?

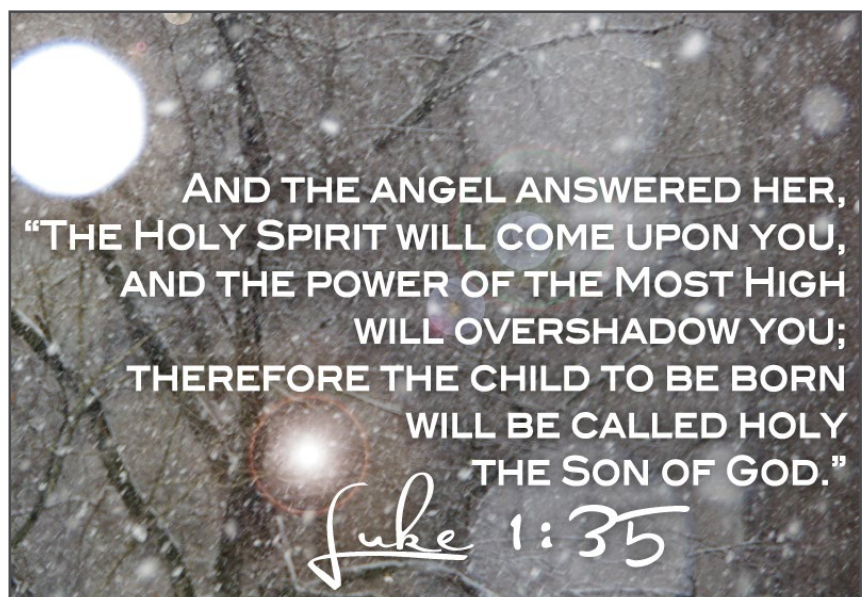
Matthew 1:18-20

THE DIVINITY OF THE OVERCOMER:

Telling the narrative of Jesus' birth from Joseph's perspective, Matthew highlights his confusion about his wife's pregnancy along with his righteous character in dealing with the unexpected and troubling news since God had not yet revealed to him the miraculous source of Mary's conception by the **Holy Spirit**. Matthew, therefore, carefully records that **after Mary was betrothed to Joseph**, but before they had any physical relations, **she was** discovered to be pregnant through the divine work of the **Holy Spirit** (v. 18). Following the marriage customs of the time, Joseph had approached Mary's family, particularly her father and the elders of her community, to arrange to marry his daughter. Part of those arrangements included the payment of a dowry—that is the gifting of goods or money to the bride's family for the "loss" of their daughter and the "transfer" of their daughter to the groom's family.

With the agreement finalized after the payment of the dowry, the couple became legally bound to be married or **betrothed**—stricter and more legally binding than what we would call an engagement today; hence, this is why Matthew could identify Joseph as **her husband** in verse 19. During this period of engagement, which lasted approximately one year, the groom left his bride with her father and then returned to his father's house to prepare a place where he would receive her to reside with him once he brought her home for the consummation of the marriage. During this time of engagement or betrothal, however, the couple did not live together nor did they have a physical relationship until the determined day that the groom would return to take his bride to her new home.

The texts both here in Matthew and in Luke make it clear that Mary had never had a physical relationship with any man to account for her pregnancy. In Luke 1:34 after the angel told her about her pregnancy, a puzzled Mary



Instruct

inquires, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” Matthew also emphasizes that she never had sexual relations with any man, including Joseph by stating bluntly that they **did not know** one another—that is have physical relations—**until** she had given birth **to her firstborn son** ([Matt 1:25](#)). This lack of physical relations serves to highlight the divine nature of Jesus’ conception, for the **Holy Spirit** worked through Mary’s body to cause her to become pregnant even though she was and remained a virgin **until** after Jesus’ birth at which point she knew Joseph intimately unlike some errant denominations teach ([Luke 1:35](#)).

At this point in Joseph’s life, God hadn’t yet made him aware of the divine nature of his wife’s pregnancy. Matthew describes him as a **just man** who wanted to treat Mary respectfully and honorably by **putting her away secretly** rather than **making her a public example** ([Matt 1:19](#)). Obviously, based upon normal human conception, Joseph perceived that Mary had been unfaithful to him during their engagement since he knew that they had not been together in that way. He, however, never became irrational and upset, but sought to deal with the situation graciously and mercifully with integrity. He never thought of ways to retaliate against Mary or her family, but instead he showed great love and forgiveness by desiring not to bring shame upon them.

In-Depth Information



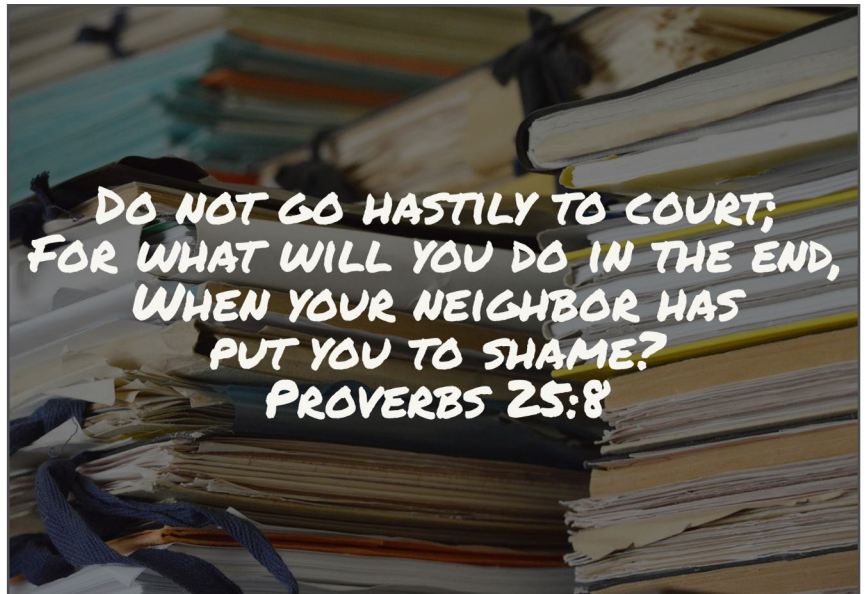
*In verse 19, Matthew records that Joseph wanted to put **her away secretly**. The term put **away** comes from the Greek word “to release”; in other words, Joseph wanted to release Mary from her contractual obligation to marry him. Because they were technically married after the dowry, but still in the period of engagement or betrothal, Joseph would have to end the marriage through an official process. In fact, most modern translations interpret the phrase **putting away** as “divorce” ([NIV](#), [ESV](#), [HCSB](#), and [RSV](#)).*

As Joseph still pondered his course of action, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream** to clarify the situation. The **angel** revealed that **Mary** had indeed remained faithful to him and that the **Holy Spirit** was the source through which she had **conceived** miraculously; therefore, Joseph should **not be afraid to take** her as his **wife** (v. 20). Even before learning about Mary’s pregnancy, Joseph didn’t jump to conclusions or fly off the handle so to speak, but he weighed his actions in his mind so that he could make the best decision for all involved. Too often, in modern society

where information comes quickly, we think that we have enough data to respond immediately even though we didn't take time to gather all the facts. These impetuous decisions can cause a myriad of problems, including prescribing guilt to someone who's actually innocent or causing unnecessary unrest and turmoil for the parties involved. Like Joseph, we need to step back from the situation, assess the information, weigh the options, and seek the will of God in our response.

Many misunderstandings and much dysfunction occur because people rush to judgment without all the facts, thereby allowing their emotions to consume them. Such reactions cause irrevocable damage to relationships most often. We tend to blame others rather than take the time to seek the truth and pray to the Lord about how we should respond. Every one of us is probably guilty of doing this at some point in our lives. For example, I had a friend riding a bicycle who attempted to greet me from the street when we were children, but I was bent over the backseat of a car retrieving some personal items and vacuuming to earn my weekly allowance. So, I didn't hear him. My parents heard him after a couple of times and alerted me, but alas it was too late. He had already ridden off in a huff thinking that I had ignored him. He

assumed I could hear and chose not to respond because I was upset with him, but he couldn't see exactly what I was doing to make a fair assessment of the circumstances; therefore, it strained the relationship because he did not have all the facts even though I later tried to explain. This type of scenario plays out frequently in life for things of even



greater consequence when we jump to conclusions and fail to measure our response reasonably with wisdom from the Lord. Let's follow Joseph's example in dealing with the situation rationally and reasonably while we wait for further wisdom from the Lord.

In what situations have you or has someone you've known jumped to conclusions and reacted emotionally? How did that affect the relationship?

Question
1

Instruct

Matthew 1:21

THE DELIVERANCE OFFERED BY THE OVERCOMER:

In verse 21, the **angel** continues to give instruction to Joseph about naming the **Son** once Mary gives birth. Explicit in his directives, the **angel** tells Joseph to **call His name Jesus**. The name Jesus is significant because it foreshadows the ultimate purpose for which this child would be born into the world. “Jesus” is a Greek derivation of the Hebrew name Joshua which means salvation or deliverance. Even more specifically, it means, “Yahweh saves.” Consequently, the **angel** refers to this meaning when he announces that Jesus **will save His people from their sins**. Indeed, approximately thirty-three years later, Jesus would deliver not only **His own people** from the bondage of **sin**, but He would also deliver the entire world through His sacrificial death on the cross—what a magnificent gift! God didn’t send an inferior, second-hand gift to save the world that would have no permanent result. On the contrary, He Himself became flesh, so that through Him we might have life through His once-and-for-all sacrifice. The Lord gave the very best that He had; He gave Himself to redeem and restore us!

What is the best gift that you have ever received for Christmas? How does that gift compare to the value you place on Christ by serving Him and sharing the gospel?

Question
2

Matthew 1:22-23

THE ANCIENT DECLARATION ABOUT THE OVERCOMER:

From the foundation of the world, God had promised to send a Messiah who would deal effectively and permanently with the consequences of sin so that His wayward creation may once again have a relationship with Him and be restored to life. God **fulfilled** His promise to us in such a grand, but unexpected way from a human point of view, by sending His own Son; therefore, Matthew notes that all this was done that **it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet** Isaiah (v. 22). Although the promise of the Messiah appears throughout the Law, Prophets, and Writings in the Old Testament, here Matthew refers to a specific declaration given by Isaiah who was God’s spokesman in the eighth century BC during the reign of King Ahaz (735-715 BC)—just a little over 700 years before the birth of Christ.

In its original context, [Isaiah 7:14](#) appears in the midst of a prophetic warning to King Ahaz about the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah by the foreign country of Syria along with an evil alliance between Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) ([Isa 7:1-9](#)). Isaiah, speaking on the Lord's behalf, prompts King Ahaz to ask for a sign from God ([Isa 7:11](#)); the king, however, steadfastly refuses declaring adamantly that he "will not ask" nor will he "test the Lord" ([Isa 7:12](#)). Isaiah responds by stating, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign" ([Isa 7:14](#)). This sign that would make God's presence known to Ahaz and assure him about the destruction of Judah was that a woman would give birth to a child and before he knew how to distinguish right from wrong the Northern Kingdom would fall ([Isa 7:14-15](#)). Consequently, the sign must have had significance for Ahaz and relate to the fall of Israel lest Isaiah be labeled as a false prophet and put to death because the Word of the Lord did not come true. So, if the sign was fulfilled in Isaiah's day in reference to the fall of the Northern Kingdom, how can it relate to Jesus in [Matthew 1:18-25](#)?

As the embodiment of God's working through people and nations in the Old Testament, Jesus more fully and more concretely fulfills the sign given to Ahaz in a unique and unparalleled way. Although the sign had immediate consequences for Ahaz, the fullest expression of the prophecy would not be realized for nearly 700 years until the birth of Christ. This time, however, it wasn't a sign of destruction because of a wicked people, but rather it was a sign of salvation—signifying that God had come in the flesh to conquer sin's dominion over people and rid the world of the death it causes once and for all. Therefore, the emphasis of the sign resides within the name **Immanuel** which Matthew goes to great lengths to interpret as **God with us** ([Matt 1:23](#)). Thus, both Isaiah and Matthew focus on the name of the child and not the person of the woman.



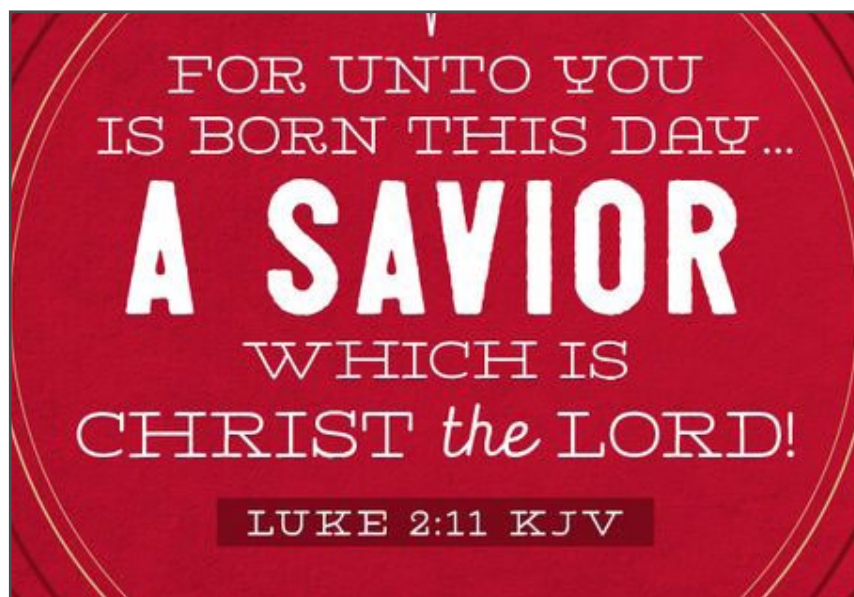
The sign of salvation, therefore, is the fact that God donned flesh, came into His creation as a baby through the womb of a virgin, and was sentenced to death in our place on the cross. Thus, we can only have salvation because God has revealed Himself

directly to us through His Son who gave His life as atonement for our sins. As a result, Matthew declares that God has literally made Himself manifest among us through the birth of His Son. Although God has always been present in the universe and among His people from the dawn of creation, He now has a unique way to identify with us by taking on human form. We don't serve a distant God who set the world into motion and then left us to fend for ourselves. On the contrary, we serve a God who is intimately involved in His creation and loves us so immensely that He came to dwell among us with the sole purpose of dying for our sins! Certainly, Christmas memorializes the physical birth of our Savior, but it ultimately looks forward to His death and resurrection which brings life to all who believe and accept Him.

To whom do you need to announce the birth of our Savior and invite to church?

Question
3

Over the years, much debate has centered around the word translated **virgin** in both Isaiah and Matthew. Many dictionaries define the term as "a young woman" and further qualify it as one "of marriageable age" whether in Hebrew or Greek. As a consequence, the words can ambiguously refer to a young woman who has either abstained from or participated in sexual activity when we look at just the word itself. Both translation and meaning, however, depend directly upon context. Without sufficient context, words can only have a range of meaning, but context allows us to interpret their meaning more precisely. For example, if I say, "You just broke the record," do you have enough context to interpret the word "record" precisely? No, because it only has a range of



meanings. It can either signify a statistic or a flat, vinyl disc with grooves containing audio which most young people today would not know! Therefore, paying attention to the larger context, not just individual words, is of the utmost importance. The Greek word translated **virgin** may refer to "young woman of marriageable age" in some contexts, but here in

Matthew it must mean **virgin** because the context limits the meaning by stressing the fact that Mary has never had physical relations with any man ([Matt 1:25](#))!

Matthew 1:24-25

THE DELIVERY OF THE OVERCOMER:

After waking from the dream through which the **angel** communicated to him, Joseph obeyed God and **took** Mary as **his wife** instead of divorcing her quietly. Certainly, this dream and the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy were much to process, but Joseph acting with integrity did as **the Lord** had **commanded**. From Luke, we know that because of a required census Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem where she delivered her **firstborn son** ([Luke 2:1-6](#))—God in the form of a baby had now humbly descended from His heavenly throne to be born into His creation so that He might redeem it from the grips of sin! Just as the Lord instructed through His heavenly messenger, Joseph named **the child Jesus**—at long last the gift of salvation had come and the promise of a Savior had been fulfilled!

Through His actions, Joseph demonstrates a successful plan by which we should order our lives. It involves only two steps and may appear too simple to be true, but this plan will never fail. First, we must listen and pay careful attention to what the Lord has said. Second, we must respond accordingly; we must obey. Joseph obeyed without hesitation. He may have wrestled with the decision on what to do before God had clearly revealed the circumstances to him. But when God did, Joseph immediately responded. Although we may not initially know what to do in a particular situation, God will always give us direction and dictate our steps at the appropriate time. From our perspective, sometimes God appears to answer or grant wisdom slower than we would like. However, we must wait on His timing. We cannot rush into uncharted waters on our own! This will often prove disastrous.

When have you had to wait upon the Lord for direction and wisdom?

Question
4

As we wait for the Lord to give us clear direction, we must continue acting upon what we know to be right. We must wait actively by maintaining righteousness and acting with integrity regardless of the obstacles we may face. We don't sit idly doing nothing, but we put the general principles in God's Word into action by applying them daily until God moves us in a specific direction. This requires not only faith in the Lord, but also self-discipline. In order for God to use us, we must make ourselves available to Him and

Instruct

we must pay careful attention to the instructions He gives. We can only be available if we are in right standing by practicing His Word and living righteously!

How did you spend your time while waiting upon the Lord for specific guidance?

Question
5

God used Joseph, and Mary for that matter, because he was obedient; he had made himself available by waiting upon the Lord, acting with integrity, and responding immediately when God revealed His plan. Joseph was no different than you or me if we pay attention and obey! God wants to use each of us in an extraordinary way so that He may be glorified. We may not be the earthly “father” or the mother who bore the Savior. But God will still use us in a miraculous way—whether big or small—to bring about His plan. The key is: Have we paid attention? Have we listened to His voice and responded with obedience?

Inspire

I have lost count of the number or times I’ve made a specific and detailed announcement at church only to have someone ask a question about the things which I had just covered. Or how many times we have printed and sent information to which people still respond, “I didn’t know about that.” At times, we act like ostriches with our heads buried in the sand. But we can’t do this with God’s Word. We must pay attention! God doesn’t buy the excuse, “I didn’t know,” because He’s clearly told us already. When God has clearly spoken, we need to respond in obedience. This Christmas let us not treat the announcement God has made about His Son as just something we celebrate annually. Let us remind ourselves to pay careful attention, act righteously, and obey. God will then use us in a mighty way!

Incorporate

How have you (or haven't) made yourself available for God to use in His divine plan?
How has God ordered your steps to fulfill that call?

How do you ensure that you act with integrity like Joseph when you don't know exactly what to do?

How evident is it in your life that you're paying attention to what the Lord has said? To what evidence can you point specifically?

December 19, 2021



The Arrival of the Overcomer

Luke 2:1-21

Focal Verse:

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:11

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Introduce

Even before the end of October this year, experts began warning consumers to start their Christmas shopping early, particularly because certain products would be scarce and difficult to get on time. For a number of reasons, we have continually heard the phrase “supply chain problem” increasing in frequency as the year has advanced. Restrictions and mandates from the

**"FOR WHEN WE WERE YET
WITHOUT STRENGTH,
IN DUE TIME CHRIST DIED
FOR THE UNGODLY.**

ROMANS 5:6 KJV

global pandemic along with people who have refused to work or cannot work due to the quarantine of themselves or a family member have crippled both production and shipping. Businesses simply can't get the products they need, resulting in empty shelves! Coupled with the inability of the shipping industry to find reliable and qualified workers, numerous obstacles prevent people from getting both what they anticipate and what they need.

On more than one occasion on websites promising rapid delivery, I've had a status update sent to my phone which changed the estimated time of arrival. The company did not offer any explanation other than indicating a new expected time of arrival—sometimes days later than the initial guarantee. As the status updates continued to accumulate over the next few days, the company then relayed a message which simply read: “Delayed.” After multiple changes to the estimated time of arrival, the shipping department ultimately responded with a generic message that said, “We'll let you know when the item has shipped.” In a few cases, the order was eventually canceled, my money fortunately refunded, and consequently the product never arrived.

It doesn't matter what the product or service may be, but we have all had difficulty with things arriving on time or getting the services we need in an efficient manner. The church, for example, has received important mail months later from the original postage date. Often without any apology for inconvenience, signs hang on empty store shelves indicating that a certain product will be re-stocked once it becomes available and arrives or online the familiar refrain of “out-of-stock” prominently appears below the product. Recently, major airlines have either delayed or canceled thousands

Introduce

of flights, sending a shockwave through the industry, crippling travel, and creating headaches for thousands of passengers. Whatever the reason—from delays caused by weather or staffing shortages—obstacles prevented people from getting to their final destination on time.

Although Jesus had to overcome many obstacles when the demonic forces of this world conspired to overcome Him at every turn, He still came at exactly the right time according to God's divine plan. From the moment of His birth, He encountered many hurdles from Herod who sought to kill Him to His own people who rejected Him. However, He nullified all these attempts to thwart God's plan, rendering them unsuccessful and powerless. From our perspective, His arrival may have seemed "delayed" just as His return may appear so today, but He was and is right on time! As Paul reminds us, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons" ([Gal 4:4-5](#)). Nothing could prevent Jesus from fulfilling the purpose for which He came and the will of the Father to which He willingly submitted! As overcomers, let us follow His pattern and allow nothing to prevent God from working through our obedient service to Him.

Key
Question

What prevents you from obediently fulfilling God's will at times in your life?

Luke 2:1-5

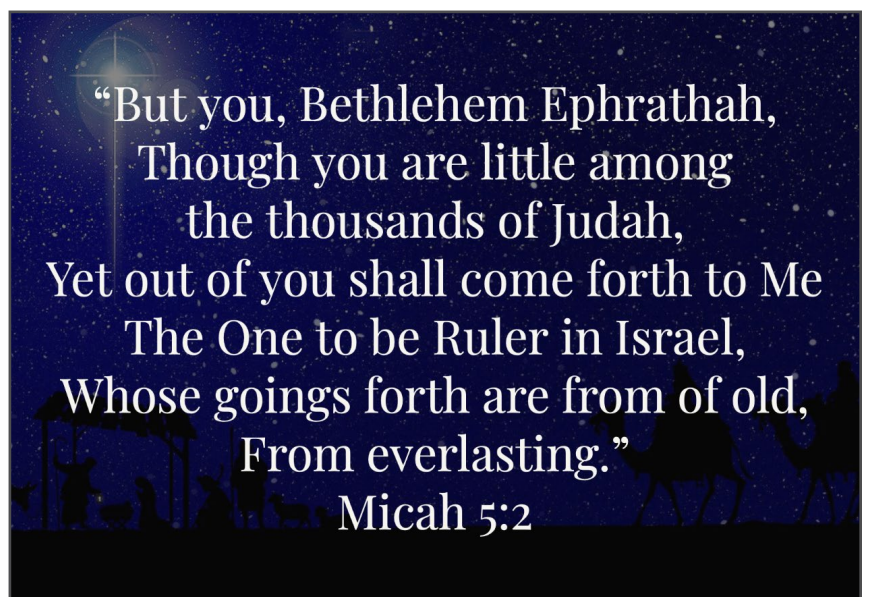
THE ANTICIPATION FOR THE OVERCOMER:

As a historian writing an orderly account of Jesus' birth, Luke begins by relating the historical setting in anticipation of the actual event. He mentions two historical figures by name: **Augustus**, that is Octavian, who became the first Roman Emperor after Julius Caesar's brutal assassination, and **Quirinius** (ker-in-knee-us) who served on the Roman counsel and later as the governor of Syria. By calculating the reigns of these two individuals along with King Herod who died in 4 BC, we can arrive at the approximate date of Jesus' birth sometime between 6 and 4 BC—the two-year span is necessitated because Herod became paranoid at the astrologers' (commonly called "wise men") announcement of the birth of a king, so he had all the males two years old and under put to death in order to protect his position ([Matt 2:16](#)).

Before he became the official governor of Syria prior to Jesus' birth, Quirinius issued a **decree** sanctioned by the Roman Senate which required a **census**; as was custom, people returned to their ancestral home in the region and city in which they had been born. Although Joseph had settled in **Nazareth**, as a descendant of David he returned to the city

of **Bethlehem** along with his espoused wife, Mary, who was well advanced in her pregnancy, to participate in the **census**.

Many of us may gloss over these historical details, but they serve an important purpose in not only establishing concrete historical data concerning Jesus' physical birth, but also in demonstrating the fulfillment of God's plan for the Messiah. As a result, we can observe how God's plan for salvation in the Messiah had been carefully crafted over the centuries rather than haphazardly thrown together as an afterthought. In [Micah 5:2](#), the prophet proclaimed the details about the birth of this Messiah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall



Instruct

come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Micah lived in the eighth century BC roughly at the same time as the prophet Isaiah; what Micah had prophesied 700 years earlier was now about to come to fruition—the long-awaited Messiah was about to make His appearance in the world.

What historical event(s) mark your second birth and show God’s work in your life?

Question
1

Luke 2:6-7

THE ARRIVAL OF THE OVERCOMER:

As our divine Savior as well as our Creator, one would expect a grand celebration befitting the birth of a king into a royal family; however, Jesus’ birth stands in stark contrast to the imagery of the birth of a future king. Instead of a royal arrival, the Savior was born into humble circumstances into a hard-working family of a carpenter. As the couple had journeyed to Bethlehem for the **census**, it came time for Mary to give birth and indeed she **brought forth her firstborn son** after they had found shelter in a stable for the night. After giving birth, she **wrapped** her Son in **swaddling clothes** and laid Him in a **manger**—the feeding trough from which the animals ate.

Jesus wasn’t born in an opulent palace or the most luxurious home, but He was born in the most deluxe accommodations that His parents could find given the circumstances



of overcrowding due to the **census**. We often think of Jesus being born into abject poverty, but this isn’t Luke’s point in recording the place of His birth as a stable and His crib as a **manger**. Rather His humble birth enables Him to identify with His creation; Jesus connects not with the social elite and the religious leaders of His day, but with common people like

shepherds; therefore, his birth shows how God desired a relationship with all men, not just the socially privileged and well-educated.

In-Depth Information



For centuries, babies, whether in wealthy or poor families, had been **wrapped in swaddling clothes** which are strips of rags which would ensure the baby's legs and arms would remain straight and prevent any potential health problems (see [Ezek 16:4](#)). The **swaddling clothes**, therefore, don't merely represent the family's poverty as the only "rags" they could afford, but they indicated a tradition which everyone followed showing that Jesus was born naturally and was nurtured just as any other baby at that time; consequently, it demonstrates His humble connection to His creation by being born just as we are—He identifies with us in every way ([Heb 4:15](#)).

At the end of verse 7, Luke cites the reason why Mary had to deliver in the stable: **there was no room for them at the inn**. We typically watch plays about the Christmas story which have a heartless and inconsiderate innkeeper who turns away the couple with Mary visibly pregnant. Yet, none of the Gospels has the couple interacting with a disgruntled innkeeper. In fact, the word that Luke uses here describes what we would call a "guest room" in a private home rather than an **inn** according to our modern concept of a motel or hotel with multiple rooms. Remember that Joseph has returned to his hometown where he likely had extended family with whom he should have been able to stay in their guest room, but even these individual rooms in private homes were occupied because of the **census**. Even Joseph's own family and close friends in the community had nowhere for the couple to lodge.

In some ways, this foreshadows how Jesus would come to His own people, but they would reject Him because He didn't look like the Messiah they expected—they had no room for Him in their beliefs. As we studied two weeks ago in [John 1:10-11](#), the apostle writes, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His did not receive Him." Even later during His ministry, Jesus spoke about how "no prophet is accepted in his own country" ([Luke 4:24](#)). Through Jesus' humble birth and His rejection by the ruling class, Luke emphasizes that, although Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, He did not fit the people's preconceived expectations of what the Messiah should be or should do.

How have you made room for Jesus in your life in the midst of a hectic schedule and a busy life? In what ways have you pushed Him aside at times?

Question
2

Instruct

Although we live in a busy world, being “busy” is truly a choice that we make. We prioritize and choose to put things on our calendars because they are important to us or we enjoy doing them. However, people are often not as “busy” as they truly believe or actually claim. People make time, even at the last minute, for things which they consider important, valuable, and worthy of their attention. It doesn’t matter what it may be, but people make room on their schedules for the things they value! Therefore, let’s not become like the citizens of **Bethlehem** who found no room for Jesus in their homes. May we not fool ourselves and falsely claim “we’re too busy,” especially when it comes to Christ. When we don’t make Christ the priority in our lives and we relegate Him to the “leftover” time, it shows how little we really value Him and appreciate what He has done for us!

Luke 2:8-15

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE OVERCOMER:

Although Jesus’ birth may have been humble lacking the fanfare of a king, the announcement of it certainly proved that He was indeed the King. **An angel of the Lord** appeared before a group of **shepherds out in the fields** where they **watched** diligently over their **flock** to protect them from predators **at night**. The sudden appearance of this heavenly being naturally startled the **shepherds** so much that they became **greatly afraid**. After bidding the **shepherds** not to fear, the **angel** explains the purpose of his visit, for he **brings** them **good tidings of great joy which will be to all people**.



The **angel** continues to explain that the **baby** which has just been **born** is the **Savior**—the Messiah who has come to liberate the world from its enslavement to sin. After this initial announcement was made, **suddenly a multitude** of angelic beings appeared and began **praising God**. The whole of God’s creation which awaited renewal breaks into spontaneous

praise at the arrival of its Savior who promises life and redemption for us all. As a result of this unusual declaration, the **shepherds** determined to travel to **Bethlehem** to witness the event personally which **the Lord had made known to** them.

How have you joined the rest of creation in the praise and celebration of the Savior?

Question
3

The birth which the **angel** announces has two implications: first, it describes the source of salvation and second, it describes the recipients of salvation. When it comes to our redemption from sin, we have only one source for salvation—**Christ the Lord** (v. 11). On that night so long ago, salvation entered the world through a tiny baby who would grow up to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. In addition to the source of salvation, the **angel** clearly announces its recipients as **all people** (v. 10). Again, the appearance of **an angel** to lowly **shepherds** to announce the birth of the King and Creator defies logic because one would expect the child's extended family along with other aristocrats and rulers to be the first to know.

However, the **shepherds** here represent common man; they are ordinary people of no special reputation. Christ came as a **baby** to save them just as much as He did the rich and powerful. Jesus is not just the **Savior** of Israel; He is the **Savior** for **all people**. Jesus died for and will save people from all races, from all nations, from all backgrounds, and from all socio-economic statuses as long as they put their faith and trust in Him and surrender their lives completely to Him. One can't be any more inclusive than Christ Himself who offers salvation freely to **all** who believe in Him!

How do you celebrate Jesus' birth? Do you announce it (i.e., share the gospel) with intention throughout the year?

Question
4

Luke 2:16-20

THE ADORATION OF THE OVERCOMER:

The **shepherds** quickly journeyed to **Bethlehem** where they found Jesus **lying in a manger** just as the **angel** had revealed to them. This prompted them to begin rejoicing immediately and telling others. Twice in verses 16-20, Luke describes the eagerness of the **shepherds** to tell others about what God had made known to them. In v. 17, Luke notes the extent to which they told these events: **widely**. In other words, they told it wherever they went and to whomever they met! After witnessing such



a significant, world-changing event, the **shepherds** didn't remain silent, but rather they told everyone about what they had observed.

How eagerly do you tell others about what God has done for you in terms of your salvation?

Question
5

Further, in verse 20, Luke emphasizes that the **shepherds** continued to **glorify and praise God for what they had heard and seen**. When we look at the response of the **shepherds**, we must remember that it also applies to our lives if we have a relationship with Jesus. First, if we have been truly transformed by Jesus, we have a personal testimony which we can tell others about what God has personally done for us. In fact, no one can argue with such a personal testimony with evidence cited from our changed lives that demonstrates the truthfulness of Scripture. Second, our natural response to the work of God in our lives ought to be to praise Him and worship Him before others by sharing the gospel.

Daily, we talk with others about significant events throughout the world or significant events that happen in our lives personally. We share what we have heard, seen, or experienced whether a local or national tragedy, the state of our nation and world, a personal achievement, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, or the celebration of a milestone to name a few things. Still, we also talk about events that may seem significant at the time, but really have no eternal or lasting value—namely things like sports, celebrities, and movies or television shows. In fact, we spend an inordinate amount of time talking about these things. We often talk about them with passion and excitement. We freely offer critiques and share our opinions.

But how often do we spend talking about the One who truly matters the most: Christ? When we compare all these other areas which we discuss and ponder daily, we may unfortunately find a discussion about Christ omitted altogether or only briefly mentioned. We certainly must glorify Him through all our speech even if we don't

mention Him specifically, but we need to be more like the **shepherds** who **made** Him **widely known**! They looked for opportunities to share about what God had told them and shown them—and they didn't miss taking those opportunities! We, therefore, need to share Christ wherever we go and with whomever we meet. Let us not miss the opportunity to adore Him and announce Him to the world as our Savior who will save them too if only they would believe in Him.

How would you characterize your passion to share the *gospel* and tell others what the Lord has done in and through you?

Question
6

Our world is filled with obstacles that lead to delays and hinder the arrival of the things we need. The supply chain crisis has made this very evident! Despite our technological advancements and automated systems, we have found out these last two years how truly unreliable things in this world can still be. The world continually searches for something completely reliable and trustworthy. Fortunately, we have an Overcomer in Christ who fills the bill! We can depend upon Him at all times, for He was not plagued or hindered by delays and He came at the right time to give us what we need: salvation. As we celebrate Christmas, let us thank the Lord for the Overcomer who came at the right time to deliver us from our sins. May we make widely known that in the city of David over 2000 years ago that a Savior was born who has brought salvation to all people! To receive that salvation and have eternal life spent with Him in heaven, all we must do is accept His sacrificial gift by responding to His call to follow Him.

Incorporate

How do you anticipate the second coming of our Lord just like those of old looked forward to His first coming? How is that anticipation of His return manifested in your life?

What comfort do you find in our Savior who can identify with all our struggles? How does His overcoming of these struggles inspire you to follow His example?

How do you glorify the Lord with your speech? What opportunities has He given you to make the gospel widely known? How do you use the platform He has given you to share the good news?

December 26, 2021



FOLLOW ME,
AND I WILL MAKE YOU

FISHERS OF MEN.
MATTHEW 4:19

*Follow the One
who Overcame*
Matthew 4:12-25

Focal Verse:

“Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”

Matthew 4:19

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Introduce

If you have ever been to a sporting goods store, especially the larger chains, you have probably noticed the section with all the fishing equipment. Usually, it spans several aisles and looks daunting to the novice who can quickly become overwhelmed by all the different items. Not only are there dozens of different types of rods and equally as many types of reels, but one must also choose from among many kinds of lines of varying tensile strength and construction. Without help, one would scarcely know where to begin. Yet, it still becomes even more intimidating when one begins searching for hooks and lures or bait. One can either get live bait from many kinds of worms and insects



or synthetic, man-made lures in all shapes, sizes, and colors. And literally there are thousands of lures or baits which all attract different types of fish. One needs a guide to follow and an experienced person to mentor him when beginning this sport which at first appearance looks so easy!

Bro. Jack Stowe has been an avid fisherman over much of his ninety-five years of life and I have had the privilege of gleaning from his knowledge as we fished for catfish on Lake Palestine. Before ever casting a line into the water, one must know all the specific regulations for the particular lake on which he's fishing: the length limit that the type of fish must be to keep and the bag limit or how many one can legally keep. Then, one must locate the fish in a vast lake and have the right bait to attract them. Over the years, Bro. Jack has perfected the development of his own "chum" which he uses to bait the hole to attract the fish. On the first day, he takes this "chum" to a specific spot on the lake, which remains a closely guarded secret per the fishermen's code of conduct. After baiting the hole, he may fish briefly, but generally waits for action early the next morning when the fish which have gorged themselves on the "chum" have gathered to wait for more.

As one begins to fish for the catfish, he must have the right kind of hook designed to sink into their tough mouths without tearing them and the right kind of bait to entice

Introduce

them to bite. Even then, one must have the right technique to catch the fish and get it into the boat. At the right time when one feels the fish take the bait, the hook must be set by jerking the line at which point he can begin reeling it in. Fortunately, for me, Bro. Jack has expertise in all these areas and has taught me to the best of his ability to fish like a pro—although I do not always have the most stellar results by no fault of his own. So many fish usually took his bait and inundate the hole that they often bumped the line, causing the false feeling of a strike. So, I would often begin reeling before setting the hook which ended in various results. Unlike a true fisherman, I have caught fish in the fin, the stomach, and even the eye! I always excused myself by saying, “It doesn’t matter how you get them into the boat—just that you got them into the boat!” Similarly, Jesus wanted the ones whom He called to follow Him, so that He could teach them to become fishers of men. For us, fishing for men or sharing the gospel can also become a formidable and challenging task when we consider all the possibilities. But we have an expert, Jesus, who has given us all the tools and techniques we need if we would only follow His example. As a result, we need the right equipment to do the job (Scripture), we need the right bait which entices them to respond (Jesus and the Holy Spirit who convicts), and we need the right technique (speaking the truth motivated by love and demonstrated through our holiness). Christ has called us to get them into the boat so to speak using any method to present the truth of the gospel to them so long as it does not change the message and meaning! To be successful fishermen, above all, we must follow the Overcomer and imitate His example.

Key
Question

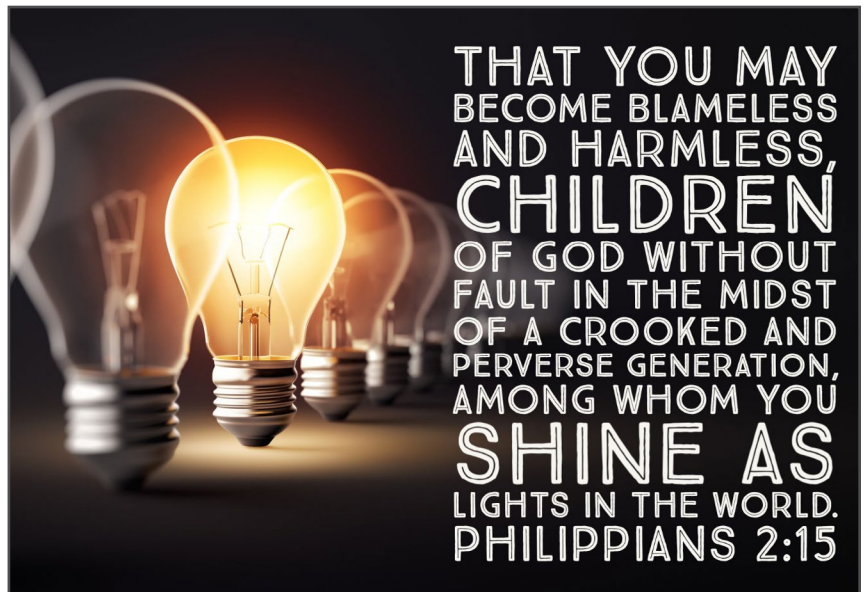
What overwhelms you about sharing the gospel? Why?

Matthew 4:12-17

A CALL TO FAITH IN THE OVERCOMER:

After having **heard** that **John** the Baptist **had been** imprisoned, Jesus strategically **departed** the wilderness for **Galilee** where He would begin His ministry of calling and training disciples to follow Him (v. 12). Matthew briefly summarizes Jesus' itinerary in **Galilee** to emphasize the significance and purpose of His ministry as foreshadowed **by the prophet Isaiah** (v. 14). Upon **leaving** His hometown of **Nazareth**, Jesus spent time in **Capernaum** on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the territory that belonged to the tribes of **Zebulun and Naphtali** (v. 13). In this area during the eighth century BC, Isaiah proclaimed the Word of the Lord both to warn the people to repent of their sins and encourage them to turn to the Lord who would rescue them from a brutal war and an eventual occupation by the Assyrians. In [Isaiah chapters 7-11](#), God ominously warns King Ahaz that the Assyrians would capture and destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel; however, implicit within this message of doom was also a message of hope of One who would come to deliver not only Israel, but also the entire world, from spiritual **darkness** and destruction.

In his characteristic style, Matthew demonstrates how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 9:1-2 (vv. 14-15). In the original context, Isaiah directed his message toward the people in **Zebulun and Naphtali** because they **sat in darkness**. **Darkness** here doesn't symbolize ignorance as if the people had no warning or didn't understand; instead, it symbolizes their spiritual wickedness (see [John 3:19](#)). Because of their own sinfulness and willful disobedience to the Lord, they had brought upon themselves punishment in the form of being attacked and defeated by the nation of Assyria. The **darkness** that was so pervasive in the land would lead only to **death** (v. 14b). However, even in the midst of this spiritual **darkness** and **death**, the Lord offers hope and life, for **a great light has now dawned**



Instruct

to rescue them from their own destruction!

How would you describe the spiritual darkness in our society?

Question
1

The inclusion of this prophecy is significant because it summarizes the purpose of Jesus' entire life and ministry. He has come into the world to rescue us from the mess that we have made by deliberately choosing to sin and rebel against God. When we sin, we don't do it ignorantly, as some people may claim, but we intentionally remain in **darkness** to obscure our evil deeds. Even a young child to some extent knows right from wrong because after he has been repeatedly warned, he will look to see if his parents are watching before participating in the activity again; he knows enough to try to avoid the inevitable punishment if caught.

Despite our disobedience, Jesus came as the perfect sacrifice Who would pay the debt of **death** we owe for our sin and be an example for us to follow in how we ought to live in righteousness. In John 8:12, Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in **darkness**, but have the light of life." To have that life, we must have a relationship with the true **Light** through His grace and mercy and our repentance from sin. Just as John had preached in the wilderness earlier, Jesus now takes up this same message: **repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**. This call to faith in Christ leads to complete transformation and surrender not only for the disciples whom Jesus will call in these next verses, but to all who will follow Him in future generations.



Barrow, Alaska

As Winter solstice approaches, the sun will set on the town of Barrow, Alaska, not to rise above the horizon for sixty-six days because of the tilt of the earth and a phenomenon known as "Polar Night." Other than artificial lights piercing the darkness and the faint glow of the twilight on the horizon as the sun's radiant beams only reflect faintly in the sky, the world

lies in total **darkness**. This aptly pictures our society gripped by sin and hopelessly held hostage without the true Source of **light**. Christ, however, has called us out of that **darkness** and into the **light**, so that we might shine as beacons which point the world to Him ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). Christ is the true **light**, but we represent Him to a darkened world ([John 1:7-8](#)). For this reason, Jesus instructs us, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). We should live righteously at all times never extinguishing our **light** so that we might always represent God with integrity in a world that needs to recognize and see the truth.

How do you let your light shine before others?

Question
2

Matthew 4:18-22

A CALL TO FOLLOW THE OVERCOMER:

Continuing to engage in ministry, Jesus shifts from mass evangelism and preaching to one-on-one discipleship. Still in **Capernaum**, Jesus was **walking by the Sea of Galilee** when He **saw two brothers** who were commercial **fishermen** (v. 18). **Simon**, also **called Peter**, and **Andrew** were actively engaged in their profession, **casting** their **net** into the lake. Approaching them, Jesus made a somewhat peculiar statement that caught their attention. In the form of a command, Jesus bids them to **follow** Him so that He could **make** them **fishers of men** (v. 19). Without questioning or hesitating, the pair **immediately** left everything and **followed Him** (v. 20).

Although Jesus doesn't explain it in this setting, we can know what it means to be **fishers of men** from the overarching context of both Matthew and the New Testament as a whole. Just before His ascension into heaven after His resurrection, Jesus commands His disciples, including us, to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20). Therefore, to be **fishers of men** means that we must verbally share the gospel by telling people how to have eternal life in Christ. It also entails training them how to live righteously, how to imitate Christ, how to continue to mature in their faith, and how to become productive followers who serve. Thus, it constitutes a comprehensive program for discipleship in which we must engage daily both as the church and as individuals.

After calling Peter and Andrew, Jesus doesn't stop there, but finds **two** other **brothers**



who were also commercial **fishermen** (v. 21). These **two brothers, James and John**, were in their **boat** along with their **father Zebedee**, repairing **their nets**. Like the **two** others before them, they **immediately** exited the **boat** and **left their father** to **follow** Jesus (v. 22). With four disciples, Jesus now has the beginning of the team in which He

would invest over three years to train and prepare for the ministry of proclaiming the Word of life.

From these few verses, we can learn several valuable principles which we can apply in our lives. First, when Christ clearly calls, we ought to respond **immediately!** When the Bible has clearly given us directives, such as evangelism, we shouldn't hesitate; we should go **immediately**. We should pray that God would give us opportunities to share, guide our conversations, give us the words to say, and prepare the hearts of individuals whom we meet, but we do not need to pray whether we should go or participate in evangelism. We've already been called and commanded to go if we have a relationship with Christ; therefore, let us put off anything that hinders and **immediately** respond to His call.

Second, we can observe that these four men made no excuses when Jesus called them. They were ordinary men, blue-collar workers, whom Jesus had called; they weren't the elite religious and political leaders of their day. Most likely, they had received typical training as Jewish men of that day and had learned the promises of the Lord from Scripture; they probably observed the Law as best they could, participated in religious festivals and ceremonies, and attended meetings at the temple. In many ways, they were like most of us. Yet, why do we make so many excuses when Jesus calls us to serve Him in the church and proclaim the gospel?

None of these men said: "I'm self-employed and have overhead costs that I must recoup; I don't have time"; "I've never been trained to be a **fisher of men**; I just don't think I have the skills"; "That's the job of the Levites in the temple. They're paid through

tithes and offerings to do those things; go and ask them”; or “I’m afraid it’s going to be too hard and too much work. We’ll face too much opposition from the religious and political leaders; people won’t respond to this message and may even threaten and persecute us.” Instead of making excuses, let us follow the example of these men and respond **immediately** without excuse!

What excuses have you made when God has asked you to serve Him or share the gospel?
How did He convict you of these excuses?

Question
3

Third, these men made Jesus the priority of their focus and completely surrendered to His call by leaving everything familiar behind and pursuing a relationship with Him. Jesus became the number-one priority in their lives above their careers, their possessions, and their families; they left their job as **fishermen** and to a certain extent risked everything—their livelihoods, their ambitions, and even their security—to follow Christ. Although they followed Jesus and made Him the priority in their lives, it didn’t mean that they abandoned their families; they simply had a different focus in leading them to Christ. They still had contact with their families (see [Matt 20:20-28](#)) and still cared for their extended family when they became ill (see [Luke 4:38-40](#)). Like these disciples, therefore,



we ought to make Christ the priority in our lives above everything else. We won’t necessarily have a trouble-free life, but God will always make provision for us and we will always have contentment when we place Him first. When we make Him priority and seek Him first, everything else will fall into place ([Matt 6:33-34](#)).

Fourth, these four men learned to rely on Christ in every facet. When He calls them, Jesus doesn’t simply say: “go and become **fishers of men**.” On the contrary, the command to **follow** Him means that He will be with them every step showing them the way. Just as God promised in [Joshua 1:5](#), “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you,” He would also be with the disciples whom He calls here. Moreover, Jesus doesn’t call them and set them free to do whatever they want,

Instruct

but He trains and equips them. For this reason, He tells them **I will make you fishers of men**; therefore, the emphasis here lies with Jesus equipping them to become fishermen.

Indeed, He spends a little over three years with them, teaching them Scripture and showing them how to engage in ministry. Likewise, we can rely on Jesus in the very same way; when He calls us, He equips us through the study of Scripture, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and through the mentorship of the local church. Jesus will never ask us to do something for which He has not prepared or equipped us and He will be with us every step of the way through the presence of His Spirit. Therefore, let us respond with trust and allow Him to guide our lives, helping us to mature in Him to fulfill that to which He has called us.

How has Christ equipped you for ministry and the challenges you have faced in life? How has He shown you the right way to go?

Question
4

Before we examine how Jesus fulfilled His own call to reach the world, we must make a few remarks about sharing the gospel in comparison to fishing. First, we must go where the “fish” or people are; we can’t sit in the church and merely wait for them to come and hear the gospel. We need to be prepared to invite them to church as well as to share the gospel with them! Throughout the New Testament, we can observe how the disciples, the church, and missionaries like Paul went into the communities and the marketplaces to share the gospel.

***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”
Colossians 3:16***

Second, we need to be equipped and trained to share the gospel. One could perhaps get lucky by just casting a hook into the water without being intentional by using the right bait and the correct technique to catch specific types of fish, but researching, studying, practicing, and applying the right techniques will always prove more fruitful. Although Christ has

indeed equipped us through Scripture with all the information we will need, sometimes we need a seasoned veteran to take us and provide a model for us to follow—Christ did that for His disciples and Paul did that for his counterparts like Timothy and Titus. God has placed us in a local church so that we can equip and encourage one another, providing examples so that we can mature in our faith and become functioning disciples who can share the gospel.

Whom has God used to equip you to share the gospel? Whom has He called you to equip?

Question
5

Finally, we must realize that every time that we share the gospel we may not see someone accept Christ as Savior—just like when we go fishing sometimes we get a few strikes and walk away empty-handed while at other times we land one on the hook. Therefore, we must exercise patience and perseverance because we won't always see numerical results. Even some of the people to whom Jesus ministered face to face rejected Him! Yet, we must remember that the Holy Spirit does the convicting and draws people unto Him; we are only the messengers whom Christ has equipped to share the good news. Regardless of whatever the results may be, we are successful when we go! As a result, let us be faithful and undaunted in our task to share the good news and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to transform lives and change the world. God doesn't judge us based on the number of people who respond; He judges us based on our faithfulness and obedience to go!

Matthew 4:23-25

A CALL FULFILLED BY THE OVERCOMER:

At the close of this chapter, Jesus begins to model ministry for His disciples; He has also called us as His disciples to train others by modeling ministry in this same way. Jesus continued traveling throughout **Galilee teaching and preaching the gospel** (v. 23). He went to where the people were gathered in the **synagogues** to share the good news and meet their physical needs by **healing all kinds of sickness and disease**. Even though Jesus did meet their physical needs, the focus was on the **gospel** because it has eternal consequences. For this reason, Matthew emphasizes the **preaching of the gospel** by placing it first in this list—before the **healing** of any the disease or infirmity. The **healing of the sick** and the meeting of physical needs proved who Jesus was, the divine Son of God, as well as showed His compassion for humanity. But most of all, it provided a platform and setting for Him to communicate the life-changing

Instruct

message of the gospel.

Jesus realized the importance of meeting the spiritual needs of the people above all. What good would it have done if someone who was **sick, paralytic, epileptic**, or even **demon-possessed** were **healed** only to die without a relationship with the Savior because they never heard the gospel (v. 24)? Because Jesus performed these great signs and miracles, **a great multitude followed Him** throughout the region (v. 25). Some were simply attracted out of curiosity because of what they could get physically (see [John 6:26, 66](#)) while others like these four disciples surrendered everything and responded to the call which Jesus had given to them. Therefore, let us be like these four men and respond faithfully to the call, having a relationship with Christ through which we become productive followers who take the gospel into all the earth—beginning right here in Fort Worth!

How do you place a priority on the gospel in your service and ministry?

Question
6

Inspire

God has placed us in a community to teach one another according to His Word and spur one another to maturity. God has gifted us each differently, but still with the same purpose: to follow Him and proclaim His Word. To put it biblically, we are to be disciples who make more disciples and not simply regular attenders. God has called every one of us to follow Him with the same promise of making us all fishers of men! He has equipped us with the right tool (Scripture), given us the Holy Spirit as a guide, and placed mentors within His church who can train us to share effectively. Success in the world's eyes always comes in the form of how many fish one catches. For God, however, success depends not on the number of "fish" who respond positively to the gospel, but our obedience to go. How obedient have we been to go as well as to train others to be fishers of men? Let us dedicate ourselves to this endeavor in 2022 as we follow Jesus.

Incorporate

How would you characterize how you follow Christ? Do you follow immediately when He calls or do you wait? Why should we follow immediately? What is the danger of waiting?

How do you keep the darkness in the world from overcoming you? Why is it important to exercise caution in what we watch, where we go, what we hear, and how we spend our time?

How successful are you at being a fisher of men? Why?

Journal: Document God's Work

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