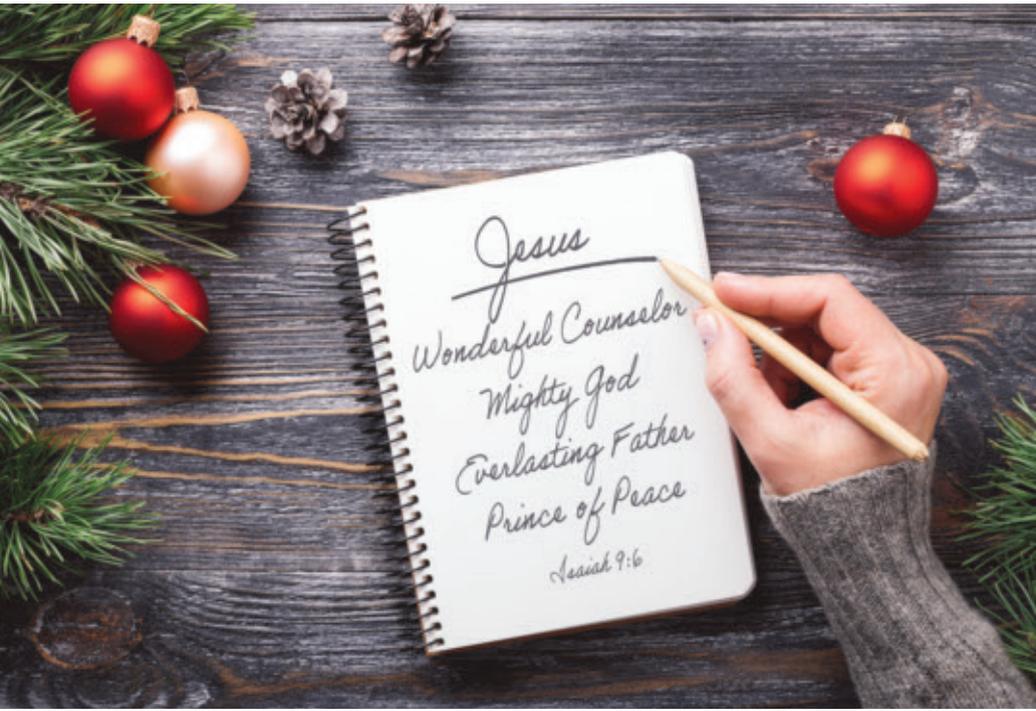


DECEMBER 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

Philippians 2:9

WHO IS THIS JESUS?

TODAY WITH MARK JOBE

President of Moody Bible Institute

What's in a Name?



Before our children were born, my wife and I spent a lot of time deciding on their names. For our youngest son I wanted a strong name and I

suggested Stone, which Dee quickly rejected. Our kids are probably thankful that we settled on Marissa, Josiah, and Grant.

Names are important. And in the Bible, we find as many as 256 names for Jesus. In Isaiah 9:6 we read His birth announcement, written 800 years before He was born: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Each of these names for Jesus are jam-packed with meaning!

Wonderful Counselor *Wonderful* in Hebrew is *pele*, meaning beyond understanding or too wonderful for words. Jesus is our guiding force, our source of wisdom. Proverbs 3:5–6 says, “Lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Mighty God You cannot be a Christian without believing Jesus was all God and all man. The miracle of the Incarnation

is that the infinite God emptied Himself to dwell among us. But He was and continues to be Mighty God. “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Isa. 40:29).

Everlasting Father There is a great difference between our earthly father and our Everlasting Father. The Lord is our protector—caring, loving, ever involved in our lives. Matthew 11 offers a beautiful example of the Father heart of God: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). I am thankful for our Everlasting Father!

Prince of Peace Jesus reigns over the peace between us and God. There is only one mediator between man and God—Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). He calls us to come to Him, and through Him receive access to the Father. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

My name, given at birth, is Mark. But when I experienced the love of God, I received another name: *Forgiven*. When we encounter Jesus, we are given another new name, *Child*. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

Truly God and Truly Man

Jesus' story did not begin with His birth in Bethlehem. John 1:14 indicates that before He "became flesh and made his dwelling among us," Jesus was "with God" and He "was God" (John 1:1). The church's teaching about the triune nature of God presupposes another equally important biblical doctrine: the dual nature of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' human nature did not exist until He was conceived in Mary's womb. The Gospels' description of Christ's birth emphasizes His humanity. Jesus was born of Mary, a virgin who was engaged to Joseph (Matt. 1:16, 18; Luke 1:27). Jesus came into the world as a child and grew to adulthood just as any ordinary child might (Luke 2:7, 40).

His divine nature always existed. The same Gospels that describe Jesus' humanity also emphasize His divine nature by showing that Jesus did things only God can do. He performed miracles of healing, raised the dead, and forgave sins. What is the relationship between Christ's humanity and His divinity? To explain this, the early church emphasized three important things. First, in agreement with the Gospels, they taught the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ. Second, they proclaimed His true deity. The third important truth emphasized by the church was

the union of these two natures in one person.

Jesus was not an ordinary human who was elevated to divine status because of His obedience. Nor was He a God who inhabited a human body with no personality of His own. And, Jesus was not a divided being, half God and half man. In 451 AD, the Council of Chalcedon used the formula "truly God and truly man" to express the biblical truth about Christ's two natures. They explained that these two natures were united in one person "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." Just as the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is "three in one," one God existing in a unity of three distinct persons, Jesus is "two in one." He possesses two natures joined together in one person.

Because He is truly human, Jesus is able to "empathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 2:17–18). Because only He possesses the righteousness of God, Jesus can "save completely those who come to God through him" (Heb. 7:25). ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *The Person of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* by Donald Macleod (InterVarsity).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

Celebrating the Gift of God's Word!

As you unwrap the presents beneath your Christmas tree, remember that God has given us the incredible gift of His Word which we have the privilege to open, read, and enjoy every single day of the year.

We hope you enjoyed reading God's Word with us in 2019! We began with a study on Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness. We walked through the New Testament books of James, Colossians, and Mark. And, we dove into the Old Testament with studies on 2 Chronicles, Zechariah, the Psalms, and Exodus. Our topical studies included celebrating God's gifts, treasure in Scripture, and praise and thanksgiving. Finally, this December, we turned our eyes on Jesus, with a study of Christology.

God is using His Word and this ministry to impact hearts and transform lives!

Thank you for sharing your stories:

"Since I came to this country from Jamaica over 30 years ago, I have been receiving *Today in the Word*. No other devotional has the same depth in bringing the events of Scripture to life.

I absolutely love when we study the books of the Bible." —*Ancrea*

"I have been reading *Today in the Word* for many years and have been soooo blessed. I have the hard copy which I prefer, and I recently got it on my mobile. I have both versions now and don't want to go a day without *Today in the Word*. Thanks for being true to God's Word." —*Janet*

"Your daily devotions are an uplifting and awesome way to start my day! Thank you for your ministry." —*Thomas*

"I've tried so many devotions but this is the best so far. Thank you for praying for me since after I started this devotional, I feel the desire to read it every day and a hunger for the Word of God. Please continue to pray for me as I really want to know God more by reading and understanding His Word." —*Marita*

"Your devotions really bless my heart and help me to grow in my walk with Christ. I am constantly sharing it with family and friends." —*Linda* ■

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SENIOR EDITOR

Elena Mafter

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

John Koessler

WRITER

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Who Is This Jesus?

At Christmas, nativity scenes, Sunday School children's plays, even carols like "Away in the Manger," remind us that Christ was born as a baby. Because He is "fully human in every way," Christ can understand and identify with our humanity. But we also know that He is fully God, making "atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

Our study this month in *Today in the Word* will remind us of the complex nature of Christ. As we read passages from various books of the Bible, we'll look at Jesus as Creator, the Eternal Word, the Risen Lord, the Suffering Servant, our Redeemer and Advocate, the Messiah and the Prince of Peace. Our prayer is that learning about these names of Jesus in Scripture will help you see Christ more clearly. We pray that each day's devotional will draw you nearer to the Lord this Christmas.

As we look forward to the New Year, we thank our readers and friends of *Today in the Word* for studying the Word of God with us and for your support of this ministry in 2019. May Christ, the Lord of Glory and King, be the center of your Christmas celebration! From all of us on the *Today in the Word* team, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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SUNDAY
DECEMBER

1

*Do not be afraid.
I am the First and the Last.*

Revelation 1:17

The Beginning and the End

Do you know who Jesus is? A recent survey revealed poor understanding of key doctrines, including those about Jesus and salvation, even among evangelical Christians. For example, 52 percent of evangelicals believe people are basically good. An astonishing 78 percent think Jesus is a created being (a heresy known as Arianism). And more than half of evangelical Christians, as well as two-thirds of Americans in general, agree that “God accepts the worship of all religions.”

This is one reason we’re devoting the entire month to a study of Christology (the theology of the person, nature, and role of Jesus Christ). We’ll look at important Scripture passages that help us understand more fully who Jesus is. And we will examine the names of Christ. By asking “Who is this Jesus?” we hope you will come to know Him better and rejoice even more during this Christmas season.

First, we will focus on Christ’s divinity. Jesus told the apostle John in the awe-inspiring vision that opens the book of Revelation: “I am the First and the Last” (v. 17). He said it again at the end of the book: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (22:13). This figure of speech, repeated three times for emphasis is called a “merism,” and it conveys the idea that Christ is the beginning, the end, *and everything in between*.

He’s the center and in Him we find the meaning of history, redemption, and everything else. Nothing exists apart from Him (Col. 1:15–17). This expression also indicates that He is incomparably above all other gods (Isa. 44:6–8), and He is the Creator of all (Isa. 48:12–13). Only an eternal God could make such a claim!

APPLY THE WORD

This month, it’s all about Jesus! “Keep a running record of your daily answers to this question in a notebook or journal. The titles given to Jesus will tell you much about our Lord.

PRAY WITH US

As we start our Bible and prayer journey this month, let’s thank the Lord for the Advent season that starts today. What a joy and a privilege it is to prepare for Christ’s birth with Bible reading, reflection, and prayer!

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory
and the exact representation of his being.*

Hebrews 1:3

MONDAY
DECEMBER

2

God's Final Revelation

In his worship song “Knowing You, Jesus,” Graham Kendrick proclaims: “Oh, to know the power of your risen life / And to know you in your sufferings / To become like you in your death, my Lord / So with you to live and never die.”

When we know Jesus, we know God the Father as well, for the Son is the Father's final, complete, and perfect revelation of Himself (John 14:7-10). In this first chapter of the book of Hebrews, we are told that “in the past God spoke” through prophets (v. 1), “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (v. 2).

The Son is called the “heir of all things”—King of the kingdom of God—and the universe was made through Him (v. 2). Only God Himself matches this description. According to verse 3, the Son is the “radiance of God's glory.” This is a relationship of identity.

Just as light and its source cannot be separated, only God can shine forth God's glory. That means the Son must be God as well.

Here we read that Jesus is “the exact representation of his being” (v. 3). Again, this indicates identity. While the Son and the Father are not the same Person, they are both God. Furthermore, the Son sustains “all things by his powerful word” (v. 3). Only God can do that, so once again, the Son is God. If He is who God is and He does what God does, then He must be God Himself!

In God's plan of redemption, the Son “provided purification for sins,” then “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (v. 3). No man could have done either of those, nor could any angel (v. 4). Only the Lord Himself qualifies. Therefore, Jesus is God!

APPLY THE WORD

December is all about Christmas, but often our culture forgets to honor the reason for this holiday, the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Begin today to keep Jesus the center of your Christmas celebration. Ask God to help you focus your heart and mind on Him, even when the days get busy and the to-do list gets long.

PRAY WITH US

Please join us in prayer that this Christmas season we'll look at Christ and remember the Cross. May Jesus be the center of our celebration. May we be renewed in our love and affection for Him every day!

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

3

*All things have been created
through him and for him.*

Colossians 1:16

Creator of All

In 1992, a new large mammal was identified for the first time in 50 years—the *saola*, a long-horned species of wild ox that resembles a deer or antelope. The saola, however, is both rare and shy. So when one was sighted in 2013 in central Vietnam for the first time in fourteen years, conservationists rejoiced. Said one leader: “This is a breathtaking discovery and renews hope for the recovery of the species.”

The beauty and variety found in nature remind us of Christ’s role in creation: “In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” (v. 16). As God, the Son created all else that exists, including the material world (the universe) and the spiritual world (angelic beings). How could both the Father and the Son be Creator? As persons of the Trinity, each is equally God. Since Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (v. 15) and

God’s “fullness” dwells in Him (v. 19), then He must be God Himself.

In addition, creation’s continued existence depends on Christ. The Bible teaches that “in him all things hold together” (v. 17). We saw this yesterday as well. The Father created everything through the Son, whose “powerful word” sustains everything (Heb. 1:2–3).

In this biblical worldview, creation implies rulership. The phrase “firstborn over all creation” (v. 15) doesn’t indicate Christ is a created being but rather means He holds the first position and is the King over all creation, as when the writer of Hebrews called Him the “heir of all things” (1:2). To the created world, Christ is the reconciler or redeemer of all who respond in faith (v. 20). He accomplished this through His sacrificial atonement on the cross—the hope of the gospel (vv. 21–23)!

APPLY THE WORD

Why not take a walk and rejoice in the beauty of God’s creation? For some readers, the weather is probably cold or snowy. But winter, like the other seasons, has its own beauty and can cause us to worship the Creator. So, if necessary, put on your coat, hat, boots, and gloves and venture out into the landscape God has given you!

PRAY WITH US

Having read today’s Scripture passage from Colossians 1, praise the Lord for His beautiful creation, sustained by His eternal, powerful word. Praise God that in Him “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

*The Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us.*

John 1:14

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

4

The Eternal Word

“A Japanese pastor wrote that the most important message of Christmas is that Jesus was born as a babe, weak and vulnerable to the world,” said artist Makoto Fujimura in his book, *Refractions*. “A baby is utterly dependent on a mother and a father, and others helping the baby to survive. Imagine, one who would claim to be the all-powerful Creator in flesh, becoming vulnerable and dependent on fallen human beings like us!”

“The Word became flesh” (v. 14) is one of the greatest truths and greatest acts of love the world has ever known. What does it mean to call Jesus the Word or *Logos* (v. 1)? To the Greek mind, *Logos* meant reason, order, and communication, both spoken and unspoken. To the Jewish mind, it meant the word of God, including both Scripture and God’s powerful word as seen in His creation (Gen. 1). The Word implied His sovereignty and represented

the culmination of His plan and purpose. God’s word put into effect His plans and purposes. John surely knew and intended both meanings.

The miracle of the Incarnation certainly stunned both the Jewish and the Greek mind. Greeks would have been astounded to think of reason and thought as a Person, while Jews would have been staggered that the Lord of Hosts could become the man Jesus. Theologically, we too may have difficulty wrapping our minds around these truths, but John had seen it for himself (v. 14).

As a man, Jesus remained the eternal Son of God (vv. 1–2). And in yesterday’s devotional we read that He’s the Creator (v. 3). He came to give light and life, the hope of the gospel, to all who will receive it by faith (vv. 4–5). By believing and receiving, we gain the great privilege of becoming children of God (vv. 9–13)!

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s reading is among the most beautiful and powerful passages in all of Scripture. In fact, we could say that about each of our first four Bible readings this month. Why not read them aloud? Perhaps you can read these passages in your small group or at the family dinner table or listen to audio Bible versions of each one.

PRAY WITH US

As we ponder the wonderful words that begin John’s Gospel, thank the Father in prayer for His *Logos*, the Word Jesus Christ through whom “all things were made” (John 1:3). Thank Him that His light shines in the darkness, and we can have life in Him.

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

5

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:12

Second Person of the Trinity

It may be difficult to understand why Jesus wanted or needed to be baptized by John. After all, Jesus had no sins of which to repent. But Jesus made it clear that being baptized was the Father’s will. When Jesus was raised out of the Jordan River: “[the] heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:13–17). In this amazing moment, all three members of the Trinity were present: The voice from heaven was God, the Father, the dove was the Holy Spirit, and the Son, Jesus, was physically present (see vv. 6–10).

Why does it matter that Jesus is the second person of the Godhead? Jesus needed to be fully God and fully man in order to redeem us from the power of sin and death. Only the God-man could perfectly know and obey His Father’s

will and thus be the atoning sacrifice. Only if we believe this, can we be “born of God” (v. 1).

Everything interconnects (vv. 2–5). To be spiritually reborn requires faith in Jesus Christ. Faith leads to obedience, which for Spirit-indwelt Christians is not burdensome but overcomes the world, that is, our sinful choices and patterns (James 4:4). Faith participates in Christ’s victory. To love God is to obey His commands, which requires faith and leads to victory. To love God is also to love His children, who are also doing all this alongside us.

God has given us eternal life through His Son (vv. 11–12). If Jesus is the source of life, and without him there is no life, this is even more evidence that Christ is divine. He is indeed “God over all” (Rom. 9:5)!

APPLY THE WORD

What does this passage teach you about Jesus? Is your list growing? More important than knowing about Christ is knowing Him as your Savior.

“Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (v. 12; see John 3:18). Have you trusted Christ for salvation? We urge you to put your faith in Him today!

PRAY WITH US

Today’s devotional encourages us to pray for those who know about Christ, but not as their Savior. Are there loved ones on your prayer list you’ve been praying for? Lift them up in prayer today. May salvation come to them this Christmas!

*Through the obedience of the one man
the many will be made righteous.*

Romans 5:19

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

6

The New Adam

J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, coined the term “eucatastrophe,” which means “good catastrophe.” When it looks like a hero is doomed . . . but then the plot turns! The death of Jesus certainly qualifies as a eucatastrophe! As one writer explains, “Jesus’ crucifixion was the most evil event in history, but it secured the redemption of those who believe in Jesus’ substitutionary atonement for their salvation.”

Christ’s sacrifice made it possible for us (and all of humanity) to start over. That is why Paul depicted Him as the *new Adam*. Today, we begin the second section of our month’s study focusing on Christ’s role in salvation.

Paul explains that, through the first Adam, sin and death entered the world and affected all humanity (v. 12). No one was innocent then, and no one is innocent now. This “original sin” means we are all born with sin natures and

stand condemned before God. The good news is that Jesus, as the new Adam, lived a perfect life of obedience to His Father. Through His sacrificial death and resurrection, life is possible for those who believe. We stand justified before God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness (vv. 18–19).

Notice the contrast between the old and new Adams. What Christ achieved is greater than what Adam spoiled (vv. 15–17). Jesus didn’t merely undo the Fall, salvation is a step up! His gift is greater than any trespass. Good is greater than evil. Grace is greater than sin. Life is greater than death. Furthermore, while sin and its consequences were deserved, the gift of salvation is undeserved by us, to God’s greater glory. The result? Whereas once “sin reigned in death,” now grace reigns and brings “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 21).

APPLY THE WORD

To give today’s passage even more context, re-read the record of the original Adam and the Fall in Genesis 3–4. How were Adam and Eve led to disobey? What were the consequences? What evidence was there that God continued to love them? Rejoice that “as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22)!

PRAY WITH US

Candlelight Carols is an important part of Christmas celebration at Moody and involves student music groups and student drama group. Pray for our students who perform on stage and those in the audience, as they attend tomorrow’s concerts.

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

7

*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes
away the sin of the world!*

John 1:29

The Lamb of God

For our wedding day, Julia and I chose the music carefully. We wanted the ceremony to be worshipful, focused ultimately on God and not us. For this reason, one of the songs we picked was “Lamb of God” by Twila Paris. It doesn’t mention marriage, but it does celebrate the amazing love of God: “Your gift of love they crucified. They laughed and scorned him as he died. The humble King they named a fraud, and sacrificed the Lamb of God.”

Lamb of God seems an unlikely title for Jesus. What does it mean? John the Baptist identified Jesus to his followers by announcing, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (vv. 29–31). This alluded specifically to the Passover story (Exodus 12; 1 Cor. 5:7). Prior to the tenth plague on Egypt, the Israelites were instructed to put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so the angel of death would “pass over”

them and spare their firstborn sons. The principle at work was that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” or life (Heb. 9:22).

Jesus is the Lamb of God because He shed His own blood for our forgiveness and salvation. A well-known Messianic prophecy said He would be “led like a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa. 53:7), that is, Jesus sacrificed Himself willingly. The apostle Peter understood the sacrificial lamb image as well, writing that we have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19).

Although only John the Baptist uses the title “Lamb of God” in the New Testament, Christ appears as a Lamb at least 29 times in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 5:6). This picture powerfully and memorably unites the meanings of atonement and victory!

APPLY THE WORD

What does this passage teach you about Jesus? Why is it important to you that He is the Lamb of God? Write down your answers and maybe talk about this with your friends or family. Then, spend some time in prayer thanking God for the gift of His Son, Jesus. “The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29).

PRAY WITH US

Will you pray for Moody’s president, Dr. Mark Jobe, as he speaks at both performances of Moody’s annual Christmas program, Candlelight Carols? Please ask the Lord to touch the hearts of our audience with the power of the gospel message.

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities.*

Isaiah 53:5

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

8

The Suffering Servant

In his sermon, “The Man of Sorrows,” nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon expressed faith-filled amazement that Jesus was fully God and fully man: “He who was ‘despised and rejected of men’ was beloved and adored by angels. And He, from whom men hid their faces in contempt, was worshipped by cherubim and seraphim. Man of the substance of Your mother, You art also essential Deity! We worship you this day in spirit and in truth!”

The Messianic prophecy in today’s reading depicts Jesus as a Suffering Servant. This title was certainly not expected by the Jews of Jesus’ day. They expected a king who would release them from Rome’s rule and sit on the throne of David . . . certainly not a servant! They desired victory, not suffering. Yet that is exactly how Isaiah’s fourth servant song presented Jesus, as “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (v. 3).

Christ’s suffering was for our atonement. We deserved what He endured in our place. “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (v. 5). Though He “was assigned a grave with the wicked” (v. 9), He had committed no sin. He suffered and died for our sake—though death would not be His end (v. 11)—and He did so willingly, choosing freely to suffer the punishment we deserved (vv. 4, 12). He did not protest or fight back (v. 7), as we see in the Gospel accounts of His unjust trials. His was silent by choice, not due to powerlessness.

This costly redemption was ordained by God the Father (Acts 2:23). “The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). “It was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer . . . the LORD makes his life an offering for sin” (v. 10).

APPLY THE WORD

As followers of Christ, it is our privilege to “share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:17). Many believers around the world are suffering today. Let’s pray for the persecuted church in countries such as China, North Korea, and Pakistan. Prayer guides are available at websites such as [Voice of the Martyrs](#).

PRAY WITH US

Another important event starts on Moody’s Chicago campus tomorrow—final exams. Please uphold in prayer our undergraduate students and ask the Lord to help them to finish well and retain the valuable knowledge they learned from their professors.

*Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here; he has risen!*

Luke 24:5–6

Our Risen Lord

“Outside of the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no hope in this world,” says Ravi Zacharias, Christian apologist and author. “That cross and resurrection at the core of the Gospel is the only hope for humanity. Wherever you go, ask God for wisdom on how to get that Gospel in, even in the toughest situations of life.”

The resurrection changed everything! Today we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ is our Risen Lord. This is not a metaphor or a symbolic picture, but the literal historical truth. The Resurrection was both a spiritual and a physical event. When Jesus appeared to His disciples, He worked hard to convince them that He was not a ghost (v. 37). Though His glorified body was qualitatively different, He could still show them the scars in His hands and feet (vv. 36–40). He even ate broiled fish (vv. 42–43).

Despite Jesus having told them before the fact (vv. 6–7), His followers had no

expectation that He would rise from the dead. The women who discovered the empty tomb had come to anoint His corpse with spices and pay their final respects (v. 1). When they brought the angels’ news to the disciples, it “seemed to them like nonsense” (v. 11). In Luke’s account, only Peter bothered to go and check, and even when he found the tomb empty, “he went away, wondering to himself what had happened” (v. 12). The two disciples on the Emmaus road didn’t know what to make of the women’s story either (vv. 19–24).

That’s why Christ’s post-Resurrection appearances were taught His followers—that what had happened had been exactly what Scripture prophesied (vv. 25–27, 44–48). He opened their minds so they could realize the incredible significance of the Truth standing before them: redemption and forgiveness of sin!

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus said “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (v. 47), a mandate the church continues to obey today. Which missionaries do you or your church support? Do you know what’s been happening in their ministries lately? Why not read one of their newsletters and spend time in prayer for them?

PRAY WITH US

Final exams, a busy time for Moody’s faculty, start today. We invite you to include in prayer the professors of the Educational Ministries program: Robert MacRae, Michael Milco, Mary Martin, and Peter Worrall. We ask for God’s blessing on them.

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:14

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

10

Our Redeemer

R. A. Torrey, the second president of Moody Bible Institute, explained why Jesus' sacrifice meets the need of every person: "The gospel, *with a crucified Christ at its center*, meets the needs of all conditions and classes of men as well as of all races. It meets the need of the millionaire and the need of the pauper; it meets the need of great men of science . . . and the need of the man or woman who cannot read nor write; it meets the need of the king on the throne and the need of the laborer in the ditch."

The gospel is good news for everyone! In his first epistle, Paul made clear that the good news of redemption in Christ is for both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 7–9). As God told Abraham, "All nations will be blessed through you" (see Gen. 12:3), a promise here called the "gospel in advance." God's plan had always been larger than one nation.

The fact is that all who trust in Christ are considered spiritual "children of Abraham."

Furthermore, redemption is about faith, not works or the Law (vv. 10–12). Since lawbreakers are cursed, and since keeping the Law is impossible, those who rely on it are automatically cursed. Those who rely on faith in Christ, by contrast, stand justified before God. This is not a new truth, since faith was also the basis for Abraham's justification (v. 6). Anyone who tries to earn salvation will fail.

In short, the gospel is not about what we do but about what Christ did (vv. 13–14; Eph. 1:7). He came under the Law's curse. He paid the death penalty we owed for sin. Only through faith in Him can we receive the rich blessings of salvation, especially the Holy Spirit.

APPLY THE WORD

The gospel is such good news, we cannot keep it to ourselves! If you're not sure how to share your faith, pray for an opportunity in the near future. If you have specific friends or family members in mind, pray for a moment to share what you believe. There's no better way to celebrate Christmas than to tell others about Christ!

PRAY WITH US

Today we pray again for the Educational Ministries faculty: Timothy Downey, Dennis Fledderjohann, and Elizabeth Smith. May they be encouraged and strengthened in the Spirit as they faithfully teach tomorrow's Christian educators.

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant.

Hebrews 9:15

Mediator Between God and Humanity

The expression “skin in the game,” often encountered in the world of business and finance, is used when people have a personal stake in reaching a goal. They see their work as much more than “just a job.” They’re risking their own resources or reputation. Their commitment might be emotional, financial, or even physical.

As the Mediator between God and humanity, Jesus most certainly had “skin in the game” because He was and is fully God and fully man. But why was such a mediator needed? Because sin made us enemies of God. We were at war, with no hope of winning, and no offering a sacrifice represented the people before the Lord. But when Jesus came, He became both the priest *and* the sacrifice.

Christ is the superior Mediator of a superior covenant (Heb. 8:6). He did what He did in the heavenly tabernacle

(God’s presence), not its earthly shadow (9:11). His atonement is once-for-all, not repeated. His blood is effectual for forgiveness, unlike the blood of animal sacrifices (v. 12). Those sacrifices made people outwardly clean, but Christ makes us inwardly clean and holy, free to serve God (vv. 13–14).

Jesus not only mediates the new covenant but also guarantees it (v. 15). How does this work? Like a will. Just as a will takes effect only when the one who made it dies, so our inheritance of eternal life took effect because of Jesus’ death (vv. 16–17). While the blood of animal sacrifices only symbolized purification, Jesus’ blood actually accomplished our forgiveness and redemption (vv. 18–22). And while formerly we were set apart for death, now through Christ’s mediation we’re set apart for life. We were God’s enemies but now can be His friends!

APPLY THE WORD

We often think more about what we have *freedom from* than what we have *freedom to do*. We think in terms of our own independence, being able to do whatever we want. Within a biblical worldview, however, freedom runs the other way. We’ve been released from sin’s bondage in order to “serve the living God” (v. 14). Obedience is true freedom!

PRAY WITH US

Indeed, Christ gives us true freedom! We can worship Him in Spirit and in truth, made clean by His sacrifice. As you pray today, praise Him that He cleansed us “from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14).

*Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.*

John 8:12

Light of the World

Philosopher J. P. Moreland described how Disneyland in California has an entire work crew assigned to do nothing but light bulbs. They keep a record of the park's thousands of light bulbs, and replace them when they reach 80 percent life expectancy. Are they successful? Never once has he seen a burned-out light there!

Light of the World is one of the most well-known names for Christ. It's an image associated with knowledge, truth, righteousness, hope, and life. As Isaiah prophesied, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isa. 9:2; see also John 1:4). Today begins our study's third section: looking at Christ's attributes in relationship with His people.

When Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (v. 12), the Pharisees immediately challenged Him (vv. 13–18). By saying

His testimony wasn't valid, they were essentially accusing Him of lying and pride. Jesus responded that He and the Father together made two witnesses and that the Pharisees were ignorant of His divine identity and origins.

Offended, the Pharisees made a second challenge (v. 19): "Where is your father?" Ironically, they proved their own ignorance, but it might also have been intended as an insult about the circumstances of His birth. If so, Jesus disregarded the insult, instead asserting that to know Him was to know the Father. For the religious leaders of Israel not to understand this was quite an indictment (John 3:19)!

As followers of Christ, we are to be "the light of the world" ourselves (Matt. 5:14) by reflecting His light. How? We are to "walk in the light" and live holy lives (1 John 1:5–7).

APPLY THE WORD

To illustrate the importance of light, try spending part of your devotional time or small group meeting in a dark room, then light only one candle or a flashlight. Notice how a single light makes an enormous difference! The good news is we don't have to generate our own light, we are called to reflect Christ's light in a dark world.

PRAY WITH US

What a powerful image of Christ as the Light of the world today's Scripture presents! It's also a challenge to us, as followers of Christ, to be the light and walk in His light. Lord Jesus, give us the strength and the courage to live holy lives.

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

13

The bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

John 6:33

The Bread of Life

The Sugarfire Smoke House in St. Louis claimed first prize at the Sandwich World Championship. Chef David Molina won the award for his “Cuban Reuben,” which included smoked ham, pulled pork, pastrami, mustard, swiss cheese, and pickles, all placed between two sourdough grilled cheese sandwiches, which in turn were made with provolone cheese, white American cheese, and horseradish mustard.

Are we making you hungry? The crowds were ravenously hungry when Jesus miraculously fed them loaves and fish (vv. 1–13). But when they came looking for more of the same, He rebuked them for wrong motives (v. 26). They should be looking for “food that endures to eternal life” (v. 27). One spoils while the other gives lasting spiritual nourishment.

The crowd asked, in essence, how can we earn such food (v. 28)? The only “work” to do, Jesus responded, is to

believe in me (v. 29). Their next question was, why should we believe in you? Apparently, the feeding of the 5,000 wasn’t enough?! They wanted something equal to God’s provision of manna in the wilderness (vv. 30–31). Surprisingly (to the people), Jesus asserted that God had already provided a better bread (vv. 32–33). “Give it to us,” they predictably answered.

Jesus met their deeper hunger by revealing Himself to be the Bread of Life (vv. 35–40). He is the Messiah and source of life, not in a temporal sense but for eternity. All who believe in Him will be accepted and one day resurrected. This is possible because Jesus perfectly obeyed the will of the Father and His plan of redemption. Best of all, He promised that no one who trusted Him for salvation would be lost (v. 39), a promise or doctrine we often call “assurance of salvation” or “perseverance of the saints.”

APPLY THE WORD

Ready for another object lesson? Try baking a loaf of bread (maybe you have a bread machine in the back of a closet). Or, purchase a loaf for your neighbor. Ask God for a natural opening to explain that you are studying how Jesus is the Bread of Life and He alone can satisfy our spiritual hunger (v. 35).

PRAY WITH US

As the true Bread of Life, Christ provides us with both physical and spiritual sustenance in wonderful, sometimes even miraculous, ways. Join us in thanking God today for meeting all our needs, giving us the assurance of His presence in our lives.

*The living Stone—rejected by humans
but chosen by God and precious to him.*

1 Peter 2:4

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

14

The Living Stone

Pondering today’s reading, musician Michael Card wrote the song “Living Stones”: “See, in Zion He is known / As a chosen precious cornerstone / And the ones who come to trust in Him / Will never know the shame / That He bore on that cross when it seems / That all was lost. / He is the Stone that makes men stumble / The Rock that makes them fall. / Living stones, living stones / We are holy, living stones / Built upon the firm foundation that is Jesus.”

What does it mean for Christ to be a Living Stone (v. 4) or a “chosen and precious cornerstone” (v. 6)? In today’s reading, Peter quoted several Old Testament references to show that Jesus was chosen by God but rejected by humans. Christ was the key to God’s plan of redemption. Those who do not believe in Him will trip over Him—their lack of faith will be their stumbling block

(vv. 7–8). Those who do believe in Him, on the other hand, will receive God’s mercy (vv. 5, 9–10).

Peter quoted from a Messianic psalm: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (v. 7; Ps. 118:22). He had previously quoted this same verse before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:11). Jesus Himself had also quoted this verse as part of the parable of the tenants, indicating that the Jewish leaders had rejected God’s Chosen One. He further said people who failed to accept Him would be “broken to pieces” and “crushed” (Luke 20:17–19). As God’s “precious cornerstone for a sure foundation” (Isa. 28:16), Jesus succeeded despite opposition in His mission of salvation. We, too, are “living stones” who “are being built into a spiritual house” or God’s family (v. 5; Eph. 2:19–22).

APPLY THE WORD

You are God’s special possession, and Peter urges you to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (v. 9). How will you praise Him today? Will you explain the gospel to a friend? Will you share a Bible verse on social media? Whatever you choose to do, give thanks for the gift of salvation!

PRAY WITH US

We encourage you to praise Jesus today as the Messiah and the Cornerstone, as quoted by the apostle Peter from Psalm 118 in today’s reading. Declare His praise with confidence and gratitude for His gift of salvation.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Rosalie de Rosset, Professor of Communications and Literature

Q Why do some people have so much and some so little?

A We live in a fallen world with a huge imbalance of money and power. There is an enormous divide between the wealthy and those with very little. But Proverbs 22:2 says, “Rich and poor have this in common: the LORD is the Maker of them all.” Nowhere in the Bible are we promised that everyone will have an equal experience. What Christ does teach consistently in Scripture is the importance of generosity and care for the poor. “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

People may be rich or poor for many reasons, among them place of birth, family circumstances, available opportunities, and life choices. But we are promised that if we know the Lord our lives can have meaning in spite of these circumstances. We are not rejected or accepted by God according to what we possess. Christ reached out to those who came to Him regardless of their circumstances; He took everyone seriously, teaching the poor and the rich alike, performing miracles for both, calling both to obedience and repentance.

Q I rededicated my life to Christ recently. My boyfriend lives with me and our finances are deeply entangled. I know God is restoring me and telling me we can no longer live together. I know I have to leave my boyfriend. How do I do this in accordance with Scripture? How does this happen peacefully?

A First, I am thankful that your life in Christ is being restored! Nothing is as crucial in life as our commitment to God and His Son Jesus Christ. Your obedience is a sign of Christ’s life in you, a tribute to your love for Him and for His Word (John 14:15).

However, as you are realizing, there are consequences to our choices, and obedience to the Lord does not mean that things will be easy or that others will accept those changes. God does not promise a peaceful resolution just because we do the right thing. If your boyfriend does not believe as you do, he may be understandably angry and upset. When you talk to him about what you must do, explain to him how hard this decision was for you and that you are a Christian and must obey God because you believe what the Bible says. Then assure him that you will take responsibility for your part of the finances. After this, continue to pray for him and ask others to pray for you.

Christ reached out to those who came to Him regardless of their circumstances.

While this will be painful, you can be assured that God will sustain you. As Paul writes to the members of the church of Philippi, “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Q **We had a woman at work give notice, and we didn't want her to go. So, I prayed about it. But she still quit. Who let me down? She or God? Also, I have been praying for years about a family member's illness and still, I have not seen healing? Why aren't my prayers answered?**

A The experience of unanswered prayer is one of the haunting questions of life. I suspect many Christians have felt let down by God, or, at the very least, confused and disappointed. Part of our reaction comes from incorrect teaching about the nature of prayer. We have been taught that if we pray the right way we will get the answer we desire. But prayer is not about getting what we want. Prayer is, as one writer put it, “surrender to the reality that there is a wisdom greater than ours.” Prayer brings us into relationship with God, the greatest guide and loving presence we can ever have. Prayer confronts us with our finiteness and God's infiniteness.

In your first example, it's important to remember that each individual has a human will he or she can use for right or wrong. God will not manipulate anyone; He gives us choices. We must always realize this when we pray for others.

In your second question, you wonder why God answers some prayers and not others. The disciples prayed for Peter's release from prison, and God released him (Acts 12:3–17). But God allowed Stephen to be stoned to death (Acts 7:54–60) and later both Paul and Peter were put to death for the sake of Jesus. In the book of Psalms, we find questions such as “Why have you forgotten me?” (Ps. 42:9) or “Why have you rejected me?” (Ps. 43:2). Questions like these are common to all of us, representing our worry and doubts.

It is natural to have questions about prayer. God understands that. The book of Psalms encourages us to express those questions honestly to God. But it also pushes us to remember God is a God of mercy who loves His children. It may not be until eternity that we will have all the answers, but I love the words of Psalm 42: 11, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

15

No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Musicians Stuart Townend and Keith Getty wrote the powerful worship song, “In Christ Alone.” The final verse proclaims: “No guilt in life, no fear in death / This is the power of Christ in me. / From life’s first cry to final breath, / Jesus commands my destiny. / No power of hell, no scheme of man, / Can ever pluck me from his hand. / Till he returns or calls me home, / Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.”

There is no other way to the Father than through Christ alone! Jesus made this very clear in today’s reading: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). The title *Way* draws on the common biblical metaphor of a path. Jesus also said: “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life” (Matt. 7:14). Early Christianity was actually called “the Way” (Acts 9:2). And for

us, there is no way to God other than Christ, even while our culture frowns on such exclusive claims.

There is also no other *Truth*, certainly not “personal truth” or “truth for me” that has become pervasive in our world. John uses the Greek word for “truth” 25 times in his Gospel, always connecting it to Jesus. Sometimes we think Satan has lesser or weaker truths, but the fact is that he has *no* truth at all—he is the “father of lies” (John 8:44).

Finally, as we’ve seen already this month, there is no other source of *Life*. In our culture, Jesus’ assertion sounds alarming, but He actually communicated this “I am” statement to offer comfort (v. 1). That’s one reason He put things in relational terms. “The way and the truth and the life” are all about knowing Jesus (vv. 7–10).

APPLY THE WORD

Our culture values sincerity and thinks there are many different paths to God. Are you ready to give a clear answer about the hope in you to others? (1 Peter 3:15). Two books that might help you express your belief in Jesus as the true Way are *Jesus Among Other Gods* by Ravi Zacharias and *Is Jesus the Only Way?* by Philip Graham Ryken.

PRAY WITH US

May our worship at today’s church services be filled with gospel truth because it is a witness to the power and beauty of our union with Christ. Praise Him today as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

*You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,”
and rightly so, for that is what I am.*

John 13:13

MONDAY
DECEMBER

16

Master Teacher

Earlier this year, Dr. Rosalie de Rosset completed 50 years of service at Moody Bible Institute. As a professor of Communications, she specializes in teaching literature and mentoring. “I love my students,” she says. “I love talking to them about their lives, their struggles, and the way Jesus meets them . . . God is good. His grace is profound, and my students have made teaching a marvel of an experience.”

Dr. de Rosset does all she does as an ardent follower of the Master Teacher, Jesus Christ. Today’s reading shows the heart of Christ who often taught with parables, using pictures and stories from everyday life. He wanted the meaning to be clear to those listening in faith (Matt. 13:10–17). He was perfectly in tune to the hearts and minds of His audience, and He always taught following the larger “lesson plan” of His Father.

The second story, later revealed to be an allegory, is built around a problem (vv. 24–28): A good man planted wheat, then his enemy came and planted weeds in the same field. This only became known when both sprouted. The solution was to sort it out at the harvest (vv. 29–30). Why wait? To make sure the wheat wasn’t harmed.

At the disciples’ request, Jesus explained the meaning (vv. 36–41). The good man is the Son of Man (Himself), while the enemy is the devil. The field is the world. The wheat represents people of the kingdom of God, that is, believers in the Son. The weeds represent everyone else. The harvesters are angels and the harvest is the final judgment. The core lesson here focuses on the two contrasting destinies: Sinners will be punished, while “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (vv. 42–43).

APPLY THE WORD

Did you have a teacher who was also a Christian role model? Why not write a note to that teacher today (if the person is still alive)? Let them know how much you appreciated their godly example. And, all of us can join in praying for teachers, that they will find ways to show Christ to their students.

PRAY WITH US

Reading about Jesus as Teacher in today’s devotional, brings to mind Moody’s faculty—undergraduate, graduate, and those leading online courses. Will you pray for our professors to follow their Master Teacher wholeheartedly?

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

17

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.

John 10:14

The Good Shepherd

In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller describes the peril of a “cast sheep,” that is, a sheep that’s fallen flat on its back and cannot get back up on its own. In this position, it’s an easy target for predators such as buzzards and wolves. And, if not rescued within a short time, it will die. Gas spreads through the digestive system and cuts off the flow of blood. If the weather is hot and sunny, the sheep can die in just a few hours.

As sheep, we need the Good Shepherd (vv. 11, 14)! As a shepherd, Jesus cares for, watches over, guides, protects, defends, and rescues us. He knows us by name (v. 3). His voice leads us (v. 4).

In Ancient Near Eastern culture, shepherding was a common metaphor for kingship. An ideal king would behave much like a good shepherd, working to

create and ensure the well-being of his nation (flock). So when Jesus asserted His authority at the end of this passage, He wasn’t really changing topics (v. 18). He is our King as well as our Shepherd!

Notice that the shepherd is strongly contrasted with the thief and the hired hand. Thieves and robbers wanted to harm the flock (vv. 1–5). These are enemies of God. Hired hands might be better, but they run away when danger comes. They’re not invested like the shepherd (vv. 12–13). These are false shepherds or bad religious leaders.

Christ is an exceptional shepherd. He loved us so much He laid down His life for us (vv. 11, 15, 17). His selfless goal is our salvation—“that they may have life, and have it to the full” (v. 10). As sheep, our best choice is to follow, trust, and stay close to Him.

APPLY THE WORD

Aren’t you thankful Jesus is your Shepherd? The image of God as a shepherd is found throughout Scripture. If you have time, read Psalm 23 today. If you have more time, we suggest reading Ezekiel 34 as well. “I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. . . . I will shepherd the flock with justice” (v. 16).

PRAY WITH US

“The Lord is my shepherd.” Psalm 23 echoes today’s Scripture reading from John 10. Today, we focus our prayers on the powerful images in both passages and thank the Lord for watching over us, even when we walk “through the darkest valley” (Ps. 23:4).

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

John 13:14

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

18

The Model for Servanthood

How soon we forget the lessons we are taught! During the Last Supper, Jesus' disciples argued about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24–27). Like many, they anticipated a Messiah who would liberate them from Roman rule and establish a kingdom, and they wanted powerful positions. They each considered themselves especially worthy! Jesus rebuked them, saying, "I am among you as one who serves" (v. 27).

Their discussion is even more surprising considering earlier that same evening, Jesus had shown them a stunning example of servanthood. In that time and place, foot washing met a practical need, but was done by servants, not a rabbi. When Jesus washed their feet, then, His bewildered disciples didn't know how to react. To see their esteemed teacher wrap a towel around His waist, get a basin of water, and wash their filthy feet was shocking.

What motivated Christ to model humility in this way? First, His sense of God's plan (John 13:1). He was perfectly clear about His identity, origins, mission, and authority (v. 3). Second, He loved the disciples. This included not only Peter and his clumsy attempt to avoid being served (vv. 6–10), but also Judas, whose betrayal was already in process (vv. 2, 11). And third, because "taking the very nature of a servant" was an essential part of His mission of redemption (Phil. 2:5–8).

We're not greater than Jesus. So if we don't follow His example, the failure to serve is a sin of pride (John 13:14–16). Genuine service, on the other hand, is motivated by love and brings about blessing (vv. 17, 35). As Paul explained, biblical freedom is characterized by humble service to one another (Gal. 5:13).

APPLY THE WORD

How can you follow Jesus' example and serve others this week? Even a small, practical act can show Christ's love. As James explained: "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (2:14–17).

PRAY WITH US

Thank you, Lord, for the reminder in today's reading of what a true servant should be! Your washing the disciples' feet still surprises and humbles us today. Help us learn how to serve others the same way, motivated by love and clear purpose.

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

19

If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

1 John 2:1

Our Advocate

Perry Mason was the title character in a popular series of novels, radio programs, and finally a television series set in Los Angeles starring Raymond Burr. The fictional lawyer specialized in advocating for the innocent, mostly people who had been wrongly accused of murder. Perry Mason epitomized a good lawyer, striving to help those in need.

The Bible uses this type of legal language, saying that Jesus is our advocate before God the Father. God’s amazing grace is key to understanding salvation. In today’s reading, the apostle John wrote to believers about what to do when sin occurs in our life after our initial salvation. Just as grace and forgiveness were at work in our justification, so also we find them at work in our sanctification.

Every follower of Christ must walk in the light and pursue righteous living (1:5–7). It’s the key to having fellowship with

God and with one another. The question naturally arises, then, “What happens when we sin?” What we must first understand is that we *will* sin (1:8, 10). It’s going to happen. God’s work in us is not yet finished.

When we do sin, we must confess our wrongdoing to God. That means repenting of our sin and turning from it, knowing God has promised to forgive us (1:9). It’s in this context that we can fully appreciate the role of Jesus as our Advocate (2:1). As the perfectly Righteous One, He speaks on our behalf before God the Judge, saying, in essence, “I have already paid the price for this believer’s sin. No penalty remains. Please grant more grace and forgiveness.” In other words, Christ’s atoning sacrifice has already taken care of matters (2:2). His blood has cleansed and purified us, and continues to cleanse and purify us, from sin (1:7, 9).

APPLY THE WORD

Today, spend time confessing your sins to the Lord. We don’t need to fear bringing our sin before a Holy God because for us as believers, forgiveness is guaranteed. And there’s every reason to do so. Sin interferes with relationships, but Christ already took care of that on the cross. Go to Him today, and revel in His grace!

PRAY WITH US

A special part of December for all of us at MBI is Moody Radio’s special Christmas programming. Please uphold in prayer the teams at Moody Radio who work hard to bring the saving message of Christ through music to listeners.

*I pray also for those who will believe
in me through their message.*

John 17:20

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

20

Our Great High Priest

In *Tell It Slant*, Eugene Peterson advised reading Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" in John 17 with a calm and attentive heart: "Jesus is no longer talking to us. Jesus is talking to the Father. Jesus is praying. He prays a long time. This is holy ground. We find ourselves embraced in a holy listening. We are in a place of prayer, a praying presence. Our mouths are stopped. We are quiet: be still my soul."

This chapter reveals Christ at work as our Great High Priest. His roles as high priest, advocate, and mediator overlap to some extent in that they each show part of what He does for us in salvation (see also Heb. 4:14–16).

First, Christ prayed for Himself, asking that He would be glorified by finishing His mission of redemption and bringing people to the Father (vv. 1–5). Next, He prayed for His disciples to be protected,

unified, sanctified, and sustained against the evil one and the hatred of the world (vv. 6–19). He also prayed for them as messengers of the gospel (v. 18). As we know, these requests were powerfully granted!

Finally, Jesus prayed for future believers, including you and me (v. 20). He asked that we would be unified in the same way He and the Father are (vv. 21–23). Why? "So that the world may believe." He also asked that we would be in heaven with Him one day (v. 24). He closed by affirming that He has indeed revealed the Father to all who trust in Him (vv. 25–26).

Jesus is our Great High Priest, but as believers we are "priests" as well (see, for example, Rev. 1:6). Part of what this means is that we have the tremendous privilege of interceding for one another in prayer, just as our Lord did.

APPLY THE WORD

Today's reading is the longest recorded prayer of Christ and definitely worth deeper study. We encourage you to consult study Bibles, commentaries, and other resources. Consider what this passage tells you about Christ. Finally, no study is complete without asking, "What difference should this make in my life?"

PRAY WITH US

During your prayer time today, as we read the Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17, thank Christ for lifting up to the Father His followers—the disciples of the 1st century, as well as future believers through generations, including us.

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

21

*From him the whole body . . .
grows and builds itself up in love.*

Ephesians 4:16

Head of the Church

When Father Christmas entered Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis, he brought gifts. For Peter, there was a sword and a shield emblazoned with a red lion. For Susan, there was a bow, a quiver of arrows, and a magical horn. For Lucy, there was a small dagger and a bottle of healing cordial.

These gifts were not on their wish lists. They were not given for personal enjoyment. They had purposes within the larger story. The same is true of spiritual gifts in the Body of Christ. They are given to believers for the purpose of serving one another and mutual edification (vv. 11–12). The goal is maturity in both doctrine and practice, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (vv. 13–16). All of God’s people are to use their spiritual gifts in this way, not just those in professional or vocational ministry.

The Head of the Body is Christ Himself (v. 15; Col. 1:18). As we know from our own experience, a body without a head will no longer function. The head is the brains of the operation. The head runs the show. The same is true in this metaphor: Christ has complete authority over the church, including both local churches and the church universal. Whereas human beings tend to exercise their authority for prideful or self-centered ends, Christ exercises His authority for our good and His glory.

Paul wrote here that Christ gives spiritual gifts (v. 11), whereas elsewhere he said the Holy Spirit distributes them (1 Cor. 12:4). This, as with being the Creator (see December 3), is another both/and situation. Since both the Son and the Spirit are God, they can both be said to be the One who gives spiritual gifts.

APPLY THE WORD

Are you using your spiritual gift(s) to serve in your church? If not, ask God where you might get involved. If you’re not sure what your spiritual gift is, we encourage you to talk to your pastor or a church leader. If you think you’re too busy to serve, we suggest re-reading today’s passage from Ephesians. Church is not a spectator sport!

PRAY WITH US

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Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

John 11:26

The Resurrection and the Life

“Death be not proud,” begins a famous *Holy Sonnet* by poet John Donne, “though some have called thee Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.” Donne addresses Death as a person, saying it has no real power, but is rather “slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men.” He compares it to rest or sleep, even as pleasurable. In the end: “One short sleep past, we wake eternally, And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.”

Like Donne, we can say that death has no real power, for the Lord Jesus has conquered it once and for all! As Jesus told Martha in today’s reading, “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25). We’ve already seen that Christ is our Risen Lord (Dec. 9), and that He’s the “firstborn from among the dead” (Col. 1:18). Today’s narrative builds on these truths.

When Christ heard that His friend Lazarus was sick, He deliberately

delayed in order to bring God greater glory (v. 4) and to strengthen His disciples’ faith (v. 15). He knew exactly what would happen. Of course, no one else had the foggiest notion. The idea that death could be reversed was so outside their paradigm that even when responding in faith—as Martha did in her powerful confession (v. 27)—they didn’t see it coming. They believed Jesus could have healed Lazarus if He’d come sooner. They believed Lazarus would be raised in the future. But now? After he’d been in the tomb four days? No way.

The fact is, though, that even prior to His death and resurrection, Jesus was Lord over death. He is life and source of all life. He brought Lazarus back to life with a simple command (v. 43), a miracle that brought many to faith in Him (vv. 42, 45). Lazarus presumably died again at a later date, for Christ was the first to be resurrected with a glorified body.

APPLY THE WORD

I’ve given some thought to the Scripture passages, music, and poems I’d like used at my funeral—not because I’m morbid, but because I want to tell others about my faith in Christ. One item on my list is the John Donne poem (quoted earlier). How about you? How would you like to testify of your faith in Jesus?

PRAY WITH US

Today is a good time to review all the names of Jesus we’ve learned so far and to add the one from John 11—the Resurrection and the Life. Thank the Lord that He has graced our lives with His love and turned the tears of our past into the joy of new life in Him.

MONDAY
DECEMBER

23

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

Luke 1:32

Son of David

Once King David was securely established on his throne, he wanted to build a temple for the Lord. God told him *no*, but also made a remarkable promise: “The LORD himself will establish a house for you” (2 Sam. 7:11). God’s faithful love would never be withdrawn from the line of David: “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (v. 16).

And we know the rest of the story! God’s covenant with David was fulfilled in the person of Jesus, Son of David (Luke 1:32b–33). Today begins four days of Christmas readings, starting with Gabriel’s announcement to Mary, called the Annunciation. The Eternal Word would become flesh, literally, in her womb (John 1:14). God would be one of us, with us—Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

The baby’s name would be Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua, meaning “the Lord saves” (Luke 1:31). He would be

“the Son of the Most High” or the “Son of God,” that is, the second person of the Trinity (vv. 32a, 35). As the Messiah and a descendant of King David (see the genealogies in both Matthew and Luke), He would be given the throne of David and fulfill God’s promise (vv. 32b–33).

There would be no biological father, though Joseph would become Jesus’ human father. Mary was a virgin. The life inside her would be conceived by God (v. 35). This is a miracle but not necessarily that surprising, given that God is the source of all life and made the first man out of dust, the first woman out of a rib.

Mary’s response was filled with faith, submission, and humility, despite the sheer size of the news and its unprecedented nature. Gabriel encouraged her with the reminder, “No word from God will ever fail” (v. 37).

APPLY THE WORD

What are you trusting God for this Christmas? Does it seem impossible? Remember you worship the God of the impossible. Perhaps you’re trying to work it out with your own resources or strength. If so, consider the faith-filled example of Mary, who said, “I am the Lord’s servant. . . . May your word to me be fulfilled” (v. 38).

PRAY WITH US

Our reading today celebrates Immanuel, God with us. Let’s ask the Lord to grant us Mary’s ability to follow and obey Him with humility, and be encouraged as well by Gabriel’s words to her: “No word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:37).

*You are to give him the name Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins.*

Matthew 1:21

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

24

Our Savior from Sin

In the United States, Christmas involves lots of money. During one recent Christmas, \$22.7 billion was spent in retail department stores . . . in December alone! Nearly 50 million Christmas trees were sold, including 27.4 million real ones and 21.1 million fake ones. And, last year, the average American family planned to spend \$794 on gifts during Christmas.

It is clear that we can easily forget the true reason for the season! Christmas is first and foremost about Jesus. He came, not to usher in a heartwarming holiday, but to save us from our sins (v. 21). In the words of Paul: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

After Gabriel’s announcement to Mary, an angel told Joseph the news in a dream. Joseph was Mary’s fiancé, and her story of a “virgin birth” didn’t sound very believable. Still, Joseph was a good

man and didn’t want to embarrass Mary publicly, so he’d decided to divorce her quietly (engagement was a more binding relationship in that culture than in ours).

When the angel confirmed the truth of Mary’s news (v. 20), as did Scripture (vv. 22–23), Joseph had an important choice to make. It wasn’t automatic. He chose to trust his fiancée, trust God, believe in a humanly impossible conception, and prepare for gossip and ridicule from the world.

From this perspective, Joseph’s obedience seems extraordinary (vv. 24–25). He acted as soon as he awoke, without delay. He took a big risk in both his relationship with Mary and his walk with the Lord. By faith, he accepted the impossible as true. He even held off on consummating the marriage so there would be no questions later about the virgin birth of Christ. Last but not least, he obediently named the baby “Jesus.”

APPLY THE WORD

There is no better way for us to begin this Christmas than to thank God for His gift of redemption through His Son. And, if you don’t know Jesus as your personal Savior, why not pray to Him today? As Peter proclaimed: “Salvation is found in no one else” (Acts 4:12). Merry Christmas, and welcome to the family!

PRAY WITH US

This Christmas Eve, as we begin our Christmas celebration with family and friends, may the Lord give us peace and quietness amid all the busyness, gift-giving, and travel. We pray that we’ll always keep our eyes on Jesus, our Savior from sin.

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

25

*And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

Prince of Peace

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, following the death of his wife and in the midst of the American Civil War. The sixth stanza reads: “And in despair I bowed my head; ‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said; ‘For hate is strong, And mocks the song, Of peace on earth, good-will to men!’” Despite his grief, he clung to hope and faith: “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail, With peace on earth, good-will to men.’”

Jesus was born as our Prince of Peace (v. 14; Isa. 9:6). The word “peace,” or *shalom* in Hebrew, means well-being, flourishing, and wholeness. Whereas sin had made us enemies of God, Christ made possible peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Sin had broken human relationships, but Christ has made possible peace with others.

Peace is given to “those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). As we know from our month’s study, God’s “favor” or grace rests on those who trust in the name of His Son for salvation. This is the only way to please God. On our own, *shalom* is unattainable. That’s why Christ came, and that’s why He’ll come again. When He returns, the whole earth will enjoy *shalom* and worship Him alone (Isa. 9:1–10).

The shepherds modeled the best possible response to this good news (Luke 2:10–11): In faith, they heeded the angels’ message and went to find the baby (vv. 15–16). In faith, they told others about their amazing experience (vv. 17–18). In faith, they gave all the glory to God (v. 20).

APPLY THE WORD

Merry Christmas from all of us at *Today in the Word!* May the peace of Christ rest upon you. If you are craving a quiet moment, listen to the beautiful hymn, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Let Christ’s promise of peace fill your heart and your home as you enjoy worshiping Jesus on this day, His birthday.

PRAY WITH US

As we celebrate the wonder of Christmas today, join us in thanking the Father for sending His Son, our Prince of Peace, and praise Him for His love, care, and guidance in your life. May His peace, *shalom*, reign in our lives!

*We saw his star when it rose
and have come to worship him.*

Matthew 2:2

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

26

The Messiah

Did you ever think about the parallels between the biblical story of Ruth and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth? In *Small Faith, Great God*, one Bible scholar notes: “The city of David, which Ruth and Naomi reached without hope except in God, became the birthplace of the Son of God in whom all the nations would hope. That is why the kings of the world came, at Epiphany, to the city of David—to pay homage to great David’s greater Son. In doing so, they followed Ruth exactly, in coming as foreigners to acknowledge Israel’s God, Naomi’s God, as the one who is sovereign over all human affairs.”

Jesus the Messiah came as part of God’s plan for Israel and for the world (Luke 2:6; Acts 2:36). The Gentile magi, upon their unexpected and very public arrival in Jerusalem, asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” (Luke 2:2). Herod was disturbed (v. 3), because to him the coming Messiah-

King represented a potential change in the political status quo. He liked the status quo, in which he held a decent amount of power.

Resident Bible scholars knew, based on a prophecy of Micah, the birthplace of the Messiah—Bethlehem, the city of David, about six miles south of Jerusalem (vv. 5–6). The magi went there and were led by the star straight to the house with the child Jesus (vv. 9–11). “Overjoyed” at the fulfillment of their quest, “they bowed down and worshiped him” (vv. 10, 11). They also presented Him gifts worthy of a king.

Herod lied to the magi, but God warned them of his deception so they could return home another way (v. 12). How did they know the one true God and the prophecy of a Messiah? Only God knows that full story!

APPLY THE WORD

There’s no better time than Christmas to learn more about Jesus! Earlier this year, *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* was released, edited by Michael Rydelnik (who is an author in our Q&A section) and Edwin Blum. If you enjoy learning about biblical prophecy, you may want to add this book to your personal library.

PRAY WITH US

We praise Christ today as the Messiah of Israel, the one whom the prophets of the Old Testament were waiting for. And now, as people living on this side of the Cross, we pray we live the lives worthy of our Messiah, in anticipation of His Second Coming.

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

27

*The wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.*

Revelation 19:7

Bridegroom of the Church

Weddings today are usually a grand event, many costing thousands of dollars. Prospective brides spend months, even years, preparing for the big day: reserving a church and a banquet hall, finding the perfect dress, ordering flowers, even creating websites to track their preparations. Often, the couple will send out a save-the-date card, inviting their friends and families to anticipate their marriage with them.

Christ's Second Coming will be the Wedding Day of the church! Today begins the final section of our study, focusing on Christ's return and eschatology (the study of the "last things"). Since the church is the bride, then Christ is her Bridegroom. God and Israel were often described this way in the Old Testament, with God as the faithful husband and Israel as a promiscuous wife (see Jer. 3:1–3). We're living in what could be called the "engagement" period. John the

Baptist understood this, as he framed his ministry as being the "best man" (John 3:29). We're to prepare ourselves for the Wedding Day by doing the righteous acts God gives us an opportunity to do, pictured in Revelation as fine linen to wear (Eph. 2:10; Rev. 19:7–9).

When will the big day come? We don't know (Matt. 25:13), but Jesus charged us to be ready. In this parable, the five wise virgins brought enough oil for their lamps, but five foolish ones did not (vv. 2–4). When the bridegroom arrived, the call came: "Come out to meet him!" (v. 6). The foolish were unprepared. What were the consequences? Only the first five were allowed to enter the wedding feast with the bridegroom. The lesson? "Keep watch," meaning that through obedience we should keep ourselves in a state of spiritual readiness "because you do not know the day or the hour" (v. 13). There is no save-the-date card for our Lord's return!

APPLY THE WORD

If you have been married, take a moment to remember how you felt in the days leading up to your wedding. Spend a bit of time reminiscing—recalling the emotions of that day. Then consider the final wedding day in your future, when we will be reunited with Christ, face to face. What a wonderful day that will be!

PRAY WITH US

Lord Jesus, we ask you to guide us and teach us how to be always ready for your return. In our reading today it says, "You do not know the day or the hour," so show us how to keep enough "oil" in our lamps to be ready for the wedding of the Lamb.

*Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty.*

Psalm 24:8

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

28

Lord of Glory

When we say something is “glorious” we mean it is spectacular, amazingly beautiful, almost defying description. The English word “glory” has its origin in the French *gloire* (c. 1200) meaning “the splendor of God or Christ.” It refers to the honor we give a person of great renown or fame. Jesus is the Lord of Glory, both kingly and divine (Ps. 24:7–10). The Hebrew word for *glory* refers to brightness, splendor, magnificence, or majesty. What a stark contrast to His death on the cross!

Paul says the gospel is a mystery that was previously hidden (v. 7). Why? Because if the powers of evil, both human and supernatural, had understood God’s plan, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (v. 8). Since by Him we are saved, we, too, are part of this mystery. The resurrected Christ proved to be truly God. And one day the entire “earth

will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. 2:14).

You and I were destined to share Christ’s glory from eternity past (1 Cor. 2:7; Rom. 8:17; 2 Thess. 2:14). The blessings of salvation are such that no one has ever seen anything like them and no imagination can reach the heights of what “God has prepared for those who love him” (v. 9). Our eternal future is certainly glorious!

The Spirit of God has revealed what was previously hidden and inconceivable: God sent His own Son to become a man, die for the sins of the world, bring in the Gentiles, and make eternal life possible for all who believe (vv. 10–12). We have seen this glory! By this same Spirit, we’re empowered to preach the wisdom of the gospel to a foolish world (vv. 6, 13; 1 Cor. 1:20–25).

APPLY THE WORD

Is your list growing? What new things have you learned about Christ this month? Take time to review your list and highlight one or two truths that stand out for you. How has learning more about Jesus changed the way you will live for Him? And, as you reflect on today’s reading, add this note to your list: *His glory, not mine!*

PRAY WITH US

We thank our glorious Lord today for laying aside His heavenly glory to become a servant, for clothing Himself in complete humility. And our prayer is that He will teach us to turn away from pride, jealousy, and vain ambition and make us ready to serve one another.

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

29

The Lord himself will come down from heaven.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Our Returning King

Are you eager for Christ's return?

Evangelist Billy Sunday once preached: "The mission of the church—the bride of Christ, or body of Christ—is to be ready to meet the bridegroom. When the body of Christ is completed He will reveal Himself to the members who are alive and in this world at that time, and at the same moment they will be caught up to meet those who have gone on before in the air, and from that moment they are forever with the Lord."

The "Rapture" is the name we use to talk about meeting Christ in the air, as described in today's reading (v. 17). This will be followed by the Tribulation and then Christ's Second Coming. From the moment Jesus ascended to the Father, the church has been looking forward to His return: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The Thessalonians believed in Christ's return, but it seems they thought everyone had to stay alive until that time. As pagan Gentiles, they saw death as the end and therefore any believer who died before His return would lose their chance at eternal life. Paul corrected that error, teaching that when Christ comes back, the dead will rise first (vv. 15–16) and those still alive will meet Him in the air (v. 17). No one who trusts in Jesus will miss out!

One day we will hear "the trumpet call of God" and "the voice of the archangel" and our waiting will be over (v. 16). We long for this day: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

APPLY THE WORD

We are to encourage one another to remain faithful. Today's reading says, "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (v. 18). How can you encourage a brother or sister in the Lord today? Send a message on social media, make a phone call, or pay a visit. Together, we can hold tight to the promise that Christ will return!

PRAY WITH US

As we near the end of our Bible study, pray through the list of Jesus' names we've learned this month. During your quiet time pray to the Lord mentioning each name from your list, one by one, with praise, thanksgiving, and worship.

*He is the one whom God appointed
as judge of the living and the dead.*

Acts 10:42

MONDAY
DECEMBER

30

Judge of the Living and the Dead

Theologian Jonathan Edwards said in “The Excellency of Christ”: “[Jesus Christ] is the Judge of the world, and the infinitely just Judge of it, and will not at all acquit the wicked, or by any means clear the guilty. . . . Yet how wonderfully is infinite mercy towards sinners displayed in him! Though he be the just Judge of a sinful world, yet he is also the Savior of the world.”

When He returns, Christ will judge the world. As Peter spoke in the house of Cornelius, he summarized Jesus’ life and ministry: “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (v. 36). Peter began with the ministry of John the Baptist (v. 37), continued on to Jesus’ miracles and other good works (v. 38), then the Crucifixion and Resurrection (vv. 39–41), and finally the mission of the apostles and the

church to preach this good news “and to testify that [Jesus] is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (v. 42). The bottom line: “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (v. 43).

When we stand before the Judge, the basis of His judgment will be faith in Him. There will be no favoritism or injustice in any form (v. 34). There will certainly be no ethnic or cultural prejudice (v. 35), a lesson Peter learned from the “sheet vision” (vv. 9–23). Everyone who trusts in Christ will go to heaven, and everyone who doesn’t will go to hell. Thankfully, Cornelius’s household responded in faith (vv. 44–48). As we draw near to the close of this study and this year, it is a good time to consider whether or not you have placed your faith in Jesus.

APPLY THE WORD

Did you know favoritism is injustice? Favoritism is a sin we often seem willing to tolerate. We need to see it through God’s eyes. James commanded against this sin vehemently, including an example of discrimination against the poor (2:1–13). Showing favoritism is disobedience to the “royal command” to love our neighbor (vv. 8–9)!

PRAY WITH US

As we look back on the past year, we hope that God used *Today in the Word* to minister to you. Thank God for the way He has worked in your life in 2019. We look forward to exploring together our Bible study topics in the new year.

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

31

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

Philippians 2:9

Every Knee Will Bow and Every Tongue Confess!

“All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” is one of the great hymns of the Christian faith. It says a lot that evangelist Billy Graham chose it as one of six songs to be sung at his funeral, and as only one of two hymns to be sung by the congregation on that occasion. As one verse proclaims: “Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball, to Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all!”

This month, we’ve answered the life-changing question, “Who is this Jesus?” One day, every person will answer with this confident statement: “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (v. 11). Today’s reading, most of which may be an early Christian hymn, walks us through the basic points of Christology.

The first three verses describe Jesus’ first Advent, namely, His Incarnation and the mission of redemption (vv. 6–8).

Despite being God, He stepped down to become human, then down again to be a servant, then down again to dying a convict’s death. These deliberate steps of humility were also steps of obedience to His Father and of love for us. Jesus is the perfect example of valuing or esteeming others above ourselves (v. 3). In this and other ways, we’re to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (v. 5).

The second three verses describe Jesus’ second Advent, in other words His Second Coming and (again) mission of redemption (vv. 9–11). The previous steps lead down and now they step up: God the Father “exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” Jesus will take His place as King and rule over all. Throughout the material and spiritual realms, every knee will bow and every tongue confess these truths!

APPLY THE WORD

“Who is this Jesus?” Are you ready with the answer? He’s the One we follow, the One we imitate, the One who is transforming us from the inside out. Take time to review and pray over this month’s study on Jesus, including the notes you began on December 1. Let’s rejoice in these truths about Christ as we begin the new year!

PRAY WITH US

On this last day of the year, we want to thank you for your financial support of *Today in the Word* in 2019. We thank God for a year full of His grace, love, and mercy to us. We hope that you will join us as we begin 2020. Happy New Year!

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are not worth comparing with the glory
that will be revealed.

Romans 8:18

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