

HIS
PLAN
OUR
PURPOSE

IS THERE MORE?

Understanding the Storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation

THE STORIES OF **POWER, CHANGE + HEAVEN**

TEACHER GUIDE

28
nineteenTM

THE WHOLE STORY

Warren Wiersbe writes, “When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”



THE STORY OF **GRACE**

> *January*



THE STORY OF **DELIVERANCE**

> *February*



THE STORY OF **PROMISE**

> *March*



THE STORY OF **FAITH**

> *April*



THE STORY OF **RENEWAL**

> *May*



THE STORY OF **PURPOSE**

> *June, July + August*



THE STORY OF **CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS**

> *August + September*

FEATURED



THE STORY OF **POWER**

> *October*



THE STORY OF **CHANGE**

> *November*



THE STORY OF **HEAVEN**

> *December*

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"YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER
WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT
COMES UPON YOU."

- JESUS

THE STORY OF POWER

The book of Acts picks up where the gospels leave off, specifically the Gospel of Luke since Acts is written by him as well. Acts covers over 30 years of history. In it, Luke shows how the plans and purposes of God worked through history. In particular, how Jesus Christ faithfully and irresistibly built His church! ¹ As Luke's second volume opens, the church does not exist; the Holy Spirit has not yet come to reside in Christ-followers; the apostles possess no power, no courage, no authority, no direction. However, by the last verse of the book, the church will span the Roman Empire from Jerusalem to Rome. ² This is a book of history more than theology, providing insights into how the church began, the leaders evolved, challenges were overcome, and power was supplied by the Holy Spirit. It was time for Jesus to pass the baton of ministry to the disciples, ordinary men that would be called upon to do extraordinary things. Still, they would not be alone even though He was ascending into heaven.

The typical baton passed from one person to another could be described as a stick. However, the baton Jesus gave to His disciples, and us, was more like a stick of dynamite, literally. Jesus promised that these ordinary disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. The word for power in Greek is "dunamis," which is the root word "Nobel" used when naming an explosive stick; we call it dynamite. ³

As we study the Story of Power in the pages of Acts, we will see the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus. It was power from heaven on earth in the lives of Christ-followers then and now. This life-changing power gives us the ability to be bold in the face of conflict, wise in the face of confusion, and confident in the face of chaos. The power of the Holy Spirit introduced in the historical book of Acts is the same explosive power that is indwelling in each and every believer; we need only to ignite the fuse.

Acts is about the activity of the Holy Spirit and the actions of the disciples in spreading the saving message of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the world, beginning in Jerusalem. Our focus in this study will be the first nine chapters as we discover the power of God lived out in the birth of the church.

Oct 3-4	The Power of the Holy Spirit - Acts 1
Oct 10-11	The Power of the Gospel - Acts 2
Oct 17-18	The Power to Stand - Acts 3-4
Oct 24-25	The Power of the Church - Acts 5
Oct 31 - Nov 1	The Power of Salvation - Acts 9

¹ www.soniclight.com/Acts

² Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Acts*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 2016; p.14.

³ www.yourdictionary.com

"BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE
POWER WHEN THE HOLY
SPIRIT HAS COME UPON
YOU; AND YOU SHALL BE
MY WITNESSES BOTH IN
JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL
JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND
EVEN TO THE REMOTEST
PART OF THE EARTH."

A C T S 1 : 8

THE POWER

OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

DATE

October 3 & 4

WEEK

1 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 1

KEY VERSE

Acts 1:8

SETTING THE STAGE

Over the last seven weeks, we have studied Christ in His own words, looking at His *I AM* statements in the book of John. Though the words of Jesus are primarily captured in the gospels, the book of Acts contains the last words spoken by Jesus on this earth to His disciples. Jesus ministered on earth for approximately three and a half years, which is chronicled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Throughout the miles traveled, time shared, miracles performed, and words spoken, Jesus was preparing these men for ministry. During those years, He invested in the lives of twelve disciples, one of whom denied knowing Him and another who betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver and eventually hung himself. Jesus knew that after His resurrection, He would be ascending into Heaven in a mere 40 days, and there would be a significant transition for the eleven remaining disciples.

Naturally, the disciples would be curious and concerned, not knowing what would happen next. There would be anticipation perhaps mixed with anxiety of the unknown. However, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus promised to send a Helper.

JOHN 14:16-17, 25-26 says, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you ... ²⁵ All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” Continued on page 8 >

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Who the Holy Spirit Is
2. The Holy Spirit's Power In Us
3. The Holy Spirit's Purpose Through Us

THINGS TO KNOW

- The arc of Scripture can be communicated in three words: “God with us.”
- According to Jesus, it is to our advantage if He leaves, and the Holy Spirit comes.
- The Holy Spirit's work is to glorify Jesus Christ.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Setting the Stage, continued >

The disciples knew how different their lives were with Jesus, but they had no idea how their lives and ministry would change when the promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. In today's lesson, we will study not only the **power** of the Holy Spirit but the **person** of the Holy Spirit, the promised Helper.

Introduction

In a culture of comfort and contentment, the word “transition” is not usually received as good news. Transitions are especially hard when they just happen to you—with or without your permission, readiness, or preparedness—and you are left scrambling. When you think of transition, perhaps what comes to mind is that all-too-familiar, underlying ache of unsettledness; or the daunting memory of moving away from all your friends and family. Or maybe it is suddenly getting laid off from a job you enjoy, or someone whom you love leaves without any notice. In the hurt and confusion, you are left thinking, “Now what?”

As Acts begins, the disciples find themselves in a state of transition they did not ask for, and at a time they least expected. The disciples are fellowshiping with their resurrected Lord, finally feeling like life was right. They were likely thinking, “We are going to usher in Jesus’ Kingdom, side-by-side with Jesus, and we will change the world!” Except, in the moment of their greatest excitement, Jesus leaves, unannounced, largely unexpected, and ascends into Heaven. And as the disciples look up into the sky, bewildered, deflated, and confused, they ask themselves that same question: “Now what?”

The resurrected Jesus does not abandon His disciples; rather, He “passes the baton” to Another who will empower them and set the church into motion: The Holy Spirit.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus would leave? Why could Jesus not have stayed with us? He is Immanuel, God with us, after all, right? Would it not be better for the world today and the church today if Jesus had never left and stayed instead? This tension is precisely where the book of Acts begins and unfolds. As we will see, the resurrected Jesus does not abandon His disciples; rather, He “passes the baton” to Another who will empower them and set the church into motion: The Holy Spirit.

Luke, who wrote this book, tells us this is a continued story that He began with the Gospel of Luke. The book of Acts is the story of power, beginning with the Holy Spirit. We will look at who the Holy Spirit is, His power in us, and His purpose through us.

ACTS 1:1-8 *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up to Heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*



⁶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

1. WHO THE HOLY SPIRIT IS

According to Jesus, He ascends into Heaven because it is advantageous for the disciples. Jesus aimed to prepare the disciples for this transition well before the time He ascended. In John 16:7, Jesus says, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” Jesus is telling us that it is better for the Spirit to be with us than for Him to be beside us.¹ Think about that. Do we live like that is true? Are we taking Jesus at His Word?

While the Holy Spirit is mentioned numerous times throughout Scripture, the book of Acts features the Holy Spirit and His role, perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, as an active, present part of the church and the Christian life. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 59 different times, more than twice a chapter.² In fact, if you have an older Bible, the book of Acts might be entitled, “The Acts of the Apostles.” Some scholars have pushed back against this title because they think the book would be more appropriately called the “Acts of the Holy Spirit” instead. All through the book, the Holy Spirit guides, indwells and empowers the apostles. The apostles could hardly keep up with all the Holy Spirit was accomplishing.

Whether we have grown up in church or are relatively new believers, we might think that the Holy Spirit seems like the most misunderstood member of the Trinity. Perhaps it is because we do not have a defined mental category for the Holy Spirit like we do for God the “Father” or God the “Son.” The question is, how are we to view God the “Holy Spirit?”

When Jesus said it would be to our **advantage** for Him to leave and for the Holy Spirit to come, He did not mean that He would be giving less of Himself to us necessarily, but perhaps more, **just in a different way**. The Holy Spirit is described in the Old Testament as the Hebrew word, “*Ruakh*,” which refers to God’s personal presence; the Spirit is a person and not merely a force.³ In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is described with Greek Words, “*Hagios Pneuma*.” *Hagios* means “holy, separated.” *Pneuma* means “spirit, wind, breath.”⁴ In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is always bringing life, light, and order where there is death, darkness, and disorder.

In Genesis 1, for example, He brings light and order where there existed darkness and disorder. Throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit comes to empower people to bring forth life, light, and order into the dark and broken areas of the world. Furthermore, at Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and empowered Him to accomplish His ministry. And now the Holy Spirit applies Jesus’ work of salvation and reconciliation to us, indwelling us to bring light and order into the darkness of our world.

When Jesus said it would be to our **advantage** for Him to leave and for the Holy Spirit to come, He did not mean that He would be giving less of Himself to us necessarily, but perhaps more, **just in a different way**.

¹ JD Greear, *Jesus Continued...: Why The Spirit Inside You Is Better Than Jesus Beside You*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2014).

² Ibid p. 12.

³ The Bible Project. “Holy Spirit.” <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/holy-spirit/>

⁴ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

The purpose and power of the Holy Spirit ironically are not about bringing attention to Himself. Essentially, the Holy Spirit comes to bear witness about **Jesus**. This is an important distinction as we observe who the Holy Spirit is and how He works. The Holy Spirit does not come on the scene and exalt Himself; rather, His express purpose is to glorify the Son. Jesus communicated this on the night before His crucifixion as seen in these verses (*emphasis added*):

- **JOHN 15:26:** “When the Advocate comes ... He will testify about **ME**” (NIV)
- **JOHN 16:14:** “He will glorify **ME** because it is from **ME** that He will receive what He will make known to you.” (NIV)
- **JOHN 14:26:** “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in **MY** name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything **I** have said to you.” (NIV)

The purpose and power of the Holy Spirit ironically are not about bringing attention to Himself. Essentially, the Holy Spirit comes to bear witness about Jesus.

I have heard theologians call the Holy Spirit the ‘shy member’ of the Trinity.⁵ This does not mean timid or embarrassed. Rather, He is not seeking attention; in fact, He is trying to give it away. Theologian J.I. Packer calls the work of the Spirit the ‘floodlight ministry’ where He is always shining the light on Jesus, not upon Himself.⁶

Let me give a quick, practical analogy: At our church, we have big floodlights that cast light upon our beautiful buildings and trees. So, whenever people drive by our church, what do they say? Do they say, “Wow... those are amazing floodlights! Think about how powerful they are...”? Of course, not. Naturally, they would say, “Wow, what a beautiful campus,” which can be seen easily and clearly because of the floodlights.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit’s nature and actions as a member of the Trinity is to glorify and testify unto Jesus Christ. He is always pushing us to look to Jesus; to think about Jesus; to live for Jesus, and to make us ‘WOW’ at the true gospel and worship. Throughout the book of Acts, we will see the power of the Holy Spirit, but always the attention is drawn to the saving and life-changing power of Jesus.

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity whose ‘umbrella’ role is to glorify Jesus in a variety of ways in our lives, all the while helping us see and know God better through Jesus Christ.

Now, the Holy Spirit works in many ways: He convicts us of sin (John 16:8); He leads us and guides us (John 16:13); He teaches us (John 14:26); He equips us with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4); He helps us pray (Romans 8:26-27). These are specific things, but they all fall under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit’s ultimate purpose, which is to direct our attention to who Jesus is and what He has done for us. And so, the Holy Spirit helps us in our own lives, increasingly make Jesus LORD in all those various ways, in our money, time, talents, relationships, etc. in our own lives and showing that to other people. This is what being a witness means.

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is a part of the Trinity whose ‘umbrella’ role is to glorify Jesus in a variety of ways **in our lives**, all the while helping us see and know God better through Jesus Christ.

- As our **Comforter**: He wants to reassure us of God’s love for us in Jesus through any circumstance we are walking.
- As our **Counselor**: He wants to remind us of the teachings and lessons of God’s Word.
- As our **Conscience**: He wants to convict us and show us why following Jesus is better than the sin we so often choose. He wants to change our spiritual appetites from within.

⁵ F. Dale Bruner and William Hordern, *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983).

⁶ J.I. Packer, *Keeping in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), p. 57.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER IN US

ACTS 1:4-5 *Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

The disciples were trying to figure out when these things would happen with the Holy Spirit. Jesus had mentioned John's baptism with water and then the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had already experienced the joy of the resurrection of Jesus, and they could not imagine what else might happen as it pertained to the Holy Spirit.

There is much confusion today about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Many Christians think it is experienced after their salvation. The Bible teaches we are baptized by the Holy Spirit when we believe in Christ. If someone asks you if you have received the baptism, and you are a Christian, then the answer is yes. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a universal work of God, a non-repeating work of God, and a unifying work of God. (Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13).⁷

The word translated baptism means to immerse, dip, and submerge.⁸ They would be baptized with the Holy Spirit from within. They were not as concerned about the baptism in the Holy Spirit as they were about the timing of it all. Jesus said it would happen *not many days from now*.

They immediately thought this would be the time of the establishment of the new Kingdom with the resurrected Lord. This was not the case. In response to their misunderstanding, Jesus simply said it was not for them to know the time of such an event. Instead, He wanted them to know something more pertinent to their daily lives.

ACTS 1:7-8 *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

Jesus uses a conjunction that shifts the attention from knowing a time frame to being empowered from within. Verse 8 is a crucial verse not only in the context of the book of Acts but for all believers throughout history. To begin with, it explains that the power of the church comes from the Holy Spirit and not from man.⁹ These words of Jesus are His last to the disciples before He ascended to Heaven.

The last words of Jesus were words of promise. There was no doubt in the words, heart, or mind of Jesus when He told them with boldness and confidence, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."* Jesus wanted them to understand that they would not be alone nor without power.

Often when we see the word power, we immediately think 'strength.' In fact, the Greek word used is *"dunamis"* which is where we get the root word for dynamite. However, the full meaning of the word is "strength, power, ability."¹⁰ This is not a picture of rocket fuel that just explodes without warning or purpose. Jesus is very clear that this power has a specific purpose. Jesus is also clear that this is something they will receive. It is a gift for all who believe.

⁷ *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, Worthy Publishing; 2013, p. 1490.

⁸ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁹ Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 323.

¹⁰ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

We like to think we can handle anything ourselves. We tend to take pride in being able to accomplish something on our own. There is nothing wrong on a practical level with being able to do a job or perform a task based on your skillset or knowledge. However, Jesus did not want us to live this life alone limited by our skills, knowledge, and ability. Jesus loves us so much He wants us to have the unlimited resources of Heaven even after He left this earth. The power of the Holy Spirit within us gives us not just the strength and power which we all want to embrace, but also the ability to accomplish what Jesus has called us to do and be. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not a luxury; it is an absolute necessity.¹¹

The Holy Spirit wants to make the gospel of God's love for us more transparent and more prominent in our lives. However, He does not want us to experience the gospel personally as an end unto itself. There is a purpose for this beyond ourselves; namely, He works **in** us to accomplish something **through** us.

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PURPOSE THROUGH US

ACTS 1:8 *"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

If you look at the end of verse 8, you will see the purpose of the Holy Spirit's work of indwelling and stirring. This power in us is to flow through us, compelling us to a lifestyle of mission in both word and deed. After all, the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to complete His ministry and bring salvation on earth; to be a vessel of redemption. Likewise, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples to be vessels of redemption on earth. That is what "Christian" means – "little Christ."¹²

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to empower us to be witnesses of Jesus. For over three years, these disciples had been following Jesus, learning from Jesus, depending on Jesus mile after mile, city after city, day after day. Jesus was about to ascend to Heaven and wanted them to know without a doubt they would have power and purpose through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus wanted them to be His witnesses, to testify to all Jesus had done in their lives, and all Jesus could do in the lives of others. Ultimately the gift of the Holy Spirit is to draw people's attention to Christ. We do that by telling our story of how Jesus has changed our lives.

These disciples were no different. They had fears and doubts as recorded in the gospels. They had more eagerness at times than discernment, as recorded in the gospels. Yet these were the ones Jesus had invested His life in and to whom He was leaving His ministry. In a few days, they would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) as Jesus was promising in these words.

The empowering was to begin in Jerusalem. Ironically, it was the city of the crucifixion. This was the city where they put Jesus, the Son of God to death on a cross and buried Him in the tomb. Jesus wanted their story of testimony to begin right where they were present in their daily lives. But this was also the city of the resurrection.

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¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, Wiersbe Bible Commentary, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 323.

¹² Jesus.Net. *Do you know where the word 'Christian' comes from?*
<https://jesus.net/miracle/do-you-know-where-the-word-christian-comes-from/>

The power promised was not to enable the apostles to live godly lives, though the Holy Spirit does enable believers to do that. What is promised to the apostles is the power to fulfill their mission, that is, to speak, and bear oral testimony to others.¹³ This was to begin in Jerusalem and expand like concentric circles; each location had unique barriers, whether religious or culture. Regardless of the location, belief system, culture, or challenge, they would not be alone, nor are we. The Holy Spirit indwells and empowers us to be a witness.

We can do this in three broad categories: in our lifestyle, in our words, and in our gifts.

A. In Our Lifestyles

When the Holy Spirit indwells, empowers, and stirs us to see and to value Jesus as Lord, we stop trying to be the Lord over certain domains in our life. Instead, His lordship begins to extend to every domain, every category, every area in our hearts and lives.

The Great Commission is not something we do when we take a trip overseas with our church. It is a trajectory of life, of saying “Jesus is Lord” over every domain in our hearts. Before we seek the “unreached people groups” thousands of miles away, the Holy Spirit is seeking to reach the “unreached categories” in our hearts that have not experienced the lordship of Jesus.

B. With Our Mouth

The Holy Spirit’s power also works with purpose through our words. As Scripture says, “*for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks*” (Luke 6:45, ESV). As such, out of the overflow of the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts, our mouths will speak about Jesus’ good, saving lordship. Throughout the book of Acts, we see the apostles speaking time and time again the truth of the gospel regardless of the risk/reward factor. They were empowered to fulfill this purpose.

C. In Our Gifts

Lastly, the Holy Spirit indwells, empowers, and stirs us to leverage our gifts and resources for the service of the Kingdom of God—the extensive dominion of Jesus’ lordship on earth, the church. Not only does God entrust us with “earthly” gifts such as resources and abilities, the Holy Spirit also equips us with “spiritual” gifts so that we can each serve the mission and Kingdom of God. Whether your gift is leadership, service, giving, mercy, encouragement, teaching, or wisdom—we all have a place in the Kingdom. As the Apostle Paul writes later to the church of Corinth, “*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*” (1 Corinthians 12:4, ESV).

Not only does God entrust us with “earthly” gifts such as resources and abilities, the Holy Spirit also equips us with “spiritual” gifts so that we can each serve the mission and Kingdom of God.

Jesus wanted His disciples then and now to be witnesses. That is our challenge even today in the world in which we live. We begin with our Jerusalem as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share our story with our sphere of influence.

¹³ www.soniclight.com/acts

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The overarching theme of Scripture ultimately tells a story of God with us. From the beginning of the Bible in Genesis to the end in Revelation, God relentlessly pursues His people. Each step of the way, God wanted His people to know Him personally and live a life that reflected the life-changing relationship.

God so desperately wanted to be with us that He came to earth in the form of flesh and blood. Jesus was fully human and fully divine, born as a baby in Bethlehem, then ascending to Heaven at the age of 33. It was at this juncture of history recorded in Acts 1 that God, through Jesus, told humanity that He would be with us continually through the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit is in the presence of the Holy Spirit, both in our individual lives and collectively in the church. Power from the Holy Spirit is not limited to strength beyond the ordinary; that power also involves courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority.¹⁴ The disciples would need all these gifts to fulfill their mission, as will we.

God's plan has always been to be with us wherever we are in whatever time span. The Holy Spirit fulfills God's plan as He unveils our purpose to be His witnesses beginning right where we are.

¹⁴ Life Application Bible Commentary: Acts; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 1999, p. 9.

THE POWER

OF THE GOSPEL

DATE

October 10 & 11

WEEK

2 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 2

KEY VERSES

Acts 2:46-47

SETTING THE STAGE

Jesus had ascended into heaven. The disciples were alone, or so it seemed. For over three years, they had relied on the physical presence of Jesus to lead, teach, and inspire them in every town and village. There was a dependence on Jesus that had become comfortable, and now He was gone. Before Jesus left, He told them He would send the Holy Spirit, and they would receive power in a matter of days.

He gave them no description of how the Holy Spirit would look or sound, nor was any detail given of how they would receive power. They waited day after day and then on the day of Pentecost it happened. "Pentecost" is a Greek word, transliterated into English, that means "fiftieth." This feast fell on the fiftieth day after Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits.¹ This was one of the three pilgrim festivals where Jews from all over would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate. To the traditional Jewish community, it had always been a day of thanking God for the early harvest, trusting in a later harvest. What was understood in the physical realm of the Torah was made manifest in the spiritual realm of new covenant times.²

When it happened, the roar of a violent wind came down with what appeared to be tongues of fire. It was unlike anything they had experienced before. In Acts 2:1-13, Luke describes these events and notes that people came from as far away as Rome, Crete, Asia, Medes, and other places. *Continue on page 16 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Heart Pierced
2. The Mind Changed
3. The Hands and Feet in Motion

THINGS TO KNOW

- The word *gospel* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term *god-spell*, meaning "good story," a rendering of the Latin *evangelium* and the Greek *euangelion*, meaning "good news" or "good telling."³
- Gospel Unity comes by seeing our deepest commonality: a common problem (sin), a common solution (salvation), a common savior (Jesus).

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Setting the Stage, continued > In Acts 1:8, Jesus said they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, which is fulfilled progressively throughout the book of Acts. However, here at Pentecost, some had come from over 1500 miles away to be part of the festival, not realizing that they would see, hear and feel the power of heaven on earth as the church was birthed.

Introduction

The supernatural dramatic sequence of events in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost caused the people to ask a similar question to what we have been asking all year in this Bible Study Series, “Is There More?” Acts 2:12 says, *And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”* This question serves as the springboard for Peter to preach with high confidence and boldness the first sermon in the book of Acts. Peter laid out the gospel of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. After the sermon, people asked another question in Acts 2:37, *“Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”* It is that question that leads us to the lesson today.

1. THE HEART PIERCED

ACTS 2:37 *Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”*

There are thousands of people gathered in Jerusalem from far away places, speaking different languages. Then, they all experience something no one expected: the supernatural coming of the Holy Spirit described as the sound of roaring wind and the appearance of tongues of fire. Then, the supernatural met the extraordinary with the hearing of the believers in their own native languages (Acts 2:1-12). It was in this context that they asked the question in verse 12, “what does this mean?”

Never be afraid
to stay in an
uncomfortable
situation long
enough to
understand.

They were confused at first but not willing to leave this supernatural, extraordinary experience simply because they did not understand what was happening. Rather, the people asked a heartfelt question, seeking to understand.

How often do we want to run away from a circumstance, person, or conversation because we do not understand what is transpiring? How often have we wondered what God was up to in a specific scenario? Never be afraid to ask the question they asked 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Never be afraid to stay in an uncomfortable situation long enough to understand.

Their question led to an extraordinary sermon about the supernatural life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter preached with boldness and confidence approximately 50 days after he



¹ www.soniclight.com/acts

² *The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, Henrickson Publishers Peabody, MA, 2016; p. 1560.

³ britannica.com/topic/gospel-new-testament

had denied three times even knowing Jesus. Peter's sermon was the embodiment of the power of the gospel. He connected the writings of the prophet Joel as well as the Psalmist to show the overarching plan of God from ancient times to the present. (Acts 2:14-36)

The sermon not only touched their hearts, but Scripture says it "pierced" their hearts. The word used means to "prick below the surface."⁴ The root word is the same one used to describe what the soldiers did with the spear in the side of Jesus on the cross. The power of the gospel pierced their hearts. It captured their attention to the point that they asked another personal question though in a gathering of thousands, "*brethren, what shall we do?*"

It is a question every person must ask when their heart is pierced with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries, people have asked that same question when moved in the depths of their soul after hearing the good news of Christ. The words of the gospel are words of hope, love, sacrifice, and eternal life. The power of the gospel is the power to pierce one's heart to ask the question, "what shall I do?"

Anytime someone hears the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there will be a response. Whether it is voiced or not, there is a questioning of "what shall I do" with what I just heard. The response may be to ignore the gospel. Perhaps the response is to be curious enough to listen to this gospel again in the future; or there is a stirring inside that cannot be shaken. For thousands of the people gathered there in Jerusalem listening to the power of the gospel from Peter's sermon, there was a stirring to the point of sincerity, with the asking what the next step would be for them. Their heart was pierced, but what about their mind?

2. THE MIND CHANGED

ACTS 2:38-41 *Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.*

Peter was very clear with his response to their question, "Repent." The Greek word for repent is "*Metanoia*," which means "to change one's mind."⁵ So often, people think repenting is merely turning away from a specific sin or even lifestyle. But the meaning is more in-depth than simply changing directions; it includes changing one's mind. Peter realized that emotionally their hearts were pierced. The power of the gospel penetrates below the surface. However, the power does not end with the emotions; it also becomes a matter of the mind.

According to Dr. Thomas Constable, if a person thinks of repentance as just turning from sinful practices (reforming oneself), repentance becomes a good work that a person does. This kind of repentance is not necessary for salvation for two reasons. First, this is not how the gospel preachers in the New Testament used the word, as one can see from the meaning of the Greek word *metanoia* (defined above). Second, other scriptures make it clear that good works, including turning from sin, have no part in justification

The power of the gospel penetrates below the surface. However, the power does not end with the emotions; it also becomes a matter of the mind.

⁴ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁵ Ibid.

(Ephesians 2:8-9). God does not save us based on what we do for Him but because of what He has done for us in Christ. Repentance, by definition, is not an act separate from trusting Christ. It is part of the process of believing.⁶

The next step is to change their minds so that their belief changes their behavior. Jesus wants a relationship with us as individuals, not just as people who “do or do not do” some action. The changed mind will cause a changed behavior. Peter challenged them to be baptized, not to be saved, but as a visual picture of what was happening in their mind and heart. To be honest, some have taken this one verse and tried to build a salvation doctrine that requires baptism. However, when looking at the totality of Scripture, it is evident that baptism is a way to testify to your salvation, to raise your flag in a public way so that others know that you are identifying with Jesus.

**The result of a
changed heart,
mind, and life
is action.**

The result of a changed heart, mind, and life is action. It is not the acts themselves that provide salvation, just like baptism itself does not give salvation, but actions like baptism are a result of what has taken place in one’s heart and mind. Someone who identifies with Jesus as a Christ-follower understands the power of the gospel to set their feet and hands in motion.

3. THE HANDS AND FEET IN MOTION

ACTS 2:41-42 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (ESV)*

This was the birth of the church, and it was a megachurch with 3,000 souls confessing, believing, repenting, and being baptized. The Holy Spirit had moved in such a way during Peter’s sermon that lives were changed for all eternity. However, these people did not sit back and simply soak it all in until the next sermon; they took action. In fact, the book of Acts is all about action.

Immediately, they took four key actions:

1. Devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching which for us would be going to Worship and Bible Study;
2. Participated in fellowship, which is about building community with other believers;
3. Broke bread together, taking communion remembering the Lord’s sacrifice followed by an actual meal together; and
4. Prayed, which caused them to focus on their personal relationship with God through Jesus, communicating with their Heavenly Father.

These actions became a lifestyle for this new church; and, there were more:

ACTS 2:46-47 *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV)*

⁶ www.soniclight.com/acts

Looking at the first phrase in these verses, we can see a blueprint of **what** a gospel community looks like practically and the unity it enjoys in action. From this passage, you can see three different rhythms at work in the church that contributed to their overall sense of unity: **consistency** (“day by day”), **corporate gathering** (“attending together”), and **personal connection** (“breaking bread in their homes”).

These three rhythms should not be too surprising, especially as you consider your own closest friendships. Whether it is weekly texts, phone calls, or meetings, you share at least a level of **consistent** presence and communication. You likely spend time with your friend in relatively large group settings and **corporate gatherings**, where you share social experiences and memories. And what makes your relationship truly close is the **personal connection**, the sharing of concerns, struggles, and blessings in a context of trust and vulnerability.

Unity in the church is the byproduct of a community demonstrating consistency, corporate gathering, and personal connection. The strongest church cultures are those who are not just doing one or two rhythms well but are executing all three rhythms in an equally, balanced way. And as the early church formed, we see all three of these characteristics operating together. They are meeting consistently and doing so in both larger, corporate groups and smaller, personal groups.

Unity in the church is the byproduct of a community demonstrating consistency, corporate gathering, and personal connection.

However, what makes their unity, so astounding is that the communal context in which these three rhythms are taking place is not one of independent commonality. These were people from different cultures as far away as Rome and Medes. The early church was modeling a sense of unity with others with whom they did not share many commonalities. And as such, their unity was a sight to behold in a society generally fragmented by a lack of consistency, corporate gathering, and personal connection, and divided by its variety of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and background.

At Pentecost, approximately 3,000 people of varied backgrounds began living in unity according to these three rhythms. The largest facets of diversity—such as skin color, language, socioeconomic class, background—were not barriers for gospel unity **to** take place so much as they were indications that gospel unity **was** taking place! In a church so diverse yet so united, the Holy Spirit was lifting up the gospel for the world to see: a power that brings unity to all types of people.

How does the gospel practically create unity in the lives of believers, especially those unlike one another in every imaginable earthly description? The answer is in Acts 2.

As Peter preaches, he communicates that unity between all people is possible because all people share the most significant commonality with one another; namely, the **common problem** that we are sinners in rebellion to God. All people share a **common need**, salvation. And in Christ Jesus, we are indiscriminately and impartially given a **common Savior**—not by background, or class, or status, or deed—but by faith.

The Holy Spirit enables people to see the truest, deepest thing about themselves, that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. And therefore, they share more in common before God spiritually than any other commonality they could ever share **superficially** in the world.

The Holy Spirit enables people to see the truest, deepest thing about themselves, that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. And therefore, they share more in common before God spiritually than any other commonality they could ever share superficially in the world.

When believers recognize this deep commonality in the gospel message, a type of unity takes action among them, practically, according to all three rhythms:

- **“Day by day”** - The consistency of their diverse assembly showed that the church was truly a community of people, not just a one-time phenomenon.
- **“Together”** - The assembling of their diverse community in mass showed the world how the gospel brings together all different types of people and cultures, united on a common idea that supersedes worldly boundaries.
- **“In their homes”** - The sharing of a meal in the context of someone’s home showed that different people can not only unite around a common idea but that these people can share a personal connection because of the common idea. Church community extended beyond the walls of the formal “church building.”

They put their hands and feet into action in spiritual and practical ways, including charity to others. They were described as having “generous hearts,” which is often associated with financial situations. But it goes beyond mere financial assistance, becoming a lifestyle of sharing what you have with others. The early church in Acts was known as a group of people who helped those in need. Not to receive anything in return, but they helped because the power of the gospel changed their hearts.

Charity adopts the posture of Christ, who humbled Himself to become a servant, obedient to death on the cross. (Philippians 2:3-8) Charity comes at a cost, but that is the heart of the gospel message: “I will take the costs into myself so that I can have relationship with you.” Thus, charity happens towards one another when we take our unity with one another seriously.

Believers already share the most profound unity in Christ, which supersedes our smaller, less significant differences that might push us apart. Whether the difference is of opinion, of skin color, or of background, Christians can share unity because the blood of Jesus pulls us together and is stronger, deeper, and more precious than the sin and the differences that push us apart. In Christ, we have more in common with someone who does not share any earthly similarities than with someone without Christ, who shares every earthly similarity.

If unity is what Christ died for us to share, then charity is what Christ died for us to practice.

And charity happens when we act upon the unity that already exists. If unity is what Christ died for us to share, then charity is what Christ died for us to practice. Unity is charity in action.

This often quoted, memorable phrase comes to mind: **“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”** Meaning, it is of utmost importance for us to unite on things of primary importance, such as the gospel message. In areas of secondary importance, we can give each other the liberty to disagree; but in all things, we must be charitable towards one another and not divide over non-essentials.

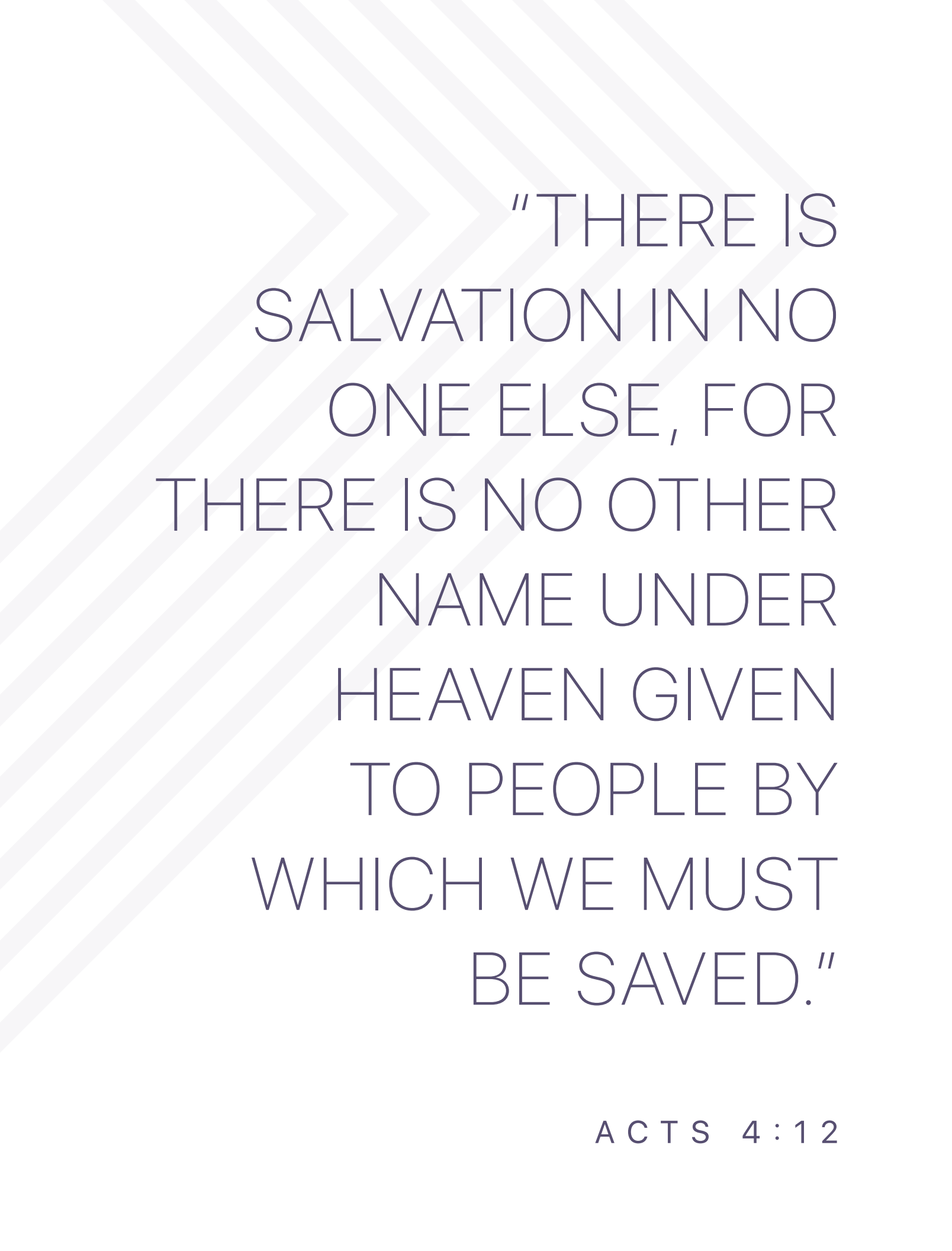
The church saw dramatic fruitfulness because of their devotion to the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, unity, and charity. They made an impact on their community and beyond. Notice in verses 46 and 47 the phrase, “day by day,” their lifestyle was such that they saw people saved “day by day.” It was not just about numbers; it was about changed lives. Lives of individuals who came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as their hearts were pierced, their minds were changed, and their hands and feet were in motion to perpetuate the power of the gospel to others.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The power of the gospel is the power of heaven. God showed the early church His power at Pentecost. But that same power is still available today. The same Holy Spirit is with us today to empower us to live changed lives that make a difference in our community and country.

So often, we overcomplicate the gospel and over-program the message. Let us learn from the early church. Let us embrace the four guiding principles they embraced in devoting themselves to biblical teaching, fellowship, communion/ community, and prayer. We are to be the hands and feet of Christ.

The book of Acts is a blueprint of how the disciples carried the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. But it all started in Jerusalem. It all started when they realized the power of the gospel. God's plan for each one of us as Christ-followers is to live out the gospel with purpose "day by day" within our circle of influence.



"THERE IS
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WHICH WE MUST
BE SAVED."

A C T S 4 : 1 2

THE POWER

TO STAND

DATE

October 17 & 18

WEEK

3 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 3-4

KEY VERSE

Acts 4:12

SETTING THE STAGE

The power of the gospel continues to change lives in Acts. Chapters 3 and 4 show both physical and spiritual changes to the lives of people who are open to the gospel. The audience of these chapters is Jewish, including high ranking officials who could be intimidating. Yet, Peter and John knew they were not speaking in their own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit. They knew that although Jesus was no longer with them physically, the power and authority was still there in spirit and truth.

In this chapter, Peter goes from preaching to the masses to fixing his gaze on a beggar who was lame since birth, making the message and power of the gospel personal. This healing is the first of fourteen miracles in the book of Acts.¹ Though there was and would continue to be opposition along the way, Peter and John have found a new boldness. They have matured from the men they were mere months before in the Upper Room with Jesus, and when they scattered in the garden at the arrest of Jesus. It was at the foot of the cross that Jesus asked John to care for His mother, Mary. It was on the beach that Jesus asked Peter to shepherd the sheep. Peter and John had indeed matured in their faith, their responsibility, and their boldness. They were learning firsthand what it meant to have the power to stand.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Standing in Jesus' Name
2. Standing with Boldness
3. Standing in Unity

THINGS TO KNOW

- Peter and John are continuing the ministry that had begun almost four years before on the shores of Galilee when they were called by Jesus to "follow Him."
- The Greek word "Parresia" means "boldness, courage, confidence, openness." It occurs five times in Acts, three times in Chapter 4 alone.²

THE POWER TO STAND

Introduction

It was May of 1940. Three hundred thousand British troops were retreating across France fleeing the Nazi war machine. The Germans had devastated the British Expeditionary Force and were now sending warplanes to raid the English coast. A Nazi invasion of the British Isles loomed. With her army in shambles and no allies (this was 18 months before the USA entered the war), Britain appeared ready to fall. Members of the British War Cabinet pressured Prime Minister Winston Churchill to either sue for peace or resign his office. They thought their country could not stand in the face of such evil.

But Churchill refused to entertain surrender. He told Parliament:

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. (Winston Churchill, “Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat,” Speech Before Parliament, London: May 13, 1940.)³

Churchill and Great Britain would stand up to the Nazis, and they paid a high cost over the next year as the Germans dropped thousands of tons of bombs on their island. But German boots never touched the English shoreline, and Great Britain kept standing until—with help—they won their victory.

Today’s lesson in Acts reminds us that Christians have the power to stand up in the face of significant opposition and win an eternal victory. In Acts 3 and 4, we will see how God’s power gives us the strength to stand in Jesus’ name, stand with boldness, and stand in unity with the church.

1. STANDING IN JESUS’ NAME

ACTS 3:1-5 *Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. ² And a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about*



¹ www.soniclight.com/acts

² www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

³ <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/blood-toil-tears-and-sweat/>

to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. ⁴ But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” ⁵ And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.

Peter and John were going to the temple to pray. They had no other agenda than to worship God through a time of prayer. But a lame man is there, as he probably was most days, begging alms from those entering the temple. This lame man did not go there because he heard about Peter and John, nor did he go to worship God through prayer; he was trying to survive another day. This was a common scene near the temple.

While Peter and John were going to pray, they heard this man and “fixed their gaze” on him. They chose not to walk by ignoring the man but to stop long enough to focus on him. And then they took the lead and said, “Look at us!” They wanted to make eye contact with this man who was begging for alms aimlessly. This lame beggar “began to give them his attention,” fully expecting something to be readily given to him, food, money, a token of some sort. They did not have anything tangible for him, but what they had would be life-changing.

They did not have anything tangible for him, but what they had would be life-changing.

ACTS 3:6-8 “But Peter said, ‘I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!’ ⁷ Then, taking him by the right hand he raised him up, and at once his feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ So he jumped up and started to walk, and he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.”

The lame man was asking for a hand out. Instead, they gave him a hand up. The lame man is miraculously healed as the Apostle Peter helps him up and tells him to walk in Jesus’ name. An astonished crowd gathers, and Peter takes the opportunity to preach a sermon, then gets arrested, preaches another sermon, defies temple leaders, and goes home without a scratch. As a result of this miracle, more individual miracles of salvation occur as “many of those who heard the message believed.” (Acts 4:4) This episode wonderfully narrates the power God grants people to stand—both physically and spiritually—in Jesus’ name.

The man, lame “from birth” (Acts 3:2), experienced physical power to stand. Like the man born blind in John 9, the lame man’s condition is not a consequence of his personal sin but a consequence of being born into a fallen and sinful world. Suffering like this was not part of God’s original creation, and it will not be part of our heavenly home. But for now, many of us suffer the effects of living in a fallen world, and it can make us feel powerless.

But God is not powerless. Scripture promises that these “present sufferings” are “not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). And God gives glimpses of that glory throughout Scripture in the form of miracles. One theologian defines miracles as “a less common kind of God’s activity in which He arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.”⁴ The lame man’s healing is a perfect example of such an activity. However, the end result was not the miracle itself. It was pointing to something more substantial, and Peter made it clear that it was pointing to Christ,

ACTS 3:16 “And on the basis of faith in His name, it is **the name of Jesus** which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, p. 355.

When Peter says, “*By faith in His name, the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man...*” he is not saying that Jesus’ name works like a “magic word” to heal diseases. Instead, he is faithfully declaring the life-giving power and authority of Jesus over the lame man’s suffering. A “name” throughout the Bible often explains everything true about a person.⁵ So, when Peter says, “*in His name, the name of Jesus,*” he is preaching a mini-sermon that he would elaborate in Acts 3:12-26. Peter is saying that Jesus is alive and powerful (Acts 3:14-15; 26). He is saying that Jesus is God’s promised Messiah, who would restore creation (Acts 3:21). Finally, he is explaining that Jesus is co-equal with God since only God has the power to heal (Deuteronomy 32:39). The life, promise, and power of God come to people through the person of Jesus Christ.

When Peter says, “*By faith in His name...*” (Acts 3:16) he is likely declaring his own faith in the person and power of Jesus. This should encourage Christians to pray in faith—like Peter did—“*in Jesus’ name*” for the physical healing of believers and unbelievers alike. Faith is a conduit or channel that connects us to God’s gracious power in our lives.⁶ And although God does not answer every faithful prayer for physical healing with an immediate miraculous “yes,” He does promise an even greater eternal healing for those who repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ.

The greatest miracle anyone can experience is the ability to stand before God forgiven of sins, made alive with Christ, and saved for eternal life.

This greater healing is what 2,000 people experienced that day in Acts 3. Praise God for the spiritual healing and life He promises to everyone who believes “*in Jesus’ name.*” Physical and spiritual healing are overlapping categories in the Bible. The ability to stand physically healed is a miracle that believers should pray for “*in Jesus name,*” but, the greatest miracle anyone can experience is the ability to stand before God forgiven of sins, made alive with Christ, and saved for eternal life. And that too is “*in His name.*” As Peter tells the temple leaders the next day, “*There is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name under heaven** given to people by which we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:12)

2. STANDING WITH BOLDNESS

ACTS 4:13-14 “*When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition.*” (ESV)

You would think that the miraculous healing of a man born lame and the miraculous conversion of 2,000 souls would quiet any opposition to the early church. In fact, it only stirred up the resistance. Acts 4 begins with the city leaders being “greatly annoyed” by the Apostles’ teaching, specifically about the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:2). So, they arrested them, threw them in jail for the night, and brought them before the high priest for questioning.

Remember that John and Peter had been here before knowing what had happened to Jesus after He had been arrested and taken before the high priest for what would be one of six illegal trials. The temptation to fear must have been nauseating as they walked the same path that led to Jesus’ crucifixion. But in their time of fear, God supplied them with boldness to stand and speak the truth about Jesus.

⁵ John B. Polhill, *ESV Study Bible*, note on Acts 3:16, p. 2086.

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, Pensacola, Fl. Chapel Library, 2015, p. 44-45.

The scene highlights God's emboldening power when the priests ask the ultimate question:

ACTS 4:7-8, 10 *"By what power or in what name have you done this?"⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them '...¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you have crucified and Whom God raised from the dead—by Him this man is standing here before you healthy.'"*

The temple leaders may have expected these uneducated fishermen to wilt under the heat of their scare tactics, just as Peter had done in denying Christ after His arrest in the garden. However, a lot had changed in Peter's life since then, even though it had only been a matter of months at best. Jesus had died, been buried, raised from the dead, appeared for 40 days, ascended into heaven seated at the right hand of God, sent the Holy Spirit, and birthed the church of what was now 5,000 people. In short, the Triune God's plan for saving humanity had reached its tipping point, and Peter now had the resources to stand up and push back against the opposition.

Peter's Spirit-filled boldness amazed and silenced the opposition, but it did not end it. Resistance to God, the gospel, and God's people had persisted since Genesis 3:15, when God announced ongoing hostilities between His people and Satan's minions. The early believers even reflected on this fact after Peter and John were released as they prayed Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26).

Knowing that boldness will be required of modern believers just as it was of Peter and the early church, consider three keys to standing boldly for the gospel in the face of opposition:

- **Be clear about the gospel message:** *"There is Salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)
- **Fear God more than man:** *"Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:19-20)
- **Pray:** *"When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly."* (Acts 4:31)

The Holy Spirit, who filled Peter, John, and the early church with boldness, is the same Holy Spirit dwelling inside every believer.

The Holy Spirit, who filled Peter, John, and the early church with boldness, is the same Holy Spirit dwelling inside every believer. By the power He supplies, stand boldly for the gospel, and silence the opposition!

3. STANDING IN UNITY

ACTS 4:32 *"Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind..."*

Emblazoned on the Great Seal of the United States is the motto, *E Pluribus Unum*: "out of many, one." The phrase is said to describe the unity of our fifty states. Though that is a principle for us today, in the first century for the early church, it was reality. We have seen the common thread of unity in the last two weeks in our lessons on the Story of Power. It was foundational for the early church to be unified in spirit, purpose, power, and message. Part of their impact in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world was their testimony of being unified as the body of Christ.

The church had inherited the poetry of David, who sang: *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!"* (Psalm 133:1). They also had the wisdom of David's less-poetic-but-more-

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Spirit of God,
enabling them to
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practical son Solomon: “if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

More importantly, they had the Holy Spirit of God, enabling them to stand in unity. Just as Acts 2 ends with a picture of the church’s devotion to “*the Apostle’s teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer*” (Acts 2:42), this episode of

Acts ends with a similar picture of church unity. In fact, a closer look at the whole of Acts 3-4 shows three clear types of unity among the early church that churches today should strive to emulate.

A. United around the Word

After His resurrection, Jesus told the disciples that “*everything written about [Him] in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled*” (Luke 24:44). Then He “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:45). As a result, Peter, John, and the early church were devouring their Bibles, which for them would be our Old Testament. This is clear from the fact that whenever they speak in Acts, they directly quote or allude to Scripture. In Acts 3-4, the Apostles reference the Old Testament at least nine separate times (Acts 3:13, 18, 21, 22-23, 24, 25; 4:11, 24, 25-26). And they are especially clear about one critical biblical fact: Jesus Christ fulfills the Old Testament prophecies. (Acts 3:18; 4:27-28).

Churches today should be equally united around God’s Word. And like the Apostles, we should view Scripture in a Christ-centered way. Moreover, because the Apostles were living, breathing, witnesses to Jesus Christ, and because Jesus had “*opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*” their words recorded in the 27 books of the New Testament should unite churches even today.

Just as the lame man was “*holding on to Peter and John*” even after he had gained the ability to jump, walk, and leap (Acts 3:11), churches should “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching” found in the Bible (2 Timothy 1:13). Churches that fail to unite around God’s Word almost always lose the gospel clarity, fear of God, and prayer commitment that are necessary to stand against dark forces that oppose God’s people.

B. United in Order

It is also clear from Acts 3-4 that the early church was committed to order. Some people consider the early church as an ancient hippie commune with no rules. They might point to the sense of awe, the impromptu gatherings, and the sharing of their wealth as evidence. But such a view overlooks evidence pointing to order:

- **Leadership:** The Apostles held unquestioned authority over the rest of the church (Acts 5:13).
- **Gatherings:** Until the church is scattered in Acts 8, the center of their meeting was the temple (Acts 2:46) at set daily prayer times (Acts 3:1).
- **Message:** The Apostles preaching in Jerusalem consistently focuses on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, the resurrection, and the call for repentance and faith (Acts 3:12-26).
- **Sharing:** Acts describes the way the church shared possessions in an orderly way, with property liquidated then distributed through the Apostles. When this became a burden for the Apostles, they created a new office to handle distribution (Acts 6:2-5).

The Apostles modeled orderly worship and fellowship. Great churches unite in much the same way today. They follow trustworthy leaders as prescribed by Scripture. They gather consistently in one location, starting and finishing services on time. They teach from an organized body of

biblical doctrine. They create processes for meeting members' needs. By keeping order, churches ensure that they will spread the gospel in their community for as long as possible.

C. United in Meeting Needs

Jesus said: *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21), and the early church showed their *"one heart"* most clearly in the way they shared wealth and possessions. The example of the church in Acts 4:32-35 sounds impossible to attain for some Christians today. *"Claiming no possessions," "selling houses and lands,"* and *"no needy people"* run against the grain of modern American experience. Two things help us apply this Scripture.

First, some believers need to feel challenged by this text. Greed is a sin that continues to tempt Christians long after they turn their lives over to Christ – especially in a wealthy country like the United States. If you are struggling with greed, look for the need in your church and seek to meet it. If you are struggling with need, be patiently encouraged by the Apostles. At the beginning of Acts 3, Peter said they had *"neither silver nor gold,"* but by the end of Acts 4, there was not a needy person among them.

Second, for churches today, the principles of generosity in meeting needs still apply. Likely, these early Christians were still tithing at the temple in addition to the sharing of possessions and assets. Of special concern was freeing up the Apostles up to pray, study, and preach God's Word. (Acts 6:4) The focus was on meeting fellow believers' needs for the sake of spreading the gospel.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

By October of 1940, the Royal Air Force had shot down hundreds of German bombers and saved their country from Nazi invasion. After that, there was no threat of the Germans taking over Great Britain. Unfortunately, the Nazis embarked on a ruthless terror campaign from November 1940 to June 1941. Night after night, they flew small missions aimed at bombing civilian targets. For Britain, the threat of falling had passed, but the brutal opposition of the Nazis remained.

Through those terrible months, Winston Churchill and his fellow Brits stood courageously committed to total victory, living under the famous motto: "Keep Calm and Carry On." And just when the Brits could carry on no more, the American superpower entered the war and gave new life to the British war effort.

To be a Christian is to live in the face of an equally brutal though sometimes not as visible opponent. But God has assured His people the victory, and even when they feel weak and powerless, He is able to keep them standing in unity, standing with boldness, and standing in Jesus' name. The plan of God shapes our purpose, as we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to make a stand for all eternity.

AND EVERY DAY,
IN THE TEMPLE
AND FROM HOUSE
TO HOUSE, THEY
KEPT RIGHT ON
TEACHING AND
PREACHING JESUS
AS THE CHRIST.

A C T S 5 : 4 2

THE POWER

OF THE CHURCH

DATE

October 24 & 25

WEEK

4 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 5-6

KEY VERSE

Acts 5:42

SETTING THE STAGE

As we have seen, the Book of Acts is fast-paced in both writing and story. It is truly an “active” book. There was excitement at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the healing of the lame man. Even though there were times of opposition by the political and religious leaders of the day, people were excited about being part of this new movement in following Jesus as “the Church.” Believers were being added daily to the thousands who were already part of the body of Christ.

These believers had learned to stand in unity and care for one another. And yet, at the beginning of Acts 5, stark reality is revealed in the story. Quite literally and figuratively, the truth stops dead in its tracks. In those days, people had given their resources for the good of others in the Church who needed food, money, or other items. It was not mandated to sell your possessions and give the money to the Church; it was a free choice even down to the specifics of what you gave.

Ananias and Saphira, a married couple in the Church, conspired to sell a piece of property for the benefit of the Church but hold some of the profit back while representing they were giving the full amount. For some, it would be considered a simple lie. However, this “simple lie” had devastating consequences. Ananias and Saphira did not come together presenting the money, but separately, hours apart. Ananias came first, speaking the lie that the amount given was the full amount received. When confronted by Peter as to why he had chosen to lie about this matter, a lie to God, not men, Ananias fell dead. Saphira, who came a couple of hours later and made the same claim, told the same lie and also suffered the same consequence, death on the spot. *Continued on page 32 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Ready to Offer Hope
2. Ready to Obey
3. Ready to Speak
4. Ready to Rejoice

THINGS TO KNOW

- The High Priest was the supreme religious leader for the Israelites yet did not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
- The Sadducees were a religiopolitical group who worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome but were more concerned with politics than religion.¹

THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

Setting the Stage, continued > Understandably this caught the attention of the people in Jerusalem. Acts 5:11 says, “And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.” Their story provides the backdrop for our verses today.

Introduction

Currently, the Church is experiencing an unprecedented season of governmental restrictions and guidelines for gatherings. While health concerns are the driving force, to some it feels like interference. This provides an exceptional opportunity to review the purpose of the Church.

The Church is a group of people, redeemed by Jesus, and purposed to live on mission with Him. Once Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to give birth to His Church. While churches come in all shapes and sizes, the true Church of Jesus is comprised of all who have confessed Him as Savior and Lord. A living organism, His body, the Church, serves to extend grace and truth on earth and to proclaim Jesus’ glory to all people.²

As part of the living organism that is the Church, we look to God’s Word in Acts for direction. Not for theology per se, but for history. When Luke gives us glimpses of the early Church, he provides guidance as we seek to function as a church, powered by God, to proclaim Jesus to a lost world.

1. READY TO OFFER HOPE

ACTS 5:12-16 *At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico.¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.¹⁶ Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

As the new Church grew, the apostles gathered in “Solomon’s Portico” (Acts 5:12). They were meeting physical and spiritual needs and were held in high esteem by the people. Hope was in the air, though that specific word may not have been used. The people were enamored by the miracles they had seen and heard about from the apostles. Notice there were those who “dared not associate” with these people and others who “held them in high esteem.” This led to the point of decision for some. When God makes Himself known, there will always be a decision to make and a direction to go.

**When God makes
Himself known,
there will always be
a decision to make
and a direction to go.**



¹ www.gotquestions.org

² Louie Giglio, *The Jesus Bible*, Zondervan, 2019, p. 5-6.

Yet undeniably, the signs and wonders taking place captured the attention of both the common and elite people of the day. Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie states, “signs were an outward evidence of the inner working of the power of the Lord in a person or situation; while wonders caused one to be gripped by awe. Something beyond human ability was involved in the healings and transformed lives which were occurring as a result of Christ’s Spirit in the apostles.”³ As the people drew closer and saw these signs and wonders, they were filled with hope.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “hope” as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” Other people were receiving miracles, so why not them? It is a fair question and natural response to be hopeful in those situations. When the Church offers hope in the name of Jesus, we are following the lead of the apostles in the early Church. Later, in Romans 5:5, Paul reminds us, “*and hope does not disappoint.*”

In Acts 5, we see families bringing their sick and tormented in the hope that Peter’s shadow would fall on them. It was not Peter’s shadow that healed them, but God at work, using His mighty power for miracles so that many would believe in Him. Can you imagine the activity of the Holy Spirit so evident in your life that people would simply want to have your shadow cast upon them? Peter had failed in ways like no other disciple other than Judas Iscariot, yet God powerfully used Peter to offer hope to those in Jerusalem in the first century. This fact serves as a reminder that God can and will use those who completely surrender to Him, giving hope to all of us.

Acts 5:16 indicates that people gathered from all around, bringing their sick and afflicted. I love the last five words of verse 16, “*and they were all being healed.*” Significantly, all these people were healed. There were no failures, and none sent away because he or she “did not have faith to be healed.” These were days of mighty power when God was speaking to Israel and telling them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah and Savior.⁴ This new and rapidly growing Church, powered by the Holy Spirit, was making Jesus famous. (Isaiah 26:8) As a result, people came from all over with a heart of hope for a miracle.

Often as Dr. Young prepares to deliver a sermon, he will quote John 12:32, which says, *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* Dr. Young knows and teaches us well that Jesus is the one who saves, heals, and draws all people to Himself. Our job as the Church is to lift Him up, thus offering hope to all who hear. This hope offered today is hope fulfilled in a transformed life. The greatest miracle of all is the transformation of a lost sinner into a child of God by the grace of God.⁵

2. READY TO OBEY

ACTS 5:17-21A *But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.¹⁸ They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,²⁰ “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”²¹ Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.*

Notice the High Priest and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy. The Sadducees were the

³ Dr. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Master the New Testament-Acts*, Word Publishing, 1983, p. 121.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 339.

⁵ Ibid.

religious leaders of the day. These were not common bystanders; these were leaders with power, yet they were still jealous. The word “jealousy” translates the Greek word “zelos,” which can also mean “zeal.” The zeal of the religious leaders was to wipe out this new movement.⁶ This zealous jealousy moved them to put Peter and John into a public jail, just as they would treat a common criminal of the day. They did not want them to have a voice with the masses of people in Jerusalem.

However, the Sadducees did not realize they were not dealing merely with flesh and blood, but with spiritual forces. They had two specific reasons for arresting Peter and John. 1) They defied the law by preaching in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:18) Though for Peter and John, it was an act of obedience to God. 2) They were giving evidence that Jesus was alive and active through life-changing signs and wonders, which caused the Church to grow in numbers daily.

The traditional teachings of the religious leaders had not captured the people’s hearts nor attracted many followers. But in a short time, the new Church, powered by the Holy Spirit, was multiplying, and the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ was spreading throughout the land.

God still calls His Church to be obedient. John 14:15 says, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* We prepare ourselves for the attacks from the rest of the world by understanding that God deserves our obedience, and He is our highest judge. When we face opposition and temptation, it is not a matter of convenience; it is a matter of obedience.

While their resolve to be obedient to God came with a price, it also came with a bonus of peace.

The apostles were obedient to God even though it would mean trouble for them. In the next few verses, we see that the High Priest arrested the Apostles and put them in prison. The apostles went quietly and respectfully. They did not resist arrest or even protest. This was not civil disobedience; it was supernatural obedience. While their resolve to be obedient to God came with a price, it also came with a bonus of peace.

The apostles were imprisoned in the public jail, but during the night, an Angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and led them out. There are several instances in the book of Acts where God used angels to care for His people. (Acts 8:26; 10:3; 12:7-11; 27:23) Surely the High Priest thought he had silenced the apostles, putting a stop to the signs and wonders getting so much attention. But as is often the case, in God’s economy, their attempt to stop the miracles set the stage for even more miracles. The locked prison doors were unlocked, yet what this Angel said was more important than what he did. The Angel’s words confirmed what the apostles had been doing and challenged them to continue without reservation.⁷

After freeing Peter and the apostles from prison, the Angel of the Lord instructed them to “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.” (Acts 5:20) Once again, driven by their desire to stand as we learned last week and to be obedient, they entered the temple and began to teach. Notice that the “L” in life is capitalized. This was not just about physical breathing; this was about the new life spiritually that comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. They were not to leave anything out; rather, they were to tell the “whole message.” The birthing of the Church was based not just on bits and pieces of God’s message that make us feel good or seem palatable, but on the entirety of God’s message that gives us new life, hope, and the courage to be obedient.

Remember, the Council was educated, ordained, and approved, yet they had no ministry of power. The apostles were ordinary laymen, yet God’s power was at work in their lives. The Council was trying desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the apostles were risking

⁶ *Life Application Bible Commentary-Acts*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 1999, p. 81.

⁷ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1999, p. 66.

their lives to share the living Word of God. The dynamic Church was enjoying the new; the dead Council was defending the old.⁸ As we fill our hearts and minds with God's Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to mold us in this new life, we are left to obey God's call over every other thing regardless of the risks.

3. READY TO SPEAK

ACTS 5:27-28 *When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."*

When the Council sent for the apostles, they were not in prison. They found them standing in the temple, teaching the people. As the apostles taught openly in the name of Jesus, however, the High Priest would not even use His name. He referred to Jesus as "*this man*." (Acts 5:28) But even in this highly charged situation with the High Priest unwilling to utter His mighty name, the name of Jesus was being praised and lifted up!

When the High Priest asked him why he was teaching, after being forbidden to do so, Peter was ready to speak. We see his eloquent answer in Acts 5:29-32.

ACTS 5:29-32 *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."*

Peter did not give the politically correct answer that might have made everyone happy. Peter spoke the truth and trusted God with the outcome. Not out of disrespect to the leaders, but in complete obedience to God. I have regretted the times I have **not** given a bold witness when God has opened a door. But I have never regretted boldly telling about Jesus! Paul says it well in Romans 1:16:

Peter spoke the truth and trusted God with the outcome.

ROMANS 1:16A *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*

Peter did not change the hearts of the High Priest or the religious Council that day. Neither was the faith of the apostles changed or even shaken. In fact, they spoke with power and were unashamed as they stood firmly for the Lord!

The angry Council wanted to kill Peter and the apostles, but God intervened. He used the unlikeliest of people to rescue them. One of the major teachers of the law was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, believed to have been a mentor to Saul before his conversion on the road to Damascus. Gamaliel spoke reason into the evil and accusing hearts of the Council:

ACTS 5:38-39 *So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.*

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 340.

His logic in these verses quelled their anger; but, his neutrality revealed something about Gamaliel. He was a gifted teacher, revered, and trusted. But in this critical moment, he did not stand with Jesus. *He that is not with me is against me.* (Matthew 12:30)

The Council listened as we see in Acts 5:40, *They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.*

This was not simply a slap on the wrist; it was a true beating of their physical body. It would not have been unusual for this to be 39 lashes across a bare back in front of a crowd. It was intended to be cruel, humiliating, and painful. They stopped short of killing them, but they wanted the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus, so they flogged them as a penalty and warning.

For most of us, flogging would silence us. It would cause me to pause at the very least and reconsider speaking about Jesus in public and identifying with Him. Some people might have lowered their heads, gathered their clothes, and timidly attempted to leave the city in anonymity. That did not happen.

4. READY TO REJOICE

ACTS 5:41-42 *So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

But through the power of the Holy Spirit they stand, speak, obey and even rejoice in being persecuted for His name.

Reading these verses, you almost must do a double-take. They had just been jailed, publicly humiliated, flogged openly and told vehemently not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer. Yet verse 41 tells us they went on their way, “*rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” Say again? “*Rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.*” Peter had denied and cursed even knowing Jesus a matter of months ago. The disciples scattered in the darkness of the garden when Jesus was arrested. These were not naturally brave and confident men. Left to their own strength, they cower. But through the power of the Holy Spirit they stand, speak, obey and even rejoice in being persecuted for His name.

Perhaps while they were publicly being humiliated and flogged, they remembered the words of Jesus’ first sermon, recorded in Matthew 5-7, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began with what we refer to as The Beatitudes section where He said,

MATTHEW 5:10-12 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

They listened and learned from Jesus, and now they were applying those words in Jerusalem. Rejoicing was not the result of the humiliation, imprisonment, or flogging; instead, it was because they were considered worthy for the sake of Christ.

It is counter-intuitive to rejoice when someone persecutes, insults, or slanders you.

The apostles and the burgeoning Church had experienced the promise of Acts 1:8, *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* God was at work in the lives of the apostles. The Holy Spirit was empowering them to walk in the Spirit.

Remember, the Holy Spirit powers the Church. As believers, the Holy Spirit empowers us. We are not slaves to our natural man nor to sin. (Romans 6:6). Peter and the Apostles, ordinary men, rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Jesus! God wants the Church, made up of “ordinary people,” to be ready to rejoice should suffering come. When it does, God’s Word is clear, and we are called to rejoice.

Joy, which is the root word for rejoice, is the undeniable mark of the new life in Christ Jesus. Joy is also the identifiable evidence that Christ is alive in us, and we are facing reality with His guidance, interceptions, and undiminshable strength.⁹

They did not just rejoice and forget; they continued the mission for Christ.

ACTS 5:42 *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

This lifestyle continued every day, whether they were at the temple or in the neighborhood. They did not let the persecution slow them down, nor the threat of imprisonment silence them. They had the power that allowed them to be actively on mission for Christ. We have that same power today, yet are we on the same mission?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We tend to look at Peter, John, and the other disciples as superheroes as we put them on a pedestal. They were ordinary men who made a living doing ordinary jobs like fishermen, one was a tax man, others were so ordinary we do not even know their livelihood. They are not superheroes, but are empowered supernaturally.

Jesus fulfilled His promise recorded in Acts 1:8. The disciples received power through the Holy Spirit. There is confidence knowing we do not have to rely on our own strength or words. There is a peace that comes with knowing we are not alone in any setting or situation. There is an excitement that stirs from within when we walk by faith in the light of Christ.

God calls the Church to give hope, to obey, to be ready to speak, and to rejoice as we continue teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. As we hold unswervingly to God, we will find Him faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

I recently heard an encouraging word in a podcast - **God will hold on to you more than you will ever hold on to Him!** In Acts 5, we see the apostles in the early Church holding tightly to God, knowing that He was holding them. This truth empowered them to continue the mission of Christ. This week may God’s plan for you shape your purpose of being on mission for the sake of Jesus Christ.

⁹ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1999, p. 74.

SO ANANIAS DEPARTED
AND ENTERED THE HOUSE,
AND AFTER LAYING HIS
HANDS ON HIM SAID,
"BROTHER SAUL, THE LORD
JESUS, WHO APPEARED
TO YOU ON THE ROAD BY
WHICH YOU WERE COMING,
HAS SENT ME SO THAT
YOU MAY REGAIN YOUR
SIGHT AND BE FILLED
WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT."

A C T S 9 : 1 7

THE POWER

OF SALVATION

DATE

October 31 & November 1

WEEK

5 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 9:1-22

KEY VERSE

Acts 9:17

SETTING THE STAGE

The Apostle Paul's ministry spanned approximately 35 years, and he wrote 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament. He traveled over 10,000 miles sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. He experienced three shipwrecks and at least three arrests. Paul was arguably the most influential Christ-follower in the first century based on miles traveled, churches planted, and letters written.

However, Paul never walked with Jesus as the original 12 apostles did. Paul never saw Jesus perform a miracle or heard Him preach a sermon. Yet, while the original 12 were primarily ordinary men without religious training, Paul was well educated in religious matters. In fact, Paul was a well-respected, well-educated, and well-read rabbi, born into a family of Pharisees. He was thoroughly trained in the Pharisees' ultra-orthodox traditions, educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3) ¹ At birth, Paul was named Saul and known by that name throughout most of his adult life as a high-ranking Pharisee.

Saul climbed the proverbial ladder of success in the Pharisees religious group, enforcing the law of the Hebrews and the Law of Moses. Saul was ruthless towards those who embraced the gospel of Jesus. He would be considered by most as unchangeable with a heart of stone toward Jesus Christ and His followers. Yet, God had a different plan for the one formerly known as Saul. That which the world considered unchangeable changed. Without Paul or someone like him, the infant church would not have grown into the spiritual and intellectual maturity, changing the course of history.²

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Encounter
2. Erosion
3. Encouragement
4. Empowerment

THINGS TO KNOW

- Saul is Paul's Hebrew name given at birth. Paul is the Greek name used after his conversion, and as he began ministering throughout the Roman Empire.
- Acts Chapter 9 is the turning point where the story begins to follow Paul more so than Peter.

THE POWER OF SALVATION

Introduction

This is not the first time we have seen Saul in the book of Acts. Saul was a well-known leader among the Pharisees in Jerusalem. His education was the equivalent of being educated at a Harvard, Yale, Oxford, or Cambridge. He had a high level of recognizable and revered education and upbringing.

Saul was from a city called Tarsus, which was known for its leaders and education. Saul was a Hebrew Pharisee and a man of the world. Both Hebrew culture, as well as the Greek culture, influenced his life. Saul studied under a man named Gamaliel, which we read about in Acts 5, where he told the Sadducees concerning Peter and John that if their plan were of men, it would be overthrown, but if it was of God, no one would be able to defeat it. (Acts 5:38-39)

Up to this point in Acts, Saul has not been a major character, though he has been present. (See Acts 7:58, 8:1-3). But that was all about to change.

1. ENCOUNTER

ACTS 9:1-2 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Saul had a rabid reputation among the religious leaders, the political leaders, and the newly formed Church, still in its infancy

Saul had a rabid reputation among the religious leaders, the political leaders, and the newly formed Church, still in its infancy. A diligent persecutor of the Church, he was very good at his job. His motivation was to thwart the message of Jesus Christ by taking down the followers of Christ, both men and women, not just in Jerusalem but also elsewhere.

In Acts 1, Jesus charged the disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. By the time we get to chapter 9, that message has gone beyond Jerusalem. In chapter 8, Phillip had a ministry in Samaria and shared the gospel with an Ethiopian Eunuch while on the road towards Gaza. The message of Christ was going out in all directions beyond Jerusalem.

Saul wanted desperately to put an end to it but to do so legally and in an official capacity. So, he got the paperwork that would allow him to go to Damascus, a key commercial city located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria.³ It was a six-day journey. When he got there, Saul could arrest the Christians and extradite them to Jerusalem.



¹ John MacArthur, *One Faithful Life*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville TN, 2019, p. xiii.

² Dr. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Master the New Testament-Acts*, Word Publishing, 1983, p. 164.

³ *Life Application Bible Commentary-Acts*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 1999, p. 152.

Notice he did this with deep-seated anger and hatred towards Christians. Saul was laser-focused on putting an end to the growing movement of Christ-followers. He was determined to succeed in this endeavor, but alas, he was stopped by Jesus Himself.

ACTS 9:3-6 *As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”*

Have you ever been walking or driving, completely focused on where you are heading, when out of nowhere something happens that you did not see coming? Saul was on a journey with a single focus. He was almost to his destination of Damascus. Saul had his eyes on the prize and hatred in his heart, willing to take those who believed in Jesus down one by one.

But God had other plans. Saul was outside of his natural surroundings; typically, he was in Jerusalem. He knew the neighborhoods of Jerusalem as well as the leaders. He was accustomed to going house to house with the sole intention of capturing Christians and putting them in prison or worse. He believed the locals of Jerusalem were becoming troublesome because of their newly found faith and belief in Jesus.

Saul was outside his regular routine. I would not say he was outside his comfort zone, because his reputation was such that he was not intimidated very easily. Yet, Saul was beyond his regular streets, neighborhoods, and familiar people. On the road for at least 4 or 5 days by now, the excitement was building as he approached Damascus; he took great pride in what he did.

And then the encounter! It started with a light from heaven, perhaps like lightening. Later in Acts, he would describe the light as *“brighter than the sun shining all around him.”* (Acts 26:13) There was no confusion, doubt, nor questioning by Saul about this encounter. Jesus knew that He had to capture Saul’s attention in a dramatic way that could not be denied. It reaffirms the truth we learned in our last series about Christ in His own words where He said, *“I am the Light of the World.”* This was a personal and intimate encounter with Jesus Christ. Saul had spent His professional adult life denouncing the truth that literally knocked him to the ground. Jesus had his attention.

Then Jesus asked him an interesting question, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”*

Saul, in his mind, was persecuting Peter, John, and other disciples. Saul was persecuting Stephen. Saul was persecuting people from house to house. Saul did not think he was persecuting Jesus, because he did not think Jesus was alive. This voice used the pronoun, “me” rather than “them” or “the church,” which probably confused Saul initially. He had earnestly pursued a course that he thought righteous as he wanted to stamp out heresy. Some of his Jewish brethren were calling a dead man the Messiah, which violated everything he knew about the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴

Saul did not think he was persecuting Jesus, because he did not think Jesus was alive.

Jesus was a man who claimed to be God, but Saul did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Nor did he believe Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was crucified on the cross, and something must have happened to his body, perhaps stolen or hidden; but Saul did not believe Jesus was alive.

Yet, while on the ground after the blinding light, Saul hears this voice, the voice of Jesus saying, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”* Saul’s response was one of respect.

⁴ Chuck Swindoll, *Living Insights Commentary, Acts*; Tyndale House Publishing, Carol Stream, IL; 2016; p. 165.

ACTS 9:5A *And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”*

He did not use the term Lord, as we would use it as a name for Jesus. Rather it was a term of respect.⁵ Saul was a religious man, very knowledgeable of the Old Testament, very rigid in his belief, and upholding the Law of Moses. Saul believed in God without any doubt, but he did not believe in Jesus. So, at best, he thought it might be the Lord God, similar to Moses hearing the voice of God in the burning bush. In this brief dialogue, Jesus identifies Himself clearly and gives instructions.

ACTS 9:5B-6 *And He said, “I am **Jesus** whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”*

Notice that Jesus did not give Saul the full picture, but merely the next step. So often, when we have an encounter with Jesus in Worship or Bible Study, at home or while away from our daily routine, we want the big picture. We want to see the finished masterpiece. We want to fast forward to the end of the story. Saul had this dramatic encounter and received instructions. What would happen next?

2. EROSION

ACTS 9:7-9 *The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

The word “erosion” means “gradual destruction”⁶ I do not think Saul woke up one day and thought to himself, “I am going to hate Christians.” I think it was a gradual destruction from within. You are probably familiar with the story of the frog and boiling water. If the water starts out boiling, the frog will jump out, but if the frog is in the water while it is soothing and then becomes warmer and warmer eventually boiling, the frog will not jump out and ultimately die.

Saul was eroding from within. This hatred for Christians was driving his life and motivation to work, to the point of going outside of Jerusalem, traveling six days to Damascus simply to persecute more Christians to stop something that in his mind was out of control.

After the encounter, the erosion became clear. The eyes that had looked with rage upon the disciples and followers of Christ were now blinded. The eyes that had allowed him to be on the road traveling approximately 175 miles to Damascus for almost six days were seeing nothing for three days. He had no appetite or thirst. Saul was eroding from the years of hatred and rage towards the truth of the gospel.

He spent three days in a strange place in utter physical darkness caused by a supernatural light from heaven.

- Three days, perhaps seeing in his mind, the houses in Jerusalem and the faces of the men and women he had taken to prison.
- Three days, perhaps seeing the angelic face of Stephen, whom he helped stone to death.
- Three days, perhaps seeing Gamaliel, his teacher and mentor and remembering what Gamaliel said, “if it is of God, nothing or no one will be able to overthrow it.”

⁵ Chuck Swindoll, *Living Insights Commentary, Acts*; Tyndale House Publishing, Carol Stream, IL; 2016; p. 165.

⁶ www.dictionary.com

- Three days, perhaps seeing this Light from the Heavens and hearing this voice saying, “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.*”
- Three days, reflecting in darkness the erosion that has taken place over the years leading to this point of vulnerability and blindness.

Each of us, when we truly encounter Jesus realizes the erosion in our life. It may not take a light from heaven or blinded eyes to capture our attention, but everyone who has an encounter with Christ will have to come to grips with their own internal erosion due to sin. However, it is by confessing that internal erosion that we can find salvation.

Saul, also known as Paul, would later write in a letter to the Church in Corinth the following, reminding us that the erosion would ultimately be a thing of the past.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

After the encounter and erosion, look at the encouragement that takes place for Saul.

It may not take a light from heaven or blinded eyes to capture our attention, but everyone who has an encounter with Christ will have to come to grips with their own internal erosion due to sin.

3. ENCOURAGEMENT

ACTS 9:10-17 *Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.”¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

We see two names in this passage that other men in Scripture have been known by who were without godly character: Ananias and Judas. These two men referenced above are not the Ananias of Acts 5 nor the Judas who betrayed Jesus. We honestly know nothing about this Ananias. He was anonymous in many ways, but not where it counted. Jesus knew his name. The Lord was going to use this otherwise anonymous man to do something we often taken for granted, give someone encouragement.

Notice Ananias was going about his business and the Lord spoke to him in a vision. He was not scared or taken aback; he simply said, “*Here I am Lord.*” But then the Lord gave him instructions and mentioned the name Saul of Tarsus. Ananias had heard about Saul, knowing that he was one who hated those who followed Jesus Christ. The word was out about what Saul wanted to do in town. Saul’s reputation had preceded him.

But the Lord had other plans for Saul. I love the phrase Jesus used to describe Saul, “*He is a chosen instrument of Mine.*” It would be easy to put Saul/ Paul in a different category because of his pre-Damascus success and also because of his post-Damascus work for the Lord. But the reality is that each of us who have had that personal encounter with Jesus and dealt with the erosion in our lives, surrendering ourselves to Him, are a *chosen instrument* to be used for the glory of God.

The reality is that each of us who have had that personal encounter with Jesus and dealt with the erosion in our lives, surrendering ourselves to Him, are a chosen instrument to be used for the glory of God.

Even the anonymous Ananias was a chosen instrument. The Lord told Ananias, chosen for this very specific assignment, to go to Saul, who had also been chosen, and encourage him. Look again at verse 17.

ACTS 9:17 *So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

There are two specific phrases that show us this act of encouragement:

1. Ananias laying his hands on him,
2. Ananias calling him "Brother Saul."

Knowing who Saul was and his reputation, Ananias was obviously nervous at first. He knew that when Saul "laid hands on you," it was typically to grab you out of your house and throw you in jail. In fact, that was the original intent of Saul as he was traveling to Damascus.

Yet out of obedience to the Lord, Ananias laid his hands on him. And I would venture to say he did so very gently. Remember, Saul was still not able to see, nor was he eating or drinking. Saul, perhaps for the first time in his life, was vulnerable.

And it was in that setting that Ananias encouraged him not only with his actions by laying hands on him but also by his words, "Brother Saul." Extraordinary in its simplicity. A very simple thing that might go unnoticed unless you had been in darkness for three days; unless you had not eaten in three days; unless you had not had anything to drink in three days; unless you had no idea what was going to happen to you next after falling to the ground because of a light brighter than the sun.

And then to hear the gentle words, "Brother Saul."

With that phrase, you become family. You are no longer the accuser. No longer the tyrant. No longer the feared, rabid Pharisee, raging against Christ-followers. You are now *Brother Saul*. Our actions and our words are to encourage. What an incredible opportunity for us to be used by the Lord Jesus to encourage someone who might be alone, vulnerable, empty, and lost.

There was first an encounter, then erosion, then encouragement, which ultimately led to empowerment.

4. EMPOWERMENT

ACTS 5:17B-20 *"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

¹⁸ *And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;* ¹⁹ *and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,* ²⁰ *and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."*

This is the power of salvation. Saul regained his sight as the scales fell from his eyes. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, which happens to each of us at conversion, and he got up and was baptized. We often talk about "getting your baptism on the right side of your salvation;" this is a great picture of that truth. Baptism did not cause Saul to be saved. He knew that all Christ-followers got baptized. He had seen it, he had condemned it, and he had punished people for baptism. But now, Saul wanted to be baptized because he was one of them! This is a turning point not only in the life of Saul, who would later become known as Paul, but it was also a turning point for the Church.

Saul was empowered to do what we should all do, proclaim Jesus. He went to the very location he was most familiar with, the synagogue. This time he did not go as an educated authoritative leader of the Pharisees; he went as a Christ-follower whose eyes had literally and spiritually been opened. Notice the words he proclaimed with confidence and power, “*He is the Son of God.*” Saul did not use the past tense but the present tense verb. Jesus IS the Son of God.

Saul was empowered to do what we should all do, proclaim Jesus.

Look at the response of the people in the following verses.

ACTS 9:21-22 *All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

Life was not easy for Saul after that moment. In fact, if you continue reading, many of the disciples were afraid of Saul. There was Barnabas who, like Ananias, encouraged Saul and befriended him, literally taking him by the hand to the others. Saul never gave up, regardless of the obstacles. He was God’s chosen instrument to accept what Jesus had challenged His disciples to do in Acts 1:8, being a witness to the uttermost parts of the world.

Saul’s life changed completely from the inside out all because of his personal encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Once his eyes were opened, he never looked back. His life had new purpose and vision. Saul went on to suffer for the sake of Christ. He regarded anything he had gained before his salvation to be rubbish. Paul looked forward. He wrote out his life goal in a letter to the Church in Philippi.

PHILIPPIANS 3:14 *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

May our goal in life be as clear and concise as we are empowered to press on toward the upper call of God in Christ Jesus.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Sometimes we forget that God knows each one of us intimately, our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our fears and doubts. God knows our hearts even when they are hearts of stone, like Saul’s heart. God had the power of salvation planned even in the days of the prophets.

EZEKIEL 36:26 *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

God is persistent and determined when it comes to saving someone’s life. He pursues those who are lost, sometimes by any means necessary, even a light from the heavens brighter than the sun for one traveling to Damascus. He desires to give you a new heart, a new life, and a new purpose. *Continued on page 46 >*

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

By God's grace and mercy, we as Christ-followers are His chosen instruments. How are you being used by God today? How are you proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God? The beautiful thing about salvation is that it has not changed in over 2,000 years. The same process of changing from a heart of stone to a new spirit within is the same.

As Christ-followers, we have the power of the Holy Spirit inside us as did the disciples in Acts. We have the power of the Gospel, which is the good news of Jesus Christ. We have the power to stand for the name of Jesus in an ever-changing world with ever-changing rules; Jesus remains the same. We have the power of the Church that provides community, teaching, and worship. We have the power of salvation that gives us new life and a new purpose for all eternity.

THE STORY OF **POWER**

THE **POWER** OF THE SPIRIT

THE **POWER** OF THE GOSPEL

THE **POWER** TO STAND

THE **POWER** OF THE CHURCH

THE **POWER** OF SALVATION



COMING UP NEXT:

THE STORY OF **CHANGE**



GOD HAS BEEN AND
WILL ALWAYS BE IN THE
LIFE-CHANGING BUSINESS.

THE STORY OF CHANGE

Jesus' first miracle was changing water into wine. He changed men who caught fish for a living into fishers of men. Jesus changed a burial grave into an empty tomb. Jesus wants lives to change, including yours and mine. And He meets people, right where they are, on a hillside, in a boat or on the road.

The Apostle Paul experienced a dramatic change in his life while traveling to Damascus to persecute and capture Christians. On the road, Jesus captured his attention with a light described as "*brighter than the sun*." For three days, Paul was blind, but in those days of darkness, the Light of the World changed his heart. Paul was educated in the teachings of the prophets and the writings of the Law of Moses. Undoubtedly, he studied these words of Ezekiel:

EZEKIEL 36:26 *Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

He was now experiencing this himself.

God has been and will always be in the life-changing business. In the Old Testament, God would often change someone's name to mark the occasion, such as Abram becoming Abraham and Sarai becoming Sarah, and Jacob becoming Israel. In the New Testament, Simon came primarily to be known as Peter, the rock. While Saul later came to be known as Paul, name changes are not as important as the changing of one's heart.

Our story of change begins with understanding who we are in view of our holy God. Scripture declares we are all on a level playing field as we enter this world as babies. Regardless of nationality, zip code, bank account, or family size, the reality is we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Once we realize who we are, then we can understand who Jesus is. Many immediately think of Jesus as the baby born in the manger that we celebrate at Christmas. Others will think of Jesus dying on a cross at Easter. But until we see Jesus in light of our desperate need for a Savior, the manger, the cross, and even the resurrection will be misunderstood.

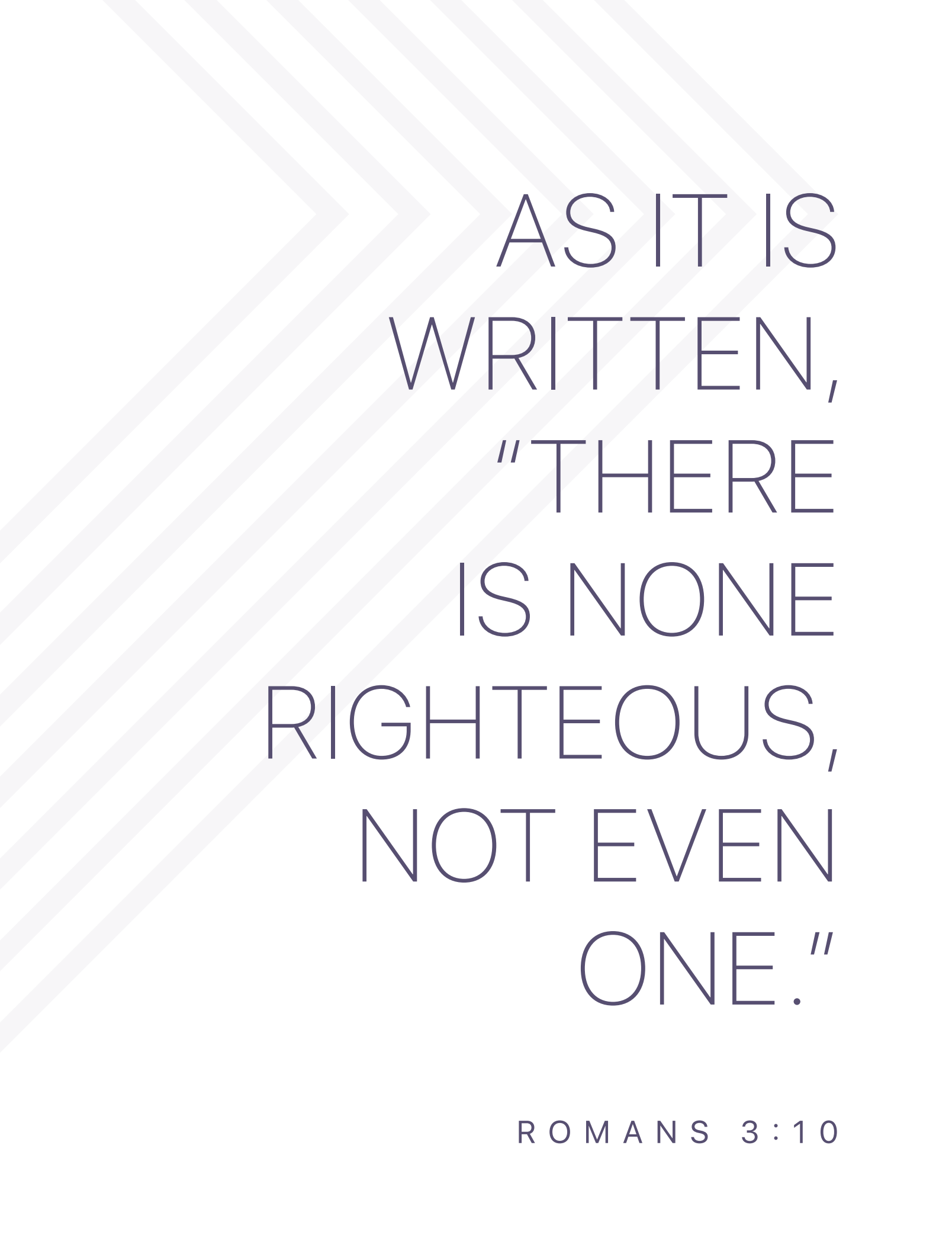
However, understanding who we are and who Christ is, is only part of the story. For change to take place in our lives, we need to understand what we truly need, what Christ provides, and how we can receive it. These next four weeks, we are going to take the Story of Change step by step, looking at the writings of the Apostle Paul to the early church.

November 7-8 Who We Are - Romans 3

November 14-15 Who Christ Is - Colossians 1

November 21-22 What We Need - Romans 5

November 28-29 What He Provides - Romans 6



AS IT IS
WRITTEN,
"THERE
IS NONE
RIGHTEOUS,
NOT EVEN
ONE."

ROMANS 3:10

WHO WE ARE

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 7 & 8

WEEK

1 of 4

OVERVIEW

Romans 3

KEY VERSE

Romans 3:10

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote what would become 13 books of the New Testament. Highly educated in the religious realm as a Pharisee, his early adult years were spent trying to destroy Christ-followers and the early church. However, as we saw last week, there was a dramatic transformation in his life that happened on the road to Damascus.

Before his conversion, based on the world's standards, Paul was at the top of his game. He was successful in his line of work. He knew the Old Testament, which was their Hebrew Bible. He was as religious as anyone else by comparison. Yet, it was his encounter with Christ that changed his heart to realize he was a sinner in need of a Savior. His life changed as did his purpose.

Paul became God's instrument to inform, educate, challenge, and admonish the early church. His writings have lasted over 2000 years, and the inspired truth in those words continues to be revealing and convicting. As we will see in today's lesson, we all are on a level playing field regardless of background, bank accounts, zip codes, or level of education. We are all sinners in need of a Savior.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. We are Sinful in our Thoughts
2. We are Sinful in our Motives
3. We are Sinful in our Actions

THINGS TO KNOW

- Paul wrote the book of Romans as a letter to the church in Rome; the audience is Christ-followers, not people who are ignorant of the true gospel.
- The book of Romans reads like a lawyer's brief as Paul slowly and skillfully presents the case for the gospel.¹

WHO WE ARE

Introduction

In 1895, German physicist Wilhelm Rontgen accidentally discovered x-rays while studying the effects of passing an electrical current through gases at very low pressures. His discovery revolutionized the medical world overnight. Within a year, Glasgow established the first-ever radiology department. The department head was able to show below the surface pictures of kidney stones and a penny lodged in the esophagus of a child.

Often when people experience discomfort and pain, they go to the doctor who looks below the surface to expose what is really going on in their body. It is hard to imagine the medical world without an x-ray. Seeing below the surface has allowed so many to receive the remedies and treatments that they need. It has given doctors the ability to see bone fractures and breaks. It has revealed arthritis and osteoporosis. It has uncovered pneumonia and breast cancer.

Similarly, the Bible takes an x-ray of our lives. When we are experiencing pain and heartache in our lives, the Scriptures peer below the surface and expose the true ailments that lie beneath the surface.

Over the next several weeks as we walk through “The Story of Change,” we will discover how change takes place in our lives. At a foundational level, we must first understand what the problems are that we are seeking to change. If we are open to being x-rayed by the Bible, it will reveal a sin problem. Every problem we experience in life can be traced back to sin and the carnage it has wreaked throughout our world. Because of sin, we live in a broken world. Because of sin, our health is compromised. Because of sin, violence is prevalent. Because of sin, injustice stands. Because of sin, peace is absent, and wars wage.

While on the outside, things may look intact, underneath the surface, we are fractured and broken. We are ridden with tumors of selfishness, hate, pride, greed, lust, and anxiety.

On the outside, we may have the appearance of righteousness, but on the inside, we stand guilty of committing “cosmic treason against God.”² We are not just people who make mistakes or who have brokenness in our lives. We are sinners. To sin is to say, think, or do anything that is against God’s Word or God’s will. To sin is to transgress God’s holy and righteous standard. As unholy sinners, we are disconnected and estranged from God.

Our biggest problem in the world is not the political climate, terrorism, health crises, or racial injustice. Our biggest problem in the world is our sinfulness. If we want to see the story of change unfold in our world, then we must realize who we are (sinners) and how we can change (through the power of the gospel).



¹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2001, p. 571.

² <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/sin-cosmic-treason/>

In Romans 3, the Apostle Paul shows us who we are as sinners. He explains how sin invades every part of our person – mind, heart, and actions.

ROMANS 3:9-10 *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.”*

Throughout the Bible, humanity is identified by two distinct people groups, Jews and Gentiles. In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were the people who were not believers in God. They had no relationship with Yahweh (Hebrew name for God). Some translations call them “pagans.” Jews were the people of God either by heritage or by religion. In the New Testament there is still a distinction between Jews (religious) and Gentiles (non-religious). Paul is showing us in Romans that the religious crowd and the non-religious crowd have the same problem. All are “under sin.” No one is righteous.

Paul explains that the common denominator of everyone on planet earth is their relationship with sin. Regardless of our culture, our place of origin, our upbringing – we are all “under” sin. The original Greek word for “under” is the preposition “*hupo*.” In the ancient Near Eastern world, this word was used to describe the relationship between a slave and his master, or a prisoner and his guard. A slave and a prisoner would both have to completely subject themselves to the wishes and commands of their master. Doug Moo tells us, “For Paul, then, the human plight is not that people commit sins or even that they are in the habit of committing sins. The problem is that people are helpless prisoners of sin.” ³ We are held captive by our propensity to sin. Sin has shackled us to the love of ourselves and restrains us from loving God.

Therefore, God did not send Jesus as a reformer to adjust a broken religious system or as a ruler to free Israel from the Roman Emperor. Instead, God sent Jesus to be a liberator for humanity from the bondage of sin. While Jesus’ earthly ministry included teaching and healing, His primary purpose was His work on the cross to defeat sin and death.

The Bible is clear that on our own, we are slaves to sin (Romans 6:17-18; John 8:34). Sin has not just damaged certain areas of our soul; it has corrupted everything about us. We are radically depraved.

The Apostle Paul in Romans 3 gives us a below the surface, x-ray view of who we are, and how deeply sin has affected our lives.

1. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR THOUGHTS

ROMANS 3:11A *THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;*

The Apostle Paul strings together an argument of the depravity of mankind through recalling the longest series of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. ⁴ The first thing he reveals to us about our problem with sin is that it starts with our minds. Scripture tells us, “*there is none who understands.*”

Paul is not telling us that we are not able to learn. We know that is simply not the case. He is not even telling us that we cannot learn the truth about God or theological doctrine. Many people know

³ J. D. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000, p. 122.

⁴ Ibid. 110

theological facts. They know the Bible inside and out, but what they lack is information shifting to transformation. We simply cannot understand rightly because of the influence of sin on our minds. Philip Ryken and James Montgomery Boice so eloquently state:

“This does not mean that a person cannot have a rational understanding of Christianity of what the Bible teaches apart from the illumination of his or her mind by the Spirit. In one sense, a scholar can understand and even teach theology as well as any other branch of human knowledge. An unbelieving philosopher can lecture accurately on the Christian idea of God. But such professors do not believe what they are teaching. If they are asked their personal opinion of what they present, they say that it is all nonsense.”⁵

The missing link between information and transformation is understanding. What we lack as human beings is not knowledge but spiritual understanding. Paul would go on to write to the Church at Ephesus:

What we lack as human beings is not knowledge but spiritual understanding.

EPHESIANS 4:17-18 *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (ESV)*

Sin has so warped our minds that it prevents true understanding about who God is and what He desires to do in our life. If we look back to the Garden of Eden, the strategy of Satan against Adam and Eve was to get them to believe wrongly about God. Satan raised doubt concerning God’s Word to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1, where he is speaking through the serpent, *“He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden?”’*” (NIV) Satan discredited God’s character with a question. He schemed to cause them to think wrongly about God, to create doubt and to inject lies into their mind. Later in their conversation, he would try to persuade them, *“You will not surely die”* (Genesis 3:4, ESV). Satan denied what God said was true.

Satan proposed an alternative plan to God’s plan. A false plan. He suggested that his plan would allow Eve to be like God and not experience any of the consequences that God had promised would take place. Satan claimed that God’s restrictions on Adam and Eve were restraining instead of protective.

Sinful thinking always over-emphasizes self and minimizes God.

And since then, he has continued to solicit us to take the same path. Sin causes us to believe wrongly about God and ourselves. Sin distorts our thinking. It misshapes the way we perceive the world and the way that we perceive God. Living life with a sinful mind is like looking into a carnival mirror. Certain facets of ourselves appear bigger or smaller than in reality. We may look and see that we have a skinny waist but a giant head. We have long legs and a short torso. We appear to have an enormous nose and a thin chin. Our sinful thinking distorts and twists the way that we see the world. Sinful thinking always over-emphasizes self and minimizes God. Our sinful minds never give us an accurate view of God, others, and the world. Our sinful thinking prevents us from truly understanding the way God originally intended us to understand Him and His Word.

2. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR MOTIVES

ROMANS 3:11B *THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD.*

⁵ J. M. Boice, & P. G. Ryken, *The doctrines of grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009, p. 77.

Our minds are polluted by sin. That pollution has drifted 12 inches south into our hearts. Scripture is clear that *there is none who seeks after God*. What an indictment upon us. If we are left on our own, we do not desire God. We are far more wicked and guilty than we would like to believe. We are far more sinful than we would like to admit.

There does need to be some clarification with this because there is a vast majority of people in the world that even though they are not Christians they are religious. But the Bible is not speaking of religion. Seeking religion does not equate with seeking a high and holy God.

**Seeking religion
does not equate with
seeking a high and
holy God.**

Back in the ancient days, before the advent of the iPhone and tablets, children used to play outside. When we would play out in the fresh air, and somebody would hit a car with a ball or break a window, we would all run. As sinners, when trouble arises, we have been runners from the very beginning. This can be traced back all the way to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned against God. When they ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they ran. The Bible says in Genesis 3:8, *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”* (ESV) When sin entered the picture, Adam and Eve did not seek out the LORD; they ran and hid. We have been running and hiding ever since.

The guilt that our ancient ancestors felt that caused them to run and hide from God has been passed down from generation to generation. We are all hiding from God. Instead of hiding behind bushes and sewing fig leaves, we hide behind everything else in our lives. We do not pursue a relationship with God; instead, we hide behind our family’s activities. We hide behind our social media profile, our activity in the community, or our careers. We even hide behind our own generosity. None of those things are bad or evil per se, just as the fig leaf and trees were not evil. But when we use those items to hide from God, it is a very different issue. No matter how hard Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves, God knew their true condition. He knew they were naked and ashamed. Just as Adam and Eve stood before God naked and exposed, we stand before the Word of God naked and exposed as sinners with corrupt hearts. No one is exempt from this kind of exposure before God.

The Bible tells us in Jeremiah 17:9, *“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”* The heart of the problem for the human condition is the problem of the heart. We do not desire God. It is not that we lack the capacity to love the Lord; it is that we do not have an appetite for the things of God.

What Paul is saying in Romans 3 is that sin has corrupted our nature and our motives. It has changed our appetite. We do not seek after God, pursue a relationship with Him, nor have an appetite for righteousness. We have an appetite for sin, and without the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we will choose sin over righteousness simply by our very nature.

3. WE ARE SINFUL IN OUR ACTIONS

ROMANS 3:12 *ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
There is none who does good, There is not even one.”*

With a sinful mind and a sinful heart, it is no surprise that we would perform sinful deeds. What lives in the human heart must come out. Imagine living in a world when the evening news is not speaking of some crime committed or of a life taken; there is no mention of a burglary, political scandal, or a rumor of war between countries. It seems so farfetched. Like an attorney, Paul builds his case quickly on what we do that is sinful. He incriminates all of us without exception, stacking the evidence piece by piece.

ROMANS 3:13-17 *“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, With their tongues they keep deceiving,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;* ¹⁴ *“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;* ¹⁵ *“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,* ¹⁶ *DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,* ¹⁷ *AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”*

This is no surprise to us. It is no surprise that Paul would accuse us of destroying people with our words. We have experienced and participated in the deadly effects of the uncontrolled tongue. We have felt the sharp stab of words used flippantly. We have all said things in moments of passion and anger that we regretted later because we know the pain would continue long after the heated argument simmered down.

Paul is not establishing this argument against some foreign non-religious people, nor saying this about unreached people in the 10/40 window. He is writing this letter to the Church at Rome. He wants to inform them and us that apart from the sincere heart transforming work of the gospel, we will all continue to think sinfully, desire sin, and carry out our sin. We are sinners. In Romans 3:23, he states concisely, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

In totality, we are desperately wicked and devoid of righteousness. This makes absolute sense when we look at the world and see the pervasive brokenness, frustration, and pain. The world, perhaps without even realizing it, is trying to treat the symptoms of sin and not the disease. Some believe that education will help to relieve the sinfulness of our thoughts. If we can just think better, then we can be better. If the world becomes educated, it will become more wholesome.

**The Bible tells us
that what humanity
needs is not
reformation but
transformation.**

Our world is desiring a utopian society where everyone is educated, has all the things they desire, and enacts goodwill toward one another. But the Bible’s response to that is we cannot treat the symptoms of the sickness in the world; we must treat the disease itself. The Bible tells us that what humanity needs is not reformation but transformation. We need to be made brand new from the inside out. We need our minds to be renewed by the truth. We need our hearts to be satisfied by grace. We need our wills to be redirected by true righteousness.

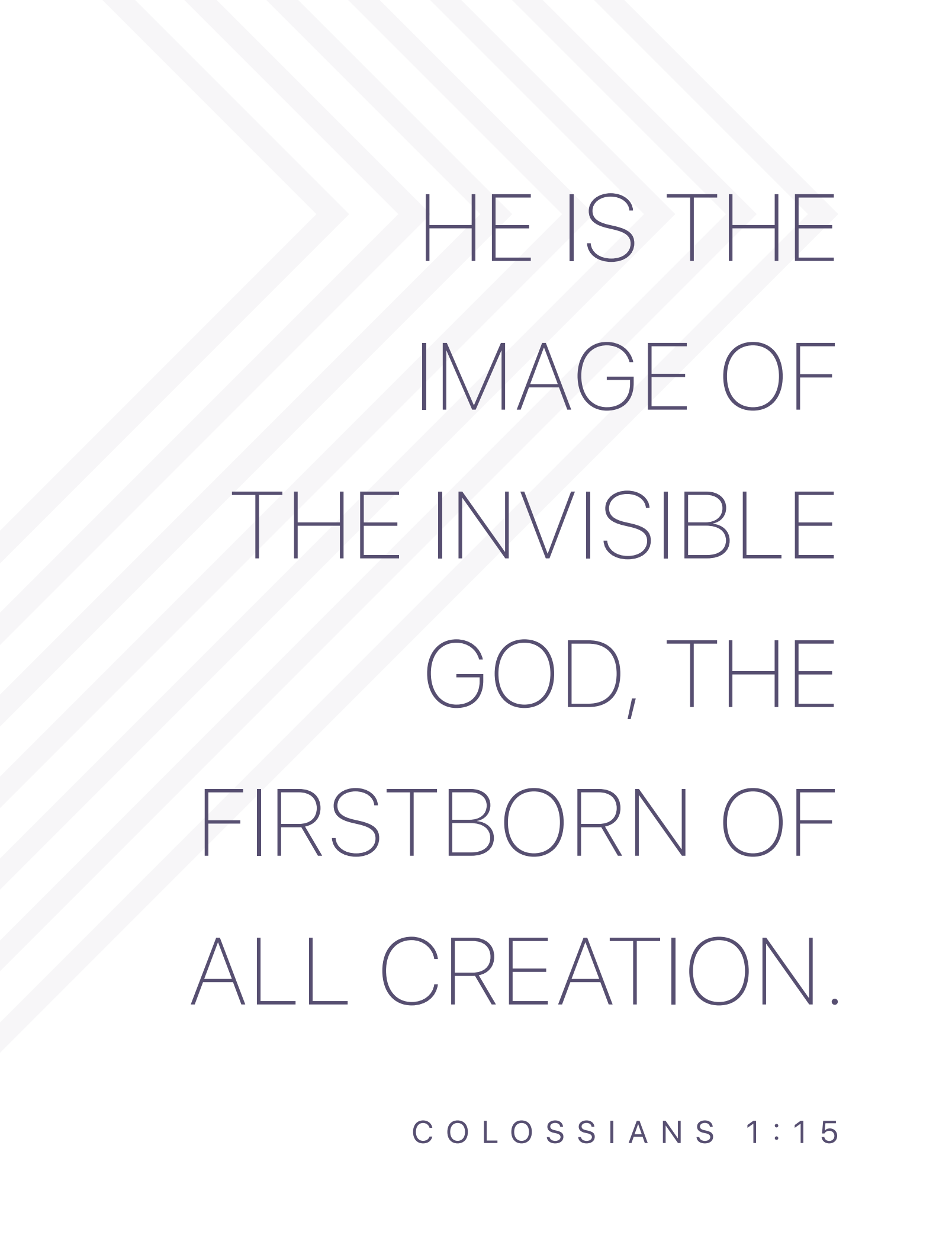
Why is Paul establishing such a strong case of our sinfulness? Why does he spend so much time showing us x-ray after x-ray of the afflictions that lie deep within our soul? It is because before we can accept the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ, we must accept the bad news of who we are without Christ. We are sinners.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

When you enter a jewelry store to look at diamonds, the jeweler always sets the diamonds on a black cloth. The jeweler wants the radiance of the diamond to contrast with the depth of the blackness of the cloth. He wants all the color and the sparkle to be ever so evident. The depth of the black cloth helps to showcase how beautiful the diamond is. In the same way, the radiance of the gospel shines brightest when contrasted with the depth and blackness of our sin. His grace glows when we see the shadow of our sin. We marvel at His mercy when we gaze at our own wickedness. Before true transforming salvation can take place in our lives, there must be a conviction of our sin.

It is never an enjoyable experience to be reminded of our sinfulness. But it is necessary. John Stott said, “We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior.”⁶ Before we think we are spotless, we must be reminded of the miry pit from which God picked us up. We must remember that we are *sinners* saved by grace. Our sinful minds need consistent transformation by the Word of God. Our sinful hearts need to be transformed by His grace. Our deeds need redirection from wickedness to righteousness. Thankfully, as we will see next week, that is just what Jesus does and who Jesus is.

⁶ M. H. Manser, Bible. *In The Westminster collection of Christian quotations*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 19.



HE IS THE
IMAGE OF
THE INVISIBLE
GOD, THE
FIRSTBORN OF
ALL CREATION.

COLOSSIANS 1:15

WHO CHRIST IS

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 14 & 15

WEEK

2 of 4

OVERVIEW

Colossians 1

KEY VERSE

Colossians 1:15

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul knew better than most what it was like to believe something that was not the whole truth. Paul was highly educated on the law and based his life on the law of Moses and the Old Testament. However, once he had the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he came to believe the full truth of the gospel. Paul came to know Jesus as the Son of God, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy as the Messiah. Based on his personal experience, he wanted to make sure that the early church and Christ-followers were not deceived by half-truths or flat out false teaching. It was with this sincere heart of concern that he wrote many of the letters we have in the New Testament, including Colossians.

Paul is writing this letter from house arrest under Roman guard. He wrote the letters to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and to Philemon around the same time: approximately 62 A.D. Paul had never visited Colossae; still, he cared deeply about the maturation of the church in this city. Paul heard a report about certain false teachers within the church who were devaluing the person and work of Jesus Christ.² In response, Paul writes a letter not detailing the error of the false teaching but correcting the falsehood with a proper view of who Jesus is and what He accomplished through the cross and the empty tomb. *Continued on page 60 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. He is Visible
2. He Creates
3. He Holds All Things Together
4. He Reconciles Us to Himself and the Father

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word “*Eikon*” is translated “image;” it means, “mirror-like representation,” referring to what is very close in **resemblance**, like a “high-definition” projection, as defined by the context.¹
- John 14:9b (Jesus speaking) “*If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.*”
- Triune God = God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

W H O CHRIST IS

Setting the Stage, continued > Paul knew the key to spiritual maturity was not argumentation but exaltation of truth. When the truth is heralded, falsehood is exposed. In Colossians, Paul exalts the truth of the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

In Ancient Greek Mythology, there was a man named Narcissus. Narcissus was a very handsome man, and he knew it. He was proud and obsessed with his own beauty. One day, as the story goes, Narcissus was led to a pool and found his reflection on the water. He fell in love with the representation of himself. For hours he gazed at the pool. Eventually, he fell into the pool where he drowned in his own reflection.

It is an ancient story, but a modern-day indictment on us and our culture today. We, too, are people enamored with ourselves. We are enamored with our own reflection, enamored with our appearance and the way that people perceive us. We do not hunch over a reflection pool; instead, we hunch over our screens and phones, looking at ourselves and drowning in our own reflection.

According to a global study in 2018, there were 259 selfie deaths between 2011-2017. ³ People were so enamored with photographing themselves in extreme settings that it was literally the last thing they did on this earth. In 2016, the typical cellphone user touched his or her smartphone 2,617 times a day on average. But extreme users handle their phones more than 5,400 times a day. The average user spends over 145 minutes on their phone daily. ⁴

In a survey of nearly 7,000 people, most admitted that their phone has control over them. 46% of men and 55% of women surveyed check their phones before getting out of bed and around the same percentage check their phones while trying to fall asleep at night. Their relationship with their phone is preventing them from pursuing flesh-and-blood relationships while also providing an entrée into temptation that negatively impacts their walk with God. What used to be sacred moments: a morning prayer before the day started, a moment to recite Scripture at a traffic light, and times of reflection and thanksgiving while our heads are on our pillows at night, have all been replaced by screen time. ⁵

The advent of the cell phone did not invent the problem of self-absorption; it merely made our self-absorption more visible. Blaise Pascal would write, centuries before the arrival of the iPhone, “take away their diversion, and you will see them dried up.” Later he would say, “Men so much

¹ www.biblehub.com/greek

² C. E. Arnold, Introduction to Colossians [Introduction]. In *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016, p. 2289-2292.

³ www.bbc.com

⁴ J. Naftulin, www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-2016-7

⁵ T. Reinke, www.crossway.org/articles/infographic-how-is-your-phone-changing-you/



love noise and stir; hence it comes that the prison is so horrible a punishment; hence it comes that the pleasure of solitude is a thing incomprehensible.”⁶ We desperately want distraction from our internal problems and to disrupt our reality. This is why, in moments when our phone runs out of battery, or we realize we left it at home, dread and anxiety overtake our hearts. We are forced to deal with our thoughts.

As we learned last week, we are sinful people. Sin has always caused us to drown in the reflection pool of our own image. Sin corrupts our thinking, causing us to think selfishly. It skews the way we perceive ourselves, the world, others, and God. Sin pollutes our hearts, turning our desires from loving God to hating God. As John Calvin so eloquently stated, “man’s nature is a perpetual factory of idols,” that the “mind begets an idol, and the hand gives it birth.”⁷ Sin affects our actions. Instead of people who honor God with our relationships and cause others to flourish, we rebel against God, slander, and hate our brothers and sisters (Romans 3:13-18).

What we need is something bigger and more significant than ourselves to turn our attention from our reflection pool. The only thing that will pull us out of the self-absorption of sin is a high view of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Colossians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul turns our focus. He knows the only way to correct this self-absorption error is by exalting Jesus.

1. HE IS VISIBLE

COLOSSIANS 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

All of us are familiar with images. Typically, we think of an “image” as it refers to a representation of something in the art world. For instance, the Statue of Liberty represents the essence of American freedom. Michelangelo’s David is a visible representation of the renaissance era. However, the word “image” used in this verse is the Greek word “*eikon*” which means “mirror-like representation,” exactly representing its source.⁸

Statues and images attempt to represent an idea or a person. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is the mirror-like representation of the invisible God. One translation puts it as “*the visible image of the invisible God*.” (NLT) Jesus perfectly represents God to mankind. Jesus makes God known to us. When we look at Jesus Christ, we can see God with skin on. The apostle John put it like this in his Gospel, John 1:14a “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory.*” The Bible, specifically the gospels, allows us to see God in the flesh through the life, ministry, miracles, and message of Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus we can see a visible representation of the love of God from the manger to the cross. Through the person of Jesus, we can see the power of God expressed through His miracles. Through the person of Jesus, we can see the compassion of God as He wept at Lazarus’ tomb. We see the forgiveness of God through Jesus when He looked at the adulterous woman and said in John 8:11b “*I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.*”

Jesus communicates the character of God to us, perfectly. God, who is by nature utterly transcendent and unable to be looked at by finite mortals, has made known His attributes, character, power, will, and works through His Son.⁹ If we want to

Because of Jesus we can see a visible representation of the love of God from the manger to the cross.

⁶ B. Pascal, *Pensées: Pascal Vol. 2*. Ontario, Canada: Devoted, 2018, p. 27.

⁷ B. Parsons, *The Heart of John Calvin*, 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/heart-john-calvin/>

⁸ www.biblehub.com/greek

⁹ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights-Colossians*; Tyndale House Publishing, Carol Stream, IL; 2017, p. 124.

know what God is like, we need not look any further than the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus fully expressed the nature and character of God to humanity, with one hundred percent authenticity and accuracy. Yet, this is so counter-cultural to who we are as people.

We often try to present our projected self instead of our actual self. Think of a job interview or a first date. We want to put our “best foot” forward. We want to be ourselves, but we do not want our date or our future boss to know the real authentic us. We want them to see all the good parts of us, so we edit all the things we do not like about ourselves and our lives. We want to display the projected self.

Jesus never had a projected self. He was always the image of God. He was always, as the author of Hebrews said, “*the exact representation of His nature.*” (Hebrews 1:3) If we want to know what God is like, we look at the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We can know God’s character in a relational way through the Son of Man. Jesus makes the invisible God a visible reality to us.

2. HE CREATES

COLOSSIANS 1:16 *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things have been created through Him and for Him.*

Jesus has astronomical power to create. John 1:1-4 puts it like this, referring to Jesus as the Word.

JOHN 1:1-4 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.”*

The Triune God that you and I have the privilege of knowing personally, created everything that you see and everything you cannot see. He has created every pebble, every grain of sand, every blade of grass. He created the roly-poly, and He created the blue whale. He hand-drew every snowflake on the top of Mount Everest (29,029 ft), and He designed every Deep-Sea Dragonfish in the Mariana Trench (36,201 ft below the surface of the Pacific). He created the toucan, and He created the tiger.

Jesus, the Light of the World, created light, that allows us to see, function, grow, and live. A beam of light could circle the earth 7.5 times in one second. ¹⁰ When you look up in the nighttime sky, remember Jesus created all that is in the heavens. If we counted all of the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy 1 second at a time, it would take us 2,500 years. ¹¹ To visualize the grandeur of the creative mind of God, consider this: if our solar system was the size of a quarter, the Milky Way Galaxy would be the size of the North American continent. ¹² If we want to bring it a little closer to home, 1.3 million earth’s could fit inside the sun. ¹³ To put that in perspective, if the sun were as tall as a typical door, the earth would be the size of a nickel. ¹⁴

The Triune God that you and I have the privilege of knowing personally, created everything that you see and everything you cannot see.

¹⁰ www.space.com

¹¹ www.space.com

¹² www.nasa.gov

¹³ www.coolcosmos.ipac.caltech.edu

¹⁴ www.nasa.gov

All the wonders of earth and heavens were created by Jesus and for Jesus. He has creative power and authority over all the earth. What does that mean for us? We may find ourselves in a desperate situation today, where we need a new opportunity created for us. We may find ourselves in an apathetic place where we need a new passion created for us. We may find ourselves in a hopeless position where we need a new job opportunity created for us. Jesus creates. If Jesus was able to create all that is in heaven and on earth, then certainly, Jesus can create what we need in line with His will. We can look at the creative hand of the Triune God and say if the Rocky Mountains can be formed out of the dirt, Jesus can create an opportunity for me as I continue to walk in obedience. If the Grand Canyon can be carved with water, He can create a new work in my heart and my life.

3. HE HOLDS ALL THINGS TOGETHER

COLOSSIANS 1:17 *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

The Apostle Paul takes us on a journey from the telescope to the microscope. Deep down inside the smallest levels of atomic structure, Jesus is holding it all together. Without the intervention of the Triune God, everything would fall apart. At the base level of material is the atom. The atom consists of the proton, neutron, and electron. Deep down in the infinitesimal level of the proton and the neutron, in the very quarks of the atom is a substance called the gluon. Gluon is essentially the electromagnetic force that holds all atoms together.¹⁵ In layman's terms, it is very much like the sound of its name; it is the glue that holds the atoms together.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote, “in Him (Jesus) all things hold together.” Paul had no clue about subatomic particles. He had no clue about quarks and protons. But he did have the experience that Jesus was holding his life together. Paul knew Jesus had the power and capability to hold all things together when he was being stoned outside of Lystra (Acts 14:19-28). He knew that Jesus was holding all things together as he was lowered down in a basket outside the city walls of Damascus (Acts 9:25). Paul knew what it was to be held together as he was tossed to and from in the Adriatic Sea and shipwrecked in Malta (Acts 27:27-28:5). He knew that the Triune God was holding the church together in times of persecution and opposition. For Paul, Jesus' ability to hold all things together was not just a theological statement; it was the testimony of his life.

For Paul, Jesus' ability to hold all things together was not just a theological statement; it was the testimony of his life.

This should bolster our confidence in Jesus. If the Triune God is holding our world together at the subatomic level, if He could be the glue that held the life and ministry of Paul together, He can certainly hold us together. Jesus holds us together and sustains during times of great difficulty and hardship. He can glue our emotions back together. He can glue our broken families back together. He can glue our broken hearts back together. Jesus can hold us together through His omnipotent love.

4. HE RECONCILES US TO HIMSELF AND THE FATHER

COLOSSIANS 1:19-22 *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,²² yet He has*

¹⁵ R. Kunzig, *The Glue That Holds the World Together*, 2000, from <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/the-glue-that-holds-the-world-together>

now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

In these verses, Paul uses the word “reconcile” twice. He uses this term in future tense and in the present tense. He tells us that Jesus is going to reconcile all things to Himself at the end of the age. Universal reconciliation is not the same as universal salvation.¹⁶ Jesus had created all things as we have seen in these verses, which means He is reconciling a world that became broken after the fall of man.

The Apostle Paul tells us that at the end of the age, God will bring all things back into their proper relationship with Him through Jesus. This world and God will once again have a harmonious relationship that does not feel the effects of sin and evil, because of Jesus. The curse will be removed. That will be a magnificent day. The world will no longer be plagued with viruses, wars, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes. The lion and the lamb will lay down together. There will be restoration and reconciliation of that which had been torn apart and separated.

There will be restoration and reconciliation of that which had been torn apart and separated.

But Paul also tells us about a great reconciliation that has *already* occurred, Jesus has reconciled us to Himself, in a very personal way. The word “reconcile” is the Greek word, “*Apokatallaso*” which simply means to bring into right relationship, a former state of harmony.¹⁷ It is the reconciliation that occurred on the cross. He tells the church at Colossae that they were once *alienated*, which means estranged. There was a separation in our relationship with God because of our sinfulness. Our sin made us *hostile* to God. Because of our sin, we had an estranged and hostile relationship with God (Ephesians 2:1-4). But God sent Jesus Christ as the means of mercy to mend the broken relationship. In Christ, God reconciles us unto Himself. Because Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, He is able to do what no mere man could ever do; reconcile lost sinners to a holy God.¹⁸

God extended His mercy and grace through His Son Jesus Christ. Our standing with God is no longer “alienated” it is *holy, blameless, and beyond reproach*. All because of what Jesus did for us in dying on the cross for our sins. The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) enacted peace on our behalf *by the blood of His cross*. He is our reconciler. He is the one who brings us into a right relationship with God.

¹⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary-NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 671.

¹⁷ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

¹⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary-NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 671.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

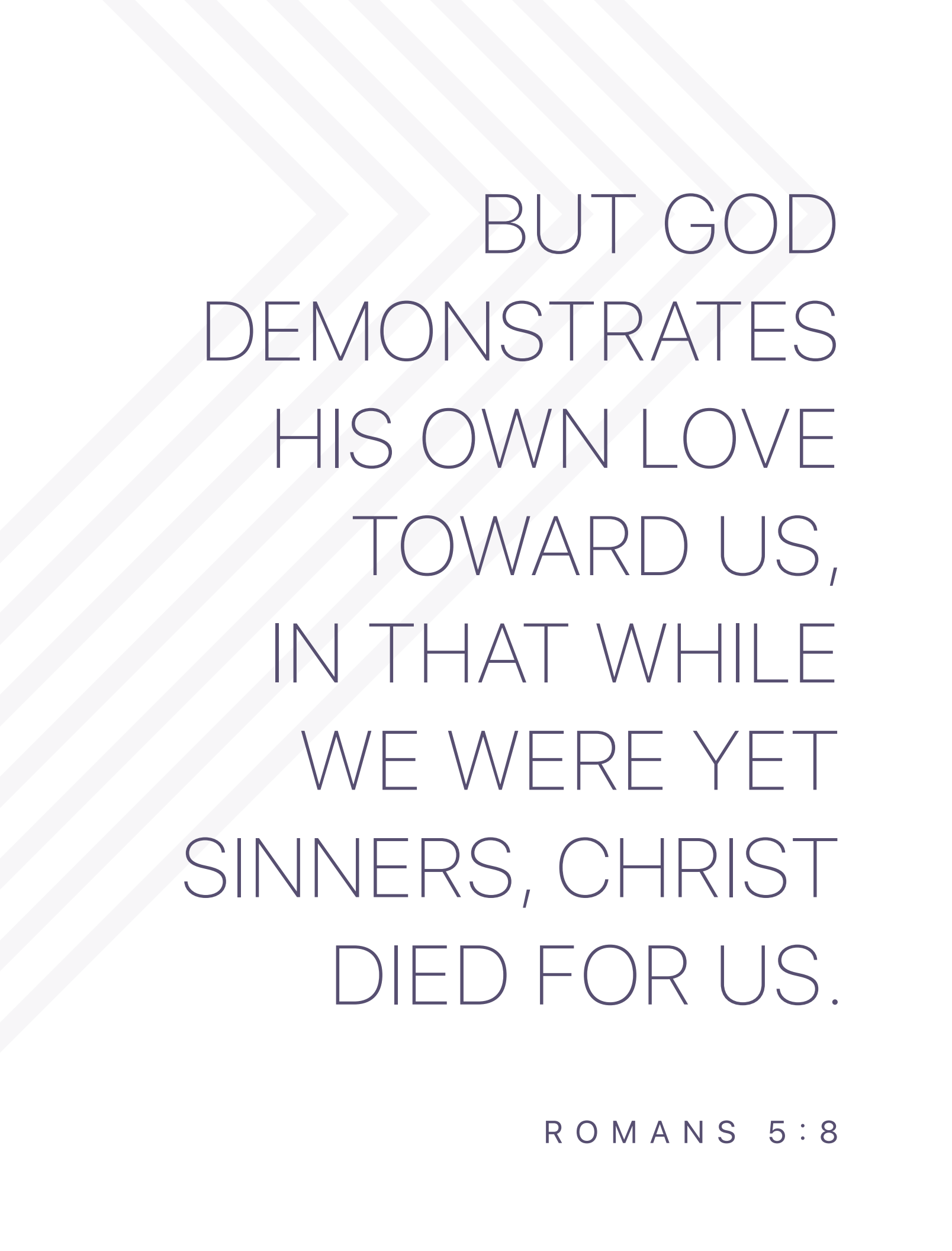
The Story of Change is truly all about change. We are changing our perspective and changing our self-absorption with the person we see in the mirror. Our eyes should focus on the One who is the mirror image of God. Changing the direction of our eyes, the focus of our hearts and the understanding of our minds will cause us to want to be closer to Jesus each day.

Our minds become renewed when we begin to think about the goodness of God. Our hearts become renewed when we start to meditate on Jesus' heart for us. Our actions change when we stand in awe of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ.

When we begin to take our eyes off ourselves, and we begin to behold Jesus as the visible image of the invisible God and appreciate who He is, we begin to change. Paul would tell the Colossian church exactly that in Colossians 3:1-2 *Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

² *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

God's plan is for us to know in our minds and in our hearts who Jesus is, what He has done, and who we are in Him.



BUT GOD
DEMONSTRATES
HIS OWN LOVE
TOWARD US,
IN THAT WHILE
WE WERE YET
SINNERS, CHRIST
DIED FOR US.

R O M A N S 5 : 8

WHAT WE NEED

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 21 & 22

WEEK

3 of 4

OVERVIEW

Romans 5

KEY VERSE

Romans 5:8

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul is never afraid to dig deep into the lives of those who are Christ-followers, including his own. Because of Paul's background as a leader in the Pharisees, he knows the details of the Old Testament intimately. He knew what the Laws of Moses meant and why they existed. Paul upheld those laws and more during his years of being a Pharisee.

As he writes the book of Romans, Paul connects the stories of the Old Testament with his new life based on faith in Jesus Christ. He does not want anyone to miss out on the Story of Change. This chapter today paints a clear picture of our need for a Savior. Paul shows that the need for help began as far back as Adam, which is the beginning of humanity. If you read this chapter in its entirety, you will notice that he builds a case of comparisons and contrasts with Adam and Jesus. There is no gray area; the lines are clear. The good news is God knows that we are people in need. God knows that we are people with a problem.

Apart from Christ, we are sinful people whom Paul refers to as "enemies of God" in our sinful state. (Romans 5:10) This chapter establishes that even though we begin as "enemies," we can be restored and reconciled to a relationship of friendship with God. The Story of Change is a story of grace, peace, hope, and forgiveness, as we will see in Romans 5.

LESSON OUTLINE

We Need to:

1. Be Restored
2. Admit Our Sin
3. Receive His Grace

THINGS TO KNOW

- Paul compares Adam in the Fall, with Christ on the cross, explaining the consequences of their actions for humanity.¹
- The failure of human beings to be the image-bearing creatures God intended, results in corruption and death.²

WHAT WE NEED

Introduction

“My name is Bob, and I am an alcoholic...” Most of us are familiar with this phrase, associating it with the organization Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). As of 2016, an estimated 2 million people worldwide were members of AA.³ AA has succeeded in helping millions of alcoholics achieve sobriety because of their simple, organizational focus and their intentional group meetings. The method that AA follows is called “The Twelve Steps,” containing twelve principles that can lead willing participants toward sobriety. The famous statement at the beginning of this paragraph sums up the message of the first of the twelve steps. Step 1 says, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.”⁴

The first step is for the alcoholic to admit that there is a problem with alcohol that he or she cannot manage on their own. Taking the first step requires the acknowledgment that the alcoholic has an urgent need that he cannot meet for himself, and he requires help. This principle is true for many more behavioral, spiritual, and emotional issues that cause pain and destruction in people’s lives. Consider gambling, sex addiction, anger management, self-harm, eating disorder, chronic laziness, to name a few. To fix the issue, first, there has to be an acknowledgment that the problems and needs cannot be resolved on our own.

We are currently studying the Story of Change, and have established the human problem of sin, as described in Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. And, we have established the Holy nature of God and preeminence of Christ (Colossians 1:15). Now we are going to explore what God has done to alleviate the problem of sin and death. Today, we are going to dive into the fundamental need that all humans have: the need for a restored relationship with the God who made us.

1. WE NEED TO: BE RESTORED

We begin in Romans 5:1-2 to see our need to be restored in our relationship with God to have peace with God.

ROMANS 5:1-2 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. (NIV)*

¹ www.soniclight.com/romans

² N.T. Wright; *Paul*; Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN; 2005, p. 35.

³ “ESTIMATES OF A.A. GROUPS AND MEMBERS AS OF JANUARY 1, 2016”. Alcoholics Anonymous (PDF) (4th ed.). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. p. xxiii.

⁴ Bill W. “Chapter 5: How It Works”. Alcoholics Anonymous (4th ed.). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. ISBN 1-893007-16-2. OCLC 32014950.



It seems impossible to have peace with God when we admittedly have a sin problem. It even seems more unlikely to be able to boast in the hope of the glory of God when we admittedly have a sin problem. And left to our own devices of what we have to offer by ourselves, it would be absolutely impossible. We need to be restored in our relationship with God because it has been broken by sin.

We need to be restored in our relationship with God because it has been broken by sin.

Genesis 3 tells the story of how the rebellion of humans made in His image broke God's created order. Eve listened to the half-truths of the serpent and believed that she could become like God by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve saw that the fruit was good for food (the lust of the flesh), that it was a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and that it was good to make her wise (the pride of life), and she decided to eat it. Because they decided that the fruit would be pleasurable, that it appealed to their vanity, and that it could let them usurp God's position, the man and woman rebelled against God; thus sin entered the world.

God then tells them about a series of curses that would result from their rebellion (Genesis 3:14-19). The woman would have pain in childbirth, and the relationship between man and woman would forever become strained. The man would have to toil in work, and life would be difficult until the day that he dies and returns to dust. The result of sin and rebellion against God is pain and tragedy in life, leading up to eventual death.

We cannot restore this relationship on our own though we often try.

A. We Cannot Restore Ourselves

We try to get clean or do good things in order to have peace with God. There may even be moments or even hours where you have not told a lie, gossiped, lost your temper, or even cursed out loud, but then the alarm goes off, and it is time to wake up, get out of bed and face the day. It becomes a different story when the kids are dragging, the toast is burned, the coffee is spilled, you cannot find your car keys, and you have cat hair on your slacks, all before you walk out the door.

Life is messy, and we are messy people. There is no way for us to get clean enough, be nice enough, or do enough good deeds to have peace with God. It did not work for Adam and Eve, nor will it work for us. It would seem we are doomed. It would seem we are helpless and hopeless people. The truth is we are simply people in need of help and hope.

Not unlike those who are part of AA, we are on a daily journey, and each day if we are honest with ourselves we should openly say, "My name is Adam, I have a problem." The reality is that we cannot eliminate areas of sin in our lives by our own willpower. We are all in the same situation. Paul expounds on this truth in Romans 7:24-25: *"²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (NIV)

The good news of the Bible is that God knew we needed help, and He provided help for all of us. Adam and Eve were hiding from God, having covered themselves with fig leaves because of their shame of sin. God provided a covering for them with the skin of an animal, which was the first sacrifice in Scripture (Genesis 3:21). In their sin and messiness of life, God showed them the picture of grace, giving them something they did not deserve but needed.

We need the same thing today in our messy, sinful, broken lives. God provided a covering for the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.

B. While We Were Still Sinners, Christ Died For Us

Notice how Paul describes this good news in Romans 5:6-11:

ROMANS 5:6-11 *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

In the midst of being helpless, God provided help. Christ died for you and me. There is not a single person alive for whom Christ did not die. Paul tells us that God has taken it upon Himself to restore the relationship with His broken people, while we were still broken and messy, while we were still sinners. Jesus cast aside the majesty of His place with the Father, humbly came to us as a baby, and gave up His life in a painful and humiliating fashion, dying on the cross—all so we could be made right with God again. That which was broken was mended because of the cross.

We experienced reconciliation through His death, and now we can experience the fruit of salvation and victory through His life.

In verse 10, Paul points out that even though we were enemies of God, Jesus' death allowed us to be reconciled to God. But that is not the end of the story, because Jesus not only died, but He was raised to life again on the third day, and He still lives. We experienced reconciliation through His death, and now we can experience the fruit of salvation and victory through His life. Jesus is alive, and He is reigning in the presence of the Father. For us, this means that gaining peace with God is not a one-time experience. Jesus' resurrection and ascension give us confidence that we can experience the life of Christ every day.

As believers, we still struggle with sin and its consequences, but because we have been made right with God through Jesus, we can experience freedom—not only from sin in general, but from the specific sins that cause pain and destruction in our lives. You can learn to control your biting and sharp tongue, you can gain control over your anger, you can eliminate gossip and slander from your life, and you can find freedom from the sexual sins that have bound you. These things can happen because Jesus died to reconcile you to the Father and because He is alive today and reigning. His death on the cross did not wait to happen until you or anyone else was good enough; Jesus died while we were yet sinners. Paul digs a little deeper into this reality of sin.

2. WE NEED TO: ADMIT OUR SIN

ROMANS 5:12;18-19 *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—*

¹⁸ *So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. ¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*

The fundamental issue that all humans face is the problem of sin.

The fundamental issue that all humans face is the problem of sin. Paul is stating two undeniable, indisputable facts: the universality of sin and the universality of death. Everywhere we look, there is evidence upon evidence that what he says is true, that

we are victims of the twin evils of sin and death.⁵ When Paul says that sin and death entered the world through one man, he is referencing the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Sin is not a new problem, nor is our need to deal with sin a new challenge. We are all people who can say, “My name is Adam, and I have a problem.” The next sentence should always be, “I need help.”

Why is sin such a big deal? Why did Adam and Eve’s choice to eat the fruit of a forbidden tree lead to the consequence of all the pain, suffering, division, and death that we see in the world today, thousands of years later? The answer is found in the nature of what it means to be human. Genesis 1:26-28 tells us that humans were made in God’s image. Our purpose in life is to know God and reflect His image to the world. God’s nature is light, life, holiness, power, glory, and a million other descriptions beyond our comprehension. Life can only be found in God Himself because He is the source of life.

Sin does not mean breaking a list of arbitrary rules given by a judgmental God. Sin is the fundamental rejection of God’s nature, and a rejection of the life that comes from knowing Him. Our sin is not an issue because “it needs to be punished,” sin is an issue because it is a punishment in and of itself. Sin necessarily brings about death, because it is a perversion of the good nature that God has given us. Sin is our rejection to live out God’s image, and it leads us to death. No one is exempt from this pattern.

Sin is the fundamental rejection of God’s nature, and a rejection of the life that comes from knowing Him.

All of us live in the same rebellion against God as Adam and Eve. Paul realized this truth as he wrote to the Romans. Paul builds a case for what happened at the beginning when sin entered the world. He shows that based on one man, Adam, we all are sinners. But He also explains that because of one man, Jesus, there is an opportunity to have a changed heart and life.

Like Adam, we reject God’s life and His purposes in favor of our own pleasure, vanity, and pride. The story of Genesis 3 has incredible explanatory power to illuminate the experience of being a human living in bondage to our own sin. In essence, it says, “My name is Adam, and I have a problem.”

Notice the first part of Romans 5:18 and 19 with the words *transgression* and *disobedience*. Both words are a bit gentler than the word “sin.” Yet, we do not want to fall into the trap of soft stepping around the impact of transgression and disobedience. Because we need to have our sin dealt with, we also need to acknowledge that unresolved areas of sin in our lives harm both the people we love and us.

When pressed, all of us will likely admit that our anger, our willingness to gossip, our envy, our greed, and our sexual sins are wrong, but we often live our lives under the unspoken assumption that it is “no big deal.” Our internal justification may sound something like this: “Who cares if my friend and I talk about our Boss behind his back? It is just the two of us, and no one is going to know.” Or “No one is going to know what I am watching on my phone. Sure, I am ashamed of it, but it is hidden, and it is not hurting anyone.” Or perhaps, “I may occasionally fly off the handle and say mean things to my wife and kids, but they know it only happens when I am stressed.” We can rationalize almost any words or actions, justifying what we have done.

If you are a believer, your sins are forgiven, but they are still devastatingly destructive to you and your loved ones.

If you are a believer, your sins are forgiven, but they are still devastatingly destructive to you and your loved ones. You need to take your unresolved sin seriously, precisely because it is hurting you and others. There is no such thing as private sin, and everything that is hidden will eventually be brought to light. Your sin is a malignant

⁵ www.raystatedman.org/romans5

disease that needs to be killed, not a pet, to be indulged and fed. Your proclivity toward certain sins is not God's design for your life, but it comes from our desire for pleasure, our vanity, and our pride. We can trace it back to Adam and Eve, yet that is not an excuse to ignore the ramifications.

Jesus came to liberate us from the punishment of sin, and He also came to free us from the bondage and grip of the individual sins that pull us away from God's purposes. We need to ask ourselves, what is the area of sin in my life right now that I am indulging, and what needs to happen to eliminate it immediately? Sin is a harsh reality that we must admit. But remember, God provided grace while we were yet sinners.

3. WE NEED TO: RECEIVE HIS GRACE

The story of Scripture is ultimately the story of God's redemption of His creation. The world is broken because of sin, and all of us are individually broken because of sin. If you find yourself bound by addiction, broken relationships, and a lack of purpose, then you can be certain that you are experiencing the results of sin.

Jesus gave His own life to deal with the sin of the world once and for all. And those who believe in Him will be made right with God again, or in other words, justified and reconciled.

Freedom from the bondage of sin can only come through a restored relationship with the God who made you, and God has made a way for that to happen. Jesus gave His own life to deal with the sin of the world once and for all. And those who believe in Him will be made right with God again, or in other words, justified and reconciled. If you have never made the conscious decision to give your life to Christ, then this is the right time for you to make that decision. Once you admit you have a problem, you can ask Christ to be the Lord and Savior of your life, receive His grace, and be freed from the brokenness of sin and death. It can only happen through Christ. Look at how this truth reads in Romans 5:16, 20-21:

ROMANS 5:16 *And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins. (NLT)*

ROMANS 5:20-21 *God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant. ²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (NLT)*

Next week, we will examine the provision of His grace in more detail.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Sometimes the hardest part of change is that first step. It is not easy to admit you have a problem. But the reality is we all have a problem, the same problem, the sin problem. We do not have to face it alone. In fact, we cannot overcome the sin problem alone. We all have the same problem, and we all have access to the same solution, Jesus. God has a plan and purpose for each of us.

How does His plan shape our purpose? What does all of this mean, practically? It means that if you want to purge specific sins from your life, it must start with living out a relationship with Christ. Becoming a Christian does not exempt us from temptation, or from the earthly consequences of our sin.

We must daily decide to live out the new life. We must make time to read and know His Word, to talk to Him and listen to His voice in prayer, and to worship Him corporately with other believers. Victory from sin and the satisfaction of the life of Christ is available to us, but we have to be willing to walk with Him to experience it daily. God's plan will continue to shape our purpose daily as we walk with the Lord, believe His truth, and receive His grace.

DO NOT OFFER ANY PART
OF YOURSELF TO SIN
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF
WICKEDNESS, BUT RATHER
OFFER YOURSELVES TO
GOD AS THOSE WHO
HAVE BEEN BROUGHT
FROM DEATH TO LIFE;
AND OFFER EVERY PART
OF YOURSELF TO HIM
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS.

R O M A N S 6 : 1 3

WHAT HE PROVIDES

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 28 & 29

WEEK

4 of 4

OVERVIEW

Romans 6

KEY VERSE

Romans 6:13

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul never wanted a Christ-follower to be stagnant in his or her life. Paul experienced a dramatic change by Jesus and is adamant about making sure other believers understand exactly the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. So often, we focus on the crucifixion, which is a part of why we are changed. But the story did not end with Jesus' death on the cross, nor in the tomb where He lay for three days.

While the death of Christ is a big part of our story of change, it does not end in the grave. Jesus victoriously rose on the third day. He then walked in the newness of life for 40 days on this earth, appearing before over 500 people, teaching, visiting, and even eating breakfast on the beach with His disciples. And then, He ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us on earth. Jesus reigns! He lives! Jesus is alive!

Paul wants us to understand that as Christ-followers, we are united with Christ fully and completely. Not just because of His death on the cross or being buried in the grave, but because of His resurrection and the newness of life that results. In Romans 6, we see a visual picture of what happens in our hearts, but the choice to be instruments of change is ultimately up to us.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. He Provides Grace
2. He Provides New Life
3. He Provides Purpose

THINGS TO KNOW

- Paul is writing to the Christians in Rome, providing details about their old life and new life in Christ.¹
- The English word "baptism or baptized" is translated from the Greek word "baptizo." The root meaning is "to dip, soak or immerse." Being baptized/ immersed in Christ (Romans 6:3) is equated with being united with the Messiah. (Romans 6:6) In the early church, baptism was their profession of faith as they raised their flag for Christ.

WHAT HE PROVIDES

Introduction

Imagine the most skilled craftsman in the world using all of his knowledge, dexterity, and care to create a perfect guitar. Every piece of wood, every fret, every curve, and every string are placed and situated to perfection. Now imagine that this perfect guitar is given to you, and every other guitar in the world is destroyed. You hold in your possession the most beautiful and perfect guitar—what should you do with it?

Even though the guitar is aesthetically beautiful, you would be making a mistake if you put the guitar on display as though it were in a museum. To share the true beauty of this instrument, either you or someone else needs to play it! A perfect guitar is perfect because it is an instrument that creates music, beautiful music that uniquely taps into the beauty of God's universe. The value and the beauty of the guitar are in the music that it can create.

Today, we are going to focus on the fact that in Jesus Christ, God has provided us with the opportunity to truly live out our calling, to become the people that He created us to be and to make the 'music' that He created us to make. He did not create us to be framed and hung on the wall as a display; rather, we were made to live out God's calling and reflect His image in our actions, our words, and our relationships.

This is our last lesson in the four-week series: the Story of Change. Last week, we discussed the question of "What we need" and established that all of us have a fundamental need to admit our sin and receive His grace to restore our relationship with God. In Romans, the Apostle Paul has built a case pointing out the fact that by grace, God has pursued us in such a way as to restore us to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ even "*while we were yet sinners.*"

1. HE PROVIDES GRACE

ROMANS 5:20-21 *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

ROMANS 6:1 *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?*

Paul begins by asking a question based on what he had written in chapter 5, which was ultimately about the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Last week we realized that we have a problem called sin, and we have a need to be saved since we are sinners because of the fall of Adam (Romans 5:12). Paul made it clear that those who believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus have forgiveness, not because they earn or deserve it, but because of grace (Romans 5:10, 20-21). Paul anticipates that people will have questions and potentially push back on this issue.



¹ *The Complete Jewish Bible*, Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, Peabody, MA; 2016, p. 1613.

God is a loving and giving God. He intended to provide us with grace through Jesus Christ. It is logical that if we sin more, then God could offer more grace. No harm, no foul. In fact, it could be argued that we would be doing God a favor by sinning more so that He could show more grace, though a feeble argument. Look at Paul's response to the anticipated question.

ROMANS 6:2 *May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*

Here are how some other translations word the first phrase:

ROMANS 6:2A *God forbid!* (KJV)

ROMANS 6:2A *What a ghastly thought!* (Phillips)

ROMANS 6:2A *Of course not!* (TLB)

ROMANS 6:2A *I should hope not!* (The Message)

ROMANS 6:2A *By no means!* (NIV)

Suffice it to say, Paul could not fathom the idea of intentionally living a life of sin after you have entered a relationship with Jesus. He is not talking about living a life of perfection; we all sin, make mistakes, and fail at times. Paul is talking about intentionally living a lifestyle of sin as if completely unchanged by Christ, simply living the same kind of life as they did before they became a Christian.

Remember, we are studying the Story of Change, which means we are supposed to actually *change* in our life because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul was so emphatic with his response because of the reality that we died to sin. In his mind, how or why would we still want to live in it?

Note that Paul did not say it is impossible to live in sin, or that sin is dead to the Christian (i.e., that it no longer appeals to us). He meant it is unnecessary and undesirable to live in sin, to practice it habitually.² Paul is also not saying that we are “in the process” of dying to sin as if it is something happening gradually over time. Paul is using the Greek aorist tense, which means this is once for all; we “died to sin.” Jesus took care of our sin problem on the cross, which is proof of the grace He provided.

Jesus paid the price of sin once for all by His death. His crucifixion became our crucifixion.

Jesus paid the price of sin once for all by His death. His crucifixion became our crucifixion. Paul would say it like this in Galatians 2:20, “*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*”

Back in Romans 6, Paul continues explaining death and life, specifically new life.

2. HE PROVIDES NEW LIFE

ROMANS 6:3-11 *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.*

² www.soniclight.com/romans

⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In these verses, Paul uses the words death, dead, died, or die 13 times. He is clearly expanding on what he said in verse 2 about being *dead to sin*. To fully appreciate the new life in Christ, we must understand the death that took place. We are never to forget the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, dying for us while we were yet sinners. Jesus, who had never sinned, not only took on our sins, *He became sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Paul asks a rhetorical question in verse 3 that he clarifies in the following verses. He is contrasting death and life, the old and new by the example of baptism. Many of us, when we see or hear the word baptism, we immediately think of water. It appears that Paul had both the literal and the figurative in mind in this paragraph, for he used the readers' experience of water baptism to remind them of their identification with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. ³ Baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Greek word "*Baptizo*" means to dip or immerse. ⁴ So, if you follow the progression of someone being baptized by immersion in the water, it is clear to see the symbolic connection that Paul is making to the Christians in Rome in verse 4a, "*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death.*" When someone goes under the water, it is a reminder that we have been "buried with Him" into death. Paul wants to make sure the readers understand that there is a death involved. Jesus died on the cross and was buried in the tomb, an immersion into the grave.

But then he writes in 4b, "*so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father.*" As someone comes out of the water, it is a visual reminder of Jesus rising from the dead and leaving the tomb empty. This is a picture of victory over death, victory over sin.

Those two truths are life-changing, to say the least, but it does not end there. Do not miss the end of verse 4 where he says, "*so we too might walk in newness of life.*" As someone comes out of the

baptismal water, there is symbolically a newness of life that was not there before. This is the full picture of baptism and the story of a changed life. It is not just being baptized in and out of the water; it is about the newness of life.

As a church, we use Romans 6:4 when someone is baptized, whether in the Worship Center, outside fountain, or on Beach Retreat. Below are the words the pastor will say as they are baptizing:

"In imitation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and in obedience to His divine command, I baptize you (*name*) in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Buried with Christ unto death; Rise to walk in the newness of life!"

It is important to remember that baptism does not save you but is a picture of what has already happened in your heart by confessing and believing Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Paul realized that those Christ-followers in the First Century made it a practice to be baptized in the same manner as Jesus as a way to be identified with Him. Paul did not want them or us to miss the fact that as Christ-followers, we are also baptized, not with water but by the Spirit, when we become Christians. Paul is declaring there is a new life to be lived because we are united with Christ.

It is important to remember that baptism does not save you but is a picture of what has already happened in your heart by confessing and believing Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007; p. 423.

⁴ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

Look again at verse 5, “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,” The word united is the Greek word, “*Sumphutos*” which means congenital, grow together, united with.⁵

When we are united with Christ, we are grafted together with Him. We are not in a tagalong relationship; we are one with Christ. In nature, if you take a branch of one tree and “*Sumphutos*” it with another tree, i.e. grafting; the branch is tied together in such a way that the life from the trunk of the tree flows into the branch and they grow together, until finally you cannot tell the difference between the graft and the natural branch. Life is fully shared.⁶

The Story of Change is all about becoming united with Him in the likeness of His death but also in the likeness of His resurrection. Our identification with Christ does not end in death to sin; it extends to our participation in His resurrection to a new kind of life.⁷

So, what does this resurrected new life look like? We find some clues at the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus never died again. He walked in newness of life for 40 days on this earth and is now even still alive in heaven sitting at the right hand of His Father.

The Story of Change is all about becoming united with Him in the likeness of His death but also in the likeness of His resurrection.

Jesus conquered death and sin once for all and lived. His death and resurrection are ours, so we are, in fact, dead to sin and able to walk in the newness of life. There is freedom in this life in both physical reality and the promise of the future in heaven. Notice there is a movement not stagnation in the word “walk.” Our salvation is not merely to save us from hell or get us into heaven. Instead, it is to give us the freedom to walk in newness of life.

We are to change from the inside out as a result of our salvation. Our attitudes should be different from what they were before we became united with Christ. Our emotions should be different from what they were before we became united with Christ. Our thoughts, relationships, goals, and values should be different as a result of being changed by Christ.

Christ has provided us new life to walk in a forward motion with purpose.

3. HE PROVIDES PURPOSE

ROMANS 6:11-14 *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

Paul tells us that we must count ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ. Because of this, sin should no longer reign in our bodies, but we must become an instrument of righteousness. This comes down to total surrender lived out with intentionality. This kind of purpose does not happen by accident, nor should it only happen in times of convenience. This newness of life should be lived out with purpose based on the realization of exactly what Jesus Christ did for you in your union

⁵ www.biblehub.com/greek

⁶ www.raystedman.org/romans6

⁷ *The Necessity of Sanctification*, www.bible.org/seriespage

with Him. He died, you died. He was resurrected, you are resurrected. He lives, you live. There is no greater truth in all the world. Does this mean we will be perfect? No. Does this mean that we will never face temptation? No.

Consider the literal translation, based on the verb tenses in the original Greek language:

“Do not constantly allow sin to reign in your mortal body so that you are constantly obeying its lusts. Neither constantly yield your members of your body as weapons or tools of unrighteousness to sin; but once and for all yield yourselves to God.”⁸

The best way to walk in the newness of life is by purposely taking one step forward at a time.

The best way to walk in the newness of life is by purposely taking one step forward at a time. There will be situations where you take two steps forward and three steps backward. There will be times when you actually fall down and proverbially skin your knee or sprain your ankle; get up, shake the dirt off, and start walking again. Peter denied knowing Christ three times in a matter of hours, yet he got up and started walking again. Thomas did not believe that Jesus was truly resurrected from the grave and would not believe until he could touch the scars of Jesus. When he did, Thomas got up and started walking again. Paul prayed on at least three occasions for the “thorn in his side” to be removed, and it was not, yet Paul got up and started walking again.

We are to be an instrument of righteousness. An instrument is meant to be played. Even a Stradivarius violin, the most valuable of instruments, is not fulfilling its intended purpose hanging on a wall in a museum. It was designed and created to be an instrument that plays music. And so, it is with those who are Christ-followers. We have been paid for by the costliest of prices on the cross. The design and purpose of our life in Christ are to walk in the newness of life. We are to be instruments that play a symphony of music for the glory of God.

Everything that we have in life—our resources, our relationships, our talents and abilities, our time, and our energy—does not ultimately belong to us. These things are given to us by God for a purpose: to know and serve Him and to bless others. It is when we step into our calling to reflect the image of God that we can experience the fullness of purpose and experience satisfaction with the blessings that God has given us. There are few things sadder than seeing a person waste their potential because they are either unmotivated, distracted, or sidetracked by lesser pleasures.

It is because of God’s grace that we surrender ourselves to Him, playing the instrument for His glory. We have a new conductor in Jesus Christ. Our challenge is not to simply be on display collecting dust; we are to walk, live, serve, and surrender to the One who changed our lives for a purpose.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

At the beginning of our Story of Change, it seems almost impossible to connect who we are and who Christ is. We are sinners. Jesus is the image of God, perfect and preeminent in all ways. We were doomed if left on our own spiraling downward literally and figuratively. We deserved death, total separation from God, who is Holy. But God had a different plan in the form of a free gift. *Continued on page 81 >*

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007; p. 425.

ROMANS 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

There is nothing logical about this verse. We deserved death because of our sin. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. That, in a nutshell, is the Story of Change. God provided a gift based on grace. It is nothing we could earn or deserve; all we have to do is accept the gift as our own.

It is in receiving this gift that causes us to be grafted into Christ, shaped into a new life with a new purpose. It is now time to tune up your instrument and let the music of grace fill this world for the sake of Christ.

THE STORY OF **CHANGE**

WHO **WE ARE**

WHO **CHRIST IS**

WHAT WE **NEED**

WHAT HE **PROVIDES**



COMING UP NEXT:
THE STORY OF **HEAVEN**



THE TRUTH IS THAT
HEAVEN IS A GREAT MYSTERY
IN MANY RESPECTS.

THE STORY OF HEAVEN

This entire year we have sought to understand the storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In January, we began in Genesis, and appropriately in December, we finish with Revelation. We began with the Story of Grace and will finish with the Story of Heaven. It is undeniable that the realities of heaven are only possible because of God's grace.

Though the book of Revelation is filled with the prophecy of end times, battles, judgments, and victories, we will focus on the passages concerning heaven. This series reveals the beauty, mystery, and unveiling of heaven. In fact, the word "revelation" is the Greek word "*Apokalupsis*," which means "unveiling, uncovering that which was hidden."¹

The first verse of Revelation explains it well, "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.*" (Revelation 1:1)

In this book, the Holy Spirit pulls back the curtain and gives us the privilege of seeing the glorified Christ in heaven and the fulfillment of His sovereign purposes in the world.² It is the unveiling of Jesus Christ given to the Apostle John, who is in his 90's and exiled on the island of Patmos. Even though John had seen Jesus up close and personal for over three years as one of His closest friends on this earth, John had never seen Jesus the Christ unveiled in His heavenly home.

Some think of heaven in images of big white fluffy clouds or streets of gold. Perhaps some think of the grandest of mansions lining a hillside. Others immediately think of Saint Peter standing at the pearly gates. The truth is that heaven is a great mystery in many respects. We try to conceive in our finite minds that which is eternal and infinite. Most will picture heaven based on what they have seen in paintings, drawings, and other forms of artistic or literary media. Peaceful. Tranquil. Perfect.

Heaven is home for those who believe in Christ Jesus. Heaven is more than a destination; it is a motivation. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now.³ This is the Story of Heaven as it was unveiled to John.

December 5-6 The Scroll and the Lamb - Revelation 5

December 12-13 The Old and the New - Revelation 21

December 19-20 The River and the Tree - Revelation 22

¹ www.biblehub.com/greek

² Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 1036.

³ *Ibid*, p. 1082.

AND THEY SANG A NEW
SONG, SAYING, "WORTHY
ARE YOU TO TAKE THE
SCROLL AND TO OPEN
ITS SEALS, FOR YOU WERE
SLAIN, AND BY YOUR BLOOD
YOU RANSOMED PEOPLE
FOR GOD FROM EVERY
TRIBE AND LANGUAGE AND
PEOPLE AND NATION.

REVELATION 5:9

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

THE STORY
OF HEAVEN

DATE

December 5 & 6

WEEK

1 of 3

OVERVIEW

Revelation 4-5

KEY VERSE

Revelation 5:9

SETTING THE STAGE

Revelation chapters 4-7 introduce us to heaven for the first time in the book. Up until this point, Jesus has been speaking to specific churches. If you have a red-letter edition of the Bible, you will notice that every word in chapters 2 and 3 are red, indicating the words of Jesus.

Then something changes in chapter 4 as we see not only that the red-letter words are gone, but John sees heaven.

REVELATION 4:1-2 *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."
² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.*

The description John gives is like someone vigorously grasping at words trying to describe the indescribable. John had spent over three years with Jesus and was one of His closest friends, even being entrusted to take care of Jesus' mother Mary (John 19:27). John was with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). But John had never seen heaven. John had never seen the majesty and glory of the One rightfully on His throne. And now, the door to heaven was standing open.

With thrones, crowns, flashes of lightning, and more, there was a scene of heavenly worship described by John in chapter 4. All gathered around the throne; they were worshipping the Creator of all creation, culminating in a song of praise. *Continued on page 86 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Scroll
2. The Lamb
3. The Song

THINGS TO KNOW

- Jesus is referred to as "the Lamb" at least twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation.¹
- Chapters 4 & 5 present heaven, God's dwelling place, as a real place.²

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

Setting the Stage, continued >

REVELATION 4:11 *“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”*

This scene sets the stage for chapter 5, still gathered in the throne room. John continues to write down what he sees and experiences as he beholds the unveiling of heaven.

Introduction

Many of our concepts of heaven come from paintings, drawings, or perhaps even movies. Depending on the perspective, images include fluffy white clouds and chubby little angels with harps floating in the sky. Or there may be dark rolling clouds with lightning bolts flashing and strange looking creatures like that of a nightmare. Honestly, depending on which part of the book of Revelation you are reading, your perspective can change.

Today we are going to be in Chapter 5, which is a setting that has a little bit of both perspectives described above. There are some strange looking creatures described briefly, but there are also harps and golden lamps. However, the most significant part of the scene in this chapter is the presence of Jesus, our Redeemer, the Lamb of God.

1. THE SCROLL

REVELATION 5:1-2 *Then I saw in the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (ESV)*

In his vision, John was in what we would refer to as “the throne room of heaven,” described in some detail in Revelation 4. The throne room is a place of worship and praise. God is rightfully on His throne, and all those present celebrate with song in His honor. John was looking from the other side of the door into heaven (Revelation 4:1).

With the words, “*Then I saw,*” his attention is drawn to the right hand of Him who is seated on the throne, God. Note there is significance in the words, numbers, symbols, and actions in all of Scripture, but perhaps to an even greater and more mysterious degree in the book of Revelation. The number 7, for instance, means perfection and completion. ³ The “right hand” is a symbol of God’s strength and justice. ⁴

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 1051.

² www.soniclight.com/revelation

³ www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible

⁴ www.bible.org/seriespage



There was this scroll written *within and on the back, sealed with seven seals*. Scrolls in ancient times rarely had writing on both sides because one side was usually rough and uneven. When both sides of a scroll were written on, it was an indication of a full and essential message.⁵ This was obviously an important message because it had writing on both sides as well as having seven seals. The scroll was not Scripture like a scroll of the prophet Isaiah or Jeremiah; it was a title deed that could only be opened by the appointed heir.⁶

The scroll was not Scripture like a scroll of the prophet Isaiah or Jeremiah; it was a title deed that could only be opened by the appointed heir.

John is watching this scene in heaven, and then a mighty unnamed angel proclaims, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seal?” There were angels, elders, and heavenly creatures surrounding this throne, yet none could break the seal. There appeared to be none worthy, which is strange since they are in heaven. But no one was found worthy from the elders to the angels, to various creatures, not one. John was not only in disbelief but moved to tears.

REVELATION 5:4 *and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.* (ESV)

The word for weep is the same word used when Jesus was weeping over Jerusalem and when Peter was weeping after having denied knowing Jesus for the third time. This was a wailing of tears from John because no one could be found worthy to unseal this important document. The urgency of the moment had gotten to him. He realized that what was unveiling before his eyes was a glimpse of the things which were to come, and it appeared that no one was worthy to break the seals of the scroll. Or was there?

REVELATION 5:5 *And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals.”* (ESV)

There was one found worthy—the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. The titles themselves depict majesty and strength. The reference to the Lion of Judah goes all the way back to Genesis 49:8-10, where Jacob prophetically gave the scepter to Judah and made it the tribe of the kings.⁷ The Kings were strong, fierce and majestic like a lion. They were to be feared and respected as leaders. The picture is that of courage and victory. The Root of David is a messianic title from Isaiah 11:1,10 showing that a descendant of David would be the long-awaited Messiah.

There is only One who would be found worthy in all of heaven to open the seal. Jesus is the One worthy to take the scroll because of **who He is**, the rightful King from David’s loins; **what He is**, the Lion from Judah’s tribe with the power to destroy His enemies; and also because of **what He has done**—He has overcome.⁸ The anticipation of One so mighty, courageous, fierce, and respected was building. What would Jesus look like in heaven?

Perhaps John remembered the times they were on the boat in Galilee, or on the hillside with masses of people gathered around. John might have thought about the intimate gathering in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion. John knew what Jesus looked like and could only imagine the majesty and glory in heaven. And then the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, entered.

⁵ www.raystедman.com/revelation5

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 1050.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11*; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 1999; p. 167.

2. THE LAMB

It was not as John must have anticipated. Jesus did not enter as One looking majestic, courageous, victorious, or respected. Jesus entered as a lamb.

REVELATION 5:6 *And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (ESV)*

There is a popular song by Mercy Me called “I Can Only Imagine,” but this is a sight that not even John could have imagined. He was not looking at a lion, but rather a lamb. The reality was setting in on what was taking place. The Lord Jesus could not be the Lion of judgment or the King of glory unless He was first “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” (John 1:29)⁹ The lamb is consistently connected with the Passover from as far back as the times of Moses. The word for lamb is describing one that would be brought in as a pet for the family. They would keep, feed, protect the innocent unblemished lamb for four days before the sacrifice of that innocent, pure lamb. Interestingly, Jesus is referred to as the Lamb 28 times in the book of Revelation and as a Lion only once.

However, this Lamb did not look pure and innocent or resemble any sort of family pet. This Lamb, though standing, looked as though it had been slain. Pause for a moment to reflect on what is taking place in the grandeur and majesty inside the throne room of heaven. The Lion of Judah, the Root of David, is a Lamb that had been slain, though standing.

John was there when Jesus was arrested in the garden in the dark, early hours of the morning He was betrayed. Jesus was arrested and tried illegally while being slapped, beaten, spit upon, and scourged publicly. Isaiah would prophesy the following about Jesus,

ISAIAH 53:7 *He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.*

**In heaven before
the eyes of John
stood the Lamb that
had been slain. His
scars still apparent
as a reminder of
His suffering and
sacrifice for the world.**

In heaven before the eyes of John stood the Lamb that had been slain. His scars still apparent as a reminder of His suffering and sacrifice for the world. A reminder of the cost to heaven for the price of sin. But do not miss the fact the Lamb was standing. The Lamb was victorious. The Lamb conquered the grave. The Lamb of God was on His Throne. The Lamb of God was the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. The Lamb of God, though slain, was still standing.

The slain Lamb was standing before all heaven “*with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*” Here is what Warren Wiersbe says about this verse,

Since seven is the number of perfection, we have here perfect power (seven horns), perfect wisdom (seven eyes), and perfect presence (seven Spirits in all the earth). The theologians would call these qualities omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; and all three are attributes of God.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; p. 1051.

The stark reality is that Jesus left the splendor, glory, and perfection of heaven to come to earth as a man (Philippians 2:5-8). He was fully divine and fully human as He dwelt among us. And for our salvation, Jesus became the Lamb of God, the final sacrifice for humankind. But now in heaven, there was still work to do.

REVELATION 5:7-8 *And He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (ESV)*

Jesus took the scroll from the right hand of His Father. Jesus was found worthy of the role of opening the scroll. Though we will not be studying what the scroll says in detail, it sets forth the judgment that takes place in chapters 6 and 8. However, at this moment, the scene is changing. John had been weeping, that has stopped. The worthy One has been introduced. It is as if when the scroll was placed in the hand of Jesus, there was a sigh of relief, confidence, humility, and praise.

Notice not a word was spoken, the scroll was merely released by God and taken by Jesus. It was time for the anticipated, but not known, action to take place. Matthew 24:36 says, “*But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*” Those present fell down before the Lamb. They took a posture of humility before Jesus holding the scroll. They offered prayers, held harps, and incense burned in bowls. The mood was changing from weeping to worshipping.

3. THE SONG

REVELATION 5:9-14 *And they sang a new song, saying,*

*“Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”*

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”*

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

*“To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped. (ESV)

Notice in verse 9 when it says this was a “new” song. This is not a song that had been written, sung, or experienced before. This song was brand-new. The time had come for that which had been long-awaited. The scroll was in the hand of the slain Lamb that was standing. The One who paid the price for the sin of the world. This new song made sure that there was recognition of the blood sacrifice for salvation.

Notice how it shows that Jesus gave His life for the world, *every tribe and language and people and nation*. There is no one on this earth regardless of language spoken, the color of skin, ancestry, or education that is not included in this verse.

This season of the year is a time we sing lots of Christmas songs, including “Joy to the World,” which reminds us that Jesus brought the joy of salvation to this entire world. One of the verses in that song says,

*He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The light of His righteousness
And wonders of His love*

Jesus showed the wonders of His love with truth and grace for the nations of this world.

Jesus showed the wonders of His love with truth and grace for the nations of this world. There is Joy in heaven because of what Jesus did and was about to do. There was an anticipation of all that will take place, ultimately leading to Christ ruling the world with truth and grace.

The waves of praise do not end with the elders. As if caught up in rapturous joy, two more groups joined in, angels and every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea. ¹¹ We get the sense that John is captured in the moment, taking it all in, and then as he looked around, he first heard the voice of many angels. It was as if they were in one voice (singular), but the numbers were beyond comprehension.

Myriads are typically known to be ten thousand, so this is a choir of angels into the tens if not hundreds of thousands, perhaps even more in one unified voice saying, not singing:

REVELATION 5:12 *saying with a loud voice,*

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”*

These are words of praise and adoration that Jesus never received on earth. Jesus was born in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem because there was not enough room at an inn. He was raised in anonymity for 30 years except for one moment when He was twelve on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was ridiculed by the Pharisees and Sadducees and condemned by the political leaders of the day. He was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver by one of His disciples. One of His closest disciples betrayed Him by denial three times. Another disciple did not believe it was Him until He allowed the disciple to touch the scars in His hand and side after His resurrection.

Jesus was crucified between two common thieves at the place of the skull on the outskirts of Jerusalem for all to see His nakedness, suffering, and last breath. Jesus had never received this kind of praise while on earth. But now in heaven, it was different. In heaven, it was at it should have been and will now always be.

In heaven, the myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels were saying in one unified voice,

¹¹ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Revelation*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2014, p. 106.

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!” (ESV)*

The Lamb was slain so we could be redeemed. As the old hymn says, “Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.” They were proclaiming that the Lamb that had been slain was worthy. After all the ridicule, persecution, beating, spitting, scourging, bleeding, humiliation, excruciating pain on the cross, and even death; the Lamb is worthy.

The Lamb is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! Do not miss the exclamation point! It is as if these thousands upon thousands of angels had to stop themselves because they could have gone on and on. They did not use a period that emphasized the truth, rather emphatically, they used an exclamation point! Joy to the World the Lord has come in the form of a Lamb, a slain Lamb that was standing.

The closing verses of this chapter expand the praise beyond the throne room of heaven.

REVELATION 5:13-14 *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,*

*“To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*

¹⁴ *And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped. (ESV)*

The entire universe began praising God the Father sitting on His throne and next to Him, the Lamb of God, His Son. This is reminiscent of the very last verse in Psalms, Psalm 150:6, “*Let everything that has breath, Praise the Lord!*”

The scene closes with worship and praise that would ultimately never end. May we join along and say with joy in our hearts to Him, “be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” Amen.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We often say things in church like “God is on His throne,” which is to say that God is in control. Those words give us comfort in times that seem so far beyond our control. There is an assurance that the One who spoke the world into existence is the One who has been and will forever be on His throne surrounded by those who worship Him. Revelation is ultimately a book of worship. This time of year, when we are beginning to see the signs of Christmas in neighborhoods, homes, and shopping centers, what better time to worship?

Continued on page 92 >

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We are to worship the One we celebrate this time of year, the baby that was born in Bethlehem. The Baby who grew up as the son of a carpenter, but had the birthright of heaven. Jesus grew up to minister for a little over three years, teaching, serving, healing, performing miracles all the while knowing that He would be led to slaughter like a lamb.

We are to worship the One who gave His life as the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. We are to worship the One who was buried in the tomb. We are to worship the One who rose from the grave. We are to worship the One who is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. We are to worship the One who is the Lamb that was slain but now stands victoriously in heaven. The Lamb of God worthy of our worship and praise. May the season of Christmas be the season of worship. O come let us adore Him, the Lamb of God standing and worthy of our worship.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE STORY
OF HEAVEN

DATE

December 12 & 13

WEEK

2 of 3

OVERVIEW

Revelation 21

KEY VERSE

Revelation 21:2

SETTING THE STAGE

The last two chapters of Revelation are the end of the book but tell of a new beginning. Throughout Scripture, we have seen God change people's lives in such a way that they would become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Ezekiel, God talked about a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). In Isaiah, God said He had a "new thing springing forth, making rivers in the desert" (Isaiah 43:19). In Ephesians, Paul tells the church to "take off the old and put on the new" (Ephesians 4:22-24). God is all about making things new.

What began in Genesis is brought to completion in Revelation. ¹ Consider the chart below:

GENESIS

Heavens and earth created (1:1)
Sun created (1:16)
Night established (1:5)
Seas created (1:10)
Curse announced (3:14-17)
Death enters history (3:19)
Man is driven from paradise (3:24)
Sorrow and pain begin (3:17)

REVELATION

New heavens and earth (21:1)
No need of the sun (21:23)
No night there (21:25; 22:5)
No more seas (21:1)
No more curse (22:3)
No more death (21:4)
Man restored to paradise (22:14)
No more mourning, crying or pain (21:4)

The book of Revelation is the unveiling of the power, authority, majesty, and home of God. John has seen visions of dragons, wars, fires, beasts, horses, plagues, Satan banished to hell, and so much more. But now, John sees the new Heaven and the new earth. John sees the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. John realizes, at this stage of the unveiling, the grandeur of Heaven beyond that imagined, that it is more personal than expected and utterly new in all realms.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Out with the Old
2. In with the New
3. A Closer Look at New Jerusalem

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word, "Kainon" means "new, recently made, unused, unprecedented, new." ²
- The Greek word, "Skenoo" means "dwell, tabernacle, abide." ³

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Introduction

John Lennon wrote a song in 1971 called “Imagine;” the opening line is perhaps one of the saddest lyrics in all of music, “Imagine there is no heaven.” Twenty-eight years later, Bart Millard of Mercy Me wrote another song about heaven, “I Can Only Imagine,” which is the opposite of John Lennon’s song. The one written in 1999 by Bart Millard focuses on imagining what it will feel like to be in heaven, the reality of seeing Jesus face to face.

There has always been a mystery and intrigue about heaven. Artists have tried to depict heaven on canvas, in books, songs, movies, and more. Heaven is no figment of the imagination, nor is it a feeling, a state of mind, or the invention of man. Heaven is a literal place prepared by Christ for a prepared people.⁴ Though John Lennon imagined there was no heaven, the Apostle John got to see heaven unveiled.

While exiled on the island of Patmos in his 90’s, John recorded what he saw of heaven. He had heard Jesus talk about heaven numerous times during those three years of ministry. John even heard Jesus say the night before He was crucified, that He was going to “prepare a place” for those who believe (John 14:1-6). However, nothing could have prepared John for what he was able to see when Jesus unveiled heaven right before his eyes. What we can only imagine is documented by the inspired writings of John in Revelation 21 and 22.

1. OUT WITH THE OLD

REVELATION 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*

**The old creation
must make way for
the new creation
if God is to be
glorified.⁵**

The phrase “*then I saw*” is always a clue that John sees a new vision in the progression of the revelation; this happens to be the last one in which he sees our eternal home. The new heaven and new earth come after the first heaven and the first earth passed away. Revelation 20:11b says, “*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.*”

Though we may not think about it often, the passing away of the old heaven and earth is not a surprise. The old creation must make way for the new creation if God is to be glorified.⁵

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 1080.

² www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

³ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁴ David Jeremiah; *Answers to Your Question about Heaven*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2013; p. 3.

⁵ Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, NT*, p. 1080.



It is something prophesied in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Isaiah mentions it specifically twice (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22).

ISAIAH 65:17 *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”*

ISAIAH 66:22 *“For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure
before Me,” declares the LORD, “So your offspring and your name will endure.”*

And Peter mentions it in his second letter, 2 Peter 3:10-13.

2 PETER 3:10,13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass
away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its
works will be burned up ...¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and
a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

In his vision, John sees this prophecy coming true; the old heavens and earth have passed away. This was not a renovation of the old, or even a transforming of the old. This was the destruction of the old to make way for the new. Notice in Revelation 21:1, the first thing that John notes will not be there, the sea.

In our present age, the sea is both essential, positive, and even enjoyable for us. To the people of the ancient world, the sea was a mysterious and dangerous place, characterized by frightening chaos and possessing the power to kill without warning.⁶ Also, remember John is exiled on the island of Patmos, 37 miles off the coast of Ephesus, when he receives this revelation. He is in his 90's and separated from people and civilization. So it could mean there is no “sea” in that there is no longer any “separation” of any kind.

The sea throughout Scripture is also a symbol of wickedness, chaos, and even destruction. So perhaps it could mean in the new heaven and new earth, there would not be any more wickedness, chaos, or destruction.⁷ The new heaven and new earth will be vastly different from what we are experiencing now, the critical factor to remember is that the old has passed away and the new has come.

2. IN WITH THE NEW

REVELATION 21:2 *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from
God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (ESV)*

John immediately sees the Holy City, new Jerusalem. This is not a restructuring of the historical Jerusalem or the present Jerusalem in Israel. This is a brand-new city. Think of it like this. In England, there are cities named York, London, and Hampshire. In the United States, we have New York, New London (CT), and New Hampshire. They are not restructured cities; they are brand-new, different cities altogether.

John sees the Holy City, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. This is a reminder that it is not a human-made city; instead, this is a God-created place prepared for this moment in eternity future.

⁶ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights, Revelation*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2014, p. 299.

⁷ Ibid.

When John sees this new Jerusalem, it is like a bride adorned for her husband. On a bride's wedding day, nothing is left to happenstance. The dress is ready, her hair is styled, her jewelry is chosen in advance, the invitations mailed, the reservations received, the plan was in place with purpose. So, it is with the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down the aisle from heaven.

The bride is adorned with purpose and intention. It is a reminder that God has adorned this new Jerusalem not only with purpose and intent but also with beauty and reverence.

The bride is adorned with purpose and intention. It is a reminder that God has adorned this new Jerusalem not only with purpose and intent but also with beauty and reverence. He is preparing not just for the wedding day, but for the eternal marriage in heaven itself. Throughout Scripture, God used the bride and groom to emphasize His intimate relationship with Israel in the Old Testament and then the church in the New Testament. By this chapter in Revelation, the bride concept expands to include not only the church but also all of the redeemed from all the ages who live forever in that eternal city.⁸

Then just as John was taking in this new Jerusalem, he hears a voice from the throne.

REVELATION 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,*

We often get so caught up with what heaven will look like, we forget about the greatest news of all, the fellowship with God. But here we see in heaven that God Himself will dwell among His people. If we are honest, there are times when God seems so far away. God, our heavenly Father, is never absent, but just sometimes feels distant. Jesus is absolutely God in the flesh, as the Son of God, and in the 21st Century; yet He is something we have not experienced in the flesh.

Up until this point of eternity future, no one has dwelt with God personally. Even Moses saw a burning bush and the glory and radiance of God, but not the face of God. So, this is something new for all the redeemed. What was foreshadowed in God's presence in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35), in the Temple, (1 Kings 8:10-11), and in the bodily presence of God Himself in Jesus, (John 1:14) will become a reality in the new Jerusalem.⁹

We often get so caught up with what Heaven will look like, we forget about the greatest news of all, the fellowship with God.

It reminds us of the promise God made to the Israelites when freed from bondage in Egypt that God would never leave nor forsake them. He "tabernacled/ dwelt" with them in the form of pillars of clouds and fire by day and night. Later on, God would "dwell" in the Temple in the Holy of Holies, with the Ark of the Covenant, symbolizing God's presence and dwelling. Only the High Priests could enter it, protected by a veil.

When Jesus was crucified the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom, a sign that each person, not just the High Priests, would have access to God through Jesus Christ. But we still needed a mediator, which is Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15).

Now in the new Jerusalem, in our new home in heaven, we are citizens of heaven, unlike when we were on earth. And as such, there is no need for pillars of fire, no need for Holy of Holies, no need for a veil, even a torn veil, and no need for a mediator. There is no need for a temple or building of any kind, as Revelation 21:22 states, *And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.* Every single person will have direct, continual access to God and Jesus for all eternity.

⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 265.

⁹ *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2011; p. 1268.

God Himself will be among us. For the very first time in the history of creation and new creation, we will see God face to face in all His Glory, and we will be touched by the hands of God.

REVELATION 21:4 *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*

Notice how personal and compassionate God is to His people. The tears do not cease to exist at the beginning, instead, God wipes them away. The same hands of God that formed man out of dust in Genesis 2:7, will wipe away every tear in Revelation 21:4. The hands of God that let go of His Son to dwell among us is the One who will embrace us in heaven. The hands of God are protective and comforting, as we can see with the list of “no more’s.”

The same hands of God that formed man out of dust in Genesis 2:7, will wipe away every tear in Revelation 21:4.

In fact, throughout the last two chapters of Revelation, there are twelve “no more’s” in the new heaven and new earth.

No More:

• Sea (21:1)	• Crying (21:4)	• Temple (21:22)
• Tears (21:4)	• Pain (21:4)	• Closed Gates (21:25)
• Death (21:4)	• Thirst (21:6)	• Night (22:5)
• Mourning (21:4)	• Wickedness (21:8,27)	• Curse (22:3)

All those things were part of the old, which will have passed away. This is a beautiful reminder that everything we experience is temporary. All that we can see, taste, touch, and hear is limited to this earth. In heaven, life will be different in every way, thanks be to God.

In verse 5, we see why things will be so different.

REVELATION 21:5 *And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”*

The first things have passed away, and all things are being made new. This promise is already a reality in eternity future. The Bible began with God as creator and ends with God as Creator. These words and visions were to be recorded. John obeyed the command of the One who sits on the throne; we have proof today with the book of The Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

REVELATION 21:6 *Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.*

That phrase, “It is done,” is different from when Jesus said on the cross, “It is Finished.”

There are two completely different Greek words and meanings. This is what Chuck Swindoll says about these two phrases.

For Jesus when he said, “It is Finished” it was a word that emphasized something in the past that has come to its intended end in the case of Jesus the suffering and sacrifice for our sins by His death on the cross.

But when God says, “It is Done” God is pointing forward to a permanent condition that has fully arrived. This perfect tense usage affirms God’s promises are so secure that although they are in our future they are already completed events.¹⁰

¹⁰ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights, Revelation*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2014, p. 301.

And then God reminds John and us He is the Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end. This open invitation continues even today for anyone who thirsts. Come to Him, and He will give a drink from the spring of the water of life without cost. Salvation has always been free to us; Jesus paid the cost, the ultimate price on the cross.

3. A CLOSER LOOK AT NEW JERUSALEM

REVELATION 21:9-14 *Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.¹³ There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

John had seen the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven, but now he is taken to this high mountain to see it from a different perspective as it is still coming down out of heaven.

Here are some details of this holy city.

- 12 Gates, three on each of the four sides. These gates have the 12 tribes of Israel, representing the Old Testament.
- 12 Foundation stones, which have the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb, representing the New Testament.

**In Heaven we will
be seeing the
fulfillment of God's
plan everywhere we
look in each direction.**

In heaven we will be seeing the fulfillment of God's plan everywhere we look in each direction. What God did in the Old Testament was not only looking forward to Jesus in the New Testament but ultimately, to heaven itself. The New Testament was not an end in itself, but as the Old Testament was looking forward ultimately to heaven as well.

The details continue in verses 15-21.

REVELATION 21:15-21 *The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.¹⁷ And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.¹⁸ The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.¹⁹ The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;²⁰ the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.²¹ And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

The size is astonishing; the beauty is unparalleled; the purpose is our eternal home with God. John gives great detail in these verses.

Completely equal on all sides, its length, width, and height each 1500 miles; the walls are 72 yards thick. John even makes sure we know that human measurements and angelic measurements are the same (v. 17). With an area that large, if we placed New Jerusalem in the middle of the United

States, its borders would stretch from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to California.¹¹

Verses 18-20 show how the foundational stones, the ones with the names of the 12 Apostles, are adorned with a precious stone like jasper, sapphire, topaz, etc. The beauty is extraordinary in every direction, looking upward to the top, the sides, and even the foundation.

Next, we find out the streets of the city are pure gold. But focus a moment on the 12 gates:

REVELATION 21:21 *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

We are told very specifically, that the 12 gates were 12 pearls not adorned with multiple pearls, but actually 12 **single pearls**. And just in case we did not understand fully, we get a more specific explanation; “each one of the gates was a single pearl.”

Everything else in heaven that has been adorned with anything precious, valuable, and significant has been either precious metals or stones, except for the gates. Each gate is made of a single pearl. Among the ancients, pearls were ranked highest among precious stones, because their beauty derives entirely from nature, improvement by human artistry being an impossibility.¹² The size of the individual pearl was enormous, considering the measurements of the city.

Now we have all heard jokes about St. Peter standing at the pearly gates. Which, by the way, is not stated in Scripture. As a result of those jokes and stories, many have missed the purpose and significance of the gates made from a single pearl. John Phillips writes:

All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster—the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is the answer of the oyster to that which injured it. The glory land is God’s answer, in Christ, to wicked men who crucified heaven’s beloved and put Him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem of pearl. The saints as they come and go will be forever reminded, as they pass the gates of glory, that access to God’s home is only because of Calvary.¹³

Chuck Swindoll puts it like this, “The pearl quite literally represents pain resulting in beauty, suffering crowned with glory.”¹⁴

“The pearl quite literally represents pain resulting in beauty, suffering crowned with glory.”¹⁴

These 12 gates, each made of a single pearl that can only be described as supernatural in size, and beauty are a reminder of the cross. A reminder of the sacrifice, the pain, the suffering, the wounds, the penetration of the spear. A reminder of Jesus, giving His life for our sins and then the beauty and miracle of the resurrection. The Victory over death and hell itself.

The eternal reminder that entering the gates of heaven is only possible for those who believe and accept Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross as payment for their sins.

So often we think of Revelation as the end, but it truly is the beginning of new life, in the new heaven, new earth, and the new city of Jerusalem.

¹¹ Dr. Robert Jeffress, *A Place Called Heaven*; Baker Books; Grand Rapids, MI; 2017, p. 51.

¹² www.soniclight.com/revelation

¹³ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; p. 283.

¹⁴ Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights, Revelation*; p. 301.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Heaven is a reminder of God's perfect plan. In the past, present, and future, you can see reminders of how He worked and continues to work in the lives of His people. His faithfulness never runs short. His grace never withheld. His mercies are new every morning. Heaven is proof that God had a plan from the beginning.

And the good news of His plan is that it included us! God wanted to dwell with us from the very beginning of time, yet when sin entered the world, everything changed. The holiness of God could not embrace the sinfulness of man. But God had a plan when He sent Jesus to dwell with man in the form of a baby born in a manger.

This time of year, we are reminded of His birth. We celebrate the fact that God had a plan to dwell for a brief amount of time on this earth in the flesh of Jesus. This was not by accident or a surprise; it was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.

ISAIAH 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*

MATTHEW 1:23 *"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."*

This season we sing the Christmas hymn "O Come, O Come, Immanuel." God had a plan to be with us even when Jesus ascended to heaven; the Holy Spirit dwelt in those who believed. But can you imagine what it will be like when we are in heaven dwelling with God every day in that magnificent city?

God's plan was not without purpose. He wants to dwell with us this season like no other. May His presence be felt in your heart, mind, and spirit to long for that time of walking through the gates made of a single pearl, telling your Heavenly Father, "I'm home."

THE RIVER AND THE TREE

THE STORY
OF HEAVEN

DATE

December 19 & 20

WEEK

3 of 3

OVERVIEW

Revelation 22

KEY VERSE

Revelation 22:1

SETTING THE STAGE

We were introduced to the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, in chapter 21. All things are made new as the original heaven and earth pass away. Life in new Jerusalem is very different, beyond just the enormity of its size. There are no more tears, dying, mourning, crying, pain, thirst, wickedness, temple, night, closed gates, and curses. While we have grown accustomed to those things here on earth, the good news of eternity is that none of those things will be in our heavenly home.

But God will be there, in His splendor and glory. Jesus will be with Him victoriously as the Lamb. In fact, because of the presence of God and Jesus, there will be no need for a temple or light.

REVELATION 21:22-25 *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed;*

What God created on day four, as recorded in Genesis, is no longer needed in the new Holy City. There is no need for the sun or moon, both of which are sources of light for us on earth. The glory of God illuminates heaven by His mere presence. *Continued on page 102 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The River
2. The Tree
3. The Life

THINGS TO KNOW

- The last two chapters of Revelation give us more information about heaven than anywhere else in the Bible.
- Revelation 22 is the last chapter of the entire Bible and reminds us that Jesus has not only prepared a place for us but is coming again.

THE RIVER AND THE TREE

Setting the Stage, continued > His glory, reaching all within heaven, abounds freely. Jesus the Lamb, who referred to Himself in John 8, as the “Light of the World,” will now be the lamp of heaven, shining brightly for all eternity.

Not only does the light of the glory of God flow in this new heavenly home, so does the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, with the tree of life close by. These will be the focus of our lesson today.

Introduction

There are only a few more days until Christmas morning. It is a season of anticipation. It is the time of year where kids are dreaming about presents under the tree on Christmas morning. As a child, I remember picturing in my mind’s eye what was in each wrapped present under the tree. Then once I found the presents with my name, I would pick them up when my parents were not looking to feel and hear if they were heavy or noisy. Admittedly I would also count the number of presents for me and then count the number of presents with my brother’s name on them, usually the exact same amount (smart parents).

Many times, on Christmas morning, I could guess what was under the wrapping before I ever took the bow off. However, there were other times when I could not guess based on the size, shape, or weight of the package. Occasionally, I would take the bow off, unwrap the gift and find a box with a picture of something on it, and then inside the box was a different item. It was a complete surprise.

This month we have looked at the Story of Heaven with great anticipation. The Apostle John received a vision of heaven, the description of which is beyond anything we have ever seen on earth. The unwrapping of heaven, as presented to John, was spectacular as the old things passed away, and all things were made new. The colors, the size, the purpose behind every item was described in enough detail to excite us and mystify us to some extent. But the truth of heaven is it will be our eternal home where we dwell with God and Jesus. It will be a place that surpasses anything we can dream of or understand based on the description. As we celebrate the birth of Christ in a manger, let us remember to celebrate the unwrapping of heaven in this last chapter of the Bible, showing us the true home of Jesus in all its glory.

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1. THE RIVER

REVELATION 22:1-2A *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street.*

John had been told that heaven and earth would pass away, and there would be a new heaven and earth. John had seen the beauty, majesty, and mystery of new Jerusalem. The Holy City came down from heaven adorned as a bride. John had seen the foundations, the walls, the street of gold, the gemstones, and the 12 gates, each made from a single pearl. John was also told in Chapter 21



that there would not be a sea in this new city (Revelation 21:1). But that did not mean there would not be any source of water.

In the first verse of the last chapter of the Bible, we are told in this new city, there is a *river of the water of life*. Rivers have always been significant in cities. In fact, cities tend to be built around rivers. The Ohio river joins two other rivers in Pittsburgh, which has the nickname, Three Rivers. The Ohio River also goes through Cincinnati, Louisville, and empties into the Mississippi River.

The Mississippi River reaches from North Minnesota all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, going through or bordering ten states along the way. The Colorado river goes through to the Grand Canyon. The Rio Grande becomes a border between two countries. Rivers have always been a source of life for cities, our economy, and stories about the people that live near them. Consider the history of the Amazon and Nile rivers as well as the Euphrates.

Rivers go all the way back to the beginning of creation in the Garden of Eden.

GENESIS 2:10-14 *Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² The gold of that land is good; the bdellium (Myrrh) and the onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

Adam and Eve had one river that divided into four rivers, two of which are still in existence. ¹ The description in Genesis shows these rivers were a source of life, nutrition, and economic impact. From one source, the water flowed freely, expanding and covering more geography, increasing in impact downstream.

God has always used rivers for life lessons, obstacles, barriers, borders, and hope.

JOSHUA 24:3 *Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.*

ISAIAH 43:20B *Because I have given waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, To give drink to My chosen people.*

Jesus understood the purpose and power of rivers, as well as the symbolism.

JOHN 7:37-38 *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"*

The Holy City, new Jerusalem, will have a river unlike anything ever seen or experienced on earth. This river will flow through the middle of the city and be as clear as crystal. It is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden but notice the source of this river. This river flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In Eden, a life-giving river had nourished the garden; now, a life-giving river nourishes new Jerusalem. ²

The Holy City, new Jerusalem, will have a river unlike anything ever seen or experienced on earth.

The centrality of this river is important in that it is in the middle of Main Street. There is free and intentional access to this river. Since it comes from the throne of God and of the Lamb,

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary, OT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO; 2007, p. 20.

² Holman *New Testament Commentary, Revelation*; Holman Reference; Nashville, TN; 19918; p. 414.

it is the purest of rivers, clear as crystal. There is no contamination of any sort, no dirt, moss, or algae. Its pure, unpolluted, unobstructed flow symbolizes the constant flow of everlasting life from God's throne to God's people.³

This purest of rivers is the water of life. Jesus would speak of such water to a Samaritan woman at a well at noon one day in John 4:14, *"but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."* In heaven, there will be a constant reminder of the flowing of God's grace and salvation. And on either side of the river was the tree of life.

2. THE TREE

REVELATION 22:2B *On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

Though we are not given dimensions of this tree of life (singular), we know that it must be enormous if it is on either side of the river; perhaps the river runs through the tree or divides to surround the tree. In Tulare County, California lives a giant sequoia named General Sherman. Not only is it the largest living tree in the world, but the largest living organism, by volume, on the planet; 2100 years old, weighing in at 2.7 million pounds, 275 feet tall, and 100 feet wide at its trunk.⁴ However, that is just on planet earth; which will have passed away by the time we see the tree of life in new Jerusalem. The tree of life is the celestial counterpart to the tree of life in Eden, and this tree provides for those who are immortal.⁵

The tree of life is the celestial counterpart to the tree of life in Eden, and this tree provides for those who are immortal.⁵

This tree of life bears twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. In Revelation 2:7, Jesus says to the church in Ephesus, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God."* This tree is the fulfillment, symbolizing the complete undoing of the curse in the garden.⁶ The blessings of this tree are perpetual, never seasonal. The fruit is such that it continues to provide nourishment for the citizens of heaven each day, each week, each month, each year, with no end.

Beyond the nourishment of the fruit of the tree of life, there is healing from the leaves. However, was John not told that there would be no pain or death in heaven (Revelation 21:4)? If people are not sick, why would there need to be healing for the nations (people)? It might help to understand the Greek word that is translated as "healing." The word in Greek is, *"Therapeia"* which literally means, "service rendered by one to another."⁷ The Greek word translated "healing" is the source of the modern English word "therapeutic."⁸

Think about the purpose of therapy as a medical service; its purpose is to be "life-giving." The leaves of the tree are similar to supernatural vitamins taken not to treat illness, but to promote general

³ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 286.

⁴ www.visitsequoia.com

⁵ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22*; p. 286.

⁶ *Holman New Testament Commentary, Revelation*; Holman Reference; Nashville, TN; 19918; p. 415.

⁷ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁸ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*; Ariel Ministries Publishers; 2004; p. 531.

health. ⁹ The beauty of the fruit or leaves is not described, but it is evident they are for the good of those in heaven. God will continue to show His grace, mercy, and provision in the new Jerusalem.

Both the river of the water of life and the tree of life focus on one commonality: life. There is life in heaven. We talk about eternal life and life after death, but sometimes forget that we are in the land of the dying and heaven is the land of the living (Psalm 27:13). The life we will experience in heaven will be beyond anything we have anticipated.

3. THE LIFE

REVELATION 22:3-9 *There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.*

⁶ *And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. ⁷ "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."*

⁸ *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."*

The life we live in heaven will be free of any curse, a complete turnaround of what was established in Genesis 3:14-19. Because of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world along with curses. The curses described in Genesis are threefold; physical, relational, and geological. There would be pain in childbirth, relational conflict between husband and wives, and the land would no longer grow items freely on its own without effort. There would be work involved in toiling the land to get it to produce food. All of these curses and more will no longer exist. There will be freedom in heaven that will eclipse anything we have known on earth. Freedom from any and all curses.

Though there is no curse, there is blessing. Notice the threefold blessings of heaven. The first is to be servants, the second is to see God face to face, and the third is to be authentically associated with God.

Firstly, as servants, we will not be hindered by anything; we will be able to perfectly serve our perfect God in the perfect environment. Secondly, we will also be able to see God up close and personal. 1 John 3:2, says, *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.* (NKJV) It is difficult to imagine seeing God face to face in all His glory, not even Moses was allowed to see His glory because of its magnificence and power. But in heaven, we shall behold Him completely.

Thirdly, we will be authentically associated with God having His name on our foreheads. Throughout the book of Revelation, foreheads with a sign or a mark have figured prominently. To bear God's name

There will be freedom in heaven that will eclipse anything we have known on earth. Freedom from any and all curses.

⁹ *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 12-22; Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL; 2000, p. 287.*

was a privilege, but it also provides protection. The seal or name of God on someone authenticates that person as genuine, guarantees God's protection, and is a token of His reward to the overcomers.¹⁰ We will be identified with Him for all eternity, part of the family of God in our heavenly home.

Life will also be different in that there will be no night. Insomnia will be a thing of the past. As we live in this temporary home of earth, we get tired and sleepy, even exhausted. However, in heaven, it appears that we will be energized, focused, and productive without weariness. The light will no longer come from the sun, but rather God and His Son will illuminate heaven (Revelation 21:22-23; 22:5). The Shechinah Glory will provide all the light that will be necessary, and all the inhabitants will be able to walk in that light.¹¹

Heaven is going
to be wonderful,
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worship God.

We anticipate what heaven will be like; we perhaps even dream about what we will see when we get there. Regardless of how unbelievably beautiful and immense it may sound, the words recorded by John are *faithful and true* (Revelation 22:6). And Jesus gives both a promise and a blessing. The promise is that He is coming quickly. The blessing is for those who heed the words of the prophecy in this book.

At the end of verse 9 are the two words that show us how to live, not just in heaven but also on earth. Ultimately, the book of Revelation is all about these two words.

Worship God. Heaven is going to be wonderful, peaceful, beautiful, absolutely perfect in every way. And our response to the wonder, peace, beauty, and perfection will be to worship God. Worship in heaven will be spontaneous, genuine, and exhilarating.

Praise will not be something we will be assigned or commanded to do; it will be natural.¹² Worship will be effortless in the presence of God and Jesus on the throne, seeing them face to face in the splendor of our new home, heaven.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

From Genesis to Revelation, God had a plan that included a river, a tree, and life. It is by the grace of God that when the created rebelled against the Creator, He provided redemption. For generations, redemption came through the sacrifice of an unblemished, pure, innocent lamb at Passover. But then God's love came down from heaven to a manger in Bethlehem in the form of a baby. Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to take away the sins of the world.

The birth of Christ was God's plan for each of us. God came to this world in the flesh to dwell among us. We celebrate that reality and remember in this season of Christmas. As the Christ child grew up without sin, pure and innocent, as the Lamb of God, He was slain, but not defeated. The Lamb of God conquered sin and the grave, resurrected, and is now in Heaven next to His Heavenly Father. *Continued on page 107 >*

¹⁰ Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights, Revelation*; p. 301.

¹¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*; Ariel Ministries Publishers; 2004; p. 620.

¹² Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven Your Real Home*; Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI; 1995, p. 64.

God's plan was to provide a new earth and a new heaven, a new home for all those who believe in the baby that was born in Bethlehem. Just as the Magi gathered to celebrate and worship the birth of a king, may we do the same this season in preparation for that which awaits us in heaven.

God's plan is heaven; our purpose is to worship, coming together as the faithful, joyful, and triumphant to adore the King, the Lamb, the Son, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, our Lord. What better way to start preparing for that eternal time than in this season of Christmas?

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels!

O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
Christ the Lord ¹³

¹³ www.hymnary.org

THE WHOLE STORY

THE STORY OF GRACE



Grace in Creation
Grace in the Garden
Grace in the Ark
Grace to All

THE STORY OF DELIVERANCE



Deliverance from the Past
Deliverance for the Future
Deliverance for Today
Deliverance from Ourselves

THE STORY OF PROMISE



Promise Kept
Promise Committed
Promise Made
Promise Fulfilled
Promise Affirmed

THE STORY OF FAITH



Faith in Suffering
Faith in God's Sovereignty
Faith in Seeking Him

THE STORY OF RENEWAL



Renewal Through Prayer
Renewal Through New Beginnings
Renewal Through Leadership
Renewal Through God's Revelation
Renewal Through Commitment

THE STORY OF PURPOSE



Purpose of Wisdom
Purpose of Work
Purpose of the Home
Purpose of Words
Purpose of Freedom
Purpose of God's Ways
Purpose of Community
Purpose of Praise
Purpose of the Valley
Purpose of the Heart

THE STORY OF CHRIST: IN HIS OWN WORDS



I AM the Bread of Life
I AM the Light of the World
I AM the Door
I AM the Good Shepherd
I AM the Resurrection and the Life
I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life
I AM the Vine

THE STORY OF POWER



The **Power** of the Holy Spirit
The **Power** of the Gospel
The **Power** to Stand
The **Power** of the Church
The **Power** of Salvation

THE STORY OF CHANGE



Who **We Are**
Who **Christ Is**
What **We Need**
What He **Provides**

THE STORY OF HEAVEN



The Scroll and **the Lamb**
The Old and **the New**
The River and **the Tree**