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December 1, 2024
No Devotional on Sunday

Readings for today: [Hebrews 3-4, Psalms 26](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

December 2, 2024
True Story

Readings for today: [Hebrews 5-6, Psalms 27](#) ([audio reading](#))

The gospel is the best story because it is a true story. Anchored on the promise of God. Sealed by the oath of God. Grounded on the fact that God cannot lie nor change His mind. Throughout human history, God has made many promises. He promised Noah deliverance. He promised Abraham a child. He promised Moses victory. He promised David a descendant to sit on his throne. In each case, He swears an oath by Himself. He puts His glory and His honor on the line. And in every case He delivers. He fulfills His promise. Even in the face of our doubts and fears, disobedience and sin, God never wavers. He is faithful.

This is why the author of Hebrews says “We who have fled for refuge have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Jesus has entered there on our behalf as a forerunner, because he has become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 6:18-20 CSB) He knows God can be trusted. He knows God has made a promise. The promise of a Savior. The promise of a Messiah. The promise of a King to sit on His throne and a High Priest to intercede in the heavens. God not only made this promise but He swore an oath. He put His glory and honor on the line. He will not let it fail. So by these two “unchangeable things” - the oath and character of God - we have assurance. We have hope. We can hold fast to what God has set before us.

The story of Jesus is no fairy tale. It is no myth or legend. It is not fiction or something any human being made up. Jesus was born. Jesus lived. Jesus suffered. Jesus died. Jesus rose again. These are historical events. You can actually go and see where they took place. You can visit Bethlehem where Jesus was born. You can walk around Galilee and see where Jesus ministered for three years. You can go to Golgotha and see where Jesus was crucified. You can touch the slab where His body lay. Not only that but you can read about these events not only in the Bible but in extra-biblical sources as well. No one disputes that they actually happened. This is what makes the gospel so compelling after all these years. It's true. It's real. It happened.

Readings for tomorrow: Hebrews 7-8, Psalms 28

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December 3, 2024
Our Great High Priest

Readings for today: Hebrews 7-8, Psalms 28 (audio reading)

Melchizedek is one of the more mysterious people in the Bible. He appears out of nowhere to meet Abraham after a great battle. Abraham is so impressed by him that he offers him a tithe of his plunder. Then he disappears from the pages of Scripture until the Book of Hebrews where he is offered up as an archetype of the Messiah. Clearly, the author assumes his audience knows the story from Genesis and he goes to great lengths to share how Melchizedek was no ordinary king. His name literally means “king of righteousness” and he is the “king of Salem” or king of Jerusalem which means “king of peace.” Some suggest Melchizedek is a theophany, an appearance by God in the Old Testament. Some even suggest Melchizedek is Jesus, appearing on earth before His incarnation. Whatever you may believe, it is clear the author of the Book of Hebrews believes Melchizedek represents an eternal priesthood, an office Jesus Himself now holds by virtue of His life-long obedience, fulfillment of the Law, atoning death, and victorious resurrection.

And that’s why the author of Hebrews draws the following conclusion, “But because Jesus remains forever, he holds his priesthood permanently. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews 7:24-25 CSB) These are some of my favorite verses in the entire book. I find the implications of what is said here to be incredibly comforting. First, God is able to save completely. Utterly. Wholly. There is not a part of my life that is left untouched by grace. Not a corner of my life that God leaves unredeemed. There is not a single door in my life that God leaves unopened. He plunges to the depths of my sin, the depths of my shame, the depth of my fear and anxiety to bring healing and salvation. Second, Jesus lives to intercede for me. He is present even now in the heavenly throne room praying for me. Talking to His Father about me. It’s an overwhelming thought. To know I am on Jesus’ heart and mind. My needs. My concerns. My desires. All are important to Him. I do not need to fear the accuser. According to the Book of Revelation, he has been cast out of heaven forever. There is no one left to condemn me before God. There is no one left to accuse me before God. No one left to judge me before God. There is only Jesus. My Advocate. My Intercessor. My Savior.

Readings for tomorrow: Hebrews 9-10, Psalms 29

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December 4, 2024
A New Covenant

Readings for today: Hebrews 9-10, Psalms 29 (audio reading)

Many years ago, I had LASIK surgery on my eyes. I have worn glasses since the fourth grade. My vision was terrible. I was as near-sighted as they come. Then I had the procedure. I remember walking out of the office and it was literally like scales had been lifted from my eyes. I could actually see things like the alarm clock in the morning or the individual leaves on the tree in my front yard. It was an incredible feeling. I imagine the author of Hebrews felt much the same way. He is intimately familiar with the Old Testament. He is obviously skilled at Jewish midrash which is an interpretive method that infuses fresh meaning into the biblical texts. He was most likely a Jew who had become a believer in Jesus Christ. As a result, his interpretive lens has shifted. Now Jesus is the hermeneutical key that unlocks all of Scripture. So he looks back on the ceremonial religious laws of the Torah and reinterprets them in light of Christ. The priesthood, sacrifices, and Temple are all re-imagined. The high points of Israel's history are revisited as are the great heroes and heroines of the faith. It's like a fog has lifted for the author and they are seeing things clearly for the very first time.

This is life-changing as you can imagine and you can sense the author's excitement and joy as he shares what he's discovered. Now it all makes sense! Now it has all become clear. This is why God instituted the sacrificial system and this is how God brings that system to fulfillment. His own Son serves both as High Priest and Perfect Sacrifice. He bears His own Body into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly Temple and satisfies the just demands of God's Law once and for all. This is the mystery of salvation all of our forefathers and mothers in the faith looked forward to and now it is ours to see and to touch and to taste. The promised new covenant has been given. The new age inaugurated. The gates of heavenly Jerusalem thrown open. The angels gathered, along with the saints who have gone before us, to join the party. A gift is being offered. An unshakable kingdom that will never fall for its foundation is Christ Himself!

Can you feel his passion? It comes to a crescendo in passages like the one we read today. "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus — he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) — and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:19-25 CSB) A full assurance of faith. What a blessing! Our hearts cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Amazing grace! No wonder he is so quick to challenge and encourage his reads to spur one another on to love and good works. It's truly incredible! Friends, the gift God offers us in Christ is nothing short of heaven itself. Through Him we receive eternal life in an eternal relationship with an eternal God who reserves a place for us in His eternal Kingdom.

Readings for tomorrow: Hebrews 11-13, Psalms 30

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December 5, 2024

By Faith

Readings for today: Hebrews 11-13, Psalms 30 (audio reading)

Some say faith is blind. Some say faith is foolish. Some say faith is an opiate of sorts for the masses. A delusion we are indoctrinated into by religious institutions. That's not how the Bible defines faith. It is a fundamental belief. A conviction that what remains unseen is nonetheless very real. It is an assurance for the future where all our hopes and dreams for eternity will come to pass. It is ultimately a deep and abiding trust in God and His plan for our lives and for our world.

Hebrews 11 is rightly called the "Hall of Fame" of faith. It lists the many heroes and heroines who walked by faith. Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Why? Because he offered it in faith. Enoch did not taste death. Why? Because he walked with God. Noah risked it all to build an ark. Why? Because he loved God more than he loved the things of this world. Abraham left home, kindred, and country. He left behind all that was familiar. All that was safe. All that was secure. Why? Because he had his eyes fixed on a better country. A heavenly one. Sarah embraced a miraculous pregnancy in her old age. She carried Isaac to term though the toll on her body must have been enormous. She risked her life to bring the child of promise into the world. Why? Because she knew God was faithful. The list goes on and on. And it's not meant to be exhaustive. It's meant to be illustrative. To encourage those of us who are still fighting the good fight of faith in this world. It's written to encourage those of us who are still seeking a homeland, eternal in the heavens.

What does walking by faith look like for you today? In what areas of your life are you being called to trust God? How are you placing your life, your future, your hopes and your dreams into His hands? Are you intentionally seeking to live by faith? Remember, "without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6 CSB) Living by faith requires intentionality. Walking by faith requires self-discipline. It means dying to self every moment of every day. Laying aside the desires of the flesh in favor of the fruit of the Spirit. It means trusting God to reveal His will in His time. It means taking all that we are and all that we have and placing it at God's disposal to use as He sees fit. It means walking with open hands before the Lord, allowing Him to guide and direct our steps.

I can tell you from personal experience there is nothing more exciting and nothing more daunting than following Christ. You end up on these amazing journeys you never thought possible. You have these experiences you never would have imagined. You get taken to the end of your own wisdom and strength and resources again and again as God teaches you to rely on Him. It's not easy. It's often scary. But God is faithful and He always delivers on His promises.

Readings for tomorrow: James 1-3, Psalms 31

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December 6, 2024
God's Wisdom

Readings for today: James 1-3, Psalms 31 (video intro) (audio reading)

I have met many people over the years who claim to speak for the Lord. They claim they hear from the Lord. They claim they have words from the Lord. They claim they've received some form of special revelation from the Lord. Now do I believe God still speaks to His people? Of course. Do I believe God visits His people in dreams and visions? Absolutely. Do I believe God sometimes gives His people a prophetic word of encouragement or conviction? Without a doubt. But how does a person know when a message is actually from the Lord?

Years ago, I was a Manager of Patient Access Services at Boulder Community Hospital. I had about four departments and around fifty employees working for me. One of them was a believer who often would claim to hear special messages from the Lord. She would wander around the office delivering these "messages" to her fellow employees. It made people uncomfortable. Her words often didn't make sense. She asked people to share inappropriately with her. It was disruptive. It was manipulative. And it created a lot of resentment and frustration in our office. When I confronted her and asked her to stop, she grew angry and resentful. She began spreading all sorts of rumors and lies about my leadership. Eventually, she had to be terminated. It was a sad episode that taught me a lot about the importance of discernment.

So how do we discern if a message is from God? James 3:17-18 is clear. "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without pretense. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace." Looking back, it was clear the wisdom my employee was offering wasn't pure or peace-loving or without pretense. It was more designed to promote her own sense of self-worth. Her intent wasn't to sow peace but to sow pride. And I know I've made similar mistakes myself. Especially as a preacher. Every week, I am responsible to get up and share a message from the Lord with God's people. I always have to check my heart to make sure I am not sharing from a place of pride or selfishness or anger or frustration or a need for affirmation. Every preacher I know wrestles with their motivations every time they get into the pulpit. We have to crucify our ego and desires and fears. We have to empty ourselves of all pride and pretense so God can fill us with His wisdom through His Spirit. And, at the end of the day, we need to be judged on our fruits. What do we produce? Not numbers. Not butts in the seats. Not influence. Not the number of followers we have on social media. But the fruit of purity and peace. The fruit of gentleness and mercy. The fruit of righteousness. This is the ultimate determination of whether we are sharing God's Word or our own words. And the same holds true for every believer in the world.

Readings for tomorrow: James 4-5, Psalms 32

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December 7, 2024

Prayer

Readings for today: James 4-5, Psalms 32 (audio reading)

“Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.” (James 5:13-16 CSB)

I’ve been praying about prayer over the last few years. Perhaps it’s because I feel like I’ve fallen into a bit of rut. Perhaps it’s because some of my normal spiritual disciplines have become routine. Perhaps it’s because I find myself running out of words when I pray or simply repeating the same phrases over and over again. Perhaps it’s because the list of people I pray for is long and I don’t want to rush through their names. Whatever the reason, I’ve been asking the Lord to teach me how to pray on a deeper and more intimate level and He is answering my prayer. Here are just a few of the reflections I’ve written down recently...

“Prayer is colossal work. It is the nakedness of a soul intent before God - heart and mind and will, answering deep unto deep.” (Alexander Whyte) Prayer involves the whole person. Heart, mind, body, and will. It requires each of these facets of a person to intentionally direct themselves towards God. It’s a posture physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. This is the secret to true prayer. It is about orientation. I think of my Muslim friends who orient themselves towards Mecca or my Jewish friends who orient themselves towards Jerusalem. As a Christian, I orient myself towards no earthly city. No earthly place where a Temple once stood. No, I orient myself towards a Person. I fix my soul’s gaze on Christ. He is the fount of heaven from which I drink. He is the bread of heaven on which I feast. He is the joy of heaven which fills my heart. He is the strength of heaven which sustains my life. He is the wisdom of heaven which guides me through life’s challenges. He is the comfort of heaven in the midst of my griefs and losses. No matter where I am, He is there to greet me. No matter what condition I find myself in, He is there to receive me with open arms.

Prayer is simply entering into Christ’s presence each morning in the silence and quiet before the noise of the day gets too loud or the demands force me to pick my pace. To stand in that place before Christ with all the confused business of my life and this world spread out at His feet. To try and see things as He see them. To try and see the people as He see them. To seek to understand the situations as Christ understands them. To have compassion. To open my heart to grace. And then to take up the burden once more onto my shoulders, full of confidence that I do not bear the burden alone, and go about my day not really having known what I should pray for but knowing that even as my words fail the Spirit prays for me with groanings too deep for words. This is what it means to pray.

Prayer begins by slowing down long enough to truly see people. To listen long enough to truly hear people. To spend enough quality time so others feel valued and of worth. Prayer is attending to the hearts and souls of others. Hearing the words behind the words. Paying attention to body language and what’s being communicated subconsciously as well as consciously. Prayer is spending your day focused on others and then bringing them before Christ in the quiet of your office at the end of the day. Keeping them in your mind’s eye with all their hopes and dreams, fears and failures, hurts and confusion, anger and frustration, joys and sorrows, loves and desires as you come into Christ’s

presence. Holding them out to Him as you speak blessing and grace and peace over them. Christ knows their needs before you speak them. You do not have to give Him a list. You can simply speak their names and the names of their children and any particular burdens you know they carry before Him and trust Christ to meet them right where they are. You can do this not only for the individuals and families you know but also for entire churches and communities and nations. You can hold up the Town of Parker before Christ. The State of Colorado. The United States. You can hold up before Christ the people of Ethiopia and South Sudan and Uganda and Bangladesh and Dominican Republic and North/South Korea and Afghanistan and Bolivia and the many, many other nations you've been and where you have friends doing Christ's work. He is with them in their suffering and heartbreak and He is at work bringing beauty from the brokenness just as He is doing with you.

The challenge of prayer has very little to do with finding the time for it or the space or the quiet or the solitude. It has very little to do with the internal wrestling that ensues when you feel you aren't being heard or your prayers go seemingly unanswered. It has very little to do with the doubts that creep in when you try to make sense of prayer or evaluate its effectiveness or square it with science. No, the real challenge for you is allowing yourself to be stripped naked before Christ. To be strapped in the "prison house of your own life." To sit long enough for all the stuff you try to hide or stuff down deep inside to bubble to the surface. Prayer keeps you honest. Prayer keeps you real. Prayer reminds you that you cannot run from yourself nor from Jesus.

These are just a few of the thoughts that I've had recently and I believe they are leadings from the Holy Spirit. Ways He is answering as I seek to learn more about how to pray. You see, I want to be a man of prayer. I want to pray righteous prayers. Prayers that are powerful and effective for healing and forgiveness and reconciliation. Prayers for peace and wholeness and shalom. Prayers for my family, my church, my country, and my friends around the world. I want to pray bold prayers. God-sized prayers. Prayers of faith that will move mountains, drive out demons, and bring revival. I want to pray in such a way that the devil trembles and the kingdoms of this world shake. I want to pray such prayers not for my own sake but for the sake of the world God loves so much. Lord, teach me to pray!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Peter 1-2, Psalms 33 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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December 8, 2024
No Devotional on Sunday

Readings for today: [1 Peter 1-2, Psalms 33](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

December 9, 2024
The Power of God's Love

Readings for today: [1 Peter 3-5, Psalms 34](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

I am convinced there is nothing stronger than God's love. There is nothing more powerful. I have staked my life on God's love. I have pushed all my chips to the middle of the table to bet on God's love. I have made it my aim in life to love fiercely and faithfully and unconditionally because I believe that's how God loves me. Make no mistake, loving like God isn't always easy or comfortable. It is often costly and takes you into all kinds of challenging situations. It forces you to forgive when you'd rather hold onto bitterness. Reconcile when you'd rather cut someone off. Let go when you'd rather hold onto hurt. At the same time, loving like God is transformational. It truly covers a multitude of sins. I have experienced this in my own life.

My father passed way last March. For the last forty years or so, my father battled alcoholism. Thankfully, he wasn't abusive but he wasn't easy to love. When he was drunk, he could be mean and hurtful. He could be overly critical and shaming. I often got into it with him. I would get angry and frustrated. There were times when I considered cutting him out of my life and might have done so if it wouldn't have impacted my mom. Having said all that, God really challenged me to love my father. Especially over the last twenty years. He challenged me to love my dad unconditionally which didn't mean giving his bad behavior a pass. He challenged me to love my dad faithfully which often meant hard, honest conversations with him. He challenged me to love him fiercely and courageously and boldly which meant sharing Christ with my dad and praying for my dad and even hugging my dad and telling him how much I loved him every time we saw each other. What happened as a result? I got to see my dad change. I got to see him soften and grow more tender. I got to see him drink less and less as the years went by. And miraculously, I got the opportunity to baptize my father in the Jordan River when we went to Israel together. It was amazing.

"Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8 CSB) I have learned to embrace this kind of love as a way of life and God has blessed me in so many ways. My wife and I no longer sweat the small stuff. We no longer let the minor irritations get in our way. I text my adult children two to three times a month just to tell them how much I love them and how proud I am of them and how I am praying for them. It opens doors to all kinds of wonderful, life-giving conversations. I am learning to listen more attentively to my colleagues and friends in ministry. I am learning a ton as a result and becoming a much better pastor. I am intentionally seeking to build bridges with those who are different than me. Culturally, ethnically, economically, politically, and as it relates to matters of faith. I am growing in so many ways as a result. My life is so enriched by every single one of these relationships and only God's love is powerful enough to hold us all together.

Readings for tomorrow: [2 Peter 1-3, Psalms 35](#)

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December 10, 2024

Effort

Readings for today: [2 Peter 1-3, Psalms 35](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

Dallas Willard is famous for saying, “Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.” We have this false idea in the Christian faith that because we are saved by grace through faith that what we do doesn’t matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. I love how 2 Peter describes the dynamic tie between faith and effort. “His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble. For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.” (2 Peter 1:3-11 CSB) Yes, God’s divine power has given us everything we need. Yes, we share in God’s divine nature by faith and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. But rather than create a sense of spiritual complacency in our hearts, these truths should motivate and drive us to build on what God has done. We should make every effort to add or “supplement” our faith with goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly and sisterly affection, and love.

Sadly, I meet far too many Christians who love the truth of Jesus but don’t follow the way of Jesus which is why they don’t experience the life of Jesus. They love what Jesus has done for them. Love what Jesus has accomplished for them. Love the unconditional nature of God’s love and the free gift of God’s grace. But they don’t allow it to change how they live. They don’t seek to align their lives with the life of Jesus. Align their wills with the will of Jesus. Align their hearts with the heart of Jesus. As a result, they never seem to experience victory over sin. They never seem to experience the joy and peace God promises to all who follow Him. They never seem to experience the assurance of God’s forgiveness. It breaks my heart because it’s honestly not complicated. It’s simply putting into place certain practices and attitudes that will change how you live and relate to others. Practices like a weekly Sabbath. A daily devotional time. Regular corporate worship. Attitudes like seeking to serve rather than be served. Seeking to love rather than be loved. Seeking to give rather than receive. Putting the needs of others above our own. These are challenging to be sure but they are not complicated. It simply means living with intentionality. It means waking up each day and determining to live for God rather than for Self.

My life is a testimony of what can happen when we seek to supplement faith with action. I used to be addicted to affirmation. I used to do everything in order to promote myself. I used to live for the praise of others. I used to pursue achievement and success at all costs. This was true even after God got ahold of my heart. Sure, the metrics for success may have changed but my attitude remained the same. Thankfully i was challenged early on by godly mentors to make every effort to build on what God had done for me. So I began chasing humility rather than pride. I traded in my cynicism for hope. I traded in my skepticism for trust. I gave up my anger in favor of peace. I let go of my bitterness in favor of joy. I re-prioritized my life. I put God first. My wife second. My children third. My church family

fourth. And myself last. I have never regretted it. Not really. Sure, I have my moments where my natural selfishness raises its ugly head but I've learned how to quickly pivot away from such thinking in order to love and serve those around me. This way of life does take time to develop. It doesn't come naturally. We don't just stumble into it. It's a long obedience in the same direction. But like any discipline in life, it gets easier and easier over time.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 John 1-2, Psalms 36

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December 11, 2024
Who do you love?

Readings for today: [1 John 1-2, Psalms 36](#) [\(video intro\)](#) (audio reading)

Who do you love? It's a really important question. It's a defining question. Perhaps THE defining question of our lives. If we love God, then we will live our lives according to His ways. We will follow in His footsteps. We will love what He loves. We will love who He loves. We will love to love. Love to serve. Love to give. Love holiness and righteousness. But if we love ourselves or we love the world, our ability to love will be limited. It will be limited to those who think like us and act like us and agree with us and look like us. It will be limited to those who please us, affirm us, support us, encourage us. It will be limited to those who meet our needs and help us achieve our wants and desires. It will be a utilitarian kind of love. An erotic kind of love. A selfish kind of love because it will revolve around our own love of Self rather than our love for God.

The Apostle John clearly articulates this distinction in his first letter. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions — is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever." (1 John 2:15-17 CSB) John understands the temptation we all ultimately face. It's the temptation to love something or someone other than God. It's the temptation to love the temporal over the eternal. To love the finite over the infinite. To love selfishly rather than selflessly. These loves cannot exist simultaneously. They cannot co-exist peacefully. They cannot occupy the same space in the same heart. One naturally drives out the other. One naturally conflicts with the other. One naturally pushes against the other. Love the world and the love of the Father is not in you. Love the Father and the love of the world is not in you. Pursue the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life and the love of the Father is not in you. Offer you body as a living sacrifice, do not covet or give a foothold to greed, and crucify the ego and the love of the world will have no hold on you. This is the key to the Christian life.

Human beings were created to and for love. We were created to love God. Created to love each other. Created to love the world and all God has made. Sadly, we chose to love Self over God and the result was alienation, brokenness, pain, heartbreak, division, separation. And what flows from this rupture is anger, hatred, bitterness, and violence. Without the love of God, everything falls apart, for only God's love is powerful enough to hold it all together. God's love is holy, righteous, and just. God's love is faithful, noble, and true. God's love is patient and kind and good. God's love overlooks a multitude of sins. God's love covers a multitude of sins. God's love endures a multitude of sins. God's love eventually overcomes a multitude of sins. God's love can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things because God's love never fails. It never fails because it springs from a divine source. It flows from a divine well. It is the gift of God Himself.

I don't know about you but I want this love in my life. I want to wrap my life around this love. I want my life to be defined by this love. I want to love like God. And if that's your desire as well, I encourage you to pray this prayer or something like it,

Father, how I long to love like you. How I long to have my life wrapped around your love. To love so well and so selflessly and so sacrificially that my entire existence becomes defined by it. There is nothing like your love. Your love gives me the power to serve. Your love offers me the joy of giving myself away for the sake of others. Your love drives me to the ends of the earth to make you known.

Your love keeps me going back over and over again to hard and difficult places and spaces and conversations and relationships. Your love compels me. Your love constrains me. Your love sets boundaries around me. Your love informs me. Your love guides me. I have never regretted loving you or loving others. I have never regretted putting all I have into love. I have been hurt, yes. I have been betrayed, yes. I have been attacked, yes. I have been put down, yes. I have been dismissed and ignored, yes. I have been all those things but I have never regretted, not for a second, the choice to love. Thank you, Father, for giving me a heart to love.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 John 3-5, Psalms 37

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December 12, 2024
Testing the Spirits

Readings for today: [1 John 3-5, Psalms 37](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Discernment is a lost art. The ability to determine right from wrong. Truth from falsehood. Good from evil. In fact, recent studies have shown how challenging it is for people to identify fake news, debunk conspiracy theories, and identify propaganda. The crisis is compounded by the rise in online warfare as nefarious organizations weaponize social media to sow seeds of dissent and confusion in societies that value free speech. All this is made possible, of course, by post-modern philosophies that started taking hold in the 20th century where truth was intentionally relativized, individualized, and marginalized. The results are not good. We are more depressed than ever. More anxious than ever. More dis-integrated than ever. The social fabric of our culture tearing apart at the seams.

Over and against the prevailing winds come these words from the Apostle John, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and you have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world. Therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Anyone who knows God listens to us; anyone who is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception.” (1 John 4:1-6 CSB)

The Graeco-Roman world was a lot like our own. People did what was right in their own eyes. It was a culture that showed little to no restraint. People were encouraged to engage in whatever behaviors felt good and right at the time. John is writing to Christian believers who are trying to remain faithful to Jesus in the midst of all the mess. He wants them to be able to know right from wrong. Good from evil. Truth from error. So he offers them a road map, a decision-making matrix that will allow them to find the godly path.

Test #1: Does the thought, attitude, or action align with Jesus? Does it reflect the ethics of the Kingdom of God? Does it bring honor and glory to His name? Will following the “spirit of the age” lead one to confess or deny Jesus?

Test #2: Resist temptation. Once one determines what is good and true and noble and right and godly, one must resist the very real temptation to go the other way. To listen to the false prophets. To follow the ways of the world. It’s tempting to think we are at the mercy of our feelings. Trapped by our biology. Helpless in the face of our circumstances. But these are lies from the spirit of the anti-Christ. John promises that in Christ we have the power to overcome temptation because greater is He that is in us than is in the world.

Test #3: Hold fast to your identity in Christ. No matter what challenges may come. No matter what difficulties you may face. No matter how much stress and anxiety and fear you may endure. You are from God. You are in Christ. Your heart has been transformed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Listen to God’s Word. Obey God’s commands. Trust in His will and His way for your life.

I know I've found these three tests to be true in my own life. They've kept me from running my life into the ditch time and time again. By employing them regularly, I have also learned to listen to the Holy Spirit. I've learned how to discern His voice among the cacophony of others that demand my attention. And as I listen to the Spirit and learn from the Spirit and live by the Spirit, God has made my life a living demonstration of the gospel in action. I could ask for nothing more.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 John 1, 3 John 1, Psalms 38

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December 13, 2024

Christ Alone

Readings for today: [2 John 1, 3 John 1, Psalms 38](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Many years ago, I was part of a denomination that struggled to affirm the truth of Jesus Christ. There were church leaders who denied His divinity. Church leaders who denied His exclusivity. Church leaders who denied His physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. Many claimed He was simply a good moral teacher. An example for us to follow. An enlightened human being who made a significant impact on His followers. Not surprisingly, it was also a denomination in steep decline. Every year, thousands of people would leave and hundreds of churches. It was painful to witness. The final straw came for me when I became a church planter and began to work with a board of church leaders whose theological vision conflicted deeply with my own. I was unapologetically evangelical which means I hold to the biblical truth about Jesus Christ. I affirm His divinity and humanity. I affirm His virgin birth. I affirm His suffering, death, and resurrection. I affirm He is the only way to the Father. Many of the board members didn't share these same beliefs and the result was a disaster that was painful for all involved.

I wish I had listened to the Apostle John back then. In his second letter, he writes, "Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 1:9 CSB) The reason my situation was so hard is that several of the church leaders I was working under had not remained in Christ's teaching. They went beyond the Bible to create their own theological vision. They didn't hold fast to what Christ Himself had revealed and lost the plot. They shipwrecked their faith and almost took me down with them. Not that I lost sight of Jesus. On the contrary, He was all I had in those dark moments. No, they almost torpedoed my pastoral ministry. In fact, one of them did his level best to try to obstruct me at every turn. What I learned from this experience is that it is critical to link arms in ministry only with those who are building on the same theological foundation. Christ alone is the rock on which we stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

What is true for ministry is also true in the Christian life. It holds true for marriages. Believers in Jesus Christ must marry other believers or your marriage will be divided from the beginning. It holds true for families. Believers must disciple their children or they risk losing them to the influence of the culture around them. It holds true for churches. Sure, there will always be people at various places on their spiritual journeys but the leadership of any church must make Christ the center lest they get pulled down all kinds of different social, political, or theological rabbit trails. Start to major in the minors and lose sight of Jesus. Every single believer faces the choice every single day in a variety of situations as to whether they will choose to place their faith in the truth of Christ, walk in the way of Christ, and receive the life of Christ or choose to place their faith in themselves, walk in the ways of the world, and experience all kinds of anxiety, fear, shame, and pain. Choose Christ that you might live!

Readings for tomorrow: Jude 1, Psalms 39

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December 14, 2024
Contending for the Faith

Readings for today: [Jude 1, Psalms 39](#) [\(video intro\)](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

How does one contend for the faith? It's an important question and many are asking it these days. In certain circles, "contending for the faith" means reigniting a "crusader" mentality and using any and all means necessary to reimpose the Christian faith in our country. The rhetoric coming from these camps is harsh, judgmental, condemnatory, militaristic, and postures the people in these camps as the true defenders of the faith. In other circles, "contending for the faith" means bringing change and reform to some of the core doctrines that have made up the Christian faith for centuries. Contending for the faith means saving it from itself by adapting it to fit the patterns of the world. Still others believe we need to "contend for the faith" by withdrawing from the world entirely, setting up neo-monastic communities where the true faith can be preserved. I believe Jude would reject all of these.

We have to remember that Jude lived in a world not unlike our own. He lived in a world of many different religions. He lived in a world where there was extreme political and social pressure. He lived in a world full of suffering and pain, death and disease, gross injustice, slavery, and oppression. Jude was an evangelist and church planter. He sought to contend for the faith in a very complex socio-political-religious environment. He was a Christian missionary from an ethnic Jewish background who sought to take the gospel to his own people. It's why he quotes from books like Enoch and the Testament of Moses as he seeks to persuade them to stand firm in their faith. But rather than call them to arms or call them to compromise or call them to retreat, Jude calls those he writes to to "contend for the faith" by living a life of faithfulness to Christ. Listen to how he describes it again, "But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. Have mercy on those who waver; save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." (Jude 1:20-23 CSB)

Build yourself up in the holy faith. Fellowship with other believers. Worship God together. Study and submit yourself to God's Word. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Pray for God's wisdom. Pray for God's power. Pray for God's grace and mercy and love to fill your hearts. Keep yourself in the love of God. Make walking in God's love in all relationships your aim. Never sacrifice God's love. Never abandon or lose hope in God's love. Wait expectantly for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. Always live with this great end in mind. Always keep your eyes fixed on heaven not on earth. Always keep in mind where all of human history is headed and live in this world as you will in heaven. Have mercy on those who waver or doubt. Do not judge or condemn. Save others by snatching them from the fire. Always be reaching out to those who do not yet believe and be willing to cross every barrier or boundary to share God's love with them. Love the sinner even as you hate what sin is doing to their hearts and minds and lives. This is what it means to contend for the faith in Jude's world and our own.

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 1-3, Psalms 40 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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December 15, 2024
No Devotional on Sunday

Readings for today: [Revelation 1-3, Psalms 40](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

December 16, 2024
Worthy is the Lamb

Readings for today: [Revelation 4-6, Psalms 41](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

Is there life beyond death? Is there existence beyond our own? Is there a world beyond our world? These questions seem to haunt the human race. We cannot seem to escape them no matter how hard we try. Sure, some of my atheist friends believe these questions are meaningless because there is no existence beyond what we have in the material world but their opinions are the extreme minority. Some of my physicist friends believe we already have the answer, eventually the universe will become cold and lifeless as all the energy runs out but again, that answer doesn't seem to satisfy. So why is it that human beings for thousands of years have wrestled over these questions? Why have they developed elaborate rituals and systems of belief in order to come up with explanations? Why are we always looking for something more? Something transcendent?

I believe it's because God has set eternity in our hearts. It's part of what it means to be made in His image. Somewhere in our genetic memory, there is an echo of Eden. A fleeting recall of a time when we walked with God in the garden in the cool of the day. And our souls long to go back there. Sadly, we cannot seem to find our way. We stumble through this world, blindly groping after an existence that remains forever beyond our grasp. Thankfully, God is faithful. He will not allow us to remain in our lost and helpless and hopeless condition. He sends His Son to save us. To redeem us and to make all things new.

The Book of Revelation gives us a window to the future. We know how the story ends because God has revealed it to us. He has answered all our questions. He has settled all our doubts and fears. He shows us a world without end. A world perfected by grace. A world full of love and devotion. A world without sin and death and fear and pain. A world where all of creation joins the angels and elders and saints who have gone before us in praise to God's glorious name. Read these words from Revelation 5 again and let your soul join in the praise...

"When the Lamb of God took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him. Each one had a harp and golden bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth. Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. They said with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say, Blessing and honor and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:8-14 CSB)

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 7-9, Psalms 42

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December 17, 2024

Sacrifice

Readings for today: [Revelation 7-9, Psalms 42](#) ([audio reading](#))

I have the great privilege to be part of one of the great Kingdom movements of our time. I have met thousands of indigenous missionaries who are planting churches in rural villages all over the Horn of Africa and beyond where the gospel has never been preached. They risk their lives to go to places like Somalia, Yemen, Djibouti, and Sudan. They confront pagan priests, witch doctors, Muslim imams, rival tribal gangs, and local warlords. They face all kinds of political and social and cultural pressure. They are often beaten and left for dead. They go hungry. They go thirsty. They are homeless. They are isolated and in many cases, on their own. But still they persevere. Though they may be arrested and go to prison. Beaten and go to the hospital. Killed and go to the morgue. They do not stop. They will not stop. I believe these are the ones described in Revelation seven when John sees in his vision those who have been given white robes, who have come out of the tribulation.

Why do these men and women do it? Why do they risk it all for the sake of the gospel? Why do they lay their lives on the line day after day, despite all the hardship, suffering, and pain? They believe with all their hearts that God will one day wipe away every tear. God will one day heal every hurt. God will one day repay every injustice. God will one day judge those who persecute them. How can they have such confidence? They believe what God says in His Word. “For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. The one seated on the throne will shelter them: They will no longer hunger; they will no longer thirst; the sun will no longer strike them, nor will any scorching heat. For the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them; he will guide them to springs of the waters of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:15-17 CSB) This is the future they have in view. They do not expect to have it easy in this world. They come from a context where every day is a struggle. Every day is filled with suffering. Every day is a battle for survival. So they do not place their trust in the things of this world and instead, look to the world to come.

Would that we would do the same! In my context, it is easy to fall in love with the world. The desires of the flesh. The desires of the eyes. The pride of life. All of these are eminently attainable. All of them are available to me. Given enough time. Given enough resources. Given enough access and opportunity. I can pretty much do what I want. I can live a pretty comfortable, if not luxurious life. But that isn't God's plan for me. He has something so much greater and more fulfilling in mind if I will simply trust Him. Obey Him. Follow Him. Sacrifice everything for Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 10-11, Psalms 43

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December 18, 2024
The Call of Christmas

Readings for today: [Revelation 10-11, Psalms 43](#) ([audio reading](#))

I find most people live with a sense of cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, everyone generally agrees that our world is not in great shape. There is too much violence. Too much pain and suffering. Too much disease. Too much inequality. Too much resource disparity. Too much anger. Too much hate. And we generally blame God for not stepping in. Not taking care of things. Not leveling the playing field. Not solving our problems. Not restraining evil. At the same time, everyone generally agrees they want to be free. Free to make their own decisions. Free to live their lives the way they want. Free to pursue the fulfillment of their desires. So we don't want God to tell us what to do. Don't want God to challenge our choices. Don't want God to restrict our behavior. But we can't have it both ways. The fundamental reality that the Bible affirms is that we are free, moral agents, created in the image of God, capable of great good and great evil, fully responsible for the decisions we make and the impact those choices have on others and this is why we are subject to God's judgment.

God loves the world. He loves everything He has made. He loves every creature He has made. He loves every human being He has made. And that's why God hates what we've done to the world. He hates what we do to each other. He hates what we do to ourselves. And He holds us responsible for each and every action and non-action. He holds us responsible for each and every word we say or don't say. He holds us responsible for the way we respond to those around us and especially the way we respond to Him. He created us to worship and to serve Him forever. And when we reject His creative purposes for our lives, we live for ourselves, and living for ourselves is what ultimately leads us to ruin. God, however, will not abandon us. He will not abandon the world He has made. He is coming again to judge the earth and everyone in it. He is coming again to make all things new and take control of His world once and for all. Listen again to how the Apostle John describes it, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. The twenty-four elders, who were seated before God on their thrones, fell facedown and worshiped God, saying, We give you thanks, Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry, but your wrath has come. The time has come for the dead to be judged and to give the reward to your servants the prophets, to the saints, and to those who fear your name, both small and great, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:15-18 CSB)

Thanks be to God that we know the end of the story! Now the challenge is for us to live with God's glorious end in mind. Live now as if the kingdoms of this world have already become the Kingdom of our God and His Messiah. Live in the reality of God's reign and rule on earth. This is the call to the church. This is the call to every Christian. And this call is renewed each and every Christmas.

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 12-13, Psalms 44

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December 19, 2024
A Different Kind of Christmas Story

Readings for today: [Revelation 12-13, Psalms 44](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

The twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation gives us a different view of the Christmas story. A different taken on human history. A different understanding of the war that is taking place all around us every single day. In this chapter, John is given a vision. A pregnant woman clothed with the sun, moon, and stars. A great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. A male child who is born to rule the nations. Now we know we are moving into allegorical territory because John tells us as much. What he's witnessing here is a sign. A symbol of what's been taking place since before the foundations of the world.

Contrary to popular belief, the Christmas story didn't begin in a stable in Bethlehem. It actually began in the Garden of Eden when God put enmity between the woman and the serpent, promising in Genesis 3:15 that her child would crush the serpent's head. And ever since that day, Satan, identified in Revelation 12:9 as the "great dragon" and the "ancient serpent", has been trying to prevent the fulfillment of God's promise by attacking the offspring of Eve. He incited Cain to kill Abel, Pharaoh to kill all the male Hebrew children, Saul to attempt to kill David, Haman to plot genocide against the Jewish people in the Book of Esther, and, of course, Herod to kill all the infants in and around Bethlehem in an effort to kill Jesus. It seems clear both from the Bible and human history that Satan particularly focuses his fury on Israel. God's chosen people.

Israel is the woman in labor because she is the one who will give birth to the Messiah. She is God's chosen instrument to bring the Messiah into the world. He will be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies. He will be the Lion of Judah. He will inherit throne of His ancestor David. He will be called Son of God and Son of Man and Son of the Most High. He will be known as Immanuel, God with us. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He is the true offspring of Eve, born to crush the serpent's head in final victory. And just in case you're still not sure who this child is, his name shall be called Jesus, the One born to save His people from their sins. He alone will rule with a rod of iron according to Psalm 2:9 so there can be no doubt about the identity of this child.

But what about the dragon? John clearly identifies him in Revelation 12:9 as the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. Thirteen times in Revelation, Satan is described as a dragon. The seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns recalls the fourth beast from the prophetic dreams of the Old Testament prophet Daniel. The stars that were swept to the earth by his tail are those angels who rebelled against God along with him and his goal from the beginning of time has been to derail the will of God. Disrupt the plan of God. Destroy the people of God. How else can you reasonably explain the persecuted history of the Jewish people? How else can you rationally justify the rampant antisemitism that exists throughout the world today and throughout human history? Why is it that they have been singled out for attack time and again, in nation after nation, culminating in the Final Solution of the Nazis? Why do so many around the world today make all kinds of excuses and justify all kinds of terrorism against the Jews, even in the face of the horrific events of October 7th? I believe the answer is clear. Behind it all lurks the great dragon, doing everything he can to destroy those whom God loves. So the veil clouding John's sight has been lifted. The political and social and moral struggles we engage in here on earth, the battles between good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are not just physical but spiritual in nature. Our battle is ultimately not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. And thank God Jesus won the

victory. God has made a mockery of what Satan believed to be his greatest triumph. Just when the great dragon thought he had finally devoured the child of the woman, God snatched that child from his grasp. Raised him from the dead. Caught him up to heaven. Seated Him on His throne. Gave Him all authority in heaven and on earth and the name that is above every name.

Are you ever tempted to look at the world around you and think that Satan has the upper hand? Do you ever question deep down in your heart if Satan might know how to fight the battles of this world better than God? Do Kingdom principles like turn the other cheek, bless those who persecute you, love your enemies, preach Christ and Him crucified, choose the weak things of this world, deny yourself, pick up a cross, and follow Jesus seem like losing strategies to you? Naive? Foolish? Too weak to meet the demands of this particular cultural and political moment? Well, if you've learned anything from the readings this year, you know that's exactly how God works. He chooses the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. He chooses the weak things of this world to defeat the strong. He makes the cross a throne. He makes the crown of thorns, a crown of victory. By His stripes we are healed. By His wounds we are made whole. By His death, He reconciles the world to Himself. By taking judgment on Himself, He bought us peace. Through His miraculous resurrection, we are given the gift of eternal life.

Friends, at Calvary, God takes what Satan believes to be his greatest triumph and turns it into his utter defeat. Drives him from heaven. Throws him down to earth where he is no longer allowed to accuse us before God. Think about that for a moment! There is no one left in heaven to accuse you! No one left in heaven to condemn you! No one left in heaven to attack you! There is only Jesus who lives to intercede for you. There is only Jesus who promises to save to the uttermost those who draw near to Him. There is only Jesus, our great and faithful high priest, who passed through the heavens, to sympathize with us in our weakness, to be tempted in every way just as we are, and who offers Himself in our place. Merry Christmas!

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 14-16, Psalms 45

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December 20, 2024
Doubling Down

Readings for today: [Revelation 14-16, Psalms 45](#) ([audio reading](#))

I still remember the last time I gambled in a casino. I was in my mid-twenties and I was in Las Vegas attending a medical technology conference on behalf of my employer. One night I went down to play a little blackjack. Now, the goal of blackjack is to get to 21 or as close to it as possible and beat the dealer and I was on a pretty good run that night. Up a couple hundred bucks when the dealer dealt me two sixes. Terrible hand. Especially since he was showing ten. So what did I do? Made the worst decision possible. I split the sixes. Why was that a bad decision? Because most likely I'm going to pull tens, end up at sixteen which is even worse than holding twelve because it's still not close to twenty and increases my chances at busting exponentially and I'll be in for double the bet. So the next card comes out. It's another six. What do you think I did? Split them again. The guy next to me was like you're crazy. Even the dealer was shaking his head. He pulled the next card. Another six. I split a third time. So now I've got four sixes, I'm in for quadruple my bet, the dealer is showing ten, and pretty much everyone at the table is laughing at me at this point. The next four cards came out. All tens of course. Now I've got four sixteens. Literally the worst possible scenario. So I hold on all four. I'm going to make the dealer play his hand. I'm not going to bust for him. Luckily, he busts out and I win big. The people around the table go crazy...all because of my stupidity.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, humanity has been doubling down on one bad decision after another. Every individual. Every generation. For tens of thousands of years. And unlike the dealer that night in Vegas, God never busts. His justice never fails. His judgments remain true. His righteousness is eternal. Take a moment and think about your own life. Think about the decisions you make every single day. How many of them are selfish? How many of them are sinful? Now multiply that by the billions of people who live around the globe today. Multiply it again by the billions who have lived throughout human history. Do all of that and you might begin to understand the sheer number of sins that must be accounted for. Must be paid for. Must be dealt with.

And why is it important that our sin be dealt with? Why can't God just forgive and forget and move on? Because our sin has real life consequences. In our individual lives. In our marriages and families. In our work and schools and communities. At the extreme end, I think of the inmates I ministered to at New Jersey State Prison. The sinful choices they made that put them behind bars. The sinful conditions they lived in that contributed to their terrible decisions. The horrific consequences of their actions. I think of the men and women and children I met in an IDP camp. Internally displaced by the civil war in northern Ethiopia. Dying from starvation and disease. All because of the sinful choices of their tribal leaders and the sinful choices of the United Nations relief agency who wouldn't give them enough food because of their ethnicity. History is clear. Man's inhumanity to man knows no limits. The list of humanity's crimes against herself and against our world is endless. As I said before, we've been doubling down and doubling down and doubling down since the beginning.

This is why the Book of Revelation prophecies that all of human history will culminate in a final battle called "Armageddon" where the nations of the earth will gather with the dragon and the beast and the false prophet to try and overthrow God once and for all. If you didn't know, "Armageddon" is actually a place. It literally means "Har Megiddo" or "hill of Megiddo." I've been there. It overlooks the Jezreel Valley in Israel and controls one of the most significant trade routes in the ancient world. The valley is fourteen miles wide and sixty-seven miles long. Several battles have been fought here over the centuries going all the way back to the Old Testament Book of Judges. Deborah and Barak fighting the

Canaanites. Gideon fighting the Midianites. King Saul and King Josiah of Israel both fought and died in this valley. In more modern times, Napoleon routed the Ottomans on this battlefield. Because of all the conflicts, the cities in and around Armageddon have been destroyed and rebuilt several times. Megiddo itself was rebuilt twenty times. And it is here, according to Revelation 16, that the kings of the earth will assemble, having diverted and dried up and crossed the great river Euphrates in a kind of reverse Exodus, to fight their final battle against the Victorious Lamb.

Now imagine how sad this must make God. Can you imagine the grief He must feel as the creature He loves most, the creature He made in His own image, the creature He died to save, doubles down on their sinful, selfish ways, trusts the lies of the dragon, the beast, and false prophet rather than the truth of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and seeks to overthrow Him so they can rule and reign in His stead? Imagine how you would feel if this was your own child? Your own flesh and blood turning against you? And God has billions of children around the world and throughout history. And all of them were created to worship God and enjoy Him forever. Friends, God doesn't want to fight with you. God doesn't want to be at war with you. God doesn't want you to struggle or suffer. God doesn't want you to be anxious or afraid. God laid down His life for you. That's how much He loves you. And He has such an amazing plan for your life. He wants to give you hope and a future. He wants to bless you with every spiritual blessing. All He asks is that you stop trying to run things on your own. Stop trying to control things. Give Him the throne of your life. Trust Him to lead and guide you. Turn from your selfish, sinful ways and embrace Jesus. Embrace all He has done for you. Accept all He has won for you.

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 17-18, Psalms 46

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December 21, 2024
Our Refuge and Strength

Readings for today: [Revelation 17-18, Psalms 46](#) ([audio reading](#))

I lived in Princeton, New Jersey on 9/11. Many of my friends and colleagues interned in New York City. Many of the families my wife worked with in her after school program worked in New York City. On the morning when the planes hit the towers, I was turning left from Canal Pointe Boulevard onto Alexander Street to go to campus. I was listening to the radio when the news hit. Every station I checked carried it. Every person delivering the report was in shock. Like everyone, I was in disbelief. I could not wrap my mind around the events. I could not begin to imagine the scope of the tragedy.

An acquaintance of mine was serving as a pastor off Fifth Avenue at the time in the city. When the towers fell, he put on his clergy robe and ran out into the streets. He threw open the doors of his church and people streamed in seeking sanctuary. A safe place. As he watched them mill about the auditorium, he knew he needed to say something. But how does one begin to put words to the national nightmare we were experiencing? My friend turned to Psalm 46. He read the Psalm aloud over and over again. God is our refuge and strength. God is our present help in time of trouble. We do not need to fear though the earth gives way for God is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. Our stronghold. Be still and know that I am God. As he recited those words, a sense of peace came over the place. The people began to calm down. They began to weep. The initial shock began to wane. They provided what food and water they could. They let people stay as long as they wanted. The church stayed open 24/7 for days as people kept coming, looking for help. Looking for hope. My friend kept returning to those Psalm.

There is nothing more powerful than knowing God is with you in the midst of tragedy. Nothing more comforting than knowing we are never alone no matter what we may go through or face in life. God is the one unmovable, unshakeable, unbreakable reality in existence. Everything else is on the clock. Father Time is undefeated whether you are talking individuals or empires. The universe itself is dying every day as more and more of her energy is spent. This is why we look to God. We know we cannot count on the things of this world. We cannot depend on the people of this world. We cannot place our trust in princes or kings, prime ministers or presidents. There is only One who is faithful. Only One who is good. Only One who has the authority and power to be our refuge and strength. Be still and know God, friends.

Readings for tomorrow: Revelation 19-20, Psalms 47 (No devotionals on Sundays)

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December 22, 2024
No Devotional on Sunday

Readings for today: [Revelation 19-20, Psalms 47](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

December 23, 2024
All Things Made New

Readings for today: [Revelation 21-22, Psalm 48](#) ([video intro](#)) ([audio reading](#))

I love the image of a new heavens and new earth. Creation redeemed. Creation renewed. Creation restored to its original glory. God finally putting an end to sin and evil and death once and for all. This is the fulfillment of God's salvation plan. It's the final act of the divine play that's been working itself out since the opening words of Genesis. And as you let these words sink into your soul, take note of a few important things.

First, the new creation will be like a bride adorned for her husband. I remember well my wedding day. My wife has never looked more beautiful. Never more pure. Never more perfect than at that moment she walked down the aisle. (I have never felt more unworthy either!) The same is true for the new creation when it comes. God has always intended to have a relationship with His creation. He desires depth. Intimacy. Complete and total transparency. The kind of relationship we can only dream about this side of heaven. The kind of relationship of which human marriage is but a foretaste.

Second, there is no Temple. God is fully present and we are fully able to experience His presence in our glorified, resurrected bodies. God literally takes up residence with us. He can be seen. Touched. Heard. He wipes away our tears. He heals our infirmities. He makes us finally, completely, and utterly whole. There is no need for sun or moon for God will be our light. There is no need for walls or guards for God is in perfect control. There is no need for judgment or punishment for all the nations of the earth will walk in the light of the Lord and will bring Him the worship He deserves.

Third, there are no divisions in the new creation. No human distinctions to keep us apart. Every dividing wall of hostility will finally be torn down. The New Jerusalem is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles and her gates represent the twelve tribes. In other words, God will gather His people - Jew and Gentile alike - together and make them one. He will gather His people from every tribe, tongue and nation before His throne and all that separates us will fade away like mist before the Lord.

It's a beautiful picture, is it not? Now here's the challenge. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We ask for the church to be a living reflection of this future glory. We ask for God's will to be done in our lives. In our community. In our nation. In our world. How are we living and acting and speaking and treating others so that they see the new heavens and new earth emerging in our midst? How are we presenting to the world a picture of heaven? How are we giving those around us a foretaste of what's to come through what we say and do?

Becoming more like Christ is more a marathon than a sprint. It involves a long obedience in the same direction. I hope you've gleaned that if nothing else from your reading this year. God is at work across the centuries and across the generations. His primary desire is to make us more and more into the image of His Son. To restore us to the image He originally intended for us to bear. May the Lord continue His work in us and among us and through us until He comes again! Maranatha!

Readings for tomorrow: Congratulations! You finished!

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