Crossroads Church Advent Devotional 2025

When I was a kid, the longest days of the year were December 23rd-24th. I do not think it has been scientifically proven yet, but I am 99% sure that there were a few extra hours added to the 23rd to make the lead up to Christmas morning feel even longer. I remember waking my parents up every hour the morning of Christmas to see if it was time to wake up and open our presents and the sad walk back to my bedroom when I heard that it wasn't time yet. Waiting was hard then. Waiting can still be hard now. In the Bible, we see quite a bit of waiting. We see spouses waiting for a promised child, we see people waiting for rescue, we see young men waiting to be king, and we see the entire realm of creation waiting for its redemption. Yet for all that waiting, it is never for nothing. In the Bible, we see men and women waiting with hope, looking for peace, rejoicing with joy unspeakable, and embracing a love from a Savior that they do not deserve. In this devotional, we are going to take a trip through practically the entire Bible. We will see the history of redemption unfold all while looking at the four themes of Advent: hope, peace, joy, and love (Plus a little extra to get us to the New Year). Some passages will only be a few verses while others will cover an entire chapter so as you use this guide, make sure you have a Bible with you! I pray that these devotionals would be beneficial as you and your family prepare to celebrate the birth of the only Savior: Jesus Christ!

-Pastor Brady

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 1- Where God is, there is Hope

Scripture- Genesis 1:1-3

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”

Devotional

In the first 4 words of Scripture, we are already given reason to hope. This world is not the result of chaos and confusion as some choose to believe. This world has a Creator, and this Creator is all powerful, all-knowing, and the great lover of our souls. Why does that give us hope? Because the very God that brought something out of nothing is more than able to bring something good out of all the bad that is in us. If God can say “let there be light” and light comes rushing through the darkness, He is more than able to bring light out of the darkness of the fallen human heart. Paul proves this in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is hard to believe that there was ever a time where this world did not exist. I think that we often take creation for granted. Yet all of creation exists to point to its Creator. David says in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” From the very moment of creation, creation was crying out in praise to God. From day 1 of creation there was hope because where God is, there is hope.

Reflection

The Bible does not question the existence of God. Instead, it states that God is there. Why do you think that people question the existence of a Creator?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 2- Hope in the Midst of Chaos

Scripture- Genesis 3:1-15

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

Devotional

Take a moment and think about what it must have been like the moment that sin entered the world. Prior to this moment, life had practically been heaven on earth. Man walked with God and was unashamed. In a flash, that all changed. In a moment, the man that once eagerly embraced being in God's presence did all that he could to be out of it. In a moment, the reality of shame and guilt plagued the heart and the soul. In a moment, the good world that was created for man to enjoy and glorify God in, became a world that was plagued by sin and death. In our lifetime, all we have seen is a world that is impacted by sin and death. We do not know what it was like to go from a sinless world to a sinful one. Adam and Eve did. God told Adam and Eve that the day that they eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that day they would surely die (Gen 2:17). Then they ate of the fruit and while they did not die physically, they did die spiritually. They needed a redeemer. They needed that which was sinless to remove their sinfulness. They couldn't do that. All they could do is add to their sin. Yet God in His mercy clothed them and gave them hope amidst the hopelessness. God said that from the seed of the woman, One was coming that would crush the head of the serpent that had tempted them. What Adam and Eve did not realize at that moment was that one day, God would walk with man again. God would come to their world, the world full of shame and sin, and God Himself would come and crush the serpent. That sounds like hope to me. One day in Bethlehem, the Serpent Crusher would be born into a fallen world and dwell among men and all the promises from Genesis onwards would be realized. The Christian today has a similar hope to look forward to. One day, Christians will walk with God again. They will see His face and long to be in His presence and the feeling of shame and guilt will be a distant memory. The sin that cast man

out of the presence of God will be no more and death will be no more, and we will be with the Lord forever. Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Praise God for the hope that we have in Him!

Reflection

In what ways do you think the new heavens and the new earth will be like a new Garden of Eden?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 3- The God who Remembers His people

Scripture- Genesis 8

"But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided."

Devotional

The first four words of Genesis 8 can cause some confusion. God had flooded the entire earth, and the entire population of man was reduced to 8 people. Did God forget Noah? How could God forget him? This is the very Noah that God put in the ark to begin with! It was this Noah that God alone found faithful amidst thousands, possibly millions of people! How on earth could God forget about him? No, God did not forget him. God can't forget anything because God already knows everything. It is impossible for God to learn anything. From Noah's perspective, he may have felt like God had forgotten him. By Genesis 8, Noah and his family had been on the ark for months. It can sometimes feel like God has forgotten us. Sometimes we let the wind and the waves of the world around us distract us from the God who is there and is not silent. What it means for Scripture to say that God remembered Noah is that God is about to act decisively towards Noah. God was making a definitive move and statement to Noah. God remembers us. Even in this world that states that God is not there and that God does not give a rip about you, God remembers you. How could He forget you? God has had His sight on you for all eternity. One of the most comforting verses in Scripture can be found in Isaiah 49:14-16. The nation of Israel is probably feeling what Noah felt on that ark. They feel forsaken and they feel forgotten. The Lord answers their objections by saying, "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands." Do you see what the Lord is saying here? We know that the thought of a mother forgetting and having no compassion towards her nursing child sounds impossible (though unfortunately we do see it happen because of a fallen and sinful world). Yet typically the love that a mother has for her child is one of the

strongest bonds to exist between two people. God says that His love is stronger than that. God says that even though a mother might forget her child, He will not forget His. Why? Because they are inscribed on the palms of His hands. Centuries after Noah and his family left the ark, centuries after Isaiah delivered these words to Israel, God came to His people, a people that a few days earlier felt abandoned and forgotten, and said to them, “Look at my hands. See my love and remembrance of you. How can I possibly forget the people that I had nails driven through my hands to redeem?” The Lord has not forgotten you either. If you are a Christian, your very name is inscribed on the heart and hands of God Himself. We do not lose hope because there is a God who remembers His people.

Reflection

Why do you think that it sometimes feels as if God has forgotten us? What are some ways or promises of Scripture that you can reflect on to remember that God remembers you?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 4- God as the Sure Promise of Hope

Scripture- Genesis 15:1-18

"It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces."

Devotional

I think we sometimes forget that even the greatest saints had doubts. If you go through Hebrews 11, the great "By faith" chapter in the New Testament, you could find example after example of people that lived by faith and occasionally had some doubts. Abraham (or Abram as he is named in Genesis 15) had some doubts. As a human, we can't blame him for those doubts. When God makes his promise to him in Genesis 15, Abram is an old man that still does not have a son. Yet God promises to Abram that Abram's descendants will be more numerous than the starts. In Abram's mind, that math isn't quite adding up. We also shouldn't overlook the importance of Genesis 15:6: "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." Abram did not yet see the fullness of the promise realized but he trusted God would do it anyway. Even before the great scene of the torch walking through the pieces of animals, God has seen Abram's faith and reckoned it to him as righteousness. All of this happens and THEN Abram asked God how he can know that it will be true. This is when God says to Abram, "Go get some animals and cut them in two. After that, put the halves into two lines." What a strange scene to us! But Abram understood in his day what was happening. Abram knew that in this arrangement, a covenant, a promise, was being made between two parties. In the time of Abram, when two kings or nations would make a covenant with each other, they would arrange animals in such a way and together, they would walk between the animals, practically saying, "If I fail to uphold my end of the agreement, may I become like these animals." But Abram doesn't walk through the pieces. Instead, he falls asleep and great terror and darkness surrounds him. When he wakes up, he sees a smoking oven and a flaming torch pass between the pieces alone. God is showing to Abram that God Himself will see to it that all the aspects of the

covenant that was made between them would be fulfilled. God alone will bear the entire weight of the covenant upon Himself. What is God really saying to Abram? Iian Duguid captures it well: “It must seem like a metaphor to Abram, a pledge of the impossible as an assurance of God’s determined purpose. Yet in the gospel the figure becomes an outrageous reality: the eternal, immortal God takes on human nature and tastes death in the place of the covenant-breaking children of Abram. On the cross God takes upon himself the full burden of making the covenant effective, despite our weakness, sin, and failure. In Jesus God himself bears the punishment of being almost literally torn apart by the whips, the thorns, the nails, and the spear for our sins, so that he could be faithful to his promise to be our God and that we might be his people through simple faith in him.” The hope of the fulfilled covenant will be brought about by God alone. God Himself will pay the price. The immortal will place upon Himself mortality so that the promise could be fulfilled. How can Christians have hope that their future is safe with God? Because God Himself has already paid the price.

Reflection

Think of the imagery of great terror and darkness surrounding Abram and the sudden light from the oven and flaming torch (the presence of God). In what ways is that like the light of the Gospel coming into our lives?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 5- The Hope that God will Overrule Evil for Good

Scripture- Genesis 50:15-21

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Devotional

The sovereignty of God is an incredible thing. We don't know all that God knows and we don't know everything that He is doing. But we know that He is working. I wonder how often Joseph thought about what God was up to. He had gone from being the beloved child of his father to sold by his brothers and then to be a slave in the house of Potiphar and from the house of Potiphar to a jail cell. In a few short years he would go from that jail cell to the second most powerful man of Egypt. God moves in mysterious ways. Joseph no doubt knew the promises of God that were made to Abraham, Isaac, and his father Jacob. I wonder how often he thought about what role he played in that promise. We may not always see where God is taking us, but we can often look back and see how God got us exactly where we needed to be. The same thing happened to Joseph. What happened to him was an outrageous act of wickedness, but God overruled that great evil to bring about a greater good so that countless lives would be saved. I think towards the end of Joseph's life that he looked back in thanksgiving that God brought him to that point. I think that all Christians can one day look at the sufferings that they went through and be able to say that God meant it for good. The greatest evil ever committed was the murder of Jesus Christ and yet the greatest good ever accomplished came through that very act. Peter preaches in Acts 2:22-23, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know- this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." It was evil and godless men that put Jesus to death. Yet it was the will and plan of God for Christ to suffer for sin. The greatest example of God taking evil and using it to bring

about good is in the cross. In the death of Christ for the salvation of sinners, we see a visual of the hope that we have that God has not been overruled by darkness. God really will take all the bad and use it for His glory and our good.

Reflection

If you look at Joseph in the book of Genesis, what are some ways that we can see him as a type of Jesus? Or to put it simpler, what similarities can you see in the story of Joseph that look like the story of Jesus?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 6- The Hope of our Deliverance

Scripture- Exodus 15:1-18

"The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him."

Devotional

When you go through the Bible, you see countless references and images of the exodus. The exodus was God's rescue mission to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt and bring them to the promised land. All through the Bible we see the exodus as a picture of God's strength, God's power, and man's dependence upon God for deliverance. In Exodus 15, we see the people of Israel go from deliverance to worship. Just 1 chapter before, the people were brought through the Red Sea and delivered safely from the hand of Pharaoh and his armies. What was the instant response to so great a deliverance? It was praise! The only proper response is praise. As 21st century Christians, we can look at the song of Exodus 15 as a song that we too can sing of our great deliverance from the enemy that is sin and death. The God that has become their salvation is the God that is also our salvation. The God that overthrew their enemies is the same God that overthrows our enemies. The same God that leads the people with lovingkindness is the same God that leads us with lovingkindness. The same God that plants secure the people in the promised land is the same God that plants us securely. This God is the God that shall reign forever and ever. This is the God that we worship. In your sins, you faced a greater enemy and trial than all the assembled armies of Egypt. Just like the people of Israel, you and I cannot deliver ourselves from this oppression. But thanks be to God, that He has come to deliver us! In Moses, the people of Israel received a deliverer that they did not expect. He didn't seem to fit the mold of what a deliverer should look like. Centuries later, a greater deliver would come that the people would not expect. Instead of One that came to reign with power, One came to suffer and die. The hope of all the people would come from a place that they did not expect. The hope for all the world would first come to a stable as a baby and would hang on a cross

condemned as a criminal. Yet this was the way by which God would deliver His people. The hope for the hopeless!

Reflection

Looking through Exodus 15, what are some praises that the people sing that we can continue to sing today?

Advent Week 1- Hope

Day 7- The Hope of a Greater Moses

Scripture- Deuteronomy 18:15-19

"I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him."

Devotional

In terms of leaders, Moses must rank up as one of the best. His patience with the people of Israel alone is admirable. It must have been difficult to lose a leader that has been such a constant presence in the lives of the people. For many of these Israelites, Moses was the only leader that they had ever known. When it comes to the history of God's people, God is always preparing the man for the moment and the moment for the man. There is always another faithful witness waiting in the wing for the moment where God will use them. Moses would have Joshua. David would have Solomon. Paul would have Timothy. God knows who is needed at just the right moment and God sees to it that these people are ready. The book of Deuteronomy can be seen as Moses' way of preparing the people of Israel after he dies. He wants to put them in the best possible position to move forward. Moses points ahead to the day when God will raise up a new prophet from among the people of Israel that will speak in the name of the Lord. Not only will He speak in God's name, but He will also speak the very words of God. All through the Old Testament we see God bring faithful prophets to address peoples and nations but none of these were the prophets that God was pointing ahead to in Deuteronomy 18. What all people need is not another Moses, they need a greater Moses. Yes, Moses was a prophet, and he was a tremendous leader, but he was also a sinner. What people need is not another sinner who is just like them, they need a sinless Savior to speak the Word of God to them. Do you think that throughout Israel's history that they ever had a prophet come and wonder whether this was the prophet that Moses spoke about? "I sure hope this is the one that Moses said was coming" they probably said. I wonder if they thought he would just be a carbon-copy of Moses? If all they were hoping for was another version of Moses, their hopes were in the

wrong place. But a greater Moses was coming. One that was without sin and One that was the only answer to sin.

Reflection

Going through Scripture, what are some ways that Jesus is a greater prophet than Moses?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 8- A Reminder of God's Peace with His People

Scripture- Joshua 3:7-Joshua 4:7

"Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?' then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever."

Devotional

It can be easy to forget the things that matter most. Sometimes we forget our car keys or where our phone is, but these are things that we could technically survive without. But what if you forgot something of critical importance? What if there was something that if you forgot it, you would be forgetting practically your entire identity? That is close to what we see happening at this moment in the book of Joshua. The Lord knew that a day would come where the children of Israel would forget their history. They would forget the mighty acts that God did on their behalf to bring them to the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Lord commanded Joshua and the people to put up a stone memorial that would remind them of the moment that God delivered them to the promised land. It was a reminder to all people that God was unlike any other. It was a reminder to all people that God alone had delivered this people. Francis Schaeffer said, "The stones were to tell the other nations round about that this God is different. He really exists; he is a living God, a God of real power who is immanent in the world." These stones were a reminder to the people of Israel that God was their God. Unlike the nations that were to be cast out and destroyed, the people of Israel were God's chosen people. They were the recipients of God's peace and future generations needed to know their relationship to God. They needed to be reminded of what God had done. Visual reminders are important. To say one thing is important but to see it for yourself is entirely different. Far in the future, God's people would receive another visual of what God was doing for them. This would be another visual to

remind them that the battle was the Lord's and that only God could bring peace to the people. Instead of being a visual of stone, this visual be a choir of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." (Luke 2:14). The visual of stone was gone and now the reminder of peace between God and His people is seen in a baby born in Bethlehem.

Reflection

Why do you think it is so easy for us to forget the great promises of God? What are some ways that you can remind yourself of what God has said and done?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 9- Don't Forsake the Peace that is Offered

Scripture- Judges 2:11-23

"Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed."

Devotional

One look at this passage and you might be thinking that it is a strange selection to include during the peace week of Advent. We see sin, rejection, plundering, and death in about a dozen verses. Sometimes we learn best through the negatives. What we see happening in the book of Judges is what was warned about to the people of Israel by both Moses and Joshua. The people had forgotten their God. They had forgotten the God that had established them and redeemed them. The peace that the people had with God was no more. God was at war with His people. As Christians, we cannot afford to neglect the salvation that has been offered to us. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. A life without God looks exactly like what we see in the book of Judges. We see lostness, we see sin-plagued lifestyles, we see death, and we see abandonment. A life without God is a life without peace. If you do not have peace with God, what are you waiting for? He offers it freely to us even though we have done nothing but give Him reasons to destroy us. Paul says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." If you have been saved through faith in Christ, how are you living your life? Are you living it in light of the fact that you have peace with God? If you are not, why do you think that is? If you want peace with God, the only way is by submitting to Him. The world offers all sorts of alternatives but nothing outside of faith and Jesus Christ can bring peace to your life

Reflection

What are some other negative examples in the Bible that we can learn from as we grow in our faith?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 10- Redemptive Peace

Scripture- Ruth 4:13-22

“Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.”

Devotional

In the story of Ruth, we see a story of redemption. In Ruth’s story, we see what happens to a life that is changed by Jesus Christ. We see a debt that is paid, we see a life that is bought, we see a bride that is cherished, and we see a life that is born. When Boaz redeemed Ruth, all that she had became his and all that he had became hers. Ruth could not redeem herself. Before this moment, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi had no peace. They had lost love and property and now were left wondering what their future could possibly look like. Poor Naomi felt like the Lord had dealt with her very bitterly, but a redeemer can change a lot of things. With Boaz, Ruth was safe. With Boaz, Ruth was taking from working amongst the servants to being served by them. Matthew Henry writes, “Thus sometimes God raises up the poor out of the dust, to set them with princes.” She was loved and provided for and God blessed her with a child. This child would go on to make a lot of people happy. This child, Obed, would be the grandfather of King David. From this family line, another baby was coming that would bring much joy to not just one family or one town but to a multitude for generations. A baby was coming that would be the greater Boaz: A kinsmen redeemer not just for a bride, but for the entire world. If Naomi rejoiced at the presence of Obed, how much more today is she rejoicing at the presence of Jesus Christ?

Reflection

Can one have peace with God without also being redeemed?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 11- What God's Peace Looks Like

Scripture- 2 Samuel 7:1-17

"I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth."

Devotional

David wanted to build a house for the Lord, but it was the Lord that would build a house for David. There are elements in God's covenant with David that are also seen in God's covenant with believers. Just as God was with David wherever he went, God is with believers wherever they go (2 Sam 7:9). Just as God established the people of Israel in their place and places them where the wicked will not afflict them as before, God has a home for believers in Heaven where wicked and evil will never afflict them again. God also grants rest to the people of Israel and to the believer (2 Sam 7:10). Just as David was promised a kingdom, the people of God are also promised a kingdom (2 Sam 7:12). Jesus says in Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Believers are promised to have God as their Father just as David was promised that God would be a Father to his offspring (2 Sam 7:14). Just as God promised to not remove His lovingkindness from David's son, God does not remove His lovingkindness from those that have been redeemed by Jesus Christ (2 Sam 7:15). In God's promise to David, we see a picture of what peace with God looks like now and what it will look like in eternity. We see that in God, we have a home, we have a kingdom, we have forgiveness, we have love, and we have acceptance. But how does one possess that? Only through Christ. In Jesus Christ we see that God does not build His kingdom up, He brings it down. In Revelation 21:2, John sees the Kingdom of God coming to earth and he says, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The Lord often works in a downward direction for His glory and our good.

Reflection

Do you think that a 21st century Christian can look at God's covenant with David and the promises that God mad to him and his offspring and claim those promises as their own?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 12- Peace Through Repentance

Scripture- Psalm 51

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Devotional

Psalm 51 is one of the most striking examples of what true repentance looks like in the Bible. David had committed an egregious sin. He had stolen a man's wife and then had the man murdered so that David could keep the woman as his own wife. What is amazing is that David did not recognize his sin (or the depths of it) for over a year. It was not until Nathan the prophet came to him that David recognized what he had done. In response to his sin, David writes one of the clearest examples of true repentance in the Bible. David recognizes that he has sinned against his savior. He has offended the God who had blessed him far beyond what he could ask or think. David didn't just change his mind regarding his sin; David grieved over his sin. True repentance is where the heart cries out to God and asks God to remove this sin because the sinner is powerless to change it on his or her own. As Christians, we must confess our sins immediately. Yes, Christ pays the debt for every sin that we commit, past, present, and future, but we should never grow tired of repentance because we don't stop sinning until we get to heaven. Charles Spurgeon said, "A Christian must never leave off repenting, for I fear he never leaves off sinning." Does the Christian have anything to fear when they repent before God? Absolutely not. Jesus says that He will never cast out those that come to Him. The true Christian has a peace with God that cannot be taken away. Even after David's sin, he was still considered a man after God's own heart. David had moments of failure and David had moments that required repentance. All Christians do. The question is what do you do with those moments? Do you flee from God and try to hide them? Or do you go to the Lord in repentance and ask Him to do what you are powerless to do? Having peace with God means that we have that kind of access to Him. Having peace with God means that we can ask that God clean our hearts and having confidence that He won't destroy us and our hearts in the process. Do not

forget that God is full of grace and mercy and will always offer forgiveness to those that truly seek it. To paraphrase one of the leaders of the early church, St. Chrysostom, God desires to forgive more than we desire to be forgiven.

Reflection

Is there anything that has been weighing down on you that you know you need to repent of this Christmas season? Who do you have in your life that you could talk to about this?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 13- Peace in the Unassuming

Scripture- 1 Kings 19:1-18

"Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"

Devotional

Within 2 chapters, we see the prophet Elijah at his highest and at his lowest. In 1 Kings 18, he has just witnessed the colossal defeat of the prophets of Baal but now in 1 Kings 19, he is running for his life. One moment he is expecting national revival and in the next moment he is running away in exile. Has God's plan failed? Despite all the efforts of Elijah and the Lord, did wickedness prevail? Or does God have a plan? There is no plan B for God. God accomplishes exactly what He wants exactly when He wants it, and it sometimes comes in ways that we cannot imagine. As Elijah is waiting at Mount Horeb, he is waiting for God to give him direction. Like Elijah, we often think that God works in enormous displays of power. Elijah sees a great and strong wind rending the mountains and breaking rocks to pieces, but we read that God was not in the wind. After that there is an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then there is a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. But then comes a small and still voice. In this small and unassuming voice, Elijah hears and experiences the presence of God. And this was enough for him. If you continue reading through 1 Kings 19, the Lord gives Elijah instructions and Elijah faithfully obeys. God is more than just a God of unrivaled might and power. He is also a God that is close to the brokenhearted and He knows when a small voice is needed for the good of an anxious heart. God is the God of the major and the minor. Elijah had just seen God move powerfully against the prophets of Baal but now Elijah experiences God in a much more intimate way. God came through in an unassuming way and He would come again in a similar way. One day God would come to earth, and He would not come in this grand display of power, but He would come as a baby. He would come not to rule with an iron fist but to serve in love. As we have said before, God really does move in mysterious ways, but He always moves

exactly as is needed. Peace with God will not come through the slaughter of God's enemies, peace with God would be accomplished through the death of His only Son.

Reflection

What are some moments in your life where you know God was working through the still and quite moments?

Advent Week 2- Peace

Day 14- The Prince of Peace is Coming

Scripture- Isaiah 9:1-6

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

Devotional

Isaiah 9 promises that a child is coming into the world that will change everything. This child will be unlike any other child that has ever come into this world. The fate of the entire universe rests on the shoulders of this child, and this child is also the Creator of the entire universe. This child was coming into the world for a set purpose. This child was coming to save that which was lost. As we look at what this child will be named, we see that God Himself is coming. The Hebrew word for "Mighty God" is El Gibor, and it is a title that is reserved exclusively for God and yet this child will be named Mighty God! He is not A god; He is THE God. As you look at these titles for this child that was to come into the world, remember all the attributes attached to these names are true of God and reassuring for His people. John Calvin writes, "When we need counsel, let us remember that he is the Counsellor. When we need strength, let us remember he is Mighty and Strong. When new terrors spring up suddenly every instant, and when many deaths threaten us from various quarters, let us rely on that eternity of which he is with good reason called the Father, and by the same comfort let us learn to soothe all temporal distresses. When we are inwardly tossed by various tempests, and when Satan attempts to disturb our consciences, let us remember that Christ is the Prince of Peace, and that it is easy for him quickly to allay all our uneasy feelings." What do you need this Christmas? Do you need counsel? Do you need comfort? Do you need peace? Christ offers all of these to you!

Reflection

Take one of the titles in Isaiah 9:6 and find another verse that connects that title to Christ.

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 15- Joy in the Presence of the Word of God

Scripture- Nehemiah 8

"Then he said to them, 'Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"

Devotional

What we see happening in Nehemiah 8 is every pastor's dream. As the Word of God is proclaimed, the crowds are moved to tears of sorrow and tears of joy. To simply be in the presence of God's Word is an amazing thing. We take it for granted in the 21st century with just how easy it is to possess a copy of the Word of God. You can purchase Bibles in all shapes, sizes, and translations. You can even download copies for free and read whenever you like. You can have it on your phone and easily take it anywhere. The people in Nehemiah's day did not have that luxury. Some of the people that were there were possibly hearing the Law of God taught for the first time and look at how they responded to it! Do you have joy when you read the Word of God? Or is it something that you are just rushing to get done so that you can say that you did it for the day. Do you have a desperate longing to be in the Word? Yes, the Bible confronts us and challenges us, but it also gives us reasons to rejoice. In the Bible we read of the God who loves us and has spoken. We are not entitled to God's Word and yet he has given it to us. Take joy in knowing that! When you read the Bible, slow down while reading it and truly reflect on what you are reading. Every page, every sentence, every word is there for a reason. Every verse has a purpose. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Rejoice that God has spoken! Rejoice that the Word has been given to us! Rejoice that in Jesus Christ, the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. John says in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." The joy that

the people experienced in the days of Nehemiah do not compare to the joy that awaits all believers when they see the Word face to face. What better way to prepare for that than to rejoice in the Word of God now!

Reflection

When you read the Bible, consider reading smaller pieces of Scripture so that you can spend more time studying and reflecting that passage. It is more beneficial to really reflect on a smaller passage of Scripture than to speed through a whole chapter or book just to finish it.

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 16- Personal Declarations of Joy

Scripture- Psalm 9:1-10

"I will be glad and exult in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High."

Devotional

If you look ahead over the next few days, you will see that we will spend quite a bit of time in the Psalms and that is intentional. Psalms is a joy-filled book because it is a worship-filled book. When the Christian praise, there is joy. Regardless of what may be going on in their lives, a Christian is one that always possesses a capacity for joy. The joy of the Christian cannot be removed from them. Even in sorrows, the Christian can still rejoice (2 Corinthians 6:10). Eternal joy is something that is distinctly Christian. No other belief system can truly offer that. It is easy to look at worship and the joy that comes with praising God Almighty and think that worship is something that happens only on Sunday morning. We think that worship can only happen when the Body of Christ comes together to sing praises to the King of Kings but that is not true. Yes, worship happens in that moment but that is not the only time or place where it happens. Worship must happen on a singular level before it happens in a multitude. It starts with one worshipper gathering with another worshipper and another worshipper and so on. That's what we see in Psalm 9. David begins with, "**I** will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart. **I** will tell of all Your wonders. **I** will be glad and exult in You; **I** will sing praise to Your name, O Most High." David says, "I will do it, I will praise, I will exalt!" He doesn't say, "We will do it." Yes, other people have joy unspeakable in Christ, the question is do you personally have joy in Christ? Could you stand as David did and truly say, "I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart"? If you aren't willing to do it personally, it will not matter what you do corporately. Christ came so that **YOU** would have joy. Do you truly have it? Can you honestly say that you possess it?

Reflection

What do you think joy in Christ looks like for you personally?

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 17- Unshakable Joy

Scripture- Psalm 16

"I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will dwell securely."

Devotional

Psalm 16 starts in desperation, and it ends in fullness of joy. In many ways, that is a picture of the Gospel. The Gospel is a message for desperate and helpless people. It is a message for the refugee that is living behind enemy lines and is in desperate need of a Savior. In the Gospel, the sinner recognizes that the only hope that he or she has is God Himself. The Christian is the one that God has not abandoned to the terrors of the world or to the depravity of sin. The Christian is the one that gets to experience unshakable joy because the One that gives them their joy cannot be moved. The certainty of the Christian's joy comes from the fact that the moment the Christian is made righteous before God, nothing can remove that from them. The Christian cannot be moved because God is at their right hand. Psalm 16 really presents a view of the entire Christian life. Derek Kidner captures this well when he writes, "This verse is unsurpassed for the beauty of the prospect it opens up, in words of the utmost simplicity. The path of life is so called, not only because of its goal but because to walk that way is to live, in the true sense of the word, already. It leads without a break into God's presence and into eternity. The joy and pleasures are presented as wholly satisfying and endlessly varied, for they are found in both what He is and what He gives- joys of His face (the meaning of presence) and of His right hand. The refugee of verse 1 finds himself an heir, and his inheritance beyond all imagining and all exploring." Psalm 16 also points ahead to the Messiah that would come to save the world. David writes, "For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." Both Peter and Paul would see this verse as fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25-28; 13:35). The sureness of joy for all believers is that if God did not abandon Christ to death, the believer can trust that God will not abandon those that Christ has redeemed to

death. Just as Christ was raised, we too shall be raised. In the end, part of the Christian joy will be knowing that death does not remove joy from us but brings the Christian face to face with the One that gave them that joy in the first place.

Reflection

What do you think the difference is between happiness and the joy that Christians experience?

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 18- Cries of Pain to Eternal Joy

Scripture- Psalm 22

"For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard."

Devotional

Psalm 22 has been called "The Psalm of the Cross." There are some moments in the Old Testament where the imagery is so strong that you can't help but feel transported to the event. Isaiah 53 is another great example. The images are so strong and similar to what is seen in the New Testament, it is almost tempting to think that someone who was present at the events of the New Testament went back and recorded it in the Old Testament! Psalm 22 captures the final moments of Jesus on the cross. It captures the desperation, the sense of abandonment, the darkness, and sense of death that Christ was experiencing on the cross. If Christ is not resurrected, the Bible is the saddest and darkest book in history. The death of Christ is meaningless without resurrection. Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 15:17-19, "and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ only in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied." If Christ is not raised, the world should feel bad for us as believers. But even in the despair of Psalm 22, there is resurrection joy and resurrection hope. Psalm 22 points ahead to a great assembly that comes together to praise the Lord forever. A coming generation will proclaim the excellencies of the crucified and risen Savior. There are often cries of pain and despair in this life. But take courage because even Christ's cries of pain would lead to outpourings of life and joy. Hebrews 12 says that it was for the joy that was set before Him that Christ endured the cross. The joy that was set before Christ was that He would glorify His Heavenly Father and that a "coming generation" and a "people to be born" would declare His excellencies and enjoy Him forever. In this world you will have sorrow, but the promise of the Gospel is that even that sorrow will turn to joy. John Piper said, "There are waves of sorrow and pain and loss

that break, big waves that break, over the unshakable rock of Christian joy, and these waves submerge the laughter in the surging. You can feel it: the surging surf of weeping that wells up unbidden from your heart. But they don't dislodge the rock, and the waves recede in due time, and the rock glistens again in tearless sunlight."

Reflection

Has there been a moment in your life where a moment of great despair has led to a moment of tremendous joy?

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 19- Joy for a King that is Coming

Scripture- Psalm 24

“Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!”

Devotional

Psalms 22-24 are all Christ-centered psalms. Psalm 22 testifies to a Christ that suffers and dies for His people. Psalm 23 testifies to the risen Good Shepherd that leads His people. Psalm 24 testifies to the ascended and reigning King that returns to bring His people home. During Advent, we look ahead with joy to a King that came and a King that is coming. We know that over 2,000 years ago, a King came into the world as a baby. Here we are now looking ahead to a King that will come into the world not as a baby but as the ascended, resurrected Savior that is coming to make all things right. We can look at this Psalm as a declaration of joy and victory because we see the King coming to the city as victor and as conqueror. Christ came to the world not to make salvation a battle that we could potentially win, Christ came to the world to make salvation certain. I’m sure the original audience of Psalm 24 read or sang these words and were wondering, “Who is this King that is coming? Who is David talking about? Is the Lord of Hosts truly going to come and reign?” Were these just lofty words or hopeful anticipation of what may come? Or was Heaven and earth moving to a moment where God Himself would come to earth to rule and reign? At Christ’s first coming, He came to win the battle. At His second coming, He comes to celebrate the fullness of the victory. He is the Lord, strong and mighty, the King of Glory!

Reflection

Later today, read Psalms 22-24 and see how it all connects to the life and work of Jesus.

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 20- Joyful Reflection on the Faithfulness of God

Scripture- Psalm 126

"Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad."

Devotional

Reflection is a powerful tool. Sometimes we look at our pasts and the things that we have experienced, and we don't realize that the past can be a powerful tool for Gospel proclamation. In Psalm 126, the psalmist looks back on their time in captivity and rather than dwelling on the pain of that moment, they burst out in praise for the God that has brought them home. There are times when the Lord will have us go through things so that we can be a blessing for others. Even the painful memories that believers have can one day lead to joyful shouting. The psalmist writes, "Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting." In the sowing of tears, there is a harvest of joy. The Christian is the one that gets to embrace the promise that while there may be pain in the night, joy will inevitably come in the morning. As we reflect on God's past and present faithfulness, it will lead us to joyful proclamation. So, embrace your memories. Embrace the moments that God brought you through that seemed painful as it first happened because you are not the same person now that you are then. God is doing something in these moments where tears that were sowed will one day lead to joyful reaping. Eugene Peterson writes, "We nurture these memories of laughter, these shouts of joy. We fill our minds with the stories of God's acts. Joy has a history. Joy is the verified, repeated experience of those involved in what God is doing. It is as real as a date in history, as solid as a stratum of rock in Palestine. Joy is nurtured by living in such a history, building on such a foundation." The joy that we have as Christians is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. He is the Chief Cornerstone. He alone is the firm foundation of all our hopes and all our joys and all our longings. He is the One that redeems

us from captivity and brings us home. The Lord really has done great things for us, and we have much to be glad about!

Reflection

What are some ways that God could use some of the struggles of your past to minister to someone that is struggling now?

Advent Week 3- Joy

Day 21- Joy for the Captives

Scripture- Isaiah 61

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."

Devotional

In Luke 4, Jesus is handed a scroll with Isaiah 61 on it. As He reads most of verses 1 and 2, He declares that what has been read has been fulfilled in the hearing of the people. Jesus has come to rescue the spiritually oppressed. He has come to free those that were enslaved to sin and to bind up the brokenhearted. He comes to clothe us in His very righteousness. We know that we are powerless to save ourselves. We cannot make ourselves righteous regardless of how much work we do. All the good that we do on the outside cannot make up for all the bad that we have on the inside. Have you recognized this? Have you recognized that the only way that you can ever have eternal joy in your life is when you stop relying on your own works and abilities to possess eternal joy? The Gospel is clear that our righteousness cannot save us. Isaiah 64:6 says, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." We will always be wearing the filthy garment of sin unless Christ places on us the garment of salvation and robe of His righteousness. You might be thinking, "What hope do I have to possess the joy and life that Christ offers? What could I possibly do to earn that?" If you're thinking that, you are on the right track. You are right, you can't earn it. You never could. Thankfully, Jesus has come to bring good news to the afflicted and liberty to the captives. Can you rejoice greatly in the Lord because He has clothed you in His righteousness? I hope you can.

Reflection

Read Luke 4:16-30 and see how Christ applies Isaiah 61 to Himself

Advent Week 4- Love

Day 22- Love Unimaginable

Scripture- Hosea 3

"Afterwards the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days."

Devotional

As has happened a few times during this study, you may have just finished reading Hosea 3 and thought, "That's a weird passage to select for Advent!" The book of Hosea is a fascinating book. Hosea is a prophet that has been instructed by the Lord to go and marry a woman that will be unfaithful to him. Hosea marries this woman and as can be seen in Hosea 1-3, the woman gets herself into a bit of trouble. Hosea is then commanded to go again and love this woman that has betrayed him. Hosea is to go and buy back the woman that has given him no reason to keep her in the first place. But he does it! Hosea sacrifices his time, his resources, his name to go and purchase his own wife back. True love always requires sacrifice. To love someone else, you must sacrifice some aspect of love that you would have originally directed towards yourself. Despite all that it would cost him, Hosea chose to love and take back his wife. What a beautiful picture we have of the love of God towards us! We give no reason for God to love us. All we do is take from Him. But He loves us anyway. He loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish. To purchase back His beloved, it would cost Christ more than just time, honor, and resources. It would cost Him His very life. Peter writes about the cost of our redemption and he says, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." You were not purchased with things that are here today and gone tomorrow. You have been redeemed by something far more valuable, far more priceless than anything the world can offer. Despite all the reasons why He shouldn't, God chose to love us anyway. Charles Wesley captures it well when he writes, "And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died

He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be? That Thou, my God, should die for me?" Amazing love it is! A love that we cannot explain and a love that we will never deserve.

Reflection

In what ways is loving someone always going to require sacrifice?

Advent Week 4- Love

Day 23- The Faithful Love of God

Scripture- Luke 1:26-56

"He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever."

Devotional

It has been said that the birth of Jesus came approximately 2,000 years after Abraham. Abraham was promised in the book of Genesis that God would bless the entire world through Abraham's offspring. For 2,000 years, God preserved the line of Abraham, and it culminates in the birth of Jesus. As has been seen throughout this study, those 2,000 years were not easy. Those years were filled with tremendous highs and dreadful lows. Those years were filled with great heroes of the faith but also great examples on what a life devoted to sin and self looks like. The people of Israel went through slavery, inconsistent leaders, years of spiritual lostness, and exile during those years. They would eventually return home as we saw in Nehemiah but for 2,000 years, they were still waiting for the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled. A time was coming when the anticipation would reach fulfillment. Soon, the hope of Israel, the hope of the world, the fulfilled promise to Abraham and his descendants would find itself born in Bethlehem. As we look at Mary's song, the Magnificat, we are reminded of the faithful love of God. For centuries, people gave God ample reasons to destroy them and leave them in their sin. But God does not break promises. God promised to Abraham that should God fail to fulfill His promise to Abraham; God Himself would pay the price. But now, the time was coming when God's promise was reaching the point of its fulfillment. God did more than just give the people a promise, He gave His very self. At just the right moment, God Himself was coming to fulfill His promise.

Reflection

Think back on Israel's troubled history. Despite all their unfaithfulness, God remained faithful.

Advent Week 4- Love

Day 24- Prepare the Way

Scripture- Luke 1:57-79

"Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Devotional

When I was a kid, the day before Christmas Eve always felt substantially longer than Christmas Eve. There was so much to be excited for. We all knew what was coming. We knew that in a few short hours (or what felt like an eternity) we would wake up on Christmas morning and be surrounded by family and presents. There was no question whether Christmas was coming. We had no reason to question that it wouldn't and because we knew that it was coming, the joy and expectations continued to rise. We knew something was about to happen. Zacharias and Elizabeth knew this too. The people around them knew something big was coming. Things were happening that they could not explain. God was working in ways that were catching people completely off guard. John Piper writes, "These were days of great expectation. Now the long-awaited visitation of God is about to happen- indeed, He is about to come in a way no one has expected." Just as there was at Christ's first coming, there is an eager expectation now for His second coming. Paul says in Romans 8:19 that all of creation is waiting with anxious longing for Christ to return. This could happen at any moment. This could happen before Christmas morning. It could happen a thousand years from now. The "when" is not as important as the "reality". Just as Christ really came the first time, He will come a second time. Could it be said of us that we are waiting with eager expectations? When know He is coming soon. Are you ready?

Reflection

Why do you think people argue so much over the date of Christ's second coming?

Advent Week 4- Love

Day 25- Love Has Come

Scripture- Luke 2:1-20

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

Devotional

Love came down on Christmas day. After years of waiting, the time had come for the Savior to be born. Instead of being born in a palace fit for a king, He didn’t even get to stay in an inn. A manger would be the location for God in the flesh to come into the world. Jesus is not just a Savior for the high and mighty. He is a Savior for the lowly and the outcast. In the birth of Jesus, we see one of the clearest pieces of evidence that God really loves us. J.C. Ryle wrote, “We see here the grace and condescension of Christ. Had he come to save mankind with royal majesty, surrounded by his Father’s angels, it would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had he chosen to dwell in a palace, with power and great authority, we should have had reason enough to wonder. But to become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest,- this is a love that passeth knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable. Never let us forget that through this humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to glory.” I always love the shepherd’s response to the song of the angels. “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and sere this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” They don’t say, “Neat! But it’s late so let’s go out tomorrow and see what this was all about.” No, they go immediately! (Luke 2:16) There is no other response that is appropriate to the love that has come to the world. We must all go to Christ immediately! With the shepherds, we see that they heard, they saw, and they told others. We have the same exact responsibility. We have heard of the love which God has for us, we have seen the love in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the salvation that He gives to us, and now we must go and tell others that love has come.

Reflection

Spend time in prayer thanking God for the gift of His Son

Advent Week 4- Love

Day 26- Love in the Cross of Jesus Christ

Scripture- John 16:16-22

"Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you."

Devotional

Why did Jesus come? He came to die. He came to save that which was lost. He came to do what we were powerless to do. In John 16, Jesus is encouraging his disciples about what will come in the next few hours. He knows that he is about to lay his life down and that even though they do not realize it, this is the greatest display of love that has ever been given. There would be grief, and a wicked world will rejoice but Christ promised a joy that no one would ever be able to take away. Jesus tells us in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." And that is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus came that first Christmas with the set purpose of laying his life down for his friends. In the cross we see the clearest display of love ever given. We see God's love to the world and God's wrath towards sin centered on the cross. If we ever wondered if God was serious about sin, all we need to do is look to the cross. But if we have ever questioned God's love, all we need to do is look to the cross. God has kept his promises. With arms spread wide on the cross, Jesus took on all the wrath that your sin deserved so that you could receive the greatest love that could ever be given. We love gifts at Christmas time. This is the greatest gift ever given: Salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Have you embraced the gift and love that is offered to you? The King came to die but death did not have the final word. Death dies in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What a tremendous gift!

Reflection

Think of the greatest gift someone has ever given to you. How does that compare to the gift that Christ offers to us?

Preparing for the New Year

Day 27- Love that is Sure and Work to be Done

Scripture- John 21:15-25

“Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!’”

Devotional

Peter had gone back to fishing and quite a few of the disciples went with him. One breakfast with the risen Savior can do quite a bit to change the mind of the former fisherman. Jesus asked Peter if Peter loved him. Peter is asked three different times if he loves Jesus. Why did Jesus do this? Was it to stick it to Peter and really make him feel the guilt from denying Christ three times? I don’t think so. What Jesus is doing to Peter is challenging him for the work that is ahead of him. Jesus had already told Peter before his death that Peter was to be a major pillar of the early church. Could Peter have had any idea what the extent of that would be? R.C. Sproul said that what Jesus is saying to Peter is, “If you want to be a pastor, a shepherd, then feed my sheep; don’t starve them. Make them your highest concern.” As long as a Christian is alive, the Lord has work for them to do. I love Christ’s response to Peter’s question on whether John will remain alive until Christ returns. The answer is basically, “It doesn’t matter, you follow me.” What if Christ returns in 2026? He very well could. But does it really matter? Shouldn’t we live with the eager hope that he could and even if he delays his return longer, shouldn’t we follow him anyway? Our prayer should be that Christ would return this year. Our prayer should be that Christ returns this very moment! But even if He doesn’t, it should not change the work that the Christian is already doing. Christ has not returned yet, that means there is still work to be done.

Reflection

What is one thing that you hope to accomplish for Christ in the new year?

Preparing for the New Year

Day 28- Devoted Together

Scripture- Acts 2:14-42

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Devotional

It's incredible to look at the Peter that is seen in the book of Acts and the Peter that is seen in the Gospel. It just goes to show that the resurrection really does change everything. As Peter gives his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, He presents the core truths of the Gospel: Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead for the salvation of sinners. The Holy Spirit so greatly impacted the hearts of the crowd that 3,000 people were saved that day. The work of the Christian does not stop at the moment of salvation though. To be a follower of Christ, one is required to do some following. There are works that God has prepared for us to do and there is a way of living that we must pursue. To become a Christian but never live out or embrace what makes you a Christian would be like a professional athlete that gets drafted to a team but refuses to play. It doesn't really make any sense. In Acts 2:42, we see a picture of what the Christian life should look like. Christians are to be in community. We are the Body of Christ and not the Individual Pieces of Christ. We see a community of believers coming together to hear the Word of God taught. We need a steady diet of God and doctrine if we want to grow in spiritual maturity. The community of believers is also engaged in fellowship. Believers need to be together, extroverts and introverts! They also observed communion together. Are we as believers regularly taking part in the Lord's Supper? Paul told the church in Corinth that some people were getting sick and even dying because they neglected the Lord's Supper! (1 Corinthians 11:30) Finally, they were devoted to prayer. Are we in constant communication with our Heavenly Father? Are we praying for our neighbors and for the church? How much of our lives do we saturate with prayer? This isn't everything that believers need to do but if we neglect these four things, we probably aren't going to do anything else to improve our

relationship with God. There is always more for us as believers to do. Christ did everything for us, what can we do for Him this year?

Reflection

Looking at the four things mentioned in Acts 2:42, which of those four do you feel you need to work on in the new year?

Preparing for the New Year

Day 29- If God is for Us…

Scripture- Romans 8:26-39

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

Devotional

Romans 8 might just be the greatest chapter in the greatest book ever written. When Satan throws in the face of the Christian their sin and makes them question whether God loves them, Romans 8 can squash those fears and anxieties. At this very moment, Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding on behalf of believers. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is able to also save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” We know that Jesus is constantly showing a loving concern for His people and constantly reaffirms that we are saved and free from all condemnation. We need to be reminded of our security in God every moment. Satan is going to do all that he can to make you question God’s love towards you and what God commands. Satan will do all he can to flood your mind questioning the existence of God and the certainty of your salvation. Martin Luther had an excellent response to this. Luther said, “So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: “I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!” Luther captures the heart of Romans 8 in this statement. Yes, we deserve death! We deserve judgement! But if God is for us, it does not matter who is against us. We are more than conquerors, not based on what we can do, but solely through Christ Jesus. Nothing in heaven above or the earth below can separate the believer from Jesus Christ. If Christ was willing to pay the penalty for your sin now, why would He ever go back on that payment? All true believers are safe and secure in the hand of God. No true believer ever loses their salvation. Paul speaks of the future glorification in such strong terms that it is as

if it has already happened. That is the beauty of our eternal life. Those whom Christ has died to save, He has saved to the very end, and nothing can take that away from us.

Reflection

It is important to remember that the promise of Romans 8:28 is not a promise that guarantees health and wealth. It is a promise that God will ultimately take all the bad that the believer endures through and turn it into good, either in this life or in eternity.

Preparing for the New Year

Day 30- Walking in Love in the New Year

Scripture- 1 Corinthians 13

“But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Devotional

Love is not an option for a Christian. Christians should be the most loving and merciful people on the planet because everything that we do should be done in response to the love and mercy that God has shown us. What Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 13 should challenge all of us. Are we loving in the way that God requires? There is a lasting permanence to love. One day our faith will become sight and all the hope that we have on earth will be fully realized but we will experience love forever. Love endures; it is everlasting because God is everlasting. In Heaven, the believer will experience nothing but perfect love. As Paul talks about love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, it sounds like a picture of Jesus. Who was more patient than Christ? How often did the disciples just not understand what Jesus was saying despite Christ clearly explain what He meant? Did He give up on them? No, because He loved them! Is Jesus kind? What greater kindness than laying down His life for His friends? Was Jesus jealous with unrighteous jealousy or arrogant? Never! Did Jesus seek glory for Himself or did He seek the glory of His Heavenly Father? Did Jesus rejoice in unrighteousness or rejoice with the truth? You see when Paul talks about love, he still points to Jesus. He wants us as believers to understand that if we are to love, we need to love like Christ loves us. You can do all the good deeds in the world but if you are not doing it with love, what is the point of doing it? Are you prepared to love in the new year? More importantly, are you prepared to love as God requires in the new year? If you ever question if someone deserves love from you, ask yourself whether you deserve the love that God has given to you? If you are honest with yourself, you already know what the correct answer is. We cannot earn God’s love. We will never be able to earn God’s love. Love is never something earned, it is a gift that must be given. Don’t forget the important words of 1 John

4:20: “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

Reflection

Who is it that you need to love like Christ in the new year?

Preparing for the New Year

Day 31- Christ Our Example

Scripture- Hebrews 12:1-3

"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Devotional

Much of what we have gone over in the past month could be taken from Hebrews 11-12. If we were to break down just Hebrews 12:1-3 verses, we would see that the Christian faith is built of a rich history of believers. Hebrews 11 is the great faith chapter in the Bible which recounts the strong faith of Old Testament saints. The author of Hebrews says, "Look at the rich history of men and women that lived by faith and be motivated by that to run the race of faith." The author of Hebrews says that we are to let go of everything that gets in our way of pursuing Jesus. The Christian should not live their lives with the question of, "Is this a sin?" Rather, the Christian should live their lives with the better mindset of, "Does this make me more like Jesus? Or does it get in my way of being like Jesus?" In verse 2, we see whom our eyes are to be set on. If you want to live for Jesus, you must keep your eye on Jesus. He is the One that begins our faith, and He is the One that will bring it to completion. If you need an example of how to live the Christian life, look no further than Christ Himself. When we get worn out and begin to feel discouraged, all we need to do is look at Jesus and what He did for us. John MacArthur writes, "Nothing we will ever be called to endure will compare to that which He endured. He is the divine Son of God, but while on earth He did not live in His own power and will, but in His Father's. Otherwise, He could not be our example. And unless, by the Holy Spirit, we are truly able to live in the same way in which He lived, His life would not be an example but an impossible ideal to mock and to judge us. We rejoice that one day we will live together with Him, but we should also rejoice that we can live like Him right now." If we are not going to live like Jesus now, when will we? Those who want to be like Jesus must start here and now. What better time to begin living like Jesus than at the start of a new year?

Reflection

Why do you think it is more beneficial to ask if something will make you more like Christ than to ask if something is a sin or not?

Preparing for the New Year

Day 32- All Things New

Scripture- Revelation 21:1-7

"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.'"

Devotional

People love to think that each new year will be better than the one that came before it. "New year, new me" is what we often hear people say. But does a new year automatically mean that things will be better? Nothing guarantees that. 2026 could be an amazing year and we should pray that it is. We should pray that it is a year of spiritual blessings and peace but there is still a chance that 2026 will not be as good as we hope. So often, we are tempted to place all our hopes on a possibility instead of placing our hopes on something that is certain. What is certain is that this world is the closest thing to hell that the believer will ever have to go through. What is certain is that all the tears that we cry here on earth have not gone unnoticed and every tear will be wiped away. Pain will be no more, and death will be no more. We hope for new, but Christ alone makes all things new. We endure through so much now, but Heaven will more than make up for it. C.S. Lewis said, "They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory." Maybe this year is the year of our homecoming. Maybe this year will be the year where all the wrongs will be made right and agony will be transformed into glory. Maybe this year is the year where revival will rock not just your home or neighborhood, maybe this is the year that revival comes to the entire world. Would you pray that would happen? We know that heaven will be inhabited beyond what we can count of number so won't you pray that you would play a part in reaching the world for Christ? People need to know about the One that sits on the throne and is making all things new!

Reflection

Thank God for the year that He has given you. What are some things that you want to accomplish for Christ in 2026? How can we as the church better equip you to be able to accomplish these goals?