

# ABIDE

A devotional through the  
writings of the Apostle John

Anthony Rea

Copyright © 2021 Anthony Rea

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 9798510753417

All Scripture quotations marked are taken from the New  
King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas  
Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ABIDE

DEDICATION

I write to you, little children,  
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's  
sake.

I write to you, fathers,  
Because you have known Him *who is* from the  
beginning.

I write to you, young men,  
Because you have overcome the wicked one.

I write to you, little children,  
Because you have known the Father.

I have written to you, fathers,  
Because you have known Him *who is* from the  
beginning.

I have written to you, young men,  
Because you are strong, and the word of God  
abides in you,

And you have overcome the wicked one.

~1 John 2:12-14

## ABIDE

# CONTENTS

John	1
1 John	221
2 John	235
3 John	238
Revelation	242
About the Author	314

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

~John 15:4

Pale horse songs of a slow decline  
Sideshow words if the songs don't mind  
A few more lines, the oil and the wine  
I thought I'd left that all behind

Pale horse vows in the sacred signs  
Traded for an infinite aloneness to find  
Wooden signs, helpful signs  
How to fit your thoughts in mine?

Black horse reaping of the crops we grew  
Comforted by sequences of sounds we knew:  
You abide in me, and I in you.  
But what exactly should I do?

Pale horse songs of a slow decline  
Sideshow words if the boys don't mind  
A few more songs, a few more lines  
I thought I'd left that all behind

~mewithoutYou, Pale Horse, 2015.

JOHN

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. – John 1:1*

Know this – the Lord you worship, Jesus Christ, is in all fullness the God of all creation. He is equal in glory, power, and authority with the Father. God of God. Very God of very God. Not created but begotten. He was in the beginning before time and has existed forever above all things. How glorious, how amazing that He cares so completely for us His muddied children! In the vast expanse of time and space, what are we? We are God's beloved creation, spoken into being by the maker of all things and known before the foundations of the earth were established by God who came and walked among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. – John 1:3*

Consider – all existence, seen and unseen, was created through Christ. Do we believe God's Word or not? Sometimes we compartmentalize our lives as if one part of our existence is beyond God's reach. We allow Christ to rule over one part of our lives while leaving others feral and ungoverned. All of creation is His, made through Him! Our entire being is subject to His reign. His name is above all names. We must surrender those abandoned, unkempt realms to their rightful Lord and be undivided. Reign over us in fullness, Lord.

*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. — John 1:4*

There is life in Christ – bright, vibrant life. Darkness has no place in that life. With Him, there is no shadow. Christ’s light is not the sterile, flickering, humming, fluorescent light that our souls abhor. In Him, emanating from Him, is that warm, comforting glow that lets us know we are home. His light warms us to our bones. His light brings comfort, security, and clarity. Thank you, Lord, for your light. Thank you for bringing us life.

*And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.* – John  
1:16

In the fullness, the complete person of Christ, we are given grace. Grace – that immeasurable treasure. That which we could not purchase for ourselves should all of the riches in the world belong to us. But Christ gives it to us. We say He gives it freely, but we mean liberally. Freely implies no cost. But the cost was dear – Christ’s own life in exchange for ours. He gives us grace liberally — grace on top of grace, on top of grace — at great cost. And we who have received such a gift have been changed by it. We have been made God’s children by His abundant everlasting grace.

*Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” – John 1:22*

The religious leaders of John the Baptist’s day were apparently confused by somebody found in Christ’s service. They had all kinds of ideas and proposals, hoping to guide John into a response. “Are you the Christ? Are you Elijah? Who are you?” They asked John for his own self-assessment, “What do you say about yourself?” The world asks us that question every day. John’s answer pointed them to Christ and highlighted the fact that he was acting in the service of the Promised One. John’s identity, his personhood, was wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. He was fully aware that his own personage was reliant on God’s plan and purpose through Jesus. True confidence, true identity, is found in this. True self-awareness is found in this – we, ourselves, are fully realized when we are found in Christ’s service.

*There stands One among you whom you do not know.* – John 1:26

John's words to the Pharisees directly challenged their presumed expertise. Who would, who could, know better on matters of faith and religion? This looks eerily similar to our own time. The Pharisees had an excuse for ignorance, for Christ had not yet entered into His public ministry. Yet, even following His ministry, they denied and harassed Him. In the Gospels, we see only a few brave souls from the religious class taking Christ at face value, taking Him at His word. The others were too consumed with their learning, ritual, and appearance of godliness to grasp hold of God Himself! Or rather, to be grasped by Him. May we be mindful of this example. May we not fail to know our Lord even now as His Spirit dwells within us and moves among us. May we not miss Him in favor of our worldly affections.

*Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?"... – John 1:38*

During their very first moments following Jesus, the disciples were questioned by Him, "What do you seek?" On the surface, this can easily be explained away as a motive check – or even a simple introduction. BUT – God's words are never wasted. He is not one for meaningless banter. This first question is the question we must all answer. Perhaps we are drawn to Jesus during a crisis. Maybe we come willingly after being shown, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Maybe we grudgingly approach the Lord just to appease a loved one, or because it is expected, or "the right thing." The question remains – what do you seek? Money? Health? Improved circumstances? No. Life, and life more abundantly. The words of eternal life. Peace. To be made new. A new heart. What does Christ give? Grace and life everlasting. Amen.

*He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah.”... – John 1:41*

Andrew. What a believer! He is excited to meet Jesus, excited to introduce others to Him, and excited to tell others about Him. He had only just met Jesus, the Messiah. He was not, at this time, a well-seasoned disciple, finely honed to the demands of evangelism. He was a freshly minted baby disciple. He didn't KNOW much, but he was sure that he had found what mattered most, and he desired to share that with others. Significantly the first person he shares Christ with is his actual brother by blood – Simon called Peter! Peter gets quite a bit of credit for ministry, but it was his brother that brought him to Jesus. Oh, that we would have hearts like Andrew – declaring what matters most to our dearest loved ones.

*... and He found Philip and said to him, Follow Me. – John 1:43*

Do we seek Christ, or does He seek us? Do we grasp Christ, or does He grasp us? In this instance, Christ does the finding. As a good shepherd, He finds His scattered sheep. He calls out to us to follow after Him. Maybe we were looking for something else altogether when Christ called us, when He found us. We are on a new path now, part of a new flock, a new fold, numbered among God's children. What is required of us in this new family? 'To follow Christ where He leads. Should we venture off on our own or make a mad dash to the front of the flock, Christ's words do not change, and He is faithful to bring us back as we listen to His voice, "Follow Me."

*His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."* –  
John 2:5

Words to live by! Mary knew that for anything to happen in this unique case, the wedding in Cana, it would have to be directed by Christ Himself. The work itself was carried out by the hands of the servants under the direction of Christ. That's us! If we are looking to do a work that has meaning, that blesses others, that is excellent, we must be listening for the instructions of Jesus. This is where we fail so often – relying on our own judgment and expertise. Lord, help us listen and obey. Help us be faithful in carrying out Your directions for the benefit of others.

*Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. – John 2:22*

Quite early in his gospel account, John calls to mind the resurrection. He not only remembers but makes a point to illustrate that the disciples all remembered that Jesus told them it would come to pass. As John reflects on that truth, he explains that the resurrection was the catalyst for their belief. The resurrection gave them faith not only in the resurrection event but also in the rest of the Scriptures – God’s Word. Is God’s Word true? Did Jesus really mean all of those things He said? Can we trust it? Sometimes we find ourselves in a full-blown crisis of faith. We wonder if this is some universal hoax meant to trick us into being on our best behavior. Cast your doubt aside, dear one! Expel those fears and lies of the evil one by remembering the promised resurrection. That is the evidence of our Lord’s mastery over death and even over life. He laid down His life and He took it back up in the Resurrection so that we might live as well! Just as He promised. And because of that, we believe.

*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see ...  
the kingdom of God. – John 3:3*

These are Christ's first words in His conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Nicodemus was a religious man, perhaps a good man. He was certainly curious when it came to what this Jesus guy was all about. Perhaps he was mindful of eternity, with a heart inclined towards righteousness. Jesus gets straight to the point, cutting through the unseen layers of protocol and conversation. He tells Nicodemus plainly – if you want to see God's Kingdom with your own eyes, then you must be born again. You have to be something new. You have to be born into the citizenry of God's Kingdom. You can hear about the Kingdom from others, you may even draw near to it, but if you want to SEE kingdom – heed Christ's words.

*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. – John 3:8*

We do not see the wind, but the results of, the effect of the wind moving upon creation. This is true of waves, trees, even tornadoes! We see the debris and precipitation caught in the wind – all moved by the wind. People will say of Jesus, of God, of the Faith, “Show me a sign,” or “If I could only see with my own eyes.” Then just look with your own eyes upon those saints – born of the Spirit, moved by the Spirit to holy work. Their transformation, their holy momentum, was wrought in the heart but quickly builds to gale force winds in the work of the saints. For we have heard the sound of the Spirit declaring, Jesus is Lord.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. –*

John 3:16

All of us in the church (and many outside the church) have memorized this verse. Sometimes our memorization is so we can use this verse as some sort of sales pitch to the unbeliever. But these words are rich with holy truth. I pray they never become common place in my heart. God's love for humanity is so complete, so pure, so utterly unfathomable by my human brain. Yet, the Holy Spirit communicates it to us in these words. God chose to endure the grief of losing a child, a part of Himself, so that He might win us to His Kingdom. He has won us by love and the gift of His personhood. What is required of those who are redeemed? Believe. What an unfair bargain. One that is decidedly lopsided in our favor. But it is one that God made for love's sake. For those who wish to know love, look here first, and believe.

*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. – John 3:17*

Some people feel as if this whole “Jesus thing” is a bit heavy. Christians have gained the moniker “judgmental,” fairly or unfairly as it may be. But Jesus Christ did not stoop to our level in a condescending or condemning fashion. He came in the fullness of grace, mercy, truth, love, compassion, and patience towards humanity. We should likewise bear these marks in our mortal bodies, so that every accusation of hate and condemnation would be a lie as we represent our Lord in this place.

*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. – John 3:18*

One fate for all – condemnation. That sentence hangs over all mankind. It was our natural state of existence. It is not Christ who condemns. Mankind has always lived under the curse since the beginning. There is but one escape – believe in Christ. We who have believed by faith in the name of Christ are accounted as righteous in God’s eyes. Consider that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to Him as righteousness! Consider Paul’s words to the Romans – “the one who is righteous by faith shall live.” (Rom 1:17) Lord, we believe! Save us by your grace.

*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world,  
and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

– John 3:19

Not very encouraging, huh? Seems bleak. Dark. It has to be!  
This is the natural human condition. We have exhausted so much effort gilding the human condition, portraying it as greatness when the fact is we would suffocate in our own darkness apart from Christ's light. We would rather wrap up our wickedness in cheap glitter and call it goodness than have it bathed in Christ's holy light and be changed to bonafide righteousness. Lord, come to us. May we never shun your light. Apart from it, we are lost, blind, undone.

*He must increase, but I must decrease.* – John 3:30

This is the prayer and desire of all true saints. By the Holy Spirit, we are being transformed more and more into Christ's likeness. This is one way He increases – we bear His righteousness before others. We are His ambassadors. By this, His kingdom is ever increasing. All the while, we are becoming more and more transparent, less self-involved. As we seek the bottom place, the place of a servant, there we find our Lord. We lift up His holy name not in our own strength – for we have realized that we are without strength apart from Christ. It is His strength that we rely upon. And His name is lifted up, magnified by our weakness. He increases, we decrease. May Your name be lifted up!

*The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. –*  
John 3:35

Christ's sovereignty is certain. All things are in His hands. While we may seek to reserve a few things to rule over, it is not our place to govern. If our heavenly Father has given ALL THINGS into Christ's hands, then why do we cling to our few things so desperately? We desire to be Lord and Master, but that is not our role to fill. We must let go – relinquishing even our desire for control. We must find our place where we truly belong and where we will only truly find peace – in His hands, along with all of creation.

*Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. — John 4:6*

It's okay to be tired! Jesus got tired. How encouraging! We get tired, too. We have something in common with our Lord. Christ was not a machine. He became weary, as we all do. Once we become believers, we do not become machines either. Being a human like us, Christ was tempted in all points like us, yet was without sin.\* That is where we are vastly different. When we are tired and hungry, we can display the worst of humanity in rudeness and unkindness towards others. When Christ was weary, He continued to minister. This is our hope: that when we find ourselves weak, we will rely on His strength and holiness, and that we would not blame our sin on momentary discomfort or weariness, but that we would be guarded by the Spirit. Lord, be with us when we are tired.

\*Hebrews 4:15

*A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink."* – John 4:7

The Jews, the good ones anyway, were not supposed to have dealings with Samaritans. Samaritans were of dubious heritage, culture, and religion. They were an affront to the proper Jewish sensibilities. Men were not supposed to engage with women this way either. This would have been scandalous in their day. But Jesus sets aside the cultural barriers to engage a wounded soul. He is not overly concerned with how His own reputation may suffer or how people may gossip about their interaction. As a loving father, a good shepherd, Jesus reaches beyond what is considered acceptable decorum, protocol, manners, and boundaries. He reaches to the unclean, socially marginalized, weak, and oppressed. He calls no one common or unclean.\* Lord, help us have this heart. May we be faithful to bear this out in our lives.

\*Acts 10:28

*Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ – John 4:10*

No small talk. Christ cuts to the core of the issue. If you knew two things, then your life could be changed. You could have living water that never runs out. You would never thirst, spiritually, again. The first thing to know is the gift of God – salvation by grace. The second thing to know is the man who gives us this living water – Christ. These two are inextricably connected. Jesus says, “If you only knew...” Is that what holds some people back? Christ is willing to give freely from His well of life to those who ask. He sees our deepest spiritual thirst, our parched, dried, and cracked souls, and He invites us to come to Him, to drink freely. Come, loved one, and drink.\*

\*Revelation 22:17

*The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?” – John 4:11*

This woman didn't know Christ's power, and she couldn't discern His heart when He invited her to living water. She saw the physical and Christ's seeming lack of ability to give her even the tiniest sip – “You have nothing to draw with.” Her eyes and heart were still fixed on her momentary and present need, while Christ's eyes and heart were fixed on her spiritual need and matters of eternity. There are times when all of us are like the woman at the well. We become fixated on our daily chores, our physical needs. We misjudge or misinterpret the nature and heart of Christ. We devalue His ability to provide for us. But He IS able. He alone is able. And He will provide to the utmost. Help us hear You, Lord. Help us see You with our spiritual eyes and hear with our spiritual ears as You invite us to drink.

*Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock? – John 4:12*

The answer to this woman's question is YES! Christ is greater than any patriarch who ever existed. His name is above all names. Her question, though, reveals her spiritual condition. She has hang-ups on tradition. She has a form of religion, however cursory that may be. Jesus is tearing those things down, even as He does in our own lives. Don't we have hang-ups, too? Don't we look to the past, as well? Don't we also elevate people and personalities over Christ? We do this with family members, pastors, dear friends – people who may very well be appalled by the thought. But Christ is over them all. He is greater. There is no doubt! May His name be magnified in our hearts and lives. May we come to see Christ in His full stature – high above all others.

*Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." – John 4:13–14*

If we are looking for satisfaction here on earth from a hole in the ground, no matter how full that hole is, we will never be satisfied. We will thirst again no matter how many times we draw. We will find ourselves trekking back to the same old holes trying to quench an eternal thirst. Christ offers and promises so much more. If we would partake of His living water, if we would truly drink from His cup rather than pantomime the motion, then we would never thirst again. Even in our moments of weakness, we are not denied access to a limitless spiritual well from our Lord, who bids us come and drink. He will give freely to those who thirst. Come. Drink. Be fulfilled.

*For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.* – John 4:18

Why did Jesus confront the Samaritan woman at the well so boldly? Was He trying to be ugly with her or condescending? Maybe Jesus was trying to put her in her place through a holy guilt trip? NO! None of these reasons suffice. He wanted her to confront her sin head-on, and He was demonstrating just how well He knew her. Christ knows us inside and out. There is nothing we can hide from His holy eyes. BUT, Jesus doesn't bring us to our sin to watch us squirm while He relishes in our discomfort. He is working in us to confront our sins – those that are secret and public alike. He asks us to confront them with Him. He offers His living water as the alternative. He asks that we be open with Him and honest about our true condition, as He is with us. Lord, help us keep nothing back from You. Cleanse us from our sin and unrighteousness.

*The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.” –*  
John 4:19

This woman, speaking to Christ face to face, having been offered living water, having her sin addressed, still doesn't recognize who she is speaking with. Sure, she grants Jesus some measure of holiness or respectability: “You are a prophet.” But she doesn't grasp the fullness of who Christ is – King of kings, Lord of lords, God with us. How many today are in the same place as this woman? Open your eyes! The good news is that Christ doesn't get up and walk away from her, and He doesn't walk away from us either, even in the midst of our incomplete understanding. He patiently listens to her half-formed ideas, and finally, He plainly declares to her, “I am the messiah.”\* Christ's patience is unmatched. His concern and tenacity to rescue the lost are unstoppable. In spite of ourselves, He comes to us, sits with us, speaks with us. Bear with us, Lord, in our awkward fumbling and searching for answers. Bear with us as we discover more of your fullness daily.

\*John 4:26

*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* – John 4:24

Our acts of worship, far more than the praise of our lips, must be grounded in the truth and exercised by and through the Holy Spirit. God's Word is truth. That is where we find our anchor – apart from any relative, subjective approach to categorizing “truthiness.” God's Word is where we find our anchor. Notice that Christ did not say that our worship must be simply sincere, but it must be in truth. True worship is sincere, but sincerity is not always anchored in God's truth. AND we must move past our flesh and worship God in the Spirit. Quench not the Holy Spirit when He moves your heart to praise and stirs your heart to worship. In Spirit-led, truthful worship, we not only demonstrate our gratitude, but we display God's character to every observer. He is Spirit, and He is truth.

*Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." – John 4:26*

Let there be no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of the Bible, is the Messiah, the Savior of mankind. He declares this truth openly and plainly. Even now, the Holy Spirit and God's Word testify to this truth. Many people hold many different opinions on Christ's nature and purpose. But the truth is plainly declared, "I who speak to you am He." He is worthy of our worship! Lord, help us to see and embrace the reality of who You are. May the magnitude of Your nature find a home in our hearts. May our minds grasp the vastness and totality of Your authority as we seek You and You alone. Be to us, Lord, our Messiah.

*The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men. – John 4:28*

Moved by her interaction with Christ, this woman finds her priorities divinely realigned. When she set out to fill her waterpot that day, she was setting out on a divinely ordered journey that would change her. Her first priority, providing for her own basic necessities, had been overthrown by her conversation with Jesus Christ. She found herself leaving her waterpot for the same reason James and John left their nets and Peter left his boat – to know Jesus and tell others about Him. She still has questions. She is far from perfect. In fact, Jesus did not command her to do this. But she was so moved to do the work. By her witness, new as she was to knowing Christ, her neighbors came to see and hear Jesus as well. Lord, realign our priorities as You see fit, for Your glory, for Your kingdom and for the sake of those who will come to know You by our witness.

*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.” – John 4:34*

While Jesus’ dear disciples are momentarily focused on their bellies, Jesus brings them back to eternal truth. True fulfillment, true sustainment is found in carrying out God’s will, not our own. Having just instructed the woman at the well, whose momentary need was water, Jesus applies the same instruction to His own. She was focused on water that can never truly satisfy. The disciples are focused on food that can never truly satisfy, even urging Jesus to eat as well. It is here that Jesus teaches them that He is sustained by carrying out God’s will and finishing the work set before Him. He offers this so gently to His disciples, not accusing them of anything but stating the truth, “My food is to do the will of God.” Lord, give us hearts that are consumed by your will. Give us eyes that look past our stomachs.

*Do you not say, “There are still four months and [then] comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! – John 4:35*

As followers of Christ, we must keep this in mind. The fields are ready for harvest. We walk through them every day. We must not shut our eyes, ignoring the demand for work. We must not absolve ourselves of this holy opportunity to reap for the Kingdom’s sake. We must not place this burden solely on the backs of missionaries and pastors. We are workers! Go into the harvest! Reap! Declare the good news of salvation. Watch as lives are changed and people are translated from darkness to light – made part of God’s eternal Kingdom. Look to the harvest! It is ready and waiting for workers.

*And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. — John 4:36*

What a glorious prospect, rejoicing over Kingdom work! It is such a blessing when this kind of unity and shared purpose are found in the church today. Unfortunately, we also find envy, self-seeking personal ambition, and carefully crafted hierarchies designed to elevate people who are supposed to be laboring in God's field. The sowers grow jealous of the reapers at harvest time! Sometimes we discount our own blessed calling because we are so fixed on watching what somebody else is doing. Be faithful, you stewards! The Lord has called you to your labor, not anything else. Rejoice with the reapers. Reapers, rejoice with the sowers. Let us have a shared joy in the harvest of our Lord.

*For in this the saying is true: “One sows and another reaps.” – John 4:37*

I am glad that the Lord has given each of us different ministries in the Kingdom. One sows, another reaps, yet we all labor for Jesus’ sake. The Apostle Paul writes about this same divine diversity.\* There are diversities of ministries, but we are all of the same Body. Find joy in your calling! Find contentment in your calling. Are you called to sow? Then sow with diligence. Are you called to reap? Then reap with boldness and confidence, being certain of your call. Our Lord has called and equipped each of us for His name’s sake. Let us work faithfully then in that which Jesus has called us.

\*1 Corinthians 12

*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did."* –  
John 4:39

The woman at the well had a life-changing moment with Jesus. She was so moved by her experience and His words that she couldn't keep it to herself. She entered into Christ's service and Kingdom work based on her short but meaningful time with Jesus. She didn't know a lot, but she was sure of who Christ was. Her testimony, her humble words, no doubt recounting her past, moved others to belief. It is amazing what the Lord and the Holy Spirit will do in the lives of others when we are obedient and willing to share a personal testimony. All this woman had was Jesus, and that's all she could give. She couldn't stand on her reputation, education, or training, but she could stand on Jesus. Lord, help us to be obedient and moved to share our story, to share You.

*So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. – John 4:40*

Our testimonies, our personal experiences with Christ, are so powerful. We are honored with the solemn duty to introduce other people to our Lord Jesus. BUT only His own words have the power to save. Perhaps those we speak with are skeptical of our experience. Introduce them to the unfiltered power of His words. God's Word is unmatched in power and ability to transform. It is God-breathed! Consider the souls that have been won by God's Word alone. No production, no gimmicks, no clever lines of questioning, no mind games. His very Word makes us holy. Even as Christ prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."\* Lord, help us get out of the way when need be and let your Word speak.

\*John 17:17

*When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” – John 5:6*

Quite often during Christ’s earthly ministry, those who were in need of healing for one reason or another (for healing is not simply physical) would seek Jesus out. They would come to Him in their incomplete state, broken and desperate. They sought wholeness. Sometimes they received more than they ever dreamed of. That is the nature of God’s grace.

Sometimes, Christ Himself would seek out those broken souls who were looking at everything except Jesus, like this man who was placing his hope in a pool of water reported to have healing power. Christ knew this man’s condition and interjects Himself into his broken life, “Do you want to be made well?” Now, this man, sick and broken for 38 years, has something to ponder. Do you want to be made well? The Lord is asking. His question is more profound than the surface questions we are comfortable with. Do you desire to be made well? Jesus alone has the power to make it so. He alone, the maker of all creation, can make us whole again – well. We must wrestle with the questions we are asked by Him, and we must answer.

*The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." – John 5:10*

This man, having been miraculously and immediately cured by Jesus, is IMMEDIATELY faced with religious ugliness. Christ had worked a magnificent miracle in his life! As a matter of fact, it was Christ who told him to take up his bed and walk. The religiously schooled would not have it! Perhaps they thought in their hearts, "How dare you violate our traditions!" Perhaps this man who had been made whole thought in his heart, "I am new! I'm whole! I am doing what the Lord Jesus told me to do!" Unfortunately, those two positions have clashed time and again throughout history and still clash in our day. We must be careful not to fall into the trap of religious snobbery where we are convinced that we have our prescribed Sabbaths. We cannot do anything to the detriment of precious souls Christ has instructed be whole, His dear ones who are obeying His command to walk. Forgive us when we fail at this Lord. Teach us to be gracious.

*But Jesus answered them, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” – John 5:17*

Jesus Christ was about work. He was about His Father’s business. He committed to His holy work unencumbered by the constraints of tradition or what other people believed to be sensible. The product of His work is changed people. Oh, that we would be committed to working in the Kingdom – wonderfully serving and affecting those around us for Christ’s sake. Oh, that we would keep an eye on the Father and the Son and be like them – working diligently. That we would shun vain tradition and sensibility in singular dedication to laboring for the gospel’s sake. Help us, Lord, help us be faithful to the work, to cast off our laziness and trepidation in favor of joyful Kingdom work.

*Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. – John 5:18*

Let there be no mistake – the Jews, seeking to kill Jesus, did not misinterpret His words. This wasn't a misunderstanding or communication error. Jesus DID say that God was His Father. He DID claim equality with the Father. Jesus was, and is forevermore, “very God, of very God.”\* He is equal in all glory, power, and authority with the Father. He was not concerned about His position as God but was willing to descend to mankind. He is above all, over all. By Him all things were created, and by Him all things are held together.\*\* He is God with us! May we praise His name forever!

\*Nicene Creed

\*\*John 1:3; Colossians 1:15–18

*Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. – John 5:34*

What is the point of Jesus? Many have taken up the topic, hoping to give their well-thought-out treatises on Christ's purpose. Some may argue that He was a product of generations of hypocrisy. "Finally, SOMEBODY pushing back against religion and the establishment," they may say. Some might say He was on a mission to change society for the better – to encourage us to love and give to our neighbors. At least one of His own disciples, Simon the Zealot, was likely aligned with a politicized Israel, probably hoping that this man, Jesus, would cast off the bonds of political oppression that they experienced. But all of those miss the mark. Some wildly! What was Christ's purpose in all of His many teachings? Simple – that you may be saved. He is the SAVIOR! That's His chief concern and purpose – that you may be saved.

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. — John 5:39*

It is possible, even common, for a person to be so familiar with the Scriptures but so distant from Christ. We can spend our entire lives pouring over Scripture only to find ourselves falling short of salvation – having never grasped hold of Christ. Head knowledge is not enough. Facts are not enough. Bible trivia is not enough. As the Scriptures guide us deliberately to Christ, our knowledge must be stirred by faith. Lord, keep us from the rote exercise of reading without results. May we know You by Your very words as we search the Scriptures in faith. Teach us, Lord. Bring us to faith.

*But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? –*  
John 5:47

Belief – that sometimes fickle companion of ours. There are times in our lives when God’s Word seems so plain to us, so . . . believable. And by it, we have come to believe God. We have come to believe these holy words that lead us to Christ. By these words, we have come to know for sure that Christ lives. Yes, we believe! Our hope, our justifying faith, is established by God’s Word. As Moses wrote about blessed Abraham, “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to Him for righteousness.”\* Praise His name forevermore who imparts righteousness to those who believe. To the unconvinced who cry out, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief,” hear our prayer!\*\* Be near to us, Lord, as we desire to know and believe Your words.

\*Genesis 15:6

\*\*Mark 9:24

*Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. — John 6:2*

People follow Christ for many different reasons. Is it because of the signs? The healings? The miraculous works? Is it because somebody we love dearly has been healed of disease? What about diseases of the heart or soul? They follow for many different reasons. We must take the time to reflect on our own motives from time to time – to check our compass. Jesus meets our needs, it's sure, but His primary concern is that part of us that lives forever. We must, at our core, follow Him because He has the words of eternal life. Were the external signs done away with, would we still follow? The thirsty soul replies, "Yes, lead on, Lord."

*And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. – John 6:3*

A common practice in Jesus' ministry was to bring His disciples together and sit with them away from all the hustle and bustle of ministry. Those times were often interrupted, but Jesus made time to get away and sit with His students. He wants to do the same with us! When we are hyper-focused on ministry, work, goals, and everything else, we need to sit with Jesus. How is it that the Lord of our lives all too often gets the scraps of our time and attention? He desires to sit with us, to fellowship with us. May we be mindful of this and make time – the best time – for Him.

*Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’ – John 6:26*

Jesus is the great discerner of hearts. He knows our hearts intimately. While approaching Jesus, following Jesus, some seek signs. Some seek the next spectacular spiritual experience. Still others seek satisfaction. And others seek to keep their bellies full. Certainly, the gospel of full bellies has found a footing in our world. People believe and proclaim that Jesus wants you to be satisfied, that He wants you to be fat and happy. Sure sounds attractive, huh? Half-truths and outright lies have spawned a wicked gospel devoid of Christ’s primary purpose – the deliverance of His children by the cross. Look to Christ for your provision, yes! But remain transfixed on the cross for your eternal satisfaction.

*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him. – John 6:27*

It has become a badge of honor for one to be called a “workaholic.” We believe the person that has been labeled such has drive, grit, staying power, motivation – all admirable traits. But what are we laboring for? Some labor for money and creature comforts. Others labor for status and reputation. It is the rare soul, even in Christ’s Kingdom, who labors for that food which endures to everlasting life. The Kingdom is often ancillary to our daily concerns of how we will survive, advance, get more! It should be our driving force! What a productive Body the church would be if we exercised the same diligence and tenacity toward our Lord’s Kingdom as we do our wallets and our bellies.

*Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” – John 6:29*

From faith to faith, beginning to end, start to finish, this is the engine that drives any meaningful labor in God’s Kingdom. This is the heart of our faith that produces much fruit. This is the most essential portion of our faith – believing in Him! If I labor non-stop but don’t have this belief, this faith, then all of that work is meaningless. Perhaps that labor is born out of some benevolent leaning towards Humanism. Perhaps it looks good, feels good, even feeds hungry people – but apart from Christ, those works will perish. To be aligned with Christ’s heart is our aim. Believing in Him brings those works, all of our works, into alignment and into the everlasting Kingdom.

Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” – John 6:30

After being instructed by Christ that the work of God in their lives is belief, the crowd then asked for a sign – something to spark the flame of belief. Keep in mind that this is the very same crowd that shared in the miraculous feast provided by Christ. How short our memories are! Or worse, we are snakes, trying to manipulate our Holy Father into giving us one more meal, one more fleeting moment of excitement, one more miracle. This belief is shallow, cursory, passing away. God does not exist to entertain us. Christ did not come to put on a show! Forgive us, Father, when we stray into the realm of spectacle and manipulation. We want to know you, Lord, and to have our belief anchored in who You are.

*Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” – John 6:32–33*

Jesus elevates. He takes the question of bread and elevates it to the spiritual level. This is very similar to His discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well. The commonality between people is our tendency to focus on the temporary satisfaction of the flesh – food, water, shelter, clothing, money, etc. Christ’s primary concern is our eternal provisioning – that we would not perish for lack of a Christ-centered diet. How many of us are walking around spiritually emaciated, moments from starving, unwilling to eat from our Lord’s table? How many of us have fixed our eyes on the food that perishes rather than the bread from heaven?

*And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." –*  
John 6:35

Jesus claims plainly to be the bread of life – everlasting life. There is no misreading or misunderstanding His claim. He is letting the listener know that He is the sustenance required for eternal life. Any person who responds to His invitation will be filled eternally even while we may suffer and hunger in this earthly abode. Christ's claim here is so over the top, so bold! In His words, we recognize that we search and search for something to fill us, something to sink our teeth into, something to keep us alive. Eating is a necessary part of humanity; so is learning about hunger. Jesus is all the substantial food that we wish we had. He alone can satisfy.

*But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. – John 6:36*

Seeing is believing, right? If God would just show me a sign. If I could just see with my own eyes, then I would believe. It is not so! How many times have we heard this? How many times have we said this? The crowds that followed so near to Jesus, who saw the works of His hands, miraculous wonders – they didn't believe. They saw Jesus working with their own eyes rather than hearing second hand from somebody else.

Yet, they did not believe. Jesus would later go on to say, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

\* That's us, the company of modern saints! We haven't seen Christ bodily, but we believe we shall see Him in eternity forevermore. Don't trust your eyes, loved one. Our world continues to deceive daily, using our own eyes against us. Trust God, trust His Word; He is ever faithful.

\*John 20:29

*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. — John 6:37*

What a comforting, reassuring verse. We have come to Jesus. We are His to care for, and He has promised that He won't cast us out by any means. The Greek text is so strongly worded that it fits into a syntactical category known as an *Emphatic Negation*. Jesus will NEVER EVER cast out those who come to Him. When we struggle with doubt, when we experience a crisis of faith, when we are disobedient for a moment – we are yet secure in our Lord's house. We are delivered to His care by the Father and kept secure by His Word. Thank you, Lord, for keeping us when we are unable to keep ourselves. We have deserved to be cast out many times, but You keep us as Your own. Keep us forevermore, we pray.

*The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” – John 6:41*

Jesus couldn't please everybody, and neither can we. Jesus, the Messiah, God incarnate, irritated people. He offended people (unintentionally) by His holy nature, instruction, and life. Now ... we aren't Jesus. But we are becoming like Him. Let's not confuse our obnoxious self-righteousness and condescending monologues with Christ's complete righteousness. The point of all this is that Jesus desired to teach His own special people about Kingdom wisdom, but they did not receive it. They complained about Him. We should expect the same today when we are rightly and humbly walking in Jesus' ways. Take heart! God's Word is true, even when the hearer rejects it or complains about the message or the messenger.

*And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"* – John 6:42

Because these people THOUGHT they knew Jesus, they couldn't see Him for who He actually was. They assumed they knew everything about Him – His heritage, upbringing, and where He was from. What else was there to know? Their minds were made up already. In their minds, Jesus was some up-jumped preacher talking about concepts that He shouldn't be talking about. He wasn't God's Son, the Messiah, in their minds. Their flawed familiarity blinded them to the truth. This is a very real and common danger today. Many people are blinded to the true nature of Jesus Christ because of a false familiarity. Help us, Father, to see Jesus in truth, as He truly is. Help us to know Him and be known by Him.

*I am the bread of life.* – John 6:48

There it is. Simple, direct, clear. Jesus proclaims, “I am the bread of life.” Let there be no doubt of His intentions. Some people, ignorant of this proclamation, will cast Jesus as merely a charismatic, moral, socially-minded figurehead. His own words declare so much more. Do you hope to live, dear one, or will you starve to death staring at the banquet set before you? Jesus is the bread of life. Our souls’ nourishment and life are dependent on Him. Come and eat and see that He is good. He gives Himself to us and for us to be filled and to have life.

*Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" – John 6:60*

Even Jesus' disciples were mightily challenged by the teaching that they should consume Him, that they should subsist on Him. The nature of following the Savior is to have our thoughts transformed into His thoughts, to turn what we believe into truth by His words – not to conform Christ into what we already think or believe is acceptable. It is Christ who turns our half-formed thoughts and beliefs into holy thoughts and right belief. So then ... be challenged by God's Word! And follow closer still. He is faithful to answer and graciously teaches us when our logic lashes out in an attempt to sabotage our faith. Teach us, Lord, what these things mean in fullness and in the depth of your wisdom.

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. – John 6:63*

We would do well to remember this. We often forget this truth, or else we place caveats on Christ's statements. We might say, "The flesh profits sometimes," or, "Yes, but the flesh bears the fulfillment of the work of the Spirit." Jesus teaches plainly, "the flesh profits nothing." We are bound to it in this life, and by it we realize our weaknesses. If our flesh, our mortal bodies, had to answer for our unrighteousnesses, we would all be lost. But by God's Spirit, we are changed, made new, prepared, and sealed for eternity. Paul's interrogation to the Galatians hits so close to home, "... having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"\* The cry of each of the saints is, "NO! We trust in the Spirit!" Lord, help us not look to the flesh for life, but to You and to Your Spirit.

\*Galatians 3:3

*And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." – John 7:12*

Some things never change. The nature, character, and purpose of Christ have been debated since His own day. One thing is for sure – everyone is confident they have Jesus figured out. The truth is that we who see Christ as He truly is, God with us, are learning every moment that we are woefully unequipped to speak to the fullness of His nature. As we draw near to Him, we find an inexhaustible well of divine character that we are forever discovering. Learning about Christ far surpasses any debate on His benevolence in substance, depth, and breadth. Perhaps we would be better served by drawing near to Him and learning of Him rather than debating His attributes, or worse – complaining.

*However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. – John 7:13*

Oh, how this verse cuts! People in Christ's day were both moved and stifled by the opinions of others. People feared speaking openly about Jesus because of the opinions held by others. There was so much fear. Everybody was afraid of everybody else. We, too, exhibit this heart occasionally. We are prone to hold back our belief about Christ for fear of others. "What will they think!?" our timid hearts inquire. Here is God's precious promise to His saints: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,"\*  
May our Lord grant us peace and keep us from fear.

\*2 Timothy 1:7–8

*And the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” – John 7:15*

When Jesus was born, He did not come equipped with pre-engineered Bible software in His brain. He was fully human, just like us. Over and over again, the people who heard Him teach were amazed because He taught with authority, grace, knowledge, and wisdom. He was filled with the Holy Spirit (being one with the Holy Spirit) and studied God’s Word faithfully (being the Word incarnate).\* There is every indication that Jesus Christ was intimately familiar with God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, even though He did not attend the renowned religious schools of His day. He drew near to God’s Word. What an encouragement for us! We can be like our Master. We can know God’s Word. We can proclaim His wonderful Word powerfully because of Christ, the Spirit, and the Word itself.

\*John 1:1

*On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." – John 7:37–38*

The resounding message of Jesus Christ is an invitation for people to come to Him, to find their relief, substance, and wholeness in Him. He desires to save sinners and to have communion, fellowship with us. His invitation is constant, His message clear. He bids us come to Him because He has all we need because by Him we shall be changed because by Him we shall know life and fulfillment forever.

*The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"* – John  
7:46

Even Christ's enemies declared His power. They could not deny that there was SOMETHING about Him that was radically different from everything they had ever known. They found themselves wrestling with Christ's message, His invitation. His message is powerful! The same occurs today. In fact, the power of Christ's message has propelled His name across empires and millennia. The God-man speaks in power. It is to Him we should listen, and from Him we should seek counsel. No author, counselor, or intellectual, present or past, could ever compare. May we not run to personality, celebrity, or earthly power that fades and is tarnished by the ugliness of selfish ambition. Seek Christ and find His power and the power of His words.

*Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. — John 8:2*

One is our teacher, and He is faithful to teach us all that we need. Certainly, He has appointed Pastors and Teachers in the church for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry; but we all need that one-on-one time with Jesus, our Great Teacher.\* He is accessible to us and remains constant in His nature, teaching those who come to Him. Teach us, Lord; shape our hearts and minds into something more like You by Your words and instruction.

\*Ephesians 4:11–12

*So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” – John 8:7*

The Scribes and Pharisees, being the religious leaders of their day, were self-assured of their understanding of the Law and in their own righteousness. They were so assured that they were more than willing to drag others around and publicly humiliate them for their sins. So, they dragged this woman, caught in adultery, before the crowd and before Jesus, to test Jesus’ understanding of the Law. They used her as a pawn in a sick attempt to change the power dynamic between themselves, Christ, and the people. This reveals the wickedness of their hearts, devoid of grace or mercy. But Jesus demonstrates all of the things they lack – grace, mercy, compassion, and wisdom. Our Lord is so good – especially when the stakes are high. Thank you, Lord, for being so compassionate towards us. We have many sins that deserve condemnation, sins that would ruin us if we were to be dragged before a crowd. But Your grace abounds more, Lord. Thank you.

*Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."* –  
John 8:11

Ever faithful to His nature, Jesus demonstrates mercy to this adulterous woman. We must understand that by the righteous requirement of the Law, this woman earned the death penalty. That is the nature of the Law – death. This woman wasn't necessarily innocent, though we have a soft spot in our Christian hearts for her. Certainly, she was a sinner, as inferred by Christ's instructions to her, "... sin no more." While punishment may be deserved, Christ gives mercy. This is His nature, abounding in mercy. I can't help but wonder if, in His own mind, He was considering the cross at this moment, knowing that He would bear the punishment for this woman's infidelity. He bore it willingly for her sake and for ours. Thank you, Lord, for Your mercy.

*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." – John 8:12*

Darkness hides things. It's interesting to think that while we were children, the dark was unsettling to us. As we mature and grow, we use it to our own advantage. Perhaps that's the situation the adulterous woman found herself in – relying on darkness to cover her sin. Jesus' message is clear – He is light. Light exposes things. Like nocturnal creatures accustomed to darkness, at home in the darkness, we are hesitant to move into the light. Why? Light exposes things. But look at the mercy of our Lord. Though we are exposed – we are not beaten for our sins by Him. We are loved and brought back to right thinking as a child of God, regarding the darkness with suspicion and having found our true home in the Light.

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. — John 8:31*

What makes for authentic discipleship? There are uncountable piles of formalized discipleship programs complete with slick publishing, handouts, charts, emotional anecdotes, colorful pamphlets filled with facts and statistics – all very pleasing and not entirely without merit. There’s always the next best method: small groups, home groups, large groups, outreach, practical ministry, intellectual growth, one on one, emotional response, growth tracks, catechisms, mentorships, and Sunday school. BUT, Christ taught us that the intrinsic everlasting nature of discipleship is abiding in His Word, making His Word our home. All those other things will fade in and out of popular demand. Christ’s Word endures forever. Abide in His Word and find the meaning of discipleship.

*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. –*  
John 8:32

By abiding in Christ's words, we are His disciples (v. 31). AND, by abiding in His Word, we will know the truth. Truth is so squishy nowadays. The relativity of individual truth is a given in modern society. No truth is certain anymore, at least in the eyes of the world. May the Lord help us! By Christ's words, we can know real, objective, solid truth. This isn't A TRUTH. This is THE TRUTH. This is truer than anything else. Christ's words are not subjective, not relative, not open for debate or varying interpretations. Christ's Word is TRUTH, and by that very real truth, those who abide in His Word shall be made free. We shall be more free than any human conception of liberty – truly free, as only Christ can make us. Abide, loved one. Abide in the Word, abide in truth, abide in freedom, abide in Christ.

*They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"*  
– John 8:33

This is what religion without relationship looks like. The people that squirmed the most under Jesus' teachings were clean-cut, good, religious people who came from nice, God-fearing homes and families. They were deeply aware of their spiritual heritage – calling upon the remembrance of Abraham as their proof. However, they ignored the bulk of their ancestral testimony – stiff-necked and hard-hearted people with a penchant for idolatry.\* Lord, keep us from relying on somebody else's white-washed faith. Keep us from white-washing our own spiritual heritage so that we might see our need. Help us to come to You knowing our condition and being wholly reliant on You here in the present.

\*Deuteronomy 9:6

*Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.* – John 8:36

It seems so simple. When we were weighed down by our past sin, we knew we weren't free. We were slaves to sin. When we came to Christ, He freed us from every form of enslavement. The freedom of the gospel is not trading one pair of chains for another, but so many conversions look just like that. "You're free," we proclaim. "Now, here are all of the rules; here's how you're supposed to live IF you want to be a good Christian." The reality is that I could hardly be a good person, much less a good Christian! But by God's grace, we are free – from everything. Jesus' yoke is easy; His burden is light.\* Learn from the Master the way of freedom. Put down your burdens. Step away from your self-imposed chains. Lay aside the weight that some careless disciple has laid on you. Be free indeed.

\*Matthew 11:30

*They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." – John 8:39*

What do we know about Abraham? Quite a bit! The colossal, earth-shaking work of Abraham was belief, faith! "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to Him for righteousness."\* This is the work of Abraham's children. How can we claim a heritage if we have abandoned what was holy about our fathers, that which distinguished them from among the nations? It is our faith, our immovable faith, that makes us His children, and even that is a gift. Do not be unbelieving, but believing, and so be children of God.

\*Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3

*Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.* – John 8:51

In a bitter quarrel with those who were supposed to be His countrymen, Jesus continued to preach. These fiery opponents were supposed to be well versed in the Scriptures. They were supposed to be men after God’s heart. But they opposed Christ. Perhaps there was one heart in that crowd that needed to hear these words that Jesus spoke. The clamoring crowd continues to belittle Jesus, to accuse Him of being born of adultery and racial inferiority, and even of being demon-possessed. Our patient Teacher proclaims these words in the midst of it all. “If anyone keeps My words, he shall never see death.” Teach us to be patient, Lord. Teach us to remain steadfast in trials when defamed and accused. Teach us to keep Your Word and proclaim Your truth.

*Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."* – John 8:58

This is probably one of the most profound statements ever made in human hearing. In a carefully worded declaration, Jesus claims openly that He is God. There can be no denying His claim. Jesus Christ was in the beginning with the Father and the Spirit. He is the creative force through which all things were made and by which all things are held together. He is the Word, and the great I AM, all at once. We see His patience, like a long-suffering parent who endures an insolent child. He restrains all of His power for mercy's sake. That is hard to understand. Yet He did so in the hope of finding repentance. Look to the Lord, dear saint. Know that the gentle hand by which you are supported is the strong hand that created all things in existence. The same voice of creation speaks life into our souls.

*Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. —*  
John 9:1

Our God is the God who sees. Jesus did not share in this man's blindness, nor does He share in our blindness. He saw the blind man, He noticed him, He saw his affliction — just as He sees ours. There are times when we begin to feel like we are beyond God's reach. Perhaps, we think, He has taken His eye off of us because maybe our Father has more important things to tend to. Nowhere in God's Word do we find these notions! His eye is on the sparrow!\* You are worth more than those birds. Our God's vision has not failed Him. Take heart in your trial; it may yet refine your faith as Our God sees and knows.

\*Matthew 10:29–31

*And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." – John 9:2–3*

We like to figure things out. When tragedy strikes, when children die, when people are born with disabilities, or when people contract a disease, we want to know why! We have come up with all sorts of mental equations to rationalize away the uncomfortable or unseemly. One of those thoughts says, "He must have gotten what he deserved." Or, "Certainly some hidden sin caused this thing." Listen, God doesn't hold us under His thumb in some domineering way meting out punishment on all of the wretched among us. In fact, hardly any of us "get what we deserve." We all deserve judgment and punishment for violations against God's holiness. But He is long-suffering, merciful, withholding wrath, dispensing Grace and mercy. What we see as hardship, and potentially punishment, God sees as the place to show His works. The disfigured and down-trodden among us may yet be lifted up. Consider that the works of God were done in our lives when we were yet blind – separated from Him. His works continue still.

*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* – John 9:5

Jesus Christ boldly and plainly declares, “I am the light of the world.” We are surrounded by so much darkness, but that darkness could never grasp Christ.\* It could never extinguish His light, not even in His death, for He conquered death and shone forth brighter than His disciples ever imagined possible. And even while the bodily Christ is no longer in our world, we do not faint as darkness abounds. As He prepares a place for us to be with Him, we know that He has not left us as orphans to grope about in our blindness. He has given us His Spirit. He has given us His Word to light our path. Burn bright, dear one, burn bright.

\*John 1:5

*Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" – John 9:8*

Jesus wrought such a tremendous miracle in this man's life that his new person was nearly unrecognizable to his neighbors and those who knew of him. They had seen him in his beggarly, pitiful state. They knew his poverty and disability. Now they saw something different, something new. They were compelled to ask him how this came to be.\* Even so, each new believer's life should mirror this new man. Those who have been truly touched by Jesus and made whole are vastly different from their former selves. We are whole. We can see. This noticeable change will draw people to inquire after Christ. Take boldness in that moment. Tell them of Jesus. Perhaps they will be made whole, too.

\*John 9:10

*Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." –*  
John 9:12

This man who was healed of his blindness, walking by faith in obedience to Jesus' commands, is questioned on the whereabouts of his healer. The question is direct, and his response is not defensive or ill-conceived. It does not carry the attitude of apostasy. He simply doesn't know. How could he unless the Lord comes to him after his healing? BUT, what is our excuse? When we are asked, "Where is He?" do we clam up, defer the question to somebody "more qualified," pontificate, or demur? Or, do we proclaim the truth? He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He will come back for His own. Be ready. Have an answer. Speak truth to those who would ask, "Where is He?"

*Therefore some of the Pharisees said, “This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” – John 9:16a*

In their own eyes and the eyes of their community, these men were dead-on when it came to their faith. They were pious, faithful to keep the commandments. They ostensibly knew the scriptures; they prayed and gave offerings to support the ministry. But they couldn't see God's handy work when they were staring right at it. They had blown the ideal to “remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy”\* so far out of proportion that they no longer knew what holiness looked like. Sure, they knew what a contrived, knock-off version of holiness looked like, but all that did for them was keep them from seeing Jesus' true person. Ultimately it kept them from true holiness. Lord, help us to see You through the fog of our traditions. May we know You truly, and may we be known by You apart from our fabricated righteousness.

\*Exodus 20:8

*Then they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples.” – John 9:28*

In a blatantly arrogant attempt to belittle Jesus and to cast aspersions on the faith of one of Jesus’ followers, these opposing men claim a superior form of discipleship. They cling to their traditions and shame Moses in the process, who taught that God would raise up a prophet for them and any man who ignored His words, God will require it of him!\*

Because of their own spiritual blindness (attacking a man whom Christ healed of blindness), they were unable to come to Christ. Their tradition, formality, and processes had made them captives to a false system. God wanted to heal them of their blindness, but they were unwilling to come to Him. Lord, may we be followers of You and not an institution. Help us see. Help us to come to You in humility, knowing that You are the one who gives sight.

\*Deuteronomy 18:18–19

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* – John 10:10

Remember these words, believer. We do have an enemy. In fact, in this life, we will find many enemies – our own flesh among them. Spiritual thieves and robbers will move among God's people, searching for an opportunity to make havoc. But we have a defender. We have a Good Shepherd. He brings life in its fullest form, and there is joy in that even as we are surrounded by wolves. Some hesitate to enter the sheepfold of faith for fear of a dull existence. But what is pig slop worth next to Christ's riches? Our lives are only complete when we are under the care of the Great Shepherd. Our abundant lives are found in Christ.

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. –*  
John 10:11

When we are assailed by the evil one, our adversary the devil – as he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour\* – our Lord remains the Good Shepherd, keeping guard over us. In the most ultimate sense, He stood fast and gave His life for God's great sheepfold. He Himself fought for us – His sheep. He kept His nerve when staring death in the face – counting our lives, our souls, worth the fight. Even as Christ considered the immense suffering He would endure, He held His ground still for our sakes. Thank you, Lord, for being good, and thank You for shepherding us still.

\*1 Peter 5:8

*The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.* – John 10:13

That's what people do who are only in it for the money. When they do the calculus, weighing their own self-interest against the interest of the flock, they count their own selves more valuable, dearer to themselves than God's precious possession. They do not care about the sheep. Oh, deliver us, Lord, from the men that have become hirelings under the guise of ministry! You will know them by their steadfastness in adversity. Have they endured or fled? Have they suffered wounds of all sorts for the flock or run at the prospect? We only have one Great Shepherd, and by His grace, He will make us like Him. Help us, Lord, to endure, to shepherd those You have entrusted to our care, and to be shepherded likewise.

*No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father. – John 10:18*

We must avoid the thought that the cross was forced on Jesus – that our Lord was an unwilling victim of a cataclysmic assault. He understood the cross better than we ever will! He looked death in the face and counted the fullness of the cost in dignity, suffering, wounds, and continued on to death as our mighty redeemer. Unlike us, Christ was able to look past death and see the victory that He would win by taking His own life back, demonstrating His deity and total authority over all things. Lord, we pray You would help us be mindful of Your authority, Your life, Your death, and Your mastery over all.

*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. — John 10:28*

There are occasions when we wonder just how secure we are in Christ. We perhaps fear that we may be lost along the way. We certainly know those who have wandered from the fold. Jesus says that the sheep of His fold will NEVER perish! He says that no one will snatch us away from Him. After all, He is the Good Shepherd who laid His life down and took it back up! He is the Great Conqueror of the grave! Who can stand against Him? Know for certain that you are in His hand, loved one. You shall never perish or be moved from that place.

*I and [My] Father are one.* – John 10:30

The Father and the Son are not divided. They are one. This is perplexing to us at times. In our attempts to understand their unity, we sometimes run afoul of a true understanding in order to appear knowledgeable rather than taking Christ at His word – creative and powerful as it is. Some have tried to relate the Son to a lesser being. Still others have ignorantly called Him the “first and greatest created being.” This is not so. Christ was not created but begotten. He is of the same substance as the Father. He is equal in power, authority, and glory. Our minds can scarcely understand this truth, and yet Christ declares plainly that it is so. Teach us, Lord, about Your nature. Help us to know You just as You know us.

*And many believed in Him there. – John 10:42*

No matter what the crowds say. No matter the barriers that are erected by the religious establishment. No matter the distance or the place, many found Christ and believed in Him. This still happens! Against all the odds or norms or customs or societal barriers; in the remotest places and the most common places; people who are grasped by the truth of the gospel and the Holy Spirit believe in Jesus Christ unto everlasting life. We have believed, and many more will as well. He is truth, and He is making Himself known.

*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. – John 11:5*

Jesus has personal relationships. He loves intentionally and deeply. The names of His friends are important to Him. This is the Lord we believe in, and we have a relationship with – the one who loves. He is not a distant acquaintance indifferent to our circumstances. He has not constructed barriers by His deity and glory so that we cannot approach Him. He is the one who loves, and He knows our names! He cares for us in every moment – grief or joy. Our interests are directed by His caring hand. Take heart, loved one! You have a friend who is closer than a brother.\*

\*Proverbs 18:24

*So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. – John 11:6*

This is a challenging verse. Jesus doesn't fulfill the role that people think He should. He doesn't go immediately to heal His friend Lazarus. He delays, knowing that those He loves are going through tremendous turmoil even to the point of death. We often consider Martha and Mary, but think about Lazarus – the one doing the dying! As he is languishing, wasting away, perhaps hoping to see Jesus, only to be disappointed in the waiting. He goes to the grave without so much as seeing Jesus' face in his moment of need. We would despair at the thought! But Jesus knows that the refinement of their sincerest faith is found in the delay, in the waiting. He is not unfaithful or unjust to forget those He loves but is purposeful in growing them through suffering. Help us endure, Lord! Help us understand! Help us believe.

*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up. – John 11:11*

Lazarus died. His family grieved. All seemed lost. BUT Jesus goes to him. For Jesus, raising the dead to life is as simple as waking someone who has fallen asleep. We were once sleep-walking ourselves, dead in our sins and transgressions. While we were still in that state, our Lord came to us and woke us out of our stupor. He give life to our decaying souls. He still does this, seeking those who are seemingly past resurrection, those who seem too far gone. Jesus goes to them to demonstrate His power and His grace.

*Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." – John 11:14–15*

So much of our faith is grown through suffering, hardship, and loss. While that is not pleasant in the moment, we know that the end of the matter, if we are fixed on Christ, is the betterment of our belief. Jesus knew just how transient His own disciples' faith was. He understood that their belief would be bolstered by this death, even as Lazarus' own sisters were growing through the same loss. Jesus doesn't keep us from losing. He keeps us in the midst of the loss. He holds us up, growing us all the while so that we may believe.

*Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. – John 11:20*

It would be easy to turn this into a metaphor to explain these two sisters' different hearts towards Jesus – but it would be false. We are tempted to exalt Martha. After all, she went to meet Jesus in her enthusiasm while Mary apparently loafed around the house. We could degrade Mary as lazy and unprofitable. But this is not fair. This interpretation removes the focus from our Lord Jesus and places it on these fragile sisters who are reeling from loss and who are in desperate need of love and grace. Remember, they are hurting! Jesus loved these women and their deceased brother Lazarus irrespective of their posture in their moment of need. Each are positioned differently – Martha goes to meet Jesus, Mary waits in the house, and Lazarus has been in the grave four days. Yet, they all need Jesus, and He comes to them with love in the midst of their need just as He comes to us – no matter where we are.

*Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” – John 11:21*

Martha knew Jesus’ power to heal. The fact that He may have delayed on purpose, that He may use suffering to grow her faith, escaped her in the moment. We imagine that if our Lord truly desired our best interests, then He would make life easy and grand, but that is not the case. As precious treasures in the Lord’s eyes, we are cared for in the scouring we endure. It is in the suffering that He reveals to us our fickle, unfaithful, and often entitled attitudes. And then He begins to faithfully scrub out the corrosion and the soil by which He makes us holy. This is sanctification. This is purification. Lord, help us to know Your heart for us in our suffering – in our loss. Hold us up when we can’t bear it.

*But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You. – John 11:22*

While Martha's statement to Jesus is true, it is not complete. It betrays Martha's feeling of separation from God. It's as if she is saying, "God didn't hear my prayer, but He will hear Yours, Jesus." It assumes that Jesus was not fully aware of the desires of Martha's heart or even her condition. This is often the place we find ourselves as well. We surmise silently, "Maybe God hasn't heard my prayer. Maybe somebody holier than I needs to pray for me." In its ugliest form, this turns to the Roman Catholic form of intercession by the saints for the lesser believer. Now, Christ IS our intercessor, and He taught us that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Peter tells us that we should cast all of our cares upon Him because He cares for us. You have access, dear one! You can speak to the Father directly – unhindered because of Christ. Our Lord Jesus bids us to come and to speak and to ask – as a child to a loving Father. Give us Your heart for prayer, Lord!

\*Luke 12:31–23

\*\*John 16:26–27

\*\*\*1 Peter 5:7

*Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." – John 11:23*

Jesus was communicating to Martha that He was about to raise her brother to life, literally, then and there. This wasn't some distant thing but would happen before her eyes. That is the power of Jesus – to resurrect our lifeless bodies. And, in so doing, He proves His power to resurrect our invisible but altogether lifeless souls. This is the miracle of Christ's Word. Though we may walk around our entire lives dead, lifeless but for our exterior flesh, Jesus calls us into life. He gives life to our mummified souls. He is the life-giver.

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." – John 11:25*

In grief and suffering, our focus can often become misplaced. Our well-intentioned friends may come alongside and remind us that everything happens for a purpose or some other platitude meant to assuage our pain. Perhaps we have done the same to others. If we're not careful, we end up using our faith in a half-hearted way to bring comfort to those who are truly in despair. We quote Paul saying, "All things work together for good." Jesus doesn't do that. He knows Martha's sorrow but doesn't treat her superficially. Instead, He delivers to her one of the great declarations of His deity, "I am the resurrection and the life." The gravity, the meaning of this, is unmatched in our spoken universe. It is only in these words that hope resides. Knowing the truth in them brings hope even in the deepest grief.

\*Romans 8:28

*And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?* – John 11:26

Eventually, we all come face to face with our core beliefs. We can pay lip service to our faith quite convincingly. We all know people who were once professing believers who no longer walk in faith. They came face to face with their belief. They were asked, or asked themselves, “Do you believe this?” The answer that ultimately came to them was ... no. Our hearts long to see those souls restored. We must answer the same question, though. When life and death are at hand, do you believe this? Christ bids us to be believing, not unbelieving. Our heart’s cry is, “Lord, I believe – help my unbelief.\* He is all we have to hold on to. All else will fail in life’s grand parade of decay. But Christ endures. Do you believe this?

\*Mark 9:24

*She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” – John 11:27*

Jesus asks Martha about her belief – specifically about eternal life. She answers with a potent profession of her own. For Martha, this is not a well-rehearsed Sunday School response. This is her own deeply held conviction on the nature and person of Christ. She may not yet grasp the fullness of her profession, but she knows the truth. She knows the truth because she has experienced the truth first-hand. Ask yourself, dear one – what do you believe? Can you claim Martha’s words as your own and mean it? Or, is there something else there – something not quite honest? Help us, oh Lord, to know you rightly, to hold these truths as our own.

*Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." – John 11:32*

As Mary, grieving deeply, falls to the ground at Jesus' feet, she says to Him the exact words that her sister did, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Perhaps Mary and Martha, in their distress, had talked one another into this shared narrative. We often do that. We talk each other into certain beliefs about the Lord or our faith. We extrapolate from previous experience with Jesus, expecting the same future experience. We suppose that the great love He has for us precludes us from suffering, and then we attempt to convince others of the same. BUT only in the coming of Jesus to us, apart from our ill-informed guesses at His character, are we reminded of His true nature and heart. He loves us enough to meet us in our grief, to be faithful to us DURING our suffering ... even the suffering that He may very well have allowed.\* Certainly, Jesus is not surprised by our suffering at all! What's more, He knows the glorious result at the end of suffering for those who believe. We must be careful not to talk people out of their suffering. Lord, help us to see You clearly even in our grief. May we never cling to false hope or the false promise of avoiding suffering. Help us bear suffering for Your name's sake so that others might believe through it all.

\*Philippians 1:29

*Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. – John 11:33*

Jesus is not some emotionless deity who is unconcerned with the hurts of humans. He became a man, was tried in all points even as we are, and He understands the human condition perhaps more than we do ourselves!\* Jesus was not, is not, exempt from heartbreak and loss. Apathy is not the mark of our Lord nor His disciples. Caring defines our ministry, rooted and built up in love. Jesus taught His disciples that the world would know them because of their love for one another.\*\* The same holds true for us. Jesus' emotions are not superficial here but deeper than we can know. It is that care for mankind and concern for our fellow man that propels the gospel and the gospel messenger into the lives of others.

\*Hebrews 4:15

\*\*John 13:35

*Jesus wept.* – John 11:35

Much is made out of the brevity of this verse. It is the shortest verse in our English translations of the Bible and yet is profound in its implications. Although the gospel writer intends to show the deity of Christ, he does not suppress His humanity. To be Christ-like is not to wear the mask of stoicism. Nor is it to embrace the melodrama of emotional performance art found in many churches. To feel real emotion is part of being a human. It is part of being a Christian. To weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice is a Biblical imperative!\* As we see, this attitude is modeled by our Lord. Many have taken in hand to explain the cause of Christ's tears. While there is some value to that, what we learn on a basic level is that Christ's own Godhood did not harden His heart toward His creation. He is affected deeply by our sorrow, and He has promised to redeem us to a place where sorrow has no ground to stand on.\*\*

\*Romans 12:15

\*\*Revelation 21:4

*And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" – John 11:37*

The short answer to the proposed question is – yes. Of course, Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. But Jesus delayed, intentionally. (John 11:6) Jesus willed that Lazarus should die, that he should be in the ground so long that there would be no doubt of his death. The unspoken question lurking behind the question of Jesus' ability to keep Lazarus from dying is ... why? Why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die? Why does Jesus allow us to suffer? Why does Jesus delay? The answers are myriad and complex for each person involved, but God never take His hand off His saints. In this moment, Jesus desires to show God's power over death, to call many into the kingdom through Lazarus' resurrection! The same is true in our lives as well. Help us to see Your hand at work, Lord. When we question You, may we ask in expectation of Your Spirit to move in our lives for Your glory and for the salvation of others. Show us when we ask amiss. Show us when our questions hide our true thoughts and doubts. Teach us to see Your heart as You are looking at ours.

*Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. – John 11:38*

Sometimes our circumstances seem immovable, fixed, like a giant stone barring the way. They stare us in the face, and we are confronted with just how little we can do in our own strength. We see a grave, a stone at the end ... awaiting all of us. These are markers of our frailty and inability to conquer that last foe – death. Here we see Christ confronted with the same unconquerable foe. BUT, He rules over all! Even death is subject to His authority. We also see Jesus' commitment to working even in the midst of His own grief. Conditions in life are far from perfect. We grieve, too. We lose others, too. We face the grave like everyone else. And what we see here is that facing seemingly immovable circumstances, compounded by an overwhelming sense of grief, is precisely when Jesus chooses to work. Hope is never far away with Jesus so near.

*Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been [dead] four days." – John 11:39*

Jesus is prepared to work. He has traveled to this scene of death for that express purpose. Every circumstance is known to Him. Every immovable force is subject to His Word. At this moment, the quite reasonable saint declares some practical matters for consideration and implies that perhaps the dead man is too far gone. He stinks. Surely Jesus does not want to come into contact with such rank decay. No, the dead man is too far gone. It's too late. Martha gives Jesus a way out. But, Jesus has other plans. No one is ever too far gone, too grotesque, too decayed. No one is ever beyond the reach of our Lord. What we see as dead and gone, Jesus sees as opportunity for resurrection and a mighty declaration of power. After all, some of us were too far gone, and the Lord still called out to us.

... *that they may believe that You sent Me.* – John 11:42

This is Jesus' primary concern. With His eye fixed carefully upon our eternal soul, our Lord desires that we may believe. He desires that our belief would be complete and based on the understanding of His personhood – that Christ was sent by God to redeem a fallen creation. His love abounds to us so fiercely that He willingly demonstrated His personhood, His deity, and humanity in full view of doubters in the eternal hope that we might be saved. And, having been elected, we might elect to be His treasure, that we may believe.

*And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." – John 11:44*

Even as Jesus calls forth the decaying corpse of Lazarus, He makes him new. Lazarus emerges, still carrying the vestments of his death. But Jesus has called him to life. Lazarus is called to be loosed, unburdened of those filthy reminders of the grave. He is set free – loosed from the power of the grave to walk in newness of life. Oh, how many of us wander halfway between life and death? How many of us still wander about in our graveclothes, even though we are called to life? Be free, believer! You have been made alive forevermore! Be rid of those wretched clothes and put on Christ!

*Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. – John 11:45*

MANY believed after seeing the resurrection of Lazarus. Our own resurrections are to serve as a testament to the nature and purpose of our Lord, Jesus. Yet so many of us walk around, called out of death, but masquerading in grave clothes. We would rather convince the world at large that we are still dead than be free in the abundance of life Jesus has called us to. We must grasp the fact, or be grasped by it, that our resurrection is meant for somebody else – just as Lazarus' was! AND just as Christ's resurrection is meant for us.

*There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. — John 12:2*

Amazing. The man who was dead four days in the grave sits with Jesus for a meal. I wonder what the conversation was like. We do not know the particulars of their personal dialogue. What we know for sure is that Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters dearly. They had a special relationship with Him. In some small way, it's easy to see ourselves in Lazarus. We were once dead, left in the grave, our families perhaps weeping over us. But Jesus called us forth into a new life. Now, having been resurrected in Christ, we wait for the supper. We wait for that day when we shall sit at His table as the new creation He has made us to be. I wonder what that conversation will be like.

*Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. – John 12:3*

I have often wondered if Jesus' own display of affection and servanthood toward His disciples later in his ministry – as He washes their feet – was in some way born out of His interaction with Mary washing His feet. The imagery here is rich and moving. Mary has gained her brother back from the dead, and in a dramatic display of gratitude, mixed with humility and holding nothing back – not even her prized possession – she worships at the feet of Jesus. She serves Him. She loves Him and declares this openly and plainly in spite of the cost. The aroma from her act of worship fills the entire house! Does ours?

*But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's [son], who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" – John 12:4–5*

Oh, Judas. How we have seen the spirit of Judas invade the heart of many long parted, one-time saints. They were once stalwart, steadfast, sure of their convictions and their standing in the Kingdom. The heart of a betrayer lived within him. Let us not be too self-righteous! The heart of a betrayer lives within us as well. We, too, are capable of abandoning our Lord. We, too, are perfectly prone to breaking fellowship with those we call brothers and sisters. History serves as our body of evidence! Our own lives and relationships testify to this fact! Did not the other disciples ask, "Is it I?" when Jesus declared that His betrayer was at hand? Did that doubt not live in their hearts and minds, too?! Let us watch and pray lest we enter into temptation!

*Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. – John 12:9*

This man was once dead and now is alive. He dines with the Lord Jesus in full view of many and serves as a testament to Jesus' life-giving power in a very literal and immediate sense. People came to see him, and they saw the divine hand of God at work. What a wonder He had wrought in Lazarus' body! Do we stand as a living testament to our God's power? He has called us into life! Are people able to see that? Do they come to get a glimpse of our resurrection? Lord, help us to live as a testament to Your power. Help others see Your mighty hand at work.

*His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and [that] they had done these things to Him. – John 12:16*

Christ's followers, His disciples, His students did not fully comprehend what they were a part of. Their understanding was clouded by their individual worldviews, informed by their upbringing and even deeply held political sentiments. It wasn't until later, after the resurrection, that they were able to reflect on Jesus' teaching in light of a new and eternal kingdom founded on the promise of redemption through Jesus' blood – guaranteed by His resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then they could see. Having only Jesus, the dross and garbage of politics and worldview fell away and was replaced by a view for the eternal. Lord, though we may not understand now, teach us to see Your Kingdom clearly.

*Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”* – John 12:20–21

Every tribe and tongue – that’s who God’s kingdom is made of. A holy mish-mash of Jew, Greek, Scythian, bond, and free.\* Our earthly identities will never commend us to or keep us from God’s kingdom. In fact, only in God’s kingdom do we find our true identity and citizenship in Christ as our hearts cry out, “We wish to see Jesus.”

\*Colossians 3:11

*But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. – John 12:23*

Jesus, knowing all things, understands that His death is imminent. How does He describe it? As the vehicle by which He is glorified. Perhaps His disciples had something else in mind. Perhaps they had anything else in mind! But Jesus knows that in this act, He is glorified. This is the opposite of the world's notions of power. Death in the world means defeat in the most permanent way. But that's not the result of Jesus' death. Rather, it is glory, power, and proof of unmatched power. In a spiritual sense, we who believe are called to die daily and to partake in Christ's death and resurrection – leaning into all of the eternal truths that declare a glorious future and a home with Christ, the one who conquered death.

*He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. — John 12:23*

Jesus calls us to have an eternal perspective. He speaks these words knowing that the time of His own death is at hand. We find it challenging to be citizens of heaven momentarily on earth as we are pulled in two directions. Remember, Jesus experienced all of those same things and kept His firm grasp on eternity – on God’s Kingdom. He was always looking forward to the promised end, never settling for simply an earthly throne. For believers to forsake their heavenly citizenship for a throne now in this world, a land of squalor, is sheer madness. Yet we know that people do this very thing. We fall in love with the world we see even while our hearts see an eternal Kingdom waiting for us. Lord, help us to cling to Your Kingdom, that we would understand our transience. Keep us for eternal life.

*If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him [My] Father will honor.*  
– John 12:26

Jesus' commands are often quite simple. To serve Jesus is to follow Jesus, to go where He goes, move how He moves, love how He loves. It means to be where He is. So many have turned aside, sadly. Professing to be servants of our Lord, they seek to supplant Jesus and rule over the lives of others. They build up servants for themselves and abuse the flock of God. They have left the serving to others; they have gone after other, lesser lords – becoming trapped by their own desires. May our Lord keep us from that. Help us follow You faithfully, Lord. Help us serve. Help us be where You are.

*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. — John 12:26*

Jesus, fully man, experiences anxiety and becomes troubled in His spirit while considering the prospect of suffering. He shares in our human condition. Which of us look forward to suffering? We don't! We are often terrified at the prospect. Our dear Lord reasons out loud about His own suffering, wondering if He should ask for deliverance. That is a much brighter prospect – to be kept from the suffering altogether. But He knows that it is His entire purpose – suffering on behalf of humanity. We could never bear the full weight of suffering that was required of Christ. But Jesus sets His face like flint to the cross for our sakes.

*“Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, [saying],  
“I have both glorified [it] and will glorify [it] again.” – John 12:28*

Oh, Lord, let this be the prayer of our hearts! The Father IS glorious! In times past, He has made Himself known, and by His mighty works, He has glorified His name. What’s more – He isn’t done! He hasn’t gone into retirement. He will glorify His name again. His name is even more brilliant, even more exalted, even more renowned. Oh, the things we have yet to see our God do! We glorify Your name!

*Therefore the people who stood by and heard [it] said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake." – John 12:29–30*

In the crowd of people around Jesus, they all were able to participate in a miracle. A divine voice, God's voice, spoke audibly to them, declaring His past, present, and future glory. But what did they hear? Many misheard God. They heard something other than the clear, plain voice of God. They either explain it away as a natural phenomenon, such as thunder; or they enter the realm of the mystic, saying, "An angel has spoken...." Perhaps the divided crowd held that same common thought in their hearts – it's absurd to think that God would speak to us. And yet, He does. The Holy Creator speaks for our sakes, for our benefit. Will we hear Him plainly; or will we explain it away as something else? Help us to listen, Lord, and to know when You speak.

*Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all [peoples] to Myself.* – John 12:31–32

The judgment of this world is death. That is the sentence we all carry every day apart from Christ in a world ruled by sin and by Satan. But Jesus Christ, who knows no sin, became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.\* He stood in our place, the place of the condemned, so that we could have life, so that we could live HIS life. As Christ is lifted up on the cross, that grotesque scene bears witness to the fullness of God's love for mankind and His desire to have communion with us. We who see this act truly, for all its worth, will never be the same. We are drawn to Christ like a honeybee to a flower.

\*2 Corinthians 5:21

*This He said, signifying by what death He would die. – John 12:33*

The cross was no surprise to Jesus. He communicates clearly how He is meant to die, lifted up in full public view. He has been communicating this from the beginning when he exhorts the hearer, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him take up his cross...”<sup>\*</sup> With full knowledge of the cross awaiting Him, Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death for our sakes.<sup>\*\*</sup> In that act, Jesus saved us from the ridicule and shame of being presented before all powers and principalities as God’s failed and fallen creation. Christ stood in that place instead. He bore that shame and punishment. He was the one who was defamed and mocked as a failure so that we could be called holy, righteous, and heirs to the heavenly Kingdom.

<sup>\*</sup>Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23

<sup>\*\*</sup>Philippians 2:8

*The people answered Him, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how [can] You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this Son of Man?” – John 12:34*

To the people who responded to Jesus’ declarations, death was unconquerable. It was impossible for Him to die AND remain forever. They had not been paying attention. Jesus’ teachings on the purpose, ministry, and ultimate end challenged their notions of right and reality. After all ... the law said so! But they had misread it. Their interpretation was muddled with legalism, formalism, and self-seeking. Christ came to bring grace, truth, and life.\* May our eyes be open to God’s truth even when our deeply held presuppositions are challenged. May we see Jesus for who He TRULY is, not who we desire Him to be.

\*John 1:17

*But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him. — John 12:37*

We sometimes hope that miracles, healing, timely provision, and visible and audible signs from God will be enough to turn the most stone-hearted skeptic into a believer. Sadly, that is not the case. We are quite deft at explaining away God's works as mere coincidence. We easily rationalize healing as a misdiagnosis or the result of a good diet. Where hopelessness was once crushing the life out of a famished soul followed by God working to bring hope into a dark place, we often call that nothing more than good luck. We are masters at dismissing the sovereign work of God. Signs and wonders will never be enough, but the person and work of Jesus will always be sufficient.

*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him* – John  
12:42a

There is always a remnant, a core of believers regardless of the noise, social pressure, or political atmosphere. There will always be a company of saints. In this case, MANY believed, even those in the ruling class. Our era is no different.

Competing socio-political causes divide people – divide us. Struggles and injustice continue. “Rational” and “logical” thinkers degrade and mock those who confess a belief in the Biblical Christ as superstitious, uneducated, and out of touch. BUT ... many still believe. Regardless of background, political slant, education, social status – many still believe in Christ. He is the hope-giver, the life-giver, full of grace and truth; and we still believe.

*...but because of the Pharisees they did not confess [Him], lest they should be put out of the synagogue. – John 12:42b*

Here we find belief without confession. This is a secret faith, an undercover faith, a faith that is unwilling to risk any type of personal loss. And what was the driving fear? Church. These timid believers were oppressed and browbeaten into submission by the religious leaders – not the world. Having come to believe in the life-giver, Jesus, they were threatened with expulsion from the institution that Christ taught against, “...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”\* Christ flipped the very core of the faith community on its head! And now, people were caught in a dilemma. They could cling to a sinking ship because that’s the way we’ve always done it; that’s where I first met God; my Mom and Dad raised me there. Or, they could follow Christ unencumbered by entering into His Kingdom. This is the question we all come face to face with at some point as we follow Jesus – what cost are we willing to bear?

\*Matthew 5:20

*For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* – John  
12:43

God's Word shows us what we truly value – just like holding a mirror up to our hearts. There were people whose hearts yearned for Jesus but who couldn't take that last full step of belief – confession – because they overvalued the praise of others and undervalued the praise of God. What a thought! God praises His saints! We know that the saints praise God, but that He praises us?! Why? Because we believe in Jesus. So, what do we value? Is it the fleeting and fickle praise of men who desire for us to live in blindness and religion, or is it God? Let us value, love, and long for praise from the eternal God who is blessed forevermore and to whom we turn back all of our praise.

*And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.* – John 12:45

Those who saw Jesus saw God the Father. Jesus is one with the Father – equal in glory and power, worthy to be praised. When we see Jesus in that glorious reunion, we will also see the Father because they are one. When we worship Jesus, we worship the Father. When we pray to our Lord Jesus, we pray to our Father. Even now, the Father and Son are with us, as promised, by the Holy Spirit who dwells within each believer.

*...when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from the world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. – John 13:1*

Jesus' love for His disciples never fails – even at what seemed to be the end, facing death and severe physical anguish. Carrying the immense mental and emotional toll of facing execution, Jesus did not retreat inward. He did not seek to comfort Himself. Instead, He focused His energy and actions toward loving His treasured disciples. AND ... He loved them COMPLETELY. Jesus loves us the same way. We may get distracted by life or ministry. We may turn inward and focus on our own selves in times of great distress. But, Jesus loves us so deeply and so completely! His love is the very center of our faith. His love will carry us through to the end.

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. – John 13:3–4*

Jesus possessed divine knowledge. He knew that God the Father had given Him all things. He knew that He was from God. He knew that He was now embarking on a divinely appointed journey marked with suffering back to Heaven's throne room, leading the souls of the redeemed with Him. What does Jesus do in this hour with all of this divine understanding? Does He exalt Himself? Does He promote Himself? Does He serve Himself? No. He humbles Himself. He exposes His humanity, laying aside His garments, and prepares to serve His dearly loved disciples. His eye and His heart are ever toward our uncleanness, and His hands are prepared to wash away the dirt. This is God, the servant who cleans His beloved.

*After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. — John 13:5*

Jesus, God with us, humbles Himself to wash feet. He took the place of a servant, the lowest place, a place shunned by those in distinguished society, so that He might demonstrate the totality of His love for His disciples. The cross awaits! Yet Jesus is found on hands and knees scrubbing the filth of the road from those He loves. Perhaps at this moment, Jesus' recalled how moved He was by having His own feet washed.\* One thing is certain, each move is intentional: the stooping, the pouring, the washing, the wiping. Oh, what love and grace are found in the heart of our Lord! We are being washed still.

\*Luke 7:44–46; John 12:3

*Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." – John 13:7*

Jesus pinpointed Peter's lack of understanding. He knew deeply of Peter's confusion while being washed by Christ. Should such a holy moment be marked by confusion or misunderstanding? We hope not. But often, God's saints misunderstand His work – maybe even right in the moment. There are times when Jesus works in our lives, but the cleansing goes unnoticed by us. When we've had time to reflect upon the Lord's work, then we see His love demonstrated to us through sanctification. Take heart – we will understand afterward. Keep your eyes on the Lord. Watch how He moves. See how He serves. Even if understanding eludes us at first, we will understand later.

*Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered and said to him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." – John 13:8*

There are still some who observe this act of foot washing literally. While many more observe it metaphorically, the intimacy, humility, and raw love are lost in the transference to a figurative understanding. The idea of washing feet has been applied to almost every act of service to demonstrate charity except actually washing feet! What is lost on the student is the uncomfortable physical touch, the vulnerability we experience as our toes and feet are brought close to the washer. In those brief moments, the one being washed must participate in the graciousness of having another remove the sweat and dirt from our skin. The act of having our feet washed is indeed challenging. Some still silently harbor Peter's feelings, "Lord, I'll never show you my feet, my stink, my unkempt toenails!" Others are more tempted to pick up the basin themselves, to take over in the washing. BUT ... we must be cleaned by Jesus Himself. We must come to and go through that raw and vulnerable place with the Lord. Only then will we have the soft heart that allows us to treat others with grace as we pick up the basin to wash another.

*Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” – John 13:9*

After being corrected by Jesus for refusing to have his feet washed, Peter swings full out to the other extreme. There is something resembling our own hearts in this dramatic shift. We often find ourselves vacillating wildly from moment to moment. We find ourselves attempting to dictate the terms under which we will allow Jesus to get close to us and wash us. In those moments, we forget that He is Lord over all, and we are not. But, oh, how great the Lord’s patience with us as we flail about! By His Spirit, He washes us, calms us, gives us His abiding peace, and teaches us how to receive the cleansing that we need.

*You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. – John 13:13*

Let there be no controversy over Jesus' claim to Lordship! Perhaps some question Jesus' high office because they are not accustomed to seeing lords debase themselves in service to their subjects. That's what Jesus did. He humbled Himself rather than fulfilling the lusts of the eyes, flesh, and pride of life – all of which are found within the lordly office fabricated by humanity. He humbled Himself and moved among men as a Teacher. He instructs us, the blissfully ignorant, and He is so gentle in His instruction. May our eyes and hearts see the true nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher.

*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. – John 13:14*

We are to be fully vested doers of Christ's holy example, not simply observers or awkward bystanders. Some will say, "I could never be like that – Jesus was perfect, and I'm just a human." This is an excuse, plain and simple. The intention behind such a statement is to attempt to absolve oneself of the holy command and responsibility set before them. Those who lay claim to such shallow excuses have not experienced the totally compelling grace of Christ by which we are unable to restrain ourselves from the doing! He washed us; we must do the same for others! We MUST serve as our Lord served because, after all, it is His Spirit that lives within us, that moves us onward.

*When Jesus had said these things He was troubled in Spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. – John 13:21–22*

None of us desires to be found as the betrayer, the denier. Was this confusion, experienced by the disciples, born out of self-confidence or doubt? We know from Matthew 26 and Mark 14 that the disciples asked, “Is it I?” Would somebody so confident of their faithfulness ask that? Certainly, Christendom has seen many self-professed and even publicly acclaimed saints fall away, damaging as many they can in their fall. Watch and pray, loved one – that you may not enter into temptation!\* Keep us, Lord, so that we do not lose our footing. By Your grace, may we keep faith with You. Let us not be the betrayer.

\*Matthew 26:41

*Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. – John 13:23*

This disciple is supposedly the Apostle John, the very author of this Gospel. And ... this disciple is you and I. Jesus loves us so very deeply. By His Spirit and the Word, He affirms His love for us. Each of us is invited to get close to Him and find our rest, our comfort, our sustenance in Him. He is like a Father to us, a Shepherd, an older brother. He loves us dearly. Will you lean on Jesus? Will you press into Him as invited?

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. — John 13:34*

The old, familiar commandment was to love God unreservedly and to love others as our own selves.\* Here, Jesus gives a new law of love. He commands that we love one another as HE loves us. In this way, we look to Jesus as the standard by which we are to love others. We are no longer the standard; He is. Self-loathing does not absolve us from Christ's law of love. We don't look toward anyone else as the model of our love. We look to Jesus alone for our example of perfect love. Help us love others as You have loved us, Lord.

\*Matthew 22:37–39

*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. – John 13:35*

Do we want all people to know that we are Jesus' disciples? If so, why? So that they may know Him and find life! How do we announce our credentials as one of Jesus' own to a skeptical world? We do so by loving one another as Christ loves us. That is a big love to replicate! That thought is intimidating. It seems beyond our ability. BUT, by the Holy Spirit, we can bring Jesus' love to life. It is not by our education, social standing, race, language, trade, or any other distinguishing factor by which we are marked as followers of Jesus, only love. Help us, Lord, to be named as Yours, identified and marked by Your love for others.

*Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake." – John 13:37*

Peter is so self-assured, confident, and sincere. Sometimes we are sorely tempted to paint Peter's words as hyperbole or exaggeration or an empty boast. We can only but take him at his word. Peter himself was convinced enough of the substance of his own conviction to make this declaration right to the Lord's face! Unfortunately, sincerity and self-confidence are never enough to move God's saints to endurance and faithfulness in the long term. Only grace does that. We must come to the realization that our unshakable confidence will abandon us when we are focused on ourselves as the wellspring of endurance rather than the grace of Christ. Look to Jesus, loved one. Find your staying power and confidence in Him.

*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. –*  
John 14:1

We are often troubled in our hearts by many things. The cares of the world, of our lives, overwhelm us at times. Real or imagined slights and insults haunt our thoughts. BUT, God is sovereign over all. There is no circumstance we have entered into that is outside of His view. There is no situation that we find ourselves in that is too far for His reach. Has the Lord's arm been shortened? In our moments of trial – thinking we are abandoned – we are not. We believe in the God who is near to us. We believe that Christ has brought us near to the Father. Be at peace. Trust the Lord our God.

\*Numbers 11:23

*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. — John 14:3*

In His evening of distress and betrayal, Christ is careful to ensure that His disciples know of their ultimate destination. Christ's focus is on the eternal, while our focus is often on the physical. He brings our focus back to the eternal as we listen to Him speak. He promised to come again so that we might be with Him. He is preparing a place for us. We will not languish forever here on earth. Someday we will be with our Lord.

*And where I go you know, and the way you know. Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"* – John 14:4–5

Having just explained that He is going to prepare a place for them, a heavenly home, Jesus is drawing the focus of the disciples to that eternal, unseen kingdom. Even though Jesus declares to them, "You know the way," Thomas is entirely uncertain and unconvinced. His honest challenge to Jesus' assertion, "We don't know the way," is the very same as our own. How often have our hearts cried out the same as we reflect upon our insufficiency and half-hearted attempts at following after Jesus? Show us the way, Lord. You've shown us a million times before. Show us again, we pray.

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." – John 14:6*

Jesus is faithful to answer Thomas' deepest questions, and He is faithful to answer ours too. He is ever faithful to respond to those big, life-changing questions – what is the meaning and purpose of life? How can I know God? What is truth? How can I make it to the end? Christ's answer to Thomas is profound in its depth and comprehensiveness. Do you desire to know where Christ is and how to get there? He is the way. Do you desire to know what real truth is? He is the truth. Do you desire to know the meaning and purpose of life? He is the life. Do you desire to see God's face? Jesus will take you there. Teach us what this means, Lord. Show us Your way. Be our truth and life.

*If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.” – John 14:7*

The person of Jesus Christ is so wrapped up in the person of God the Father that to know Jesus is to know the Father and to see Jesus is to see the Father. We don't know the Father less because of Jesus – we know Him more! God came near to us and brought us near to Him by the Son. The Father's face, heart, and nature are revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

*Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father..."* –  
John 14:8–9

Philip's condition may be more common than we want to believe. This man had known Christ intimately. He had seen so much, heard so much, handled so much. He had been instructed in the deep things of the faith by the Lord Jesus personally! Yet still, he couldn't see clearly what Jesus was trying to show him. He was, in a sense, blind to Christ's nature as being one with God, the Father. But our Lord answers and corrects. Rather than casting Philip out, Jesus is incredibly patient and gentle, responding, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Philip needed to hear these words explicitly; so do we. Help us to see and know the fulness of who You are, Lord. As we walk closely with You, may we not lose sight of Your majesty.

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. – John 14:12*

There is much conversation in modern Christianity over the intersection of faith and works. There are those sluggards who do not labor for the kingdom – fully assured of their inheritance. BUT Jesus tells us that we who believe in Him WILL DO the works that He does, and greater! How could we not obey?! If His Spirit lives in us, then we will be about His business. Get to it!

*If you love Me, keep My commandments.* – John 14:15

This is not a legalistic pitch towards works-based righteousness but a proclamation that shows us how we may judge our own hearts and our love for Christ. We might read this, “SINCE you love Me, keep My commandments.” Love precedes works – always. We know this is the case because of Christ’s own example. It is His love for us that moved Him and that draws us to Him. Following Christ’s example, our love for Him cultivates within us a love for others and the obedience that is the soil for acts of worship. All we do in the way of obedience to Jesus is worship. We keep His Word and commandments because we love Him.

*... I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. – John 14:16*

How long will the Holy Spirit abide with us? Forever. We need not feel lost or forsaken in our moment of trial – the Holy Spirit is with us. His time with us is not limited. His presence with us, in us, over us, is enduring for all time. Take heart, believer! The third person of the trinity is with you as promised by our Lord. Do not forget that the Spirit is equal in power, glory, and authority with the Father and the Son. The Spirit is not a second-rate substitution for the presence of the physical Christ. He is truly God with us and God in us, and He will be forever.

... *Because I live, you will live also.* – John 14:19

What a promise! Jesus' resurrection is the proof that we shall live forever. His Spirit in us is the guarantee that we are His. As we share in His death, putting aside our past selves, we will share in His resurrection. This is not implied through some clever twisting of Scripture. This is not unclear or cryptic. Because He lives, we will also live! Jesus declares this in plain language! Our Lord lives forevermore, having conquered sin and death! We shall be with Him, alive in the truest sense, for eternity!

*At that day you will know that I am in my Father; and you in Me, and I in you.* – John 14:20

Unity – that is what we have from the triune God. All of the saints are inextricably bound up in the personhood of the Son. The Son, Jesus Christ, is enmeshed in the personhood of the Father. We are all, individually, grafted into this holy union by the will of God and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Is your life fragmented and strained? Are you experiencing a crisis of division or disunity? Are you in some sense separated, at arm's length, from the Father, Son, and Spirit? Is your life compartmentalized with spiritual bulkheads preventing that shared space in your spirit? It ought not be! Unity – unity with God is our state of being when we are His. Draw near to Him and find oneness.

*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.*  
– John 14:21a

Love is far more than a feeling, emotion, or memorable moment. Love, Christ's love, is enduring. His love is marked by obedience, faithfulness, consistency, and stability as He demonstrates His union with the Father. When we consider these things, perhaps the sparks of recognition begin to glow in our conscience as we begin to see that our contrivances of love fall far short of God's love. But, Lord, help us to be filled with and supported by Your love. Help us to love You, Lord. Teach us.

*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word – John 14:23a*

Jesus continues to reiterate this truth – love is recognizable by the deeds of the lover. Those who love the Lord keep His words. SINCE we love the Lord, we keep His commandments. We may find that we are still learning to love Him fully. We may find that our very human love or our attempts at love are miserable, failing, contrived, burdensome, or altogether false. It is Christ's Word that brings us back to the heart of the thing. Help us love like You love us, Oh Lord. Help us to keep Your Word.

*He who does not love me does not keep my words; – John 14:24a*

This message – that obedience and faithfulness to keep Christ’s words demonstrates love – is so important that Jesus reiterates this over and over again. Keeping His commandments is the evidence of our love for Him. Conversely, to be found unfaithful or disobedient in keeping His Word shows how little we love Him. Christ’s personhood and His Word are inextricably linked together. We who desire to love Christ must love His words also. We who have failed in this must repent and seek renewed obedience, not because we are seeking to justify ourselves but born solely out of our love for Christ. We love You, Lord. Help us love You, truly.

*...the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. –*  
John 14:24b

The Father, God, desires to speak to us. Jesus, being one with the Father, spoke His words faithfully. He didn't do so as some kind of soulless machine, but in unity with the Father, obedient to the Father, one with the Father. This is difficult to comprehend, but the truth is that the Father and the Son speak in unison.

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. – John 14:26*

We have communion in the Word with the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son declares the words of the Father. We who love Him keep His words. The Son, one with the Father, faithfully declares that which we obey. The Spirit, our abiding Helper, sent forth by the Father on behalf of the Son, also ministers in that very same Word – teaching us all things. We are taught by God! It is God who brings forth His Word to our minds, and as we dwell upon that Holy Word, we have communion with the triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit.

*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. —*  
John 14:27

Is your heart restless, anxious, or unruly? Are you searching for peace, repose, and stillness? Draw near to the Lord who gives us peace. He gives us HIS peace unconditionally, without strings, unachievable expectations, or performance goals. Jesus provides to us that peace that surpasses all understanding.\* We may ask, “How do I access that promise?” Draw near to Jesus. Bring Him your cares and find rest in His person.

\*Philippians 4:6–7

*And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. – John 14:29*

Our loving Lord has not left us clueless. He has warned us by His Word and by His Spirit of things to come. He has not done so to cause anxiety but that we may be further strengthened in our belief. While we don't know EVERYTHING that will come to pass, we do know SOME things. And, as we see those things manifested, we can count them as mile markers along our eternal path – attesting to the certainty of God's Word and the immediacy of Christ's return. Hang on! Know that Christ is growing our belief.

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. – John 15:1–2*

Christ is the TRUE vine. He is not just one of many other available options. He is not simply “a” vine. He is the true vine from which comes life. God the Father tends to the vine and the fruit. He cares for that blessed vine and for us the branches. He sees our fruit or our withered stalk. As He tends the vine, He removes that which has died and lifts that which bears fruit. In this, we find our truest nature with the Father and Son. We subsist by the Son’s life-giving nature. We are cared for by the Father. And as we find our place in God’s grand vineyard, we have communion with the Father and the Son, ultimately, so that we would bear fruit for the vine keeper.

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. –*  
John 15:4

Live in Christ. Derive all of your substance, life, worth, and energy from Him. We must remain attached to our Lord, the true vine, if we have any hope to produce true, living, and good fruit. Our greatest efforts apart from Him are predisposed to failure and rotteness. We must live IN Christ. Have you been striving to bear fruit only to find failure and disappointment? Do you feel dry and withered, only good for the wood pile? Be grafted back to your Lord and find life! Be revived by His Spirit, and allow Him to live in You.

*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. — John 15:5*

It is not enough for us to align ourselves with Christ in name alone. Nor is it enough to be close to Him in merely a spatial/geographical sense (like those who believe sitting in some sanctified building brings about holiness). We must dwell WITH Him. We must become part of His body in the most real terms – sharing a unity of substance. And He must become a part of us. Otherwise, we will be found barren in our efforts – fruitless. Make us part of You, Lord; graft us into Your holy vine. Make us the branches. Give life and cause us to bear fruit.

*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. – John 15:6*

As much as we look to the sweet promise of abiding in Christ, our true vine, we must acknowledge the alternative resting place for those divorced from the vine. We must not ignore the flames that wait for those fruitless, disconcerted, disconnected branches. So often, we look to these verses to encourage well-meaning workers to “stay plugged in” while ignoring the ultimate end of the disconnected member – fruitless, withered, tossed to the fire. Lord, by Your grace, keep us connected to you. Make us fruitful for Your glory. Keep us from the fire.

*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. –*  
John 15:9

The Love of the Father and the Son abounds to us. Christ loves us completely, fully – even as the Father loves Him. Let us remember how great the Father’s love is for us too! That He would give His only Son as a ransom for us! “How deep the Father’s love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He would give His only Son, to make a wretch His treasure.”\* Christ’s love is as great! He commands us to live, dwell, abide in His love. Do not be moved from that holy love, beloved.

\* Stuart Townend, *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us*, 1995.

*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*  
– John 15:12

How does Jesus love His disciples? To the very end.\* He loves us with a never-ending love because He is eternal. There shall be no end to Christ's love. And we are commended quite directly by our Lord that we should love one another likewise. We can try to contrive this sort of love, but this love comes only from abiding in Him and being filled with the Spirit, whom Christ promised to us. His love flows to us and through us to others. This everlasting love, which is so remarkable compared with other forms of love, is gifted to the saints by Christ for a purpose – that we might love others.

\*John 13:1

*These things I command you, that you love one another.* – John 15:17

Love is so important that Jesus repeats Himself! It's as if He is saying, "In case you missed it the first time ... love one another." The command that Jesus gave to these disciples is equally applicable and pertinent for our day and age. Love the disciples! Love those whom God has put in your family of faith. The disciples were expressly commanded to have this abiding love and affection for one another. We are to have the same thing in our era. Love those you are in fellowship with, serving with, suffering with – love them. Love them as Christ loves them. Try to see them with His eyes and His heart. Love one another.

*...all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. – John 15:21*

Where we find love in Christ and a community of disciples, we will also find conflict in this world. We will be hated and persecuted because the world we live in does not know God. We may be sorely tempted to strike up an alliance with our world so that we might guarantee our own comfort, but don't forget – friendship with the world is enmity with God! We do not desire the peace that the world gives nor any other faulty guarantees. We desire Christ's peace, and we will rest in His Word in the midst of any trial.

*He who hates Me hates my Father also.* – John 15:23

It is quite impossible to keep God while excluding Christ. Some have deluded themselves into thinking they can have one without the other. That thought is simply not based on reality. Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Spirit are so inextricably intertwined that we cannot have one without the other. They are of the same substance. More commonly, well-meaning believers try to shun the Spirit but keep the Son – it doesn't work that way. God's personhood is not a buffet to pick and choose from as we desire. As we are possessed by Him, we are to be grasped by His full nature, including those attributes that we are less than comfortable with. Let Him be all and in all.

*But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.*  
– John 15:26

The Holy Spirit speaks, testifies, and indicates truths about Jesus. He is described as the Helper – He helps us to understand Jesus. He helps us to keep His commands. He helps us to love one another rightly. Help us, Holy Spirit! He is called the Spirit of truth. Teach us, Spirit; instruct us in truth and teach us to know lies when we are confronted with them! He testifies of Jesus. Holy Spirit, we pray that You would teach us all about our Lord. Help us to know that He is truth.

*But because I have said these things to you sorrow has filled your heart.*

– John 16:6

As Jesus prepares His friends, His students, for suffering and to bear witness to His suffering, they are mightily challenged in their own hearts. They find themselves sorrowful – an accurate diagnosis on the part of Christ. They have seen so much victory over the years – healings, miracles, changed lives, people brought to life, people brought into the Kingdom! Now, as Jesus is instructing them on His departure, they might be wondering, “Is this how it ends?” This isn’t lost on Jesus. He diligently prepares their hearts to handle hardship. They were being instructed to lift their gaze from the earthly plane to the heavenly plane. Their lives would be marked by suffering, but their sorrow would only be temporary. Look up and see and understand what Jesus is doing. Gird yourself in His grace and cast aside your sorrow. Though we may suffer for the time being, He is preparing us for eternity.

*And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and of judgment. – John 16:8*

Part of the Holy Spirit's work is a convicting work. The very same Holy Spirit who brings comfort also brings forth conviction. Sometimes we are too hasty in trying to relieve others of that holy conviction supplied by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, undiscerning as we are, we attempt to undo that holy work of God being wrought in the life of a sinner. We must come to understand that this is outside our realm. It is not our place to stand between the Holy Spirit and people. The Holy Spirit brings conviction AND comfort by His perfect will. Often, if we let the Spirit have His way, that seemingly uncomfortable conviction brought by the Spirit will birth perfect comfort through repentance. Our role is to hear His voice, respond accordingly, and let Him have His way with His people.

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. –*

John 16:12

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus demonstrated that He understood not only the weight of His words but also the frailty of the human condition. As a skilled teacher, He knew that His beloved students had a limited capacity for hearing, thinking, understanding, learning, etc. He also knew, and still knows, of our limited capacity for suffering, confusion, trials, and the like. We are weak – prone to splitting apart at the seams when faced with too much! On this night, Jesus held back a portion of the whole counsel He desired to give them, not as some test to see if they can operate with limited information (as we sometimes believe), but because they cannot bear the fulness of Christ's instruction at that moment. Rather than overburdening or crushing His disciples, He waits and commends them to the care and instruction of the Holy Spirit. Jesus does the same for us. We don't have to drink from the firehose of theology. He is faithful to measure out exactly what we need as He teaches us.

*They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.” – John 16:18*

As Jesus instructs His disciples on His imminent death, confusion abounds. This isn't how they thought things would work out. This seems to be far from victorious. What does He mean ... a little while? In 3 days? In 2000 years? What's going on? We don't understand! After a few years of ministry with Jesus, they still became confused. They still tried to reconcile their personal conceptions of what Christ SHOULD do with how He ACTUALLY worked, taught, and lived. They, like us, were prone to misunderstanding and confusion. But take heart! Our Lord knows our confusion and brings peace. He doesn't acquiesce to our presuppositions or adjust His plans to fit our contrived narrative, but He is always true. He is ever faithful to teach us a better way if we would but listen.

*For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. – John 16:27*

You are loved by God! The almighty, sovereign creator of all things loves you and delights in your faith. As He appraises your belief in His Son, Jesus Christ, and the trust you have put in His redemptive act, His heart swells with love. You, the creation, are loved so dearly and completely and without equal. Teach us what this means, Lord, to the fullest extent. Help us to be carried forth, moved, propelled by Your great love for us.

*Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?” – John 16:31*

After years of ministry with God incarnate, the disciples affirm their belief in Jesus almost tongue in cheek. They say, “Oh, now we believe ... because You are speaking plainly.” This is a borderline subversive remark on Christ’s teaching style. Jesus responds, “... do you?” He further tells them that they will scatter in His hour of trial. Their professed belief wouldn’t be enough to stir up their courage when they became known as an associate of this man, Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing they had seen, nor heard, nor felt could steady them for the trial ahead – and they WERE scattered! Oh, how shallow our roots; how soft our steel. To profess a belief but not maintain it. Lord, be with us. Be our strength and our resolve when our sly declarations of faith elude us.

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* – John 16:33

Jesus' words and teachings do not eradicate tribulation, hardship, or suffering. We live in a fallen creation – cursed until that final and total end. But where do we find peace? Far too often, we look to our circumstances as the metric for our peace. Jesus says, “Have peace in Me.” He reminds us that all of our circumstances and the inevitable trials that come our way are already conquered. He is our peace, and He will never be conquered. Look to Jesus and His words for your peace.

*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. – John 17:3*

In the final hours before His betrayal, Jesus explains eternal life. This thought is really too rich to comprehend fully. What does it truly mean to KNOW God? We know Him through His Word, His Son, and His Spirit. The truly amazing thing is that we are actually bidden, invited, to know God intimately – not just in passing and not just as an acquaintance. To know Him deeply will take eternity. His ways are unreachable, past finding out!\* Praise God – He has made a way for us to come to know Him! He has given us eternal life! God has quite literally given us eternity to know Him more; *that* is unfathomable.

\*Romans 11:33

*For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. – John 17:8*

Jesus gives His disciples that which is most precious – God’s Word. He is the Word that stirs us to believe. By the Word, we know Him. By God’s Word, we believe. By God’s Word, Christ is made real to us unto everlasting life.

*I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. – John 17:15*

Our Lord prays for His disciples, His friends. His prayers are not so much concerned with a quick exit as they are with “keeping them from the evil one.” This is an interesting turn of phrase. By our own machinations, we often tip-toe toward and around temptation even as we are assailed by our enemy, the accuser of the brethren. Even so, we pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”\* Jesus’ prayer in this text is not that we would be removed from the trial, but that we would bear up under it. AND we can be certain that HIS prayers are more than effectual for our needs.

\*Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4

*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. – John 17:16–17*

Our own nature is to be bound up with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Since Christ is not of the world, we are not of the world. We are IN the world, but we are called to be separate from it, sanctified by His Word, set apart by truth. This prohibits both monasticism and worldliness. Jesus' ministry was to the worldly – even to us sinners in our former state. But as we are conformed into His image, we renounce those worldly appetites by His grace and seek to move among the world as our Lord did, as His Spirit moves us. As we move, we bring that same truth, that same good message, so others might hear and be sanctified.

*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word – John 17:20*

Jesus Christ, the Lord of all creation, our redeemer, prayed for us! Prayer is powerful, meaningful, necessary; and He prayed for us. We were on His heart as He called out to the Father in His evening of betrayal. All the trials awaiting Him could not keep Him from praying. Of all the things that He could have prayed for ... He prayed for us. Should we lose heart when we know that surely the Father hears Christ's prayer and will make it so? No, take comfort in knowing that you are cared for, loved, prayed for by the Lord, Himself! Thank you, Lord, for caring for us! We live off of your intercession for us – knowing that you pray for us still.

\*Romans 8:34

*...And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. – John 18:5b*

Where do you stand? Reflect upon that. Know where your position is. Are we with Christ briefly, maybe for just a season? Or, will we stand in His righteousness for all eternity? Many have claimed allegiance to Christ over the ages. They have pledged their undying faithfulness to Him only to be found standing with the enemies of the Lord – with the betrayers. Such a thought challenges the very foundations of our weak understanding of sovereignty, free will, grace, and how those intersect with one another. Lord, help us to be Yours alone. May we be found faithful by Your grace. May we stand in You alone.

*So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given Me?" – John 18:11*

Jesus does not need to be defended by Peter. He does not need to be defended by us. When we feel that our Lord's dignity is under attack, we sometimes flail about like some untrained, unskilled, newly conscripted soldier with no real understanding of how to handle a sword at all! In the flailing, we often end up wounding somebody else inadvertently. In the flailing, we fail to defend ourselves and become dangerously disoriented. The truth is that we need Jesus to defend us! He is our defender! Nothing occurs that is outside of Christ's sovereignty. This band of soldiers seeking His arrest did not surprise Him. When men defame Jesus and cast aspersion on His holiness, we should not be surprised by that. In the face of all the insults this world has to offer, Jesus is still Lord over all, God of creation, holding life in His hands. Jesus submitted to God's will. Can we?

*Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." – John 18:17*

Peter desired to follow Jesus. He did follow Jesus, right into a hearing, right into a crowd of accusers. BUT ... when the moment came to identify with the Lord, his boldness fled him, just as Christ predicted. Peter is conflicted. He desires to identify with and follow after Christ, but he is also susceptible to social pressure. Even as he desires to follow Jesus, he still wants to identify with the crowd in some measure. At the very least, Peter is unwilling at this time to be scorned like Jesus. Consider, can we be one with Jesus without sharing in His suffering? Can we have friendship with the world and friendship with God?\*

\*James 4:4

*Jesus answered Him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing."* – John 18:20

Jesus spoke openly. His message was available to all within hearing distance. He did not hide it, nor was He ashamed of the message because His words are the words of eternal life. How about us? We sometimes speak in whispers when discussing the gospel, as if we are entering into some grand conspiracy. But the message that we carry is truth! It is life! Do not be ashamed! Declare openly that hope that is in you! Share life.

*Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said. – John 18:21*

Have you heard the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ? Are you prepared to recount His teachings? We must! We have heard truth. We must be prepared, always, to relay those things we have heard. We have a duty and a calling to serve as a witness to the truth.

*Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!" – John 18:25*

As Peter warms himself by the fire, a fire made by the servants and officers of those who have imprisoned Christ, he is asked to confess his allegiance. Those gathered around the fire understand that Peter is different somehow. He doesn't quite fit in. And, when he is pressed, when the time comes to be true ... he conceals his true nature. He would rather blend in, perhaps conquered by fear of ridicule. We know the end – Peter's multiple denials of Christ break his heart. But Christ saw it coming and loved him still. What will you do at the fire side? Deny or confess? Blend in or speak truth?

*Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" – John 18:38*

Subjective truth is not new. We live in an era where people believe they are pioneers of personal liberty – each man free from oppression by adopting our own subjective truths or relative morality. This is far from novel. In the days of the Judges, each man did what was right in their own eyes.\* In Christ's day, Pilate asked, "What is truth?" In our day, we say, "to each their own." God's Word tells us that truth is knowable, but we love darkness more than light.\*\* We have struggled with truth and come away ignorant. BUT ... truth is knowable, and real, and everlasting. Remember Jesus' declaration, "... I am the way, the truth, and the life."\*\*\*

\*Judges 17:6, 21:25

\*\*John 3:20–21

\*\*\*John 14:6

*Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him their hands. – John 19:3*

Part of Christ's propitiation for us was being humiliated for our sakes. He was bruised for our transgressions, in totality, not just in the flesh, for that would be purely superficial. He bore the FULLNESS of God's righteous wrath for us, and we know that God's wrath is consuming, searching, penetrating. Behold, the God-man...wounded in all points, to bring us into peace with God.

*Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above..."* – John 19:11

The crucifixion and trial of our Lord was no accident. Christ was not caught unaware, outsmarted by a conniving government who felt threatened by His teaching. He acknowledged that He came to be a ransom, to give His life for many.\* God's sovereignty reigns supreme even in Christ's darkest hour. The suffering and indignity that Jesus endured was intentional, purposeful, not just allowed to happen to Him but MADE to happen to Him. And all the while, it is our destiny that Jesus lived out to make peace between a fallen creation and a holy God.

\*Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45

*...Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify Your king?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" – John 19:15*

God's special people, Israel, were always supposed to be ruled by God alone. He had communicated to them over and over that HE was their king. But, they rebelled over and over again. They sought out other gods, worldly leadership, political alignment with their one-time captors. Over and over, God still raised up men to bring them back from their errant paths. Christ is the final Shepherd for Israel, and they openly shunned Him in favor of a gentile king who worships other gods. Israel rejects Jesus, and yet God's faithfulness to them is still intact. He will redeem. For those of us who are His, let us pledge our allegiance to one Man, Jesus Christ. He is our only King.

*And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him. –*  
John 19:17–18a

Jesus had taught that one must bear his cross to follow Him. Oh, how those words must have echoed in the minds of those who watched this man Jesus, straining under the weight of His own, very real, cross. This cross is not metaphoric. It is His – heavy and publicly humiliating. It is rough, imposing, and promises certain death as the tortured body of our Lord hangs upon it. Yet, He did not go raving, as a madman, terrified and resisting. Instead, He carried His cross with intention. He endured it for the joy set before Him.\* Lord, as we look to You, help us carry our cross in a worthy manner.

\*Hebrews 12:2

*Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also a tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be." – John 19:23–24a*

We are those who are clothed in Christ's righteousness. We do not rob our Lord of it. He gives it to us freely, though it cost Him much. We do not cast lots and rely upon the luck of the draw so that we might have a scrap of Christ's robes. He purposefully, intentionally gives us new holy garments gleaming with His righteousness. It is without seam, weakness, or flaw ... by design. Except for Jesus, this garment would be unknown to us, and we would stand as we always have, destitute, filthy, ignorantly in our ragged righteousness. But by the cross, we are clothed in holiness forevermore. May we keep our garments clean as we wait upon our Lord's return.

*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" – John 19:28*

Jesus' suffering was prolonged on purpose. He was not granted a swift, painless execution. Time was needed to accomplish His purpose – atonement. He had to bear the penalty of our sins in His body, in totality. And He did. He faithfully bore the righteous wrath of God – experiencing the anguish and pain that we have each earned. Being God, Jesus knows when all has been fulfilled. This is a knowledge that only God, the Judge who passes the sentence, knows. But, being man, His flesh cries out for drink as His body withers. Consider the mystery ... at the cross, the dark moment of punishment, we see God and man, undeniable parts of Christ's being, displayed in unity – weakness and power. He knows all, feels all. Lord, teach us the fulness of who you are, how you rule over our circumstances and identify with our weakness.

*So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. – John 19:30*

Christ on the cross. The power of God and the frailty of man are here on display. The Son of Man, judged. At the cross, Jesus Christ gulped down the fulness of the wrath of God – such a sour potion – for our sakes. Having begun reconciliation between God and man, Christ enters into that last frontier that must be the culmination of all our sin – death. As He gives up His spirit, by His own accord, He enters now into the realm of our final foe – to conquer it once and for all. Oh, death, where is your sting?

*But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. — John 19:34*

By the cross, we are brought near to God. As sure as sin brings forth death, Jesus entered into that last full measure of sacrifice for our sakes. By the soldier's spear, His death is confirmed, brutal in its testing. By the good, we are reconciled to God. By the water, we are set apart and cleansed — as the water of the Word. Those who believe are to share in each of these fully — the blood and the water — whereby we are baptized into the Kingdom.

*And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. – John 19:39*

Oh, Nicodemus, the one who came by night, the one who heard the Lord's words, "You must be born again."\* Is this what you imagined eternal life looked like? Is this what victory is? Brutalized on a Roman cross, thrust through by a Roman spear? The one who told you wonderful things of everlasting life is undoubtedly dead. Can His words be true? Oh, Nicodemus. Does your heart break when you remember Him – His gentleness, His truth, and compassion? You honor Him now in the sight of men. His death has pulled you into public worship. Oh, what will His renewed life do to you!?

\*John 3:7

*So there they laid Jesus.* – John 19:42

The lifeless body of Jesus is laid to rest, entombed by men. Why? Because that's what we do with our dead. Let there be no question of Christ's total suffering and the end of it. Jesus Christ walked through that last full measure of human experience – death. The final disposition of Christ in the minds of those watching from afar was a garden tomb ... among the graves ... just like all other men. No hoax. No careful manipulation or trick of science. The cross, the beatings, the deprivation, the Roman spear, the hand of God all saw to the fulness of God's wrath conquering the mortal flesh of the Messiah. See His life traded for the life of the world. See His body laid to rest. See the Son of God's life extinguished as the propitiation for us.

*So they both ran together.* – John 20:4

Upon hearing of the empty tomb, and not yet knowing the full significance, Peter and John run together to that place. BUT ... they did not arrive together. John outran Peter. Perhaps his youth, maybe his enthusiasm propelled him. BUT ... they ran together, in substance. They ran to the same place, the same direction, and with the same motivation and desire – to see the empty tomb even though they didn't quite understand the cosmic importance of the moment. Are we running together? In heart, and substance, and hope, let us so run. Yes, others may be quicker. Nevertheless, our race is together and to the same place – to the resurrected Lord!

*For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. – John 20:9*

Once I was so sure of myself and my worldview – to the point of hurtful arrogance. I did not yet know the Scripture. I knew sound bites, platitudes, and cliches. I knew clever turns of phrase to force moral compliance, and I wasn't necessarily wed to even that basic cultural morality that our sermonizing demands. I did not yet know the Scripture. I certainly didn't understand the significance of the Resurrection. But God, by His Holy Spirit, is ever faithful to teach His holy Word. By it, we are changed. Our worldviews crumble, we crumble, as we encounter the ever-living God in the person of the resurrected Christ. Teach us Your Word, Oh God.

*...they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." – John 20:13*

Mary was wrong. Was she devoted? Yes. Was she faithful? Yes. Was she bold to even venture a visit to Jesus' grave? Yes! Was she in love with Jesus? Absolutely. Even in death, she declares Him as her Lord. But she was wrong. Her assumptions about what happened to the body of Jesus were, shaped by her limited information, untrue. Nobody moved Jesus' body. He was not taken away. And because she misunderstood Jesus' final disposition, she was grieved – without hope – reduced to tears. This is a story about us. We can be so much like Mary – believing, loving, submitting to the Lord, bold, serving, SEEKING! BUT we can find ourselves in that all too familiar position of hopelessness if we forget where our Lord is. He has not been moved by any man. He lives! He reigns!

*...go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." – John 20:17*

By the cross and the resurrection, we are brought fully into the family of God. We are siblings with Christ even as He reigns over us. We are adopted by our Father, our God. We may approach Him with all the familiarity of a beloved family member.

...*He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* –  
John 20:22

The Holy Spirit is so necessary for our relationship with Jesus. He is so necessary as we walk among this fallen creation. How could we find our way but by God's Word and the Spirit? Even as Christ told His disciples, "Where I go you know, and the way you know."\* We know the way because the Spirit who dwells in us is familiar with His home – His Kingdom —and He is showing us the way. Spirit, lead us onward. As fearfully unequipped as we are, we look to You to guide us.

\*John 14:4

*The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” – John 20:25*

Thomas was devastated. His entire worldview was turned upside down when Jesus was crucified. In His mind, the Lord was still dead. He acknowledged his own deep unbelief openly. Yet ... he remained in fellowship with his brothers in the faith. Modern Christians go through this too. Some even live in a perpetual state of doubt or unbelief – perhaps having experienced grievous loss. Perhaps Jesus didn't match their expectations. Perhaps in their minds, Christ is still dead. But, there is hope for those who truthfully acknowledge their unbelief, their doubts, while maintaining the bonds of fellowship. Jesus may yet come and show Himself. He is ever faithful. He desires that none should perish.

*Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” – John 20:27*

Having not been present when Thomas issues his confession of unbelief, Jesus still knows his hesitation deeply. Jesus does not come to cast Thomas out or belittle Him. Instead, Jesus brings peace and a chance for Thomas to see and feel the things that he longs for – the body of His Lord. It is Jesus’ desire, His command, that Thomas would find his belief in His resurrected body. The Lord comes to us too and bids us believe despite the loss experienced along the way. Be believing.

*And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God."* –  
John 20:28

Jesus Christ, by His wounds, pulled Thomas out of his unbelief. The fact of the resurrection, demonstrated in the marred body of Christ, resurrected Thomas' faith. This brought Thomas into a deep understanding of how Christ related to him. He is Lord – holding dominion over Thomas, sovereign in word and deed, unimpeachable. He is God – eternal creator of Thomas, maker, provider, the existing one. May we come to know Jesus in these realms as our Lord and our God.

*...Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.* – John  
20:29b

This is for us. We have not see the risen Lord bodily and yet we believe! We believe that we shall see Him face to face. During these millennia, since Christ brought Thomas to belief by His wounds, Christ has been bringing many to belief IN His wounds. We believe the wounds are there. We believe He was wounded for our transgressions. We believe He is risen. We believe He is preparing a place for us, that where He is, we may also be. We believe, having not seen. But ... we SHALL see.

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. – John 20:30–31*

We don't know everything. What a humbling and magnificent thought. We know SOME things. By those things, we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. BUT ... there's more! We don't NEED more. Jesus' grace is sufficient, the Scriptures are sufficient, and He has given us everything we need to know Him intimately. BUT ... there's more. Far surpassing mere human conjecture, there are unrevealed truths about Christ's life that add depth and vastness to who Jesus is. And we shall see Him one glorious day in all His fulness.

*After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples. – John 21:1a*

Jesus still had more to teach. The same is true for us as well. He comes to us, speaks to us, shows Himself to us again by His Spirit and His Word. We have much to learn, and He is ever faithful to meet us. AND He is showing Himself to others THROUGH us. Have we shown Jesus to others? Are we willing to be part of that ongoing work?

*Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."* – John 21:3

Much has been made of Peter's return to the fishing nets. Previously, Peter had left those nets to follow Jesus.\* Now, at the culmination of Christ's ministry, he returns to them. Having already seen the risen Lord, having seen His wounds, His empty tomb, having heard His resurrected voice, Peter returns to his nets. Perhaps he simply wanted a distraction from all that had transpired. Maybe doing something familiar could comfort him as he reflected on the hot and cold nature of his own belief ... his rebuke of Christ ... his stalwart assertion of faithfulness ... his failed courage ... his denial. One thing is sure; Christ will not leave Peter in the boat. As he was called before, even so the Lord's voice will call him into the water again. What have we returned to? The Lord will call you out again.

\*Matthew 4:18

*But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. – John 21:4*

Why didn't the disciples recognize Jesus? Especially Peter, James, and John – men with a particularly close relationship with Jesus. Perhaps they were too far away to discern those telltale mannerisms and expressions that would indicate their Lord was near. Perhaps they were not very mindful or concerned with the distant onlooker who stood at the shore, instead devoting their energy to the task at hand. Perhaps they were tired, having labored all night with no catch. Sound familiar? We have experienced all of this ourselves. Having known Jesus intimately, do we miss Him when He stands on the shore waiting for us?

*Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” They answered Him, “No.” – John 21:5*

Jesus is our sustenance – our bread of life. Except for Jesus, we starve! Apart from Him, we find that we are woefully unequipped to feed ourselves. We may labor long and search far, but what we require to satisfy our hunger still escapes us without Him. We are beggars for your bread, Oh Lord. We come to your table in need.

*And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. – John 21:6*

To know who Jesus is, we must listen and obey. In the listening, we hear His voice. Perhaps we’ve heard His voice a million times before, just like the disciples. But hearing alone does not help us know Him fully; otherwise, all of the souls who heard His blessed parables would be saved! BUT hearing, they did not hear, nor did they understand.\* It is in the obedience, the living of His life-giving words, that we come to know the certainty of WHO Christ is. It’s how we come to recognize Him. We walk by faith, and in that walk, our faith grows. We find every word of His to be true. Who is this man that speaks truth forever? God with us – the one leading us to abundance.

\*Matthew 13:13

*Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea. – John 21:7*

One time before, Jesus called Peter out onto the water. He went then, in miraculous fashion, and sank. Peter now goes of his own volition – willingly – knowing he will plunge beneath the water. The boat he is on will not suffice, in his moment of recognition, to carry him quickly enough to Jesus. So, he goes unaided into the water and toward Christ. The waves, the depths, the cold do not stay him. He will be with Christ in all of his soaking wet mess. Lord, help us to know You. Help us to come to You through the water.

*But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. — John 21:8*

Who is more holy? Is it the man who plunges into the sea straight away to be with the Lord, or the disciples who faithfully bring in the nets? Would we say that the disciples with the nets are more mindful of the things of the world? After all ... it was Jesus who told them to cast! The difference between the two parties is immaterial. These men, all of them, are Christ's chosen Apostles. They each have a role to play. They each come to the Lord serving as best as they knew how. Are you a swimmer or a rower? What matters is where you are heading. Let it be toward Jesus.

*Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast.”*

*– John 21:12a*

After a night and a morning of toil, hard work, the disciples are bidden to come and eat with the Lord. We will find ourselves laboring in Christ’s kingdom – what a blessing! We will find our faith challenged along the way. We will find that, except for the Lord’s word, our nets will be empty. As we listen for His voice and work alongside other followers of Christ we will find both rowing and plunging into the sea ... empty nets and full. But, in all of that, let us not lose sight of our first love. Let us continue in fellowship with the Lord Jesus as He invites us to eat at His table. He desires to eat with us – to feed us. Let us draw close to Him as we respond to His invitation.

*So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." – John 21:15*

Much has been made of the language in this passage. Does Peter love Christ perfectly? Does he love Christ partially? Why does Jesus ask three times? Does this have anything to do with Peter's three-fold denial? Many questions remain. What we know for certain is that the dialogue occurred and centered on the love of Christ that Peter possesses. "Do you love Me?" That is the question. Likewise, do we not all find ourselves in a similar dialogue with Jesus? Are we not asked daily whether or not our love for Christ is real in a thousand different ways? Have we not also been the denier – choosing evil rather than good? Should we not take more time to examine our hearts and answer the question? Nevertheless, as with Peter, we are not cast out, rebuked, or publicly scolded. The Lord brings us aside, in the quiet place, and speaks with us. Finally, knowing that we do not intrinsically deserve the honor, Jesus implores us to feed His sheep. Who? Me? Yes! Feed the little lambs, loved one. Trust that His grace, HIS LOVE, is sufficient, even when ours is not.

...*He said to him, "Follow Me."* – John 21:19

Here is the heart of everything – to follow after the Lord Jesus, in the bedraggled states that we find ourselves. Having denied, cursed, fled, but also having professed heavenly truth and having left the boat, Peter is given his marching orders for the rest of his life – “Follow Me.” All who come to Christ are so instructed, complicated as we are. We will fail miserably, and we will succeed beyond imagination! But hold one thing constant in the face of failure and fair weather – “Follow Me.” Do not turn to the left or the right, but follow where Christ leads.

*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. — John 21:25*

Jesus still works today. Your life, your story, fits among the eternal volumes that are composed by the Spirit for the Kingdom. We must testify of these things. Jesus still works, still moves, and we, the saints, are the result of His handiwork. We ARE His handiwork. All blessing and honor and glory to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His reign lasts forevermore. Amen.

# 1 JOHN

*...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. – 1 John 1:3*

John emphatically declares his eyewitness account of Christ, just as his spiritual brother Peter does in his second letter. He proclaims so certainly the undeniable fact of Christ, the God-man with us, that it inspires fellowship among those who believe. The foundation for the fellowship of the saints is *only* Jesus Christ. It is through Him that we relate to the Father and the Spirit. Any unity found among the church is woven through the reality of Christ and the certainty of the gospel.

*...these things we write to you that your joy may be full.* – 1 John 1:4

Do we do this? Is what we – those who are set apart by God to preach the gospel and wash the feet of the saints – is what we communicate a joy to the hearer? Certainly, not every sermon, nor every interaction, will put a smile on our faces – nor should they. There is a time for contrition and conviction and repentance. But these are also elements of the complete joy we find in the message of Christ. Our joy is born out of the love of Christ for us, “while we were yet sinners.”\* Or do we find ourselves on a self-appointed mission to snuff out joy in the Body by our callous or burdensome message to God’s children? Hear now – Christ’s yoke is easy!\*\* Rejoice in the good news! Christ has overcome the world!

\*Romans 5:8

\*\*Matthew 11:30

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. – 1 John 1:8*

This is our natural state. Humankind has gravitated toward relativism to the extent that each man's truth is his own. And who are we to question that? But the certainty of God's Word declares that we are all under the sway of sin – that we all have failed to live up to God's standard of holiness. The one who denies his sin is not found wandering in exile in the secular world but is found in our midst! They wander through the church, having forgotten that they were bought at a price – Christ's life – and did not make payment on their own. We also are gullible enough to deceive ourselves into believing the lie. But for Christ's work, we would still be under the penalty. Lord, keep us from believing the lie.

*My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. – 1 John 2:1*

The saint's responsibility is to follow the Shepherd closely – to be holy. Our holiness is purely contingent on our faith in Christ and cannot be arrived at through our own works. But this does not diminish the call of Christ to pick up and bear our cross daily. Most assuredly, the weight of that cross is too much to carry, and we will all lose strength at some point. This is where we best understand the grace of our Lord – who stands eternally between us and our just punishment. He bore His cross once, for all, and makes us holy by His own blood. So be holy, just as He is holy. He will equip us with the required endurance. And should we falter along the way, He lifts our heads into eternity.

*...by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” – 1 John 2:3*

The impact of the Upper Room Discourse found in John’s gospel cannot be overstated as it relates to John’s continued ministry. These words are derived from Jesus’ teaching to His disciples during His final moments with them before His betrayal, “If you love Me, keep my commandments.”\* This idea is not meant to be conditional in nature – like an exchange of services. Rather, the thought rests on the foundation of a pre-established relationship that drives the disciples’ actions. To paraphrase: *since* you love Me, *you will* keep my commandments. Remember that our deeds are the evidence of our faith, and in John’s verse, we can reconcile the legalist and the laggard.

\*John 14:15

*I write to you little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. – 1 John 2:12*

The forgiveness imparted to us through the death of Christ and proved through the resurrection is not intended to assuage our guilty conscience in a self-gratifying manner.

Indeed, our forgiveness is not FOR us. The forgiveness that we receive is based on the fact that our Holy God promised to redeem mankind through His Son and accomplished that promise on the cross. “Let God be true, but every man a liar!”\* We are saved for His eternal glory – to prove Jehovah strong, and faithful, and true – for His name’s sake.

Everything else is incidental to that fact.

\*Romans 3:4

*Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. – 1 John 2:23*

The foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ – the Son – reconciling our debts in His body as directed and predestined by the Father. A prevailing sentiment of our time is the idea that one can have God without Christ. This often manifests itself in questions like, “Don’t all roads lead to God?” or “Why do I need Jesus to get to God?” John’s answer is that the Father and the Son exist in unity – God and Jesus Christ are one. They are inextricably linked, as Christ taught, “No one comes to the Father but by me.”\*

\*John 14:6

*For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. – 1 John 3:20*

An accusing heart is one of the most pervasive obstacles preventing people from committing their souls to Christ's care. We feel like we are simply not good enough. Our own hearts condemn us and whisper lies to us continually – even after we have come to Christ. This is why it is so crucial that we remain anchored in God's Word, that we remain focused on what He has promised us. One of those promises is that He is ever faithful, even when we are not.\* God's Word tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?"\*\* So why should we trust our accusing hearts while we are in the palm of the Almighty? We shouldn't. We ought to trust Christ, who knows all things, including every ounce of our being. He is faithful and steadfast and truer than our hearts will ever be. He is greater.

\*2 Timothy 2:13

\*\*Jeremiah 17:9

*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. – 1 John 4:10*

Our relationship with God was never, and is never, contingent on how we feel about Him. In Paul's letter to the Romans, we learn that Christ demonstrated His love towards us while we were still in our sin by dying for us.\* So then, we come to the paradox of being steeped in sin and wickedness – yet in love with God. In this, we see that even our bravest attempts at faithfulness prove tenuous at best. Can it be? Any love we have, or the capacity thereof, is only truly gifted to us and brought to fruition by the Father above. Apart from His love, we are all counterfeits – pretending a behavior we can never fully grasp apart from Christ.

\*Romans 5:8

*Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. – 1*

John 4:17

This confirms the finality of Christ’s work on the cross. He is not saving us bit by bit but all at once and completely. This is not a metaphysical declaration of a work to come. The believer stands before the Father, perfect in Christ. Indeed, the Holy Spirit continues to refine our obedience to the Father in the present, but John’s bold statement is, “as He is, so are we in *THIS* world.” There is no greater proclamation of grace. We certainly do not deserve the holiness in which we are draped. And there is no greater calling to the saints than to walk worthy of this gift. Live out this truth – be “as He is.”

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves Him who is begotten of Him. – 1 John 5:1*

To know Christ is to know God. Since the earliest days of the Faith, there has been an insidious deception that one can know God without Christ – that a relationship with Christ is not necessary for one to know God. The truth is that Christ Himself declared, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.”\* In the same breath, however, even one of Christ’s beloved disciples says, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus responds, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me? ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father....”

\*\* Still, there are those who presume to question God’s sovereign design for salvation while grasping vainly for the Father’s hand. It cannot be. Is there any greater way to insult our creator? The evidence of our love for the Father is born out in our love for His Son – Jesus.

\*John 14:6

\*\*John 14:8–9

*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. – 1 John 5:13*

The saints addressed in this letter had not seen the risen Lord in the flesh, yet they believed it was so unto eternal life. John wanted to be sure to encourage them in their faith, to affirm their belief. He exhorts them to continue in their belief, implying an alternative course of ruinous disbelief. May our Lord grant us endurance and faithfulness as we desire to continue in our belief. May our roots grow deep and firmly anchored through studying God's Word, prayer, and being a witness to eternal life that comes through Christ's namesake. This is the fundamental purpose for this epistle – to encourage the saints to a personally dedicated endurance. Not all who run win the prize.

*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.* – 1 John 5:19

Who is the wicked one? None other than the father of lies, the accuser of the brethren – Satan. The point here is that we ought not to be caught off guard, just as he writes, “he who is born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.”\* First and foremost, the saints must know that we have an enemy – we are opposed! Second, we must know who our enemy is and that “he is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.”\*\* Guard yourself! Be watchful! But do not be terrified! Take courage in the assurance that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world,”\*\*\* and fight on! By the Spirit of God, wage the good warfare.

\*1 John 5:18

\*\*1 Peter 5:8

\*\*\*1 John 4:4

## 2 JOHN

*And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have heard from the beginning: that we love one another. – 2 John 5*

Jesus delivered this commandment to His closest disciples during the upper room discourse on the eve of His betrayal. John was there, and this is the unceasing drumbeat of his doctrine – that the saints ought to have a holy, unconditional love for one another. In this passage, he pleads with the “lady” on this point – imparting this directive to love with special emphasis. This concept is hard to grasp outside of the Gospel. Truly, our only example of this is Christ’s love for humanity. John writes in his account, “having loved his own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”\* And He loves without boundary and without end as the Risen Christ.

\*John 13:1

*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. – 2 John 10–11*

This deception, that Christ did not come in the flesh, that He was some sort of apparition, or on the other hand not fully God but completely and utterly human, was already besieging the church in John's day. This heresy still exists in many forms today. We have largely ignored the instruction to not receive those who ignore the deity of Christ and the truth of the triune God – nor greet them! Instead, we reason to ourselves that we might persuade them. In doing so, we discover that such people, having once been presented with the true gospel, have willfully taken it in their hands to distort the truth of God – ignoring both the Holy Scriptures and the Spirit who testifies of these things. May we be obedient to God's Word and have no part in these lies. Certainly, there is a time and place for persuasion, for calling people to be reconciled to God – to give a defense for our faith. John's instruction is to beware of people peddling an alternative gospel, a mutant version of the gospel that has become mired in confusion – one that does not bring the peace of God. May our Lord grant us discernment and wisdom.

# 3 JOHN

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. – 3*

John 4

John labored for the church. He suffered tremendously for the church, for the gospel's sake, and for the name of Jesus. In fact, he also knew that those whom he called his children were called to similar suffering. He also knew that not all who take up the name Christian or disciple will remain steadfast to the end. Certainly, he had witnessed his fair share of believers swept off the map by one thing or the other. I'm sure that for him to hear of the perseverance of the saints, his spiritual children, made his heart swell. The same is true today. The casualty list is long, but our hearts are encouraged by those who still remain. May our Lord keep us, and may we remain as an encouragement to others through our perseverance.

*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. – 3 John 9*

We may find it surprising, even appalling, that a legitimate, trustworthy eye witness to the risen Christ, one who had given so much for the edification of the saints, would now be suppressed and contended against in his own time by an illegitimate poser. This truth is applicable for every age. Men will seek to exalt themselves and control the message of the church at all costs, especially when that message – the gospel – threatens their position or livelihood. It is astounding how quickly after the resurrection, the church became a place for false teachers, wolves, and enemies of true scriptural doctrine. May God give us discernment in these matters and protect us from deception.

*I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.*

*Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name. – 3*

John 13–14

The fellowship of the saints, through our shared faith in Jesus Christ, is central to a life of discipleship. We can accomplish much through correspondence – especially in our technologically advanced age – but coming together face to face is a unique way of stirring our hearts and spurring us on towards action. We who believe must endeavor to bear in mind that we are the bride of Christ – what profound gravity! Our fellowship with the Son and with one another is holy and appointed by the God of creation for encouragement, instruction, assistance, joyful worship, and common prayer. Christ meets with us when we congregate – He promises to be in our midst! May our hearts yearn for sweet communion with the saints.

# REVELATION

*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy,  
and keep these things which are written in it; the time is near. —*

Revelation 1:3

We believe that the entirety of scripture is God-breathed, inspired, and under divine protection by Jehovah God for the instruction of the saints and His holy church. Based on that belief, the words of John here in the opening of his Revelation carry a two-fold message. The first is for those who read and hear the words of this exceptional book – Revelation. The subtle implication is the promise to the reader AND hearer – but we must internalize the message. The second, and universal truth, regards the study and reception of the ENTIRETY of God’s Word and positions Revelation as the capstone of our holy canon. May God grant us wisdom while studying His Word, the Bible. May we grasp His promises and live out His truth – for the time is near.

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” –*  
Revelation 1:8

This statement ought to be the center of examination for those seeking to know God’s character, the core of His being. When we wonder in our hearts, “Who are you God?” – we find more than we asked for in this answer. The fulness of God’s person is bound up in each distinct thought. Spend some time on each thought – the beginning ... the end. Truly the profound vastness of God’s person may escape us altogether. In this, our own authority and power are rightfully displaced to give way to the majesty and universality of God in the person of Christ who proclaims, “I am....”

*And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.”* – Revelation 1:17

Much has been said about the proper reverence we must have for God as our heavenly Father. We know the necessity of a properly held fear of the Lord, one that is similar to the respect we demonstrate towards our earthly parents. But in our reverence toward God, there is no terror. Let’s not forget that the third person of our God is the Comforter. So He, the Comforter – *parakletos* – is present with John in the midst of his very real, albeit momentary, fear. He extends the right hand of blessing and implores, “Do not be afraid.” The remainder of Christ’s exhortation, “I am the first and the last,” demolishes any fear held in our finite existence. We are blessed by the almighty, eternal God who urges us to find peace in HIS everlasting nature.

*...you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. – Revelation 2:3–4*

The first archetype Christ addresses while instructing the churches in Revelation is a “doing” church. He sees their work and perseverance but identifies that their focus has shifted over time from Him to the work of their hands. Christ instructs them to return to their first works – their first love – because no matter how righteous our works are, or how noble the cause, they should never be a substitute for our relationship with Jesus Christ. This rebuke is certainly cutting to the church of our day, where many have left their first love, Christ, and become enamored by the labor itself.

*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches;  
To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in  
the midst of the paradise of God. – Revelation 2:7*

We must actively listen for the voice of God. He is speaking and has committed truth to us by the Spirit and through the Holy Scriptures. Through these, we begin to know Him. The danger is to stop listening for the Spirit's voice while becoming entangled in anything else – well-intentioned or not. And what is the Spirit calling out to us? Perseverance of belief – which we certainly can't accomplish apart from God's Spirit in us. He equips us even in the midst of calling us to press on.

*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. –*  
Revelation 2:10

Christ encourages the church in Smyrna to have peace while they are staring suffering full in the face. He calls us to peace as we are enveloped in the vastness of God's sovereignty. Indeed, any suffering or persecution the church endures is in the sight and reach of the Almighty. We do not need to fret in our hour of trial – but take new courage! You have been chosen in that moment to serve as God's champion before the world and unseen powers. May we remain steadfast to the end and prove our God strong.

*I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to my name, and did not deny my faith. – Revelation 2:13*

This church is in the thick of it. Their environment is not what we would call “ideal.” They exist a world apart from the sanitary conditions we expect our churches to be surrounded by today. Moreover, this church is assailed by supreme wickedness –where Satan dwells! Yet, their faithfulness to Christ was steady even in the midst of tremendous persecution. Take note that they did not deny HIS faith – our faith is consistently and predictably shaky. His faith is everlasting and extends to us even while we are found to be faithless. Lord, grant us a steadfast heart in the midst of darkness. Keep us as we fight against ourselves, imposters, and a shaky faith. Help us remain faithful.

*But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. – Revelation 2:24–25*

A compromised church with a small contingent of faithful disciples remaining – holding fast to Christ. They are beset on all sides by doctrinal compromise, filth, and lies. Not knowing who to trust on their left and right. And all of this is wrapped up in the skin of the church! This is a very real threat.

Perhaps you have encountered it yourself. It has happened before and will happen again. In fact, it may be occurring even now. But for those faithful believers in this church, Christ says, “Hang in there. Be faithful. Endure.” Notice, He doesn’t tell them to run away or bail on fellowship with one another but to hold fast what they have. Certainly, this path will lead to conflict, but our Lord will give them, and us, the required endurance. Hold fast.

*...I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* – Revelation 3:1

These are hard words for us to hear from our Lord. They are hard to swallow and can leave a bitter taste in our mouths. However, we know that He is a true and faithful witness. His words are not intended to wound, but words like these certainly leave a mark, as they should. He loves us as a Father. He loves His church like an expectant groom. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful – open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.”\* Our Lord warns us and corrects our course because His desire is for our eternal souls. Who better to give life to a dead, false, or fraudulent church than THE life-giver, conquerer of death – Jesus Christ. Hear and obey, church.

\*Proverbs 27:5–6

*I know your works. See I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name. – Revelation 3:8*

The works of Christ have never been contingent on the qualities of humans. His purpose will be accomplished because he is sovereign over all. To prove this truth, Christ uses weak and damaged instruments – people like us, with just a little strength. As Paul writes, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.”\* We pray to be this faithful body, to keep Christ’s word, to hold fast to His name. And to do so by His strength when we find ours to be so insufficient.

\*1 Corinthians 1:26–27

*Behold I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. – Revelation 3:11*

In this statement, we find the explicit promise from our Lord that He is coming again. Wherein, we the church exist in a second era of advent, patient expectation, waiting upon the second arrival of our promised Redeemer. This notion is certainly challenging and has been ruinous to the faith of some. The Apostle Peter shared his thoughts as inspired by the Holy Spirit, writing, “Knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”<sup>\*2</sup> But we, the household of faith, wait with purposeful expectation. We find here, too, that we will be challenged for our crown in that season of waiting! But it is ours to keep or surrender. May Christ give us the faith through our expectation to hold fast to Him no matter the severity of our challenge. Lord, come quickly.

<sup>\*2</sup> Peter 3:3–4

*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.* – Revelation 3:19

These are the sincere words of a loving Father towards His children. Good parents correct their kids! Christ's desire is for His church to remain steadfast in expectation and conduct, to demonstrate faith. It must cause our Lord great pain to look upon an apathetic Body who is called by His name. But He does not forsake us at the heap of grievous offenses we bathe in because we are *HIS* along with all of our flaws, baggage, and poor behavior. We are His alone, purchased at great price. He corrects us and calls us to faithfulness, to a closer following, to repentance. Christ's everlasting promise is, "*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne*"\* The grace of our Lord is boundless. Lord, help us to see our condition truly, with open eyes and a malleable heart, and to heed your correction.

\*Revelation 3:21

*Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. —Revelation 4:2*

This is the one true eternal God – Jehovah. He reigns forever over all things. That is all. Our morality, social causes, our very humanity are all within the realm of His dominion and are not co-equal to our Holy King. However, we often set up fraudulent thrones on earth where we coronate what we hope will be the right and just ruler of our hearts — some cause, emotion, or thought. Nonetheless, these are all contrived by our own will. They all fall before the almighty creator. He alone will reign. He is good and just, and He alone can rule our hearts rightly.

*But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." – Revelation 5:5*

Take heart, believer! Our Lord has prevailed! Jesus Christ is the only one in eternal existence who is capable of redeeming mankind, and He has prevailed! The suffering and confusion we are shadowed by is passing away and lingers on the saints of God at its own peril. Our Lord is faithful to redeem – even as He holds the deed to humanity in his bloodied hand. Do not waiver, faint, or be terrified, for He is with us always, even to the end of the age\* – and He is coming.

\*Matthew 28:20

*I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they hold ... then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who would be killed as they were was completed. –*

Revelation 6:9–11

There are some who go by the name “Christian” who teach a message of heaven on earth – paradise here in the present. You can live your best life with the world’s riches at your grasp! This message is preached to the extent that it has created a modern, pseudo-christian paganism. Christ never promised us an easy discipleship with pockets big enough to carry all the treasures we would accumulate. He promised that His yoke is easy. We must be bound to Him, even in suffering, to experience His yoke. The saints pictured in this passage were faithfully bound to Christ even unto death. They were not looking for a theocratic reinvigoration of earth’s governments but looking expectantly and with certainty for the return of Christ. Their death bears witness to their faith; it is the evidence of their faith. May we be bound to Christ’s yoke. May we be found faithful, alongside our Lord.

*After these things I looked, and behold a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. – Revelation 7:9*

God's kingdom is not divided as we have made it. His kingdom is open to all who put their hope in Christ. How glorious to see this as God's plan. Keep in mind that this sprawling assembly of saints will endure great suffering for Jesus' sake before receiving their robes, yet they stand as one body – whole. There will come a time when all of our "other" causes will be burned like chaff for the cause of encouraging one another to endurance in our shared faith. Help me see my eternal family every day, Lord, not by color or country but through the lens of Christ's blood.

*...for the lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. – Revelation 7:17*

In the midst of tremendous suffering and chaos that surrounded these weary tribulation saints, Christ was faithful to meet them in their moment of trial and shepherd them into faith, into eternity. That is His unchanging nature and His heart for all people. That thought is concentrated in Christ's teaching, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*\* And while this glorious company of battered saints may have taken their sweet time to come to Christ, He places no lesser value on their faith. Why? Because it is not about them. Furthermore, our faith is not really about us. It is always about Christ and His faithfulness. Our good shepherd remains faithful. He will shepherd them as He has done so for us.

\*John 10:10–11

*Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. — Revelation 8:5*

God's judgment is holy. God's judgment is fair and just. The fire from the altar is pure, undefiled, and holy. God's judgment poured out upon the earth is, first and foremost, devoid of evil intent. God's patience towards mankind and His desire for reconciliation endures for millennia (even to this day) — in which we see God alone providing reconciliation through the person of Jesus Christ. Finally, we see that God is faithful to His promises and judgments. He is faithful to his Word.

*...I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book." And he said to me, "Take and eat it, and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be sweet as honey in your mouth." – Revelation 10:9*

Just so, we too are to consume the Book – a practice that has fallen out of fashion in many Christian circles. How else do we receive spiritual sustenance? We must take God's Word in our hands and eat it up! In it, we find the sweetness of peace and joy and everlasting life. By it, we are challenged in our innermost being. Our gut is put to the test. Can we stomach God's words?

*...there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. – Revelation 11:13*

While John's Revelation has gained an unfair reputation for being all doom and gloom, it is important that we always remember God's nature. He is not arbitrarily bringing chaos and disorder upon humanity. His heart is for us! Even the purpose of this calamity is to bring people to Him. Oh, that men would be saved without going through tragedy! But we know that is not always the case. Blessed is the man whose trust in God is, from the very beginning, unspotted from the tragedy of human sin. That would be a very rare creature. Most of us exist in the realm of faith stirred by earthquakes.

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. – Revelation 12:11*

To wage an almighty fight against Satan, the accuser of the brethren, requires these things. Sometimes we can become overly verbose while attempting to instruct others in their faith. We invent “how to” guides for “walking out your victorious Christian life!” John’s words here have a gravity and simplicity that cannot be ignored. We overcome, first and foremost, by the blood – Christ’s blood. This points to an act on Christ’s part and on our behalf that exists apart from any action of ours. Furthermore, we overcome by the Word — the holy Scriptures! Our final act of resistance is born out, by not holding too tightly to our earthly person – dying to ourselves. Lord, Help us cling to this daily that we might overcome.

*Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. –*

Revelation 12:12

Dangerous times befall humanity because of our enemy, particularly because his time is running out. Indeed, he has lost any perceived power through the bounty of the cross, and he relies on his chief scheme, deception, to convince men to turn over their inheritance. Our enemy spews lies disguised in the glory of God's Word, whispering, "Hasn't God said..."\* His wrath is on display as one fighting a battle known to be lost and striving to inflict as many wounds as possible before final defeat. He is unable to fulfill the sweet promises he has peddled to gullible pilgrims, and now he defaults to his true nature – raging and throwing a tantrum like a child. He, too, is a created being, and his time is short. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."\*\*

\*Genesis 3:1

\*\*1 Peter 5:8–9

*He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints.* – Revelation 13:10

In the midst of tremendous violence and chaos – a world ruled by wickedness – it seems only natural that people should seek to assert themselves, defend themselves. In desperation, people will even justify committing violence to protect what they perceive as basic human rights and dignity. Let it not be so for every person named a saint! May we cast off our earthly rights in exchange for our Lord's righteousness. Faced with brutality and death, may we patiently and faithfully bear our light and momentary affliction in exchange for eternal peace with our Lord. By the Spirit that dwells in us, may we demonstrate Christ's nature before a raging world.

*And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by these signs which he was granted to do. – Revelation 13:14*

The thing about being deceived is that we never know at the moment we are being deceived, or certainly, we wouldn't allow ourselves to be taken advantage of. It is always after the fact that we realize we have been scammed and are just crushed! But here, God gives an explicit warning to those who will experience unmatched spiritual deception by a skilled con artist. People who have lived their lives saying, "If I could just see a sign," will be a prime target for this scam. Jesus teaches in Mark 13:22–23, "false Christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive if possible even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand." The saints are not exempt! Be wise! Be discerning! Don't live in fear; that's not Christ's spirit. Measure what you see and hear against the certainty of God's Word because He remains faithful and true.

*Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell in the earth – to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. – Revelation 14:6*

This book we call Revelation has unfortunately received a bit of an unfair characterization throughout history. People are sometimes drawn to it out of a fascination for the mysterious or some sort of dark morbidity. Some people are simply trying to answer the question, what happens next? Sometimes, people are repulsed by the violence and tremendous vision of suffering. God has taught me gently to see this book through His eyes – with grace, and love, and holiness. Even in the midst of what appears to be terrible deception, death, and pain, God sends a messenger. He sends the gospel – the good news! There is hope in Christ! Our Father will never abandon His creation. He offers a millionth chance to drink at the fountain of grace and mercy. His love never fails.

*...and they have no rest day or night who worship the beast and his image and whoever receives the mark of his name. – Revelation 14:11*

There is no rest apart from Christ. This truth is eternal. James writes, “Do you not know that peace with the world is enmity with God?”\* We know that there is true rest and peace in Christ, that His yoke is easy! We know that the thief has come to steal, kill, and destroy, but Christ has come that we would have life more abundantly!\*\* Know where to find rest – in the person and promises of Jesus Christ. Shun the lies of the enemy, for his promises are hollow and allegiance with him and with the world will bring only restlessness. Cling to the promises of our faithful Lord; His promises are enduring, and His rest is eternal.

\*James 4:4

\*\*John 10:10

*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." –*

Revelation 14:13

Over and over again, we get to see God's heart for His people. He knows that the labor of these saints is strenuous. He knows that they will have to be deadly serious about their work until the very end. By John's pen, He encourages them with the promise of rest and, in some measure, that their works have meaning. Their works have eternal meaning because they are wrought faithfully in His name! May we be like these saints, looking to our rest and not crippled by a fixation on it. Instead, let us be working for the kingdom until the end. May it be said of us that our works follow us.

*And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: 'Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested. – Revelation 15:2–4*

It is the saints' good and eternal pleasure to worship God!  
Our worship contains truth and magnifies the glory of our  
Lord. May His praise go on forever!

*And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments." – Revelation 16:7*

As God's judgment is poured out upon the earth, people will say, "What kind of loving Father would punish people like that?" even while their last cynical question hangs on their lips, "Why would a loving God let bad things happen to good people?" This is the reconciliation of those two thoughts. A Father who has seen His kids abused and murdered brings forth the fullness of His wrath; and God's wrath is devoid of evil. God's judgment is true and righteous in its application and execution. This complete judgment, poured out upon humanity, and witnessed in Revelation, is the recompense for ages of crime patiently endured by our Father. As the psalmist writes, "But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand."\* Lord, help us to understand that while our judgment and wrath are often vindictive and ugly, Your judgment and wrath remain true and righteous.

\*Psalm 10:14

*They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. – Revelation 16:11*

Rather than come humbly to the Great Physician for relief, some people would prefer to rage against Him in their pain. In the midst of their deserved torment, these afflicted people are consciously choosing to blaspheme God. They are cursing His holy name for all they are worth! In Him alone resides the anesthetic that they desire, but because of the hardness of their hearts, they would much rather suffer, with curses on their lips, than repent and know peace and relief. God, give us soft hearts! May our circumstances never cause us to curse Your name.

*Behold I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.* – Revelation 16:15

Keep your clothes on! When some people come home, they immediately begin disrobing. They are getting comfortable because they're home. They have entered into their rest, or at least a *place* of rest. Listen, Christian. Keep your clothes on; you have not yet entered into your rest! Don't get too comfortable. This place is not your home! Watch and pray, our Lord is coming back! Don't be caught unprepared for that glorious meeting. And what is our attire? Put on Christ. Trade your rags for that heavenly garment, the righteousness of Christ, and be ready.

*Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"*  
– Revelation 16:17

Finality rests solely with our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the completion of God's wrath, poured out upon Christ, was marked by similar wording – "It is finished,"\* so too there is an end and completion of God's judgment upon humanity. The former judgment seals a gift of salvation to those who believe and cling to the hope of Christ. The latter marks the completion of God's judgment on mankind. Since those who endure this final judgment will have purposefully rejected that first declaration of God's judgment on our behalf, poured out upon the suffering Christ, they will be required to pay the entire debt – a debt that culminates in eternal separation from God. Take joy, believer; the finality of God's wrath has been born by Christ on our behalf and pronounced complete in His declaration, "It is finished!"

\*John 19:30

*These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful. – Revelation 17:14*

Humanity, given over to depravity, loudly rages against Christ. These are the last flailing throes of a desperate animal. But Christ's victory is certain! Sin will be conquered. Death will be defeated. Any emissary or mercenary operating under those two banners will be vanquished. Christ is pre-eminent over all, and the encouragement to the saints is this: you, dear one, are called! In fact, you are chosen! By God's grace, you WILL BE found faithful.

*And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."* –

Revelation 18:4

Our Father, by His strong hand and the authority of His Word, keeps His people from wrath. He directs them, commands them, and delivers them from captivity across time! The consistency with which God has done this throughout history, both physically and spiritually, is nothing short of miraculous. Here, God's people are kept from experiencing His righteous wrath as they are called out of a world ruled by a false religious system. Today, God calls each of us out of wrath through the covenant of Christ's blood. We are called to escape wrath! Help us to be obedient, Lord. Help us to listen for your commands.

*The fruit that your soul has longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. – Revelation 18:14*

Our treasures, apart from God, are trash. The things that people rely upon to satiate their desires for fulfillment, apart from Christ, are fleeting. How often have we experienced this? Nevertheless, we still believe that the next object of our desire will bring lasting fulfillment. That contrived joy, peace, exhilaration, or any other emotion we have attached to our momentary fulfillment will fade one day – forever. Our only prospect of partaking in eternal satisfaction is bound up in the everlasting riches of our King. He alone satisfies our deepest needs and gives liberally to His children. He alone provides the desire of our hearts because we are the desire of His heart!

*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready." – Revelation 19:6–7*

We, the saints, all members of the Body and knit together in love, are happy to proclaim loudly the praises of our Lord. We are so moved by His love for us we cannot suppress our joy at this union. We will rejoice to see that day when the church, Christ's bride, enters into eternity with her groom, who loves her and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.\* Be ready, church! The wedding date approaches.

\*Ephesians 5:25–27

*And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!"* – Revelation 19:10

This well-seasoned, experienced saint, John, loses his bearings in the moment. He mistakenly falls down to worship a fellow servant. Be on guard, Christian! If our forefathers, John among them, fall so easily – mistakenly or not – then how much more the weaker vessel are we? Do not fall down at any man's feet, taken in by their personality or charisma. Fix your heart and entire being on worshipping the one true God. Any fellow worker will tell you the same. Any anchored servant will point you to our Lord.

*Now I saw a new heaven opened and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. – Revelation 19:11*

Here we see our true and faithful Lord ready for battle. When we examine ourselves, we realize that we have so many questions about truth, fully recognizing our own lies, even if nobody else does. But Christ is true, and He has made us His children. Our faith, often terrified, anxious, and incomplete, haunts us. But Christ is faithful, and He has made us his own. All of that, being transformed from a lying, wormy flake into a sanctified and holy vessel, is sealed by the certainty of His righteous judgment. Here, the commander of the armies of the Lord sits ready – and we, His children, are counted among His number in spite of our failures. While man's vision for war is muddled with wickedness, our Lord makes war in complete righteousness. He waged total war for our souls and won! How different we are from our holy God! Yet His love for us is true and faithful.

...*And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."* –  
Revelation 19:9b

God's Word is true. The authenticity and application of God's Word are timeless. When we hear His words, don't our hearts stir fervently within us, burning to be with our Father?  
\* The Holy Spirit also comes alongside us to instruct us in the fact that the truth and certainty of God's words are without mistake. On the other hand, our enemy and his allies have taken up the crafty turn of speech, "Has God indeed said....?"\* Lies! Know God's Word, dear saints, and uncover the lies of the wicked one! Pray for wisdom in these things and cling to the eternal truth of God's words.

\*Luke 24:32

\*\*Genesis 3:1

*He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him. – Revelation 19:13–14*

Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be made white as snow.\* We are cleansed, bleached, by the blood of our Lord. His robes bear testimony of His suffering, having lost His blood on our behalf that we might be made white, clean, and fresh. Our garments are provided by His hand alone and bear no marks of punishment or struggle. We are robed in His righteousness when we should be dressed in potato sacks! The testimony of His great love toward us, Christ drenched in blood, stands in heaven as a testament to a paid debt, the purchase of our souls.

\*Isaiah 1:18

*Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword that with it He should strike the nations.* – Revelation 19:15

The Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.\* Our Lord's warfare is not waged with weapons formed by human hands, and neither is ours. The creator of ALL things spoke His creation into existence, holds it together in His being, and will judge the deeds of nations by His holy words with the sword of His mouth. Help us know Your words, Oh God! To be found abiding in Your Word, sanctified by Your Word. Your Word is truth.

\*Hebrews 4:12

*And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.* – Revelation 19:16

Christ is above all. He is one with the Father, equal in authority and power. He is the firstborn over all creation, through whom all things are held together. There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. The point to all of this is our Lord's power is unimpeachable. His sovereignty is without challenge. If our fears are fixed on this world's present petulant princes, we can take peace in the supreme knowledge that Christ is Lord over all and nothing is beyond His grasp or outside of His dominion. No ruler who ever lived has had such complete sovereignty. He alone is God over all. May He be high and lifted up forever. Amen.

*Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. – Revelation 19:20*

Wickedness will be defeated. There is no set of outcomes that results in victory for the enemies of the cross. There is no alternative universe where evil prevails over the holy. The fate of our enemy is certain, and time is running out. Be on guard, believer, that you are not deceived in the final moments of this world! Tremble, workers of deception who war against the saints. Your Judge does not remain idle. Praise the Lord, all you, His saints, for His faithfulness in conquering our enemy.

*He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and satan and bound him for a thousand years. – Revelation 20:2*

Our enemy, the devil, is a created being. He is not outside God's dominion, though he may parade as such. Should the Lord call him to judgment today, he could not resist. He is created as any other being and subject to the Word of the Almighty God. He will be bound for his wickedness and rebellion and assaults against humanity. Resist him, saints, knowing our Lord is his conquerer.\* Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.\* Fear not! His threats are idle speech. You are in the hand of the Almighty and beyond the enemy's reach.

\*James 4:7

\*\*1 John 4:4

*And I saw the dead both small and great standing before God and books were opened. And another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by things which were written in the books. – Revelation 20:12*

What do these books contain? How can I make sure I'm found in the Book of Life? Will my works be enough? While we do not know the specifics of these volumes, we do know God's Word, The Book, says that all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags before our holy God.\* And by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.\*\* AND no man comes to the Father but by Me.\*\*\* We are saved by God's grace through our belief. As it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live.\*\*\*\* Our belief, our faith, is the ONLY WORK that counts towards our righteousness. That is the work God is looking for. All else flows from that.

\*Isaiah 64:6

\*\*Ephesians 2:8–9

\*\*\*John 14:6

\*\*\*\*Romans 1:15

*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire.* – Revelation 20:14

There will be an end to death. On this side of eternity, death stands as a certainty for us all. It has been said, “Nobody makes it out alive.” But death has a conquerer – Jesus Christ. Death will be destroyed and cast off for all eternity by our Lord. Take heart, believer; our Lord is faithful to fulfill His promises. We vacillate mightily here on earth in our feelings on death. In our youth, we often scoff at death. In our age or in tragedy, we cower – fearing that death has overtaken us. At the end of time, death is overtaken, judged, cast into the lake of fire, conquered once and for all. We who are God’s saints will have the final triumph over death with our Lord.

*And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* – Revelation 21:3–4

One day we will dwell in the house of our true Father. He promises to make His home with us, to dwell with us, to care for us to the fullest measure. Today, in our fallen and tattered state, God stoops to wipe our tears in our moment of sadness and kiss our foreheads when we need comfort because we are His beloved children. At the beginning of eternity, our Father will wipe away suffering altogether – forever. All of our wounds will be mended completely and finally; the former things will pass away. God's creation, purchased through the cross of Christ, will be restored, and we will shed heartache and pain to forever commune with our loving God.

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."  
And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." –  
Revelation 21:5*

God alone is our Maker, our Creator. We are all as clay in the Potter's hands. As a master sculptor, He reshapes us from our damaged past – cracked and broken as we are. He makes us new. This much we have experienced here and now in the hands of our Lord. We wait with longing expectation for the day when He will make ALL creation new – finally restored in whole. We are certain of this coming day because we are the proof of His power to make new things, and His words are ever true and faithful.

*And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to Him who thirsts."* – Revelation 21:6

Fullness is found in Christ. He is all-encompassing, the A to Z. You can't make words without an alphabet, and Christ is the whole thing! He encapsulates the Beginning and was with God in the beginning.\* He enfolds the end of all things, and all time is subject to His command. What does One so powerful set His mind to? Domination? Conquest? No! Although, all dominion is His by right as the maker of all things. In all of His omnipotence, He has set as His purpose giving living water to those who thirst. By His service, our hearts have been won to Him. The dryness of our souls is quenched through Christ. That One so powerful is concerned with our thirst and need is truly profound. Take and drink, thirsty soul, and you'll never need to draw again.\*\*

\*John 1:1–3

\*\*John 4:14

*He who overcomes shall inherit all things and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.* – Revelation 21:7–8

What a promise, glorious in its simplicity! Overcome and be God's child. Overcome because you are God's child. But, to overcome will cost us. Namely, that cost will be born in our abandonment and rejection of those things that pull souls into the second death. At one point or the other, we have all been marked by our own part in this wickedness – cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, etc. But by Christ's blood, we overcome. Your part, your inheritance, is with God, oh child! Only demonstrate courage and belief and reject the filth that seeks your demise. As the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."\* Take courage, believer. Overcome. Rule over sin by Jesus' blood.

\*Genesis 4:6–7

*Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. – Revelation 21:14*

Why are Christ's apostles memorialized as such? They were men of suffering, men condemned, the offscouring of all creation, a spectacle to men and angels in their dogged tenacity.\* They stood on the foundation of Christ's glorious resurrection. It was that Event that transformed cowards into steadfast preachers. They boldly declared that truth and the good news of mankind's redemption through Christ's blood. Their accounts of Christ's life, the gospels, became the foundation of the Church – Christ's bride. Their doctrine has withstood the test of time and will stand until the Lord returns. Their foundation is everlasting.

\*1 Corinthians 4:9–13

*But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. – Revelation 21:22*

There is no need for an ornate religious edifice in God's new kingdom. In the present age, we have sought to build mighty and dramatic buildings hoping that they might keep God in our consciousness. The bigger, the better! It's almost as if we are afraid we may forget. We have convinced ourselves that if we can look to a building or some other physical reminder of God, if we can remember Him in our thoughts, then He will remember to be near to us. But Christ promised that He would never leave or forsake us. That promise was never contingent on us. The fact is God dwells within the believer presently by His Holy Spirit, and it is glorious to know that He will be with us in His kingdom as our eternal and most perfect place of worship.

*The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. – Revelation 21:23*

In our present state, we look to the sun and moon for light. We even fabricate and manufacture the means for light so we might see and have warmth. Otherwise, darkness surrounds us when the sun is hidden. There are places on our earth that have entire seasons alternating dark and light. Our dependence on the sun for light, warmth, and continued life cannot be overstated. In God's new creation, there is no need for these celestial bodies. We will be so near to Him that our warmth, our light, will be provided by His very glory. Even as He provides us light and warmth now, we will one day be surrounded by His perfect eternal light.\*

\*1 John 1:5

*Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). –*  
Revelation 21:25

In the new creation, there will be no need to close the gates. No need to barricade ourselves against evil or violence as we do now. The glory of our Lord will illuminate our space forevermore, and there will be no darkness to cloak wickedness. Consider, in our current state, we lay our heads down to sleep only after ensuring our houses are locked up tight, for fear of intruders. It will not be so in God's kingdom. His eternal light expels the darkness. He is ever watchful over us and will keep us in perfect peace.

*But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles or causes an abomination or lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. – Revelation 21:27*

For too long mankind has been subject to defilement, pollution, and lies. These things constantly war against our souls. We are to be watchful, to walk circumspectly, to discern the times. In God's kingdom, we will cast aside our concern for these evils in exchange for everlasting holiness. We will be unburdened. Furthermore, we will no longer be troubled or provoked by chaotic, fractured guesses as to what is holy and pleasing to our Father. Only holy things will be there! And Christ's saints, His holy ones, will be in the midst!

*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,  
proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. –Revelation  
22:1*

Our Lord is the giver of living water. If we would only ask, He promises to give us this precious water in abundance – and we would never thirst again. He is the true giver of life. Sometimes we don't even realize how polluted the springs we drink from are until we see and taste the crystal clear water from God's throne. Thank you, Lord, for providing that water that quenches our eternal thirst.

*And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. – Revelation 22:3*

As humanity fell subject to the curse of Adam, humanity was delivered by Christ from that very same curse. One day, in eternity, we will be at perfect peace, going about our eternal service in full view of the Throne. Any true servant of God will tell you of the tremendous joy that accompanies serving the Lord now in the midst of the curse. How much more joy will we find when we leave behind any memory of the curse and our service is unhindered! We look forward to that day, Lord! Come quickly!

*They shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads. –*  
Revelation 22:4

Some believers constantly wrestle with doubt. We wonder if we are truly Christ's child. We long for the day when we will see Him face to face. Listen as our Lord reminds by His Word daily that we are secure in His hand and that nobody can ever snatch us away. In that glorious day, there will be no doubt whose we are. We see Him in fullness, full in the face, as He sees us. We are marked with His holy name – then visible, but now, invisible. Take heart, doubter. We who believe are marked by His name even on this side of heaven.

*Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets set His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. – Revelation 22:6*

God's Word is eternally faithful and true. Since it was He that spoke all creation into being by His divine utterance, we can trust that His Word is forever real. We don't believe blindly. We have witnessed His creation and have seen the result of the Spirit that moves.\* And yet, we have the prophetic Word made more sure.\*\* His Word, eternally precious, is a comfort and a help to us now – a light to our path in a world that grows dimmer. All of these things are passing away, but His words will never pass away. We are ever closer to Christ's return, and His enduring Word will help us to the end.

\*John 3:8

\*\*2 Peter 1:19

*Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.* – Revelation 22:7

Christ's promise is that He is coming again and quickly. Our temptation, two millennia removed from these words, is to doubt and enter into a state of complacency – to ignore God's Word rather than keep it. Do not cast aside your hope! Our God is faithful! Paul writes, "If in this life only we have hope we are of all men most pitiable."\* Take heart! Christ is coming again. We have an eternal hope that surpasses this lifetime. He promised that He is making a place for us so that where He is, we should be with Him also.\*\* Imagine! If in six days God created the earth and all of the wonders in it – how much more astounding will our heavenly home be! Do not fall into that most despicable state warned against by Peter where men scoff and say, "Since the fathers slept all is as it has been. Where is his coming?" Know this, "Christ is not slack concerning His promises but is longsuffering toward us not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."\*\*\* Watch and pray. Our Lord is coming quickly.

\*1 Corinthians 15:19

\*\*John 14:2–3

\*\*\*2 Peter 3:4–9

*... And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."* – Revelation 22:8–9

We humans have a tendency to fall down and worship the messenger when our minds are blown, as if the messenger created the message. It is not so! Faithful servants point to God. Wicked servants receive the worship, just like Satan. Only One is worthy to be worshipped, God alone. May the Lord help us keep our worship focused on His holiness and not the messenger, no matter how special they are. May the Lord help those of us who are messengers to know our place – we are the brethren, fellow servants, those who keep the Word of the Book. May we always direct our worship to our Father.

*And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.” – Revelation 22:10*

It is critical that we know God’s Word from beginning to end. Otherwise, we will develop a half-informed concept of God’s nature and relationship with humanity. This book of books is to be read and known, not sealed up and hidden away. One of the earliest challenges for the church was dealing with the bogus, yet attractive, teaching of a “hidden knowledge” that was only available to a few enlightened people. That is known as Gnosticism and is a lie! Here, God’s messenger is explicit that these words, this knowledge, should not be hidden. God’s Word is for all to see and know. May God give us understanding in the things that He shows us. May we be students of His Word.

*He who is unjust let him be unjust still; he who is filthy let him be filthy still; he who is righteous let him be righteous still; he who is holy let him be holy still.* – Revelation 22:11

As Christ's return approaches, some people may feel like they can hedge their bets and change allegiance at the last minute. Be warned, our Lord's return will come upon us suddenly, without warning, as a thief in the night. No man knows the day or hour of His return. At that moment, each person will be found as they are. If you are Christ's, then you are righteous and holy because you are clothed in His unmatched righteousness. If you find that you are filthy and unjust, it is because you are clothed in your own righteousness and have denied the Lord Jesus' petitions to bring you close. Now is the time to cling to Christ, to take His robes. Time is quickly expiring. Do not delay.

*And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. – Revelation 22:12*

Be ready. Keep oil for your lamps. Watch and pray. As sure as God's Word has ever been, these words are certain. Christ has promised to come again, and we wait in deliberate expectation, exercising, building up our faith until that glorious day. He is bringing His reward with Him for those servants who have been found faithfully working. What is the work? It starts with belief, the only work that matters, grows through building up the Body by our service to Christ, dispensing that which we have received, and culminates in a perfected faith when we see Christ face to face and enter into the joy of His kingdom. Help us be ready, oh Lord! Help us be ready.

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.* – Revelation 22:13

There are doubters who, in their ignorance, declare that Jesus Christ never claimed to be God. Christ states this fact many times. He even declares boldly about himself, “I AM.” This is a reference to the name God called Himself when speaking with Moses. The name Jehovah means “the existing one” or “the one who is.” No better picture is given of the fullness of the Existing One’s nature than here in John’s Revelation. Jesus Christ is the Beginning and End of all things. He is the First and the Last, sovereign over all, unbound by time, space, or matter. Our Lord is the categorical summation and culmination of all things. We offer praise to His holy name, for He IS the Existing One, the most high God, above all things and over all things.

*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. — Revelation 22:14*

Jesus taught His disciples, “If you love me, keep my commandments.”\* During His time with the disciples, Jesus instructed them on how to pursue God. Such authoritative and pure instruction is hard for us to imagine apart from Christ. We live in an era of qualifying statements, exceptions, and asterisks. It is essential that we carry out our Lord’s commandments. We must not be hearers only – or what do we gain? We must be doers, workers in Christ’s field, looking forward to the promise of His coming and the invitation to enter through the gates – by the narrow way. No one shall enter without Christ’s express permission. No one shall enter in by some other way.\*\* There is no wall to scale to crash the party. Help us be diligent in obedience to your commands, oh Lord.

\*John 14:15

\*\* John 10

*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things in the churches.*

– Revelation 22:16a

Jesus takes full ownership of this message, of THE MESSAGE! All scripture is God-breathed, inspired. Christ directs His message and sends it directly to His bride. The universal Church AND local churches are special to Jesus. The churches receive so much care from our Lord. He shares so much with us. He desires that we would know the things written in this Book. Because He has committed His Word to us, we won't be caught off guard, wondering if we've been abandoned. AND how glorious it is that we each individually, as parts of the whole, get to be a part of the churches that Jesus cares for so much! Lord, help us to be discerning and attentive to the message you are communicating to Your churches.

*...I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. – Revelation 22:16b*

Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to raise up a King from David's lineage to rule forever and ever. He did not strive, maneuver, or campaign for this role. He did not fabricate some tenuous lineage to claim His crown. Search the Scriptures! Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. He is begotten, ordained, and appointed by God's sovereign will. He is the perfect fulfillment of all that was foretold. What an amazing, incomprehensible thought! He really happened and is happening! All of that seems so improbable, so unrealistic, so unfathomable. And yet, it is happening now! As sure as Jesus Christ fulfilled all of God's Word, all of God's promises, He is faithful to His Bride forevermore. He is coming quickly!

*...The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*" – Revelation 22:17

God offers an open invitation to partake of His life-giving water freely. This message is pervasive, announced by many for the benefit of all who hear. And we who believe have been drafted into the service of announcing this invitation. This isn't a secret, AND it's not exclusively extended to the perfect or well-hydrated souls. The invitation is for "whoever desires." The way is open to all, through Christ. We are all bidden to drink of the water liberally and to find life in His cup. Thank you, Father, for your grace, for calling us to drink. Help us faithfully and fervently offer the invitation just as You have.

*He who testifies of these things says, "Surely, I am coming quickly."  
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! – Revelation 22:20*

This interaction demonstrates much regarding the relationship between Christ and the believer. It is a beautiful picture of promise and expectancy. Our Lord gives the steadfast and sure promise – “I am coming quickly.” In that moment, the believer does not respond with, “How long is that going to take? What does ‘quickly’ mean?” The heart and mouth of the believer responds with expectancy – “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” Enthusiastically we long for, and cheer for, the pressing arrival of our Lord. If we become entangled in the concern of how long, we have missed the point. Be ready! Our Lord’s word is as faithful as it ever has been. He is coming quickly.

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. –*

Revelation 22:21

This is the final verse in the Bible. The last word. And the last word is GRACE! God's incalculable, immeasurable, unearnable favor bathes us in the very midst of our failures. We don't deserve it. We can't deserve it. Have you ever failed? There is grace. Have you ever doubted? There is grace. Have you done almost everything right!? There is grace for that, too. God's grace is not a respecter of our contributions or failings. That's what makes it grace. Do you desire to follow after Him but are unsure where to start? Start with grace, and at the end of it all, just like God's Word, you will find grace.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony Rea is a sinner saved by grace. He pastors Living Water Christian Fellowship, a small church in rural Dothan, Alabama that is part of the Calvary Chapel movement.

[www.livingwaterdothan.com](http://www.livingwaterdothan.com)