

A silhouette of a child is positioned behind a rustic wooden door, looking out towards a dark night sky filled with numerous bright, multi-pointed stars. The scene is bathed in a deep blue light, creating a serene and contemplative atmosphere. The child's silhouette is dark against the lighter wood of the door, and the stars are scattered across the upper portion of the frame, some appearing as bright, multi-pointed stars and others as smaller, distant points of light.

What Child Is This?

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Sunday: John 1:1–5

Passage: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

Thoughts: How often do we reflect upon Christ as the Creator—as the Word of God who created this world? Probably not near as often as we think of Christ in his other roles, such as Savior. It’s easy to think about Jesus only as the man who came to earth, but we need to broaden our view of Jesus, the second person in the Trinity. He is as eternal as God our Father. He was the Word who created as much as he was the baby in the manger. And when we stop to think about that, it’s hard to not be overwhelmed with awe. The Christ that came into this world is the same Christ that created this world. He created everything; in fact, “without him nothing was made that has been made.” Today, may we pause to praise Jesus as our Creator; to praise and thank him for his power, creativity, and majesty displayed throughout this world.

Monday: Genesis 1:3–8

Passage: *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.*

Thoughts: “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” How many of us shake our heads at that old saying? Why is that? We know that it isn’t true, but why? I think because we know words do have more power than the phrase suggests. In fact, in this passage we learn that the heavens, the earth, the stars, and everything else was created through words—through God’s words. All God has to do is speak and things happen. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” God speaks his Word, that is Jesus Christ, and his Word creates. The power is jaw-dropping. May we simply ponder and rest in the incredible power of Christ our Creator. Let us pray, thanking God for his power and his ability to create.

Tuesday: Hebrews 1:1–3

Passage: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the*

universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Thoughts: The power of Christ as Creator extends to Christ as Sustainer. We have a God that does not create and then step back; he did not merely start the clock and then count down the timer. By no means! We serve a God who is very active in sustaining this world through his Word. Christ creates and Christ sustains. He is the driving force behind the activity of the world; he keeps it going. He did not leave us alone in this world, but he is with us; he is sustaining us. May those words provide us peace as we trust in Christ to be our Sustainer. May this truth provide hope and comfort when we fail to sense his presence and control. Let us pray, honoring Christ's continual work in this world and his care for being active in our lives, and asking for an awareness of his hand throughout this world.

Wednesday: Colossians 1:15–17

Passage: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Thoughts: "In him all things hold together." Do we really believe that? Or do we read that merely as an exaggeration? What role does Jesus Christ—the Word who created this world—now play in creation? Oftentimes, nonbelievers will look at the chaos of the world and question God's existence; and yet, could you imagine a world without God? Could you fathom a loveless and hopeless world? What a blessing it is have the one who created this world, Jesus Christ, now be the glue that holds all things together. Take a moment, if you would, to trace the "glue" of Christ throughout your life. How has he held things together in your life? Perhaps, you could share these things with your family. May we pray to have eyes that can see the handiwork of God in our lives.

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 8: 5–6

Passage: For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

Thoughts: What are we designed for? If there were a description for how we should live, what would it say? Notice the distinction between the phrase describing God the Father, "for whom we live," and the phrase describing Jesus Christ, "through whom we live." What does that reveal about Jesus as Creator? The word "for" reveals a purpose and the word "through" a method for us. As people created by Jesus Christ, we have a purpose of living for God the Father and a method of living through Jesus Christ. In other words, we were created to live for the glory of God our

Father through the power of Christ his Son. That is our design. It begs two questions for us: What are we really living for? And, how are we doing that? May we continuously pray, as designs of God, for him to direct our life towards his glory through the power of Jesus Christ, our Creator.

Friday: Psalm 33:6–9

Passage: By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Thoughts: How do we respond to our design? The power of the Lord's Word lends itself to a response. The psalmist seems to have a response in mind, but is it our response? As we gaze at the world around us, as we reflect on Christ as our Creator and Sustainer, as we realize his power, how do we respond? The psalmist calls us all to "fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him." The word "revere" is a word for "honor." His reasoning is straightforward: because God created through his Word, now we honor him. May we begin to identify our responses to Christ as Creator, and pray that we can cultivate a healthy fear of the LORD and develop ways to honor him.

Saturday: John 1:10–13

Passage: He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Thoughts: This passage describes the ultimate tragedy: the creations do not recognize Christ as their Creator; they do not recognize that "the world was made through him," and this impacts their response: "they did not receive him." As a result, they miss out on all the rights that God desperately wants to give. They miss out on becoming children of God. How often do we fail to recognize Christ for who he is? How often does the world fail to recognize Christ for who he is? May we be people who initiate a response of fear and honor towards Christ our Creator, and as we respond in this way, may our response lead others to the family of God. Let us pray for God to use our responses to bring other family and friends so they may join God's family.

WEEK 2: CHRIST THE SIN-BEARER (December 5–11)

Sunday: Matthew 1:21

Passage: She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Thoughts: But we mess up. We messed up and we continually mess up God's creation through sin. We sin, we rebel, we disobey, and we turn our backs on God. As people have done that ever since Adam, and as we continue to do that today, we dangerously flirt with the consequences of sin, which is death. Sin leaves us in a desperate and dire situation. A situation similar to the one Joseph found himself in when the woman he was going to marry suddenly became pregnant. He didn't know what to do. In fact, he was even contemplating leaving Mary. And yet, these prophetic words from the angel comforted Joseph. Don't be afraid. God knows what he is doing. And to us, the words ring true: don't be afraid. God has recognized our desperate and dire situation and he is sending Jesus to be our Sin-bearer. May we praise God today for how he understood our situation and loved us enough to send Christ to save us from our sins.

Monday: 2 Corinthians 5:21

Passage: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Thoughts: It's not a thought we often have. It's not often that we think about how God made Christ to be sin for us. I mean, think about the ugliest action, the ugliest sin, and place that on Christ. That is what Christ became. Christ became murder, rape, adultery, theft, and the list continues. Think about all the sin in your life, think about all the evil thoughts, actions, and reactions we have all accumulated—now place that on Christ. You could even make a list, and then write over-top, "Christ put these on himself." We often speak in generalities when we think of Christ bearing sin, but let's take the time to speak specifically today. What exactly did Christ become for you? May we pray for a deeper understanding to the darkness that Christ put on himself. May we thank Christ for the specific sin he became because of us.

Tuesday: Isaiah 53:5–6

Passage: But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Thoughts: What was it like for Christ to be our Sin-bearer? As a result of becoming sin, what was that like? The words are striking. He was pierced. He was crushed. He was punished. He was wounded. It is easy to focus on what happened to us; we were forgiven and granted eternal life. But what happened to Christ? What was it like for him to be our Sin-bearer? That was supposed to be our punishment. That was the treatment we deserved to receive. The severity of sin demands a severe punishment. As we read this passage, may we contemplate the suffering Christ endured for our sin, and may that contemplation remind us of the severity of our sin. May we pray to never take sin lightly or forget what Christ endured for us.

Wednesday: Mark 15:16–20

Passage: The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Thoughts: This passage is only a piece of the narrative of Christ’s suffering. There is the agony in Gethsemane, and ridicule during the trials, and the sheer agony on the cross. As we think about Christ as Sin-bearer, it’s vital to contemplate and reflect on what he actually went through. What story did we write for him? The passage provides a vivid description to that role. Reread this passage. Pick out the verbs. They mocked, spit, called out, twisted, and took off—all because of our sins. It’s not a comforting passage, but rather depressing. We caused this for our Savior. We do not often stay there, but can we stop for a day here. May we stop at the narrative of the Passion of Christ. May we pray for God, confessing our role in Christ’s suffering and asking for forgiveness.

Thursday: 1 John 2:1–2

Passage: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Thoughts: Christ’s role as Sin-bearer does not preclude us from ability to sin now. We still sin—that is obvious. “But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” Christ is our Defender. He pleads our case for us to God the Father. When we sin, there is punishment. Every sin is and must be punished. Can you imagine the list we all have accrued over our lifetimes? If there were a background check done on any one of us, it would go on for pages and pages. But the amazing thing is we never serve our sentence. We never serve our sentence because Christ is the best defense council around. He speaks to the Judge, he speaks to God our Father and tells him—Don’t look at who they are, but look at who I am. I am the Righteous One and judge them based on my righteousness. May we never forget the punishment we deserve because of our sin, and let us take comfort when we remember how Christ—the only Righteous One—always defends us.

Friday: Hebrews 9:26b–28

Passage: But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Thoughts: “It is finished.” These famous words that Jesus proclaimed before he died on the cross emphasize the point of this passage: the work of Christ as our Sin-bearer is done. The verb is in past tense. It was an actual historical event that already occurred. Our sins have been paid for through Christ’s sacrifice. It was a one-time deal. May those words soak in. “It is finished.” Christ appeared “once for all.” This does not mean that we no longer sin—that won’t happen until Heaven—but it means that we can be assured of our forgiveness. We can be assured that the consequences of sin have been paid for once and for all. Let us praise God for his power and ability to take away our sins with one sacrifice. And may the finality of Christ’s work inspire us to begin living out the implications of his death.

Saturday: 1 Peter 2:22–25

Passage: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Thoughts: So now what? Christ’s role as Sin-bearer has implications for us: first, “so that we might die to sins,” second, so that we may “live for righteousness.” There is a purpose of death and a purpose of life. Christ is our Sin-bearer so that we may put to death the sins of our lives and bring to life his righteousness. What does it look like for our lives? What are we dying to? What are we living for? It cost Christ his life to be our sin-bearer, what does our response cost us? Are we suffering to deal with the sins in our life? May we pray that God will help us die to sins that pollute our heart and live for the righteousness to which God has called us.

WEEK 3: CHRIST THE REDEEMER

(December 12–18)

Sunday: John 1:29

Passage: The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Thoughts: Today marks a transition into reflecting on Christ as our Redeemer. The idea of redemption is rewriting a story. Our story of being fallen and sinful creatures, apart from God and destined for death, is being rewritten through the work of Christ—through his life, his death, and his resurrection. We have a new Author and he is Christ the Redeemer. The first part of our new story is the taking away of our sins. It’s as if he is taking an eraser and telling us, “Your life used to be defined by your sin, but through my sacrifice, your life will be defined by my sacrifice.” May we pause to

reflect on the new story Christ wants to write in our lives—our new story will not be defined by sin, but by Christ. May we pray for the ability to surrender to our new Author.

Monday: 1 Peter 1:17–21

Passage: Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Thoughts: The old story can be hard to erase at times. Often, our parents or grandparents have passed down a certain lifestyle to us. Their imperfections and struggles are passed on from generation to generation, and we find ourselves with the same imperfections and struggles. And there is this perpetual cycle that often leaves us frustrated, confused, or even feeling helpless. It's like we want to cry out, "What am I supposed to do about it? I can't change the life I was handed down." But do you want to hear the great news? We don't have to be perfect. It's not up to us. We have a Redeemer who was perfect for us. He was "a lamb without blemish or defect." We are done with the empty way of life, and we have the new story available to us because of Christ's perfection—not because of ours. Let us praise Christ for his perfection. Let us ask Christ to help us move away from the emptiness of our old life and into our new story.

Tuesday: Galatians 1:3–5

Passage: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thoughts: Rescue. It's a word that brings connotations of one person in despair, inability, and a need for outside help, and another who swoops down and saves the day. It involves a scene change. A person was in one situation and was moved to another. Isn't that us? Aren't we people who Christ gave a change of scenery? Think of some of the scene changes that Christ given to you. What "present evils" did he rescue you from? It can be easy to forget those sometimes. It can be easy to become confused and frustrated within our new scene, and forget where we came from. May we pray for God to give us the big picture. May we continue to see the larger picture of Christ our Sin-bearer.

Wednesday: Colossians 3:1–14

Passage: *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Thoughts: How often do we compare stories? How often do we actually realize what we were redeemed from? There are essentially two stories in this passage. There is one story filled with “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.” This is our old story. But because of Christ, because he is our Redeemer, we have the privilege of a new story. This story is filled with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love.” May we take some to reflect on the difference between the new stories. And may we be filled with a sense of gratitude and privilege as we embrace our new story. Let us pray for God to help us continually put to death our old story and put on our new story.

Thursday: Mark 2:1–12

Passage: *A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”*

Thoughts: No story gives more testimony to Jesus' ability to redeem and rewrite our stories than this one. We see in this passage a man who is physically paralyzed and guilty of sin when he comes to Jesus, and yet, when he leaves he is free—free to walk and free from his sin. This is a passage revealing the power of Christ. May this story provide hope as we are in the process of being redeemed. There is nothing out of the realm of Christ's redemption. He redeemed the man from his physical paralysis as well as his sinful paralysis. We are all redeemable. There is nothing we have done or could do to make us "unredeemable." God died for us while we were still sinners and his power rises above any situation or sin we have faced, are facing, and will face. As we turn to God in prayer, may we acknowledge and praise God for his power, while asking him to redeem us from our crippling sins and situations.

Friday: Galatians 3:13–14

Passage: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everything who is hung on a tree." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Thoughts: Am I good enough? Do I follow God's Word enough? Have I met all the requirements? These are some of the haunting questions many people wrestle with—at least people under the curse of the law. Even as people redeemed by Christ, we want to go back to the law and measure ourselves in that way. The law was used to show people that they are not good enough to meet every requirement; they are under the "curse of the law." But that is not our story in Christ. He fulfilled the law for us. He redeemed us from the curse of the law and now we are free from the law. We are free in Christ. It's about our goodness—it's about Christ's goodness. But at times we do not act like that. At times, we measure ourselves in other ways, such as going to church, praying, and giving. At times, we still try to believe that we are good enough and that we do meet all the requirements. May we confess to God the ways we put ourselves under the curse of the law, and how we measure our spiritual life by external things. May we pray for understanding that Christ has now become our measuring tool, making us free in him. May we live out our freedom.

Saturday: 2 Corinthians 5: 17–18

Passage: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Thoughts: The major theme to our story is this: "the old has gone, the new has come." And yet, it is a process. We are in the process of becoming completely new creatures, but part of the old is hanging on. We still struggle with certain sins. There is still brokenness in the world. That is because we live in the "already but not yet" time in history. This is a time in

history in which Christ has already come once, but not yet a second time. This time calls for patience and trust. There can be the very legitimate temptation to be frustrated at reoccurring sins in our lives. We can pose the question, “Why am I still struggling with this?” It’s a process. It’s like an orange that is halfway peeled. We can taste part of the goodness, but not all of it. There are still parts of the orange to be peeled. May we pray for the ability to be patient in this time. May we recognize the process of writing a new story and pray to trust in the hope of Christ as Restorer.

WEEK 4: CHRIST THE RESTORER

(December 19–25)

Sunday: Isaiah 9:1, 6–7

Passage: *Nevertheless, there will be more gloom for those who were in distress ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

Thoughts: In the middle of rebuking Israel for their sin and the way they turned their backs on God, Isaiah brings a word of encouragement to his people. He prophesies of a future reality—a reality of justice, righteousness, and peace. There will be no more gloom. This is the hope of Israel. This is our hope today. There is a future reality—a reality of justice, righteousness, and peace. There will be no more gloom. This reality is rooted in Christ’s second coming. And as we live in this “already but not yet” time frame, may we never forget that. May we never forget that Christ is coming back. Let us always place our hope in that. May the truth of his second coming allow us to live with more urgency and readiness today. Let us pray to God, confessing the way we live without expectation, and asking for the urgency to live ready.

Monday: Luke 2:10–14

Passage: *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”*

Thoughts: The announcement of Christ’s birth lends itself to a certain response. The announcement that the Christ, the “Anointed One,” is coming into the world demands a certain response. It is a response of praise. Read it again, “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God ...” The fear of the shepherds was

quickly turned to praise. If you continued down to verse 20 it reads, “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God ...” Once they realized Christ had actually been born, their fear was replaced with praise. As we live in times of fear, as we face situations that may terrify us, may we remember the shepherds. May we remember their initial fear and how their fear was replaced with praise because of Christ’s coming. We too, are certain of Christ’s coming—his second coming. As we pray, may we acknowledge our fears before God, but also let our fears be turned to praise as we realize that Christ is indeed returning—as the Restorer.

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 15:20–26

Passage: But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Thoughts: It’s hard to imagine. It’s hard to imagine the reality described in this passage. It’s hard to imagine the reality of Christ as Restorer. A major part to the reality is the defeat of evil as Christ puts “all his enemies under his feet.” Every single enemy of Christ will be defeated. Once that happens, after Christ destroys death, he hands over the kingdom to God the Father. I wonder how much it is like a mechanic completely renovating an old, beat-up car. He gets the car and it’s his job to make it new. And when he finally finishes it, the car is sparkling new. No dents. No engine problems. Not even a scratch. It is perfect. He performed his role, and then he hands the keys to the car back to the owner. Christ is the mechanic to the world, to our lives, and to our hearts. All of the evil, all of the injustice, all of the brokenness, all of the insecurity, and all of the sin will be destroyed. Christ will restore this world, our lives, and our hearts to perfection. Let us pray a prayer of surrender, as we submit to the work and plan of Christ. Let us pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is Heaven.”

Wednesday: 1 Peter 5:10–11

Passage: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Thoughts: Is Christ really going to be our Restorer? Because it sure doesn’t seem like it. I don’t even see a trace of restoration in my life. Have you seen my life? Do you know how long I have struggled with this? Do you know how long I have suffered? These are questions most of us have asked before. Haven’t we all been there? Maybe you are there now. Maybe you know someone who is there now. There are moments, periods, and times

of life, where we ask the question: Really? Really God? This is your idea of restoration? I didn't picture my life this way. This passage doesn't erase those questions, but it does help us frame them. In the grand scheme of God's plan for us, there are two things: glory and suffering. The glory is eternal and the suffering is temporary. Peter wants us to see the larger picture. We have been called to "eternal glory in Christ." Suffering will happen, but we have a promise that we will be restored, and be strong, firm, and steadfast. May we pray to have the understanding of God's plan and promise for us. As we wait for eternal glory, may that understanding grant us the hope and strength to endure the difficult times of suffering.

Thursday: Revelation 21:1-4

***Passage:** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Thoughts: What is it going to be like? Will there be sports? Will there be shopping? This is a question I think all of us love to ponder. When everything is all said and done, what will it be like? The Bible does not give us the specifics. It does not tell us if sports or shopping will be there. And yet, there is one thing it does tell us: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." There is something profound in the information we are given about Heaven. It's like God is trying to tell us that nothing else will even compare to his presence. When we face God and he lives with us and us with him, we will be so overwhelmed that everything else will fade in the background. We will be with God for eternity and it will be unimaginably glorious. He is all that we will need or want. May we praise God for the future glory awaiting us, and until that time, may we pray for our hearts to be continually satisfied in this world by him alone. We may be like the psalmist in Psalm 73 that says, "Who have I in heaven but you? And earth was nothing I desire besides you."

Friday: Acts 1:6-8

***Passage:** So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Thoughts: We must not forget our role. We must not forget the way God has empowered us. We can realize the role of Christ as Restorer, and understand how he is going to destroy all the evil of the world, and we can take great hope in that truth, but we can still miss something. We can miss our role. In the disciples' concern for the restoration of Israel, Jesus informs them that "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set." Jesus diverts their question away from what he is going to do and towards what they are to do. "You will receive power ... you will be my witnesses." May we be encouraged to seek active roles in this process of restoration. May we realize that Christ as Restorer should not create passivity in our lives. We have been given the Holy Spirit and through that gift, may we witness to others about Christ. Let us pray for wisdom and courage to understand how and where we can be faithful witnesses through the Holy Spirit.

Saturday: Matthew 25:31–33

Passage: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Thoughts: Are you a goat or a sheep? Is your friend a goat or a sheep? Is your neighbor a goat or a sheep? Do you know? A part of Christ's role as Restorer is separating the sheep from the goats. A part of his role is gathering the sheep to be with their Shepherd. The sheep are believers and the goats are unbelievers. The beautiful hope is at the same time a hard truth. Christ is our Restorer—but is he your friends' Restorer? Is he your family members' Restorer? It's a question we must not only ask, but also act upon. "He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left." May we thank God for the assurance we have in Christ, that we have the gift to spend eternity with our Shepherd, but may we also ask for God to work in the hearts of the unbelievers, of the goats, we know and care for. May we seek to be the people God uses to place on the right.



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