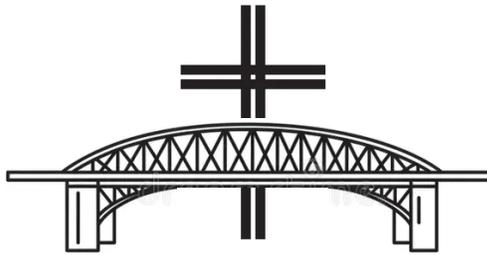


# Creation, Covenant, Christ



Lenten Bible Study, 2026

Grace Covenant Church  
Lakewood, CO

*Blessings!*

I never know how God's Word and Spirit will lead me when I sit down to write. This turned into more of a Bible study than a series of meditations. A Bible study is more information than inspiration. That does not mean God won't be your inspiration as you ponder these scriptures.

This Bible study only touches the surface of a matter of great importance: sin... and, of course, what God planned to do about sin. I invite you to join me on this endeavor to learn about sin and the devil, God and Jesus Christ, and, of course, *you* and how you will respond to God's Word.

However, I leave you in the care of the Holy Spirit to disclose what these verses mean to you. Perhaps you may want to take notes, or write in a journal. If you are brave enough, you may want to share your own discoveries with others.

Regardless of what you do with this information, spend time daily during this season of Lent to draw closer to God by examining your own feelings about sin and what God planned to do about it. There are short prayers written at the end of each day, but feel free to expand that prayer in your own words.

From creation, to the covenants of God, to Christ, I hope you can see how the Lord completed His plan in dealing with sin in your own life. Through study and prayer, I found myself going from mountain peaks to crawling in underground caverns... and back again. Where will God take you?

Meet you at the cross! - *Tom Duckworth*

**And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17).**

From the beginning, God set the condition upon which human relationships with the Lord would be based. This has never changed. Your relationship with God is still founded upon your freedom of choice. You may choose to obey or disobey God’s Word. God created Adam and placed him in a beautiful garden, providing all the nourishment and enjoyment he would ever need. He was given freedom to eat anything from the garden except for one thing.

There’s always “*one thing*.” There is always one thing that will trip you up in your pursuit of living a life that God desires for you. Imagine standing in a gigantic garden, filled with tons of luscious food. Where do you begin? Which fruit tree do you taste first, then second and third, and so on? The choices are overwhelming. And yet, there is one tree that, for some reason, stands out. It intrigues you. It entices you. It causes you to wonder what its fruit tastes like.

You have a choice to make. God gave you the right and privilege to choose. Do you obey God’s wish, or do you choose to grasp that forbidden fruit to satisfy your curiosity? God warned Adam that eating from that one tree would result in a particular consequence. He would die. He would “*certainly die*.”

All decisions come with consequences. Sometimes you learn from your mistakes and become better for it. Sometimes, in the midst of all the choices which could be made, your eyes tend to be drawn to that which is forbidden. What to do?

Isn’t freedom of choice a wonderful dilemma? Today, you stand in the garden of God’s grace. You have so many possibilities in the many choices you can make today. Choices come with blessings or consequences. Which will you choose today?

Father, you created me with the responsibility of freedom of choice. In my actions as well as my attitudes, help me to see life as You intended. I pray that Your Holy Spirit will break through my confused mind as I make decisions which will not only impact my life, but the lives of those around me. Help me to further understand that my choices impact the relationship I have with Jesus. I choose to keep my eyes on Jesus and follow the leading of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

## 2. (Thursday)

## CREATION

**The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him...”**

**So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man...**

**Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:18, 21-22, 25).**

The Lord could see that humans need one another. People do not need to live in isolation. This is one of the reasons Christ instituted the church. You do not need to live life on your own, without suitable support from other people. As the woman (Eve) was to Adam, you are created to be able to help others.

People will always debate the reasons God created human beings. That is not the issue here. In this Bible study, the issues surrounding sin will be the main focus. In this portion of the creation story, another truth is revealed. Verse 25 of the second chapter of Genesis clarifies this truth. *“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* There is no shame when there is no sin. The emphasis is not on the word “naked,” but on the word “shame.” Sin had not yet entered the world.

Eating from the *“tree of the knowledge of good and evil”* would result in death, but because Adam and Eve had not eaten of that fruit, they did not know the difference between good and evil. They had no experience of evil. Shame comes from knowing the difference experientially. Interestingly, Adam not only taught Eve that eating from the tree would cause death, he also told her to not even touch the fruit from that tree (See chapter 3). Why?

Sin is not looking at the tree. It is not even touching the fruit. Sin is the disobedience of eating the fruit of that tree. When you are trying to avoid gaining more weight after the holidays, you do not gain weight by simply looking at that delectable cinnamon roll. The pounds don’t seep through your fingers if you hold the pastry in your hand. But it is a very short distance from your fingertips to your lips. Temptation is the precursor to sin. Sin precedes shame.

God, open my eyes today that I may see You in every detail of my life, especially in the decisions I must make. May Your Spirit help me to dwell on Your righteousness and not on what is unholy. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”\* I trust You, Lord, to be with me through this day, knowing I can only live one day at a time. Today, let me see You, Jesus. Amen.

\*Matthew 6:13

### 3. (Friday)

### CREATION

**Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”**

**“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).**

Rationalizing leads to permissiveness. Seemingly sensible reasoning incites the desire to sin. When tempted to sin, your mind leaps toward justifying the decision to sin. Your mind twists the truth in such a way that giving in to sin seems the rational thing to do. The serpent (devil) connected a lie with a truth which led to the sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Being “*like God,*” and “*knowing good and evil*” appeared to be appetizing.

A little background. The devil has many names, including Lucifer, Satan and Tempter. Lucifer is a created angel who fell because he believed he was as good as God and could run heaven and earth better than God. His pride was his downfall (See Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28). Jesus was a witness to this. “He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’” (Luke 10:18).

The devil is not always in your face when you choose to sin. Because of Adam and Eve’s weakness, temptation has become a human weakness. However, the process by which you choose to sin is the same as it was in the garden. To rationalize the supposed benefits of sin leads to yielding to the sin.

Have you ever rationalized that, because it was a “small, insignificant sin,” it gave you permission to sin? Justifying yourself as “better than others” because *their* sins are worse than *yours*, may unrealistically make you feel safe to sin. Sin is a slippery slope. One sin leads to another until you are overwhelmed with shame. In contrast to how the serpent spoke, pray that “*your eyes will be opened,*” and you will see, in advance, the consequences of sinning and the blessings of trusting God.

Merciful God, I know You do not lead me to sin, nor do You tempt me to sin. Your desire for me is quite opposite. Help me to become aware of how I compromise Your truth by submitting to temptation. Open the eyes of my heart that I may see You clearly, and desire, above all, to follow Your path for me. When I fall, forgive me. And help me to stand again in Your holy presence. Amen.

#### 4. (Saturday)

#### CREATION

**When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (Genesis 3:6-7).**

Can you imagine a world in which every human being walks around buck-naked, and nobody thinks anything about it? That was Adam and Eve's world. It was not that they were naive, but they did not have knowledge of sin.

The serpent was right. Upon eating the fruit of that tree, they were "*like God, knowing good and evil.*" Their innocence was broken. Their relationship with God was also broken. Trust had been lost.

When the man and woman realized that "*they were naked,*" what was the first thing they did? They attempted to cover up the shame of their sin by sewing fig leaves together. Adam and Eve could no longer look at each other as God created them. If only they could cover up their nakedness, they mistakenly thought life would return to the way it was before.

Turning away from God by choosing what God told them not to do is what led to their feeling of shame. They never knew this feeling before because they had always believed and trusted God.

Psychologists can debate the fine points of shame. It comes down to this: shame is the fear of being found out. It is unwanted exposure that causes discomfort by fear of others knowing. Much mental illness is grounded in this feeling of being exposed, feeling you are not right or acceptable, or even unlovable. Shame is carrying a load full of guilt for things real or imagined.

It is instinctual to try and hide your faults and fears from others. There is something deep within all humanity that wants to hide in shame out of fear that others might know the truth, even if the truth is a lie (just perceived as truth). Adam and Eve's shame was not their nakedness. It was obvious, for the first time, that they had sinned (disobeyed God). Understand, there is hope. Though the feelings of shame are strong, God gives hope: "Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated (Isaiah 54:4).

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.\* Even so, You will not put me to shame. You always have my best interest in mind. Amen.

\*Psalm 51:1-3.

## 5. (Monday)

## CREATION

**Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"**

**He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:8-10).**

Apparently God, Adam and Eve would hang out together in the great garden. Adam and Eve heard the Lord walking toward them, so in their shame, they decided to hide from God. There is a sense of humor in this passage that God would ask, "Where are you?" Why would an omniscient (all-knowing) God need to ask where they were hiding?

This was not a geographical question. God knew exactly where they were physically hiding. It was a relational question. It was an intimate question. The Lord was asking, "Where is your heart for me?"

Busted! Stepping forward in their new self-designed fig leaf garments, they 'fessed up.' As the saying goes, "Confession is good for the soul." You can almost feel sorry for them. Can you remember being like Adam when your sin was discovered? There is a sharp tug in your heart entrapping your conscience. Fear and shame consume you and all you want to do is hide. Your voice trembles as you confess your guilt.

Just as it is impossible for you to physically hide from God, neither can you hide your sins from Him. There is only one solution: confession. The Lord commanded the Israelites to confess when they became aware of their sins. "When anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned" (Leviticus 5:5). The Psalmist wrote: "I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin" (Psalm 38:18). The wisdom of Solomon records: "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy (Proverb 28:13).

The word of God makes it quite clear that there are consequences for sinning. In essence, all sin is disobedience to God's Word. All sins carry the same consequence: separation from God. Still, it is human nature to try to cover-up your sin and hide from God.

Father, teach me to pray with purity of heart. Show me that I need not fear You. All of my life is fully exposed before You. In those times when I may have forgotten that I am a sinner, I pray as David prayed: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."\* Amen.

\*Psalm 139:23-24

## 6. (Tuesday)

## CREATION

**And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”**

**The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”**

**Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”  
The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:11-13).**

When confronted about the truth of their sin, Adam and Eve began to play the “blame game.” You know the rules of that game. It’s never “my fault.” The blame can always be passed on to another.

The first blame fell on God. Adam tried to place the blame on God because it was He who made Eve and she enticed him. “The woman **you** put here...” It had to be God’s fault! If He hadn’t given Adam a suitable helpmate, maybe he would not be in this position of guilt. In the same breath, Adam also blamed Eve because she gave him the fruit to eat. She may have handed him the fruit, but it was his own mouth that tasted it.

Not to be outdone, Eve blamed the serpent for deceiving her. The comedian, Flip Wilson, had a bit where he coined the phrase, “the devil made me do it!” That was Eve’s excuse. It wasn’t her fault because that nasty serpent lied to her.

Had there been anybody else around, they most likely would have been blamed as well. The blame game is nothing but denial. It is a feeble attempt to avoid responsibility for one’s own sin. It is making up imaginative excuses in order to divert the attention away from one’s own guilt.

If this portion of scripture teaches anything, it is this foundational truth: you are responsible and accountable for your own sins. Covering up your sins, hiding from God because of your sins, blaming God and others for your sins does not fool the Lord. There is only one thing that can be done. Come clean and repent.

There is hope. There is redemption. There is a plan which God will soon begin to reveal that addresses the consequence of sin. In the meantime, bring all of your sins to the Lord. Do not hold back. The best is yet to come!

Memorize this old monk’s prayer and hold it dear to your heart. Ponder its meaning and what it says about you and God:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.

**So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.**

**And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:14-15).**

Did you notice that God did not even question the serpent (the devil)? There would be no point to doing that. The devil was guilty of his manipulative schemes. So God got right down to business. It was time to dish out the consequences of this sin. That the serpent would be required to crawl on its belly and eat dust does not seem like much of a punishment. After all, the serpent instigated this fiasco. But God was not finished. What the Lord says next should be seen as bad news for the devil, and good news for you.

There would be a great hostility (enmity) between the devil and humankind. From Eve’s generational offspring, there will always be this opposition to Satan. There will be One, however, who will stand out in this fight. There will be One who will destroy this enemy and the chasm that has divided God from humankind.

You might call this God’s “Plan B.” “B” as in **B**irth... the birth of the Son of God who will one day ultimately and totally defeat Satan. In these words of Genesis 3:15, we are given a hint that God has a plan for our redemption. In His mercy, there is hope.

God’s original warning to Adam was that, if he ate from that tree, he would die. God did curse Eve and Adam and cast them out of the perfect garden, but He did not kill them. Physical death would come, but the Lord enacted His will by offering mercy. Yes, there will be physical death, but the death to which God was referring is spiritual death. We see the culmination of this death in the final book of the Bible. “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). Thanks be to God that He has a plan.

Nobody wants to talk about death and dying. It is a dark and oftentimes depressing subject. However, it is a reality of life. Adam and Eve were created to be eternal beings. They were not supposed to die. They were supposed to be obedient. Sin is disobedience to God. Sin has its consequence. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Lord, I do not fully understand Your plan, but right now, I place my trust in You. You are God and You know what You are doing. You love me, so I know there is hope of redemption from my sins. My hope is in You. Thank You! Amen

**The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).**

There is a huge clue in this verse that speaks of God's mercy and redemption. You may have read this verse many times before, but skimmed over it without recognizing God's perfect plan.

The Lord replaced their imperfect and inadequate robes of Ficus carica leaves. He made new garments for them to wear. It would seem that God was concerned about their condition, so He gave them something else to cover their shame. Animal skin.

This new garb would have felt much more comfortable than scratchy fig leaves. Its purpose was not to cover their skin, but to cover their sin. It did not eliminate sin or its consequences. In order for God to make this new clothing, an animal had to die. A living animal was sacrificed for the sake of Adam and Eve. An innocent animal shed its blood to be able to cover-up their shame.

After the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, God gave Moses a long list of "dos and don'ts" for the people. One explanation, in particular, speaks to the reason God made clothing for Adam and Eve out of animal skin. "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11).

God instituted sacrifices for the atonement of sins. These sacrifices require the death of an animal, pouring out its blood on an altar dedicated to God. It is a gruesome concept, but perhaps it is like the reason a rainbow appears after it rains. That was to be a reminder to God that He would never destroy the earth by flood again. Perhaps the blood sacrifice of an animal reminded the Lord of what He had done for Adam and Eve by covering their shame with animal skin. God's plan requires a sacrifice of blood. Animal sacrifice for atonement is temporary. It did not stop people from sinning. But it did appease God in light of His ultimate plan of redemption.

It may seem to you that simply asking God to forgive your sins is sufficient. You lay your head on your pillow at night and ask forgiveness. When you wake in the morning, off you go, maybe with good intentions. But by the end of the day, there is a long list of sins to confess all over again. Atonement by offering a yearly animal sacrifice is only a temporary solution. There is more to God's plan of redemption than merely offering words or sacrifices.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I am not worthy of Your forgiveness, yet You give it to me freely. May my day be filled, not with regret of my sins, but with the hope of atonement in Your forgiveness. Reveal Your mercy and love to me. Thank You for Your enduring love. Amen.

## 9. (Friday)

## CREATION

**Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast (Genesis4:2-5).**

The saga continues. The children of Adam and Eve were taught to honor God and to bring offerings to the Lord. Cain, the firstborn, was a farmer and brought “some” of the produce he had grown. Abel, his younger brother, raised sheep and brought “fat portions from... the first born of his flock.” The absence of information does not mean that Cain did not also herd animals, or that Abel did not grow vegetables and fruit.

It appears that God liked Abel’s offering more than He appreciated Cain’s offering. This does not imply that God loved one of the brothers more than the other. It does not mean that Cain’s offering was less worthy of God, or that there was less value in his offering. Just like the parable of the prodigal son, the father loved both of his sons even though one squandered his inheritance (Luke 15:11-32).

The difference may have been in the attitude of the giver. It sounds like Abel was willing to sacrifice a sheep (“firstborn of his flock”) and Cain just brought “some” of the grain of his land. Does this have anything to say about your own heart? Is the Lord more pleased if you give Him some of your heart or when you give Him all of your heart? Jesus commended a poor widow for giving “two small copper coins” in the offering box. He said that the rich gave “out of their abundance,” while the widow, in her poverty, “put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4). It’s not the amount given, but the amount given from the heart that matters to God.

Perhaps it had to do with the fact that a blood sacrifice was offered by Abel, just like the Lord sacrificed an animal to cover Adam and Eve’s shameful sin. Whatever the reason, Cain was angry that God found more favor with his brother’s offering. Jealous or envious, it would seem that Cain looked at his brother’s offering begrudgingly. A rift had now come between the brothers.

The beginning of the book of Genesis gives us an understanding of what sin is: disobedience to God. The information about Cain and Abel now demonstrates that withholding from God is also sinful. Once sin was given birth in the garden of Eden, it began to spread like a virus.

Gracious Father, in this season of Lent, I do desire to give my whole life to You, just as Jesus gave his whole life for me. Help me to become aware when I withhold my love from You. Keep me from jealousy of others who appear to love You more. I do not know what is in their hearts, but You know what is in mine. For that, I thank You. Amen.

**Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:6-7).**

When sin was unleashed, it came out hungry. The Lord had loving compassion on Cain and went to him to discuss the matter of Cain’s heart. God was affirming: do what is right and you’ll be all right. With His admonition, God added a warning. If Cain was not careful to do what was right, sin was ready to devour him.

Here’s an often overlooked truth. You don’t have to go out looking for sin. Sin will come and find you. In the imagery of God’s words to Cain, He speaks of a door. As long as Cain is inside the house, he is safe and protected. It is what lies outside that should concern you. Sin waits patiently at the door, ready to pounce on you at the first opportune moment. Like a hungry lion, sin waits to grip its teeth.

The apostle Peter was very aware of this. He wrote, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” (1 Peter 5:8-9). Inside the house of the Lord’s loving protection, you are safe. It is when you step away from God and into the world, where the devil waits to consume you, that you must be most alert.

Remember, the devil is a coward. He hides in the darkness, waiting to strike. However, as James, the half-brother of Jesus, said, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). That is God’s promise to you.

The warning given to Cain is a warning for you as well. Sin attacks with a double punch. It first hits you so hard that you fall and give in to the sin. Then the followup punch condemns you for not trusting God, or telling you another lie: that God is untrustworthy. Once again, the devil’s main method of deception is to lie. Have you been knocked down by sin? Stand up. Regain your ground with the Lord. You may have been knocked down, but you are not knocked out. “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

There is wisdom in that saying, “Get down on your knees and fight like a man.” It is in prayer that you find strength. It is in trust and obedience to the Lord that you find victory over temptation.

Righteous Father, I am a sinner. I have fallen to temptation so many times. I accept responsibility for my decisions to sin. Help me to regain my footing by getting down on my knees to pray. Lift me up in Your forgiveness that I may live in Your presence always. Satan, be gone! Go and eat the dust to which you were cursed. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”  
“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

**At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:9, 26).**

Much has transpired since the time of Cain and Abel’s offering. Cain did yield to sin and murdered his brother. God confronted Cain about his brother and we are given that famous answer: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain lied to God and then disavowed any responsibility for his brother. But God was not fooled. He was very aware of Cain’s actions and condemned him to wander in the world. This seemed to Cain to be unbearable, but the Lord was still with him. Cain married and had children. After four generations, something wonderful happened. “At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.”

Out of ashes comes new life. As destructive as sin was (and is), God was (and is) able to prevail. To “call on the name of the Lord” can also mean to “proclaim the name of the Lord.” Through a history of sin, hope emerged and people began to turn to God. Proclaim the mercy and love of God. Faith prevails, but sin is persistent.

There is a small statue of Donald Duck beside my desk. On one of Donald’s shoulder’s sits an angel. On the other, the devil. Each one is speaking into the renowned duck’s ears, trying to convince him of what to do. It seems to me that the angel (or Holy Spirit) whispers while the devil screams. Both want our attention. Both want our obedience. The battle rages on. Whose voice do you listen to?

The Lord said (to Elijah), “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:11-12).

God calls with a calm and loving voice, even though He is more powerful than wind or lightning and thunder. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Powerful and loving God, calm my nerves. Calm my soul. There are many distractions which surround me. Allow me the quietness to listen to Your gentle voice. As Jesus prayed, “Lead (me) not into temptation, but deliver (me) from the evil one.”\* May I obey Your voice. Amen.

\*Matthew 6:13)

**He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).**

What about the serpent? What has the devil to do with this? The devil knows you have freedom to choose what you believe, just as Eve and Adam had that choice. Satan's tactics are no different today. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32).

In calling Satan a "murderer," Jesus was declaring the truth about sin and death. Paul wrote, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12). Because of Adam's sin, death came into the world.

In identifying the devil as a "liar," Jesus revealed the devil's true nature... his lies lead to sin, which leads to death. Paul continued: "To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given... Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses" (Romans 5:13). Sin and death are tied together because of the devil's lies.

You can see how the devil twisted and perverted God's words to Eve as well as to Jesus (during his temptation - Matthew 4:1-11). The devil is a liar. In fact, the devil invented lying as he is also "the father of lies." Jesus clearly declared that "there is no truth in him." God told Cain, "Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you" (Genesis 4:7). You can be assured that any temptation is going to be based on the devil's lies. In that same verse, God explained to Cain, "You must rule over it." The words of James are worth applying: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

To "rule over sin," and to "resist the devil," there is only one voice to whom you must listen. Call on the name, "Jesus!" "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

Peter quoted a prophecy during his first sermon. "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21/Joel 2:32). Hear the word of the Lord. Call on him. His name is Jesus.

Jesus! How sweet Your name is to me. Lord, I choose to listen to Your voice. I realize that the devil lies to me, but Your words are truth that set me free. "The word of God is alive and active."\* Speak Lord, and I will listen. I will submit to You and Your Word in order to resist the devil's temptations. Amen.

\*Hebrews 4:12

### 13. (Wednesday)

### COVENANT

**The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:5-8).**

How long will God tolerate sin in the world? Here, we read that the Lord had reached His limit. Evil was so rampant that God was saying, “Enough is enough.” How horrible was sin that God regretted creating humans and animals in the first place?

There was one glimmer of hope: Noah. God did not withhold His hand from demonstrating His wrath, but He did cover Noah and his family with mercy. You know the story. The rains came. The water rose from the earth. Noah and his family had built an ark in which to preserve animal life. And then came the rainbow showing God’s promise.

Even in the Lord’s regret, He offered hope. He extended an unconditional covenant agreement to Noah. “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Genesis 9:13-16).

God gave His promise, an unconditional covenant to the inhabitants of the earth. God withheld the full fury of His wrath because He had a plan. Paul asked, “What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:22-24).

This first covenant was unconditional. It was God’s promise that, though He is a God of wrath, in His patience, redemption was His plan. His plan includes your redemption from sin, to “make the riches of his glory known” to you.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.\* Thank You, Lord, for Your amazing mercy and redemption. Amen.

\*Psalm 51:10

**The Lord had said to Abram... “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you...” Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness (Genesis 12:2, 3, 15:6).**

**“This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham... I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:5, 7).**

The covenant God made with Noah was to never destroy the earth by flood again. He gave the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Another covenant was given to Abraham. Abraham was to become the father of many nations. This covenant (also unconditional) was based on faith. “What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3 - see Genesis 15:6). Paul adds in verses 21- 22, “...being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’”

The sign of this covenant of faith was coupled with the act of circumcision. “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you” (Genesis 17:10-11).

Through the redemption of Noah and the righteousness of Abraham’s faith, God’s covenants were demonstrated in corresponding signs. As the rainbow was a sign of redemption, circumcision was the sign of identification. By faith, Abraham and his descendants would be set apart from all others. They would be identified with God by their faith. Not only that, but the promise would impact the world: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Circumcision marked (in the flesh) the descendants of Abraham. However, circumcision does not save people from their sins. Sin still has its strong grip. The good news is, God has a plan which will also include you. “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Benevolent God, circumcise my heart. I want to be set apart for You. I choose to enter into a covenant of faith with You. I desire to draw close to You every day. I want to love You with all my heart and with all my soul, and live for You.\* Amen.

\*Deuteronomy 30:6.

**Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him... “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac... Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.”**

**Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”**

**“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together (Genesis 22:2, 6-8).**

You know the rest of this story. Abraham raised his knife to kill Isaac, but God stopped him and honored him for his obedience. Abraham looked over and saw a ram stuck in a thicket. He sacrificed that ram (male sheep) and called the place where the offering was made: “The Lord Will Provide” (Genesis 22:9-18).

Abraham was such an old man and Isaac was his only legitimate son through whom “all nations” would be blessed. It would be unbearable to obey, but Abraham’s faith was stronger than his fear. He trusted God and God proved Himself to be trustworthy. A substitute sacrifice was provided instead.

The purpose of this encounter was to be a foreshadowing of God’s “Plan B.” God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love” (vs. 2), and sacrifice him. As the ram was to Isaac, Jesus is to you. God declared of Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love...” (Matthew 17:5). And then God sacrificed His only Son on the cross. There was no substitute animal provided. Instead, Jesus became the sacrifice in your place. He took your sins upon himself on that cross by shedding his blood. The Lord provided what was required.

Abraham and Isaac went on “together,” but they were not alone. They walked with God together. They walked by faith. To Noah, God promised to never repeat bringing a flood. To Abraham, God promised to honor Abraham’s faith... to be their God throughout all generations.

The ongoing relationship God promised to Abraham was His unconditional covenant: to be Abraham’s God and the God for all of his descendants... even to “all peoples.” The path Abraham walked was by faith in God. He believed “the Lord Will Provide.” The covenant made to Abraham connects the faithfulness of God to your faith in God.

Yes, Lord, I desire to walk with You by faith every day. Though I may stumble, I know You are with me. That You would make it possible for me to be in Your presence is overwhelming, especially in light of the price You paid for my salvation. Jesus, you paid it all! Amen.

**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6).**

**Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.”**

**Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exodus 24:7-8).**

430 years have passed since the Lord established His covenant with Abraham. It was time for the Hebrew people to learn that obedience to God follows faith in God. Moses led the people out of their slavery in Egypt. God gave Moses the Law (Ten Commandments and subsequent laws of the Torah): the Israelites were to obey the laws as a covenant sign of their relationship with God.

The Law became the next covenant for God’s people. After Moses read from the “Book of the Covenant” to the Israelites, they, with one voice, declared obedience to God’s commands. Moses sealed this covenant (agreement) by sprinkling blood (an animal was sacrificed) on the people: “This is the blood of the covenant.”

The Law did not eliminate sin. After giving the Law, the Lord made provisions for addressing their sins. “The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone sins...’” (Leviticus 4:1). The words that follow list “unintentional” sins, but they all had one thing in common. An animal must be sacrificed as a “sin offering” for the atonement of their sins. By this, “The priest shall... make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven” (Leviticus 5:10).

The Law written on the tablets became the sign of this covenant. The Law became a responsive covenant, a conditional agreement between God and His people. Submitting to the Lord by obeying His Law, the Hebrew people would be God’s chosen people. They responded by proclaiming, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.” God would be their only God, and they would be “a holy nation,” obeying His commandments and laws. Obedience follows faith.

Lord, I know your laws are wise and true. I admit that I allow sin to persuade me to neglect obedience to your Word. Guide me with Your truth. I trust Your voice to guide me onto paths of righteousness for Your name’s sake.\* May my faith become evident by submitting to the authority of Your Word. I bless You and praise You. Amen.

\*Psalm 23:3.

**So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.**

**What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law (Romans 7:4-7).**

The Jews had circumcision and the Law. But the Law still could not save them. Sacrifices were to be offered yearly as a temporary atonement for their sins. In other words, as Paul asserted, the Law had no lasting power over sin.

Paul points out that the purpose of the Law was to identify the power of sin. The Laws of God cannot save you from your sins. They can only remind you that you are a sinner. This is why a sacrifice for the atonement of sins was necessary. The Law could not save, but it could guide His people.

How often have you promised God that you would change your sinful ways? Was knowing God's Law able to keep you from sinning? Have you ever thought, "I can keep on sinning because God will forgive my sin?" That's just another one of the devil's lies. Or how about this: "It's just a little sin!" Sin still crouches at your door. Sin is not afraid of the Law. It still has a strong grip on you.

"So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Romans 7:21-25).

Paul identifies another law, the law of sin, which makes you a slave of that law. Though your mind may "delight in God's law," you are still shackled (enslaved) to sin. There are two laws at work within you. Like Paul asked, "Who can save me?" He has a ready answer for you: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Now, you can live "in the new way of the Spirit."

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. In other words, God, *HELP!* Help me to live in the new way of the Spirit. Amen.

**When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**

**Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12,16).**

Another 400-450 years have passed. The prophet Samuel declared, “The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people” (1 Samuel 13:14). Change was in the air. Another covenant was about to be established.

In Samuel’s words above, Samuel declared that David’s heir will reign forever. Solomon succeeded David as king, but these words have declared yet another covenant, one established forever. The Lord proclaims that, through David’s lineage, another king (from David’s “offspring”) will be established. The “throne of this kingdom will be established forever.” This new throne became the sign of God’s next covenant. David responded by saying, “Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant” (Romans 7:28).

David called God’s covenant “trustworthy.” He was a man who sought after God’s heart. He believed that this future King would rule forever. In making this unconditional covenant with David, God moved from the signs of circumcision and the Law to a new sign: the establishment of an eternal throne. There will be a King who will reign on His throne forever.

“They encircled the throne... In a loud voice they were saying: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain... To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Revelation 5:11-13). “He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5).

What has the Lord been doing since He banished Adam and Eve from the garden? He has been building a way to reunite Himself to His people. God established a throne for David. From his descendants would come a King whose kingdom will be established forever. God has not been uninvolved in restoring His relationship with people. He’s just been very patient. Establishing His covenants were His plan all along. They were the foundation by which God will restore an eternal relationship with Him.

My Lord, You have been working all this time, making covenants that were intended to draw people near to You. I want to be a person who seeks after Your heart and proclaims allegiance to Your eternal throne. Amen.

**“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant...**

**“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

**No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).**

Another 350-400 years have gone by since the covenant was made with David. Another 400 years will pass when “Plan B” becomes a reality: the **B**irth of Christ. Jeremiah declares the time of the final covenant is coming. The best is yet to **B**e! This new covenant will be the last and only covenant necessary. This new covenant will be the permanent access which bridges the way for everyone to be able to walk with God as the Lord walked with Adam. This covenant will complete God’s restoration for all people.

Jeremiah emphasizes that the time will come when there will be a “new covenant with the people.” This covenant will be altogether different from the previous covenants. “The days are coming” sounds like urgent expectation. The time will be soon. It won’t be like the covenants of old, for God will place His law “in their minds and write it on their hearts.” This covenant will be personal. With strong conviction, the Lord lays it all on the line. He’s committed. He’s “all-in” with His plan. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

The covenants of the past were given to build a solid foundation for this new and final covenant. The covenant to Noah was for God to remember (redemption/rainbow); to Abraham, it was relational (faith/circumcision); to Moses, it was a reminder (obedience/Law); and to David, it was a promised ruler (throne). The new commandment will be the fulfillment of God’s redeeming plan (Jesus, our Redeemer). This covenant will be permanent. This covenant is for everyone, “...from the least of them to the greatest.” This new covenant is God’s gift, given especially for you. And it comes at great cost.

Jesus, forgive me. Give me a new mind and heart by which to know You. You are my God. You are my eternal hope. You are my Lord. Amen.

**You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:31-33).**

The angel Gabriel was sent to a young virgin named Mary. She was informed that she had been chosen to give birth to the Christ. Gabriel told Mary he would be given the name "Jesus." The meaning of the name Jesus is, "the Lord saves." Gabriel also repeated what Samuel had prophesied; he would be a descendant of Abraham (Jacob was Abraham's grandson); he would come from the lineage of David, and his throne (Kingdom) would be established forever.

This was so important to Matthew that he started writing his gospel by verifying Jesus' bloodline to both David and Abraham. "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Matthew wanted his Jewish readers to understand that Jesus' bloodline fit the description of the prophecies regarding his bloodline. Jesus was born to be King!

Matthew also ends his gospel (as did the other gospel writers) by recording the words on the sign above Jesus' head on the cross. The sign indicating the charges against Jesus read: "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37). It appears vital to Matthew that his Jewish readers should understand this truth. Jesus was/is Messiah (Hebrew), and Christ (Greek).

Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies. He is "the anointed One" (the meaning of Messiah and Christ) as well as the promised King. God proclaimed to Abraham that through his descendants, "...all nations on earth will be blessed through him" (Genesis 18:18). His kingdom would come from David's throne: "your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Signed, sealed and delivered!

Next Christmas, as you reread all the accounts of Jesus' birth, keep this truth in mind. Jesus is the promised One. Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin which began in the garden with Adam and Eve. "Alleluia! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!" (Revelation 19:6-7).

Jesus, You are my Lord and Savior. You are the promised anointed One. Today, I rejoice and am glad to give You the glory You deserve. You are the "Son of the Most High," and "Your kingdom will never end!" Alleluia! Amen.

**This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

**But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 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.”**

**All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). (Matthew 1:18-23).**

Mary’s “husband” was pledged to be married to Mary. This betrothal had significant implications in that, though they were considered to be married, they would not live together for a period of one year. After one year, the marriage ceremony would take place and they would then live together as husband and wife. Joseph, being a compassionate man, was perplexed when he learned that Mary was pregnant... not with his child. He had decided to quietly divorce her with no charges of infidelity, thus sparing her from being stoned to death.

In a dream, an angel spoke to Joseph and instructed him to “take Mary home as your wife.” He explained that her conception was from the Holy Spirit. Joseph was also instructed to give the baby the name of Jesus, “because he will save his people from their sins.” *Jesus* is the Greek name for *Joshua*, which means “*the Lord saves*”

Following this announcement, the angel cited Isaiah: “They will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”) - “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

In Jesus, God became flesh in order to “be with us.” Since the extraction of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, there has been a separation between God and humans. That perfect communion He once had in the garden was severed, but now, will soon be restored. The revealing of God’s plan came down to this: He would come Himself, in the flesh, in order to save you from your sins and restore you to Him.

Thank You, Lord, for being with me. Thank You for the role Joseph played in Your plan. I ask that I too would be ready to listen to You and do as You desire. You are with me. I am grateful to You. Amen.

**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 all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5, 14).**

The disciple John took on a different task from the other gospel writers. His main purpose was to let his readers know who Jesus is: God! He was writing to both Hebrew and Greek readers and needed to choose his words carefully in order to speak to both Jew and Gentile.

The Jews would immediately think of Genesis 1:1 when he used the phrase, "In the beginning." To the Greek mind, they would understand "the Word" (logos) as a term of theological purpose. So John writes of the birth of Christ, indicating that Jesus is both the "Word" (of God) and the "Word" (is God).

John explains that Jesus (Word) was both "with God" and at the same time, "was God." Our language does not allow us words that explain how one person can be seen as singular and plural at the same time. Having done so in his opening remarks, John proceeds to tell how Jesus (God) created the world. Not only did Jesus (God) create light in the beginning, He is also "the light of all mankind." He explained, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (John 1:9). And so, Christ, the Messiah was born. John uses the same terminology as Jesus and refers to God as "Father," and Jesus as "Son."

You are probably aware of John's most familiar verses (John 3:16-17). As a reminder, here they are again: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

There it is! God's purpose coming into our world in the flesh as Jesus, was to "save the world through him." The name Jesus means, "the Lord saves." It is through your faith in Jesus that you know this. The great dividing chasm which was created in the garden has now been bridged. In Him, we are no longer separated. God is with us, "full of grace and truth."

My heart overflows with joy, Jesus, that You would come into this world to become the sacrifice that gives eternal life. You bridged that gigantic gap caused by sin... not just the sin of Adam and Eve, but my own sins. You came to earth and died as if just for me. Praise You, my Lord and God. Amen.

**Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"**

**Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." Then the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man (Matthew 9:2-8).**

At that time, orthodox Jewish belief held that, if a person was sick, it was a direct result from a sin. They concluded that healing could only be completed if the individual was forgiven by God. The teachers of the law firmly believed that only God was able to forgive sins, but because Jesus declared the man's sins as being forgiven, they accused Jesus of assuming God's authority.

Jesus entered their conversation by asking which was easier, to forgive sins or to heal a person? In order to prove that he had the authority to forgive, Jesus told the lame man to stand up and walk. The teachers of the law, as well as the crowd, could only draw one conclusion. Since the man was able to rise and walk, his sins had to be forgiven. If only God can forgive sins, then Jesus must be God.

"Son of Man" is a description of Jesus that signifies both his humanity and divinity. The teachers of the law would be well aware of this term from one of Daniel's visions. "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

Sounds like Jesus! He not only has the "authority" to heal, but has the "sovereign power" to forgive sins as well. Sounds like Jesus! Yes, Jesus came to heal, but ultimately, to forgive your sins.

Have you ever asked, "What have I done to deserve this?" That's a fallout from what those teachers of the Law believed. Do you believe that your "sickness," or bad situation is a direct result of sin? You may be right, as there are consequences to sinning. But you would also be right to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Jesus, I receive Your forgiveness, that I may walk with You daily as did Adam in the Garden. Thank You for Your sovereign power! Amen.

24. (Tuesday)

CHRIST

**When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8).**

Jesus stepped into an empty boat belonging to Peter and asked Peter to take him into the water so he could preach. When he finished preaching, he told Peter to go into deep water and lower his fishing net. Reluctantly, Peter obeyed. When he pulled up the net, there were so many fish in the net that it began to tear. After calling his fishing partners, they filled two boatloads of fish from the net. The weight was causing both boats to sink.

Peter's reaction was to fall down at the knees of Jesus and beg Jesus to depart from him. Peter admitted in the Lord's presence to being "a sinful man." There is something about being in the presence of God that causes you to realize your sins are fully exposed. Peter's reaction was the same as Adam's. Adam tried to hide from the Lord because he realized he was "a sinful man." Peter just wanted Jesus to go away.

In God's presence, your sins are exposed. There is no hiding or running from God that will eliminate sin. Light exposes what is in the dark, but darkness can never remove what is there.

Although you may be able to hide your sins from other people, your sins are clearly evident to God. You can blame others, lie and pretend that you have not sinned but that does not remove the sin from God's eyes. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Sin separates us from God.

Sin, no matter how small, is still sin. You cannot hide from God, and He won't "go away" because you ask Him. Confession is good for the soul. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Keep in mind: confession without repentance is shallow. "Repent" means to turn around; to turn away from sin and turn toward God. Confession of sin without intent to turn your back on sin is only boasting. Unfortunately, the body you wear is human, and you often find yourself saying, as did the apostle Paul, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). Paul continues: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25).

The Lord does not turn His back on you. By sinning, we turn our backs on God. His presence is not intended to condemn you, but for you to know Him as He is: your loving, forgiving Father.

Lord, I am sinful. Of that there is no doubt. I try to compare myself with others whose sins I regard worse than mine, but that does not erase my sin. Only You can remove that stain from my soul. I confess my sin, repent, and intend to walk in Your presence where I truly want to be. Amen. - "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ!"

**Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50).**

Once again, a religious leader was questioning Jesus about being able to forgive sins. A Pharisee had invited Jesus to dinner. A “sinful” woman had crashed the party because she heard Jesus was there. As she stood behind him, her tears splashed down on his feet. Then she bent over and dried his feet with her hair. All the Pharisee could think is, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). It is easier to condemn the sins of others than to confess your own sins. The relevant question is, how did Jesus look upon this woman?

After rebuking the Pharisee, the amazing happened. “Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48, 50). As confession without repentance is shallow, repentance without faith has no effect. This woman’s heart was clearly forgiven. It was her faith that brought her to Jesus. As the Psalmist wrote, “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17).

This sinful woman came with a repentant and contrite heart. The word “contrite” means penitent or remorseful. It also means, “ground to pieces.” Sin turns your heart to stone. Confession and repentance break it to pieces. Faith in Christ replaces your hard, crushed heart with a new and supple heart... a heart that beats with the heartbeat of God. As God promised, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).

This, God craves far more than any sacrifice or offering. You can be sure the woman who wiped her tears from Jesus’ feet left there a new and changed person. It was not being a descendant from Abraham that changed her heart. It was not the tablets of stone given by Moses that ground her spirit. It was not the crown of David that made any difference. It was her faith in God that changed her heart and life... faith in Christ’s forgiveness.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24).

O Lord, You know my heart. I cannot hide it from you. I give you permission to search my heart and thoughts. Holy Spirit, reveal any sinful way in my life, and lead me in the way of everlasting peace. Amen.

**The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel” (John 1:29).**

**The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:35-36)**

Two days in a row, John the Baptist made the same proclamation. “Look, the Lamb of God.” To be spoken twice infers the importance of this title. This is the only place in the Bible where this title is used, although reference to Jesus being “lamb” is found, especially in the book of Revelation. Peter wrote: “...the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect...” (1 Peter 1:19).

John the Baptist was making a strong effort to prove that he was not the promised Messiah, nor a prophet, but only, “the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” (John 1:23 - referring to Isaiah 40:3). John understood that he held the incredible responsibility of ushering in the coming of the Messiah (Christ). Before John’s birth, an angel told his father, Zechariah, that he would have a son who would proclaim the age of the The Messiah. The angel said Zechariah’s son would “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The “Lamb of God” has become the ‘Call-Sign’ for Jesus and a perfect description of who Jesus is. The Baptist also explained the role of this Lamb. He said Jesus was “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is also an affirmation of what Abraham said when God called him to sacrifice his son, Isaac: “God himself will provide the lamb” (Genesis 22:8).

John the Baptist understood his role was to prepare people for the coming of Christ. Of course, God had been doing that for centuries. The covenants He made were always pointing to the future and a covenant that would include all people. The time had finally arrived to enact this new covenant (see Jeremiah 31 - Day 19). Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb who takes away your sins. His throne will be established forever. As the apostle John described in the book of Revelation: “I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne” (Revelation 5:6).

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, I humble myself before You because there is no other way to be reconciled to God. You have brought me into the family of God by Your sacrifice on the cross, and I am truly grateful. Again, I thank You and praise Your holy name. Amen.

**Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”**

**The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about (Luke 18:31-34).**

John the Baptist tried to prepare the Jewish community for Jesus' coming. Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for his death. On at least three different occasions, Jesus told them what was about to happen. Perhaps they could not understand, or were afraid to know, but Jesus understood the importance of trying to prepare them for his death.

The account in Luke is very specific. He expressed two very important truths. Jesus would be killed and, “on the third day,” he would rise from from his death. You can easily understand why his disciples had such difficulty comprehending these truths. It was out of their scope. It was not in their realm of reality.

Because you are aware of what happened to Jesus, it is not as much of a shock as it was to his disciples. The end of the story reveals the truth within the story. The three synoptic gospel writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) all agreed that the telling of Jesus' warning had no impact on their understanding or acceptance of it.

The entire Old Testament, especially the recordings of Moses and the Prophets, pointed to this event. The Jewish people knew the writings and the prophecies, but found it impossible to believe when it happened right in front of their eyes.

Don't to be too harsh with them. You too have often been so shocked by good or bad news that you gasped, “I can't believe it!” In fact, you may also be one of those who now reads these words of forgiveness, redemption and salvation and still say, “I can't believe it.” (Or would it be more accurate to say, “I won't believe it?”)

The Word of God has always declared the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to be absolutely true. The disciples and followers of Christ through the centuries have died defending these truths. In what do you believe so strongly that you are willing to die for it? Jesus said of himself, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13), Jesus is your friend. Can you believe it?

Jesus, You are Lord and Savior, but sometimes I forget that Y ou are also my friend. You laid Your life down on the cross in my place. Holy Spirit, remind me throughout this day to reflect on this friendship. I'm so glad You are my friend. Amen.

**“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

**“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.**

**“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:11, 14-15, 17-18).**

One of the most difficult tasks in understanding why Jesus went to the cross to die is that it was his own choice. It is human nature to blame someone else for things we don't like. To blame anyone for the death of Jesus is ridiculous. Certain people may have had a role in the process of his crucifixion, but it was Jesus' decision to die on the cross. It was God's plan all along.

You may have to stop and pause here for a minute. Have you ever blamed others for his death? Do you have a bias against Jewish people because you believe they killed him? You're not alone. This thought is a severe misunderstanding which appears repeatedly throughout history. Listen to what Jesus said! He called himself “The good shepherd. What is the purpose of this good shepherd? To sacrifice his life for his sheep: “I lay down my life for the sheep.”

You are his sheep. He is your good shepherd. He loves you just as the Father loves His Son. Jesus clarified that the reason the Father loves him is because he willingly gave his life “of his own accord.” Jesus chose to die for you. Jesus chose to die because of you... because of your sins. He laid down his life for the forgiveness of your sins. His choice!

Also notice he said that he has “authority of take it up again.” It's a package deal. He gave up his life, knowing he would rise again from the dead. Technically, you could say that no one killed Jesus because he is alive! He died, knowing he would live again. However, his resurrection does not diminish the purpose of his death. He died for you, not just to forgive your sins, but to pave the way for you to have a personal relationship with God through him. Jesus declared, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The pathway, once destroyed by Adam's sin, has been bridged. Jesus is the bridge to God. This is why he chose to die.

That You love me so much, Father, is beyond my comprehension. That Jesus would die for me... for the complete forgiveness of all my sins, is hard to fathom. That You bridged the chasm between You and me is most wonderful! Thank you for choosing to die in my place. Amen.

**While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26).**

In the sacrament of Christian communion, the bread encompasses Christ's physical body. After giving "thanks," Jesus took some of the unleavened bread and began to tear it in pieces. Then he commanded his disciples to eat it, as it represented his body.

The bread revealed the physical suffering Jesus would endure through his flogging and crucifixion. Though his bones were not broken ("He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken" Psalm 34:20 - see also John 19:36), his body was torn to pieces. The 40 lashes of the whip tore apart his skin, even to the depth of showing bone. The spikes which penetrated his hands and feet would have brought incredible pain. Not until after Jesus' crucifixion was anyone able to even begin to understand what he was talking about in reference to the bread.

For the Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt, the use of unleavened bread (no yeast) was meant to prepare for a hasty departure into their liberation from slavery. They wouldn't have time to let the bread rise. The use of unleavened bread in the hands of Jesus meant that he had not yet risen from the dead, anticipating his liberation from death.

In the context of communion, the bread represents Christ's sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Your sins were crucified with Jesus on the cross. He bore your sins on the cross. You can even say that your sins were nailed to the cross. His body was the substitution (exchange) for your sins. He exchanged his body for your sins by nailing your sins to the cross.

To eat the "body of Christ," in obedience to his command, "Take and eat; this is my body," is to participate in the death of Christ in which he removes your sins. You are to consume his "body," just as Jesus consumed your sins in the death of his body.

Luke adds, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). In other words, never forget what Jesus has done for you. Always remember, his sacrifice was for the forgiveness of your sins. Keep in mind all that Christ suffered in his body when he was flogged and nailed to the cross.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. It is almost unbearable, Jesus, to imagine what You went through for my sake. I will never see that with my own eyes, but I now realize in my spirit just what You endured. Every time I hear the words, "This is my body," I will remember You. And I will remember what You have done for me. Amen.

**Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28).**

In the Passover Seder, there are four cups, or four times to drink from the cup. Luke's gospel alludes to these four different times of drinking from the cup when he writes, "After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you" (Luke 22:17). This would have been the fourth and final time to drink the wine during the Seder. This was not the cup of communion.

There are four names given to the four cups used in the Passover meal. The names may be slightly different, depending on who has interpreted the cup's purpose. The reference to the cups comes from Exodus 6:6-7). The first is the cup of Sanctification ["I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians"]. The second is the cup of Deliverance ["I will free you from being slaves to them"]. The third cup is the cup of Redemption ["I will redeem you with an outstretched arm"]. The final cup is the cup of Acceptance ["I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God"].

It is Luke who identifies a fifth cup. At the giving of the fourth cup, Jesus told his disciple to "divide it among you." In other words, Jesus was instructing them to drink the remaining wine. "Finish it!" By so doing, Jesus was declaring God's purpose to be fulfilled in his blood. All the covenants in the Old Testament were complete. They had fulfilled their purpose. Jesus came to fulfill everything past in order to bring in the new. The last words of Jesus on the cross were, "It is finished" (John 19:30. Luke adds, "With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

The old had finished its work. It was time to bring in the new. Again, it is Luke who points this out: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). Paul reasserts the usage of the word "new" in his instructions for communion in

1 Corinthians 11:25. The new covenant does not eliminate the old; it fulfills it in order for the new covenant to begin.

The old covenants are the foundation upon which the new covenant is upheld. Before the new could come, the old would have to be completed. Jesus is the new covenant. "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

Praise the Lord! I am an heir to the new promise, the new covenant with God through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Forever, I am His. Forever, I will live to praise His name. Forever, He will be my God. Amen.

**“...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.  
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7,9).**

The fifth cup, which Jesus introduces, is the cup of the blood of the new covenant, or, “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25). From the time of the creation to his death on the cross, it has always been about the blood. “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Leviticus 17:11).

The blood of an animal was shed in order for God to make clothing in the garden to cover Adam and Eve’s sin. The blood of a ram was offered by Abraham in place of his son, Isaac. In the Law of Moses, blood sacrifices were offered for the atonement of sins. Through David’s bloodline, the eternal king would be given David’s throne. It would be established through the blood of Christ.

From creation, to covenant, to Christ, it is the blood that signifies forgiveness. The blood of Jesus “purifies us from all sin,” just as John had written. God is faithful. God is just. God is trustworthy. Through the blood of Jesus, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Look at how Matthew worded it: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Although Jesus shed his blood for all to be forgiven, Matthew cites the word “many.” Many will be saved, but not everyone. Only those who accept and confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, will be saved (See Romans 10:9-10).

“All sin.” Every sin, if you confess and repent of your sins, will be forgiven. That is the promise and guarantee of the new covenant in his blood. “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:14).

My Lord and my God, I am not worthy to receive Your grace and love. There is no reason I should receive Your everlasting forgiveness except for Your love. In me, Your grace abounds. Thank You, Jesus, for dying on the cross. I now have new life through the forgiveness of my sins... through Your blood of the new covenant. Amen.

**But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith (Romans 3:21-25).**

The “righteousness of God” has been revealed, according to Paul, not by human ability to obey the Law and the Prophets. His righteousness has been given “through faith in Jesus Christ.” There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. This righteousness is given to everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ. Human attempts to appease God by continually offering sacrifices to atone for their sins “fall short of the glory of God.” There is only one solution: justification by grace.

What the Law and the Prophets were unable to provide (righteousness) was freely given to all who believe and have faith in Jesus. You would benefit from memorizing these words: “all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” The next verse explains how this came about. “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.”

People attempted to become righteous before God by their own methods, but could never fully achieve it. People felt that, by their own devices and attempts, God would favor them. However, human attempts to become righteous failed miserably. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” What humans failed to accomplish, God provided by His grace. The redemption for sin has come through faith in the shedding of Jesus’ blood.

Does hanging a cross or a painting of Jesus praying over a rock forgive your sins? Does attending church and wearing a cross around your neck save you? Do any attempts by you to gain God’s righteousness ever work? No. Salvation is not attained by what you do, but by what God has done for you. By faith in Jesus Christ and the blood he shed on the cross to forgive your sins, you have been saved... you have been redeemed... you have been made righteous... you have been justified. It was God who gave Jesus to be the “sacrifice of atonement” for your sins. It was all God, and it was always God’s plan to do this.

Heavenly Father, all of my attempts to be right and justified before Your eyes have failed. I could no more jump to the moon than do anything that would forgive my sins. Thank You for paving the way for me to receive this blessing of salvation through my faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—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 (1 John 2:1-2).**

Nobody is perfect. The scriptures are clear that everyone falls into the category of “sinner.” It does not matter the weight or the size of the sin, because all and any sin is an act of rebellion against God. All sin is an attempt to justify disobedience to the Lord, as did Adam and Eve when they ate from the forbidden fruit tree.

Comparing one sin to another is a feeble attempt to justify a life of sin. In essence, if you choose to sin, you choose to mock God. The Lord said through Isaiah, “They have chosen their own ways, and they delight in their abominations” (Isaiah 66:3).

Jesus did not die in order for you to continue to live a sinful life. Neither did he die so you can go back and try to please God on your own again. He died to set you free from the bondage of sin and death. No longer are you chained to sin and the fear of death. Christ has set you free by his atoning sacrifice.

Here is the good news: when you do sin (and you will), Jesus is your advocate. Jesus appeals to the Father on your behalf. Because of the righteousness of Christ, your sins, past, present and future, have been forgiven by Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for your sins. And not only your sins, but the sins of the whole world. “Your sins have been forgiven on account of his name” (1 John 2:12).

Why? John speaks to this: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10). It all boils down to the character of God. God is love (1 John 4:8).

You do not have to struggle to live a perfect life. You have been given the avenue on which to walk. John explains that “we might live through him (Jesus).” The “might” in this verse reaffirms that you always have a freedom to choose how to live. You may not be perfect, but you are free to walk in the perfect love God has for you. You may fall and sin, but Jesus is your advocate who will pick you up again and again, so that you can learn to “live through him.”

Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.

Lord, I am not perfect, but I am so glad You have forgiven me. May I walk with You all the days of my life. When I fall, I trust You to pick me up so we can continue our journey together. Wherever You lead, I will follow. I will walk with You in Your perfect love for me. Amen.

**“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6).**

Chapter 42 of Isaiah begins with these words: ““Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.” As a prophetic book, it is not difficult to understand that God is talking about Jesus as “my servant.” It is easy to look back and see how God’s words, spoken through Isaiah, define the Christ. In a subsequent verse (6), a remarkable prophecy is made in regard to the Christ. God says of His servant: “I... will make you to be a covenant for the people.”

There have been four covenants God has made with His creation through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Through Isaiah’s prophecy, God is declaring that there will be one more. Jesus called this “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). God did not say His servant (Jesus) would introduce another covenant. He declared that Jesus is the new covenant. He is the fifth, final, and eternal covenant established by God.

The new covenant of Christ is the bridge by which sinners are reconciled to God. Where people were once separated from God (because of Adam and Eve’s sin), there is no longer a separation. Jesus is the bridge which leads people to God.

Look at it like this: the four covenants made through Noah, Abraham, Moses and David are the foundations which uphold the bridge. They are the strong buttresses which support the bridge. The foundations (covenants) by themselves were never able to restore humanity back into a living and loving relationship with God. However, they had their place and purpose in history. Jesus, by his blood sacrificed for the atonement of your sins, is the bridge which spans the covenants and completes the way to redemption.

Again, Jesus is the new and final covenant between God and His creation. Jesus is “a covenant for the people AND a light for the Gentiles.” The covenant in the blood of Jesus is a covenant made for all people. The promise to Noah (redemption), the promise to Abraham (relational “all nations will be blessed”), the promise made through the Mosaic Law (sacrifice for the atonement for sin), and the promise made to David (eternal kingdom) are now fulfilled in the covenant of Jesus Christ. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Jesus, You are the path of truth, the avenue of love, the road of salvation, the highway of hope, the thoroughfare of redemption, the bridge of eternal life! Thank You for bringing me to the Father. By Your blood, You have accomplished all that God planned since the beginning. PRAISE YOUR NAME! Amen.

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them... We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).**

"The new is here! All this is from God." The second half of these combined sentences should remind you that you have done nothing to deserve this gift from God. You are a "new creation" if you are in Christ. Jesus did it all. All that was required to restore (reconcile) your relationship with God was accomplished by Christ on the cross. Because of this, you are a "new creation." It is as if God molded and made you brand new, as if for the first time. The old (slavery to the law of sin) is gone. The old (separation from God) is over. The new you is here.

What the old covenants could not achieve, Christ completed on the cross. He bridged that gap between you and God by dying for your sins. In so doing, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." What that means, as Paul explained, is that your sins are gone. They have no power over you anymore.

How is that possible? Again, Paul explained, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, he took your sins upon himself. He took your sinful life and the eternal consequences of sin away from you. He bore your sins on the cross. By so doing, God made Jesus (who had no sin) "be sin" for you. The blood of Jesus was offered as a sacrifice for the atonement of your sins. You are now "at-one" (atone) with God. Reconciled. Restored. Renewed. Redeemed!

Picture this: you stand at the end of a long, narrow bridge and cannot see the other side. The toll to cross the bridge costs far more than you could ever pay. Jesus comes to you and asks, "Do you want to go to the other side of the bridge?" You truthfully answer, "Yes." "Let me pay the price for you," Jesus answers. "Then come, follow me!"

On Christ's behalf, Paul urges you to follow Jesus. "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." By writing "we," he means Jesus, himself, and all who have already crossed that bridge, to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. The word "implore" is heartfelt. It means, "beg earnestly," "to cry out and weep for." Ultimately, this is the purpose of this Lenten Bible study. I implore you, come to Jesus and **be reconciled to God.**

Lord Jesus, I come to you knowing that You died for my sins, and are presenting me to God as a new creation! I am reconciled to You. Amen.

**...giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:12-14).**

You qualify! That's a statement you receive in the mail or email almost daily. Isn't it great to know you are qualified! In this context, yes, it is, "thanks to the Father." It is God who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of "the kingdom of light." Christ is the light who has brought you out of the darkness of sin and death.

Paul reminds you that Jesus "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness." You now live in the "kingdom of the Son he loves." The entrapment of sin (darkness) has been released, and you now live in the light of redemption. You "qualify" because of what Jesus has done for you. He has brought you from darkness to light; from slavery to freedom; from condemnation to forgiveness; from the power of Satan to the power of God.\*

Do you remember what God said to the serpent (Satan) in the garden? "He will crush your head" (Genesis 3:15). Paul is writing to confirm that is exactly what Jesus did on the cross. The power of Satan and his dominion have no power over you since you are now a "new creation." You qualify for the inheritance God planned from the very beginning: eternal life in God's glorious kingdom.

Warren W. Wiersbe wrote: "Jesus Christ is preeminent in salvation. No other person could redeem us, forgive us, transfer us out of Satan's kingdom into God's kingdom, and do it wholly by grace."\*\* Paul aptly explains, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

What can you do? Give "joyful thanks to the Father." You are qualified! You are forgiven and redeemed! And that is only possible because of God's grace toward you.

In my spirit, Lord, I want to leap up and down joyfully for what You have done for me. Don't let my human inhibitions stop me from rejoicing out loud. I praise You, my God and Savior for all You have gone through, just for me. Thank You, Father, for Your amazing gift of grace! Amen.

\*Citing Wm Barclay, Daily Bible Series, Westminster Press, 1977.

\*\*Be Complete, Victor Books 1982.

**Here is a trustworthy saying: if we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him (2 Timothy 2:11-12).**

This “trustworthy saying” may have come from one of the first hymns of the Christian church. During the earliest persecution, in order to spread the gospel, believers often put their teachings into song. In the words of the scripture, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Romans 6:8).

There is more to being a Christian than merely making a change in your moral compass. Christianity, faith in Christ, is a matter of identity. You identify with Jesus when you know him as Lord and Savior.

You are identified with Jesus in his death, as well as his resurrection. It is a matter of recognizing that you died with Jesus on the cross and you were raised with him from the tomb. As Jesus died, so did you. As Jesus was raised from the dead, so have you. In living, we talk about going from life to death. God has turned this completely around. In Christ, we move from death to life.

To “endure” life does not mean to simply put up with life. You are not on the platform of the salvation train, waiting to be exported to heaven. To “endure” means to live! It means to live in Christ. If we live in Christ, we shall also “reign with him.”

“If we died with him, we will also live with him.” Jesus put it this way: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Whatever you “endure” while living in Christ will be worth it. Think of what Jesus endured for you! You have this promise: “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” (1 Peter 5:10).

To die with Jesus means to be resurrected with him. It’s a package deal. To put your faith in him for your salvation, you also put your faith in him for strength to follow. You don’t put faith in your own power or feelings. Keep your eyes on Jesus and the victory will be yours. “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2). You will “reign with him.”

Savior, in dying with You, I have been raised as a new being. Because You died for me, I can endure all things for Your sake. Knowing I am able to endure, I know I shall also reign with You in Your kingdom forever. What a great deal! Amen.

**But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:26-28).**

From creation through the covenants to the cross, Jesus brought God's plan into total fulfillment. His death was the summit which had to be reached. The climax (culmination) of this journey from the garden was reached on the cross. By his atoning sacrifice on the cross, Jesus completely eliminated the eternal consequences of sin.

Far from the Mosaic covenant, which repeatedly required animal sacrifices for the atonement of sins, Jesus only had to die once. He did "away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." Never again does Jesus have to suffer and die for you. It is done. The last words of Jesus were, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

The admonition: "Just as people are destined to die once," is a warning to those who believe that there is absolute nothingness after death. Everyone faces the reality of physical death. Thank God, that does not have to mean spiritual death. After death, the writer of Hebrews says, humans will "face judgment." If you have trusted Christ, there is no need to fear judgment. You will "reign with him" (Day 37).

Isaiah was told, "Come now, let us settle the matter," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). No matter how deep and far the devil reaches into the files of your sins, he will find nothing. They are gone... erased by the blood of Jesus. Because you have been cleansed by his blood ("white as snow"), there can be no accusation made against you. Picture yourself standing in the presence of God, the Judge, and you, with a trembling voice say, "I'm sorry for my sins," His response will be, "What sins?" You have nothing to fear, for your sins have been removed "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

The next time Jesus comes, it will not be for him to "bear sin." It will be to "to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." We have this assurance, repeated often in the scriptures: "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him" (2 Thessalonians 2:1); "while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13); "Look, I am coming soon!" "Yes, I am coming soon" (Revelation 22:12,20). What a great day that will be!

Lord, this I affirm: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."\*

\*Revelation 22:20.

**With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:37-38).**

According to the gospel of John, the last word Jesus spoke was “It is finished” (John 19:30). In Greek, it is one word, “Finished.” This was the “loud cry” which Mark records immediately before Jesus died. To be sure, this was not a cry of suffering or loss; it was a shout of praise. Jesus declared with his last breath that God’s plan was now fulfilled. Victory!

Mark also reported what happened in the temple the same moment Jesus died. “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The significance of this is crucial. This curtain served the purpose of dividing the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It was hung to separate the place of the dwelling of God (Most Holy Place) and the Holy Place where priests would daily offer sacrifices. Only the high Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and that, only once a year on the Day of Atonement, offering a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

The fact that this heavy curtain was completely torn in two, “from top to the bottom,” was God’s confirmation of Jesus’ last word, “It is finished.” No longer would God be separated from humans. The tearing from top to bottom indicates that God above tore it in half Himself. Now people will forever have access to God. No longer will a priest have to make atonement once a year. God has opened His dwelling place for all to enter and see who He is. He is no longer hidden. God is totally available to all who seek Him. Through the blood of Jesus, all sin is forgiven and access to God has been restored, just like it was in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve.

The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ as “high priest,” offering sacrificed blood for the atonement of sins. “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). The curtain, ripped in half, from top to bottom, indicates that the way to God is now open for all to enter into His presence.

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). “And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary” (Hebrews 10:18). [Read Hebrews, chapters 9 & 10]

Almighty God, the length You went to secure my eternal salvation and the forgiveness of my sins boggles my mind. This was Your plan from the very beginning, to die for me. From the covenants and the laws, to the cross and the curtain, You bridged the separation which sin caused between You and me. On this “Good Friday,” I remember Your good grace which has freed me from bondage to sin and death. You paved the way for my redemption with the blood of Christ. And You did that for me. I am Yours, Lord. Thank You for this precious gift of love. Amen.

**Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43).**

In ancient eastern cultures, kings would often build a garden with the most beautiful flowers and foliage. It was the custom of these kings, whenever they wanted to honor one of their subjects, to invite them to walk together in this garden known as “paradise.”

It is this kind of image which reveals what Jesus said to the thief on the cross next to him. Jesus hung between two men. One mocked him, but the other defended Jesus. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” These words were this sinner’s confession of faith in Jesus. Jesus affirmed: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

Although the Garden of Eden is not described as “paradise,” it is often understood to be “paradise.” Paul once wrote of a believer who “was caught up to paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

The thief, referring to Jesus’ kingdom, is a reminder of the parable Jesus spoke about separating sheep from goats. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’” (Matthew 25:34). There is a kingdom awaiting his faithful followers that has been “prepared... since the creation of the world.”

The last act of Jesus on earth was to forgive the sinner next to him. It was also the final act of redemption for the world. Place yourself in this scene. Jesus’ saying “you will be with me in paradise” is his invitation to you to come to him by faith. Faith in Jesus as the Christ is what opens the garden of paradise to you. Jesus’ blood on the cross is his invitation for you to come and enter his eternal kingdom.

There is one final plea. “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says... I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). The “tree of life” was also in the Garden of Eden. Since sin cut off access to the garden and this tree, nobody has had access to its fruit until the moment Jesus died. Now, through the atoning sacrifice of the blood of Jesus, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), you have access to God now and forever.

The covenant of Jesus (his blood) is the bridge reconnecting you to God. Access to God has been opened by the blood of Christ. The kingdom of God’s Paradise welcomes you! God’s plan from the beginning came full circle in the death of Christ on the cross. It was always God’s plan for you to be able to have a personal relationship with the God of the universe. “It is finished!” Jesus is pleading: “Come!”

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. “Just as I am, without one plea, I come!” Amen.

(EASTER SUNDAY)

RESURRECTION DAY

*Alleluia!*  
*He is risen!*

*He is not here; he has risen,  
just as he said.*

*(Matthew 28:6)*