

The New Testament **The Dots Connected**

What a blessing the Connecting the Dots journey has been! Both Chris and I can certainly say we have learned more than we ever thought possible. In fact, every devotion we write causes us grief, as each one reminds us of all we missed in past devotions. When we started this journey, we didn't know it all and when we finish, we still won't know it all! I now understand why authors often go back to write revised editions. This is not to say the first edition was wrong, it simply says the author has learned much more since writing the previous edition. This endeavor has certainly been a learning experience. There were many things we did not cover in the first edition which began in 2014. We have added 26 weeks in both Connecting The Dots and The Dots Connected second editions.

St. Augustine said “The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.”

In the eight volumes of Connecting the Dots, we looked at the Old Testament in a two year chronological overview. The order was based on a children's devotional book written by Marty Machowski, titled Long Story Short. The New Testament devotional, The Dots Connected will be 26 weeks and will likewise follow the outline of Marty Machowski's devotional book, Old Story New.

The New Testament can be broken down into four sections:

Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Prophecy or Apocalyptic

Just as Connecting the Dots did not cover the Old Testament verse by verse, The Dots Connected is chronological and will not cover the New Testament verse by verse.

What you hold in your hands is Volume 1 of the second edition of The Dots Connected. It's time to get started! If you fall behind, catch up or just jump back in. The daily devotions will cover the material that we will be preaching on the following Sunday. This will put everyone on the same page when we gather for worship each week. There is power in God's people being in God's Word together.

Dennis Watson

WEEK 1 THE PREHISTORY OF JESUS----- -----Dennis Watson

It has been said that the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. As you read and study each testament, you will come to a greater understanding of both. Jesus is all in the Old Testament, but it is not recognized until you begin to grasp the New Testament. Although Jesus of Nazareth was born into history, He is eternal, but He entered into history at a specified, prophesied and fulfilled time. He has no beginning and no end. This week, as we move into the New Testament, we will be looking at the prehistory of Jesus.

Day 1

Read John 1:1-18

The gospel of John is unique. The other gospels, known as the Synoptic Gospels, are Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are called synoptic because they describe similar events. They see together with a common view and they tell us what Jesus did and said. The gospel of John, on the other hand, tells us who Jesus is and he focuses more on the identity of Jesus. John could safely be called the spiritual gospel while the synoptic gospels are the historical gospels.

In the passage today, the opening verses of John, we are connected to the opening words of **Genesis 1:1**, "In the beginning." Here in this gospel, the "Word" is the instrument by which all things are created. The Word then is identified with God. **Genesis 1:1** says, "In the beginning God created." The Word and God are one and the same and the Word and God, which are one, did the creating. In **Genesis 1:2b**, the writer completes the teaching regarding the Triune God. We read, "And the Spirit of God was hovering." In this link we see all of the Godhead; the fullness of God is seen. As we read on in John, we discover who this Word is which created in the beginning. **John 1:14** says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This Word is,

Jesus of Nazareth, who was born into history. He was God in the flesh in history, so man could know Him and He could become the cure for our overarching human problem—sin.

The historical Jesus was not an after-thought of God. He was with God from the very beginning, creating and revealing Himself and His perfect plan. The historical Jesus was God in the flesh. Take a moment to give praise and thanks for God coming to us and making us His children.

Day 2

Read 1 Peter 1:17-2

In Colossians 1, we read about the incredible nature of Jesus Christ. In **Colossians 1:26-27**, Paul writes referring to the ministry entrusted to him, "²⁶The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. ²⁷To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul often speaks of the mystery or the mysteries pertaining to the gospel. The word mystery has to do with a plan or work of God that has been or was unrevealed, but is now being made known. It does not carry the idea of a secret being withheld, but of one to be revealed. It was held as a mystery until the predetermined time set by God.

In today's passage the word mystery is not used but it is implied. In Verse 20 we read about this once mystery that Christ was foreordained. He was known by God before the foundation of the world. This means He was existing before and was participating in the counsels of God from before the beginning of time. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are eternal. They are outside of time, space and matter. Jesus was in that group, pre-incarnate. He was existing and participating with the Godhead before creating time, space and matter. Now, in these *last times*, the one who was hidden, the mystery, is made known for you; that which was hidden until the right time is now revealed. He is not just revealed; He is revealed for you. The *for you* is for all who will believe and receive that He is the One sent to save.

It is an amazing mystery revealed that God so loved and He chose to demonstrate His love for us.

All that planning, all that history....so He could deliver the mystery goods to you! Not a small thing for sure. Thank Him for His amazing plan that is no longer a mystery, but a blessing.

Day 3

Read Exodus 3

Did Moses meet the pre-incarnate Jesus?

In the Old Testament, there are theophanies. A theophany is a manifestation of God in the Bible that is tangible to the human senses (gotquestions.org). There are also Christophanies. A Christophany is what some commentators believe to be appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. These are usually recognized as an appearance of the Angel of the Lord. Although this is not always the case.

We read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New Testament. We have been thoroughly introduced to the historical Jesus in the New Testament. When we read the Old Testament, it becomes easy to see glimpses of the historical Jesus appearing to people in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3, Moses is confronted with a burning bush. The Angel of the Lord speaks to him from the burning bush. Later in the passage, when Moses asks who he was to say had sent him to the people in bondage in Egypt, he was to say, "I AM has sent me to you." **Exodus 3:14** Immediately, we recognize Jesus because the historical Jesus made such statements as:

"I am the bread of life" **John 6:48**

"I am the way the truth and the life" **John 14:16**

"I am the light of the world." **John 8:12**

In Judges 6:11:21, we see the Angel of the Lord appearing to Gideon. In Verses 23-24, the Angel of the Lord used familiar phrases we recognize from the New Testament such as *Peace be with you* and when Gideon built an altar, he called it *the Lord is Peace*. We can hear the Jesus of history in **Mark 4:39** speaking to the storm on the Sea of Galilee, "...peace be still."

There are many other instances where we see Jesus appearing in

His pre-incarnate state in the Old Testament. We recognize Him because we now know Him as the historical or the incarnate God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only that, but if you are a believer, discovering Him in the pages of the Old Testament becomes a very special experience of what this devotional guide is all about—connecting the dots.

Give thanks for the mystery revealed.

Day 4

Read Hebrews 13:8

Some things never change. This sentence is often heard and you have often, perhaps, said it, but it is just not true. People change. We are born with the smooth soft skin of a baby. Babies grow and becomes active and vibrant. Then the youthful vibrancy fades. Wrinkles take the place of the smooth skin and then comes more fading until taken by death.

The people we were often so close to in our childhood, high school and college days are often replaced by family and new friends as our lives change and we mature and begin to live as adults. Responsibilities of family and career cause us to move on. Our friendships change.

Technology changes rapidly and brings with it even more change to our lives. The cell phone, which is really a handheld computer, has made worldwide communication instantaneous. We are always available to family, friends, and work, as well as people and organizations we have no real connection with. We have instant access to news and information right in our hands. It can be a good thing and it can be a bad thing.

There is always one sure constant; One who does not change. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Here are two instances of the nature of God in the Old Testament linked to the nature of Jesus, God in the flesh in the New Testament:

"But You are the same, And Your years will have no end."
Psalms 102:27 (NKJV)

"Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed But You are the same, And Your years will not fail."
Hebrews 1:12 (NKJV)

"Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last." **Isaiah 48:12 (NKJV)**

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

The unchanging nature of Jesus is connected with the unchanging nature of God because Jesus was, in history, God in the flesh. He is the up-close, knowable, experiential version of God. He came so that we could know God personally. He came so we could experience God. And He is like God—He does not change. He has promised to be with us all the time. Jesus is fully reliable.

With the constant presence of change, take a moment to give thanks for the eternal, unchanging nature of Jesus!

Day 5

Read Revelation 1:1-3; 4:1

The book of Revelation is eschatological. It is about end time events. Christian eschatology is the study focused on the ultimate destiny of the individual soul and of the entire created order. Jesus, as we have seen this week, had a pre-incarnate existence. He was with God before creation; before He made the beginning of history. We encounter Him in various places in the Old Testament appearing and speaking to different people. In the New Testament, we meet Jesus as He enters history in the incarnation. He came and dwelt among us.

Today, we will take a moment to reflect on Jesus in His post-incarnate state. After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven at the right-hand of God. The book of Revelation is titled by the opening words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." **Revelation 1:1 (NKJV)** Jesus is showing John what is going to take place regarding His second coming and what must shortly take place. In Revelation 4, a transition is made which appears to be a time after the rapture of the church. Jesus will show and tell John what must take place after this.

Before Jesus' encounter with John regarding the end times, He wrapped up His ministry within history. Jesus told His disciples He would be leaving them and He even told them it was best for Him to leave:

"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." **John 16:5-7 (NKJV)**

He tells them there would be post-incarnation existence as there was pre-incarnation existence with incarnate existence in between.

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." **Mark 16:19 (NKJV)**

After His bodily resurrection, He ascended into heaven and then sent the Helper. The Helper is the Holy Spirit. The KJV calls Him the Comforter which is translated from the Greek word 'paraklete.' On the Day of Pentecost the church was birthed and was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was seated and is still seated at the right hand of God.

Another post-incarnation activity is described in John: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know." **John 14:3-4 (NKJV)**

Jesus is at the right hand of God and He is preparing a place for His own. In addition to preparing a place for us He is interceding for us, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." **Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV)**

Jesus is interceding (praying) for His own. Not for salvation, but for those who are already saved. He is praying for us to be delivered from and through trials. When you are struggling, Jesus is interceding for you to His Father. He continues to be the One who rescues us.

Also, He is living inside His own, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)**

There are other post-incarnation activities of Jesus, but these give you a good idea not only of Jesus's prehistory, but His eternal nature.

Jesus was at work in the Old Testament secretly or not fully revealed. In the New Testament, He is incarnate, God fully revealed in the flesh. In the incarnation, He entered history. In His post-incarnation work, we enter eternity. Give thanks to the Lord that He entered our fallen history so we could enter His glorified eternity.

Week 2 MARY VISITS ELIZABETH-----Chris Wason

This week brings us to the celebration of the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary. Their pregnancies were similar and, yet, so different. Both women loved God and were devoted to Him. They would both give birth to sons who would change the world and one who would ultimately save it, Jesus Christ. What must it have been like to be Elizabeth and Mary as they navigated all of the news that had come upon them?

Day 1

Read Luke 1:35-40

Mary had just found out she was to give birth to the Savior of the world. Imagine the thoughts and emotions she was dealing with. Right after finding this out, she finds out here her cousin, Elizabeth, was also with child and was 6 months along. Verses 39 and 40 tell us Mary went with haste to see Elizabeth.

Mary wanted to celebrate with Elizabeth. We, as believers, have so much to celebrate. Scripture reminds us that any good and perfect gift comes from the Father. God has been so gracious to give us good gifts. I'm reminded of the words in the hymn, "Count your blessings." "Count your blessings name them one by one. Count your blessings see what God hath done. Count your blessings; name them one by one. Count your many blessings see what God hath done." Whether it is a child or a church, a friend or a marriage, a vehicle or a relationship, we have so much to rejoice about but the greatest is God Himself.

I am sure it was quite the celebration for Mary and Elizabeth. Today think of the things you have to celebrate, be it big or small, and thank God for them.

Day 2

Read Luke 1:41-42

Celebrating joyous occasions are a great thing. Mary and Elizabeth were pre-Jesus, but they trusted and followed God. There are several interesting focuses/truths found in these two verses in Luke. The first is that life, all life is valuable. Verse 41 says when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb. I remember watching all of our kids move around in Lisa's belly as they grew. Like many of you with your own babies, I would talk to them and even sing to them. Research has shown us that babies respond in the womb to things like music and familiar voices. This is another reminder that every child that grows inside of a woman is a precious child. I don't know what situation you find yourself in while reading this. You may have children that are grown and have already moved out or your children may still be living in your home. Maybe you just got married and hope to have children one day or maybe you are married and desire children but God hasn't yet answered that prayer. I want to encourage you to put your hope in Him and look solely to Him. Maybe you find yourself realizing life is valuable, but you made a choice as a woman (or supported a choice as a man) to abort a child. God loves you and can forgive you. In fact, if you are a Christian, He already has, as scripture tells us, there is not condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Life is precious and it is given from the Lord. I'm so thankful He gives not only physical life but spiritual life as well.

Elizabeth was herself with child and the Holy Spirit was with her. This is how she knew even before Mary told her that Mary was with child. As believers, we have been filled with the Holy Spirit which means no matter where we go or what we say, the Holy Spirit is always with us. God doesn't leave us, He said He never would. It is a mindset. This means instead of being Chris Watson driven I should be Holy Spirit driven. Instead of being Chris Watson led, I should be Holy Spirit led and instead of being Chris Watson focused, I should be Holy Spirit focused. Are you self-driven, self-led and self-focused, or are you Holy Spirit focused? As you start your day, ask God that you would be Holy Spirit driven, lead, and focused. As we will discuss in a few days, the Holy Spirit does what we could NEVER do. Thank God.

Day 3

Read Luke 1:42-45

Have you ever thought about this account and what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph? Mary would bring forth into the world, the Savior of the world. We see in Verse 45 that Elizabeth tells Mary there would be a fulfillment of those things that she was told from the Lord. We will look further at the birth of Jesus foretold in Week 4, but here is a portion of it below:

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

²⁹But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

³⁵And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷For with God nothing will be impossible."

³⁸Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary would literally carry the son of God for nine months and bring Him into the world. He would live His life, die for our sins and He would be raised from the dead. He not only lived then but He lives now. Take some time to thank God for Jesus!

Day 4

Read Luke 1:46

Such a short verse, yet, with so much meaning. When Mary says in this verse, "... my soul magnifies the Lord," it's conveying that all of who she is celebrates and worships the Lord. Having just been informed she was with child along with her cousin Elizabeth, I am sure she was overwhelmed, but in a good way. It was like getting the best news, and it was a lot to take in. What was her response when she finds out she is with child? In **Luke 1:38** Mary said to the angel "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

I believe Mary was overwhelmed with the goodness of God in this wonderful news and she worshipped; her soul magnified the Lord. What do we do when we are overwhelmed with good news or bad? The best response, no matter the situation, is to worship the Lord for He is in control. As I write this devotion, I am preparing to preach Sunday on Lamentation 3. Right in the middle of this passage of turmoil, struggle and Judah's captivity, Jeremiah looks to the Lord, much like Mary did, but he was in a bad situation. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, may we always look to the Lord and magnify His name for He is worthy.

Day 5

Read Psalm 34

In most Bibles translations, Psalm 34 is broken into sections, each with a beginning verse/phrase if you will. Take some time to dwell on each verse/phrase in bold. If you feel led, write down how that verse directs you to obey or trust in God.

**¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.

³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

**⁴ I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.**

⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷ The [a]angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him,
And delivers them.

**⁸ Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!**

⁹ Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!
There is no [b]want to those who fear Him.

¹⁰ The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

**¹¹ Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.**

¹² Who is the man who desires life,
And loves many days, that he may see good?

¹³ Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁵ **The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their cry.**

¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
To [c]cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as [d]have a contrite spirit.

¹⁹ **Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.**

²⁰ He guards all his bones;
Not one of them is broken.

²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous shall be [e]condemned.

²² The LORD redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

Thank God for who He is.

Week 3 THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS----- -----Dennis Watson

In the New Testament, there is only one genealogy recorded which is the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. It is in the New Testament twice and each one is unique. One is found in Matthew 1:1-17 and the other is in Luke 3:23-28. The genealogies of Jesus are important because they demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies spoken of Him. Jesus could only be the Messiah as the son and heir of David. The two genealogies are different and there is a reason, which we will discuss this week. There is no contradiction in the lineage, only confirmation.

Day 1

Read Matthew 1:1-17

Today we will look at the overall genealogy in Matthew and tomorrow we will look at the genealogy found in Luke. It is not a case of error, but to meet the provisions regarding the prophecies about Jesus.

Though Jewish genealogical records would be destroyed in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, Jesus's genealogy was supernaturally preserved in the Gospels. (Tony Evans)

Matthew and Luke's genealogies are the same from Abraham to David but Matthew then branches off and follows the line of David's son, Solomon. Both genealogies link the line of the Messiah to the line of Abraham which places Him in the nation of Israel. However, Matthew's genealogy does not connect Jesus to Joseph because Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and Matthew's recorded genealogy is actually traced from Abraham to Joseph. The line of Joseph gave Jesus the legal title to the throne.

It is safe to say Jesus is actually the step-son of Joseph. A step-son had legal status as a son. Since Joseph was a blood descendant of David and of David's throne, Jesus had legal right to inherit the throne of David. This was necessary for Jesus' Messianic claim.

It is tempting to say, God thought of everything. He did not have to think, plot or figure it out. He made it all happen before the foundation of the world. We get to figure it out and be amazed and give Him glory for His incredible revealing of His sovereignty.

Day 2

Read Luke 3:23-28

In **Verse 23**, we find some very important words which are key to understanding the two genealogies we are looking at. The key phrase is regarding Jesus, "... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli." The qualifying phrase is "...as was supposed the son of Joseph." Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but it was supposed by the people that Joseph was His father. We know that Jesus was virgin born; no man had a part in it. In reality, Luke is saying that Jesus was the Son of Heli by way of being Heli's grandson. It was not unusual for a person to be called the son of someone, meaning a descendent, not necessarily the son. So Heli was Joseph's father-in-law because he was Mary's father and Jesus' grandfather.

Matthew traced the paternal line of Jesus' earthly, adoptive father, Joseph. This linked Jesus legally to the throne. Luke traced the maternal line of Jesus through Mary's line. It is through the line of Mary that Jesus got the blood line of David. He could not have been born of man. It was necessary He be born of a virgin. For this reason, He was born of the seed of the woman which was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. Jesus, born of the woman's seed, was the One who would crush the serpents head. Both lines were of the tribe of Judah and the line of David.

This is no small or insignificant truth. I like the way J. Vernon McGee puts it:

The second genealogy is in Luke 3:23-38. This is the genealogy of Mary, and it does not come through Solomon but comes through another son of David, Nathan. There is no curse and no judgment on that line. The Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born, and He came through Mary's line. That is where He got the blood title to the throne of David. I find this to be one of the most remarkable things that has occurred in this world! ¹

¹ J. Vernon McGee, Thru The Bible

God has always been working to bring His gospel message into the world. It is way beyond man to fully comprehend what He has done. Give thanks to His amazing delivery system.

Day 3

Read Revelation 12

We are looking at the genealogies of Jesus this week, but significant in this discussion is the sovereignty of God. Revelation 12 is about a woman who represents Israel. The fiery dragon represents Satan. Satan is waiting for the woman (Israel) to give birth (to the Messiah) so that he can devour Him. This has been the focus of Satan ever since he was booted out of heaven. The two genealogies we have been looking at are not just names of random people. The names are of significant people God protected and sovereignly preserved so the Messiah would come miraculously into the world, born of a virgin, a specific virgin, Mary.

The battle is seen in the attempts of Satan to obstruct God's plan to rescue mankind from the effects of sin and rebellion. His attack is continuously on the lineage of the Messiah. Think of it this way, Satan is messing with the delivery system of the gospel. The battle is first mentioned in **Genesis 3:15** "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

We first see this played out when Cain, prompted by the deceiver Satan, murders his brother Abel. His attempts begin in trying to stop the line of the Messiah. However, the sovereign God thwarted Satan's plan through the continuation of the Messianic line through the birth of Seth. You see Seth in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's account.

We also see his attempt to thwart the Messiah's coming when Satan attempts to contaminate the pre-flood gene-pool. God raised up Noah and his family and sent the flood. You see Noah in Luke's genealogy.

The plot is seen again by enslaving the people of God in Egypt and seeking to kill the deliverer Moses when he is just a baby. God miraculously intervenes and delivers the deliverer. Moses,

is also in Luke's genealogical account.

I could make a list which would go on for a long time. One more example is in the book of Esther. We read how a wicked man by the name of Haman put together a plot to exterminate the Jews. Once again, Satan attempts to thwart God's plan by wiping out the Jews. The plot was discovered by Mordecai and Esther found herself in the place God put her to rescue her people from the plot.

The extreme to which Satan took his plot was the killing of baby boys two years and younger by King Herod soon after the birth of Jesus. The plot was thwarted when Joseph took his Son and Mary and fled to Egypt. Then, another attempt to destroy the deliverer was in the crucifixion of Jesus. God stopped the enemy's attempt and raised the deliverer from the grave on the third day.

Satan continues his attempt to thwart the gospel delivery system. by trying to stop you. But be reminded, God will provide a way of escape from the attempts of the enemy to stop you as part of God's gospel delivery system. You are a vital part of God's gospel delivery system.

Day 4

Read Acts 10:24-34

When Peter went to the home of Cornelius after having a vision about clean and unclean foods, he came to understand that "God is not a respecter of persons." (**Verse 34 KJV**) He is saying that God does not show favoritism.

You may want to read Matthew 1:2-16 again. It is possible to do a quick casual reading of the genealogies of Jesus and miss two major lessons. We will look at one today and the other tomorrow. Today, I want to look at the character of a few of those listed. The list reminds us of human sin and imperfection. God uses sinful people. In fact, it is safe to say God uses only sinful people. The only exception is His son, Jesus.

A close look at the names reveal some really shady people. Jacob, was a deceiver. We know that he manipulated and deceived the people in his family. David was an adulterer and murder. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah, sent to the front lines of battle to be killed. Solomon was a womanizer having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Manasseh was a wicked King. Tamar dressed up as a prostitute to lure her former father-in-law, Judah, into a sexual relationship and then gave birth to two sons, both of whom appear in the genealogy. Rahab was a prostitute.

God's grace is always in play. His grace is His tool to bless people and make them to be a blessing. He can only use broken people because that is what we all are. Give thanks to God today for His amazing and transforming grace. If He could use those imperfect people, He can use us.

Day 5

Read Romans 3:27-31

Once again, “...God is no respecter of persons.” (**Acts 10:34 KJV**) He does not make a distinction on skin color or nation of origin. Now, back to the genealogies. Tamar, Bathsheba, Rahab and Ruth each descended from Ham. Ham was believed to have been black. We see in the genealogy of Jesus, both Jews and gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. God used women as well as men. God is in the people business. He does not make distinctions based on gender, skin color, and nation of origin. He is concerned that all people come to faith in Jesus.

What color was Jesus?

Pastor E.V. Hill used to tell of a time he received a death threat from the Black Panthers because they didn't like his preaching about that “white Jesus.” This was his reply: “I don't know anything about a white Christ – I know about Christ a Savior named Jesus. I don't know what color He is. He was born in brown Asia, He fled to black Africa, and He was in heaven before the gospel got to white Europe, so I don't know what color He is. I do know one thing: if you bow at the alter with color on your mind, and get up with color on your mind, go back again – and keep going back until you no longer look at His color, but at His greatness and His power – His power to save!”

Very well said!

WEEK 4 THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD----- -----Dennis Watson

Luke was a gentile doctor writing a summary of eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. Luke was writing this account for a man by the name of Theophilus who was, apparently, a gentile official. His name means lover of God. Luke presents Jesus as the *Son of Man*, which is a Messianic title focusing on His humanity. In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, he traces the line back to Adam. This week, we will look at two announcements made by the Angel Gabriel, one to Zacharias telling of the birth of John the Baptist and the other to Mary telling of the birth of Jesus. As we journeyed through the Old Testament, we have been anticipating this time - here we are, studying about The Dots Connected.

Day 1

Read Luke 1:1-38

The Angel Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias the priest, when he was serving his time in the Holy Place at the temple. Gabriel told him Elizabeth, his wife, who had been unable to have a child, would have a son in answer to his prayers. His son would be great and would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Zacharias was also told the son's name would be John. We read that John would drink no wine or strong drink which indicated he was to be a Nazarite. Luke recorded that John would bring joy and gladness. In Luke 15, when lost things were found, there was joy and rejoicing, which speaks of salvation. John would be the forerunner of the Messiah. This was spoken of in Malachi 3:1, prophesied more than 400 years before the event took place.

Then, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary who was probably in her teens. Luke described her as a virgin. Mary responded to Gabriel by saying she had not yet known a man. This was a way of saying she had not yet become sexually active. Gabriel told her she would have a son, but her son would be called *Son of the Highest* and would reign on the throne of His father David.

The response of Zacharias and Mary was markedly different. Both were granted the grace of God to participate in His plan to bring salvation to the world. However, Zacharias questioned Gabriel and said he and Elizabeth were too old to have children. Gabriel told Zacharias since he questioned him, he would be unable to speak until the child was born. Mary responded by asking how this could happen to her since she was a virgin and Gabriel explained that she would become pregnant by a miracle of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The Lord knew her heart. At this explanation, Mary surrendered to the Lord's will and plan. Nothing is impossible with the Lord.

Both Zacharias and Mary were used of the Lord to accomplish His purpose. What about you? Are you questioning the Lord with the intent of avoiding His plan? Or, are you, like Mary, ready and willing to surrender to His plan and will? Thank the Lord that He uses common, ordinary people to bring Jesus the Savior to the world. Surrender to His plan to use you through His grace.

Day 2

Read Luke 1:39-45

What an amazing biblical, historical account. Elizabeth knew what had taken place with Mary before they spoke. When Mary and Elizabeth saw each other, the unborn baby, John the Baptist, immediately *leaped* in Elizabeth's womb and was filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the power of the presence of Jesus, perhaps just days after conception! There was an instant connection between the two unborn babies. Neither of these unborn babies were to be merely normal baby's—they were both prepared by the Lord to carry out His plan and will. I believe that the recognition of Jesus as the Savior of the world is what caused John to leap in his mother's womb.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with great joy. She called Mary *blessed among women*. Note that she did not call her blessed above women. Mary was an ordinary young lady, but the Lord had shone His favor or grace on her. Mary should not be considered as someone extraordinary, but one who was obediently surrendered to the Lord. Elizabeth recognized that it was God's activity on Mary's behalf which made her *blessed among women*.

I am safe in saying that every conception is of the Lord. David expressed this in Psalm 139. Jeremiah was told by the Lord that He knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother's womb. Samuel's birth was obviously a miraculous plan of the Lord. It is important, as with Jeremiah, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus, that we acknowledge the Lord has purposed us. This is why we are here. We need to acknowledge and seek to live out His plans, purposes, and His will.

Give thanks to the Lord for forming you and giving you life. Surrender your life to Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 1:46-56

Mary was overcome with joy and blessings as she considered what had taken place. She was chosen by the Lord to bear the Savior of the world. Mary's song is called "The Magnificent," which is Latin for her first three words, *my soul magnifies*. (Verse 46) Mary gives praise to the Lord for His grace shown to her. Her song can be broken into two parts. The first part (46-50) is praise for the Lord's special favor on her. She calls the Lord *My Savior*. (Verse 47) Here, she expresses intimacy with the Lord, not only because He has chosen her to bear the Savior, but He would also be her Savior. This is an overwhelming thought. Mary was going to give birth to her Savior! She also spoke of His faithfulness, power, holiness, and mercy. In the second part of the passage (51-56), Mary praised the Lord for His special favor on Israel. Mary was aware that through the Child she was to bear, God was being merciful to Abraham and his descendants. Mary was aware that the birth of her Child was a fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham and his people. She was also aware what the Lord had done through her. He had reached back into the roots of her Jewish heritage and forward to generations of all people to come.

Can you imagine the joy Mary felt? I am certain there were many other emotions she experienced. I can't imagine how she felt. The Lord's favor, which is His grace, had been heaped on her. What an amazing position to be in. She was going to be used by the Lord to bring the Savior of mankind into the world. He was to be the Savior of all, including Mary. It is not surprising she would breakout in a song of praise!

Have you been used by the Lord to bring the Savior to someone? It is equally amazing to bring the message of the Savior by which people (family members, friends, work associates, and even strangers) come to personally know Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Get in the game! Join the Lord who brought you into the world and who brought the Savior into your life. Begin to be used by His grace to introduce others to Jesus the Savior and then sing His praise!

Day 4

Read Luke 1:57-80

It is always good to repeat that prophecy in the Bible is the Lord God writing history in advance. Of course, we associate this in the Old Testament, but the New Testament is also filled with the Lord God writing history in advance.

In today's passage, an Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled, but the next aspect of this prophecy is extended when Zacharias celebrates the birth of his son, John. When the angel Gabriel told Zacharias about the coming of his son, Zacharias questioned and doubted him. For the entirety of Elizabeth's pregnancy, he was unable to speak and probably could not hear. When Elizabeth gave birth, all of the people assumed the baby would be named after Zacharias, his father, but Elizabeth said his name would be John. The people were shocked. They signed to Zacharias asking about the name and Zacharias motioned for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." (**Verse 63**) As soon as he wrote the name, he could speak again. And oh, how he spoke! He immediately began to praise the Lord which connected the Old Testament prophecy to what was taking place. Talk about dot connecting! This is exactly what Zacharias did. He was now able to make sense of what was going on—the announcement of John's birth and Mary's pregnancy. He saw that the words of the prophets in the Old Testament were becoming a reality and he was right in the middle of it. It is no wonder that he was so excited. He spoke of the *horn of salvation* and the *House of His servant David*. (Verse 69) He spoke of the promise made to Abraham and he spoke of how his son would prepare the way for the Messiah as was spoken by the prophets. He also spoke of salvation, light, and the remission of sins. This was an amazing coming together of prophecy and the anticipation of what was to come!

Connect the dots! Just like Zacharias, we, too, are recipients of the prophecy that has become a reality. The light has come to us and Salvation has come our way, but the light is also shining in and through us and salvation is taken through us to those who need it. We are not just connecting dots in this study; we are

connecting dots as we connect people to the prophecy and the reality of Jesus Christ, the Salvation and Deliverer from sin!

Thank the Lord that He has and He continues to connect the dots through willing vessels like Zacharias and you!

Day 5

Read Isaiah 4:2-3

As we read yesterday, Zacharias' song was very much a high point of dot connecting. He spoke of the One to come from the line of David. He spoke about prophecy delivered by the Old Testament prophets, while at the same time he spoke of the One who would come to bring salvation and light. When we read the Bible, we are often simultaneously reading about prophecy that has been fulfilled and prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. We live in amazing times!

In that day (Verse 2) refers to the Day of the Lord. This phrase occurs many times in Isaiah (as in all the prophets), and it is also used in the New Testament. The prophet Joel, in particular, has something to say about it. We need to realize that each Hebrew day begins at sundown. The day begins with darkness and moves to the dawn. In this case, *the day of the Lord* begins with the Great Tribulation and goes on into the millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah spoke of a *branch*, which was like a code word used by the prophets to describe the future Messiah who would bring salvation. Both Zechariah and Jeremiah also called the future Messiah, the *branch*. There are eighteen Hebrew words translated into one English word, branch. All of these words refer to Jesus. In this verse, the word branch means sprout. We are told that He is a branch out of a dry ground. He is something green that has sprung up in the desert.

Jesus came to save and to establish an eternal reign of righteousness and justice. A simple expression of this is when He has completed His work and established His eternal reign, all of the people who remain will be called holy.

Jesus is the branch which was prophesied and now has come. He would die on the cross for sinners, be resurrected from the dead defeating Satan, sin, death and the grave. He will ultimately return to establish a reign that will be characterized by peace, perfect peace. Give thanks to the Lord God's amazing plan!

WEEK 5 THE BIRTH OF JESUS----- Chris Watson

Much of our Old Testament study pointed forward to this week's devotion, the Birth of Jesus. Jesus was not an afterthought, but was in God's mind the whole time to redeem mankind. Every book in the Old Testament, in one way or another, pointed forward to Jesus. We first saw this in Genesis 3:15, the very first book of the Bible where God was already pointing forward to Jesus. In Isaiah, Chapter 53, we saw the suffering servant which was about Jesus and what He would endure during His life and His death on the cross. This week, we will see God's plan unfold as His Son is brought into the world, ultimately for our salvation.

Day 1

Read Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 2:1-6

After our studies of the Old Testament, the birth of Jesus shouldn't be a surprise. As we have already seen, the accounts and prophecies in the Old Testament clearly lay the groundwork for Jesus' entrance into the earthly world. **Micah 5:2** says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." God, through the prophet Micah, had told His people that Jesus would come into the world. Not only would Jesus come into the world, but He would be born in Bethlehem even though it was the smallest of the clans of Judah. God picked Bethlehem, a place lowly and humble, as the location of His Son's birth. It shouldn't surprise us when we read in Luke that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that everyone should be registered in their home town, though the prophecy Micah issued was given 600 years before Caesar Augustus was born. We know that Joseph was in the line of David and he had to return to Bethlehem for the census. After arriving in Bethlehem to register, Mary gave birth to her Son. Our Savior, Jesus, was born in the exact place which had been prophesied in the scriptures. We find in Matthew 2:4 that even the chief priests knew where He would be born because they knew of Micah's prophecy. What an incredible plan!

Galatians 4:4 confirms that in the *fullness of time* Jesus was born. The fullness of time means just the right time, not too early and not too late. In God's time, Jesus would be born. At this time, this place, and for this reason, our Savior would come.

Take time today to thank God for His plan of sending Jesus and that it was not done haphazardly, but done as part of His plan, in His timing. Thank Him for using sinful people in His plan to carry out His purposes. Ask God how He might want to use you as part of His plan.

Day 2

Read Luke 2:8-21

We often think of this passage around Christmas and we don't really discuss it much throughout the year, although we should. This is the announcement of our Savior's birth. Verse 9 indicates that the shepherds were afraid and **Verse 10** reads, "Then the angel said to them, 'do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings (news) of great joy which will be to all people.'"

While we could focus on many things stated in Verse 10, we are going to focus on two. We will focus first on the words *good tidings* or *good news*. Why would the birth of Jesus be good news? Why wouldn't His birth be just like that of any other baby? It would only be good news to the shepherds and others if they understood the bad news. Mankind is sinful and separated from God. Jesus, who had just been born, would fix this problem. This is why the news was good and worthy of great joy. The shepherds understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. The good news was great to them because they knew the predicament that all mankind was in.

The second focus is on the words at the end of **Verse 10**, "...which will be to all people." In other words, this birth and the good news that Jesus' birth brought, were to be for all people. It wasn't just for the Jews or any other particular group of people, but for the people of all nations. Jesus' birth was for you and me; it was for people on the other side of the world, in China, France and even in Iraq. His birth was for people that look like me and for people that look completely different. God's gift of Jesus is for all who will receive Him. Have you received God's gift of Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus to take away your sins? If not, why not today? If you have, are you sharing it? Today's passage tells us "The shepherds made widely known what had been revealed to them concerning the Child." (**Verse 17**) Are you making Jesus known to all people? God has left us on this earth to know Him and to make Him known! How can you make Jesus known today?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 2:10-11

In Verse 11 we read that the Savior was born; who was and still is Christ the Lord. Yesterday we focused on our need for a Savior. Our need for a Savior is not for salvation alone, as we often think when we first come to Jesus. It's not that we put our faith in Jesus and no longer need Him anymore. It is the opposite! We not only need Jesus to save us from our sins so we know God and go to Heaven, we need Jesus to save us on a regular basis.

We are eternally saved when we put our faith in Jesus. We need Him to save us from many things throughout our years on this earth; mainly, we need to be saved from ourselves. Reflecting back to the Israelites in our Old Testament study in 2 Kings 17, we saw they needed to be saved from themselves. They put many things in the place of God. They had been told the truth by the prophets and they knew they needed to get things right and put God back in first place where He belonged, but they didn't do it. Rather, they continued to follow their own desires.

God saves us daily from ourselves. The problems we experience are not centered as much in the people we live with, work with, or go to church with, as much as they are in us. It's our attitudes, our pride, wanting our own way, and desiring to be right, which causes the problems. These are some of the very things God sent Jesus to help us overcome. When Jesus died on the cross, He desired to save us from ourselves to Himself. We need to exchange our desires for His, our minds for His, our thoughts for His, and our attitudes for His. We can only do this by trusting in Jesus everyday. As we spend time with Jesus daily through scripture, prayer, and worship, we submit ourselves to God, allowing Him to save us from poor choices we might make otherwise.

Think of all of the ways you know Jesus has saved you. Now imagine all the many ways He has saved you that you might not even be aware of. Thank God that He saved you from Hell. He saved you to Himself, and He saved you from yourself. Ask God today to help you die to yourself (Galatians 2:20) and live to Him.

Day 4

Read Mathew 2:7-21

God's overall plan will not be messed up; it will not be thwarted. Many have tried, but they have all failed. Herod thought he could mess with God's plan, but he could not. Though his ungodly decree called for the killing of all the male children two years old and under, God's plan prevailed. Many might ask why God would allow something like this to happen. We know that just like us, Herod had the choice to follow God or not; he chose not to and others paid for his disobedience.

In Verse 13 of today's passage we read that under God's direction, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus departed for Egypt. Later, as noted in Verses 19-20, they were instructed to leave Egypt and return to Israel. The prophet foretold this, by saying "Out of Egypt I called my son." (**Hosea 11:1**) From the beginning God knew people would try to thwart His plan in Jesus, but it would not happen. In fact, many of the Jews and leaders who killed Jesus thought they had taken care of Him, but we know this didn't happen. Since that time, there have been many attempts made to remove Jesus from this world, especially in America. The good news is, if you know God personally, no one can remove Him! Although they may try and remove Him from the public square, God is always with us.

For two thousand years plus, people have tried to stop Jesus' plan and stop His name from being proclaimed. It hasn't worked. In fact, the persecution and pushback has often helped in advancing the gospel. We will see this throughout the New Testament. Thank goodness His plan will not be thwarted. Thank Him and trust that when you are ridiculed or persecuted for your faith, He may be using it to make Himself known and to grow you.

Thank Him for being in control.

Day 5

Read Hosea 11:1-2

Today's passage has two meanings. The first meaning refers to God's love for Israel. The other, and our focus for today, is the last part of **Verse 1** which says, "And out of Egypt I called My son." We read this scripture yesterday in Matthew 2:15. These were the words of Hosea, the prophet, and were written many years before Jesus would physically come into the world. The verse we read in Hosea and later in Matthew tells us that Jesus would come out of Egypt. When we read the account in Matthew, we learn God protected Jesus and brought Him out of Egypt, saving Him, so that one day He could save the world from their sins.

From our Old Testament study and from your knowledge of the Bible, take some time to write down some of the prophecies seen in the Old Testament which were fulfilled in the New Testament or have been fulfilled through today. This may be something you think about and come back to from time to time.

Take some time to thank God for fulfilling these prophecies and that His Word is true and can be trusted.

WEEK 6 JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE-----

-----Dennis Watson

Luke 2 concludes with these words, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” **(Verse 52)** Jesus grew in several different ways. Even at the very beginning of His life, the law of the Lord was very significant as it was throughout His life. James 2:10 says that if we break just one of the laws of the Lord, we are guilty of breaking the whole law. Jesus fulfilled the whole law. Just think, He did not break one law of the Lord! Throughout His life, He observed the whole law, even from infancy. This week is about anticipation and realization. Anna and Simeon had been anticipating the coming of the Messiah and now that anticipation had become a realized experience.

Day 1

Read Luke 2:21-24

Some people get a perfect SAT score. What an accomplishment! Imagine that same person taking it every day for the rest of their life and getting a perfect score despite changes made in the test. This would be beyond exceptional, but can you imagine that same person being perfect in every way? Pitch a perfect game in baseball every time! Hit a homerun every time! Always perfect! Well, our idea of perfect isn't like that. For instance, a professional baseball player can get a hit 30% of the time and he is considered exceptional. However, God's scale of perfection is 100% perfect in everything. Jesus was always perfect, He had to be in order to die for our sins. He had to do the right thing all the time!

From birth Jesus was sinless. He had to be perfect to fulfill His purpose. His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, were very conscientious Jews who sought to follow the Law of Moses. Through the Law of Moses, God said every baby boy was to be circumcised when he was eight days old. In keeping with the law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus when He was eight days old to be circumcised. Because the first born son belonged to the Lord, when the time of purification after having a baby was over, the parents were to take the first born son to offer a sacrifice and present him to

the Lord. The parents were to redeem the son by offering a lamb as a sacrifice. If they could not afford a lamb, they could offer a turtle dove or young pigeon. So, once again Mary and Joseph submitted to the Law of Moses which the Lord God had given.

The start of Jesus' life was lived according to the Law of Moses as given by the Lord God. Throughout His life Jesus submitted to the law because the law came from His Father, the Lord God. He kept the whole law. I am so thankful for this because I am a transgressor of the law. Just think about the Ten Commandments. How many have you broken? I'm pretty sure I have broken them all since Jesus expanded on the ten laws, speaking not just of the act, but the thought behind the act. Jesus said that if we have broken the law in our heart, we are guilty. That's me and it's you, too. There is nothing you and I can do to remedy that. We are all guilty, but Jesus kept the law completely. He alone would die to cover our sin.

Thank the Lord God for His grace and mercy and how He does not expect perfection from us. Jesus was perfect for us and then He died for our imperfections.

Day 2

Read Luke 2:36-40

I clearly remember the days that Denise, Chris and Josh were born. It was a time of celebration! Their arrivals had long been anticipated and looked forward to. Special people were there, family members and friends. It was such a special time.

The birth of Jesus was no different. One of the people present the day Jesus was presented at the temple at about six weeks old was a woman named Anna. The name Anna means *grace*. Anna was a prophetess, a woman who spoke forth the Word of the Lord God. Anna was part of what is called the remnant. People who make up the remnant are those who believe the Lord God to continue what He started and are expecting Him to finish fully. Anna was anticipating the coming of the Messiah. The passage here says that Anna lived at the temple. She fasted and prayed day and night. From what Luke says about her, she may have been over 100 years old. The Lord God had shown her, through His word, that the Messiah would come and she would see Him. Upon seeing Jesus, she spoke to all who were like her, expecting His coming, telling them this was the One they had been looking for.

What a day this must have been for Anna. Each day, probably all day, she was watching for the Messiah to come. What joy she must have felt when she declared that the Redeemer who brought redemption had come.

Many people in the days of Anna had pretty much forgotten about the coming of the Messiah. Either they had forgotten or they no longer believed. They were not looking forward to or anticipating His coming. Who is the remnant today? Our faith is not just backward looking. We look back and see what God has been faithful to do, but we also take what He has said and look forward to what He says He is going to do. If you believe and trust Him for what He has said and done and are anticipating He will do all He promised, you are part of the remnant. We are once again anticipating Jesus' return when He will deliver His church

from the wrath to come and He will ultimately rule and reign in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Not only are we anticipating, but we need to be letting others know He is coming again to finally, once and for all, deal with sin, death, and Satan.

So keep looking and anticipating! Jesus is coming again. Are you ready? What about your friends and family?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 2:25-35

The truly devout Jews would have been living with knowledge of the prophecies given by the Old Testament prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah. They would have been living with an anticipating and watchful eye. Like Anna, there was another significant person at the dedication of Jesus at the temple. Simeon came to the temple the day Jesus was dedicated to the Lord. The Holy Spirit had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Yesterday, we read that Anna was part of the remnant, a group of people who believed God for His promises about the coming of Jesus, and, today, we will look at Simeon.

When Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms, he began to prophesy that God's salvation had come to His people. This salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all people. Simeon then blessed Mary and Joseph telling them that their Son would bring division and the rise and fall of many. He also predicted Mary's own soul would be pierced, probably a reference to Mary's heartbreak as she would see her Son rejected and then crucified.

Of course, as agonizing as Jesus' death was, it was the means by which the salvation Simeon spoke of came to the Jews and to the whole world. He was proclaiming the truth which had been made known to him which, in Jesus, had become a reality.

Now, we know the outcome. Jesus grew up and there have been many to rise and many to fall based on their response to Him. We also know that Mary's soul was pierced as her Son was pierced on the cross.

All biblical prophecy and teachings point to the salvation which was brought into the world by Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. Anna and Simeon pointed to this truth and so should we.

Day 4

Read Luke 2:41-52

Annually, the Jewish males went to Jerusalem to observe three feasts. Sometimes the whole family would go. When a Jewish boy turned 12 years of age, he was considered a son of the law. It was time for him to be taught the instruction of the law. He would learn about fasting, aspects of worship and it was time to begin learning a trade. According to this passage, Jesus' whole family went to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem every year. When Jesus was 12 years old and His family went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and the festivities were over, everyone started to head home. Jesus stayed behind, but no one noticed He was not with them. He was among the teachers, He was teaching the teachers. Luke writes He was listening to them and asking questions. I believe His questions were didactic; He was asking them questions to teach them and the questions were thought-provoking. The teachers were "...astonished at His understanding and answers" (Verse 47), literally beside themselves in amazement. When His parents found Him, they too, were *amazed* or *struck out of their senses*. They were behaving like what they were, worried parents! Jesus answered them based on His own understanding of His mission. He asked them two questions. "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Verse 49) He had been asking the teachers teaching questions and now He asked His parents teaching questions as well. Do you think that maybe Mary and Joseph had forgotten who He was and had claimed ownership of Him?

What a tough task it is to serve as a foster parent. To take in a little baby or child, care for them, love them and then release them to someone else. This is similar to the way it was for Mary and Joseph. Jesus was really the Son of another and this was now a reality. What do you think went through their minds when He asked, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" (Verse 49) Surely, Joseph thought to himself "I am your father," but perhaps Joseph was immediately reminded that the time had come for their Son to be on His real Father's mission.

Thank the Lord God for the surrender of Mary and Joseph to serve the Lord (and us) by caring for the Son of God.

Day 5

Read Psalm 9:7-14

Earlier this week, we talked about Simeon and how he rejoiced when he held the baby Jesus and said, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” (**Verse 29**) Salvation in the Bible refers to two things. First, it refers to God’s protection of His people from their enemies. David rejoiced in how the Lord God had protected him in the past from his enemies. It also has a forward look to the saving of people from sin. David anticipated this in the Psalms. David anticipated and experienced the righteous judgment of the Lord God. When you read the words of **Verses 13-14**, it sounds much like the celebration of Simeon—“Have mercy on me, O Lord...I will rejoice in your salvation.” David anticipated the coming salvation of the Lord God, but it was Simeon who experienced and proclaimed it.

Once again we are in a very privileged position. We read about David experiencing the Lord God’s deliverance from his earthly enemies. We also read that David anticipated an even greater deliverance and salvation. The salvation he anticipated would come through the Messiah and it would be salvation from sin.

You and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, also experience and anticipate God’s salvation. We have experienced His deliverance from the power of sin in our daily lives. However, we also anticipate the time when the conflict will be over, when our salvation is complete and the flesh is totally done away with. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will ultimately be saved.

Thank the Lord our salvation is complete and that one day we will fully experience it without the influence of flesh. I once heard a preacher say regarding a believer who has passed away, “He breathed out his last breath in the flesh and the next breath in was breathing in the Spirit life of eternity.”

WEEK 7 THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST-

-----Chris Watson

Approximately 30 years passed between the events we read about in Matthew 2, where the wise men visited Jesus, and Matthew 3, when we read about John the Baptist. John was born into the priesthood and his father was Zacharias (Luke 1:5). We know that John and Jesus were cousins because of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). This week we will see that God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus.

Day 1

Read Matthew 3:1-3

Long before John the Baptist was born, Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophesying about him. Verse 3 of today's passage refers to Isaiah's words prophesying that John would prepare the way for the Messiah. This was all part of God's plan to get the people ready for Jesus.

Try to imagine John's job. John the Baptist didn't exactly have an easy or desirable job. He could have been jailed immediately, but God was working through him to prepare the way for Jesus. John the Baptist was faithful to prepare the way. In fact, Jesus said in **Matthew 11:11**, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."

Notice the message John was preaching. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Verse 2**) Repent simply means to turn around, do a complete 180. You must realize you are going the wrong way, stop, and then turn and go the right way. The people were headed away from God and were involved in ungodly acts. John was telling them to stop, acknowledge they were wrong, and turn to God!

We all need to do this, both believers and unbelievers. Do you know Jesus? If not, repent and turn to Him. Recognize you are going the wrong direction, put your faith in Jesus, call on Him to save you, and then turn and follow Him. Those who know Him

are also in need of repentance. Are you headed in the wrong direction? Maybe you are involved in an ungodly relationship or maybe harboring bitterness. Are you acting deceitful or hateful? Are you just empty? We can look back to Jonah and remember that the people of Nineveh were very wicked people and God sent Jonah to tell them to repent and turn to the Lord. The people, including the king, called on God and turned from their sin and because of this, God heard their cry and chose not to destroy them. So, be reminded that when we repent of our sin, it can bring about a right relationship with God and save us from many undesired consequences down the road. Repent and turn to the Lord. He is our only hope. Call out to Him and follow Him with all you have!

Day 2

Read Matthew 3:4-11

Many heard John the Baptist's call regarding repentance and returning to God. We read in Verse 5 that many repented and were baptized!

However, there were two groups of people that showed up to the baptisms just to check things out. They were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These were two groups of people which had many things in common, but also disagreed about many things. The Pharisees were legalists and traditionalists, and were consumed with keeping the law perfectly. The Sadducees were more powerful and their ranks included the chief priests and high priests. However, they were more concerned with politics than with the things of God. Later, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus and had problems with the authority of the Old Testament. In fact, they denied the inspiration of the Word of God. Both groups were supposed to be religious and they may have been, but they were not godly and they were not following the things of God. They were in it for themselves, what they wanted, and what made them look good.

It's not surprising that John calls them a brood of vipers. This refers to Genesis 3:15 and is actually calling them sons of Satan. Wow! That was pretty harsh. It appears to be true as they were religious, but had no thoughts of the things of God. They seemed to look great on the outside, but on the inside, they were just like everyone else. They needed to repent of their sins and be baptized.

There are a lot of religious people today. People may look like they have it all together. They may have all the right answers, know a lot about the Bible, and they may even lead others in their ways. However, for some of these people, it's not about Jesus or a relationship. It's about rituals, legalism, or looking good, while they are really just putting up a front. I pray this isn't the case with any of us. If it is, we must cry out to the Lord in desperation, repent from our selfish ways, and put our hope and trust in Jesus. We all need Jesus, DAILY!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 3:1-9

We see a similar account of John the Baptist in Luke's gospel with a little more detail. In fact, in the four gospels, we read many similar accounts from different angles. It would be as if four of us were eyewitnesses to an event. We all saw the same event, but we would explain it in a different way and focus on different aspects of the event.

John says in **Verse 6** that "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." This should have been an obvious picture to the Jews that salvation was not just for them, but for all people. We will see in the weeks to come that the Jews, God's chosen people, believed salvation was just for them, but Paul helped them see Jesus came for all peoples, for anyone who would call on Him.

Marty Machowski wrote, "Jesus' death on the cross was the way God kept his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring, for Jesus was born into Abraham's family, and salvation is now offered to all people." We are reminded Jesus is for all people, whether black or white, rich or poor, whatever our differences. Jesus is for all.

God continues to convey this to us throughout all of scripture. He tells us often through Paul's writings that we are to take the message of Jesus to all people, to every nation, and every tribe. As a believer, this is not a burden, but a blessing! We have an incredible responsibility to take the Gospel to our neighbors and to those around the world. Let us share Jesus not just with our lives but, with our words. How will they know if they haven't heard the Truth? Who will you share Jesus with today?

Day 4

Read Luke 3:10-18

John was the forerunner, the one who went before Jesus to prepare the way for Him. John taught repentance (turning) and baptism. Jesus' ministry had not yet begun, so John was preparing the people by telling them they needed to turn from their sins. Turning from our sins and baptism alone won't save us. We must totally put our trust in Jesus for salvation is what saves us. We read in today's passage that when John was baptizing people, he told them Jesus was coming and He would baptize them with *the Holy Spirit and fire*.

John was helping them see their need for Jesus. They were sinful and hopeless and only Jesus could save them. As you might remember from our Old Testament study that before Jesus came, people were saved by putting their trust in God, hearing what He said, and putting their hope in Him. However, when Jesus came, He died for the sins committed before His physical life, during His life, and after His death and resurrection. His death covers all sins ever committed.

John the Baptist realized he was not the focus; he was not the Messiah, although many thought he was. His purpose was solely to point people to Jesus. Sound familiar? This is what God desires for us to do all day, every day. Whether we are with our family, our friends, at work, at home, or out and about, we are always to point people to Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says we are Christ's ambassadors, as if God is making His appeal through us! We don't point people to what we do, what we have done, or how great we think we are, we point them to Jesus. John the Baptist couldn't save anyone and neither can we. Who are you pointing to Jesus today? Who are you showing the way to salvation? Are you making sure your life glorifies God? Look for opportunities to point people to Jesus today. The opportunities are there, let's take advantage of them.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 40:1-5

Isaiah lived hundreds of years before John the Baptist and yet he wrote about him. This was one of God's many ways of pointing to Jesus before Jesus was physically on this earth. Today, we can look back and read the prophets like Isaiah, and see God's plan was in full swing before John the Baptist was born. God's plan and sovereign will was played out then and continues to be played out today.

In Old Testament times, God often used prophets to share the Truth and proclaim what was coming. Today, we have something people in the Old and New Testaments didn't have; we have the fully inspired and infallible Word of God. We can see from Genesis to Revelation the whole account of God's plan. As Paul Harvey would say, "We have the rest of the story." We know that God still uses people to convey His Truth through His Word, but as individuals, we can read God's Word daily. We can study it and learn from it. Just a few days ago, I saw a cartoon of someone looking up to God in heaven and saying, "God please speak to me." In response, God handed that person a Bible indicating, "I already have and you have those very Words in your hand, on your heart, and they can be with you everywhere you go."

I am sure you are aware that there are still many people-groups across the world that do not have the Bible written in their language. Some groups have a few books of the Bible, while there are others which don't have any part of the Bible. We have the very words of God at our fingertips every day, yet we often leave it lying on our tables. Then, we either can't find them, or we don't pick them back up again until the following Sunday. Will you thank God for His Word? Will you continue to read and study it? Are you thankful you have "The rest of the story," the account that tells us one day we will spend eternity with Him? We will walk and talk with Him. Until then, may we know Him better as we connect through His Word. Will you cherish the Word of God?

Week 8 JESUS IN JERUSALEM AT TWELVE----- -----Chris Watson

Jesus was no ordinary child. He was born from Mary, but not in the line of Adam. He was literally the Son of God. This week we will see that being the child of God meant something very different for this child. After all this *child* changed the world.

Day 1

Read Luke 2:39-41

Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover.

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is a Jewish festival celebrating the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' freedom from slavery to the Egyptians. The Feast of Passover, along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was the first of the festivals to be commanded by God for Israel to observe (see Exodus 12). Commemorations today involve a special meal called the Seder, featuring unleavened bread and other food items symbolic of various aspects of the exodus.

Passover is one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. Along with Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) and Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles), Passover is one of the three *pilgrimage* festivals in Scripture, during which the Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem and observe the feasts together. Passover takes place in the spring, during the Hebrew month of Nisan. In Western countries, Passover is celebrated in early to mid-April and is always close to Easter.

The book of Exodus tells of the origin of Passover. God promised to redeem His people from the bondage of Pharaoh (Exodus 6:6). God sent Moses to the Egyptian king with the command that Pharaoh "...let my people go..." (Exodus 8:1). When Pharaoh refused, God brought ten plagues on the land of Egypt. The tenth and worst of the plagues was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt.

The night of the first Passover was the night of the tenth plague. On that fateful night, God told the Israelites to sacrifice a spotless lamb and mark their doorposts and lintels with its blood (Exodus 12:21–22). Then, when the Lord passed through the nation, He would “pass over” the households that showed the blood (verse 23). In a very real way, the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from death, as it kept the destroyer from entering their homes. The Israelites were saved from the plague, and their firstborn children stayed alive. From then on, every firstborn son of the Israelites belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed with a sacrifice (Exodus 13:1–2, 12; cf. Luke 2:22–24).

The children of Israel in Egypt followed God’s command and kept the first Passover. However, none of the Egyptians did so. All through Egypt, behind the unmarked, bloodless doorways of the Egyptians, the firstborn children died at midnight (Exodus 12:21–29). “There was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead” (verse 30). This dire judgment finally changed the Egyptian king’s heart, and he released the Israelite slaves (verses 31–32).

Along with the instruction to apply the Passover lamb’s blood to their doorposts and lintels, God instituted a commemorative meal: fire-roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8). The Lord told the Israelites to “observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever” (Exodus 12:24, ESV), even when in a foreign land.

To this day, Jews all over the world celebrate the Passover in obedience to this command. Passover and the story of the exodus have great significance for Christians also, as Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, including the symbolism of the Passover (Matthew 5:17). Jesus is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:12). He was killed at Passover time, and the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Luke 22:7–8). By (spiritually) applying His blood to our lives by faith, we trust Christ to save us from death. The Israelites who, in faith, applied the blood of the Paschal lamb to their homes become a model for us. It was not the Israelites’ ancestry or good standing or amiable nature that saved them; it was only the blood of the lamb that made them exempt from death (see John 1:29 and Revelation 5:9–10). ²

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-Passover.html>

Can you imagine what Jesus as a child must have thought about Passover? He was a child, but He was also the Son of God. Take some time today if you are a Christian to thank God that you have been passed over; that death (the enemy) has no victory over you because the blood of Jesus has covered you.

Day 2

Read Luke 2:42-45

Have you ever lost your child for a whole day? You didn't just lose them, you thought your child was with people you knew or with the rest of your traveling group in this case, only to find out that they weren't? We understand that upon realizing that Jesus wasn't with them, Jesus' parents began looking for him among relatives and acquaintances in the group, but couldn't find him. They returned to Jerusalem 3 days later and found him teaching in the temple. Can you imagine, you are the mother of Jesus and, literally, you have lost Him. You have lost the Savior of the world; the One that would save mankind couldn't be found. Joseph and Mary were parents just like you and me. They parented the Savior of the world, but they still had to feed Jesus when He was a baby, they still had to care for Him and He was still their responsibility. I am sure, like with any child, this was a great responsibility and sometimes they got it wrong.

I am the father of three children, an 11, 7 and 4-year-old and I know I often get it wrong. Sometimes, I become impatient. Sometimes, I become visually frustrated or aggravated about a situation. Truth is, even the Lord's parents didn't always get it right. As parents, grandparents, or siblings, we will sometimes get it wrong. We might lose it and have to apologize. We will, at times, feel like we are losing the battle and at other times we will see glimmers of hope that let us see we might just be winning the war. This is not an excuse to be hands off or let our children do what they want, but in those tough times, remember even Jesus' parents didn't know where He was for 3 days!

Take some time today to ask Him how to guide your children and/or grandchildren. When you get it wrong, confess it to the Lord and to your children. When you are seeking God and leading your family one step at a time, be assured you can be in God's will. Know in those tough times, God is still the God of grace and love.

Day 3

Read Luke 2:48-50

In today's passage, Jesus could not be found. His parents had lost Him and had to retrace their steps to look for Him. When they found Him, He basically said, why in the world are you looking for me? Almost like a rhetorical question of why did you bother? You should have known where I would be and what I would be doing. He tells His parents that He was being about His Father's (God's) business, but they did not understand. Although Mary was the mother of Jesus and Joseph was the earthly father of Jesus, and knowing that Jesus was the Son of God, they still didn't understand He was all about what the Father wanted. They didn't fully understand that anything He did was in accordance with God's plan and will. In fact, Jesus didn't act apart from the direction of the Lord.

Are we about our Father's business? As I type this, I am preparing to preach Sunday on Daniel. Daniel 1:8 tells us Daniel lived with a purposed heart. His heart was set on the purpose of God, not his own. Jesus' purpose was set on the purpose of His Father, God. He didn't act on His own, but at the will of His Father. Even while on the cross, He prayed not His will be done but His Father's. Sometimes, if we are honest, we get off track and can get distracted or caught up in things that don't matter as much as Jesus. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on Him. God has us in our marriage, school, job, church, etc. as a part of His plan. May we be about His business and not look back.

Day 4

Read Luke 2:46-47

If we look back at Verse 42, it tells us that Jesus was 12 when He was left in Jerusalem alone. When Jesus' parents found Him, He was in the temple with teachers, both listening and asking them questions. They were amazed with His understanding and His answers. Although He had been left for 3 days, obviously He wasn't concerned as He was about God's business.

When we speak the truth or evangelize to others, God gives us the words. In fact, many won't share because they are afraid they won't know what to say or they will look like they don't know what they are talking about. This is a pride issue. If you don't know the answers, simply say, "I don't know, but I will try to find out." You don't have to have all the answers. You might be surprised if you speak the truth and speak up for Jesus, God will often give you the answers. In fact, I have found that if I don't speak up, I won't have the right answers, but if I do, I will. Don't be afraid to speak the truth. The world needs the truth now more than ever, whether it's at home, in the church, at the ballfield, at school, or in the work place.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53

Remember our 12-year-old little boy preaching in the temple last week? Isaiah 53 is also about this little boy. Isaiah 53 was written about 700 years before Jesus' time, as prophecy. That little boy would grow up, begin His public ministry at the age of 30, call 12 disciples, be arrested, be beaten, be put to death and would rise to live again. Scripture tells us He sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf.

Jesus, as a child or adult, had nothing (Verse 2) in regards to looks or wealth to draw people to Him. Rather, as a child, He grew in wisdom and in stature, in favor with God and man. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Mary to care for Jesus? To change His diapers, watch Him play with His friends, watch Him teach in the temple, grow up, begin His ministry, call His disciples and then go to the cross? Mary watched Him literally die for your sins and for hers. What an emotional and heart wrenching experience that must have been. Now imagine what it must have been like to find out that Jesus had risen from the dead, and all that He said was indeed true.

I'm reminded of the hymn, "I serve a Risen Savior, He's in the world today, I know that He is living whatever men may say." This Jesus which was prophesied in Isaiah 700 years before His birth, is the same Savior that died for our sins and lives today. He doesn't just live, but as believers, He lives in us. He walks and talks with with us as we go. Thank God for His goodness and for chosing to walking with us.

WEEK 9 THE BAPTISM OF JESUS-----Dennis Watson

As we have seen, John the Baptist's baptisms were for repentance. Jesus never sinned, yet, Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize Him. Jesus came to this earth for sinners. To be specific, Paul writes that Jesus came to become *sin for us* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus completely identified with us in our humanity though He was both fully God and fully man. He was born as a helpless infant just like we were and He grew up into an adult. He lived a sinless life and in His death He identified with our sinfulness. He became sin for us. His baptism was identification with our sin. He didn't need to repent, but He was to take on our sin and His baptism was an example for us. This week we will look at the baptism of Jesus.

Day 1

Read Matthew 3:13-15

We don't know how John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, but it was probably the Holy Spirit who let him know. It seems odd he didn't know his cousin was the Messiah, but John did know he was not worthy to baptize Jesus. Jesus was without sin! Why did Jesus ask John to baptize Him? John had been calling people from all over the region to come to him for repentance of sin. Jesus said He needed to be baptized to fulfill righteousness.

John's message was a message of repentance and those experiencing it were looking forward to the coming Messiah who would be righteous and who would bring in righteousness. If the Messiah were to provide righteousness for sinners, He must be identified with sinners. It was therefore in the will of God for Him to be baptized by John in order to be identified (the real meaning of the word "baptized") with sinners.³

Jesus took the initiative to identify with us. He was born as an infant, a helpless infant. Can you imagine the God who created

³The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

all things became an infant in need of the care and concern of a mother and father? By becoming human, He identified with our humanity. In baptism, He identified with our sin though He was sinless. In His death on the cross He identified with our guilt. He became human sin, and guilt for us. Now, we get to identify with Him. In baptism, we identify with the death He died for us. In that death, He took away our sin. Also in baptism, we are symbolically identifying with His resurrection. The old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all." He paid it all. He did the difficult; identifying with us so we could receive the benefit of His resurrection.

Paul expressed it this way:

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

Romans 6:5 (NKJV)

The sinless Son of God put Himself in harm's way so we would receive the benefits. Thank the Lord God for becoming flesh and sin for us so we can receive the benefits of His resurrection.

Day 2

Read Matthew 3:16-17

As Jesus came up out of the water following His baptism by John, Heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. "And suddenly a voice came from Heaven saying, 'This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (**Verse 17**) Here at the baptism of Jesus all three of the persons of the Trinity of God were present. The Son Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and rested on Jesus, and God spoke from Heaven. The Trinity, humanly speaking, is impossible to explain. There have been many attempted explanations, but none truly explain the Trinity. The Trinity describes or defines God as three in one. God is three but one. This is beyond human grasp, though we know it is true. The Lord God is indescribable. We can only attempt to speak of the One True God in human terms but He is larger and greater than our words will ever express.

When the Spirit of God descended and God spoke, John truly understood that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). It also fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that the Spirit would rest on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2). The descent of the Holy Spirit empowered the Son, the Messiah, for His ministry among people.⁴

The Lord God affirmed and authenticated Jesus in the virgin birth, the appearance of the Trinity at His baptism, at the transfiguration, and in His resurrection from the dead.

Give thanks to the Lord God for His many confirmations for us that Jesus Christ is the One God sent to be our Messiah.

⁴The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read John 1:29-34

John proclaimed Jesus was, "... the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (**Verse 29**) In the biblical, historical account of the Passover in Exodus, the people were instructed to take a lamb, kill it, and spread the blood of the lamb on the door frame of their homes. When the angel of death came along, he passed over homes which had the blood of the lamb on the doorframe. The lamb's blood saved those households from experiencing the death of the firstborn. Jesus is the Lamb of God. His blood provides salvation from sin, death, and the grave, for people who have placed their faith in Him and His shed blood.

John also said Jesus was *before me*. Although John was a few months older than Jesus, he knew and proclaimed that Jesus was before him. John spoke of the preexistence of Jesus. Jesus was present with God the Father in the beginning and all things were made by Him and for Him.

John acknowledged Jesus was the Lamb of God and He existed before him. John saw the Spirit come down and remain on Jesus when He was baptized and John was certainly familiar with Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 11:2) proclaiming the Spirit would come and rest on Him. For John the Baptist, this was God's confirmation that Jesus was His Son and the promised Messiah. Because of all of this, John testified Jesus was the Son of God.

There is some long term dot connecting going on here! John made the connection between Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Passover lamb whose blood spared families from experiencing the death of the firstborn. He also connected Jesus to His role as Creator. Give thanks that Jesus is all over and throughout the Word of God!

Day 4

Read Mark 6:17-29

The ministry of John the Baptist put him at odds with many people who did not have an affinity for the Word of God. He preached about sin and called all people to repent of their sins and turn to God. King Herod divorced his wife and took his half-brother Philip's wife to be his wife. John the Baptist confronted Herod about this; so much for being a politically-correct preacher. His new wife, Herodias, was outraged at the audacity of John the Baptist. She insisted King Herod arrest John and put him in prison. She wanted John the Baptist killed, but Herod had a respectful fear of him because he knew John was a holy and just man. At Herod's birthday party, Herodias' daughter danced for Herod and his attendees. Herod was delighted with her dance and told her he would give her whatever she requested up to half his kingdom. She asked her mother what she should ask for and Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod, with regret and sorrow, had John executed and had his head brought to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

John, like all biblical people of faith, was ultimately saved by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The blood of Jesus covered all people who had faith in God's redemptive plan. Often, we are faced with ridicule and harassment due to our obedience to God's Word. Like John, we too, will be delivered by the blood of Jesus. Are you taking a firm stand with people regarding the Word of God? If so, you may not always be popular. In fact, some people will hate you and abuse you, but Jesus said to rejoice when you suffer for Him.

Give thanks to the Lord for John's faithfulness even unto death.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 11:1-5

It is interesting that today's passage was written about 700 years before Jesus came to live on earth. In this passage, Isaiah linked Jesus not to David, but to David's father, Jesse. Though this still links Jesus to the Davidic Covenant that the Messiah would rule on David's throne, Isaiah linked Jesus to the poor farmer from Bethlehem. Like Jesse, He was born to peasants. The geographical link was not to the City of David, which was Jerusalem, but to the little town of Bethlehem.

We have already looked at the passage in John 1:32 about the Spirit coming to rest on Jesus at His baptism. This was prophesied in today's passage. Look at what J. Vernon McGee says about this:

This is the sevenfold spirit which rested upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The plenitude of power is the sevenfold spirit: (1) of the LORD; (2) of wisdom; (3) of understanding; (4) of counsel; (5) of might; (6) of knowledge; and (7) of the fear of the LORD. The number seven in Scripture does not necessarily mean perfection. The primary thought is fullness, completeness. John 3:34 tells us, "...for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." In Ephesians 5:18 we are admonished, "...be filled with the Spirit." Some of us just have a few drops at the bottom, others are one fourth filled, and some are half filled. Very few Christians you meet are really filled with the Spirit. A little girl once prayed, "Lord, fill me with the Spirit. I can't hold very much, but I can run over a whole lot." Very few Christians are just brimming full, running over on all sides. The Lord Jesus Christ was the exception to that. ⁵

There is a critical need today for God's people to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. Are you spilling over with His Spirit? If not, ask the Lord to fill you in a mighty way.

⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

WEEK 10 THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS-Chris Watson

We all are tempted daily. We live in a sin-filled world where all manners of sin and the things of this world are at our fingertips. Jesus was tempted, just like you and I, but He never sinned. This should remind us that we can't do it on our own; if we desire victory over the enemy and temptation, then we need to put our hope and trust in Jesus. This week, we will see Jesus being tempted and overcoming that temptation, knowing ultimately He is in charge.

Day 1

READ Luke 4:1-4

Jesus had just been baptized and His Father had just told Him how much He took delight in Him. We might think that following His baptism, God through Jesus would do some great miracle or something incredible would occur. Yet, right after His baptism, He went into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil. This often happens in our lives, too. Right after God does a great work, or we have a wonderful victory, the enemy tries to get us off track.

In this account, Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit (God) to fast and seek God while at the same time He was being tempted. Even this was a part of God's plan. Jesus would be tempted just like we are, and yet, He would not give into the temptations. Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus was tempted just like you and I, but He remained sinless.

It's interesting to note that Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden by the enemy as well, but they failed and gave in to the temptation. Jesus (the last Adam, 1 Corinthians 15:45) was tempted in the wilderness and succeeded in resisting temptation. Though Jesus was hungry, He, overcame the temptation.

Notice **Verse 3** reads, "If you are the son of God..." In the Greek, which is what the New Testament was written in, there are conditional clauses when it comes to the "if" statements. It could mean "if and it's not so," "if, maybe it's so and maybe it's not," and "if

and it's so, thus..." In other words, this *if you are the Son of God* statement by the devil wasn't a question or a wondering, but it was an, *if you are the Son of God, and you are, then tell the stones to become bread*. For if He wasn't the Son of God, it would have been meaningless. Satan knew He was the Son of God and he was seeking to tempt Him and hoping He would give in.

However, Jesus didn't; He fought the temptation with God's words from Deuteronomy 8:3. He told the devil that God's Word is greater than any physical food and God's Word is the true source of our strength.

We need the Word of God and we can know them by reading, studying, and memorizing. Then, when you and I are tempted, God, through His Word, will be victorious in us. What are you tempted with right now? Whatever it may be, it is not greater than our Jesus. He has the words of life and nothing will satisfy other than Him. Call on Him to help you resist temptations and tell the devil you have the very words of God.

Day 2

Read Luke 4:5-8

This passage is very significant. At first glance, especially for someone who is not familiar with it, it may seem like the devil is in control. If the devil can give Jesus anything and everything, doesn't that mean he is in control or that God is not all powerful? The answer is no.

God is sovereign, meaning He is in control. We can trust God and His plans. Jesus told us "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." (**John 12:31**) Three key words are *this world* and *ruler*. Satan is *ruler* of this world only when it comes to evil and darkness. In other words, the devil has no power or rule over believers; we are under God's love and grace. In fact, **Ephesians 2:1-2** speaks of those who used to have the mindset of the enemy in this world when it says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." In other words, we used to walk in the way of this world before God saved us, but now we walk in the peace and grace of God.

God is ultimately in charge. **Colossians 1:15-18** says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." The enemy was trying to tempt Jesus with the whole world and fast track what was ultimately His anyway. Jesus knew that one day the evil of this world would be destroyed. If Jesus had fallen for the devil's plot, He would have received the darkness and evil of this world, which wasn't a deal at all, as God is light. So while Satan was seeking to tempt Jesus with a shortcut to have this world, Jesus ultimately knew God's plan and

knew Who was really in charge. Satan made a valid offer, but the terms were not acceptable. The Father had promised to give the Son all the kingdoms of the world (Psalms 2:7-8), but Jesus first had to suffer and die. Satan was trying to offer a shortcut and there are no shortcuts in God's plan.

Jesus' answer told the whole story when He responded, "... you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." **(Verse 8)** Jesus knew the only one who deserved worship and praise was the One True God. No person, sport, material thing, possession, position or any other thing deserves to be worshipped. Only God deserves our worship. If He works through a circumstance or a person, they don't deserve the worship, God does because it is God working through them.

Take time to thank God that He is all knowing, worthy and totally in control. The glory belongs to no one else. Commit to worship and serve only Him. Most of all, thank Him, that as a believer, you are no longer under the authority of the devil of this world, but under the grace and mercy of God through Jesus.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Hebrews 4:14-16

Our passage today reminds us Jesus was tempted, yet He did not give into temptation. He was tempted in every way just like we are and He knows what we face, He understands.

James 1:14-15 says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." In other words, be assured that temptations will come. While there are often things we can do to avoid temptation, sometimes they come even while we are trying to avoid them. It's what we do after being tempted that determines how we responded to that temptation. Did we turn away and run to Jesus, or did we give into the temptation?

Obviously, there have been times we have given into temptation. If you are not sure, ask yourself, "Have I ever lied, have I ever stolen anything, have I ever cheated, or have I ever had a bad attitude?" I would think these would certainly cover all of us and if you are like me, unfortunately, you are four for four.

Without Jesus we have no hope. However, the end of today's passage tells us we can boldly go before the throne of grace and receive mercy and find grace to help us in times of need. In other words, when we do give into temptation, there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. We can come to Jesus, acknowledge our sin, and receive His grace. It is His desire that we will seek to follow Him; wanting to love God with all we are, including our actions.

I am so thankful for the grace and love of God through Jesus Christ. I desire to walk with Jesus. Do you? Although I have shortcomings and I sin, each day it is my desire to walk closer with God than I did the day before. I want to be able to look back and say because of Jesus, I am walking more in the light than I was a year ago. Are you walking with Jesus more this year than last? It's not pride, legalism, or our own righteousness that should compel us, but Christ's love (Colossians 5:14-15). Does Christ's love compel you to righteousness, hope, truth, service, and a daily walk with God? Today, will you ask to be compelled by God's love?

Day 4

Read Luke 4:9-13

During this biblical, historical event, Satan knew scripture, but he didn't use it in context. The verses he quoted were Psalm 91:11-12 which speaks of abiding in the presence of God as He gives His angels charge over you. Satan was tempting Jesus but he was not properly using scripture. Sometimes the enemy tries to get us to take, read, or use scripture out of context to make it say what we want it to say. It's important when we read scripture, we see it in light of the whole Bible, looking at what comes just before it and just after it. Obviously, Satan was using scripture for his own purposes. He was trying to further his plans, but it didn't work.

Satan was seeking to command or demand of Jesus what he wanted. However, Satan can't do that. Yes, he can ask or try commanding God to do this or that, but God is in control, not Satan. This should come as a great reminder and a refuge for us. No matter what you and I face, God is in control. In the darkest of days or when things are going great, we can trust Him because He is in control. Our responsibility is to remain in Him (John 15) and walk with Him. We walk with Him because we know Him, we have seen His faithfulness. Satan knew who Jesus was, he knew Jesus was in control, though he didn't like it and he tried to do things his own way. Those of us who trust Jesus know that He is King. We know He loves us and He is in control even though there are times we have to be reminded. Those who have walked with God have seen His faithfulness. Chuck Missler says, "Trust never employs tricks to find out whether the one trusted is trustworthy." We don't have to use tricks to test God's trustworthiness; we know we can trust Him.

Do you trust God? Is your hope in Him? Are you walking with Him? If so, be encouraged; even in our worst days we can have peace. Let this sink in, "When a child of God is in the will of God, he can claim the Father's protection and provision; but if he willingly gets into trouble and expects God to rescue him, then he is tempting God" (Chuck Missler).

Paul wrote that whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)
Today, let us walk willingly in the ways of God, trusting Him, not
tempting Him. In other words, don't willfully walk into sin, for
it is not from God. Thank God for delivering you from sin and
giving you victory over temptation.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 61:1-3

After Satan left Him, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and He began to read from Isaiah. Remember, Isaiah was written hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth and we see its fulfillment in the New Testament passages.

Let's break down this passage and remember what Jesus has been doing, and continues to do, on our behalf:

"To preach the Gospel to the poor."

Jesus preached to all people whether financially rich or poor because we are all poor in spirit without Jesus. We know that God has called us to take Jesus to all the nations. Are you?

"He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted."

In the gospel accounts, we read Jesus healed the brokenhearted. Sometimes He physically healed someone; at other times He offered hope in a terrible situation. Many who read this are brokenhearted. Are you? The truth is, we have all either been brokenhearted, are brokenhearted, or will be in the future because we live in a fallen world. However, in our broken heartedness, God heals and comforts us. Psalms reminds us God is near to the brokenhearted. Place your heart in God's hands and trust Him with all of your hurts.

"To proclaim liberty to the captives and to release those who are oppressed."

God came to free those in bondage who were willing to follow and put their trust in Him. Notice the first part says to proclaim, meaning He came to tell and show people how they can be freed from their captivity and oppressions. The same is true today. Are you oppressed or held captive by something? God wants to free you, but first, you must lay it down and walk in His ways and follow Him. Will you?

In addition, **Luke 4:18** reads, "... and recovery of sight to the blind." Jesus physically healed some people who were blind and He can still do it today. Often, however, He healed them of spiritual blindness. A good example of spiritual blindness would be to look at Saul who was later named Paul. Saul was killing Christians by the hundreds before he followed Jesus and Jesus changed his name to Paul. When God opened his eyes, it was as though a light switch had been turned on and Paul's thoughts and motivations changed, just like that! Has God showed you what Jesus can do for you? He can save you from your sins and He can give you spiritual sight. Have you received it? Are you walking in that light?

What a full passage of the truth about Jesus, both then and now. Take some time today to thank God for what He has done for you and what an incredible Savior and King He is.

WEEK 11 THE WEDDING FEAST----- Dennis Watson

The first recorded miracle of Jesus is at the wedding at Cana. J. Vernon McGee says, “The wedding is a picture of another wedding that is coming. Christ began His ministry on this earth at a wedding. He will conclude it, as far as the church is concerned, with a wedding. At the marriage supper of the Lamb the church will be presented to Him as a bride.” The turning of water into wine was the first of thirty-five recorded miracles Jesus performed. This week, we will look at His first miracle.

Day 1

Read John 2:1-5

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother, Mary, was there along with Jesus and His first six disciples, Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip and Nathaniel (Bartholomew). It is very interesting to note that Jesus began His ministry at a wedding and the beginning of eternity will be the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven as a bride adorned for her groom—a wedding! Marriage is extremely important to the Lord God. One of the first things He did, in the beginning, was to make man and woman to fit together. He often used marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Himself and His followers.

Jesus' first miracle took place at this wedding. A wedding in those days, and in that culture, was a seven day affair. With Jesus and His disciples, there were probably more guests than expected, but for whatever reason, they ran out of wine. Jesus’ mother, Mary, went to Him for His help. His initial response sounded rude and disrespectful. However, He was telling her it was not time for people to know who He really was. Mary’s insistence He do something may have risen from a need for justification on her part. People were probably still talking about her becoming pregnant before marrying Joseph. A miracle would prove that He was no ordinary man.

His response of *my time has not yet come* or similar words occur five times in John (2:4; 7:6, 7:8, 7:30; 8:20). Later He would use similar terminology saying that His time had come (12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus was telling her that the time of revealing who He was had not yet come. She, then told the servants to do what He said—she trusted Him and left it up to Him to do what He deemed best.

Mary believed she could take her problems to Jesus, her Son. Two passages tell us to cast our cares on Him—Psalm 55:22 and 1 Peter 5:7. Mary was bold and unapologetic in approaching Jesus with the problem at hand. We should do the same. Cast your cares on Him.

We can learn from Mary. She did not make the need known and then tell Him what to do; she simply pointed out the need and left it in His hands. This is true submission.

What about the needs you submit to Jesus? Can you leave them with Him? This is true trust.

Day 2

Read John 2:6-10

Jesus went ahead and turned the water into wine, although His time had not come. I don't believe He felt pressured to do it. He was telling His mother a truth she would need to continue to understand. His time would come for miracles, for suffering, and for death. Ultimately, the time of His resurrection and glorification would also come. In that event, she would truly be confirmed.

This miracle was known only by Mary, Jesus' disciples, and the servants. There were six pots which were used for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus told a group of servants to fill those water pots with water. They were ordinary, empty clay pots. They filled them with water and when a cup was dipped into one of the pots, the cup was filled with top quality wine. Where there was no wine before, there were now at least 120 gallons. The guests nor the host knew the source of the wine. We were once empty, useless pots and Jesus filled us to overflowing with His Spirit. I cannot help but think of this when I read this account.

Turning water into wine was no real challenge for the Son of God. He did not need months or years for time of fermenting. He did not need the elaborate natural process. He was God in the flesh.

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” **Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)**

How difficult would it be for Jesus to perform such a miracle? No problem at all. There was suddenly enough wine for 2500 wine glasses to be filled. I can guarantee you they would not run out of wine again at that wedding feast!

Empty pots; probably old and chipped pots filled with fine wine. Sounds familiar--We have this treasure in jars of clay. Consider

Paul's words: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."
2 Corinthians 4:7 (NKJV)

Jesus is still in the business of filling worthless clay pots for His name's sake! Rejoice; again, I say rejoice.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read John 12:23-32

Jesus told His mother His time had not yet come. It was not time for Him to show the world who He was by working miracles. However, He did perform His first miracle by turning water into wine at the wedding feast. Several other times in the gospels He said, *My time has come*. In today's passage, we see one of those times. He said, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." (**Verse 25**) The time had come. Jesus made it clear why He had come. By referring to Himself as, *The Son of Man*, He connected Himself to prophecy (Daniel 7:13). This is a Messianic title. Jesus is identifying Himself as the Messiah and predicts His death. He even said the method of His death would be crucifixion.

Jesus surrendered Himself to His Father's will although He was troubled. Jesus, The Son of God, was agitated and stirred because of the prospect of being made sin in His death (2 Cor. 5:21). However, He was all in with His Father's plan. This was no small thing. He was tempted just like us or it could not have been true. Yet, His greatest desire, even more than preserving His own life, was doing His Father's will. The prayer was so real.

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."

John 12:27 (NKJV) He was totally on board with God's plan, so He would not and could not pray a prayer which did not fit.

Jesus came to save us from our sin. His whole life had been a journey to the cross and now that journey had reached its final stretch. His hour had come. The Father's name would be glorified. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and millions throughout history would be drawn to His death and resurrection for salvation.

I am moved as I write these words, being reminded once again of the power and the plan of God to deliver us from the grip and power of sin. The whole of the Bible is about this! His hour had come. He died for me and He died for you. Is He your Savior?

Day 4

Read John 2:11-12

Today we return to the scene of the wedding. Jesus had turned water into wine and the master of the wedding feast was amazed. He was amazed the best wine had been saved until the end of the feast. He simply thought they had been holding back. He did not know the source.

It is very interesting to read what John wrote in **Verse 11**, "And His disciples believed in Him." Had they not previously believed in Him? In the previous chapter, John told of Jesus calling these disciples to follow Him and they did. Obviously, there was an initial belief for them to have followed Him. Because of this miracle their initial faith had grown. Healthy faith, like a tree, should always be growing. The rings of a tree reveal seasons of growth. The growth, most often, represents normal growth at the start and end of growing seasons. At other times, the rings reveal times of stress from drought or fire. We grow in our faith the same way. The six disciples saw the first miracle of Jesus and believed—more. Their lives would be characterized by more of the same. There would be struggles, suffering and more miracles. This would be the soil in which their faith would grow.

It is the same soil our faith grows in. We have good times and hard times; times of soaring high and times of hurt and disappointment. Give thanks for the growth of your faith!

Day 5

Read Isaiah 62:11-12

After the water to wine miracle at the wedding, the first six disciples were probably feeling pretty good about following Jesus. Jesus had saved the wedding hosts the embarrassment of running out of wine, but He came for far more than to save us from embarrassment. The disciples were starting to connect the dots. They probably knew of Isaiah's prophecy and the prophecies of many other Old Testament prophets. They might have wanted to go out shouting what Isaiah wrote in today's passage, "Surely your salvation is coming." These verses were written as though the Lord was on His way so the people should be expecting Him. It is incredible there were not more people expecting His coming since there were so many specific prophecies about His coming.

As this verse indicates, this announcement in Isaiah 62 is pertinent for the present hour. The salvation of Israel is part of God's overall plan of salvation. We ought to present the gospel to every person, including all Jews. The Messiah is their Savior. He is also our Savior. He is the Savior of all people who receive Him as Savior. And, the second coming of Christ will be the coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth for all of these people.

Isaiah called them *holy people*; but, Israel cannot be called a holy people today. They are not redeemed. Jerusalem is a forsaken city right now, but the day will come when things will be different. The experience of God's salvation will work a transformation in the nation of Israel and also in the physical earth. The people will be called a holy people and the land will be greatly desired. The contrary is true today. What a glorious future we have! ⁶

Jesus is coming again! Are you expecting His coming? It could happen any day. Is He your Savior? If so, proclaim Him as the Savior who has come and is coming again.

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

WEEK 12 JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE----- -----Chris Watson

Jesus is loving and patient, yet He spoke truth when it needed to be spoken. When things were not going in line with scripture, He acted accordingly, especially when it came to His Father's house. As believers, we should do the same. We should be patient and loving, but when we see things that are against God's plan, we should pray and wait for direction from the Lord. If so directed, we should speak up. We should do so with God's authority, but always with love and kindness.

Day 1

Read John 2:13-17

We often think of Jesus as someone who is meek and mild who never ruffles any feathers. However, as we have and will see in the Gospels, He spoke tough words to many people including the Pharisees and the Sadducees, He made sure people understood what it meant to truly trust and follow God. In today's account, we don't see Jesus being meek and mild. In fact, He took a whip throughout the temple, poured out the money changer's coins, and overturned the tables.

At first glance, some may look at these verses and try to use this as an example that Jesus sinned. However, scripture tells us in our anger to *sin not* (Ephesians 4:26). It is possible to become angry and not sin, however, we often allow our anger to turn into sin. Thankfully, Jesus did not.

In this passage and also in Matthew 21:13, we see that the money changers were cheating the people. These things should not have been happening in the temple. Worship and sacrifice should have been taking place in the outer court of the temple, but selling and cheating were taking place. No wonder Jesus took the action He did! Did you realize the Passover was at hand? What was considered one of the holiest and greatest remembrances of God's deliverance of His people was being celebrated, yet people were oblivious and doing the exact opposite of what they should have been doing in the temple.

Jesus was zealous (Verse 17) for the things of God. He couldn't stand by and watch ungodly things going on in His Father's house. He wanted only proper worship and sacrifice at the temple. We, too, should desire to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. Whether we are at home or at church, we should worship God with all of our hearts. Many times, we may be at church and while we may not be selling or cheating people, our hearts are not fully there; we are not zealous for God and the things of God. Are you zealous and in love with God? Do you want the things He wants? Are you content with the status quo? Ask God to help you love what He loves and hate what He hates. Ask Him to change your heart to be like His and see things the way He sees them. Then, maybe the trivial things won't matter to us; and the things which matter to God, will matter to us. Let us be in tune with God and His heart.

Day 2

Read John 2:18-22

It's easy to second guess the Jews in the New Testament, knowing what we know now. Truth be told, had we been in their place, we might have done the same thing. The Jews wanted a sign that Jesus cleansing the temple was right and He had the authority to do so. However, we see in **Matthew 12: 38-42** what Jesus said about those who ask for a sign, "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" Again they questioned Jesus. He was telling and showing them He was Jesus, the Son of God, and no sign demanded by humans would be given aside from what had already been seen and would continue to be shown as a part of His ministry.

When Jesus told the Jews that the temple would be destroyed and in three days He would raise it, it was almost impossible for them to grasp. From His response, they thought He was talking about the physical temple. In reality, He was talking about Himself; He is the temple. They could only see what was right in front of them. However, the disciples remembered these words when He was crucified and rose from the grave.

When Jesus died, the veil to the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. From that moment we began to have direct access to God through Jesus. We don't have to go to a temple, church, or any other special place to meet with Jesus. Though Jesus instructs us to be a part of His Church, we can talk and meet with Him anywhere. Jesus is the temple and if Jesus is in us, He is with us wherever we go.

Isn't that incredible? Even after knowing this most of my life and experiencing it for myself, it's incredible to think the God of the universe lives in me. He is near me. He walks beside me, He comforts and guides me. This amazes me! Jesus is the temple.

Not only are we to take care of our earthly bodies (as the temple) as Jesus is in us, but we are to be good stewards of Jesus and His message. We often think of stewardship in terms of money, but how are we being good stewards of Jesus and His message? In other words, what are you doing through Christ living in you? Are you leaning on Him? Are you sharing Him? Are you living for Him? Are you going through the difficult parts of life with Him? Jesus is in us; we have His power. All praise and glory to Him! Thank Him for being Christ in us.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Matthew 27:39-43

Have you ever thought you were 110% right concerning a situation, so convinced of it, you shared it with others, announced it to the world, and then learned you were totally wrong? I have and you might have, too. The Jews, chief priests, scribes, elders, and others were mocking Jesus, hurling insults, laughing and questioning Him, saying things like if you are who you say you are then come off the cross. They even said, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself." **(Verse 40)** They didn't know they would soon be proven wrong; what they were so sure of, would all come crashing down.

Be assured Jesus is in control. There are many in our world, many in the media, and maybe many of our friends, who think what we believe in and Who we follow is crazy. They can't fathom the hope we have and Who that hope is in. Be encouraged that we don't have a false hope, but the ONE Hope, Jesus Christ. Don't question or laugh at those who disagree, pray for them, share with them, and show love and kindness to them. We want them to see what we see, have what we have, and know Who we know. We don't want them to be wrong and find it out later; we want to show them the Truth, so they can also know the Truth. Who can you share the Truth with today?

Jesus is Lord over all. He was Lord over the money-changers, Lord over those who hurled insults, Lord over us, and Lord over life and death. Because Jesus hung on the cross, enduring such hurt, hatred, blasphemy, mocking, and pain, we have hope. He not only died on the cross, but He arose and is alive today. We have salvation and the promise of heaven. We know the "rest of the story." Not only do we know the rest of the death and resurrection account, we know God is in control and one day He will take us to be with Him. One day, He will create a New Heaven and a New Earth and we will walk and talk with Him with no more pain, sorrow, hurt, or loss. We will know Him and others who have gone before us. Because we know Jesus, we have hope on this earth and hope in the future. Do you have that hope?

If not, call on Jesus now. If you do, thank God for it. Enjoy Him every day and look forward to Heaven. If you have never read Heaven written by Randy Alcorn, I highly recommend it. It is a great biblical view of heaven and answers many questions we all have about heaven. However, until heaven comes, we have Jesus in our hearts.

Day 4

Read John 2:23-25

At first glance, it appears this passage may seem to say that it's possible to put our total faith in Jesus, but Jesus not commit Himself to us. However, this is not what it says. Notice in Verse 23, many *believed* in His name when they saw the signs He was doing. These people, from what we know, were not necessarily ready to follow Jesus or to put their total trust or hope in Him. Rather, they believed He was definitely someone different and special, based solely on the miraculous signs He was doing.

We see the nature of their belief expressed in **John 3:2** when Nicodemus, speaking to Jesus says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs unless God is with them." The people trusted in their signs and knew this man was from God, but didn't trust in Him as Jesus, as God's Son, or as One who could offer salvation. If they had trusted in Him, Jesus would have trusted Himself to them. He didn't because He knew there was still work to be done in their hearts. Their eyes were not open to the truth of who Jesus really was.

Many people believe in Jesus when times get tough and they have nowhere else to turn. Or, they may believe when they have seen His miracles. These are reasons, however, one must believe and trust Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. He is the One God sent into the world to live, suffer, die, and rise to live again, for our sins. When we place our faith and hope (belief) in Him for what He has done and trust Him to forgive us of our sins, we are saved. We can't just believe Jesus to be just a good man, a miracle worker, or even just acknowledge He is God's Son. We must put our total trust and hope in Him to be saved. Not only do we need to be saved to go to heaven, we also need to be saved from ourselves and to Jesus. We want to be saved not just to a future heaven but to a relationship with God through Jesus now.

Do you know Jesus? Have you just heard about Him? Have you casually believed because of the things you have heard He has done? Or, have you put your total trust and hope in Him? If you have not, today is the day of salvation. Pray right now to God and put your total trust and hope in Jesus. If you have, take some time to thank God that He has given you Himself, the best gift you could ever have.

Day 5

Read Psalm 69:7-13

The beginning of **Verse 9** reads, "Because zeal for your house has eaten me up." In other words, David had zeal for God's house (temple) and the things of God. The word zeal means, fervor for a person, cause, or object; eager desire or endeavor; enthusiastic diligence; ardor.⁷ David, Jesus, and others we know from scripture had a zeal for God's House and the things of God. During Old Testament times, it would have been a zeal for the temple. Today, it could mean a zeal for God's church as a building, but this is not necessarily what it means. Rather, it means to have a zeal for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

When you think about your relationship with Jesus, does the word zeal come to mind? Do you have fervor and a love for Jesus and the things of Jesus? Do you desire to follow Jesus and the things Jesus follows? Do you desire to go to the places where He would go? Do you desire to love the things He loves and hate the things which He hates?

If we are truthful, sometimes our zeal may not be for Jesus or the things of Jesus. At times, we may think we are zealous for the things of Jesus, but may not show it in the right way. For instance, we should hate sin and all of its effects, but God desires us to love others. We don't have to hate the person who sins, but we can hate the sin. If we love a person we will speak the truth to them with kindness and the love of Jesus about their sin. If we truly have zeal for Jesus we would not be showing His love if we didn't speak truth to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Again, our motives should not be selfish, derogatory, hateful, or spiteful, but should flow from our zeal and love for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

⁷ Dictionary.com, Zeal

Are there things in your life, maybe actions, words, thoughts, and desires that speak the opposite of having a zeal for the things of Jesus? Do you need to lay those things down? Would you take some time today to do just that? Lay them down, those things which go against Jesus and against having a zeal for Him. Let us speak truth for Jesus and let our zeal be a godly, loving zeal, not hateful or mean-spirited.

WEEK 13 NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS----- -----Dennis Watson

Day 1

Read John 3:1-8

Nicodemus was a religious man, but he was clearly sensitive to spiritual truth. Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of night so his Pharisee companions would not see him. He was drawn to Jesus and His teaching.

"Three things are said about Nicodemus here. The first thing is that he was a man of the Pharisees. That means that he belonged to the best group in Israel. They believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament, they believed in the coming of the Messiah, they believed in miracles, and they believed in the Resurrection. He was a man of the Pharisees, and his name was Nicodemus -- we are given his name. And he was a ruler of the Jews. This tells us of the three masks that this man wore."⁸

"Nicodemus was of a religious group who believed that you needed to be a good Israelite and avoid sin to be accepted by God. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that coming to God was not something that you can accomplish on your own. What a shock it must have been when Jesus announced to him, "...Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God..."

Verse 3:3 After all what kind of religious activity can cause a person to be born again? Very early in Jesus' ministry He makes it clear that getting right with God is not something a person can do by merit. The command to be "born again" is something no one can do on their own. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born of water and the Spirit. No one had anything to do with their first birth. The new birth is a work of God!

"Water" would remind Nicodemus of John the Baptist's emphasis. Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to enter the kingdom, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be

⁸ ThruThe Bible with J. Vernon McGee

regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There are two distinct realms: one is of fallen man (the flesh) and the other is of God (the Spirit). A fallen person cannot regenerate himself; he needs a divine operation. Only God's Holy Spirit can regenerate a human spirit. People should not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus' words. They must be born from above. The necessity is absolute and is universally binding."⁹

If you are saved, you add nothing to it and you take nothing away. It is a gift not achieved, but received. Give thanks to the Lord for His great accomplishment in you on your behalf.

⁹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty

Day 2

Read John 3:9-15

The writers and prophets of the Old Testament spoke of a time to come when there would be a new age with the working of God's Spirit. Nicodemus and the other religious leaders failed to connect the dots. Here is one example of prophecy regarding the work of the Spirit: "²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." **Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NKJV)**

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying so he asked, "How can these things be?" (**Verse 9**) Jesus then questioned how he could be a teacher and not understand these things. Nicodemus did not see himself as a sinner in need of being saved. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to a biblical, historical event in which the Israelites sinned and were suffering and dying and Moses put the bronze serpent on the pole instructing the people to look at to be healed. Jesus told Nicodemus that Jesus, the Son of Man, would also be lifted up and all who believe in Him would receive eternal life.

What a huge departure from the heavy-handed religion Nicodemus and the Israelites were accustomed to. God had provided the solution to the problem of sin. He alone could deal with sin and make people acceptable. Religion is man's attempt to get to God. Christianity is God's plan to come to man. I often speak with people who are questioning their salvation. They wonder, Did I do it right, or Did I pray the right prayer? Salvation is a gift. It was accomplished by God sending Jesus to die for our sins, and then for Him to be raised up victorious. He did it. You receive it. It is a gift received, not an award achieved.

Give thanks to the Lord that He has provided what we need in order to know Him. Jesus paid it all!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read John 3:16-18

Heaven and hell are real places. In Hebrews it is written, "As it is appointed for men to die once, but after that the judgment."

Hebrews 9:27 (NKJV) It is very clear in biblical teaching that death is the result of sin. It is also clear that after death, people will either spend eternity in Heaven with the Lord God, or in hell separated from God, with Satan and his demons. Jesus summarizes the gospel when He tells Nicodemus those all too familiar words, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." **John 3:16 (NKJV)**

God is a good God! Because He is good, sin must be punished. The punishment for sin is death and hell. Jesus tells Nicodemus that God loved the people of the world so much He sent Jesus, His only Son, into the world to die and that all those who believe in Him will receive not death and hell, but eternal life with Him in Heaven. Just like the historical account in the Old Testament we discussed yesterday, Jesus would be lifted up to take away the price of our sin.

It is clear for those who believe in God's work through Jesus for salvation that they will spend eternity with the Lord God in Heaven. However, those who do not believe will receive the full impact of sin—death and hell. Is that mean or cruel on God's part? Is it unfair? Think about it. If God were fair, we would all go to hell. He has chosen to give us grace and mercy.

A long time ago, long before Moses and the serpent and before God created everything, He had already planned to save us, both you and me, from our sins. God was motivated by His love to send His Son to deal with our sin. Give thanks to the Lord God for His amazing grace and love. All of scripture points to Jesus, God's only Son.

Day 4

Read John 3:19-21

Light shines and exposes things which may not ordinarily be seen. I have often put on a shirt that looked fine under our home lighting, but then showed stains in the light of the sun. This is what Jesus did when He came to earth. He brought the light of true righteousness. When that light shines, the deeds of people are seen for what they really are. In ordinary light, we seem okay, but when the light of the world shines, suddenly the stains are seen. One reason people do not like Jesus is because He exposes sin. Men love darkness rather than light. The darkness allows the sin stain to stay hidden.

Jesus came into the world to save us from sin, but to be saved we need to know we are sinners. He also came to expose our sin as sin. How will anyone know they need a Savior if they are not aware of what they need to be saved from? Sin committed in darkness is sin we want to hide or keep secret. You can hide sin from other people. You can pretend you are good and that you are really okay. Compared to others, this may be true, but when Jesus comes to you, your sin is exposed so there is the need to hide. The light shines. The goal is for you to realize that, compared to Jesus, you are a sinner. Don't compare yourself to other people. Stand by Jesus and know the truth. You are sinful and He has come to forgive you and to save you.

Make no mistake; we are all deserving of sin's death. However, Jesus came to shine the light to expose sin and He came to become sin for us so we can live free of our failures. Because of Jesus, I know I am a sinful man and I will never measure up to God's standard, but Jesus measured up for me! Give thanks for His amazing work.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 60:1-5

In John 3, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the light coming into the world. Many years before Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that God would send His light into the world. The light would shine all over the world and people would be set free in the light. In January 2014, we had an ice storm that left us without power for a week. It was miserable! We had no TV, no radio, no lights, and no heat. When our neighbor loaned us a portable generator, we experienced some relief, but each evening I looked forward to morning when the sun would come up. The light just seemed to lift my spirit. This is what Isaiah was speaking about. He announced God's light would come, the nations would come to the light, and people would be filled with joy.

Once when I was on a mission trip to a very remote part of the world, our plane was making its final approach into a very small airport. I am accustomed to looking out the window of the plane and seeing the lights of the city around the airport, but not this time. There were very few lights and they were dim; the airport was almost totally dark. Within fifteen minutes of arrival, they closed the airport and turned out those few lights. Oh, how I longed to see lights.

People of the world are longing for light. Not just the light that shines and gives physical light, but the light which comes from the One True God. His light gives hope and security. It exposes danger and trouble. His light shows us the way. God's light, Jesus, is the way the truth and the life.

There was a time when the Lord's light was shining in the tabernacle, but departed because of Israel's sin. His glory was in the temple, but departed when the nation turned to idols. Later, true light came into the world, and that light was Jesus Christ. He said He was the Light of the world; however, even the Light of the world was nailed to a cross. Today, God's glory is in His church and in His people, individually. The day will come when His light will dawn in the New Heaven and the New Earth and the darkness will be totally cast out.

Rejoice in the Light of the world, which is Jesus.

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