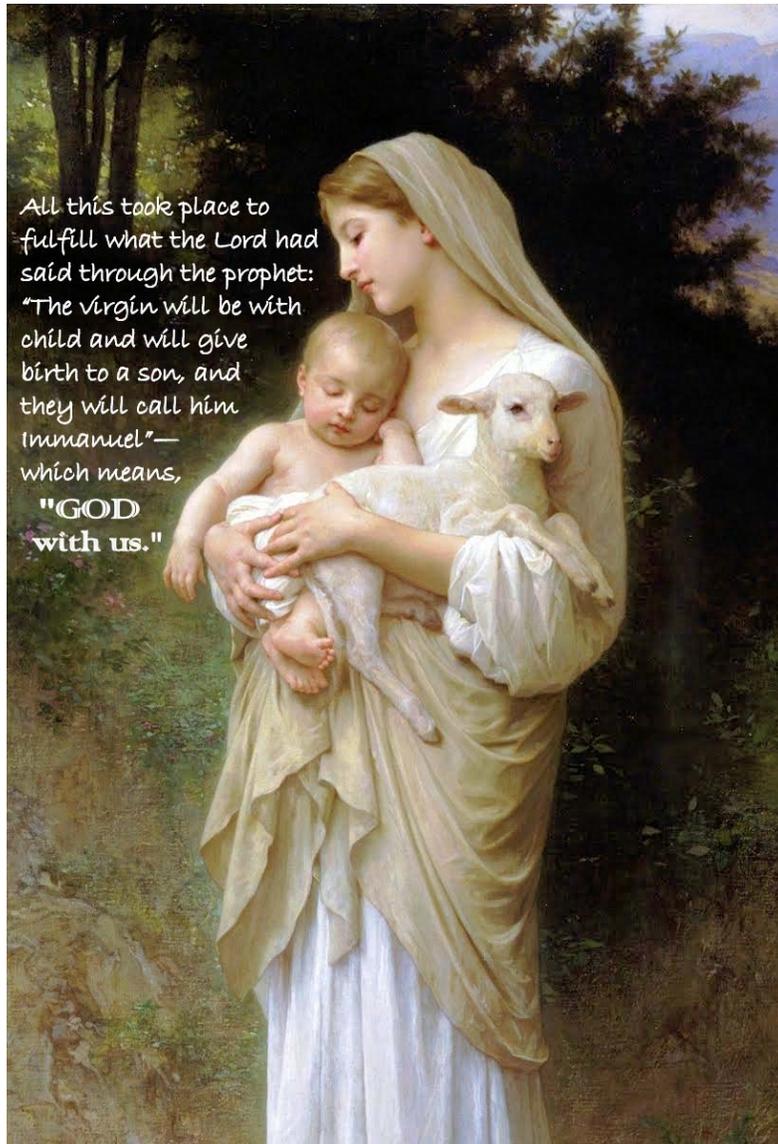


Daily Devotional

December 2016



All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "GOD with us."

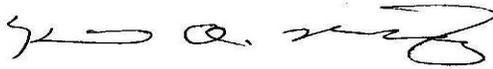
Foreword

During the course of this month, after getting a start in the book of Isaiah, we are going to return to our study in the book of Philippians. We are starting where we left off in the second chapter of Philippians. We'll return to Isaiah as we approach the celebration of Christmas to enjoy a few favorite prophetic descriptions of the coming Messiah.

Recall that I will often direct you to readings in other parts of the Bible as we pursue lessons in Isaiah and Philippians.

May God bless you as you study the written Word—always with the intent of knowing the Living Word which stands behind the text we study. What a blessing to “sit at the feet of Jesus, and listen to what He has to say!”

In His grace,



Kevin Redig



Bible references in this booklet are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) or the 1984 New International Version (NIV)

Lessons from Isaiah

Thursday December 1: Read Isaiah 6

What an absolutely fearful and awe-inspiring vision of God in His throne-room. No doubt this was something that helped Isaiah persevere during his decades of ministry. Today, I would like you to consider the great irony in this passage, one that is equally true in our day. We could certainly make the case that Isaiah was one of the most spiritual men in all the world at the time of his vision. And yet, when he is confronted with the holiness of God, his response is:

"Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Here is the irony, if this is the response of the most spiritual of men, how much more is the expected humility of those less spiritual and more needy. Yet in both Isaiah's day and our day, how many people have decided that it is acceptable to go about their daily lives as if God doesn't carry any weight? How many of those who have some relationship with God fail to manifest an outworking of that relationship that is in any way visible? Sad to say, this appears to be almost the norm in our day.

So what can we learn from this? 1) The more we grow spiritually, the more we can expect to become aware of the glory of God and our lack of standing before Him. Praise be to God that our acceptance before God is based upon our union with Christ and not our own standing before God. (Ephesians 1:6) 2) Don't be surprised at the apathy toward spiritual things of those around us. It is our calling to hold out the truth, but then remember that: God is drawing them, the Spirit is convicting, and the Word of God remains alive and powerful. For only spiritual growth can allow us to see God as He really is and our woeful inadequacy before Him apart from our identity in Christ!

Return to Philippians

Friday December 2: Read Philippians 2

As we begin a detailed study of Chapter 2, we can look forward to one of the most powerful passages of Scripture in the Bible. As we do, let's make sure to maintain the flow of ideas that has been developed by Paul, and not let the arbitrary chapter boundaries (or our break in studying Philippians) cause undo interference. Chapter 2 encourages believers in Jesus Christ to persevere in the face of opposition. Any fellowship that focuses upon proclaiming the Gospel and growing to maturity is going to face opposition. Surprisingly, it can come from two sources:

- Attacks from outside the church, that was our topic at the close of Chapter 1.
- Attacks from within the church, that we can clearly label division within the church. This is the subject of the first part of Chapter 2, as well as portions of Chapter 3. Due to the much greater emphasis on this topic, we can presume that Paul considers division within the church to be the greater risk.

Why the much greater emphasis on division within the church? To begin with, Satan is always looking for a weakness to exploit, an area in which to *drive the wedge*. If he can do so, the resultant strife within the fellowship can compromise its testimony. That's the reason behind Paul's admonition in Philippians 2:14-16. It is essential that the church avoid this compromise of its witness. So what are Paul's specific instructions? We'll learn more tomorrow, but in the meantime, we want to be so careful to guard against sowing discord within the Body of Christ. For there are "*six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him*". . . and the seventh on the list is. . ."a man who stirs up dissension among his brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

Return to Philippians

Monday December 5: Read Psalm 145 (Philippians 2:1)

Verse 1 of Philippians 2 follows an interesting pattern:

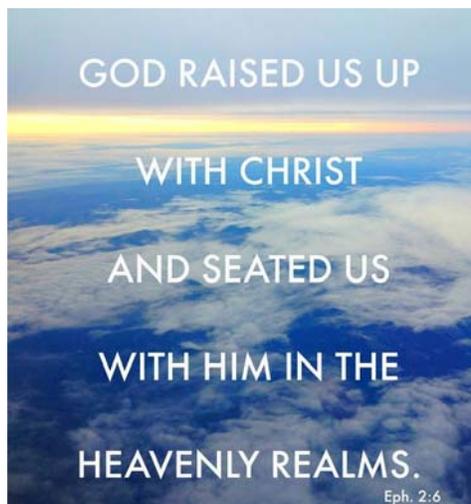
⓪ If you have any ^{#1}encouragement from being united with Christ, ⓪ if any ^{#2}comfort from his love, ⓪ if any ^{#3}fellowship with the Spirit, ⓪ if any ^{#4}tenderness and compassion. . .

This verse assumes that the Philippian believers have a rich experience in four specific areas with respect to their relationship with God. How do we know this? Four times we have the word “if” in the above passage. Each usage is what is called a first class condition in the Greek. What that means is the statement that follows is true. For example, we could translate the first phrase: *“In view of the fact that you have received encouragement from your union with Christ. . .”*

As believers in Christ, do you realize that each of these same items should be true of us? Let’s look at them in turn:

1. We too can be encouraged because of our union with Christ, for God has raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 2:6)

Continued on the next page.



Return to Philippians

Monday December 5: Read Psalm 145 (Philippians 2:1) (Continued)

If you have any ^{#1}encouragement from being united with Christ, if any

^{#2}comfort from his love, if any ^{#3}fellowship with the Spirit, if any ^{#4}tenderness

^{#4}and compassion. . .

2. We too can take comfort in His love as we consider Ephesians 3:17-19 in which the love of Christ covers every conceivable aspect of our lives. For it is wide enough to cover every circumstance. It is long enough to cover the entire span of our lives. It is deep enough to cover our moments of greatest failure and despair. It is high enough to remind us of our privileged position in Christ.
3. We too have fellowship with the Spirit, as we have been sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), we are taught by the Spirit (John 16:13-f), and we are enabled by the Spirit (Romans 8:4).
4. We too can have a softening of the heart in view of God's mercy and compassion towards us (James 5:11). For He has compassion on all that He has made (Psalm 145:9). God delights to show mercy to us (Micah 6:8) and His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:19-21).

What a great God we have, and how incomprehensible is the depth of the relationship He desires to have with His children.

Return to Philippians

Tuesday December 6: Read I Corinthians 6 (Philippians 2:2)

Verse 2 presents a challenge to correctly interpret and apply. Consider the verse as laid out below:

(to complete what was begun) (one in goal and disposition)
“ . . . make my joy complete by being like-minded, having

(as Christ has for you) (one-souled)
the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Paul wants his work of planting a church in Philippi to come to a conclusion that will “make his joy complete.” What could that be? How about taking the grace of God that has been received vertically and apply it horizontally.

Here is the vertical:

*. . . whoever is united with the Lord is one with Him
in spirit. I Corinthians 6:17*

And then, considering the horizontal in our text, can you identify the two things God has in mind for every fellowship of believers? They are the love of Christ and the union of the Spirit. It is wonderful when we are on the receiving end of the love of Christ and in fellowship with the Spirit. However, this verse makes it clear we are also to manifest that love toward others in the fellowship and work to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

So we see that in Paul’s estimation, unity is one thing that is questionable in the Philippian church and to bring it about would be to him the fulfillment of his calling and give him great joy. Let me suggest that should we, as a church fellowship, labor to manifest the love of Christ in this fellowship and maintain the unity of the Spirit, it would, in part make our joy complete and, at the same time, bring joy to our Lord and Savior.

Return to Philippians

Wednesday December 7: Read Proverbs 6 (Philippians 2:3-4)

We have seen that the basis of church unity is a solid vertical relationship with Christ. We then extend the love of Christ and the unity of the Spirit horizontally within the fellowship to “complete what is lacking” with respect to a practical manifestation of the new life that is ours in Christ. In other words, we put on display the love He has for us, when we love others in the same way. As we move forward, we are going to consider things that can disrupt unity within a church fellowship. Think for a few minutes and make your own mental list of “unity killers!” You might be surprised how many of the items on your list are contained in our passage.

(strong negative (to serve a faction) (vainglory)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in

lowliness of mind (ahead of)

humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of

(to fix one’s eyes with deep attention)

you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In order to fully understand this passage, we will look at it from a number of different perspectives including both what hinders, and what promotes, unity.

That Which Hinders Unity

First, an attitude that hinders unity is looking out for the interests of your faction (which of course can be as small as just one) and self-centeredness!

Return to Philippians

Wednesday December 7: Read Proverbs 6 (Philippians 2:3-4) (Continued)

Second, at its most basic, nearly everything that hinders unity is rooted in pride. Pride is to have an elevated view of self. Or, stated another way, pride is to incorrectly place yourself in the *pecking-order*.

Third, the first two items describe what pride is, but Proverbs 6:16-f describes what God thinks of it! (You can find a number of other unity-killers in Proverbs 6 as well.) But, let me go a bit further with the concept of pride as it relates to thinking too much of self. Let me ask you to mentally list for me your top three heroes.

I recently heard of a teacher who asked her third graders to do the same thing. The list of comic book heroes and rock stars no longer caused her consternation, since she had heard them before. However, what caused her pause, was the number of children who simply answered back, "Me!" She realized that over time, the faces on Mt. Rushmore had been replaced by the face in the mirror! What is it that could cause such a change in focus? Clearly a shift toward an inordinate focus on self, which means the blossoming of pride in the hearts of our young people.

Let me ask you another question: "What do you think is going to happen when these same individuals enter into a marriage relationship, have kids, or become part of church congregations?" Is it possible that unity might suffer? Now you see why this is such an important point for us to address.

We will continue in our next lesson.

Return to Philippians

Thursday December 8: Read Isaiah 42
(Philippians 2:3-4)

That Which Hinders Unity Continued

Continuing from yesterday, the next item in the list is vain-glory—or literally, empty-glory. What is glory? It has a number of related meanings. First, that which gives weight (value). It can also mean to emit light. Finally, and most importantly, it is that which is elevated as an object of special attention. What was it that captured Eve's attention in the Garden (Genesis 3:6)? Do you see, it was the lie from the mouth of Satan that the fruit would cause her to "be like God?" In other words, she saw an opportunity to elevate herself to the level of God, that is, to seize His glory!

Consider Solomon who conducted a very destructive experiment—on himself no less! You see in the book of Ecclesiastes, he denied himself nothing: no experience, nothing that wealth and wisdom could provide, no chance to establish a name for himself. He denied himself nothing even to the point of dabbling in idolatry, which caused God to rip part of the nation from his lineage, as well as leading the nation into terrible idolatry. After a life of chasing every glory imaginable, what lesson does Solomon pass on: vanity (empty), vanity! Everything apart from knowing God is indeed an empty chasing after the wind.

So what does God have to say about all this? Let the Scriptures speak for themselves—God says,

I will not share my glory with another. Isaiah 42:8

So now after discussing what will "kill" unity, let's turn our attention to what will promote it—and that will be tomorrow's objective.

Return to Philippians

Friday December 9: Read Matthew 11
(Philippians 2:3-4)

Promoters of Unity

First, true unity (and fellowship) is based upon our position and possessions in Christ. Second, unity within the body is a command, one related to *completing* the work of Christ. Third, the next thing up is humility. This word has such an interesting etymology. During Old Testament times, there literally was no such word. Instead, the authors of Scripture used a term that was used to describe such things as a river during a time of drought, that is, “lowly”. (See Isaiah 57:15 for an example.)

By the time the book of Philippians was written, the term did have meaning in terms of a character trait, but was typically only used in a derogatory sense. But here is the most astonishing thing, the character trait of humility, that which was looked down upon by the Romans and Greeks, was modeled for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. You can see for yourself in Philippians 2:8 and Matthew 11:29.

How could it not help promoting unity within a local church fellowship to have the same kind of humility as modeled by our Lord? So let's follow that thought by asking, “What kind of actions might result from those who have humility?” They might regard others ahead of themselves. They might think about the interests of others ahead of their own, demonstrating such things as compassion and pathos.



Continued on the next page.

Return to Philippians

Friday December 9: Read Matthew 11 (Philippians 2:3-4) (Continued)

Two closing thoughts to ponder: First, thinking of others ahead of yourself is to be the norm among Christians. It is of course easy when everyone else is trying to do the same thing. What makes it a challenge is when new converts come into a fellowship bringing a lot of baggage with them. It takes the enablement of the Holy Spirit to be humble when some of those around you are not.

Second, thinking of the interests of others sounds nice, but is it practical? Don't we have responsibilities? Where do you draw the line? The question of the practicality, you will have to answer between you and the Lord. But I would like to give you one very challenging example. Do a web search of C. T. Studd and see the kind of life he lived. Look at how he dealt with his privileged position and future. See how he gave his inheritance away except for a small portion he gave to his betrothed, who then turned around and gave it away. He, and many like him, have allowed the Lord to accomplish great things simply because they looked first to the interests of others.

We have the same call.

*“Some wish to live within the sound
of a Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a Rescue Shop,
within a yard of hell.”*

C. T. Studd

Return to Philippians

Monday December 12: Read James 4 (Philippians 2:3-4)

In order to tie together the last few days, consider the fact that each of us will make a choice to follow one of two examples: Either pride, self-centeredness, and vanity or the rightful giving of glory (worship) to God and in humility considering others and their interests first. On the one hand, we have the example of Lucifer, who was not satisfied with his privileged position in the plan of God. He rebelled in a pride-driven effort to seize and direct glory to himself. Or, we have the example of Eve who chose disobedience so she could “be like God.”

On the other hand, we have the example of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, who humbled himself in order to fulfill the plan of God. Keep in mind, in all the universe, the only one for whom humility was not appropriate or required, was our Lord, and yet he chose to model it. Consider the words of His prayer to the Father just before the crucifixion:

“I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do.” John 17:4

How can we do less, for no “*servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him*” (John 13:16). This is a very clear call for us to follow the example of Christ in putting others first. And yet, if our Lord and Savior was a servant to others, how is it that the focus in many churches has devolved into ministering to *felt needs* rather than seeing themselves as a body equipped to minister to others—loving the fellowship and attempting to rescue the perishing? Let me close today with this thought, everything we think and do is laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we will give an account. So these few days are a reminder that thoughts and motives do matter! Remember, following after the example of our Lord is both a very high calling and impossible apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Return to Philippians

Tuesday December 13: Read John 1
(Philippians 2:6-7)

These next few verses are going to make absolutely clear the unique nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who being in very nature God. . . John 1:1-3

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell Colossians 1:19

... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.... For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily....
Colossians 2:3,9

All these verses make it abundantly clear that Jesus was eternal God, co-equal with the Father. His claim to be God was certainly clear to the Jewish leaders of His day, for it was the basis upon which they plotted to kill Him. Their error was in not recognizing the truth of the claim.

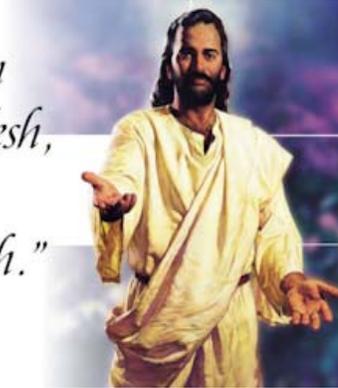
Continuing on in our verse in Philippians: “. . .**being made in human likeness.**” The verb in this sentence refers to a point of time, that is the point at which the Son of God became human via the virgin birth. The word “likeness” sometimes causes people to question whether or not Jesus was actually human, or as God, just took on the appearance (likeness) of a human being. Many passages definitively answer that question (Romans 8:3, Colossians 1:22, Hebrews 2:14-17, 4:15, and so on.)

Return to Philippians

Tuesday December 13: Read John 1
(Philippians 2:6-7) (Continued)

*“God sending his own Son
in the likeness of sinful flesh,
and for sin,
condemned sin in the flesh.”*

– Romans 8:3



My favorite verse that clearly states the truth of Christ's humanity is:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John 1:14

So here is what I believe the Bible teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ: in one person, we have a union of undiminished deity and perfect humanity. Further, he was both God and man without co-mingling, confusion, or alteration of either nature. Theologically, this is referred to as the *hypostatic union*. It is a challenging idea to grasp, but the essential concept is that Jesus Christ is fully human and can represent us. He is also fully divine, therefore, He can represent God. All of this is essential to His role as Savior, a truth we will develop further over the course of the next few days.

Return to Philippians

Wednesday December 14: Read Revelation 4 (Philippians 2:6-7)

Consider with me the common Biblical phrase: Lord Jesus Christ. In keeping with our last reading, do you see how helpful this series of names is in reminding us of the unique person of our Savior?

- The term “Lord” refers to His undiminished deity.
- The term “Jesus” refers to His perfect humanity.
- The term “Savior” refers to His designated role as Savior in God’s plan of redemption.

Having begun to think through the unique pairing of divinity and humanity in the Lord Jesus, let’s move on and consider another phrase from our verses in Philippians “. . . **but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of servant. . .**”

The Greek word translated nothing (kenosis) can mean to *empty* or to *make without effect*. We have to be careful at this point to not misunderstand for there are some who use this passage to say that Jesus ceased to be divine during His incarnation. Consider these two verses to refute this position:

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the
Godhead bodily... . Colossians 2:9*

*And without controversy great is the
mystery of godliness:*

*God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,*

*Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16*

Return to Philippians

Wednesday December 14: Read Revelation 4 (Philippians 2:6-7) (Continued)

And, I believe that Hebrews 1:3 teaches us that even while Jesus walked this earth, He was sustaining our physical universe by His deity. What then does this passage mean? I



think you may find this quote by L.S. Chafer very helpful.

What, then, is a true theory of the kenosis, or self-emptying of Christ? First of all, the principle must be laid down that "the Logos . . . ceases not for a single moment (in spite of His voluntary humiliation) to be that which He was in His eternal nature and essence."

When the preexistent and eternal Logos took on humanity, He gave up the visibility of His glory. Men could not have looked upon unveiled deity. The kenosis, furthermore, implies that Christ gave up, as Strong aptly suggests, the "independent exercise of divine attributes." Christ was possessed of all the essential attributes and properties of deity, but He did not use them except at the pleasure of the Father. We believe just this is meant when Christ declares: "The Son can do nothing of Himself" (John 5:19)."

As I hope you have come to see, the Lord Jesus Christ is the unique personage of all time and worthy of our worship. *For worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive honor and glory and power!* (Revelation 5:12-14)

Return to Philippians

Thursday December 15: Read Hebrews 1 (Philippians 2:8-11)

Let me give you a working definition of humility within a spiritual context: *humility is a view of self that is subordinate to the will of God, the purposes of God, and the call of God on one's life!* Has anyone more perfectly modeled this definition than the Lord Jesus?

He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:8

And I remind you that our “*attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 2:5) Now is this the end of the story? Jesus acted in humility and died—the end? No indeed, as Verses 10-11 make abundantly clear:

Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name which belongs to Jesus, every knee should bow ...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

We can extract a number of things from this fantastic passage. First, the Greek word translated “exalted” carries the connotation of above and beyond. Jesus has been *supra-exalted*. Both Hebrews 1:34-f and Acts 2:33-36 make it clear He is in a heavenly place of honor. What name has been given to Christ? We don't know, but Revelation 19:6 reinforces the difference between the First Advent during which Jesus was a humble servant and His Second Coming as the “*King of kings and Lord of lords.*”

Second, do you think there might be a general principle here with respect to God's calling on our lives as Christians? Are we first called to a life of humble service, followed by the potential for exaltation for those who have been obedient? Does “first the cross and then the crown” have applicability to you and me? We'll investigate these questions further tomorrow.

Return to Philippians

Friday December 16: Read Luke 14 (Philippians 2:9-11)

God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name. . . Philippians 2:9

These words, and the context in which they are found, make it clear that Christ's humble service and obedience to the will of the Father led to exaltation and a place of honor. So let me repeat yesterday's closing question once more, does this have any kind of application to us as Christians? Consider the texts of Matthew 23:5-12 and Luke 14:8-14. Although the illustration in each is different, they both close with,

*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Furthermore, if the future public confession of the Lordship of Christ, even by those unwilling, brings glory to God, what about those who willingly follow the example of Christ eschewing the call to elevate self? Consider this simple summary: following the example of Christ in this life, although it can at times be difficult and require sacrifice, is a call to blessing and honor for eternity. The saying, "First the cross and then the crown" does indeed apply to us. One theologian describes it this way:

Christ becomes what we are--thus enabling us to become what He is. Philippians 2:6-8 sets forth the former idea; Verses 9-11 describe His exaltation. At 3:20-21 we learn that the power given to Him will enable Him to transform us into conformity with Himself: We shall become like Him. Jesus humbled Himself under God's mighty hand, and the Father has now exalted Him. The Philippians are to be conformed to Christ's likeness in humility, and they will be exalted when He transforms them into His own likeness. (O'Brien)

Nativity Messages

Monday December 19: Read Isaiah 7

As Christmas approaches, I thought it appropriate to consider a collection of Scriptures that would focus our attention on the First Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As far as the celebration of Christ's first advent, Verse 14 of Isaiah 7 fairly leaps off the page:

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign.
The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,
and will call Him Immanuel.*

Not only is this a prediction of the way in which Christ would come into the world more than 700 years before it occurred, it also clearly involves the supernatural. For, not only is God Himself going to be with us, but His coming is going to involve a virgin woman becoming pregnant and bearing a Son who is both fully divine and, at the same time, fully human. Nothing proves that fact more than Christ's entry as a baby and growth to manhood.

So, the Jews had a clear indication of the way in which the Messiah would come. However, here is the part I don't want you to miss. King Ahaz, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, was very afraid. For both the king of Aram and the king of the northern kingdom had allied themselves in order to overthrow Judah. God tells king Ahaz not to worry. In fact, He gives Ahaz the opportunity to ask for a sign to prove the truthfulness of what God has told him.

Nativity Messages

Monday December 19: Read Isaiah 7
(Continued)

Ahaz feigns spirituality by declining, but, in reality, his heart is full of unbelief. It is at that point that God Himself proclaims the sign of the virgin birth, and it is important to realize that He is doing so as a response to unbelief.

So now you realize the irony of the many, many nay-sayers who have mocked the virgin birth and continue to do so in our day. That prediction was given 700 years in advance, in the face of unbelief, and fulfilled exactly as prophesied. Yet some things never change—for unbelief marches on.

On the other hand, let our hearts appreciate every prompting to faith and the absolute faithfulness and capability of our God.



Nativity Messages

Tuesday December 20: Read Isaiah 9

The first five verses of this chapter would certainly have seemed cryptic to the Jews of Isaiah's day, but still good news. But then in Verse 6 you start to get a great deal of specifics applied to one person,

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . .

And this child actually defies comparison for, not only will He be a great and wise leader, but He is also said to be Mighty God, everlasting, and one who will reign forever. Go ahead and take a moment to meditate through each of these descriptive terms as they apply to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you know that we always hear this passage read at Christmas, but I want to make sure you think this through with me. For this is typical of many pieces of prophecy—they come in two (or more) parts, which are fulfilled at different times. For indeed a *child was born* and a *son was given* over two thousand years ago at the First Coming of the Lord Jesus. However, the entire rest of the passage awaits fulfillment at the Second Coming of Christ.

So from one perspective, we could certainly say that this would be a much more appropriate passage to read at the Second Coming of Christ rather than the first, since so much more of it will be fulfilled then. For now, let's look at it this way. As we approach the annual remembrance of Christmas and celebrate the coming of God into this world to take on humanity and save us, let us keep in the back of our minds that His humble coming in the manger is only part of the story. When He comes again, it is going to be in great power and majesty as He takes up rulership of this entire world, as the greater Son of David, reigning with an iron scepter in true justice and righteousness. The babe in the manger will be the ruler of the world!

Nativity Messages

Wednesday December 21: Read Genesis 49

Verse 10 is part of the prophetic blessing of Jacob given to his sons. Focusing on just Judah, this is what we learn:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His.

You will not be surprised to find out that King David was a descendant of Judah, and in fact this promise is really reinforced by the Davidic Covenant which promises that the Messiah would come through the line of David (and thereby Judah), and that He would establish a kingdom that would last forever. (II Samuel 7:10-16)

This has clearly not happened yet, and will not be fulfilled until the Lord Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to establish His Millennial reign. (Revelation 19-20) Now here is the thing to note about the First Advent of Christ and our celebration of Christmas: Jesus presented Himself to the Jews as their Messiah, and the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, but they rejected Him. You can see this throughout Matthew Chapters 8-12. Of particular note is the application of Isaiah 42:1-4 to the many acts of healing done by Jesus. How did the Jewish leadership respond? They suggested,

It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons. Matthew 12:24

From that time forward, the offer of the kingdom is withdrawn and Jesus starts to speak of the Church, the cross, and a future kingdom to come. I mention this because what a blessing we have to live during a time when the offer of God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is available, and a time when God is still waiting for the fullness of the Gentiles to come in. But this time is drawing short, so let's honor our Lord by sharing the good news with those God brings to us this Holiday season!

Nativity Messages

Thursday December 22: Read John 1

As we focus on the First Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, this first chapter of John's Gospel causes us to squarely face two aspects of the unique nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, His divinity;

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Go back as far in time as you want and you find the Word was already there. And, this Word is clearly revealed as God by both declaration and acts of creation (Verse 3). Now with His divinity clearly in view, move ahead to Verse 14:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Notice that the eternal Word, that which was declared to be divine in Verse 1, is now declared to have taken on humanity. The Word has always been divine, but became fully human. So Who is the Word?

The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (Verse 17)

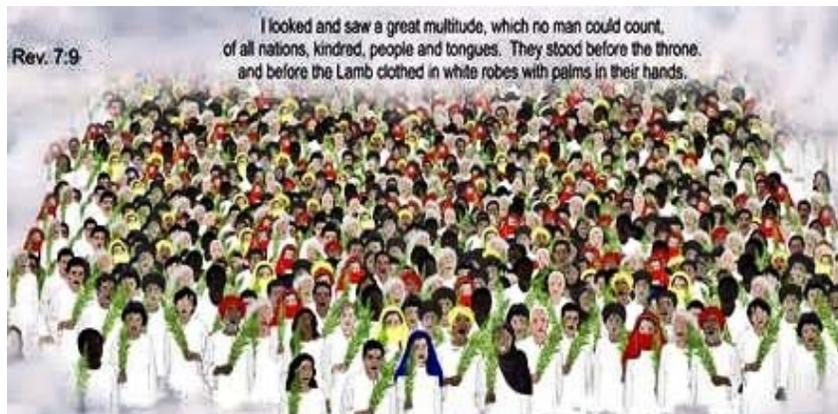
So at the First Coming of Jesus Christ, we have the manifestation of the unique person of the entire universe—the Lord Jesus Christ: fully divine and fully human. As we learned in our study of Philippians, He was two natures inseparably united in one person. I am particularly attracted to the word translated “dwelt among us.” The word literally means to *pitch a tent*. Perhaps a more refined translation would be *to tabernacle*. The unique person of the universe came and tabernacled right among His fallen creation in order to minister to them and ultimately, provide a way of salvation for them. What a humble and loving Savior we worship!

Nativity Messages

Friday December 23: Read Matthew 1

Don't you just love genealogies? Probably not, which is why you didn't really start paying attention until Verse 18. But there are actually some things profoundly interesting in this particular genealogy which I would like to share with you. First, there are five women mentioned: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Uriah's wife (Bathsheba), and Mary. Why is this noteworthy? First of all, women were typically never included within a genealogy, so already the convention is broken and lays the foundation for the principle that in Christ there is "*neither male or female*" (Galatians 3:28).

The second thing I would like you to note is the ethnicity of three of the women. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites. Ruth was a Moabitess. If you were a self-respecting Jew and these women were in your background, you would most certainly try to keep it hush-hush. But God has put this fact into His Word because "*God so loved the world that He sent His Son*" so that a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue would be before the throne and before the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9)



Continued on the next page.

Nativity Messages

Friday December 23: Read Matthew 1 (Continued)

As a third item to note, Tamar was in a terrible family situation, which pushed her into prostitution in order to try and obtain justice, and Bathsheba committed adultery. How could God possibly have allowed sinners like these into the lineage of His Son? Consider this as a point of holiday application: God can take the messiest and most sordid of family situations you can imagine and, not only use them for good, but straighten them out. You see faith in Christ *always* leads to newness of life and often leads to a fresh start.

One final observation, which is my personal favorite. The story of Ruth occurs during the time of Judges, a time of terrible spiritual declension. Even the heroes of Israel, men like Sampson and Gideon, show glaring flaws in their character. However, there is one bright light, one person rich in character and that is the Moabitess Ruth. Ponder her declaration to her mother-in-law Naomi:

Your God will be my God, your people my people.

You see, God can always make something out of a life devoted to Him! For it is not about pedigree, it is about a heart fully devoted to the Lord. May this Christmas season and its remembrance prompt such hearts in us!

Theme of the Year Reflections

For each of the past four years we have begun the year with a particular Scriptural theme, which we try to reinforce throughout the year. I thought it might be of benefit, beginning on Monday to briefly review the themes of the past years, as we head into 2017. And then on Friday, for the final devotion of the year, we will consider the theme for the year ahead.

Theme of the Year Reflections

Monday December 26: Read Joshua 5

Finally, after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites are inside the Promised Land and ready to begin the conquest of the Land with the walled city of Jericho. We should remember that it didn't take 40 years to get to the Promised Land because it was such a long journey. Rather, sin caused a detour, as it always does. For although God loved the Jewish people as the "apple of His eye," He is also a holy God who will punish sin—and in particular the sin of unbelief. There is much we can learn from a study of Old Testament Israel.

Imagine Joshua, now leading the people as the successor to Moses, on the outskirts of Jericho. We don't know exactly what was on his mind, but we can certainly imagine some of his thoughts. Suddenly, he is confronted by a man with a drawn sword. Joshua's hand goes to his own sword and he issues a challenge. Joshua has been told to be strong and courageous in Chapter 1, and he must have really taken the lesson to heart, for he unknowingly just challenged God Himself. When he realizes he is face to face with the Commander of the Hosts of the Lord, who is very likely none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, I want you to note what He does.

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

What a fantastic response, one we should mimic every day as we come into the presence of the Lord through His Word. For his response is one of worship and receptivity to the Word of God. A recognition of who God is, and a willingness to do what He says. That's a great focus for the year!

Theme of the Year Reflections

Tuesday December 27: Read Philippians 3

Here is the particular text from Chapter 3 that we focused on during 2014:

...one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind. . .I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12-14

Before preaching this message, I had ten months to think about the ramifications of the first phrase of this well known passage, *"forgetting those things which are behind. . ."*

For ten months prior to the start of that year, I visited a woman at a local hospital with advanced colon cancer. She was a woman I originally didn't even know, but she had visited our fellowship. Our relationship began when I asked her, "So how is your walk with the Lord?"



Theme of the Year Reflections

Tuesday December 27: Read Philippians 3

(Continued)

Beginning with that question, I not only learned an important spiritual principle, but also began a mutually beneficial relationship that lasted until she passed away from the cancer. Further, it also allowed me to build a relationship with her daughter, brother, sister, and led to her own baptism. What has prompted so much reflection on my part is something she said to me in our first conversation. She said, "I hope this thing I have (the cancer) will help me to put some of the hurts of my life behind me!"

She gave me permission to tell her story, and I am relaying it to you because I don't think it is God's plan for the Christian to wait until they have cancer to put the hurts of this life behind them and to repair broken relationships. You see the Christian Life is meant to be lived in light of eternity, moment-by-moment filled with the Spirit, as we "*redeem the time*" that God has given us.

So what kind of things do we need to leave behind? We need to *forget* the sins of the past. We need to leave them at the cross where they were paid for! We are meant to leave the hurts of the past in the hands of our loving Savior, who knows the hurts of this life to a much greater extent than we ever will. We are to simply find our rest in Him as we press on toward His upward call on our lives.

Now that's a great focus for the year!

Theme of the Year Reflections

Wednesday December 28: Read Psalm 85

Our theme for 2015 echoed the cry of Psalm 85:6:

*Will You not revive us again,
that Your people may rejoice in You?*

We learned that *to be revived* is to be brought back to a condition of vitality or to flourish. It can even mean to be brought back to life! Contrary to popular usage, you can see in the context that ongoing revival is something that applies to the people of God as opposed to the lost for these reasons:

- Revival is not just large and dramatic, but daily and personal.
- It is a daily process because the Christian Life is not static (it doesn't stand still), but is dynamic. For we are "*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. . . .*" For this reason, we need to continually seek spiritual refreshment.
- Revival emphasizes the personal nature of Christianity. For eternal life is defined as "knowing" the Father and the Son (John 17:3).
- The Christian Life is externally dependent. There is no functional Christian life apart from the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God.
- The Church in America desperately needs revival. Is it true that the Church in America epitomizes what it means to be salt and light? If not—we need to be revived.

Theme of the Year Reflections

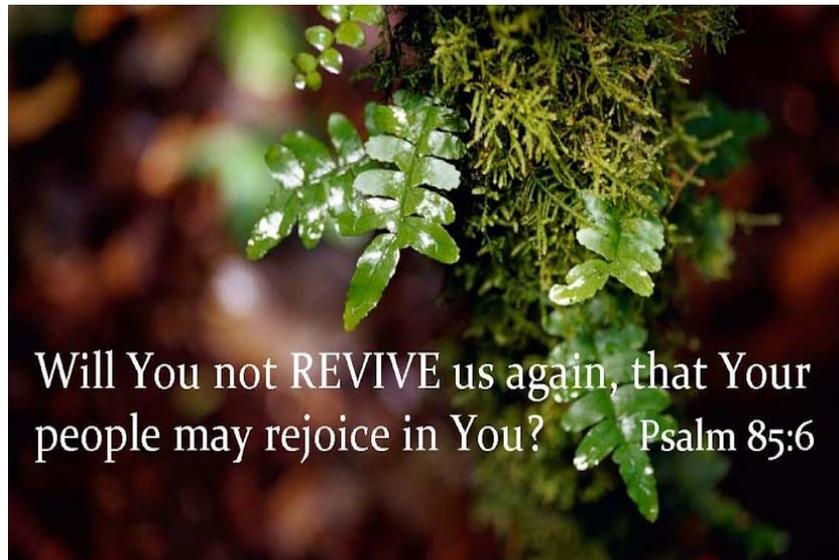
Wednesday December 28: Read Psalm 85
(Continued)

Let me close by reminding you of our working definition of revival:

Spiritual revival is characteristic of a Christian who returns to a condition of spiritual vigor, by means of the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

The “revived” see God as bigger than any obstacle, faithful to keep all His promises, and are simultaneously convicted of their need and the wonders of God’s grace.

Now that’s a great focus for the year ahead!



Theme of the Year Reflections

Thursday December 29: Read Luke 10

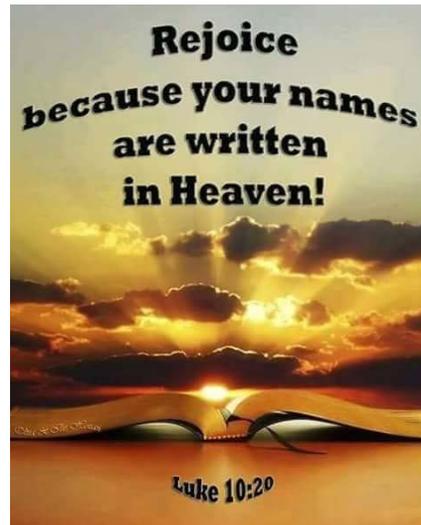
We all have possessions we value. For some, it is a family heirloom; for others something we worked very hard to achieve. The possession of these things gives us a certain satisfaction. However, there is one thing that every child of God possesses that should be a source of joy every single day until we know joy unspeakable and find ourselves in the presence of the Lord.

In Luke 10, Jesus sorts through the possibilities for us, and tells us the one thing in which we should rejoice:

*...do not rejoice in this,
that the spirits are
subject to you, but rather
rejoice because
your names are written
in heaven.*

In context, Jesus is saying, don't even rejoice in success in ministry for there is one thing that takes priority above all the rest. This was our theme for 2016.

As we navigate our way through the daily circumstances of life, the one thing that takes priority is the eternal salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. Not only is our focus to be shifted from the temporal to the spiritual, but there exists one aspect of our spiritual lives that should be of the greatest joy to us.



Theme of the Year Reflections

Thursday December 29: Read Luke 10

(Continued)

Not only is this a reason for rejoicing personally, but this is also the basis of our fellowship as a local body of believers, each and every one of us who has trusted in Christ has his or her name written in heaven!

Of course this begs the question, "How exactly do you get your name written in heaven?" This question has been asked and answered in Scripture:

*"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said,
"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,
you and your household." Acts 16:30-31*

And while we are at it, let's ask the question, "Can you know for sure that pen has actually been put to paper?" Scripture, once again, is very comforting:

*And this is the testimony:
God has given us eternal life,
and this life is in His Son.
He who has the Son has life;
he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
I write these things to you who believe
in the name of the Son of God
so that you may know that you have eternal life.
1 John 5:11-13*

There is so much more to say on this topic, but for now—let me remind you, what a great way to start this year!

Theme of the Year Reflections

Friday December 30: Read Jonah 4

The lessons during this week have been a review of our themes from the past few years. Today you will get a sneak preview of the year to come. Each year we have typically selected a theme Scripture for the year. However, this year will be a little bit different as our theme for the year will be personal evangelism. We will use multiple passages of Scripture during the year to reinforce our theme beginning with Jonah 4:11.

"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left. . ."

You might think this a strange verse on which to focus for part of the upcoming year, but let me give you a few things to consider. First, the passage is part of a dialogue between Jonah and God, and sad to say, we are often a lot like Jonah. He is completely caught up in all kinds of personal issues. His *world-view* extends no further than the source of his shade from the sun.

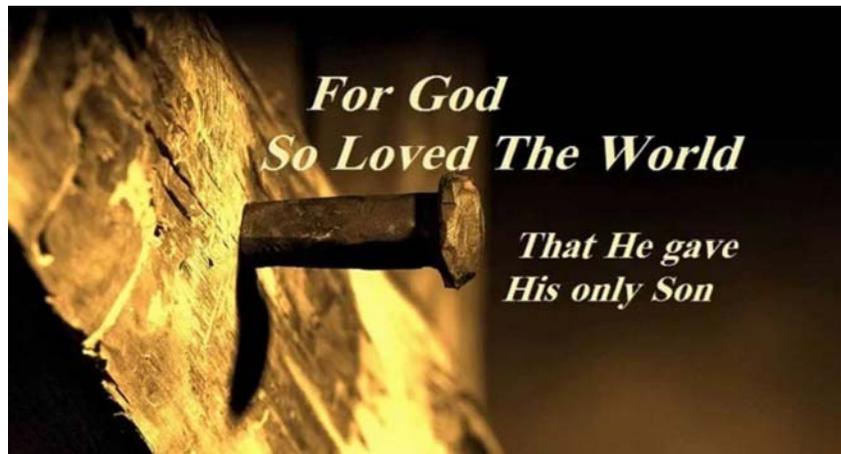
Second, God shows His ever-present love for His rebellious creation by drawing Jonah's attention to the many lost people in Nineveh. It's a simple question, but if lost people are on God's mind, shouldn't they be on ours as well?

Theme of the Year Reflections

Friday December 30: Read Jonah 4 (Continued)

By the way, the people of Nineveh were not nice people and apparently that didn't have anything to do with God's love for them. I always think of this verse when I get a negative response from people regarding the Gospel. I just tell myself, "What else should I expect—they don't know their right hand from their left!" Then I can move on to trusting in the Spirit of God to break down barriers and convict the heart.

For God's interest in the lost is always there and it is ours to simply get in step with Him. I trust we will work to get in step with the Lord in the year ahead.



VISTOSO
Community Church



He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit... *John 15:5*

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