

# Today

March/April 2023

refresh, refocus, renew

*Jesus,*  
**LAMB**  
*of God*



**ALSO: THE PEACE THAT ENDURES**

Friends:

Will lasting peace ever come to our hate-filled and war-torn world?

In the month of March, Pastor Sergei Sosedkin, who has family members in both Russia and Ukraine, explores the Bible's teaching on war and human strife. The Bible promises peace, and this is the ultimate peace of being right with God. This personal peace comes only through knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet this peace not only makes us right with God but also puts us on the right path to peace with our neighbors, the people around us. And the peace that comes through Jesus looks forward to worldwide peace one day, when God's kingdom of peace fully comes and nations "will beat their swords into plowshares" (Isaiah 2:4).



In the month of April, Pastor Hernandez Dias Lopes guides us in reflecting on the basics of our salvation taught in Scripture. Throughout these meditations we catch glimpses of the mystery, depth, and wisdom of God's plan to redeem this fallen world. At the very heart of God's plan of salvation is the love of Jesus Christ. His life, death, resurrection, and continuing work nurture our new life as his followers. Jesus' great love also inspires and challenges us to love each other and to share his love with the world.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**"The Peace That  
Endures"**  
**Sergei Sosedkin**



**"Jesus, Lamb of God"**  
**Hernandes Dias Lopes**

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# april

## Jesus, Lamb of God

**Hernandes Dias Lopes**

Jesus' suffering and death were not the work of chance or the result of a flaw in God's plans. These things happened according to "God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, moved by their amazing love for us human beings, entered into the covenant of redemption for our sake. And although Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified, died, and was buried, he also rose victorious over death, ascended to heaven, and now rules over all things so that we can have new life and live with God forever.

Throughout this month, Rev. Hernandez Dias Lopes leads us through Bible passages that help us see God's redemption plan in action. May these meditations build you up in faith and help you draw near to the God who loves you and wants you to share his love and life with the people around you, both near and far away.

*Hernandes Dias Lopes is the Portuguese-ministry leader for ReFrame Ministries. He also serves as director of Luz Para o Caminho ("Light for the Way"), an organization formed in partnership between ReFrame and the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. Hernandez has written more than 100 books and is a popular conference speaker in Brazil. He graduated from Seminário Presbiteriano do Sul in Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, and earned a doctorate of ministry from Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He and his wife, Tina, have two children.*

## THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

*"When your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD. . . .'"*  
—Exodus 12:26-27

Passover is an ancient feast that celebrates God's deliverance of his people Israel from slavery in Egypt (around 1440 B.C.). Israel had been in bitter captivity for more than 400 years. The people groaned and cried out to God for deliverance. God saw the people's suffering, heard their cry, and prepared Moses to lead them to freedom, where they could worship and live for the Lord. God called them out of Egypt so that they could shine like a light and share his blessings with all nations.

God's command to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was urgent: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me" (Exodus 8:1; see also 5:1; 7:16, 8:20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). But Pharaoh hardened his heart, and God sent ten plagues, showing that the false gods of Egypt had no power to help them. The last

plague was devastating, bringing death to the firstborn in every Egyptian family. Every Israelite family sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on their doorframe. That night God passed over those houses and would not let death enter. But in all other houses the firstborn died.

So Israel was set free. The blood of the lamb that was sacrificed for each household was a sign that death could not enter there. And this sign pointed to Jesus, whose death once for all sets us free from the curse and slavery of sin.

Lord, thank you for setting us free. Through Jesus and by your Spirit, guide us to worship you and live for you. Amen.

## THE SUFFICIENT LAMB

*"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*  
—John 1:29

Several texts in the Bible speak of a lamb that was sufficient to be a substitute.

In Genesis 22, God tests the faith of Abraham by calling him to give up his only son, Isaac. And when Isaac said, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And God provided a young ram as a substitute for Isaac.

In Exodus 12, the Passover lamb, with its blood painted on the doorframes of Israelite houses, was a sufficient substitute for sparing Israel from the plague of death on the first-born sons in Egypt.

In Isaiah 52-53, the willing sacrifice of God's faithful, suffering servant, "led like a lamb to the slaughter," would be sufficient

to pay for the sins of God's people from "many nations." He would bear "the iniquity of us all."

All of these texts point forward to Jesus, and in John 1:29 we read that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is sufficient to take away the sin of the world.

The Lamb of God is sufficiently powerful to save the whole world. Jesus, God's one and only Son, died to purchase with his blood "persons from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Loving Father, the blood of Jesus is sufficient to set me free from sin and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I praise and glorify you for your great love for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## THE LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH

*You were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*  
—1 Peter 1:18-19

The lamb sacrificed for the Passover had to be a lamb “without defect” (Exodus 12:5). This ritual pointed to the perfect and complete sacrifice made by Jesus Christ for us many years later.

There is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. But the blood of lambs cannot truly atone for sin. On Passover night, when the lamb was sacrificed and its blood was sprinkled on the doorframe, that pointed to the Lamb of God, “without blemish or defect,” who died for our sins and shed his blood on the cross so that we might be redeemed from sin and death and cleansed from all impurity.

The lamb for sacrifice could not have any defects. This pointed to Jesus Christ, who was without sin but suffered and took on the curse of sin for us. He died for our sins—the just for

the unjust. His death was substitutionary. He suffered the blow of the law that we should suffer. He drank the cup of wrath that we should drink. He died our death to give us his life.

O God, we exalt your great name for the great mercy you have shown us. We deserved all of the punishment for our sin. But Christ suffered in the place of us all. Praise be to you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

## SAVED BY BLOOD

*"When the LORD goes through the land . . . he will see the blood . . . and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter. . . ."*  
—Exodus 12:23

The firstborn sons of Israel were spared from death on Passover night. But this was not because they were better than the children of the Egyptians. The Israelites were no less sinful or depraved than the Egyptians. The Israelite firstborn were spared only because of the blood of the lamb.

When the Lord passed through Egypt and saw the blood on the doorframes of Israelites' houses, he passed over those houses and did not allow the destroyer (death) to enter there.

It was not enough for the lamb to die. It was also necessary that the lamb's blood be applied to the doorframe as a sign of God's protection.

Likewise, it is not enough to know that Jesus Christ died on the cross. It is necessary to re-

ceive, by faith, the benefits of his death.

Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Now we must receive him as our personal Savior. He is our Passover Lamb!

Lord, we are saved not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of your grace through the blood of Jesus. Guide us to receive and trust in him as the one and only Savior. Thank you for your saving grace! Amen.



## THE REPLACEMENT LAMB

*"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."*  
—Genesis 22:8

Abraham had already passed through several tests of his faith in God. God had called Abraham to move to another land, and he did (Genesis 12:1-7). God had promised to give Abraham an heir, and he believed (15:4-6). God had said that all the males in Abraham's household were to be circumcised to be part of God's covenant with him and his descendants, so Abraham did that too (17:9-27).

But now Abraham faced the hardest test of all. After receiving his son Isaac and seeing him grow in fulfillment of God's promises, Abraham was told by God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. So, trusting that God could even raise the dead and keep his promises (see Hebrews 11:19), Abraham responded in obedience. Abraham loved Isaac, but he loved God more. And God had kept

all his promises. So Abraham trusted God.

Isaac said, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb, my son." Abraham then prepared the altar and got ready to offer his son there.

But God did not want Isaac sacrificed; God wanted Abraham's love. In this gripping test of faith, God was pointing ahead to show that Jesus, his only Son, would become a sacrifice for us. For Isaac there was a substitute lamb, and Jesus became the Lamb of God for us. God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).

Lord God, thank you for giving up your only Son to die in my place. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## ANGUISH AND LOVE

*Being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.* —Luke 22:44

Praying in anguish, Jesus asked his Father to take away the suffering that he would soon be facing on the cross for our sake. Jesus prayed so earnestly that his sweat fell like drops of blood to the ground. And as he raised his tearful cry to heaven, Jesus' disciples fell asleep. Yet he said to the Father, "Not my will, but yours be done."

On that dreadful night, the religious leaders were plotting against Jesus as he prayed in Gethsemane. Led by Judas Iscariot, the temple soldiers marched into the garden to arrest Jesus forcefully. But Jesus, now ready to lay down his life for us, proceeded willingly.

Jesus knew that on the cross he would take our place, carry the weight of all our sins, and take on the curse that we all deserve so that he could rescue us from sin and death.

Jesus went to the cross not because Judas betrayed him out of greed (Luke 22:1-6), nor because the religious rulers handed him over out of envy, nor even because the Roman governor Pilate sentenced him out of cowardice (Luke 23:1-25; John 11:45-53; 19:1-16). Jesus went to the cross out of love!

Blessed Lord and Savior, we know that what moved you to face the cross for our sake was your eternal love alone. May this love fill our hearts today and move us to serve you faithfully. Amen.

## DARKNESS AT NOON

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining.*

—Luke 23:44-45

When Jesus was born, there was a bright light at night (Luke 2:8-14). When Jesus died, there was darkness at noon. Even the sun hid its face from the terrible suffering of the Son of God. Jesus' suffering was not only physical but, more deeply, spiritual. Even though his pain was indescribable, from the flogging and torture he endured to the excruciating agony of crucifixion, Jesus' greatest suffering was that he was separated from the Father and subjected to the torments of hell.

Jesus became a curse for us. Our transgressions lay fully on him. The ugliness of our sin covered him with shame and pain. The crushing weight of our iniquities was cast on him. Because he was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), the law demanded his death,

for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

In the darkness of that day, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and Jesus opened for us "a new and living way" to God (Hebrews 10:20). Through his death we are reconnected with God.

On the cross, Jesus opened for us the door to heaven!

Father, the darkness that inhabited my heart has been dispelled by your light. The glory of your majesty has filled my soul with the presence of Jesus. In him I give thanks! Amen.

## A CRY OF TRIUMPH

*Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*  
—John 19:30

Before he died on the cross, Jesus uttered a cry of triumph, saying "It is finished."

The Greek word here—*tetelestai*—had three meanings that point out Jesus' finished work for us.

First, it was used for the completion of a task. When a son finished his work on a project, he would say to his father, "*Tetelestai*," meaning, "The work entrusted to me is finished."

Second, it was used to pay off a debt. When a person paid off a debt with the legal authorities, the document was stamped "*Tetelestai*," meaning, "The debt has been paid."

Third, this word was used to declare a person's definite possession of a deed. When someone bought a piece of property and paid for it in full, they received the deed with the inscription "*Tetelestai*," meaning,

"You have the right of possession."

When Jesus gave up his life for us on the cross, he completed the work the Father had entrusted to him so that we could be saved from sin and death. And on the cross he paid our debt in full, opening the way to eternal life for us. We have forgiveness and salvation. Because of Christ's finished work, we have received the right to take possession of eternal life.

Jesus' sacrifice was fully sufficient to offer us eternal redemption and full life forever!

Father, you have forgiven me a debt that I could never repay. May the certainty of your forgiving love create in me a forgiving heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## THE PROOF OF GOD'S LOVE

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*  
—Romans 5:8

Today we celebrate the proof of God's love for us. Jesus has risen, victorious over death! He laid down his own life for us so that our debt of sin would be paid, and because he rose from the dead, we can have new life with him forever. Through the Spirit of God our new life begins now—and even though we may die physically before Jesus comes again, we are promised that our bodies too will rise when he comes to usher in the new heaven and earth! Alleluia! Praise the Lord God!

God's love for each one of us is eternal, unchanging, and unconditional. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God proves his love for us by the fact that "while we were still sinners, Christ

died for us," and "while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son." We have salvation not because of our love for God, but because God loves us and sent his Son to pay for our sins and to give us new, eternal life.

Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave to reveal God's love for us. The finished work of Jesus is all the proof we need that God cares for us all. The God of love is determined to save us!

Heavenly Father, thank you for your amazing love. Move us, who were once your enemies, to love you and serve you today and always, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## RABBIT OR LAMB?

*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

—1 Corinthians 5:7

As we celebrated Jesus' resurrection yesterday, we may have seen or heard references to the Easter bunny, Easter eggs, and chocolate. In ancient Europe, the Germanic goddess Ēostre (Ēastre in Old English) was celebrated during the spring equinox. Rabbits and eggs represented fertility and the revival of life in springtime. Since Jesus' death and resurrection occurred at the same time of year, the church in Europe tried to replace that pagan tradition with the worship of Christ and the celebration of new life in him. They even used the name "Easter" to try to Christianize the springtime holiday.

But that hasn't worked very well, has it? The celebration of Christ's victory over death has nothing to do with rabbits, eggs, or chocolate. Sadly, all of that can distract us from reflect-

ing on the gift of life we have through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But in Christ we can remember another ancient tradition—Passover, with its sacrificed lamb and celebration of deliverance from slavery. That pointed to the gift of Jesus, who came to free us from the slavery of sin.

So let's focus on the Lamb of God, Jesus—our Savior and the giver of full life—which is far greater than the seasonal refreshing of life in spring. This doesn't mean we can't celebrate with feasting or a bit of chocolate, but let's be sure to worship the one true God who loves us and sent his Son to save the whole world!

Lord, guide us to remember and celebrate all that you have done for us in Christ. Amen.

## NO REDEMPTION THROUGH CHOCOLATE

*Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

—Romans 5:9

As we noted yesterday, when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at Eastertime, we may often hear about the Easter bunny and eggs and chocolate. Those old secular traditions have nothing to do with Jesus' gift of new life for all who believe in him. But they can be distracting if we forget to focus on God's amazing love shown to us through the death and rising of his Son, Jesus.

Reflecting on the shed blood of Jesus may make us uncomfortable. Perhaps we would rather focus on nicer, sweeter things—like chocolate or some other treat—at this time of year. But the sacrifice of Christ is the only thing that could pay the debt of our sin and bring us peace with God. There is no redemption through chocolate.

Our redemption from sin and death came through the shed

blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. As we saw earlier this month, when God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, the sacrificed lamb of the Passover pointed ahead to the sacrifice of Jesus, God's only Son. He became "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). By his death we have life. By his shed blood we are set free and cleansed from all sin!

Lord God, you have freed us from sin through the blood of Christ shed on the cross for our sake. Through his death we can now enjoy full life in you. In his name we pray. Amen.

## THE ETERNAL LAMB

*[Christ] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.* —1 Peter 1:20

Jesus is the holy Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He came into the world to die for our sins. His death was not an accident; his mission was set in eternity. Although his death took place nearly 2,000 years ago on a cross outside Jerusalem, in the mind and plan of God it was set in motion from before the creation of the world. When God planned our salvation, there was no universe and no earth yet. The stars did not yet shine, nor did the sun give its light.

Before creation, in the depths of eternity, God had already set his heart on you—and Jesus, the Son, was chosen to be slain in your place, on your behalf. The same is true for each one of us who believes.

The cross of Christ was not a sign of defeat but of triumph. Jesus died not as a victim or

martyr but as the Redeemer. And he died willingly. He gave himself for you and for me, and he was chosen for that mission from eternity. He glorified the Father in his death and won eternal redemption for us.

Praise be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Holy God, we are amazed that Jesus' voluntary surrender was planned in eternity. You decided to love each one of us even before you created the world. We thank and bless you, in Jesus' name. Amen.



## THE SILENT LAMB

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. . . .*  
—Isaiah 53:7

The prophet Isaiah pointed to Jesus about 700 years before his birth, describing him as a suffering servant of God who was “led like a lamb to the slaughter, and . . . did not open his mouth.” The Son of God was “pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities.” And “by his wounds we are healed.” He was despised and mocked. He was led to crucifixion under the cursing of a bloodthirsty crowd, but he did not return cursing for cursing. Like a silent lamb, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for our sin.

He endured the excruciating pain of being nailed to a cross and lifted up to die in view of all who passed by. Even though he suffered terrible torment, he scorned the shame of the cross for the joy that was set before him (Hebrews 12:2). Even though he was

obedient to death, he endured the crushing blow of the law that we deserved. Even though he was the blessed one, he was made to be a curse for us by taking our place. He bore our sins and shed his blood to redeem us from captivity and certain death. His suffering brought us relief. His death brought us life. There, at the cross, Jesus opened for us the inexhaustible fountain of salvation!

Lord God, your Son bore the sufferings that should have been mine. But at no time did he complain. He was moved by love to receive my punishment so that I might have peace. In him I give thanks. Amen.

## THE VICTORIOUS LAMB

*"I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"*

—Revelation 1:18

The apostle John may well have been the last surviving apostle when he was exiled to the island of Patmos. He was sent there to live as a prisoner because he had been preaching "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

Though all the doors on earth were now closed to John, the Lord opened a door in heaven for him. John received a series of amazing visions of the glorified Christ, whose hair was "as white as snow" and whose face was "like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Jesus' eyes were "like blazing fire" and his feet were "like bronze glowing in a furnace." His voice was "like the sound of rushing waters," and out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. The apostle fell at the Lord's feet as though he was dead, but he heard, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and

the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"

The conquering Christ is the Lamb who was slain but rose again. He triumphed over death in his resurrection. The victorious Lamb sits on the throne of the universe and rules the heavens and the earth.

God, just as your Word teaches us about Jesus' suffering, it shows us his resounding victory that came through his resurrection. Christ is alive! Alleluia! In his name we pray. Amen.

## THE SAVING LAMB

*"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*  
—John 1:29

John the Baptist was the prophet whom God called to prepare the way for the Messiah. He explained that he was not the Messiah and was not even worthy to untie the straps of the Messiah's sandals. The Messiah was greater than he, said John, because the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Luke 4:16).

But of all John's statements, this was the most direct: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" All the Old Testament rituals pointed to the Messiah, the great deliverer who was to come—and now John identified Jesus as this promised Anointed One. Jesus was the spotless Lamb who would take away all our sin.

God gave his own Son to die so that we can live, for there was no way for us to save our-

selves. Jesus is the Lamb of God, provided by God, to be slain to fulfill the law of God himself for our sake.

God laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded and pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5-6). He bore the burden of our sins on the cross. He died for our sins. He paid the entire debt that we owed. And he reconciled us to God, giving us forgiveness and eternal life.

Lord, thank you for helping us see and believe that we can be saved from sin and death—and that this is possible through Christ alone. We praise your name and give thanks in him. Amen.

## THE WIFE OF THE LAMB

*"Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."*

—Revelation 21:9

In this vision that God gave to the apostle John, we are invited to take in the glory of "the bride, the wife of the Lamb." The glorified church is the bride of Christ (see also Revelation 19:5-9; Ephesians 5:21-33). When John sees the bride, he sees in her the glory of God. All the splendors of God adorn her. She is glorious. The church is the ransomed people of God who were slaves to sin and now are set free. Christ loves the church. He gave himself for all God's people and sanctified them through the gift of his life.

Christ adorned the church to present it to himself as glorious, unblemished. His love for the church is everlasting. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so Christ rejoices over the church, the bride of the Lamb, which is now being pre-

pared, adorned, and sanctified to meet the bridegroom.

That will be the glorious day of the Lord, when Christ will come with power and glory to live with his bride, the redeemed people of God. They will be gathered from the four corners of the earth. The church will join in the banquet of salvation. And the marriage of the Lamb will be celebrated in a feast that will never end!

Father, your church is the bride of the Lamb, for whom Christ gave himself up. I need to love her more and criticize her less. Give me grace to contribute to the beauty of your bride. In Jesus, Amen.

## THE PURIFYING BLOOD

*"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*

—1 John 1:7

Sin is an undeniable reality. Its effects can be seen every day in our lives, in our families, and in society.

Sin is the transgression of God's law and the lack of conformity to that law. We sin against God in our words, thoughts, and actions—and even by not doing the good we should do. We sin because we are sinners. We were conceived and born in sin, and we live in sin. We cannot cleanse ourselves. Sin has affected our reason, emotion, and will.

All areas of our lives have been tainted by sin. No religious ritual can cleanse us from sin. Sin separates us from God, setting up a barrier that we cannot cross.

But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for us what we cannot do. By his death we have life, and by his blood we

have cleansing from all sin. No sin that we commit is too great for him to cover, or so bad that God cannot forgive it. In Jesus Christ, our Savior, we have redemption—abundant, full, and free!

Lord, holy is your name. Sin does not dwell with you. Thank you for the full and free forgiveness that Jesus' blood has purchased for me, allowing me to be close to you. In the Savior's name, Amen.

## JESUS, THE SHEPHERD

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*  
—John 10:11

Jesus is the good, the great, and the supreme shepherd of his sheep—and his sheep are all who believe in him. As the good shepherd, he gives his life for the sheep. As the great shepherd, he lives for the sheep. And as the supreme shepherd, he will return for the sheep.

Jesus is unique. There is no other like him. What does his uniqueness consist of? It is that Jesus gave his life for his sheep. He died for his sheep. He shed his blood to redeem them. He poured out his soul in death so that his sheep could live forever.

Jesus suffered cruel thirst so that his sheep could drink the water of life. He was made to be sin so that his sheep could be justified (made right with God). He was made to be a curse so that his sheep could be blessed. He endured God's

wrath so that his sheep could receive God's grace.

The good shepherd is also the great shepherd, who rose from the dead and lives for his sheep. He lives to intercede for them. He lives to reign over them.

The good and great shepherd is also the supreme shepherd, who will come again, bringing the new heaven and earth, where there will be "no more death or mourning or crying or pain," and he will live together with his sheep forever (Revelation 21:1-4).

Lord God, you are the true and good shepherd. Nothing can snatch me out of your hand. Thank you for your faithful care. I praise you! In Jesus' name, Amen.

## JESUS, THE GATE OF THE SHEEP

*"I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture."* —John 10:9

Shepherds had to keep watch over their flocks constantly so that predators would not attack. At night they often rounded up their sheep and kept them in improvised sheepfolds. And if more than one shepherd was in the area, there would be more than one flock in the fold. The shepherds themselves were the gateway to the sheep. And the sheep knew their shepherd's voice. So in the morning when they heard their shepherd call, the sheep followed.

It is in this context that Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep. This metaphor suggests three truths. First, Jesus is the door to salvation: "Whoever enters through me will be saved." There is no salvation outside of Jesus. He is the way to God, the door of salvation. No one can reach God by their works or even by their religiosity. Christ alone is the door!

Second, Jesus is the door to freedom: "They will come in and go out. . . ." There are many doorways and roadways in life that lead to captivity and slavery. They are wide and spacious, but they lead to danger and misery. Jesus, however, is the door to freedom.

Third, Jesus is the door to provision: "They will . . . find pasture." Christ provides everything we need in order to flourish in abundance. He came so that we "may have life, and have it to the full!"

Lord and Savior, thank you for the full, abundant life you give. All other pathways in life lead to slavery and death. Only you lead and guide us faithfully. We praise your name! Amen.

## THE HIGH PRICE OF REDEMPTION

*You were redeemed from the empty way of life . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

—1 Peter 1:18-19

Jesus' death on the cross for us was the world's greatest ransom mission. And this ransom was not paid to the devil, but to God himself. The Lord provided his own substitutionary sacrifice so that we could be delivered from our slavery to sin and its inevitable outcome: death. God redeemed us not by gold or silver (precious metals) or even by the most valuable currency. He redeemed us by the precious blood of Christ, the spotless and unblemished Lamb.

The Son of God gave up everything to redeem us. He gave himself completely. And the gift of the Son as the spotless Lamb was not a last-minute decision. As the apostle Peter put it, "He was chosen from before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

Not all the gold on earth would be enough to redeem a single person. But God paid the highest price, the price of the blood of his only Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, you are highly valued by God. He has invested everything to save you, that you may have full and abundant life with him forever.

O God, only through the gift of Christ can I see my worth, for in his finished work your unconditional love for me is revealed. I praise you. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## THE GOD OF RECONCILIATION

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. . . .*  
—2 Corinthians 5:18

Because of sin, we human beings are in rebellion. We are at war with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with God's creation. By ourselves, we would never return to God. We cannot change our own heart. Without God, we don't even realize that we are mired and stuck and lost in the misery of sin.

Salvation is not a human initiative. God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself. God loves us so much that he sent his Son to save us. The innocent seeks the guilty. The agent of reconciliation is Jesus Christ. And now through Christ we can turn to God.

Jesus is the one and only way to God. He is the door, the gateway, to salvation. He is the mediator who reconciles us to the Father. To reconcile us to himself, God did not keep our transgressions on our account.

Instead, he laid them on Jesus Christ.

On the cross the Son of God paid in full the debt that was against us and completely set us free. And God credited us with the perfect righteousness of Christ so that no condemnation can weigh on us any longer.

What a great salvation you have accomplished for us, O God! Only the finished work of Christ could justify us. And you credited his righteousness to our account. Thank you, Father. In Jesus, Amen.

## INCOMPARABLE FORGIVENESS

*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

—Colossians 3:13

In our reading for today we are reminded that because of Jesus, we are called to live into the full life he has made possible for us. And a crucial part of our daily living is this: “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Jesus told an important parable about this in Matthew 18. A king was settling accounts with his subjects, and he found that one owed him 10,000 talents. The man was unable to pay, so the king ordered that the man’s entire family be sold. But when the man asked for patience, the king forgave his huge debt. The forgiven man, however, was not so generous. He found someone who owed him 100 denarii but could not pay. The second man begged for mercy, but the forgiven man refused and threw him into a debtor’s prison. When the king heard about this, he became angry and handed the first man over

to the jailers until he should paid off his debt.

As we think about this parable, it can help to understand that 100 denarii was 100 days’ wages, and that one talent was about 20 years’ wages. So 10,000 talents was about 200,000 years’ wages!

In this way Jesus was saying that our debt to God is unpayable for us—and yet God has forgiven it. Therefore we are called to forgive one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us (see also Ephesians 4:17-32).

Lord, you are gracious; your mercy has no end. Your forgiveness is greater than all my sins. Help us each day to share your love and grace by forgiving others. In Jesus, Amen.

## SUCH A GREAT SALVATION

*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*  
—Ephesians 2:8-9

This passage helps us to understand some very important things about salvation.

We are saved only by God's grace to us in the finished work of Christ, not through any works of our own. And we receive this wonderful salvation through faith. Also, we are not saved because of faith, but through faith.

Three truths can be highlighted about salvation: first, its cause: grace. Second, its instrument: faith. Third, its consequence: good works. We are saved by grace through faith in order to do good works.

We are not saved by any work we do for God, but by the work Christ did for us on the cross and through his resurrection. And we do good works not to be accepted by God but because we are saved through grace. Good works are not the

cause of salvation; they are the result of salvation. We have been saved to do good works that God has prepared for us to do. And the Spirit of God empowers us to do them.

Grace, faith, and good works are like a tripod that illustrates our salvation. All three are accomplished by God himself, for grace, faith, and good works are God's operations in us and for us.

Compassionate Father, the greatness of our salvation in Christ is revealed in your grace to us, in your gift of faith to us, and in your good work through us in our everyday lives. Guide us to live faithfully for you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

## GREATEST CRIME, OR ACT OF LOVE?

*"This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge. . . ."*  
—Acts 2:23

Christ's death was the greatest crime in history. One of his closest followers, Judas, betrayed him for money. The religious leaders paid that money and handed Jesus over to be killed because they envied him. The witnesses who accused him were false. His trial was a blatant legal error. The judge, Pilate, who sentenced him to death was convinced of his innocence but did not want to displease the people.

This greatest crime in history, however, was not an accident, but part of a plan. Jesus was delivered over to death by the determined design and foreknowledge of God.

This fact does not excuse the accusers and perpetrators from responsibility, however. As the apostle Peter put it, "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." This was the

dark side of the death of Jesus Christ.

There is another, glorious side as well: Christ's death was the greatest expression of God's love—for us and for the whole world (see John 3:16). God sent his one and only Son to save us and give us eternal life. Jesus, the Son of God, gave up his heavenly glory and became human, just like us. And he went willingly to the cross, laying down his life as the sacrifice for our sin.

Lord God, history unfolds at the command of your Word. And Christ's death was the execution of your eternal plan of love. We thank you and praise your name! In Jesus, Amen.

## THE HUMILIATION OF JESUS

*He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*  
—Philippians 2:8

The incarnation of the Son of God is one of the greatest mysteries in history. There is one God who exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are of the same substance, meaning that the Son is coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

But to accomplish our redemption, God the Son emptied himself of his glory and became human. In the fullness of time he was born of a woman, under the law, to be our surety and substitute (see Galatians 4:4-5). Being God, he became human; being rich, he became poor; being Lord, he became a servant.

The Son of God entered time and put on human skin. “He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Even in the

face of the most severe afflictions, he did not waiver from his purpose to save us. Though he was persecuted, spat upon, and crushed by the fury of sinners, he loved them to the end. Though he laid down his life in obedience and gave himself up to death, he triumphed over death in his glorious resurrection.

Through his extreme humiliation, Jesus was exalted to receive the name above all names, opening the way for us to eternal life with God.

Father, to save us, your Son humbled himself and submitted to death on a cross. He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, to lay down his life for us, even though we were your enemies. In him we exalt you! Amen.

## THROW OUT THE OLD YEAST

*Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are.*  
—1 Corinthians 5:7

The Jewish Passover was instituted on the night God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12). For each household a lamb without defect was slain, and its blood was sprinkled on the doorframe. In a similar way, Christ, our Passover Lamb, was slain for our redemption, and in this way God delivered all who believe in him from the slavery and tyranny of sin.

For the Passover feast, all yeast was to be removed from every house. This was a sign of sanctification. The yeast that leavens dough was a symbol of sin that infiltrates our lives and contaminates us through and through. It reminded people that they could not participate in the Passover with impure hearts and a defiled life. They had to throw out the old yeast, for they were being reshaped

as a new unleavened batch of dough.

As believers in Christ, we have received a new heart, a new mind, a new life. We are part of a new family. We are God's people, called to be light in the world. We cannot imitate the world or be of the world. We are called to reshape it for the kingdom of God. We are a holy people, remade in Christ. We are saved from sin to live in holiness for Jesus' sake. So we must walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to live for God.

Dear God, thank you that in Christ we can have a new life. Remake us to be like Jesus, and guide us to live in holiness, following him day by day. In his name, Amen.

## SCANDAL AND MADNESS

*We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.*  
—1 Corinthians 1:23

The apostle Paul was writing to his Christian friends in Corinth, a prominent Greek city. Great thinkers disputed their ideas in the public square. Their admirers applauded them. The Greeks (Gentiles) were fond of philosophy. When they heard about Jesus, who was crucified for our salvation, they thought it was madness to believe in and preach about him.

Many Jews, on the other hand, thought their Messiah should be a great warrior-king who would free them from the tyranny of Rome. So, to them, it was scandalous to think of this person nailed to a cross.

Paul was not intimidated by these prejudiced and extreme reactions. He continued to preach the message of the cross. There is no other gospel to be preached, he said, but the message of Christ, who

was crucified for all who believe in him.

There is no good news for the sinner apart from the message of Christ. Only by the death and resurrection of Jesus do we have life. It is by his blood that we receive forgiveness and redemption. It has pleased God to save sinners by the foolishness of this preaching. The foolishness of God is wiser than the so-called wisdom of the world. The cross of Christ may be rejected by unbelievers, but to us who believe, it is “the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Father God, the finished work of Jesus reveals your power and your wisdom. Thank you for giving us faith in Jesus, who was crucified so that we may have life. In his name, Amen.

## THE GOSPEL, THE POWER OF GOD

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. . . .*

—Romans 1:16

Paul was preparing to visit Rome, the capital of the empire. He was on his way to Jerusalem to bring the poverty-stricken people there a generous gift. From Corinth he wrote his most robust letter, which we now call the book of Romans—and already here in the prologue, he has made a most audacious statement: “I am not ashamed of the gospel. . . .” Paul felt indebted to the gospel—the good news of Jesus. He was ready to preach the gospel, and he was not ashamed of it.

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel even though he was arrested and flogged and stoned nearly to death because of it. Paul was not ashamed because the gospel is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” in Christ as Lord and Savior. The gospel is God’s power for

salvation. And this power is available for all who believe. It doesn’t matter what people or nation they come from. What matters is that they believe.

The door of salvation is open in Christ. Behold the power of the gospel!

Lord, thank for giving us the gospel, the good news of Jesus, with its power for all who believe. Thank you for your grace and mercy in sending Jesus so that we can be saved to new life in you. May we live by faith in you, knowing that we never need to be ashamed because of you. In Jesus, Amen.



## JUSTIFICATION, AN ACT OF GOD

*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
—Romans 5:1

Justification is a legal act of God. It is accomplished in God's court and applied to our lives, all because of the finished work of Jesus. Justification is complete and final. The newest believer is just as justified as the most seasoned, faithful believer.

Paul teaches us four important truths about justification in Romans 5:1. First, God is the author of justification. We are justified not on the basis of our merits but because of the merits of Christ.

Second, we are justified through faith. In this way faith is the instrument of our justification.

Third, the fruit of justification is that we have peace with God. We are reconciled to God and reborn into the family of God.

Fourth, the agent of justification is our Lord Jesus Christ.

All of these spiritual blessings are granted to us through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Christ is our righteousness. He is our peace. In him we have abundant redemption.

Lord and God, trusting in the righteousness of Christ for my justification brings peace and comfort to my heart. My salvation depends not on me but on you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

*"Take and eat; this is my body."*

—Matthew 26:26

Jesus celebrated a ceremonial final meal with his disciples. We call it the Last Supper. At the table with them he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and passed it to the disciples, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

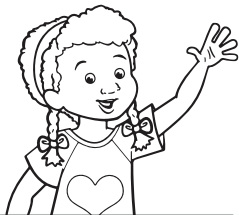
In the church we celebrate this new-covenant meal by breaking bread and drinking wine (or juice) together in remembrance of Jesus. We call it the Lord's Supper. This meal replaces the Jewish Passover. There is no longer any need to bring a lamb to the altar, because Christ is the Lamb of God, sacrificed once for all, who takes away the sin of the world. There is no longer any

need to sprinkle the blood of a lamb on doorposts, for by faith we receive the benefits of the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sin.

Christ is our Passover Lamb. To him the patriarchs and prophets pointed. He was the hope of our spiritual fathers and the content of the preaching of the apostles. Christ is the spotless Lamb of God, the living bread that came down from heaven. With his body and his blood, he fulfilled all the requirements of God's law, delivering us from the slavery and tyranny of sin and death forever!

Lamb of God, in you we find deliverance, salvation to new life, full and free! Be exalted in our lives each day. Amen.

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