

# Today

March/April 2024

refresh, refocus, renew

JESUS  
SAVES



**ALSO: GOD'S ANSWERS FOR LIFE'S CHALLENGES**

Dear Friends:

On a highway near our house, a large sign proclaims, "Jesus Saves!" Certainly all followers of Jesus Christ wholeheartedly agree, but what exactly do we mean when we say, "Jesus saves"? What's more, we might also ask, "How does Jesus save us"? In March, Kent Van Til explores some of the questions surrounding the what and how of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Focusing on the meaning of our salvation can help us grow in faith, gratitude, and service.



While we know the central message of the Bible is that Jesus saves, we may also wonder if the Bible can help us in our daily living and dealing with everyday challenges. In April, Darrell Delaney uncovers a treasure trove of biblical wisdom highlighting practical advice for following God in our daily lives. We see that God cares for us and can comfort, encourage, and strengthen us. God's love and care extend to us in *whatever* situation we may find ourselves—no matter how big or how small. Our mighty God promises to provide for all our needs, and he has already taken care of our greatest need through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ!

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

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

Kurt Selles

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**“Jesus Saves”  
Kent Van Til**



**“God’s Answers for  
Life’s Challenges”  
Darrell Delaney**

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# march

## Jesus Saves

**Kent Van Til**

The two words “Jesus saves” may provide the shortest description of the gospel that we can imagine. But if we ask, “How does Jesus save us?” the Bible gives us a complex answer including many important points. These include “He died in our place to pay for our sin”; “He recreates us”; “He conquers the devil”; “He reconciles us with God and others”; and more.

This month we will look at these and many other biblical descriptions of how Jesus saves. And as we do so, may our lives be enriched by the faithful, deeply loving, many-faceted work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Kent Van Til served as a missionary in Costa Rica. He taught theological ethics both there and in the United States. He is the author of four books. The most recent is a spiritual biography of his grandmother titled A Name for Herself: A Dutch Immigrant's Story. Kent likes to fish, hunt, make music, and entertain his grandchildren.*

## JESUS RECREATES US

*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*  
—2 Corinthians 5:17

God loves, reasons, and creates. So do his children, made in his image and likeness. But instead of honoring the good, doing the right, and creating the lovely, we fell into sin (Genesis 3). As a result, we despise, pervert, and destroy our world and our relationships. Though we are still able to do some good (by the grace of God), it is painfully obvious that we do not live up to our created potential. We willfully do wrong, hurt others, and destroy.

It is hard to imagine the disappointment and heartbreak God must have felt when we first turned against him. God might well have destroyed humanity and started over. And in a way he did make a new start. God sent his Son, Jesus, to bear his image without falling into sin; Jesus was fully human, like us in every way (see John 1:14; 3:16-18; Hebrews 2:17;

4:15). He loves and thinks and creates as a human made in God's image should. He hit the restart button on human nature.

The miracle of salvation through Jesus is that we can become part of the new creation and the new world he creates. We can become part of God's family again. With the new life he makes possible for us, Jesus saves!

Dear Jesus, thank you for being the first responder for all of creation. You have given us a new start. Help us to live faithfully in your name. Amen.

## JESUS CRUSHES SATAN

*Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

—Colossians 2:15

We can tell from the story in Genesis 3 that a conflict was already going on behind the scenes when Adam and Eve sinned. As Revelation 12:7 describes it, “War broke out in heaven.” The devil, or Satan, rebelled against God and was thrown out with his rebellious followers. And they have been trying ever since to rule the world in their way, battling against God and trying to drag us humans along with them.

The serpent who tempted Adam and Eve to sin is described in Revelation 12:9 as “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” He tempted God’s children, created in God’s image, to disobey the Lord, and we caused a lot of grief for our Father.

But the devil and his destructive forces are really no match

for God. God sent his own Son, Jesus, to be born as a human being. And Jesus’ mission was to rescue his siblings from the mess they got into when they fell into sin. He laid down his own life to pay the price for human sin. As he did that, he disarmed the devil’s “powers and authorities . . . triumphing over them by the cross.” Then Jesus rose again, victorious over death, so that we can have eternal life with him (1 Corinthians 15:55-56)!

We still face battles with temptations today. What do you struggle with? Alcohol, greed, porn, abuse, power? These and more create spiritual battles. Call on Jesus, who won the battle for us.

Lord Jesus, help us to share in your victory over evil today. Amen.

## JESUS DOES WHAT IS RIGHT

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

—Matthew 4:10

It's easy for us to be tempted. There are temptations everywhere—within our hearts and coming at us from all sides.

Satan provides a master class on temptation in Genesis 3. He begins by suggesting that God is keeping us from enjoying something good. "Did God really say you can't eat anything in this garden? Poor soul." And when we feel we are missing out on something, the devil adds, "You can do this. Nothing bad will happen." Then the thing we want looks good, and we think it will do us good. And we say, "Yes, that's what I want. I'll try it. It won't hurt."

But it doesn't work out that way. *Right* and *wrong* are really built into the universe. Just as God created limits for the waters and times for light and dark, he also created limits for our moral behavior. The first

command—don't eat the fruit of that one tree, was the initial moral law testing our parents' obedience. That has since been expanded into God's law for his people, summarized in Exodus 20, Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-40, and other passages. And we are tempted to break all of it. We dishonor God and hurt people. We lust, we envy, we get angry over trivialities. And yielding to these can lead into adultery, theft, and violence.

Thank God that Jesus resisted all of Satan's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11). He represents us in all his perfection before God's throne.

Father, thank you for sending Jesus and for crediting us with his perfection. Through his finished work we can stand before you. Amen.

## JESUS PROVIDES REST AND PEACE

*"Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*  
—Matthew 11:29

Did God rest after creating the world because he was tired? No. When God rested, he set up a pattern for his people to follow so that they could take time to rest and to worship him (see Exodus 20:8-11). Finding our rest in God provides peace, as God intends for us all.

God wants his people to be able to live in a good, peaceful place where they can rest—that is, where they can flourish and have full life. God brought his people Israel out of slavery for that purpose. But Israel rebelled and failed to believe that God could provide that for them. So they did not inherit God's promised rest even though God eventually brought them to the land he had promised them (Numbers 13-14; Judges 2; Hebrews 3:7-4:11).

Later God sent Jesus to show the way. Jesus knew that God

could overcome any enemy that tried to prevent him from living God's way and entering God's promised rest. Jesus lived faithfully, trusting in all of God's promises. And he finished the work God had sent him to do.

We all work, and we all need rest. But none of us can do the job that will bring us eternal rest. Jesus has done that for us, however—so now all we need to do is follow him. We can rest and find peace in God through the work that Jesus has completed on our behalf.

Dear God, forgive us when we fail to believe and trust that you will bring us into your rest. We cannot find the way to full life on our own. Help us to follow the Savior, Jesus. Amen.



## JESUS DELIVERS US FROM SLAVERY

*Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* —Galatians 5:1

Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world at the time of the Exodus, when God freed his people from slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh reigned over the prosperous civilization of the Nile. He had huge temples built in honor of his gods. His gravesite is still visible today in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor. Yet Pharaoh was unable to stop God from liberating his people. Through Moses, who had no army or political standing in the Egyptian court, God freed his people from slavery.

Today God frees us from slavery too. Until we are saved through Jesus, we are slaves to sin. We are subjects of the world's great powers; we are at the mercy of Satan. We have grown accustomed to our addictions. We need liberation. Moses showed Pharaoh that God had more power than all of the Egyptian gods com-

bined. The gods of the Nile, of the cattle, of the harvest, and so on were all shown to be powerless in comparison to the God of Israel.

Today false gods inhabit power structures as well. There are political powers, economic powers, military powers, familial powers, and corporate powers that oppress people. Yet God is stronger than all of them. Jesus, God's Son, delivers us from all these powers, and he has already freed us from their grip, paying the price of sin and canceling the power of death for our sake.

Lord Jesus, help us to trust in you to deliver us. Free us from the oppressive powers we face today. Strengthen us to follow you. Amen.

## JESUS BRINGS US OUT OF DARKNESS

*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

—1 Peter 2:9

A World War II veteran told me that he had never experienced complete darkness until he was on a ship in the Pacific Ocean during the war. There were no stars at night, and the ship's lights were off so that no enemies could see it.

When it is pitch dark, you can't see your hand in front of your face. You have no idea what lies ahead of you or what might be near you. You have no idea of the risks you could face with every move. That is a compelling picture of being lost in sin.

If Jesus had not come into our world, we would still be lost in the darkness of sin. We would have remained in hopeless blindness. But Jesus is "the light of the world." He is the one who comes to us in our darkness and leads us into his glori-

ous light. He shows us the way out of hopeless darkness and continues to guide us by the light of God's mercy. "Whoever follows me," he promised, "will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Into the darkness a light has shined. That light is the light of life and the light of the world. Do not walk in darkness; follow Jesus' radiant light.

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. Yet many people walk in darkness. Help us all to seek and to see your light. Help us to walk in your light faithfully, that we may live with you always. Amen.

## JESUS SUFFERED FOR ALL

*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*  
—Isaiah 53:5

Never was someone treated so unjustly as Jesus was. Absolute good was attacked by absolute evil. And that evil was our evil, shared by all humanity. Our sins, along with those of the whole world, were like the nails that pinned him to the cross.

Sometimes in our churches we skip over the excruciating suffering that Jesus endured for us on the cross. When he took our place to pay the price of our sin, Jesus was pierced and crushed and afflicted, “led like a lamb to the slaughter.” He was mocked and ridiculed. He was forsaken by God. Yet Jesus chose to take on that suffering for us. Even the thought of the agony he would experience caused him to sweat drops like blood (Luke 22:44).

Our salvation was made possible through Jesus’ agonizing physical pain. Our salvation is

a very physical event. God did not just “save souls”; he saved whole human beings. In the new heaven and earth we will have perfected and restored bodies (1 Corinthians 15). We will live in a renewed, physical creation.

Christ’s salvation for us was a gruesome, physical affair. Thank God that our bodies and our physical world are saved through Jesus, who not only died for our sins but also suffered for them.

Jesus, you suffered excruciating agony for us. You did so because of the joy it brought you to welcome us back into fellowship with our Father. Thank you for bearing our pain. Amen.

## JESUS REMOVED OUR SHAME

*No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame. . . .*

—Psalm 25:3

Shame is different from guilt. If you are guilty, you did something wrong, and you realize you are responsible for it. You can feel shame from being guilty, but feelings of shame are not always tied to guilt. Shame has more to do with a lack of self-worth, and that can come from not measuring up to a standard, from feeling insecure, from being bullied or abused in various ways, from public disgrace, ridicule, and more. When you are ashamed, you may or may not have done something wrong, but when others see you, you feel exposed, dirty, unworthy of respect.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they realized they had done wrong. They saw that they were naked. They were exposed and felt shame. They tried to cover up and hide. But they couldn't hide from God—and that was a good thing, because God loved

them and valued them, despite what they had done wrong. God loves us all too, despite any bad we have done.

Jesus came to take away the guilt and shame of our sin. And he did that by taking on the most shameful death possible: crucifixion on a Roman cross. He hung there naked, in public disgrace, exposed to the abuse of the jeering crowd. And yet he was innocent. "He endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2), so that we can be freed from all shame and live fully with him. Now, because of Jesus, we are forever clean.

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking on the shame of all the world to free us from shame forever. In your name, Amen.

## JESUS MAKES US INTO HIS FOLLOWERS

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*  
—Mark 8:34

Following Jesus means more than listening to him and agreeing with his teachings. Jesus says that whoever wants to be his disciple "must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow" him.

Notice that Jesus says we must deny our *selves*, not that we must deny ourselves something—like chocolate or a new car. We are to deny our own self-interest, self-absorption, and pride. The misguided self must be replaced with a new self that is being shaped to be like Jesus. And, like Jesus, this new self is not here to be served, but to serve, and to give its life for others (Mark 10:45).

What does it mean to take up our cross? It means being willing to sacrifice our own desires and to give of ourselves so that others may come to know Jesus and want to follow him.

That's what he did for us, and he calls us to follow his example, even to the point of suffering and giving up our own life, if necessary.

Jesus took up his cross and let himself be crucified, once for all, so that our old selves could be crucified, set free from sin, and made new through him (Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 5:24). And by the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us new life in Christ, we are called to take on the self-sacrificial life of Christ. Jesus explains: "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."

Jesus, help us to follow you. Fill us with your Spirit so that we may deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you. Amen.

## JESUS PASSES THE TEST FOR US

*Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*  
—Matthew 4:1

Since the beginning, human beings have failed God's test. In Eden, Satan asked, "Did God say . . . ?" and then misquoted God's words. Adam and Eve responded by questioning the word of God and then doing what seemed right in their own eyes. So do we.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to live among us as a human being. And, in his case, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. There Satan made some suggestions that sounded rather reasonable—"have something to eat; show your power; fall into the arms of God." Jesus responded to each temptation with a quote from the Scriptures. Rather than twisting God's words, he said, in effect, "No, I live by the Word of God."

This is still our challenge as well. Will we live by God's Word, or will we do what seems right in

our own eyes? Like Adam and Eve, we are experts at twisting God's words to suit our own purposes. We lie, we lust, we get angry, we are greedy, we gossip—and so on. Rarely does a day pass in which we don't yield to some temptation.

We need to rely on the only one who passed the test. Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). What's more, Jesus also laid down his life to pay the price for our sin—so that we can live forever with God. What a Savior!

Father, forgive us, for Jesus' sake, when we fail to live your way when we are tempted. Lord Jesus, thank you for living faithfully and giving your life for our sake. Amen.

## JESUS, THE ONE AND ONLY SACRIFICE

*We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*  
—Hebrews 10:10

The book of Hebrews looks at Jesus' life from the perspective of the Old Testament system of sacrifices. Today we will reflect on Jesus as the one and only sacrifice for sin.

In ancient Israel, God commanded that sacrifices be made to cover the sins of the people. These sacrifices were symbolic, representing the sinner. By making a sacrifice, the sinner was saying, "I have done wrong and deserve punishment, but please accept this offering in my place."

The Israelites were required to make sacrifices for many things. If they touched a dead animal—make a sacrifice. If they harmed their neighbor—make a sacrifice. If they accidentally hurt someone—make a sacrifice. Making sacrifices was a part of everyday life. Why were there so many sacrifices? Because there were so

many sins, and each sacrifice only (symbolically) covered one sin.

When Jesus came, however, he gave up his life as a sacrifice. Though he was pure and perfect, he gave up his body in place of all our bodies. And his sacrifice did not symbolize just one man dying for his sin; Jesus, the perfect Son of God, offered himself as a sacrifice for all human sin. And because he committed no sin, Jesus' sacrifice covered all the sins of all people, including you and me.

Thank you, Jesus, for putting an end to the Old Testament system of sacrifices. We could never offer an acceptable sacrifice. But your perfect sacrifice makes us acceptable to God forever. Amen.

## JESUS, THE IDEAL PRIEST

*Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.*

—Hebrews 7:26

Priests had a very important role in ancient Israel. They served as mediators between the people and God. They stood between the holy God and his sinful people, enabling these people to approach the Lord.

But the priests themselves were also sinners. So even the best of them, the High Priest, had to purify himself before making sacrifices for the people.

Jesus, however, was pure and sinless, the Son of God who took on human flesh and came to live among us. He came to perform the role of the ideal High Priest for us all. Whereas the Old Testament (Old Covenant) priests were sinful and mortal, Jesus is pure and immortal. Jesus therefore serves as the perfect High Priest forever for our sake.

Now ascended and ruling in heaven, Jesus serves as our ultimate High Priest in the holiest place. He is the mediator at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, interceding for us. When God sees us now, he sees pure and blameless children of the new covenant mediated by the perfect High Priest, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Jesus, you are pure and blameless. You alone can be the mediator between us and God. Thank you for taking this role and for continuing to exercise it as you intercede for us in heaven. Amen.



## JESUS, THE TRUE TEMPLE

*"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body.*  
—John 2:20-22

Did you know that the tabernacle in the Old Testament (Exodus 36-40), and the temple afterward (1 Kings 6-8), were made from heavenly blueprints? Hebrews 8 helps us to see this. All the features and furnishings were meant to show that the temple on earth was just a copy of the sanctuary in heaven.

When Jesus came to live among us, he brought the temple with him—in his person. The temple was the place where God met his people. It was where the Israelites presented themselves and their sacrifices before God.

When the Son of God became human, God and humankind were united as never before. God himself lived among us and was one of us. In fact, the original Greek text of John 1:14 tells us that Jesus "tabernacled" ("made his dwelling")

among us. Since God himself is present with us through Jesus, why would we need to meet with God anywhere else? The temple building in Jerusalem became obsolete after Jesus came, because God was present on earth in Jesus himself. And now a perfect human, Jesus, is present in heaven with God.

The book of Revelation adds that in the new heaven and earth God himself will dwell among us, and there won't be a temple structure because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb [Jesus] are its temple" (21:3, 22). And we will live there forever with God!

O God, we long to be with you. Bring us into the holy place you have prepared for us. Amen.

## JESUS SPARES US FROM DEATH

*"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."*  
—John 3:14-15

In John 3, Jesus teaches that the strange story about a bronze snake in Numbers 21 points to him and his work of healing. Jesus saves us from sin and death.

The book of Numbers includes many stories about the Israelites' complaining to God as they trekked through the wilderness. In Numbers 21 they complain again about the food. And in this case God punishes them for their rebellion and disobedience.

Like many Bible stories, this one continues with a plea for forgiveness, and God provides a merciful response. But the response is very unusual. God says, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole. Then whoever looks at it can live."

The bronze snake that Moses made represented a sort of antidote to the venom of the

snakes that were biting people. Looking to the bronze snake that was lifted up spared the people from death.

Jesus brought up this old story while he was teaching about the work he had come to do. Jesus came to save us from the death we brought on ourselves by sinning and rebelling against God. Lifted up on a cross for our sake, Jesus died to pay the price of our sin. And when we look up to Jesus in faith, believing in the power of his sacrifice to save, "we may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus, thank you that we can look to you in faith and be saved. Amen.

## JESUS SAVES US FROM HELL

*Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.*  
—Romans 5:18

Hell is not an easy subject to discuss when we are talking about faith in Jesus. It's much more pleasant to focus on the love of God through Jesus that saves us from death and hell. Nevertheless, the subject of hell is mentioned in Scripture, and it is probably best described as *condemnation or complete separation from God*.

Romans 5 helps us understand that "sin entered the world through one man"—that is, Adam (see Genesis 3)—and that death, or condemnation, "came to all people" because of that. But Jesus, the Son of God, who became human, came to turn that problem around. Jesus never sinned when he was tempted, so through his obedience all who believe in him are "made righteous." God's "abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness" are made possi-

ble "though the one man, Jesus Christ!"

Sadly, all of us sin, so it is fair to say that we all deserve condemnation. Romans 6:23, for example, says that "the wages of sin is death"—and then it adds, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"!

All who have been rescued by Jesus have no need to fear. We will not be condemned. Jesus took on himself all of the sins that condemned us. So instead of being condemned to hell, we are promised new life forever with Jesus in the new heaven and new earth.

Jesus, thank you for rescuing us from sin, death, and hell. Help us to share this good news with everyone! Amen.

## JESUS BREAKS THE POWER OF THE DEVIL

*He . . . shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*  
—Hebrews 2:14-15

In the beginning, when the first human beings brought sin into the world (Genesis 3), we became enslaved by the power of death—and that put us under the tyranny of the devil.

But that is not the end of the story. Ever since that time, God also promised to redeem us. In other words, God would somehow pay our debt of sin and free us to live as he intended. And one day Jesus, God's Son, accomplished that for us. As the apostle John put it, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).

Jesus willingly laid down his life, giving himself over to death because death was the payment for sin. As Romans 6:23 puts it, "The wages of sin is death." What's more, Satan held us captive by the power

of death because we had fallen for his temptation. And by falling into sin, we became subject to the curse of death.

Jesus, however, did not fall for Satan's lies. Jesus remained sinless. So when he gave his own life to pay for our sin, the devil could not hold Jesus in his grasp. Jesus broke through the power of death with new life. He conquered death. He annulled the binding contract that subjected us to Satan's power. He gave the devil his due—a perfect human life, and that ransom payment set us free, bringing us back to enjoy life with God the Father forever.

Jesus, thank you for redeeming us from the power of Satan. Help us to live for you. Amen.

## WE ARE ADOPTED

*We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption. . . .*

—Romans 8:23

This passage in Romans says that we become adopted into God's family through the finished work of Jesus Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. This makes us "heirs of God and coheirs with Christ." Amazing!

So, while blood relation can determine who is part of a family, so can adoption. And this involves love—unconditional love—as well as deep, lasting, faithful commitment. God's love and commitment to us provide the best possible foundation for our lives.

It is indeed good news that we are adopted by God the Father through the work of Christ Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus and the Spirit, we become full sons and daughters in the family of God. Jesus, our older brother, brings us into the family. His

commitment to us is so great that he gave up his life to free us from the curse of sin and death so that he could bring us into full life as children of God the Father.

In our adoption God says yes to us: "Yes, you are mine. Yes, I am with you. Yes, I love you forever." God's love and commitment are immeasurable. Thanks to Jesus and the guiding work of the Spirit, we are heirs to all of God's promises and blessings.

Brother Jesus, thank you for making our adoption as children of God possible. We know that you are now seated at the right hand of the Father, claiming us as part of God's family. We are no longer estranged, but beloved children. Amen.

## JESUS BRINGS US INTO TRUTH

*"I am the way and the truth and the life."*

—John 14:6

It is sometimes hard to face the truth, especially when the truth is that we have messed up. Instead we make excuses. We think we are exceptional: "I didn't really mean it that way." "I thought it would be OK if . . ." And so on. But the truth is the truth. And Jesus is the Truth.

The worst thing we can do is to ignore or deny this absolute and final Truth—that Jesus is the one and only Son of God who saves sinners. Though the truth about God's nature and presence is clear to all, people tend to suppress it (Romans 1:18-20). We are all guilty of doing this. When we recognize the truth, we don't like what we see. So we think it isn't true for us, or that it doesn't matter. But the truth does matter. Lying to ourselves matters, and it matters most if we lie to ourselves about God.

Today we live in a media storm of falsehoods. Many, many voices today lie or bend the truth to suit their own views or preferences. But beyond all the deceptions in this world, the final authority is God in Jesus—the Truth himself. Believe what he says, and believe that he died and rose again so that you may have life everlasting.

Dear Jesus, forgive us for our lies. We lie to try to prove we are right. We lie to try to make ourselves look good. Forgive us especially if we lie about who you are and what you have done. Amen.

## JESUS GIVES US LIVING WATER

*"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*  
—John 4:14

Water is basic and fundamental to life. I once heard a biologist say that when God decided to create water, the rest of creation was details. This is not meant to minimize all the complexities of God's creation, but it can help us to see how important water is.

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, he was breaking two social taboos. He was talking to a woman, and he was talking to a Samaritan. Jewish people thought of the Samaritans as half-breeds and heretics, and the Samaritans did not have much respect for the Jews. But by asking the Samaritan woman for water, Jesus wanted her to reconsider all the things she thought she knew.

She said, "You have nothing to draw water with and the well is deep. . . ." But Jesus wasn't

talking about H<sub>2</sub>O; nor was he talking about the kind of life that H<sub>2</sub>O makes possible. He was talking about himself—the water that brings eternal life.

Jesus offered the woman everlasting life. And when she drank in the living water of Christ—that is, the good news of eternal life in him—she was filled with new life.

Though we still have to drink enough H<sub>2</sub>O each day to keep our bodies going, we need only to drink the living water of Jesus to receive eternal life.

O God, thank you for the gift of new life in Christ. Fill us with your living water, that your good news may flow from us to all the world, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## JESUS, THE TRUE WORD OF GOD

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*  
—John 1:1

In John 1 the Greek term for “Word” is *logos*. John chose this word carefully. In Greek philosophy the word *logos* referred to divine reason, or the power that made order out of chaos. This idea fits well with the scriptural teaching that God—whose word is always faithful and true, and who created all things—has revealed himself in a new way through his Son, the Word of God, who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

God has long been communicating with us—through creation, the prophets, and the Scriptures. But with the coming of “the Word”—that is, Jesus—God revealed himself even more. Earlier forms of communication were less clear. Since the *logos* became flesh, however, we can see, hear, and know that we have met God.

Jesus is the best and the only perfect representation of God. This contradicts the teachings of other religions that claim they have a better or additional revelation of God. Why would you want or need to hear more about God once you have heard from the Word himself? Jesus showed that God is love and “the light [that] shines in the darkness.”

We need to recognize that the true and complete Word of God has come into the world. That Word is Jesus Christ, “the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Word of life, help us to trust in you for salvation and new life. Thank you for coming so that we can know the truth that sets us free from sin and death forever. Amen.



## JESUS DIES FOR HIS FRIENDS

*"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*  
—John 15:13

In our Scripture reading for today we see that Jesus calls his disciples "friends." Friendship is based on mutual love. A friend is someone you can talk with about anything. A friend is someone whom you look forward to seeing. A friend is someone you care about.

Jesus is the best friend you and I have ever had. He laid down his life for us so that we could be freed from the curse of sin and death and receive new life with God. Jesus proved the extent of his love for us when he died in our place.

There may have been some people in human history who willingly died for someone else. But no one besides Jesus could possibly trade his life for the lives of millions and millions of his friends.

An old hymn says, "What a friend we have in Jesus!" Jesus

is indeed our friend, and, amazingly, he sees us as his friends! He is our lifelong friend whom we can talk to about anything. He loves to hang around with us. He cares about us.

What is the result of this beautiful friendship? Joy! Jesus takes joy in us, his friends, and we take joy in him.

Lord Jesus, we enjoy your friendship. We know that becoming our friend cost you dearly. Thank you for paying that price and for truly being our best friend forever. Amen.

## JESUS REVEALS THE ONE TRUE GOD

*"Father . . . glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. . . . Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."* —John 17:1-3

Many years before Jesus came, the Lord God Almighty called Abraham and made promises to him—and Abraham trusted and followed (Genesis 12:1-8). At that time most people believed in many different gods, and all the nations claimed they had gods of their own.

The Lord, however, taught Abraham and his descendants that he is the only true God. And he often demonstrated that by overthrowing the false gods of other nations. For example, when God delivered his people Israel from slavery in Egypt, he sent ten plagues that showed his power over Egypt's gods: the Nile god, the harvest god, the sun god, and so on (Exodus 7-12).

God showed that he is the creator and sustainer of the whole world. The God of Israel was not attached to one as-

pect of the world, but moved throughout the whole world and controlled the events of history.

Jesus came to reveal the one true God and his salvation for the whole world (John 3:16). And he calls everyone to believe in him as Savior. Jesus is also one with God and with the Holy Spirit (see John 14:8-21; 16:7-15).

Even today people worship other gods—wealth, sports teams, Shiva and Vishnu, and more. They will all pass away. None of them could ever direct history or provide salvation. Only the God revealed in Jesus can do that. Worship only him.

Dear Jesus, thank you for revealing the true God to us and for being our Savior. Amen.

## JESUS BUILDS US A HOME

*Like living stones, [you] are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*  
—1 Peter 2:5

Jesus came as the Savior to bring us into God's family, providing us a home with God.

As Peter describes it, Jesus is also the cornerstone of our faith: "The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (See also Psalm 25:3; Isaiah 28:16.) And "like living stones," we "are being built into a spiritual house" to serve God with "spiritual sacrifices."

Another way to say this is pictured in Ephesians 4:12-13: we are called to "works of service, so that the body of Christ [the church] may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God."

All of this imagery reflects the fact that, through Jesus, God has brought redemption for all who believe him, making them his family, his chosen people. Again, as Peter writes, "you are

a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

We become royalty when we are adopted into the family of God. We are built together on the firm foundation of Christ with the love of God through the Holy Spirit. No storm can shake this house. This "dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" will stand forever (Ephesians 2:22).

Lord Jesus, you are our firm foundation. Hold us together in your holy church. Build us into a dwelling that is worthy of your name. Amen.

## JESUS WELCOMES US HOME

*"My father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"*

—John 14:2

There is nothing like a good homecoming. Perhaps you enjoyed one recently. Family members return home. Children, grandchildren, and other relations gather around, delighted to see each other and renew relationships. Or maybe a reunion brought together old friends who hadn't seen each other in a long time. If you were making preparations, didn't you scurry with anticipation—planning, preparing food, and making sure that accommodations were made and rooms were ready?

Jesus is preparing for us to come home. He loves us so much that he wants all of us to be there. In fact, the whole reason he came to live among us was so that we could later join him in our Father's house.

He came to rescue us from the curse of sin and death so that

we can enjoy new life with him forever. Then he went back to heaven when his work here was complete. And now in heaven he is preparing a place for us.

I can imagine the kind of place being prepared—with wonderful food, glorious music, delightful friends—and all in a context of perfect peace. Wow!

If you have welcomed Jesus into your life, he waits, smiling and with outstretched arms, to welcome you into his Father's home.

Jesus, thank you for coming to live among us. We look forward to the amazing homecoming that awaits us in heaven, thanks to your finished work here on earth. Amen.

## JESUS RENEWS ALL CREATION

*The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

—Romans 8:21

Did you know that God's plan of salvation includes more than the saving of human souls? For many Christians "Jesus saves" means that Jesus saves us from our sins, and that is true—but there is also much more. Jesus came to save the whole world, all of creation.

So, when Jesus comes again, the world will not be obliterated—it will be renewed. The creation will no longer be subjected to the effects of human sin. It will be renewed, purified, and made whole.

At the time of our first sin, the ground itself became cursed. And throughout human history we have often been a curse to the ground and to the air and the seas as well. We often spoil and wreck God's creation rather than protecting, guarding, and cultivating it.

In this situation, creation "groans" under the effects of the curse of sin. All of creation longs to be set free from this cursed state. The universe longs for Jesus to return, for his enemies to be conquered, and for his children to be revealed as his own.

Then all creation will be set free, along with the children of God.

O God, thank you for your solution of setting the whole world free from the curse of sin. Help us to guard and cultivate the world you came to save. Amen.

## JESUS CONQUERS ALL FOR US

*Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

—Romans 8:38-39

Most of the conquerors in history have been egotistical thugs. They established kingdoms by their own power and for their own glory, often killing many thousands of people to do so.

But what we learn from Scripture is that Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, has conquered all things by laying down his own life as a ransom for us. By doing that, he broke the power of sin's hold on us. And that means no other power in all creation or even in the spiritual realms can separate us from God. Nothing can separate us "from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sometimes the challenges we face are from circumstances and other people, but the root of all challenges to our faith

comes from spiritual forces that are at war with God. Those spiritual powers would love to destroy us, but they cannot touch us because of God's protection in Christ.

Jesus has already won the battle. And because he won, we win! When Jesus rose from the dead, he overcame the ultimate weapon of the forces of evil—death. Never again can Satan and the powers of evil have a hold on us, because Jesus has brought us into everlasting life. With him, we are more than conquerors.

Jesus, you won. You won for us. Help us to stand firm against all influences that want to challenge our faith in you. Help us to live for you each day. Amen.

## JESUS SHOWS GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

—John 3:16

Notice that God loves this whole, great big world. He doesn't just love only a few people—or even all people—but the whole world. That includes all creation. Wow, that's a big love!

All of nature is God's, and God loves all of it. True, we humans are the capstone of creation, but we are still very much a part of it. All of us, and all of creation, can and should give praise to our Maker. So, for example, the flower that grows in a meadow, unseen by humans, is seen by God. And God delights in it.

God's love, as revealed in Jesus, is the broadest, deepest, most penetrating love there has ever been. Its breadth extends to every creature God has ever made. The bear, the butterfly, and the amoeba all celebrate God's love, praising their

Maker by doing what they are created to do.

God loves the whole world, and he sent Jesus to redeem all of it. As the crown of God's creation, we must love it too. How can we do that? By treating the world as an object of our love, by saving the scarce flora and fauna that God put here, and by nurturing rather than destroying the world. God's love is BIG. Our love needs to be like his.

Jesus, you love the whole, big, world. Help us to love it too. Help us to care for it and protect it. Help us to share your love within it. Amen.

## JESUS CHOOSES LIFE FOR US

*This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life. . . .*  
—Deuteronomy 30:19

In Deuteronomy, Moses is giving his farewell speech to God's people Israel. So he tells the Israelites straight up: "You can go one of two ways—the way of blessings and life, or the way of curses and death. Choose life!"

The choice seems rather simple and obvious, right? I can't imagine people saying, "Well, I'll choose curses and death." But some do. Some people reject or ignore the choice that God gives them.

The same thing happens today. People reject or ignore the choice to follow Christ.

In Moses' day, God laid the choice in front of Israel in terms of a "covenant." That was a pact between God and his people—a pledge of fidelity on both sides. God promised to be faithful to his people, and the people were called to re-

ciprocate. They needed to be faithful to God. They needed to keep the terms of the covenant. Those terms made up the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments: do not worship or serve other gods; do not harm your neighbor; and so on.

Yet no human could keep the terms of that covenant perfectly—till Jesus came. Jesus is the only human who kept every stipulation of the covenant. And he not only chose life for himself but also made it available to all who choose life in him. Thanks to Jesus, we have blessings and life!

Jesus, you have blessed us in every way. You give us life now and forever. Help us share this good news everywhere. Amen.



## JESUS IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." —John 11:25*

This quotation is a brief summary of the good news of Jesus. He says that anyone who believes in him will live, even after death. He says that life comes only through him. And he does not merely say that he knows how to find the resurrection and the life; he says, *"I am the resurrection and the life."*

This occurs amid the dramatic story of the raising of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, Jesus' close friends. Lazarus became ill and died while Jesus was away. Jesus even waited to come so that everyone would know Lazarus was surely dead by the time Jesus arrived. Jesus did this so that his followers would believe, learning that he had the power to raise someone from the dead. Then Jesus went to Lazarus's tomb and brought his friend back to life, so that everyone would believe

and see the glory of God (John 11:1-44).

Soon after that, resurrected life became available to all—through Jesus' own death and resurrection. As the apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus became "the first-fruits" of resurrection life for all who "belong to him"—that is, for all who believe in him as Savior and Lord. Because of Jesus' resurrection, all can rise with him. All that God requires is that we believe Jesus is indeed the resurrection and the life.

Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life. Raise us with you. Thank you for giving us life after death, that we may live with you as part of God's family forever. Amen.

## JESUS UNITES US

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. . . .*  
—John 15:5

Are we really united to Jesus like branches to a vine? Yes, and amen! And does that mean we are also united with other people who are Christians? Yes, it does.

If we are united with Christ, we are like a branch of the holy vine of God. Yet there are other branches too, and the people represented by all those branches are loved by God just as we are—even if we might disagree with them in some ways or don't understand why they believe as they do. Sadly, there are divisions in the worldwide church of Jesus Christ, and those can often be ugly and unnecessary.

Do different Christians see things differently? Yes. Do they act differently? Yes. May we separate from them, when they are living branches in the vine of Christ? No. To do so would be arrogant and hurtful.

Sometimes, however, people come up with false teachings that deny the truth of Christ (as in 1 John 2:18-27). And if they insist on following those teachings, they can mislead others and cut themselves off from the vine of Christ. That is a terrible tragedy, and we need to know how tragic it is when something like that happens. Let's do all we can to remain united with Christ and with the other branches of Christ's church. Jesus says, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. . . . Love each other as I have loved you."

Forgive us, Lord, if we think that we are always right and that others should conform to our way. May we seek unity in you, the true vine. Amen.

## JESUS RECONCILES US

*Now [God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*  
—Colossians 1:22

I have friends and family who have been estranged from one another. It is, at best, unpleasant. At worst, it is horrible and painful. Spouses despise each other; children and parents don't speak to each other for years; business partners want to be rid of each other. Things can get ugly in this old world.

This is why the news of God's reconciliation is so marvelous. The hatred, enmity, and hostility are scrubbed away. We are doused in the cleansing blood of Jesus. We can be reconciled to God and to others because we are made blameless and spotless again through Jesus.

Jesus makes us spotless and blameless through his own body and blood. We are no longer stained, sinful, and bitter. We are new people, remade with holy ingredients. Once we are reconciled with God,

we learn to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us (Colossians 3:13). It is no longer the old sinner who comes forward to bind up the ruptures we have with others. It is a new person, who is holy and without blame or blemish. Once we are made new in Christ, we can respond to others as Jesus responded to them. And they can see us not as the blameworthy people who harmed them, but through the eyes of Christ, who accepts us all. Anyone who is reconstituted in Jesus can and should accept another.

God, thank you for reconciling us to yourself through the death of Jesus. Help us to be reconciled with others through Jesus as well. Amen.

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