TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

December 2022

December 1, 2022 - To Make Intercission

He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

It says that Christ is able to save to the uttermost — forever — since he always lives to make intercession for us. In other words, he would not be able to save us forever if he did not go on interceding for us forever.

This means our salvation is as secure as Christ's priesthood is indestructible. This is why we needed a priest so much greater than any human priest. Christ's deity and his resurrection from the dead secure his indestructible priesthood for us.

This means we should not talk about our salvation in static terms the way we often do — as if I did something once in an act of decision, and Christ did something once when he died and rose again, and that's all there is to it. That's not all there is to it.

This very day I am being saved by the eternal intercession of Jesus in heaven. Jesus is praying for us and that is essential to our salvation.

We are saved eternally by the eternal prayers (Romans 8:34) and advocacy (1 John 2:1) of Jesus in heaven as our High Priest. He prays for us and his prayers are answered because he prays perfectly on the basis of his perfect sacrifice.

December 2, 2022 - I Will Magnify Him

I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. (Psalm 69:30)

There are two kinds of magnifying: microscope magnifying and telescope magnifying. The one makes a small thing look bigger than it is. The other makes a big thing begin to look as big as it really is.

When David says, "I will magnify God with thanksgiving," he does not mean, "I will make a small God look bigger than he is." He means, "I will make a big God begin to look as big as he really is."

We are not called to be microscopes. We are called to be telescopes. Christians are not called to be con-men who magnify their product out of all proportion to reality, when they know the competitor's product is far superior. There is nothing and nobody superior to God. And so the calling of those who love God is to make his greatness begin to look as great as it really is.

The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of God and Magnify Him.

December 3, 2022 - Glorify Him As God

Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21)

When gratitude springs up in the human heart toward God, he is magnified as the wealthy source of our blessing. He is acknowledged as giver and benefactor and therefore as glorious.

But when gratitude does not spring up in our hearts at God's great goodness to us, it probably means that we don't want to pay him a compliment; we don't want to magnify him as our benefactor.

Jesus did not come to minister to those who insist they are well. He demands something great: that we admit we are not great. This is bad news to the arrogant, but words of honey to those who have given up their charade of self-sufficiency and are seeking God and can now glorify Him as God,

December 4, 2022 - The Blood Of Christ

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)

Here we are in the modern age — the age of the Internet, smartphones, space travel, and heart transplants — and our problem is fundamentally the same as always: Our consciences condemn us and make us feel unacceptable to God. We are alienated from God. And our consciences bear witness.

We can cut ourselves, or give a million dollars to charity, or serve in a soup kitchen, or a hundred forms of penance or self-injury, and the result will be the same: The stain remains and death terrifies.

We know that our conscience is defiled — not with external things like touching a corpse, a dirty diaper, or a piece of pork. Jesus said it is what comes out of a man that defiles, not what goes in (Mark 7:15–23). We are defiled by attitudes like pride and self-pity and bitterness and lust and envy and jealousy and covetousness and apathy and fear.

The only answer in this modern age, as in every other age, is the blood of Christ. When your conscience rises up and condemns you, where will you turn? The answer is: Turn to the blood of Christ. Turn to the only cleansing agent in the universe that can give you relief in life, and peace in death.

December 5, 2022 - Once For All

[Christ did not] offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:25–26)

It is not to be taken for granted that there should be a welcome for sinners in heaven. God is holy and pure and perfectly just and righteous. Yet the whole story of the Bible is how such a great and holy God can and does welcome dirty, unholy people like you and me into his favour. How can this be?

If Christ followed the pattern of the priests, then he would have to die yearly. And since the sins to be covered include the sins of Adam and Eve, he would have had to begin his yearly dying at the foundation of the world. But the writer treats this as unthinkable.

Why is this unthinkable? Because it would make the death of the Son of God look weak and ineffective. Where would we see the infinite value of the sacrifice of the Son of God? It would vanish in the shamefulness of a yearly suffering and death.

There was shame in the cross, but it was triumphant shame. This is the gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). I pray that no matter how dirty or unholy with sin you are, you will see the light of this glory and believe in this once for all sacrifice.

December 6, 2022 - A People Prepared

"He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:16–17)

What John the Baptist did for Israel, Advent can do for us. Don't let Christmas find you unprepared, spiritually unprepared. Its joy and impact will be so much greater if you are ready! So, that you might be prepared . . .

First, meditate on the fact that we need a Saviour. Christmas is an indictment before it becomes a delight. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). If you don't need a Saviour, you don't need Christmas. Christmas will not have its intended effect until we feel desperately the need for a Saviour.

Second, engage in sober self-examination. Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter. "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23–24). Let every heart prepare him room . . . by cleaning house.

Third, build God-centred anticipation and expectancy and excitement into your home — especially for the children. If you are excited about Christ, they will be too. If you can only make Christmas exciting with material things, how will the children get a thirst for God?

Fourth, be much in the Scriptures, and memorize the great passages! "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:29)! Be a people who are prepared.

December 7, 2022 - My Soul Magnifies The Lord

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." (Luke 1:46–55)

Mary sees clearly a most remarkable thing about God: He is about to change the course of all human history; the most important three decades in all of time are about to begin.

And where is God? Occupying himself with two obscure, humble women — one old and barren (Elizabeth), one young and a virgin (Mary). And Mary is so moved by this vision of God, the lover of the lowly, that she breaks out in song — a song that has come to be known as "The Magnificat."

Mary and Elizabeth are wonderful heroines in Luke's account. He loves the faith of these women. The thing that impresses him most, it appears, and the thing he wants to impress on Theophilus, his noble reader of his Gospel, is the lowliness and cheerful humility of Elizabeth and Mary as they submit to their magnificent God.

The only people whose soul can truly magnify the Lord are people like Elizabeth and Mary — people who acknowledge their lowly estate and are overwhelmed by the condescension of the magnificent God.

December 8, 2022 - He Has Visited

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us." (Luke 1:68–71)

Notice two remarkable things from these words of Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, in Luke 1.

First, nine months earlier, Zechariah could not believe his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he is so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts it in the past tense: *"he has visited and redeemed his people." For the mind of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done. Zechariah has learned to take God at his word and so has a remarkable assurance: God "has visited and redeemed!" (Luke 1:68).*

Second, the coming of Jesus the Messiah is a visitation of God to our world: The God of Israel has visited and redeemed. For centuries, the Jewish people had languished under the conviction that God had withdrawn: the spirit of prophecy had ceased; Israel had fallen into the hands of Rome. And all the godly in Israel were awaiting the visitation of God. Luke tells us that another old man, the devout Simeon, was *"waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). Likewise, the prayerful Anna was "waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).*

These were days of great expectation. Now the long-awaited visitation of God was about to happen — indeed, he was about to come in a way no one expected.

December 9, 2022 - Big God For Little People

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. (Luke 2:1–5)

Have you ever thought what an amazing thing it is that God ordained beforehand that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem and that he so ordained things that when the time came, the Messiah's mother and legal father were living not in Bethlehem but in Nazareth; and that in order to fulfill his word and bring two unheard-of, insignificant, little people to Bethlehem that first Christmas, God put it in the heart of Caesar

Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled each in his own town? A decree for the entire world in order to move two people seventy miles!

Have you ever felt, like me, little and insignificant in a world of seven billion people, where all the news is about big political and economic and social movements and outstanding people with global significance and lots of power and prestige?

Our God is a big God for little people, and we have great cause to rejoice that, unbeknownst to them, all the kings and presidents and premiers and chancellors and chiefs of the world follow the sovereign decrees of our Father in heaven, that we, His children, might be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ — and then enter his eternal glory.

December 10, 2022 - No Place For Them

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6–7)

You would think that if God so rules the world as to use an empire-wide census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, he surely could have seen to it that a room was available in the inn.

Yes, he could have. Jesus could have been born into a wealthy family. He could have turned stone into bread in the wilderness. He could have called 10,000 angels to his aid in Gethsemane. He could have come down from the cross and saved himself. The question is not what God could do, but what he willed to do.

God's will was that though Christ was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. The "No Vacancy" signs over all the motels in Bethlehem were for your sake. "For your sake he became poor" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

God rules all things — even hotel capacities — for the sake of his children. The Calvary road begins with a "No Vacancy" sign in Bethlehem and ends with the spitting and scoffing of the cross in Jerusalem.

God could have seen to it that Jesus had a room at his birth but that would have been a detour off the Calvary road.

December 11, 2022 - Peace For Whom?

"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:12–14)

Peace for whom? There is a sombre note sounded in the angels' praise. Peace among those on whom his favour rests. Peace among those with whom he is pleased. But without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). So, Christmas does not bring peace to all.

"This is the judgment," Jesus said, "the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (John 3:19). Or as the aged Simeon said when he saw the child Jesus, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed . . . so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34–35). Oh, how many there are who look out on a bleak and chilly Christmas day and see no more than that — a sign to be opposed.

The key that unlocks the treasure chest of God's peace is faith in the promises of God. So, Paul prays, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13). And when we do trust the promises of God and have joy and peace and love, then God is glorified.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased! Everyone, from every people, tongue, tribe, and nation, who would believe, that's who.

December 12, 2022 - Born King

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:1–2)

Unlike Luke, Matthew does not tell us about the shepherds coming to visit Jesus in the stable. His focus is immediately on foreigners — Gentiles, non-Jews — coming from the east to worship Jesus.

So, Matthew portrays Jesus at the beginning and ending of his Gospel as a universal Messiah for all the nations, not just for Jews.

Here the first worshipers are court magicians, or astrologers, or wise men not from Israel but from the East — perhaps from Babylon. They were Gentiles. Unclean, according to the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

And at the end of Matthew, the last words of Jesus are, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18–19).

This not only opened the door for us Gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah; it added proof that he was the Messiah. Because one of the repeated prophecies was that the nations and kings would, in fact, come to him as the ruler of the world. For example, Isaiah 60:3, "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."

So, Matthew adds proof to the messiahship of Jesus and shows that he is the Messiah — a King, and Promise-Fulfiller — for all the nations, not just Israel.

December 13, 2022 - Come To Worship

"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:2)

Over and over the Bible baffles our curiosity about just how certain things happened. How did this "star" get the magi from the east to Jerusalem? It does not say that it led them or went before them on the way to Jerusalem. The answer is: We do not know. There are numerous efforts to explain it in terms of conjunctions of planets or comets or supernovas or miraculous lights.

But what is plain concerning this matter of the star is that it is doing something that it cannot do on its own: It is guiding magi to the Son of God to worship him. There is only one Person in biblical thinking that can be behind that intentionality in the stars: God himself.

So, the lesson is plain: God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky to get a little handful of foreigners to Bethlehem so that they can worship the Son. This is God's design. He did it then. He is still doing it now. His aim is that the nations — all the nations (Matthew 24:14) — worship his Son.

This is God's will for everybody in your office at work, and in your classroom, and in your neighbourhood, and in your home. As John 4:23 says, "The Father is seeking such people to worship him."

But what is not different is the purpose and power of God in the ingathering of the nations to worship his Son. The magnifying of Christ in the white-hot worship of all nations is the reason the world exists.

December 14, 2022 - He Was Troubled

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)

Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him, and he arouses opposition against those who do. In this story, there are two kinds of people who do not want to worship Jesus.

The first kind is the people who simply do nothing about Jesus. He is a nonentity in their lives. This group is represented at the beginning of Jesus's life by the chief priests and scribes. Matthew 2:4 says, "Assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, [Herod] inquired of them where the Christ was to be born." So they told him, and that was that: back to business as usual. The sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what was happening.

And notice, Matthew 2:3 says, "When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." In other words, the rumour was going around that someone thought the Messiah was born. The inactivity on the part of the chief priests is staggering: why not go with the magi? They are not interested. They are not passionate about finding the Son of God and worshiping him.

The second kind of people who do not want to worship Jesus is the kind who are deeply threatened by him. That's Herod in this story. He is really afraid. So much so that he schemes and lies and then commits mass murder just to get rid of Jesus.

So today, these two kinds of opposition will come against Christ and his worshipers: indifference and hostility. Do not be troubled or indifferent but worship Jesus.

December 15, 2022 - Offered Him Gifts

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:10–11)

God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25). The gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need-meeting. It would dishonour a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care-packages.

Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. Deuteronomy 10:17 says that God takes no bribe. Well, what then do they mean? How are they worship?

Gifts given to wealthy, self-sufficient people are echoes and intensifiers of the giver's desire to show how wonderful the person is. In a sense, giving gifts to Christ are like fasting — going without something to show that Christ is more valuable than what you are going without.

When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying, the joy that I pursue is not the hope of getting rich by bartering with you or negotiating some payment. I have not come to you for your things, but for yourself. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, 'You are my treasure, not these things.'"

I think that's what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Or whatever else we may think of giving to God.

December 16, 2022 - He Himself Partook

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

Walk through step-by-step the Christian view of Christmas. It might go something like this, a phrase at a time:

"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood . . . " In sending Christ, God has the salvation of his "children" especially in view. God was especially gathering "the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52).

" . . . he himself likewise partook of the same things [flesh and blood] . . . " This means that Christ existed before the incarnation. He was spirit. He was the eternal Word. He was with God and was God (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9).

" . . . that through death . . . " The reason he became man was to die. As God pure and simple, he could not die for sinners. But as man he could. His aim was to die.

" . . . he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil . . . " In dying, Christ de-fanged the devil. By covering all our sin. This means that Satan has no legitimate grounds to accuse us before God.

" . . . and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." So, we are free from the fear of death. God has justified us. Satan cannot overturn that decree. What a great Christmas present from God to us! And from us to the world!

December 17, 2022 - The Real Thing

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. (Hebrews 8:1–2)

The point of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has not just come to fit into the earthly system of priestly ministry as the best and final human priest, but he has come to fulfill and put an end to that system, and to orient all our attention on himself, ministering for us first on Calvary as our final Sacrifice and then in heaven as our final Priest.

The Old Testament tabernacle and priests and sacrifices were shadows. Now the reality has come, and the shadows pass away.

Here's an Advent illustration for children — and those of us who used to be kids and remember what it was like. Suppose you and your mum get separated in the grocery store, and you start to get scared and panic and don't know which way to go, and you run to the end of an aisle, and just before you start to cry, you see a shadow on the floor at the end of the aisle that looks just like your mum. It makes you really hopeful. But which is better? The hopefulness of seeing the shadow, or having your mom step around the corner and it's really her?

That's the way it is when Jesus comes to be our High Priest. That's what Christmas is. Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing: Mum stepping around the corner of the aisle, and all the relief and joy that gives to a little child.

December 18, 2022 - Ultimate Reality

We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. . . . They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:1–2, 5)

According to Hebrews 8:1, another great thing about the reality which is greater than the shadow is that our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. No Old Testament priest could ever say that.

Jesus deals directly with God the Father. He has a place of honour beside God. He is loved and respected infinitely by God. He is constantly with God. This is not shadow-reality like curtains and bowls and tables and candles and robes and tassels and sheep and goats and pigeons. This is final, ultimate reality: God and his Son interacting in love and holiness for our eternal salvation.

Ultimate reality is the persons of the Godhead in relationship, dealing with each other concerning how their majesty and holiness and love and justice and goodness and truth shall be manifest in a redeemed people.

December 19, 2022 - Much More Excellent

Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)

Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. What does that mean? It means that his blood — the blood of the covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 13:20) — finally and decisively purchased and secured the fulfillment of God's promises for us.

It means that God, according to the new covenant promises, brings about our inner transformation by the Spirit of Christ. And it means that God works this transformation in us through faith — faith in all that God is for us in Christ.

The new covenant is purchased by the blood of Christ, effected by the Spirit of Christ, and appropriated by faith in Christ. The best place to see Christ working as the Mediator of the new covenant is in Hebrews 13:20–21:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The words "working in us that which is pleasing in his sight" describe what happens when God writes the law on our hearts in accord with the new covenant. And the words "through Jesus Christ" describe Jesus as the Mediator of this glorious work of sovereign grace.

So, the meaning of Christmas is not only that God replaces shadows with Reality, but also that he takes the Reality and makes it real to his people. He writes it on our hearts. He does not lay his Christmas gift of

salvation and transformation under the tree, so to speak, for you to pick up in your own strength. He picks it up and puts it in your heart and in your mind and gives you the seal of assurance that you are a child of God.

December 20, 2022 - Life Abundantly

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Many of you will feel your loss this Christmas more pointedly than before. Don't block it out. Let it come. Feel it. What is love for, if not to intensify our affections — both in life and death? But oh, do not be bitter. It is tragically self-destructive to be bitter.

Jesus came at Christmas that we might have eternal life. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Do you feel restless for home? I have family coming home for the holidays. It feels good. I think the bottom-line reason for why it feels good is that they and I are destined in the depths of our being for an ultimate Homecoming. All other homecomings are foretastes. And foretastes are good.

Unless they become substitutes. Oh, don't let all the sweet things of this season become substitutes of the final, great, all-satisfying Sweetness. Let every loss and every delight send your hearts a-homing after heaven. Christmas. What is it but this: I came that they may have life? That we might have Life, now and forever abundantly.

Make your Now the richer and deeper this Christmas by drinking at the fountain of Forever. It is so near.

December 21, 2022 - Highly Exalted

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11)

Christmas marked the beginning of God's most successful setback. He has always delighted to show his power through apparent defeat. He makes tactical retreats in order to win strategic victories.

In the Old Testament, Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, was promised glory and power in his dream (Genesis 37:5–11). But to achieve that victory he had to become a slave in Egypt. And, as if that were not enough, when his conditions improved because of his integrity, he was made worse than a slave: a prisoner.

But it was all planned. Planned by God for his good and the good of his family, and eventually for the good of the whole world! For there in prison he met Pharaoh's butler, who eventually brought him to Pharaoh, who put him over Egypt. And finally, his dream came true. His brothers bowed before him, and he saved them from starvation. What an unlikely route to glory!

But that is God's way — even for his Son. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. Worse than a slave — a prisoner — and was executed. But like Joseph, he kept his integrity.

And this is God's way for us too. We are promised glory — if we will suffer with him as it says in Romans 8:17. The way up is down. The way forward is backward. The way to success is through divinely appointed setbacks. They will always look and feel like failure before we are highly exalted.

December 22, 2022 - A New Covenant

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah . . . " (Jeremiah 31:31)

God is just and holy and separated from sinners like us. This is our main problem. How shall we get right with a just and holy God?

God is merciful and has promised in Jeremiah 31 that someday he would do something new. He would replace shadows with the Reality of the Messiah and he would powerfully move into our lives and write his will on our hearts so that we are not constrained from outside, but are willing from inside, to love him and trust him and follow him.

That is, in fact, what he promised in the new covenant. But there was a huge obstacle. Our sin. Our separation from God because of our unrighteousness.

How shall a holy and just God treat us sinners with so much kindness as to give us the greatest Reality in the universe (his Son) to enjoy with the greatest possible joy?

The answer is that God put our sins on his Son, and judged them there, so that he could put them out of his mind, and deal with us mercifully and remain just and holy at the same time.

Christ bore our sins in his own body when he died (1 Peter 2:24). He took our judgment (Romans 8:3). He cancelled our guilt (Romans 8:1). And that means our sins are gone (Acts 10:43). They do not remain in God's mind as a basis for condemnation. In that sense, he "forgets" them (Jeremiah 31:34).

Which means that God is now free, in his justice, to lavish us with all the unspeakably great new covenant promises.

December 23, 2022 - I Have Sent Them

"As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." (John 17:18)

Christmas is a model for missions. Missions is a mirror of Christmas. As I, so you.

For example, danger. Christ came to his own and his own received him not. So you also. They plotted against him. So you. He had no permanent home. So you. They trumped up false charges against him. So you. They whipped and mocked him. So you. He died after three years of ministry. So you. But there is a worse danger than any of these which Jesus escaped. So you!!

In the mid-16th century the missionary Francis Xavier (1506–1552), wrote to Father Perez of Malacca (today part of Malaysia) about the perils of his mission to China. He said,

The danger of all dangers would be to lose trust and confidence in the mercy of God. . . . To distrust him would be a far more terrible thing than any physical evil which all the enemies of God put together could inflict on us, for without God's permission neither the devils nor their human ministers could hinder us in the slightest degree.

The greatest danger a missionary faces is not death but to distrust the mercy of God. If that danger is avoided, then all other dangers lose their sting. Christ escaped this danger — the danger of distrusting God. Therefore God has highly exalted him! As he, so you.

December 24, 2022 - Free From Slavery

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

Jesus became man because what was needed was the death of a man who was more than man. The incarnation was God's locking himself into death row.

Christ did not risk death. He chose death. He embraced it. That is precisely why he came: "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Jesus stripped Satan of his power. He disarmed him. He moulded a breastplate of righteousness for us that makes us immune to the devil's condemnation. How did he do this?

By his death, Jesus wiped away all our sins. And a person without sin cannot be condemned by Satan. Forgiven, we are finally indestructible. Christmas is for freedom. Freedom from the fear of death.

Jesus took our nature in Bethlehem, to die our death in Jerusalem — all that we might be fearless in our city today. If death is no longer a fear, we're free, really free. Free to take any risk under the sun for Christ and for love. No more enslavement to anxiety. The Son has set you free, you are free, indeed!

December 25, 2022 - The Reason

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

The assembly line of Satan turns out millions of sins every day. Some people work full-time on the assembly line.

Every minute of work on the assembly line makes God the laughingstock of Satan. Sin is Satan's business because he hates the light and beauty and purity and glory of God. Nothing pleases him more than when creatures distrust and disobey their Maker.

Therefore, Christmas is good news for man and good news for God. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). That's good news for us.

Christmas is good news for God because Jesus has come to lead a strike at Satan's assembly plant. He has walked right into the plant, called for the Solidarity of the faithful, and begun a massive walkout.

Christmas is a call to go on strike at the assembly plant of sin. We won't be a part of making it anymore. Christmas Solidarity will not use force or violence, but with relentless devotion to Truth it will expose the life-destroying conditions of the devil's industry.

Christmas Solidarity will not give up until a complete shutdown has been achieved. When sin has been destroyed, God's name will be wholly exonerated. If you want to give a gift to God this Christmas, walk off the assembly line of sin and don't go back. Take up your place in the picket line of love. This is the reason the Son of God appeared.

December 26, 2022 - For This Purpose

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world — to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37)

This is a great Christmas text even though it comes from the very end of Jesus's life on earth, not the beginning.

Notice: Jesus says not only that he was born, but that he "came into the world." The uniqueness of his birth is that he did not originate at his birth. He existed before he was born in a manger. The personhood, the character, the personality of Jesus of Nazareth existed before the man Jesus of Nazareth was born.

The theological word to describe this mystery is not creation, but incarnation. The person, not the body, but the essential personhood of Jesus existed before he was born as man. His birth was not a coming into being of a new person, but a coming into the world of an infinitely old person.

His birth was purposeful. Before he was born he thought about being born. Together with his Father there was a plan. He was the eternal Truth. He spoke only the truth. He acted out the greatest truth of love. And he is gathering into his eternal family all those who are born of the truth.

December 27, 2022 - Believe And Have Life

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

We should feel the awe, the fear, the astonishment, the wonder of the Son of God, begotten by the Father from all eternity, reflecting all the glory of God, being the very image of his person, through whom all things were created, upholding the universe by the word of his power.

You can read every fairy tale that was ever written, every mystery thriller, every ghost story, and you will never find anything so shocking, so strange, so weird and spellbinding as the story of the incarnation of the Son of God.

I pray for a breaking forth of the Spirit of God upon us; for the Holy Spirit to break into our experience in a frightening way, to wake us up to the unimaginable reality of God.

One of these days lightning is going to fill the sky from the rising of the sun to its setting, and there is going to appear in the clouds the Son of Man with his mighty angels in flaming fire. And we will see him clearly. And whether from terror or sheer excitement, we will tremble and we will wonder how we ever lived so long with such a domesticated, harmless Christ.

These things are written — the whole Bible is written — that we might believe — that we might be stunned and awakened to the wonder — that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into the world so that we might have life and life more abundantly.

December 28, 2022 - Rejoice In God

If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:10–11)

How do we practically receive reconciliation and exult in God? We do it through Jesus Christ. Which means, at least, that we make the portrait of Jesus in the Bible — that is, the work and the words of Jesus portrayed in the New Testament — the essential content of our exultation over God. Exulting in God without the content of Christ does not honour Christ. And where Christ is not honoured, God is not honoured.

To exult in God, we exult in what we see and know of God in the portrait of Jesus Christ. And this comes to its fullest experience when the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Romans 5:5 says. And that sweet, Spirit-given experience of the love of God is mediated to us as we ponder the historical reality of verse 6, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

So here's the Christmas point. Not only did God purchase our reconciliation through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10), and not only did God enable us to receive that reconciliation through the Lord Jesus Christ, but even now we exult in God himself, by the Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:11). Jesus purchased our reconciliation. Jesus enabled us to receive reconciliation and open the gift and Rejoice in God.

December 29, 2022 - Works Of The Devil

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7–8)

What are "the works of the devil" in this text? The answer is clear from the context which shows that the issue in this context is sinning, not sickness or broken cars or messed up schedules. Jesus came into the world to enable us to stop sinning.

Jesus appeared in the world for two reasons. He came that we might not go on sinning and he came so that there would be a propitiation for our sins, if we do sin. He came to be a substitutionary sacrifice that takes away the wrath of God for our sins.

The upshot of this second purpose is not to defeat the first purpose. Forgiveness is not for the purpose of permitting sin. The aim of the death of Christ for our sins is not that we relax our battle against sin. The upshot of these two purposes of Christmas, rather, is that the payment once made for all our sins is the freedom and power that enables us to fight sin not as legalists, earning our salvation, and not as fearful of losing our salvation, but as victors who throw ourselves into the battle against sin with confidence and joy and destroy the works of the Devil.

December 30, 2022 - Christmas Gifts

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

Three Gifts from God.

Gift #1. A Clear Purpose for Living

Believe Jesus and love others. That is your purpose. That is the sum of the Christian life. Trusting Jesus, loving people the way Jesus and his apostles taught us to love.

Gift #2. Hope That Our Failures Will Be Forgiven

Let the fact that failure will not have the last word give you the hope to fight. Want to fight sinful patterns in your life. And what God is saying to you is this: Let Christ's covering of your failure give hope to fight.

Gift #3. Christ Will Help Us

Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins. Christ will really help us in our fight. He is on your side. He didn't come to destroy sin because sin is fun. He came to destroy sin because sin is fatal. It is a deceptive work of the devil, and it will destroy us if we don't fight it. He came to help us, not hurt us.

Christ will help overcome sin in you. First John 4:4 says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Jesus is alive, Jesus is almighty, Jesus lives in us by faith. And Jesus is for us, not against us. He will help you in your fight with sin in the new year. Trust him. Enjoy these 3 Christmas Gifts from God.

December 31, 2022 - His Way Is Perfect

"The waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me. . . . This God — his way is perfect." (2 Samuel 22:5, 31)

After the loss of his ten children owing to a natural disaster (Job 1:19), Job said, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).*

This has several crucial implications as we think about calamities in the world and in our lives — like the massive disaster that occurred on December 26, 2004, in the Indian Ocean — one of the deadliest natural disasters on record with 1.7 million people made homeless, half a million injured, and over 230,000 killed.

Lesson #1. Satan is not ultimate; God is. Satan had a hand in Job's misery, but not the decisive hand. God gave Satan permission to afflict Job (Job 1:12; 2:6). Satan is real. Satan brings misery. But Satan is not ultimate or decisive. He is on a leash. He goes no further than God decisively permits.

Lesson #2. Destructive calamities in this world mingle judgment and mercy. God's purposes are not simple. Job was a godly man and his miseries were not God's punishment (Job 1:1, 8). Their design was purifying, not punishment

Lesson #3. The heart that Christ gives to his people feels compassion for those who suffer, no matter what their faith is. The Bible says, "Weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15), Job's comforters would have done better to weep with Job than talk so much.

Lesson #4. Finally, Christ calls us to show mercy to those who suffer, even if they do not deserve it. That is the meaning of mercy — undeserved help. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). His Way is Perfect.