TikTok Devotional Series Transcript:

February 2023

February 1, 2023 - The Leftovers

Jesus said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (Mark 8:17)

After Jesus had fed both the 5,000 and the 4,000 with only a few loaves and fish, the disciples got in a boat without enough bread for themselves. When they began to discuss their plight, Jesus said, *"Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?" (Mark 8:17). What didn't they understand?*

They did not understand the meaning of the leftovers, namely, that Jesus will take care of them when they take care of others. Jesus says,

"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:19–21) Understand what? The leftovers.

The leftovers were for the servers. In fact, the first time there were twelve servers and twelve basketfuls left over (Mark 6:43) — one whole basket for each server. The second time there were seven basketfuls left over — seven, the number of abundant completeness.

What didn't they understand? That Jesus would take care of them. You can't out-give Jesus. When you spend your life for others, your needs will be met. *"My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).*

February 2, 2023 - The Doors were Opened

Immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. (Acts 16:26)

In this age, God rescues his people from some harm. Not all harm. That's comforting to know, because otherwise we might conclude from our harm that he has forgotten us or rejected us. So be encouraged by the reminder that in Acts 16:19–24, Paul and Silas were not delivered, but in verses 25–26, they were.

First, no deliverance:

- *"They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace." (verse 19)*
- *"The magistrates tore the garments off them." (verse 22)*
- *They "inflicted many blows upon them." (verse 23)*
- *The jailer "fastened their feet in the stocks." (verse 24)*

But then, deliverance:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God . . . and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. (verses 25–26) God could have stepped in sooner. He didn't. He has his reasons. He loves Paul and Silas.

Question for you: If you plot your life along this continuum of Paul's initial suffering and later deliverance, where are you? Are you in the stripped-and-beaten stage, or the unshackled, door-flung-open stage?

Both are God's stages of care for you. He has not left you or forsaken you (Hebrews 13:5). If you are in the fettered stage, don't despair. Sing. Freedom is on the way. It is only a matter of time. Even if it comes through death. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). God's door is always open for His people.

February 3, 2023 - Help and Glory

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12)

It is very good news that God designs his glory to be magnified through the exercise of his grace. To be sure, God is glorified through the power of his wrath (Romans 9:22), but repeatedly the New Testament (and the Old Testament, for example, Isaiah 30:18) says that we should experience God's grace so that God gets glory.

Ponder how this works in this prayer. Paul prays that God would fulfill our good resolves. How? He prays that they would be done "by [God's] power." That is, that they would be "[works] of faith." Why? So that Jesus would be glorified in us.

That means the giver gets the glory. God gave the power. God gets the glory. We have faith; he gives power. We get the help; he gets the glory. That's what keeps us humble and happy, and keeps him supreme and glorious.

Then Paul says that this glorification of Christ is "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus." God's answer to Paul's prayer that we rely on God's power to do good works is grace. God's power to enable you to do what you resolve to do is grace.

That's the way it works in the New Testament over and over. Trust God for gracious enabling, and he gets the glory when the help comes. We get the help. He gets the glory.

February 4, 2023 - Need Them All

"Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." (Matthew 6:31–32)

Jesus wants his followers to be free from worry. In Matthew 6:25–34, he gives at least seven arguments designed to take away our anxiety. One of them lists food and drink and clothing, and then says, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all" (Matthew 6:32).

Jesus must mean that God's knowing is accompanied by his desiring to meet our need. He is emphasizing we have a Father. And this Father is better than any earthly father. Our Father in heaven! He knows everything about us, where we are, now and tomorrow, inside and out. He sees every need.

Add to that, his huge eagerness to meet our needs. Remember the "much more" of Matthew 6:30*, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?"*

Add to that his complete ability to do what he is eager to do (he feeds billions of birds hourly, around the world, Matthew 6:26). So join me in trusting the promise of Jesus to meet our needs. That's what Jesus is calling for when he says, *"Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."*

February 5, 2023 - Confess our Sins

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

A vague, bad feeling that you are a crummy person is not the same as conviction for sin. Feeling rotten is not the same as repentance.

Crummy feelings can be useful if they lead to conviction for specific sins. But vague feelings of being a bad person are not usually very helpful.

The fog of unworthiness needs to take shape into clear dark pillars of disobedience. Then you can point to them and repent and ask for forgiveness and take aim with your gospel bazooka to blow them up.

I'm broken, and I'm angry at my sin. I want to kill it, not me.

In this conflict, I hear the promise, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).* Peace rises.

Now, prayer feels possible and right and powerful again. How wonderful it is to confess our sins.

February 6, 2023 - That We May Return

Cause us to return, O Lord, that we may return! (Lamentations 5:21, my translation)

There is no hope for God's people unless God causes them to return from their sliding and leaping into sin and unbelief.

The book of Lamentations is the bleakest book in the Bible. God himself had decimated the apple of his eye: Jersualem.

- *The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger, and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations. (Lamentations 4:11)*
- *He has killed all who were delightful in our eyes. (Lamentations 2:4)*
- *The Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions. (Lamentations 1:5)*

So how does the book end? It ends with the only hope there is: Cause us to return, O Lord, that we may return! (Lamentations 5:21) That is my only hope — and your only hope!

Christian, this is true for you. This is your only hope of perseverance in faith. Glory in it.

Christ Jesus is the one who . . . is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)

He will cause us to return. Therefore, *"to him who is able to keep you from stumbling . . . be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever" (Jude 1:24–25).* Let us return.

February 7, 2023 - I Will Heal Him

"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners." (Isaiah 57:18)

Learn your doctrine from biblical texts. It stands up better that way, and feeds the soul. For example, learn the doctrine of irresistible grace from texts. In this way, you will see that it does not mean grace cannot be resisted; it means that when God chooses, he can and will overcome that resistance.

In Isaiah 57:17–19, for instance, God chastises his rebellious people by striking them and hiding his face: *"Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry, I struck him; I hid my face and was angry" (verse 17).*

But they did not respond with repentance. Rather, they kept backsliding. They resisted: *"But he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart" (verse 17).*

So grace can be resisted. In fact, Stephen said to the Jewish leaders, *"You always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).*

What then does God do? Is he powerless to bring those who resist to repentance and wholeness? No. He is not powerless. The next verse says, *"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners" (Isaiah 57:18).*

So, in the face of recalcitrant, grace-resisting backsliding, God says, "I will heal him." He will "restore." The word for "restore" is to "make whole or complete." The grace of God triumphs over our resistance by creating praise where it did not exist.

The point of irresistible grace is not that we can't resist. We can, and we do. The point is that when God chooses, he overcomes our resistance and restores a submissive spirit and heals us.

February 8, 2023 - His Purposes

For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

We seldom know the micro reasons for our sufferings, but the Bible does give us faith-sustaining macro reasons.

It is good to have a way to remember some of these so that, when we are suddenly afflicted, or have a chance to help others in their affliction, we can recall some of the truths God has given us to help us not lose hope. Here is one way to remember: 5 R's.

The macro purposes of God in our sufferings include:

Repentance: Suffering is a call for us and others to turn from treasuring anything on earth above God.

Reliance: Suffering is a call to trust God and not the life-sustaining props of this world.

Righteousness: Suffering is the discipline of our loving heavenly Father so that we come to share his righteousness and holiness.

Reward: Suffering is working for us a great reward in heaven that will make up for every loss here a thousandfold.

Finally, Reminder: Suffering reminds us that God sent his Son into the world to suffer so that our suffering would not be God's condemnation but his purification. Remember His Purposes.

February 9, 2023 - Promises to David

"There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown will shine." (Psalm 132:17–18)

Who will benefit from the promises God made to David?

Now connect this text with Isaiah 55:1, 3, *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! . . . And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David."*

From this side of the cross, here's how I would paraphrase that promise: Whoever comes to God through Jesus Christ, his Son, thirsting for what God is for us in Christ, rather than depending on who we are or what we do, God will make with that one a covenant.

Remember how the Bible comes to an end in Revelation 22:17? *"Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."* This is not just the Jews of Isaiah's day. This is anyone who comes to Christ to satisfy the thirst of his soul. *"I will make with [that one] an everlasting covenant!"*

What covenant? A covenant defined and secured by God's "sure love for David."This means that I am included in the Davidic covenant. What David gets, I will get in Christ Jesus. I will get the promises to David.

February 10, 2023 - Forgive us our Sins

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:4)

Who forgives whom first?

- *On the one hand, Jesus says, "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4)*
- *On the other hand, Paul says, "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." (Colossians 3:13)*

When Jesus teaches us to pray that God would forgive us, "for we ourselves forgive," he is not saying that the first move in forgiveness was our move. Rather, it goes like this: God forgave us when we believed in Christ (Acts 10:43). Then, from this broken, joyful, grateful, hopeful experience of being forgiven, we offer forgiveness to others.

This forgiving spirit signifies that we have been savingly forgiven. That is, our forgiving others shows that we have faith; we are united to Christ; we are indwelt by the gracious, humbling Holy Spirit.

But we still sin (1 John 1:8, 10). So we still turn to God for fresh applications of the work of Christ on our behalf — fresh applications of forgiveness. We cannot do this with any confidence if we are harboring an unforgiving spirit.

Jesus protects us from this folly. That's why Jesus says we ask for forgiveness because we are forgiving. This is like saying, "Father, continue to extend to me the mercies purchased by Christ, because by these mercies I have been forgiven, and I forsake vengeance and extend to others what you have extended to me." May you know God's forgiveness afresh today, as we ask God to forgive us our sins.

February 11, 2023 - For His Name's Sake

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

Why should we emphasize that God loves, forgives, and saves "for his name's sake" — for his own glory? Here are two reasons (among many).

1) We should emphasize that God loves and forgives for his own glory because the Bible does.

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

2) We should emphasize that God loves and forgives for his own glory because it makes clear that God loves us with the greatest love.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory. (John 17:24)

God loves us not in a way that makes us supreme, but makes himself supreme. Heaven will not be a hall of mirrors, but an increasing vision of infinite greatness. Getting to heaven and finding that we are supreme would be the ultimate letdown.

The greatest love makes sure that God does everything in such a way as to uphold and magnify his own supremacy so that, when we get to heaven, we have something to increase our joy forever: God's glory. The greatest love is God's giving himself to us for our eternal enjoyment, at the cost of his Son's life (Romans 8:32). That is what he means when he says that he loves us and forgives us for his own name's sake.

February 12, 2023 - I was Afflicted

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. (Psalm 119:67)

This verse shows that God sends affliction to help us learn his word. How does that work? There are innumerable answers, as there are innumerable experiences of this great mercy. But here are five:

1. Affliction takes away the glibness of life and makes us more serious, so that our mindset is more in tune with the seriousness of God's word. And mark this: There is not a single glib page in the Bible.
2. Affliction knocks worldly props out from under us and forces us to rely more on God, which brings us more in tune with the aim of His word.
3. Affliction makes us search the Scriptures with greater desperation for help, rather than treating it as marginal to life.
4. Affliction brings us into the partnership of Christ's sufferings, so that we fellowship more closely with him and see the world more readily through his eyes.

5. Affliction mortifies deceitful and distracting fleshly desires, and so brings us into a more spiritual frame and makes us receptive to the spiritual word of God.

May the Holy Spirit give us grace to not begrudge the teaching of God when we are afflicted.

February 13, 2023 - Those Who Have Faith

We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Hebrews 10:39)

Don't look at the temporary cost of love, and shrink back from confidence in God's infinitely superior promises. If you shrink back, not only will you lose out on the promises; you will be destroyed.

Hell is at stake in whether we shrink back or persevere. It's not just the loss of a few extra rewards that hangs in the balance. That is eternal judgment.

So, we warn each other: Don't drift away. Don't love the world. Don't start thinking nothing huge is at stake. Fear the terrible prospect of not cherishing the promises of God above the promises of sin. As Hebrews 3:13–14 says, *"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."*

We must focus on the preciousness of the promises and help each other value above all things how great the reward is that Christ has purchased for us. We must say to each other what Hebrews 10:35 says: *"Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward."* And then we must help each other see the greatness of the reward.

February 14, 2023 - He Prospers

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3)

How does the promise in Psalm 1:3 point to Christ?

It says, "In all that he does, he prospers." The righteous prosper in everything they do. Is this naïve or profoundly true? In this life, it certainly seems that the wicked prosper.

In this life the righteous often suffer and their goodness is rewarded with abuse. The psalmists themselves knew this. We are not protesting something they didn't already know.

Therefore, when the psalmist says, "In all that he does, he prospers," he is not naïve. He is pointing through the ambiguities of this life to life after death, where the true effectiveness — the true prosperity — of all that we have done will appear.

This is the way Paul thought. First, he celebrates the victory of Christ over death. "'O death, where is your victory?' . . . Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

Then, he draws out the implication that, because of this triumph, every work that believers have ever done will prosper. *"Therefore, my beloved brothers . . . in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).* When something is not in vain, it prospers.

Because Jesus died in our place, he guaranteed that every good deed prospers — sooner or later. Reviled here, Rewarded there, yet in all that we do, we prosper in Christ.

February 15, 2023 - Into Your Kingdom

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:42)

One of the greatest hope-killers is that you have tried for so long to change, and have not succeeded. You look back and think: What's the use? Even if I could experience a breakthrough, there would be so little time left to live in my new way that it wouldn't make much difference compared to so many years of failure.

The former robber, the thief on the cross next to Jesus, lived for another hour or so after his conversion. Then he died. He was changed. He lived on the cross as a new man with new attitudes and actions (no more reviling). But 99.99% of his life was wasted. Did the last couple hours of newness matter?

They mattered infinitely. This former robber, like all of us, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of his life. How will his life testify in that day to his new birth and his union with Christ? How will his life confirm his newness in Christ?

The last hours will tell the story. This man was new. His faith was real. He is truly united to Christ. Christ's righteousness is his. His sins are forgiven.

Now back to our struggle with change. The last years and the last hours of life matter. If in the last 1% of our lives, we can get a victory over some long-standing sinful habit or hurtful defect in our personality, it will be a beautiful testimony now to the power of grace; and it will be an added witness at the last judgment to our faith in Christ and our union with him as we are in His Kingdom.

February 16, 2023 - Glory and Strength

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! (Psalm 96:7)

What are we doing when we "Ascribe to the Lord strength"? First, by God's grace, we give attention to God and see that he is strong. We give heed to his strength. We give due regard to its worth.

We find his strength to be wonderful. What makes this wonder that we experience a "giving" kind of wonder is that we are especially glad that the greatness of the strength is his and not ours.

We feel a profound fitness in the fact that he is infinitely strong, and we are not. We do not envy God for his strength. We are not covetous of his power. We are full of joy that all strength is his.

We find the deepest meaning in life when our hearts freely go out of ourselves to admire God's power, rather than turning inward to boast in our own. We discover something overwhelming: It is profoundly satisfying not to be God, but to give up all thoughts or desires to be God.

In our giving heed to God's power there rises up in us a realization that God created the universe for this: so that we could have the supremely satisfying experience of not being God, but admiring the Godness of God — the strength of God. There settles over us a peaceful realization that admiration of the infinite is the final, all-satisfying end of all things as we admire his glory and strength.

February 17, 2023 - A Great Reward

Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. (Hebrews 10:35)

We need to ponder the superiority of God as our great reward over all that the world has to offer. If we don't, we will love the world like everyone else and live like everyone else.

So, take the things that drive the world, and ponder how much better and more abiding God is. Take money or sex or power and think about them in relation to death. Death will take away every one of them. If that is what you live for, you won't get much, and what you get, you lose.

But God's treasure is vastly superior, and it lasts. It goes beyond death. It's better than money because God owns all the money and he is our Father. We are his heirs. *"All [things] are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:22–23).*

It's better than sex. Jesus never had sexual relations, and he was the most full and complete human that ever will exist. Sex is a shadow — an image — of a greater reality, of a relationship and a pleasure that will make the most exquisite sex seem like a yawn.

The reward of God is better than power. There is no greater human power than to be a child of the almighty God. Everything the world has to offer, God is better and more abiding.

There is no comparison. God wins — every time. The question is: Will we have him? Will we wake up from the trance of this stupefying world and see and believe and rejoice in and love what is truly real, and infinitely valuable, and everlasting and grasp our great reward.

February 18, 2023 - A Better Country

If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:15–16)

Faith sees the promised future that God offers and "desires" it. *"As it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."* Dwell on this for a moment.

There are many people who water down what saving faith is by making it a mere decision with no change of what one desires and seeks. But the point of this text in the great faith chapter in the Bible — Hebrews 11 — is that living and dying by faith means having new desires and seeking new satisfactions.

Verse 14 says that the saints of old (who are being commended for their faith here in Hebrews 11) were seeking a different kind of country than this world offered. And verse 16 says they were desiring something better than what a present earthly existence could offer. *"They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."*

They had been so gripped by God that nothing short of being with God would satisfy. So, this is true saving faith: seeing the promises of God from afar, and experiencing a change of values so that you desire and seek after and trust in the promises of God above what the world has to offer as we desire a better country.

February 19, 2023 - A Freedman

He who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. (1 Corinthians 7:22)

Paul correlates our liberation with Jesus being our Master ("a freedman of the Lord"). And he correlates our new slavery with Jesus being our Messiah ("a slave of Christ"). It seems strange because the Messiah came to liberate his people from their captors; and masters take control of their slaves' lives.

Why does he say it this way? The switch has two effects on our new liberty and two effects on our new slavery. On the one hand, in calling us "the liberated of the Lord," he secures and limits our new liberty:

1. His lordship is over all other lords; so our liberation is uncontested — absolutely secure.
2. Free from all other lords, we are not free from him. Our freedom is mercifully limited. Jesus is our Master.

On the other hand, in calling us the "slaves of Christ," he loosens and sweetens our slavery:

1. The Messiah lays claim on his own in order to bring them from the confines of captivity into the open spaces of peace.
2. And he makes them his own to give them the sweetest joy. Rejoice in being a freedman.

February 20, 2023 - Prepared a City

He has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:16)

No pollution, no graffiti, no trash, no peeling paint or rotting garages, no dead grass or broken bottles, no harsh street talk, no in-your-face confrontations, no domestic strife or violence, no dangers in the night, no arson or lying or stealing or killing, no vandalism, and no ugliness.

The city of God will be perfect, because God will be in it. He will walk in it and talk in it and manifest himself in every part of it. All that is good and beautiful and holy and peaceful and true and happy will be there, because God will be there.

Perfect justice will be there and recompense a thousandfold for every pain suffered in obedience to Christ in this world. And it will never deteriorate. In fact, it will shine brighter and brighter as eternity stretches out into unending ages of increasing joy.

When you desire this city above everything else on the earth, then you honor God, who, according to Hebrews 11:10, is the designer and builder of the city. And when God is honored, he is pleased and not ashamed to be called your God who has prepared this city.

February 21, 2023 - I Live by Faith

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

Why did God create the universe? And why is he governing it the way he is? What is God achieving? Is Jesus Christ a means to this achievement or the end of the achievement?

Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God. He is God in human form. As such, he is the end, not a means. The manifestation of the glory of God is the meaning of the universe. This is what God is achieving. The heavens, and the history of the world, are "telling the glory of God."

Jesus Christ was sent to accomplish something that needed doing. He came to remedy the fall. He came to rescue sinners from inevitable destruction because of their sin. These rescued ones will see and savor and display the glory of God with everlasting joy.

In that accomplishment on the cross, as he died for sinners, Christ revealed the love and righteousness of the Father supremely. This was the apex of the revelation of the glory of God — the glory of his grace.

Jesus is the end for which the universe was made, and the means that makes that end possible to enjoy by justified sinners as we live by faith.

February 22, 2023 - Laid Down His Life

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. (1 John 3:16)

The love of Christ for us in his dying was as conscious as his suffering was intentional. If he was intentional in laying down his life, it was for us. It was love.

"When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

Every step on the Calvary road meant, "I love you." Therefore, to feel the love of Christ in the laying down of his life, it helps to see how utterly intentional it was. Look at what Jesus said just after that violent moment when Peter tried to cleave the skull of the servant, but only cut off his ear.

Then Jesus said to him, *"Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (Matthew 26:52–54)*

It is one thing to say that the details of Jesus's death were predicted in the Old Testament. But it is much more to say that Jesus himself was making his choices precisely to see to it that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.

Jesus was not choosing to take the way out that he could take, because he knew the Scriptures. He knew what must take place for his people to be saved so he laid down his life for us.

February 23, 2023 - He was Tested

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. (Hebrews 11:17)

For many of you right now — and for others of you the time is coming — obedience feels impossible. You feel that if you do what the word of God or the Spirit of God is calling you to do, it will make you miserable and that there is no way that God could turn it all for good.

Perhaps the command or call of God you hear just now is to stay married or stay single, to stay in that job or leave that job, to speak up at work about Christ, to refuse to compromise your standards of honesty, to confront a person in sin, to venture a new vocation, to be a missionary. As you see it in your limited mind, the prospect of doing this is terrible — it's like the loss of Isaac, the only son who can be an heir.

You have considered every human angle, and it is impossible that it could turn out well. Now you know what it was like for Abraham. This story is in the Bible for you.

Do you desire God and his way and his promises more than anything, and do you believe that he can and will honor your faith and obedience by being unashamed to call himself your God, and to use all his wisdom and power and love to turn the path of obedience into the path of life and joy?

That is the crisis you face now: Do you desire him? Will you trust him? The word of God to you is: God is worthy and God is able even when we are tested.

February 24, 2023 - He Set Me Apart

He set me apart before I was born, and called me by his grace. (Galatians 1:15)

Ponder the conversion of Paul, the sovereignty of Christ, and what Paul's sins have to do with your salvation. Paul was beating and imprisoning and murdering Christians as a God-chosen, soon-to-be-made-Christian missionary.

There was no denying or escaping it. God had chosen him for this before he was born. And now he would take him. The word of Christ was sovereign. There was no negotiating.

Damascus was not Paul's final, free will yielding to Christ after decades of futile divine effort to save him. No. God had a time for choosing him (before he was born) and a time for calling him (on the Damascus road). God called, and the call produced the yielding.

Therefore, the sins that God permitted between Paul's birth and his calling were part of the plan, since God could have called him sooner. Do we have any idea what the plan for those sins might have been? Yes, we do. They were permitted for you and me — for all who fear that they might have sinned themselves out of grace. Oh, how sweet are the designs of God in the sovereign salvation of hardened, hopeless sinners as God sets us apart.

February 25, 2023 - Stirring Up

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder. (2 Peter 3:1)

As Easter approaches, let's stir up our thankfulness and joy and admiration and amazement at what the resurrection of Jesus means for us. The curse of our fallen nature is that what once thrilled us becomes ordinary. The reality hasn't changed. We have changed.

This is one of the reasons the Bible exists. Peter says of his two letters that they are written to "stir up" or "arouse" by means of "reminder."

So, let's stir up our sincere minds by way of reminder. What has God done in raising Jesus from the dead? Here are a few biblical answers.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are born again to a living hope.

Because of Jesus's resurrection, he now has the glory for which we were made. Our ultimate destiny is to see him as he is.

May the risen Lord Jesus himself awaken and arouse your sincere mind to new depths of worship and allegiance and joy as God stirs you up.

February 26, 2023 - Walk by Faith

"Walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Our "walk" is our conduct, which should be "by," or in terms of, our faith. To walk "by sight" is to go about our life in terms of reason, our own evaluation. Faith is contrasted to sight because the latter is associated with what is earth-bound.

The entrance of the Hebrews into the land of promise after their forty-year exile for doubting God's promise that the land was theirs was a miracle. Most of those who had crossed the Red Sea on dry land forty years earlier had died; only their children, now adults, along with the two trusting spies, Joshua and Caleb, were

then entering. Once again, they would do so on dry ground, this time across the Jordan riverbed with their own children (Josh. 3:1-17).

According to Joshua 3:1-2, God required Israel to camp on the banks of the Jordan for three days before He stopped the waters and took them across on dry land. Consider that fact. For three days, all Israel had to camp near the banks of the Jordan and look at an impossible crossing. Three days gave them enough time to doubt God, to think of turning back, or to grumble at the absurdity of trusting in God. They did not doubt, and God took them across.

Perhaps you are now at a particular Jordan crossing. There seems to be no way through your problem, nor any safe crossing. All this may be the Lord's testing to see if you will walk by faith.

February 27, 2023 - From His Fullness

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Why does this fullness have such an impact on us, In part because . . .

- . . . the one from whose fullness I am being drenched with grace is the Word that was with God and was God (John 1:1–2), so that his fullness is the fullness of God — a divine fullness, an infinite fullness;
- . . . this Word became flesh, and so was one of us, and was pursuing us with his fullness — it is an accessible fullness;
- . . . when this Word appeared in human form, his glory was seen — his is a glorious fullness;
- . . . this Word was "the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14) so that the divine fullness was being mediated to me not just from God, but through God — God did not send an angel but his only Son to deliver his fullness;
- . . . the fullness of the Son is a fullness of grace — I will not drown in this fullness but be blessed in every way by this fullness;
- . . . this fullness is not only a fullness of grace but of truth — I am not being graced with truth-ignoring flattery; this grace is rooted in rock-solid reality.

Is it any wonder, then, that I would feel astonished and full of joy at the fullness of Christ!

February 28, 2023 - Revive Us Again

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Psalm 85:6

It's rare (and rarely good) when a Christian college chapel makes the evening news. But a service that began Wednesday 8/2/2023, at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky is still going, and news outlets have noticed. Now "The Asbury Awakening" is attracting visitors from all over. As one observer described:

When I arrived, I saw hundreds of students singing quietly. They were praising and praying earnestly for themselves and their neighbours and our world—expressing repentance and contrition for sin and interceding for healing, wholeness, peace, and justice.

Nearly 300 years ago, Jonathan Edwards offered five marks of a true work of the Holy Spirit. A true revival elevates Christ, opposes sin and Satan, prizes the Bible, distinguishes truth from error, and manifests love. So far, so good. Please pray for the students, leadership, and visitors of Asbury University, that what we are seeing there will spread and grow and renew the hearts of God's people, and heal the wounds of our troubled land. Revive us Again!