



COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH



God Loves The World

October 18 - November 28

CHBC Daily Scripture Readings

WEEK 1: WHO IS GOD?

Monday, October 18 - John 3:16-21

If there is a more famous verse in the Bible than John 3:16, I don't know what it is. It is one of the first Bible verses we memorize in the Children's Department. It is the verse written on the poster board at a football game. It is one of the first verses we share with a non-believer when witnessing to them.

John 3:16 deserves to be one of the most famous verses of Scripture because it is a fantastic, perfect summary of the story of the Bible. It tells us who God is, what God does, who God did it for, how we should respond, and why we should respond. Over the next four weeks, we are going to remind ourselves of the answers to these five questions. How we should respond will be an overarching question, but each week we will take one of the other four. This week, we ask who is God?

God is the main subject of John 3:16. It is God who initiates the love relationship between God and the world. God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but to save it. We see the heart of God in John 3:16-21. God has given every person an opportunity to come into the light instead of being in darkness. However, most people will stay in darkness because the light exposes the sin in their life. It is scary to be exposed in this way. People will return to the comfort of the darkness. Ignorance is bliss, as the saying goes.

God does not want it to be this way. God does not want the world to die in ignorance. God does not want people to die in darkness. And that is why light came into the world (John 1:9). The light that has come does not condemn us, but it does convict us. We must be convicted of our sin in order to repent and remain in the light. To come and be in relationship with God.

Who is God? He is one who did not spare His Son/Himself for you and I. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Tuesday, October 19 - 1 John 4:7-21

One of the first mathematical proofs a person learns is $a = b$, therefore $b = a$. In other words $2 + 2 = 4$ is the same as $4 = 2 + 2$. You with me? That proof does not work for our passage today. Just because God is love or $\text{God} = \text{love}$, does not mean love is God or $\text{love} = \text{God}$. Love is from God but love is not God. Just to clarify and then we will move on: just because a husband loves his wife does not mean that God is in the middle of their relationship. That's what we mean by saying love is not God.

So what does this tell us about God? It defines the eternal nature of God. It reminds us that everything God does is because of love. When one loves another person, in order for it to truly be love, love must be freely given. Love is not forced, but in freedom we give love to one another. It is in freedom that God shows us love.

Because God is love and God lives inside of us, the argument goes in 1 John that we know that we abide in Him when we love one another. In addition, by loving one another we can grow deeper in our love for God because love for one another is how we learn what love is. The passage goes as far as suggesting that if you do not have love for one another, God is not living inside of you.

God is love and that is why he sent his Son for the world. At the same time, God is love and that is why he is angered by sin. Sin is antithetical to love. Sin toward your neighbor and toward God is the opposite of loving your neighbor and God. God is love and that is why Christ's sacrifice was necessary. There needed to be atonement for sin, so God sacrificed Himself. "There is no greater love than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). This made the way to a relationship with God. God is love.

Wednesday, October 20 - 2 Timothy 3:1-4:5

As Paul begins to wrap up his letter to Timothy, he warns Timothy of what people will be like in the last days. Then, he charges Timothy with how to act differently than “people.” Paul uses his life as an example in 2 Timothy 3:10 as an example to follow. Paul does this regularly throughout the letters in the New Testament continually saying to different churches a version of “imitate me, as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

He then makes this bold statement in verse 12: “all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” That is a strong statement. If this is the case, and just a few verses later, God’s Word tells us that all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, then what about those of us who live very comfortable Christian lives with no threat of persecution. Are we doing something wrong? Ponder that question and we will explore it tonight. There are a lot of great words of encouragement and exhortation to us in these verses. I hope you will join us to study together!

Thursday, October 21 - Genesis 1:1-2

Who is God? God is the creator. There is something powerful about the Hebrew word used in Gen. 1:1 for create. This verb, *barah*, is reserved only for God. God is the only one who creates in this way. He is the only Creator. God is the origin of life in the beginning; He is the creator of your life as well. The same wind/Spirit/breath from God mentioned in verse 2 is the breath which gave Adam life, it is the breath which gives you life as well. Who is God? God is your creator. He crafted you out of clay, giving you the characteristics and personality you enjoy. God gave you everything that makes you YOU!

Last Christmas, my sister gave me a lego set which when finished was a Texas Rangers baseball hat. It has over 2000 pieces and took me 6 months to build! When I finished it this summer, I was proud of my accomplishment. I was careful transporting it to my office where it is on display today. When you create

something, you want to see it well taken care of. You don't want it to break or fall into pieces. You don't want to see it transformed into something you did not create it to be. It's the same with God. God is our creator and wants the best for us. He takes pride in who we are and what we can accomplish. He takes great care to make sure we are provided for. He doesn't want to see us fall away from Him and allow sin to overcome our life and eternity. God is our creator, wants the best for us, and that's why He took the punishment for our sin upon Himself. Praise God for his indescribable gift!

Friday, October 22 - Revelation 5:1-14

Who is God? God is on the throne. God is the sacrificial Lamb who overcomes the sin of the world. God is the Lion who can open the scroll and seven seals. Because of his status as Lion and Lamb, God is worthy of our worship. As a Lion, God is strong and mighty. As a Lamb, God is humble and meek and mild. Who is God? God is both Lion and Lamb.

It is important to see in Revelation 5 that it is the Lion announced and the Lamb who is seen. The Lion has taken the form of the Lamb. Christ has humbled himself and become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The Lion of Judah has chosen to become the Lamb to cover the sins of the world. In Christ, there is absolute power freely sacrificed.

The Lamb that is seen has seven horns and seven eyes, representing the seven spirits of God. Seven being the number of completion, it seems that the seven spirits of God are actually God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Who is God? The one who is on the throne, the one who is the Lion and the Lamb, and the one who is the Seven Spirits. God is in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Meditate and reflect on God as three persons today. Reflect on Him being on the throne, on Him being the Lion who becomes the sacrificial Lamb, and on

Him being the Holy Spirit within us and in the world. Worthy is God of our worship and praise.

Saturday, October 23 - Revelation 19:11-16

Who is God? God is on the white horse coming to conquer, defeat the beasts of this world, and establish the new heaven and earth. God will fight our battles as he makes righteous and holy war. He will defeat the enemies of His people. He is truly the King of kings and Lord of lords.

His weapon of choice is the sharp sword which comes from his mouth. God is a God of words. When God created the heavens and the earth, God spoke them into existence. I believe that Revelation 19:15 shows that it will be Jesus' words which strike down God's adversaries on earth. Let us not forget that his name is the Word of God in verse 13 and in the beginning was the Word (Jn 1:1).

Who is God? God is our Savior. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God has saved us, God is saving us, and as we see in our passage today, God will save us. Praise be to God.

Sunday, October 24 - Psalm 113

WEEK 2: WHO AM I?

Monday, October 25 - John 3:16

One of my best friend's favorite Christian songs is Casting Crowns *Who Am I?* Here are the first two verses:

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt
Who am I, that the Bright and Morning Star
Would choose to light the way

For my ever wandering heart
Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin
Would look on me with love and watch me rise again
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea
Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me

Who am I that God loved me so much to send his Son so that I may live? Last week, we looked at John 3:16 and discussed who God is. This week, we define the world by asking Who Am I? We will personalize the sacrifice Jesus made by focusing on our individual lives but make no mistake: Jesus died for the whole world. Jesus died for all the nations. For God so loved the world...Who are we that God would care about us? Who are we that God wants to have a relationship with Him? Why does God love the world so much? Who are we? Who am I?

Tuesday, October 26 - Romans 3:21-26

When kids are trying to assert their independence, many go through the “I do it myself phase.” When they are three or four, they want to fill up their water or brush their teeth on their own. The problem is that they are not old enough yet to do those things on their own. They can’t pick up the water pitcher; they don’t have the dexterity to put the right amount of toothpaste on the toothbrush. So when they try to do it on their own, they make a giant mess.

Before we get to the good stuff of who I am, we must acknowledge the bad. You and I are sinners. None of us like to admit it, but none of us are perfect. We think we can live this life on our own, but when we try to “do it myself” without God, we just make a big mess. We must admit to ourselves and to God that we cannot do it ourselves. We must realize that we cannot be justified in front of God by our own actions. We must admit that you and I are sinners.

Of course, if you are reading this, it is highly likely you have admitted this a long time ago and prayed for God to forgive you. You are a Christ follower, a Christian. So today, let's go a step further. When was the last time you confessed your sin to God? When was the last time you prayed and agreed with God that sin was sin? It is wonderful that we are justified by the grace of God, but even Christians still sin. What sin are you holding on to? What sin are you withholding from God? Satan loves Christians having secret sin because it stunts a Christian's spiritual growth. Get rid of that today. Admit to God that you still have sin in your life. Confess it to God, and commit yourself to turning from that sin forever.

Wednesday, October 27 - 2 Timothy 4:6-22

We conclude 2 Timothy tonight with some personal instructions to Timothy as well as greetings to others who are with Timothy. We will certainly spend much of our time looking at verses 6-8 tonight, but for the devotion today I want to go to the beginning of verse 21. "Do your best to come before winter."

When I read Scripture, I sometimes forget that the writers of these letters and books are human. They are not divine and they have human needs. They face human struggles. They are heroes of the faith in one sense, but, in another, they are ordinary people. Paul needs his cloak before winter. It is getting cold and he doesn't have anything to keep him warm.

Would you take time to pray for your church leaders today? We are called by God to do a noble task of ministry and it is God who gives us the strength to carry on. At the same time, we are human just like Paul was human. It may not be a cloak we need, but winter is coming. We all face dark moments in our lives and face daily struggles. Would you pray that the Lord protects us and that any material needs are provided? Let's come together to be able to pray for one another and worship God.

Thursday, October 28 - Genesis 2:4-7

This week's devotions build on one another. If you missed Tuesday's, I'd encourage you to go back and read it. Answering the question Who am I?, we started where we must: I am a sinner. To walk with Jesus, we must admit that we are not perfect and only God is. The beauty and majesty of God is that He does not want us to remain in this convicted, depressed state. He wants this to be a starting point of a lifelong journey with Him!

Yes, we are sinners, but we are more than that. We are creations of God. God speaks in Jeremiah 1:5 saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you..." Psalm 139:13-14a proclaims, "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Please do not use these as science lessons for your children and grandchildren but trust in the spiritual truth of God that we are his creation.

I have struggled in ministry feeling as if I am an imposter. When I gather with other pastors, they speak with consistent spiritual overtones. There's this language they speak that is not natural for me. Then, this doubt sets in. Am I really called to this work? Why don't I fit in with these pastors? Am I holy enough to be a pastor? These questions are not questions of conscience but from the devil, the deceiver, himself. God has absolutely called me to this work, created me to serve in this way. God called me to this work as I am designed, as I am. He wants Josh to live out his vocation, not a fake Josh who fits in with everyone.

God made you to be as you are and called you to serve because of who you are. You are not a mistake. You are not the sum of your mistakes. You are a creation of the Lord God, who took great care to create you as you are. You are not a disappointment to God. You are as He designed. God loves you; God loves the world.

Friday, October 29 - 1 John 2:29-3:10

First of all, let me tell you what this passage is not. This is not claiming that anyone who still sins is not really a Christian. While this passage out of context can be interpreted that way, when you read it in conjunction with the rest of Scripture, it is obvious that this passage cannot mean that. Also, practically, if that were the case, then no one is a Christian. Ok, so what is really going on, here?

What we see in this passage is that we are children of God. We answer the question “who am I?” in that way today. We are children of God. Using the metaphor of being children, a child does not choose their parents. In response to God, our father, we respond in doing righteous works and remaining pure as he is pure. The indwelling of these works in our lives is how God’s family is supposed to act toward one another. It can be summarized as John does in 1 Jn 3:11 “love one another.” If we follow the will of God and allow the Spirit to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” then we will live lives of righteousness and purity.

At the same time, we are not perfect at this and I haven’t answered what is going on, particularly in 1 Jn 3:4-10, because it sounds a lot like if you sin, you aren’t a Christian. Let us always remember that we are reading over someone else’s shoulder when reading the letters of the New Testament. That these letters were written to particular churches and particular times with particular issues. Then, we interpret these letters, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to apply to our lives. There were some in the church to which John is writing, who seem to be telling the children of God that sin is fine. That good or bad doesn’t matter now that you are in God’s family. So John writes what he does: “sin is lawlessness...everyone who does right is righteous...” What makes the most sense is that there is a distinction between momentary lapses of judgment and what we might call “living in sin.” As children of God, we must commit to living

lives which do not form the habit of sin. John makes it clear: sin is the characteristic of children of the devil, not God.

Who am I? I am a child of the Living God. I am one who strives for righteousness and to live as Jesus told the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11 “go and sin no more.”

Saturday, October 30 - Galatians 4:4-7

Who am I? Yes, I am a sinner, but I am a creation of God. Not only that, I am a child of God, which means I am also a co-heir with Christ. One point that is brought out in Galatians is that God adopted us into his family. This action would have stuck out to the original readers. Under Roman law, if you had a biological son or daughter who disobeyed you or dishonored you in some way, you could disown them, kick them out, write them out of the will. But if you were adopted, you were part of that family forever, and that relationship could never be dissolved.

We are the adopted children of God, co-heirs with Christ. We can have a blessed assurance that Jesus is ours forever. What does it mean to be co-heirs with Christ? Recall that phrase “in the fullness of time” in verse 4. It was in God’s perfect timing that Jesus was born, and it will be in God’s perfect timing when God comes and rules on a new heaven and earth. It is in that place, where we will receive our inheritance. We are co-heirs of the future Kingdom of God.

Sunday, October 31 - Psalm 114

WEEK 3: What is love?

Monday, November 1 - John 3:16

My favorite Christian band as a teenager was DC Talk. Popular in the 1990s, they had several hit songs which sometimes would crossover onto secular rock radio stations. *Jesus Freak*, released in 1995, was their most

popular song and even found its way onto the top 100 charts for all rock music in 1995. *Luv is a Verb*, another song written by DC Talk in 1992, has an important message for all Christians. The song reminds its listeners as the title suggests, love is a verb. Saying “I love you” to someone but not living out the actions of love makes the words you say meaningless.

“For God so loved the world...” Over the past two weeks, we have asked the questions, “who is God?” and “who am I?” We turn our attention to the verb this week: what is love? What we clearly see in John 3:16 and elsewhere in Scripture is love is not a feeling but it is an action. Love is a call to serve the person whom you love. Because God loves you and I, Jesus came to this earth and died, so that if we put our faith in Jesus’ actions, we will live forever with God. That is the ultimate example of love.

Can you imagine if God said I love you and never showed that love in any way? Can you imagine if God told Israel in the Old Testament I love you but never rescued them from oppression? Can you imagine if God said I love you in the New Testament but left people without hope of salvation? Is it love if there isn’t action involved? Thank God for his love and show love to someone else today.

Tuesday, November 2 - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If we are going to ask the question “what is love?”, we obviously have to read 1 Corinthians 13. There are so many descriptions of what love is and is not in this passage. We hear it read at weddings, even though it’s not about married people but the church at large, because it is a beautiful description of how to submit yourself to another person in order for the couple to grow as one.

While we could look at these characteristics of love, I want us to focus our attention on the first few verses. What good is it to have the answers to the world’s questions, if no one will listen to you? How fruitful is it to live a life of sacrifice if your sacrifice is not for the purpose of giving to others? Our Christian

witness to the world must be one of love. We have the answers to life's questions, but if we do not share that testimony in love, no one will listen; we are as effective as a noisy gong. We must speak the truth in love as Ephesians 4:15 says.

Let me give you an example of this intersection. Non-Christians need to know the truth that without Christ in their lives, they will go to Hell when they die. They need to hear that and understand that. However, minds and hearts will not be changed if you just scream "you are all going to Hell!" That is not how to gain the trust of another person. Instead, speaking the truth in love would take a different tact. You would be much more loving in your tone and conversational in your witness. You would express compassion instead of disregard for the other person. You would see the other person as one of God's creations as opposed to a horrible sinner in need of repentance.

What is love? Love is telling the world about Christ in the same way Jesus shared of himself with "the sinners" of his day. Are you speaking about Christ in a loving way? Or do you sound like a clanging cymbal to non-Christians?

Wednesday, November 3 - Titus 1

It seems as if Paul and Titus had a similar relationship as Paul and Timothy. In the introductions of each letter, Paul refers to these two young men as "loyal sons." Titus' work takes a prominent role in 2 Corinthians as Paul mentions several times about Titus' journey and even commends his ministry in 2 Corinthians 8:16-23.

There are many similarities between the letters to Timothy and Titus. Instead of focusing on the similarities, over the next few weeks we will note the differences. One major difference will be location. Timothy was in Ephesus, a church which was established early in Paul's ministry. Titus is on the island of Crete which, from indications in the book of Titus, seems to be a new church. Differences in setting such as this will lead to different instructions for Titus. One

example is who can serve in ministry. Paul's first letter to Timothy makes it clear that no recent converts should serve (1 Tim. 3:6). However, Paul does not put that qualification in the letter to Titus. It's possible that there isn't this qualification because everybody in the church is a recent convert! These types of differences will be what we focus on over the next two weeks.

Titus is leading a young church which has much to learn. Part of Titus' mission is to "put in order what remained to be done" (Titus 1:5). As one reads throughout the rest of Titus 1, Titus has a large task ahead of him to organize the Cretans into a fully functioning church. Let us dive into Titus and discern how we can apply these words to our church today.

Thursday, November 4 - Jonah 3:1-10

We spend the next two days discussing an example of God's Love to His people. It is clear that the Book of Jonah highlights the mercy of God towards not only Israel but everyone. God is a god of forgiveness and a god of second-chances. He rescues Jonah from drowning in the sea, and God gives Jonah a second-chance at fulfilling the calling on his life. God calls Jonah to preach a message of destruction to Nineveh which allows the Ninevites to repent of their sin. This leads to God giving them a second-chance as well. Thank you Lord for being a God of second chances!

Please note this as well though. God only gives second chances after Jonah and the Ninevites ask for them. God only forgives after there is confession and repentance. God is merciful, but He is also just. Salvation is not given to all but only those who ask. Jonah had to be humbled in the belly of a fish before being spewed onto dry land; the Ninevites had to humble themselves and turn from their evil ways before God withdrew the punishment which Jonah pronounced. God is merciful, but receiving mercy requires humility on our part.

Who needs to hear this message of mercy today? Pray for the opportunity to speak to this person about salvation in the coming days. Make a point to call

them or visit them so that they can know about the mercy of God and the decision they can make to humble themselves before the Almighty God. God loves you; He wants to give you mercy. You just have to ask.

Friday, November 5 - Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah was very glad to receive God's mercy. God could have just let Jonah drown in the sea and the story of Jonah would be done after the first chapter. Instead, God saves Jonah and gives him a second chance at life and ministry. However, when God decided not to destroy Nineveh, Jonah was very upset concerning God's mercy. It is very ironic. Throughout the Prophets, Jonah is one of the few prophets who the audience listens to, but Jonah is mad that they believed him when he preached.

What does God do with Jonah? Well, it's a good thing that I am not God because I would have been tempted to smite him right then and there. Maybe I would have sent a tidal wave to let him drown because of his pity party. Like I said, it's a good thing I am not God. Instead, what God shows Jonah is patient love. God speaks the truth in love to Jonah. God allows Jonah to vent and be angry, but God does not get angry. God lets Jonah make insane claims like he wants to die because a bush which gave him shade withered. And once Jonah is done, God calmly explains to Jonah that God loves the Ninevites and so God chose to save them.

I'm glad that God is patient with us. That even when we get upset about who God chooses to save, he doesn't kick us out of the family. I'm glad that when we act like the Elder Son in the Lost Sons parable, God doesn't rebuke us, but he kindly invites us to come into the party as well. I'm glad that when we want to control the gates of heaven, he speaks the truth in love and reminds us that that isn't our job. Love is patient. Thank God for his patience with you in your life. And when you get the opportunity, practice patience with one another.

Saturday, November 6 - John 15:9-13

What is love? It is the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. Jesus gave this command in these verses: “love each other as I love you.” I’m not sure if Jesus could have been more clear. The message is that we must sacrifice for one another because love sacrifices for the other person. Will it come to martyrdom for the Kingdom of God? I hope not and I doubt it, but we must be ready to sacrifice for one another in this ultimate way.

Again, the likelihood of this type of sacrifice is small, but sacrifice is necessary when we love one another. I share this as only an example, not a point of pride. Several months ago, I decided to get breakfast on my way into the office. I thought a chicken biscuit sounded good, so I headed over to Chick-Fila. When I get to the church, I see a homeless man who seems to have spent the night on our sidewalk. I had gone to get breakfast for myself, but seeing someone in need more than I, I offered my sandwich to him and got him some water. That’s what sacrifice can look like. Putting someone else’s needs ahead of your own.

If we abide in Jesus’ love, then this type of sacrificial love will flow from our lives without thought. We will choose to be last instead of first. We will be humble instead of prideful. We will go without so others can have. We will sacrifice our wants, needs, and desires for our friends.

Sunday, November 7 - Psalm 115

WEEK 4: WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE?

Monday, November 8 - John 3:16

Time is a constant in our lives. We are always concerned about time. Several years ago, I watched this bizarre movie called *In Time*. The premise is that scientists have discovered how to prevent aging which allows the body to live forever. However, in order to prevent overpopulation, time has become a

universal currency. At age 25, you are given one year's worth of time. If you do nothing, you die in one year. However, working gives you more time. Buying dinner costs time. If someone is rich enough, they can live forever with the mind and body of a person in the prime of his life.

Can you imagine living forever? Not in a sinful world, but in a perfect place. Can you imagine being somewhere for 10,000 years but having no less days than when we first begun? Can you imagine not worrying about death or sickness or pain or anxiety? Can you imagine being in the prime of your life forever? I hope you can imagine it because that is what Eternal Life in Heaven is like. As we finish our study of John 3:16 this week, we get the chance to consider what heaven is like and how we can experience the joys of heaven on earth today. Eternal life in Christ brings joy today and tomorrow. A relationship with Christ gives us a foretaste of glory divine. What is eternal life? It is being with God today, tomorrow, and forever. Praise be to God!

Tuesday, November 9 - John 14:1-7

It's fascinating to me how some people are naturally good with directions and others just aren't. I am a person who is pretty good with directions. I remember an uncle who was coming to visit us one time. I was either in 2nd or 3rd grade at the time. My uncle called to get directions to our house and I answered the phone. I was able to give him turn by turn directions from where he was to where our house was. When he arrived at our house, he was very impressed that I was able to do that as a 7 or 8 year old. My sister, on the other hand, is very very bad with directions. We have lived in Cleburne for almost three and a half years, and I still don't think she could get to my house without turn-by-turn directions. Some people just know the way to go and others do not.

What John 14:1-7 shows us is we know the way to heaven if we know Jesus because Jesus is the way to heaven. There are no complicated directions, just one. This is not an individual journey, but one with a guide. This is not a hike

into a deep forest, but one where the path has been cut. A relationship with Jesus is a relationship with God. Following Jesus is the way to eternal life. Who do you know who needs to hear the message of John 14:6 today? Who is uncertain of how to get to heaven? This is too important to not tell others about. “No one comes to the Father except through [Jesus].”

Wednesday, November 10 - Titus 3

Since we included Titus 2 with 1 Timothy 5 several weeks ago, we jump to the end of Titus and the conclusion of our look at the Pastoral Letters. Titus 3:4-7 is one of the most beautiful sections of the New Testament which succinctly describes what our Lord has done for us. In many Christian denominations, these verses are read as part of a Christmas Eve or Christmas Day service.

It is the beauty of this passage and the wonder of what God has done for us which really makes verse 9 a punch in the gut. We have been saved by the mercy of God and the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ and yet we have to be warned to avoid controversies and quarreling. Receiving eternal life (to return to our theme for the week) is given to us by God’s grace and yet we are over here arguing about whether we should baptize someone in immersion or with sprinkling. Eternal life has been granted to all who believe and yet we decide to fight about how often to take the Lord’s Supper.

The Spirit has been poured out on us. Let us not lose sight that this is what is most important. We must avoid frivolous fighting. I will not be in attendance as I am taking a quick vacation, but the sermon will be recorded for you to enjoy together after praying. Come together to discuss the goodness of God and what he has done. Let us also remind ourselves to avoid the nonsense.

Thursday, November 11 - Revelation 21:1-8

Have you ever been on a really long road trip that you couldn't wait to be over? I remember returning from a family vacation to Florida when I was 11 or 12 years old. We were driving the trip over the course of two days and as we got close to home, just on the east side of Dallas, I was done. I just wanted to be home, I felt like we were close, but in reality we were still two hours away. Those last two hours were agony! Of course, we did finally make it home. It was a glorious feeling.

Revelation 21 is the moment of arrival at home. For Revelation and the Bible, it is a moment of arrival for all Christians. It is a time when those who have conquered and persevered in life are given their reward. For those who have continued the journey, they receive paradise as described in these verses. There is no more sea, which is where evil metaphorically came from. There is no more night. There is God in our physical presence now and forevermore. Can you feel it? Can you sense it? Are you ready for it? This is eternal life.

But today, we are still on the journey. We have not reached the final destination yet. Much like we mentioned in our last sermon series, if we haven't arrived, we must keep going. Read Revelation 21 and meditate on these words. Put yourself in the story. Think about the awesomeness of being there for eternity. And let that promise of heaven take you through your daily struggles on earth.

Friday, November 12 - Ephesians 2:17-22

Eternal life does not begin when you die, but it begins the moment you begin to follow God. Eternal life is not just about you and God being together forever, but it is the family of God being with God forever. Ephesians 2:17-22 helps us to understand that together we are the temple of God. The Apostles and Prophets are the foundation, Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are the structure for the presence of God. God lives in us, together.

This is why it is so important for us to work together in the Kingdom of God. Our Christian faith is not an individual assignment but a group project. We are connected. The old hymn *Blest Be the Tie* is a great explanation of this. Verse 1 reads “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.”

Eternal life is being now and forever connected to the Father through the Spirit. Eternal life is being connected with other believers into a temple of the Lord with Jesus as the cornerstone of the building. There is more going on with eternal life than just you and Jesus. Eternal life is us and Jesus together forever.

Saturday, November 13 - Isaiah 7:13-14

Are you preparing for Christmas yet? Even though I am writing this six weeks ahead of time, I can all but guarantee you that our Christmas tree is up and the house is almost if not fully decorated for Christmas. Our passage today is a passage known as a prophecy about Jesus. Matthew quotes it in his account of the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:23). The virgin birth is not our focus today, but the name Immanuel is. As you likely know, Immanuel means “God is with us.” To me, this is one of the most important names which Jesus has. It is a great comfort in times of grief and anguish. This is one of the great promises of eternal life. God is with us. Simply put, every person has a choice to make while they are on the earth. Do they want to live eternally separated from God or eternally with God? Jesus came to this earth in order to be with us and make a way for us to be with him always even after the end of the age (cf. Mt. 28:20). He came to be with us and die for us, so that we may choose to be with him forever in heaven. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Becoming a Christian is truly as simple as believing that Jesus is the Son of God and he deserves to be followed. We believe that Jesus died on the cross and in some way that took the punishment of our sins away. If we put our faith in

him, we will receive eternal life. Have you made that decision before? Is there someone who needs to hear the gospel message in that plain of language? Praise God that he sent his Son to be with us.

Sunday, November 14 - Psalm 116

THANKFULNESS

Monday, November 15 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

As we prepare for Thanksgiving next week and for a sermon on Thankfulness this coming Sunday, we read a series of exhortations at the end of 1 Thessalonians. In the middle of this list is verse 18, “give thanks in all circumstances.” Some don’t see much of a connection with these commands at the end of 1 Thess., but I do. It is in these actions which a person can give the fullest Christian life possible. This list is not a buffet from which to choose a little of this and a little of that, but with Christ ruling your life, these are the ways to live the Christian life.

Near the command to give thanks are also the commands to rejoice and pray. All three commands are given with qualifications that these actions are not only done sometimes but they are always, without ceasing, and in all circumstances. This does not mean we rejoice and give thanks about all situations. This is not true. We do not rejoice nor thank God that we have cancer, but we rejoice and thank God for walking alongside us during the treatment. These actions are to be directed at God no matter the circumstance; they are not due to the circumstance.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” The past two years have been extremely difficult for most people. It can be hard to find things to be thankful for. The one thing that will never change is that you can give thanks to God for never changing and never giving up on you and I. No matter the circumstance, give thanks.

Tuesday, November 16 - Judges 2:16-18

I'm pretty certain that my kids would like to run away and join a circus. At least, that's what it seems like they are training for around the house. Whether it's the couch, chairs, stairs, trees, or anything else in the house, the kids will try to climb on it, swing on it, or jump off of it. Almost daily, LeeAnn and I have to remind them that what they are doing is dangerous and they need to stop. And almost daily, they get some type of injury from the dangerous stunts they know they are not supposed to do. And in these moments, it is very hard to have sympathy for my children.

In Judges 2:16-18, we have a summary of how God acts over and over again with the nation of Israel during the period of the judges. Notice in verse 18 what the emotion of God is during these situations: pity. In some older translations, it uses the word repent. "God was moved to repent" (KJV). The point is that God felt sorry for them. He wanted to deliver them from the calamity which they caused for themselves. That's how much God loved Israel.

And that's how much God loves you too. I am very thankful that God does not act like I do in these scenarios. Because in our relationship with the Heavenly Father, we seem to always be straying from His rules and commands. We are the kids jumping off the furniture and getting hurt. What does God do after that? When we cry out for Him, he comes to pick us up and console us. He doesn't chastise us or say "well, that's what you get" or "what did you think was gonna happen?" Instead, God is moved with pity and comes to our rescue. Thank you Lord for healing me even when I have caused my own pain.

Wednesday, November 17 - Jude

A few months ago we read Jude at the beginning of our Walking in the Spirit sermon series. Tonight, we will study Jude during Prayer Meeting. There are several odd verses in Jude which we can discuss tonight, but there is nothing

difficult about the overall theme of the book. False teachers have infiltrated this church and they must be called out and condemned immediately.

The end of Jude is a beautiful benediction for all of us. It reminds us that the only way in which we can avoid the punishment which we deserve for our sin is by God's grace. The only way we can stand before God and be deemed righteous is through our Lord Jesus Christ taking our place. Read verses 24 and 25 several times today. Make it your prayer and testimony before God today. And then let's talk about the entire letter when we come together tonight.

Thursday, November 18 - Genesis 21:1-7

It's hard to imagine how joyous Sarah must have felt at the birth of Isaac. I remember the joy LeeAnn and I felt at the birth of our two children. It is an unmatched joy in my life. Those days, along with my wedding day, are the three greatest days of my life. My family is always at the top of my list of things I am thankful for. When I describe myself I am a follower of Christ, a husband, a father, and a pastor. That is the order and priorities of my life. I am only more thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus than I am my family. But here's the thing: I got married when I was 23. We didn't have any troubles or concerns in our pregnancy. There was great amazing joy in those three days, but the joy did not come from suffering or excruciating waiting.

For Sarah, she waited and waited and waited to have a child. She never thought this day would come. She laughed so that she wouldn't cry when the messengers came to tell Abraham and Sarah she would become pregnant. But on this day, she is able to name her son Isaac, which means son of laughter not because of anxious, disbelieving laughter as she had earlier but laughter of joy. "How sweet to hold, a newborn baby" when you never thought you'd have one of your own.

As we get closer to Thanksgiving, give thanks to God for your family. Whether it is large or small, give thanks that God has blessed you with them. If

you are estranged from family at the moment, pray for them. Pray for your relationship so that you can come together and joy in your family once again.

Friday, November 19 - Genesis 45:4-8

Many times I have discussed with you about the progression of history from God's perspective and from our history. From our perspective, many times the world doesn't make sense. From our perspective, bad things happen to good people and evil causes calamity for the innocent. From our perspective, it is sometimes hard to even see God. Luckily, the world is not moving forward based on our perspective, but it is moving forward from God's perspective. It is from God's perspective where He can take evil and turn it for good. God can take the chaos and give it peace.

Today, I thank God for his providence. I thank God that He takes care of the world and each of us like he took care of Joseph and his family. I pray that we can see the events of the world in the same way Joseph saw God's providence. That, even after he was sold into slavery and thrown into jail through no fault of his own, he harboured no resentment toward his brothers because he saw the bigger picture. He realized that God had brought him to Egypt for a purpose.

In every person's life, there are ups and downs. Admittedly, some people have more downs than ups and vice-versa. In those times, remember that God is with you and God can take the bad and turn it for good. Praise God for his providence. Thank You Lord for taking care of me.

Saturday, November 20 - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Today, I thank God for Scripture. Scripture is to be our guide. It is to provide comfort, encouragement, and rebuke when necessary. It helps all believers be on the same page (pun intended) when it comes to living out our faith in Christ. We can be assured that Scripture stays the same now and forever. What the Scripture taught when we were children is what the Scripture still means today (of

course, you have to make sure your teacher of Scripture knew what the Scripture meant, but I digress).

What is your favorite Scripture? Mine is Micah 6:8 as you probably know. I think this verse does a fantastic job of succinctly summarizing what all of the Prophets were trying to tell Israel and what they are telling us: seek justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God. These verses guide me in my understanding of what Christians are supposed to do.

Think and meditate on your favorite verse or passage today. Why is it your favorite? What about it speaks to you? Thank God for His words which prepare us to be equipped for every good work.

Sunday, November 21 - Psalm 117

THANKS-MAS? CHRIST-GIVING? ADVENT WEEK 1: PROPHETS

Monday, November 22 - Isaiah 9:1-7

We begin our Advent readings today before taking a break to resume Thanksgiving devotions on Wednesday and Thursday. That's why the heading is a mix up of Christmas and Thanksgiving. It can be a confusing week to prepare for Christmas before Thanksgiving, but that is how we proceed starting today.

Instead of the normal four weeks of hope, love, joy, and peace we will use alternate Advent themes of the Prophets, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi. This week, we focus on the Prophets and, in particular, the prophecies of Isaiah about Jesus. Isaiah lived 750 years before Jesus was born. Yet when you read these prophecies, it is as if he is reporting the news of what happened during Jesus' life. What a miracle to see the prophecies of Isaiah come to fruition in Jesus!

Verse 7 is a great promise to all people in search of leadership in this chaotic world. In the Kingdom of God, there is endless peace. There is a leader who supports justice and righteousness. There is God who will reign forever. On

the day that this leader is born, this son will have authority. He will use this authority to break the rod of the oppressor and he will multiply the people.

In the days when Isaiah was prophesying, the outlook was bleak. The Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been conquered by the Assyrians and much of Isaiah's prophecy is toward the Southern Kingdom of Judah to warn them that their demise is next. People see a world which is spinning out of control and much of what Isaiah prophesies is that it is going to get worse. But then, there are passages of hope. It is not all doom and gloom. It's definitely going to get worse before it gets better Isaiah says, but if you look to the future, God will redeem and save.

Maybe this is the message you need to hear as well. In your life, you feel as if things are bad and they are only getting worse. Maybe that's so. However, if you look above the immediate path and look further into the distance, there is hope of peace. There is a land which is ruled with justice and righteousness. There is a place where there is endless peace and tranquility. And there is a promise at the end of verse 7. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." God will take care of us. Even when the day is dark, God provides the light we need.

Tuesday, November 23 - Isaiah 11:1-3a

In today's passage, Isaiah describes the character of the coming Messiah. First of all, he must come from Jesse, King David's family. It has been prophesied since 2 Samuel 7 when David was king that his family would rule on the throne forever. Imagine the concern from the people of Israel when Assyria overtook the Northern Kingdom. Imagine the horror when Isaiah says the Southern Kingdom will also fall. The people wonder "did God lie when he said David's lineage will rule forever?"

Isaiah quickly eases their concern. No, God didn't lie. In the future, the Messiah will come from Jesse and he will reign on the throne forever. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him. From this spirit will come wisdom, understanding,

counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. Is this not who Jesus is? He was wise when bombarded with questions from the Pharisees and understanding when speaking with the poor and needy. A counselor when the disciples have questions, and a mighty warrior when sacrificing himself on the cross. He was all-knowing, perceiving the thoughts of others, and he had fear of the Lord when he asked for the cup to be passed from him, but humbled himself to say “not my will, but yours be done.”

The Apostle Paul tells us in the New Testament to imitate Christ. Since these characteristics in Isaiah are the characteristics of Christ, we would do well to instill these characteristics into our lives. We are not seeking perfection, but we are seeking to be obedient to the command to follow Christ. Here’s the good part. The characteristics found in these verses are not found by hard work but by the spirit of the Lord resting on you. If you have the Holy Spirit in your life, which as a Christian you do, then you can live in this way by allowing the Holy Spirit to live through you. Commit yourself to living this way for the remainder of the week. Remind yourself that it is not about what I can do but what Christ can do through me. The Holy Spirit lives inside of you; let Him be seen on the outside.

Wednesday, November 24 - Luke 24:1-5

There is no church tonight with Thanksgiving tomorrow. We transition today and tomorrow from focusing on Advent to Thanksgiving. We read the glorious passage of Jesus’ resurrection today because I believe this event is the ultimate reason all of us can be thankful. I get chills almost every time I read “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Our God is alive!

Do you worship a God who is dead or alive? Do you worship a God who can do amazing work or not? I believe in a God who is still active in this world and active in each and every one of us. I believe in a God who is not dead but alive! Put your trust in God, who is living and active. If you are looking for a

reason to be thankful this Thanksgiving, this is your answer. Don't look for God among the dead. He is alive.

Thursday, November 25 - Psalm 100:1-5

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! I am thankful for all of you. I am thankful for allowing me into your lives over the past three years. I am thankful you have taken care of my family during that time as well. May you have a blessed day with family and friends today!

I am glad you are reading this devotion today. I don't know if it's before the chaos of family or after, but reflect on Psalm 100. How do you feel when you read this psalm? What emotions does it bring out? Meditate on this scripture throughout the day. Seven verbs govern our relationship with God in this psalm. Make a joyful noise, worship, come into his presence, know, enter, give thanks, and bless. Which of these actions is missing in your life? Give all of yourself to God today and live out this psalm because "the Lord is good...to all generations."

Friday, November 26 - Isaiah 11:10-12:6

We return to Advent readings today, even though you may still have the tryptophan hangover from yesterday. We gotta get ready for Sunday! Christmas is coming in 29 days!!! We read from Isaiah 11 on Tuesday reading about the character of the coming Messiah. Today, we read of what will happen because the Messiah arrives. The people of God return to His kingdom, Judah and Israel reconcile under the one messiah. When the people return to the one kingdom, they sing the songs recorded in Isaiah 12.

While the people of Israel assumed that this meant there would be a physical kingdom united once again under the Messiah, we know that this is not the type of nation which the prophecy speaks of. The Kingdom of God gathers all of God's people from all four corners of the earth into one people united under the lordship of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

As the people of God, we submit to God and allow Him to rule over us. One of the actions which Jesus commanded us to do was take the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is very symbolic. It is a time to remember what the Lord did for us by dying on the cross. The bread is his body and the cup is his blood. When we consume the bread and juice, we are symbolically consuming the person of Jesus. We believe that as Christians, Jesus lives inside of us. The Lord's Supper can be a time to symbolize that Jesus is truly inside of you and I.

During the four Sundays of Advent, we will be taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday. We will be very intentional in remembering the sacrifice Christ has made for us by coming to this earth and dying on the cross. Isaiah told the people that the Messiah was coming. He told them that he would unite the people of God once again. Jesus came and did exactly what God told Isaiah.

Saturday, November 27 - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

We close out the week of reading prophecy about Jesus by reading one of the Suffering Servant hymns in the latter half of Isaiah's prophecy. I am always humbled when I read this passage. To think that the one who was with God and was God in the beginning is the one who humbled himself to become human, a poor human at that, live a mostly unassuming life, and then be executed as a criminal all for yours and my sake. It is simply amazing to think that God did that.

We will light the first advent candle tomorrow. Advent is a time of awaiting the arrival of our King Jesus. Let us anticipate the coming of the Messiah together in worship. Would you join us? Who do you know who you can invite to hear the message of the Savior during this Advent season? Call them today and invite them to experience Christmas with you at College Heights!

Sunday, November 28 - Luke 1:68-79

We've read about the prophecies from Isaiah this week. Read the rejoicing that Zechariah the priest, the father of John the Baptist, exudes when he is able to speak for the first time in months! Zechariah prophecies about Jesus (68-75) and John (76-79). Praise God that he has looked favorably upon his people!