



WHEATON
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For Christ & His Kingdom

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*Risen with Healing
in His Wings:*

God's Tender Compassion for a Hurting World





Risen with Healing in His Wings: God's Tender Compassion for a Hurting World

LESSONS FROM THE GOSPEL OF LUKE FOR
THE 2020-2021 ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, AND
NEW YEAR SEASON

by Wheaton College President Philip G. Ryken

Jesus' Revolutionary Gospel

No better sermon has ever been preached than the first one Jesus gave in his hometown of Nazareth. The gospel according to Jesus—expounded from the prophet Isaiah—is filled with tender compassion for a hurting world. It promises to save us from all our needs and troubles—everything from worry and fear to more extreme afflictions like poverty, imprisonment, disability, and oppression.

*Hark! the herald
angels sing*


Jesus' words were revolutionary—but not in the way most people expected. They wanted an earthly salvation that would bring physical deliverance. But Jesus also had the deeper purpose to bring spiritual deliverance from the power of sin.

Jesus had special concern for the needs of the poor. Earlier in the passage, God's people are rebuked for not taking care of the needy. But Jesus also came to give the poor and the materially rich alike the greatest wealth of all—the gift of eternal life.

For the imprisoned, Jesus preached liberation not only for the body but also for the soul's bondage to sin.

For the blind, he preached a recovery of both physical and spiritual sight. Finally, Jesus preached a message of freedom for the oppressed—anyone bodily wounded by wickedness or crushed in spirit by a sin-sick world.

As we prepare our hearts to welcome the Christ Child, let us acknowledge that we are all spiritually poor, imprisoned, blind, and oppressed if only we will see it. We have nothing to offer God except the crushing debt of our sin. But with tender compassion, Jesus offers us the riches of his saving grace—true healing balm for our wounded bodies and troubled souls.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT *November 29, 2020*

We Are Called to Be Like Jesus

*And he rolled up
the scroll and gave
it back to the
attendant and sat
down. And the
eyes of all in the
synagogue were
fixed on him. And
he began to say to
them, "Today this
Scripture has been
fulfilled in your
hearing."*

—LUKE 4:20-21

*F*irst and foremost, Jesus' inaugural sermon was a proclamation that Isaiah's prophecy from long ago had been fulfilled in the very presence of those who heard him.

When Jesus finished reading, a sense of expectancy hung in the air. His next words made a radical claim: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus was announcing the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ had come. The compassionate Suffering Servant who empathizes with us in our deepest grief was here in the flesh.

Within this passage is a profound spiritual lesson: the gospel that saves us is the same gospel that other people need. The same Holy Spirit that anointed Jesus has been poured out on you and me. Christ calls us to proclaim his gospel to the people around us—people who are just as needy as we are.

*The gospel that saves us is the same
gospel that other people need.*

Like Jesus, we are called to care for people's bodies as well as their souls. This means meeting the material needs of others, visiting the imprisoned, helping the diseased and disabled, and comforting those who suffer.

But most of all, the gospel according to Jesus is about the renewal of the church and the reformation of society through the spiritual salvation of God's people. It is about

lifting us up from the poverty of our souls, releasing us from captivity to sin, and helping us see past our spiritual blindness.

As we prepare our hearts to receive the gift of the Christ Child this Advent, God calls us to reach out and help others who share our desperate need for salvation.

*With God's help, what steps can you take to repair your
estrangement from God and others?*



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 6, 2020*

Compassion: Our Holy Obligation

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. —LUKE 5:24-25

A large and impressive crowd had gathered to hear Jesus teach, including religious leaders from as far away as Jerusalem. It was so crowded in the house that it was impossible to get inside.

A small group of men outside were desperate. Their friend was paralyzed, and they longed to get him in front of the only man capable of healing his infirmity. Then one man had an inspiration: why not climb the outside staircase common to the architecture of the day and lower their friend through a hole in the roof?

We can only imagine the commotion below as debris started to fall and daylight appeared around the sweaty, determined faces of the men who would stop at nothing to bring their friend to Jesus.

Our hands are the hands God uses to reach out to people no one will touch. Our arms are the arms he uses to carry people to Christ.

Their story is a powerful example of Christian compassion. These men loved their brother and did everything in their power to get him the help he desperately needed. Caring for the needs of others' suffering bodies—a natural consequence of a sin-sick world—is a holy obligation. So is caring for their souls.

This story is also a powerful example of Christian faith. It was by faith that the paralyzed man was healed, for when Jesus "saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'" (Luke 5:20). We may infer that the

paralyzed man had as much faith as his friends—faith in Jesus and his power to forgive.

As we prepare to celebrate the Christ Child's humble birth, let us come to Jesus in faith, trusting him for healing and forgiveness. He will touch our sin-sick souls and cleanse our unholy hearts. He will also touch the people we love well enough to bring closer to him. Our hands are the hands God uses to reach out to people no one will touch. Our arms are the arms he uses to carry people to Christ.

How does your confidence in Jesus' kingship compare to the faith exhibited by the paralyzed man and his friends?

*Hail the heaven-born
Prince of Peace!*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 13, 2020*

Not All Who Wander Are Lost

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

—LUKE 15:4

It was a marvelous moment of spiritual insight. As Israel's shepherd went about his daily work of tending sheep, David realized that the loving care he gave his sheep was like the loving care he received from God. So begins David's most famous psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1).

The shepherd from David's psalm became part of Israel's working definition of God—a caretaker who laid his flock down in green pastures, led them beside still waters, and restored their souls.

But sometimes sheep get lost, and then they are far too disoriented to find their way home. As soon as they stray, they are defenseless against almost any danger. When they wander, they must wait to be rescued.

In those days, a man with one hundred sheep was doing rather well financially. He could probably afford to lose a sheep or two. And a full-grown sheep is no easy burden—weighing more than one hundred pounds.

Weary and worn, we often do not have the strength or the ability to find our way home.

But God's compassion for us will not allow him to abandon any one of us, despite the heavy burden of bringing us back. What comfort this gives to all the sheep! Weary and worn, weighed down by the slings and arrows of a hurting world, we often do not have the strength or the ability to find our way home. This Advent season, let us rest in the knowledge that our Savior the Good Shepherd, in his tender compassion, will carry us back to the fold no matter how far we roam.

In what areas of your life are you like a lost sheep, wandering away from the security of the flock and the comfort of God's love?

*Light and life
to all he brings.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT *December 20, 2020*

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. . . . Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows." —LUKE 12:4, 6-7

*W*e cannot eliminate fear altogether—especially the fear of death. It is part of our frailty as fallen creatures. Our souls were made for eternity. How can we help but fear our own mortality?

There is more than one kind of fear, however—a wrong fear and a right fear. Jesus tells us not to fear people who can harm only our bodies. This is a hard teaching because we love our bodies and instinctively protect them any way we can. We shudder at the prospect of death.

Nevertheless, Jesus tells us not to be afraid of people who can only kill our bodies. He draws a distinction between this life and the life to come. For the believer, death is only temporary. Therefore, our real concern ought to be with what will happen to us in eternity. If we belong to God through faith in Jesus Christ, our death will be our entrance into glory.



*For the believer, death is
only temporary.*

By clearly distinguishing between two different kinds of fear, Jesus gave his disciples another basis for Christian courage. The same God who holds the power of judgment is also the God who knows me and loves me.

Jesus proves this point by making a famous comparison between a sparrow and one of his disciples. If God takes such good care of sparrows, what will he do for us?

Trusting in God's merciful compassion comforts our fears. God is with us in times of trouble. He provides for our daily needs, guides our future, rescues our broken relationships, and heals the deep wounds of our hearts. If his eye is on the sparrow, we can be certain of his deep and abiding love for us.

Consider the fears you have harbored during this difficult year. How much energy did you expend worrying about problems that never materialized?



CHRISTMAS EVE & DAY *December 24 & 25, 2020*

Faith Delivers Us from Earthly Anxiety

And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. . . . Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

—LUKE 12:22, 31

*H*e causes of anxiety are many: fears about the future, financial pressure, loneliness, family conflict, grief, illness and death. Yet one of the clear commands of Christ is: Don't worry! Here our Savior gives us a double imperative: do not worry about either food or clothing, the basic necessities of life.

Far from adding to our life, anxiety always subtracts. Worry is a thief. It steals our time, our rest, our health, our hope, our obedience to God. Kierkegaard said it like this: Worriers feel every blow / That never falls / And they cry over things / They will never lose.

There are only two ways to live: for ourselves and the things of this world or by seeking out God and his kingdom. The key verb here is "seek." To seek is to set your heart on something, to make it your main objective.

There are only two ways to live: for ourselves and the things of this world or by seeking out God and his kingdom.

Of course we still need our daily bread. Of course we need to work so that we can eat, provide for our families, and plan for our future. The Bible speaks to all of these issues. God will take care of what we need.

Today as we celebrate the real joy of Christmas—that God became a man to give us peace—let us be delivered from all worldly anxiety. Our loving Father, in all his merciful, healing compassion, already knows what we need and has promised to provide it.

But Jesus tells us not to worry about such things. Worry tosses our souls like ships on stormy seas. At issue is not what we have or do not have. At issue is what we are striving after, what we are living for, and therefore what we are anxious about.

What does your heart long for? What do you seek?

*Born to raise us
from the earth*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

December 27, 2020

For Believers, Death Is Not the End

While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." —LUKE 8:49-50

As the crowds welcomed Jesus back to shore, a prominent community leader named Jairus fell at Jesus' feet. His beloved and only daughter was dying. He had heard about Jesus and the miracles he performed and had come in humble submission to ask for help.

But then, as Jesus became occupied with another matter, a servant came running with the news that Jairus had been dreading: his beloved daughter was dead.

When Jesus overheard the servant, he said, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well" (Luke 8:50). All Jairus had to do was believe. But that must have seemed impossible at the time. Grief overwhelmed his soul, and fear clutched his heart.

Yet Jesus told Jairus not to be afraid. He told him to have faith, which is the very antithesis of fear.

Faith and fear always stand in opposition. We have a choice to make: either we can be afraid of all the things that might go wrong and have gone wrong—or we can trust Jesus to see us through.

*Either we can be afraid of all the things
that might go wrong and have gone wrong—
or we can trust Jesus to see us through.*

We face this choice all through life—not least in times of global crisis. In every anxious situation, Jesus calls us to trust in him.

What is remarkable in the case of Jairus' daughter is that faith was extended beyond the grave. Jesus told Jairus not to be afraid, even in the face of death.

In one of the most dramatic scenes in Luke's Gospel, Jesus told two inconsolable parents and a roomful of mourners that the girl they loved dearly was "not dead but sleeping" (Luke 8:52). With these words, Jesus introduced an entirely new perspective

on what it means to die, based on his divine power over life and death.

The Christmas manger points us to the cross and the empty tomb. Because of Christ's sacrifice, death is not the end for believers in Christ. Our bodies, like Christ's, will sleep in death but will also rise again. We have this hope for ourselves and all the people we have loved and lost who believed in Jesus, including the losses that many have suffered due to COVID-19. The souls of the faithful still live, and their bodies too will rise again. "Do not fear," Jesus tells us. "Only believe, and all will be made well."

In what areas of your life do faith and fear stand in opposition?



NEW YEAR'S DAY *January 1, 2021*

His Compassion Heals— and Emboldens—Us

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."
—LUKE 7:12-13

*A*s Jesus approached the little town of Nain, he met a sad procession. A woman who had already lost her beloved husband was now grieving for her only son.

Jesus could see that the widow was alone in the world and had compassion on her. As “the protector of widows” (Psalm 68:5), he did not even wait to be asked, but graciously took the initiative.

Sadly, some people would rather not come anywhere near people who are grieving or hurting. Sometimes they are not sure what to say, preoccupied with their own problems, or embarrassed by others’ untamed emotions.

But Jesus cares. The word Luke uses to describe his response is a word of passionate feeling, an intense word for a gut response of loving sympathy for someone else’s pain.

As we experience the compassion of Christ, the newborn King, we are called to share it with others.



In this case, Jesus went a step further. As the crowd watched, he spoke to the body shrouded in death: “‘Young man... arise.’ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother” (Luke 7:14-15).

Jesus does not promise to repeat this kind of miracle every time a loved one dies—but he does offer us his comfort. The God of the universe—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—has deep compassion for his people in pain. He knows our suffering. He hears our cries of anguish,

for as the Scriptures say, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4).

As we experience the compassion of Christ, the newborn King, we are called to share it with others. To be like Christ is to be drawn to people who suffer, to have an instinctive compassion for their sorrows. The comfort we receive is the comfort we are called to give. Let us live according to the tender, compassionate, and selfless example set by the Son of Righteousness whose humble birth we now proclaim.

*Consider the last time someone offered you their compassion, no strings attached.
What did you learn?*

*Born to give
us second birth.*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

January 3, 2021

Our Gratitude Glorifies God

"Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks." —LUKE 17:15-16

While making his way to Calvary and the cross, Jesus was in the wilderness between Samaria and Galilee when he met ten lepers. In those days, lepers were social outcasts separated from their families and community—much like coronavirus patients on strict quarantine.

The ten lepers "stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'" (Luke 17:11-13). This is the kind of prayer that God loves to answer: a desperate cry for help offered in the name of his Son.

Yet the main emphasis of the story is not so much on how Jesus cured the lepers by the power of his words. Rather, it is on the way one leper responded to God's mercy: "Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks" (Luke 17:15-16).

Only one man out of ten went back to say "thank you." Sadly, this is a microcosm of humanity. Is any sin more characteristic of our fallen race than ingratitude? Ingratitude is a direct assault on God's glory, suggesting that God owes us whatever he gives us, and we owe him nothing in return.

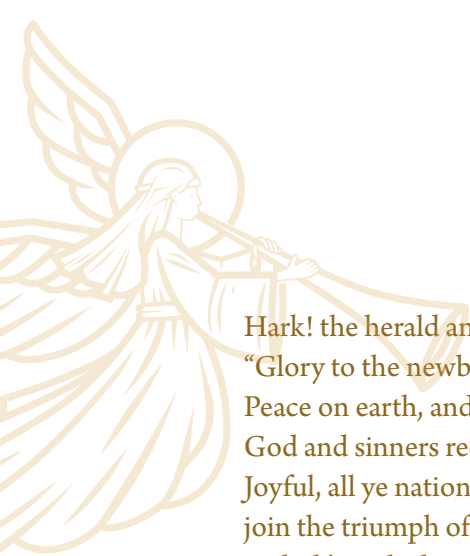
*The best way to show our gratitude is
by living for God's glory.*

To guard against this sin is to follow the tenth leper's example and return thanks to God on every occasion of his blessing. Whenever the sun dawns on a bright new day, whenever we sit down to a meal, whenever God works in a broken relationship, whenever we are confronted with problems that force us to depend on God, whenever we experience God's healing hand on our lives, it is time for us to praise him.

The best way to show our gratitude to God is to praise him and live for his glory. Let us praise him for his tender compassion; for the miracles that cured the sick and raised the dead; for the wisdom in his teaching; and for his love for lost and lonely people—sinners just like us.

As we welcome 2021 and hope for better days, let us praise God for the privilege of a fresh start, for family and friends, and for the courage and strength to share the love and compassion of Christ with a hurting world.

When it comes to showing gratitude, are you more like the tenth leper who said thanks—or the other nine?



Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th’angelic hosts proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin’s womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th’incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

Refrain:

Hark! the herald angels sing
“Glory to the newborn King!”

First published in 1739, “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” features lyrical contributions from Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, two of Methodism’s founding ministers, and music by Felix Mendelssohn. Brimming with theological truths, the beloved Christmas carol sums up the entire gospel story, focusing on Christ’s nature, birth and incarnation, ministry, and salvific purpose.