

The background is a watercolor painting. The top half features soft, blended washes of teal, light blue, and pale yellow. The middle and bottom sections are dominated by warm, vibrant colors like orange, red, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. In the lower right foreground, a simple, dark wooden cross stands on a small patch of ground with some sparse, dark grass. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and color bleeding.

# THE SEVEN

2024 HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL

In the beginning, God created all things by the power of his word. Through his word, God gives life and wisdom, making us fit for every good work. When God speaks, his power goes forth and always accomplishes exactly what he intends, never returning to him void.

As we meditate on the final hours of Jesus' life, we do so this year by considering his last words on the cross. With these words, Jesus announced the full extent of his suffering and the magnitude of his saving power. With these words, Jesus invites us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the unfathomable love of God.

Jesus Christ is the living Word of the Father made flesh. And as God once created the world, Jesus came so that the new creation would dawn upon us. In Christ, God is making all things new.

This Holy Week, may the seven words of the Word make you new as well.

written by:

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*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Luke 2:22-32; Luke 23:32-38

After being nailed to the cross, Jesus' first word was to pray that God would forgive: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is a striking moment, which reveals that Jesus possesses a capacity for love that goes well beyond what you or I experience. Who among us, if condemned while innocent, would say words like these?

There were some of whom it could be said that they knew not what they did, but that is not true of everyone. The pagan Pilate had no interest in the Jews except to keep the peace, and condemned Jesus although he knew he was innocent (Luke 23:4). But the priests and Pharisees were no better. During his ministry, Jesus healed hundreds—thousands—and sent them to the priests, saying, "[G]o and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for our cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them" (Luke 5:14). When Jesus healed a man born blind on the Sabbath, the Pharisees condemned that man and cast him out of their synagogue for refusing to denounce Jesus as a sinner (John 9). They were obligated by the covenant to receive David's Son as their king, but instead cried out, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

But the random soldiers gathered to execute Jesus were not like either the leaders of the Jews or the Romans. Those soldiers had likely never heard Jesus' name until that very day. They were commanded by evil men to kill one they thought was a criminal and found the blood of the Lamb—the Lord of life—upon their hands. Yet, to have that blood upon you means that salvation is not far from you—for it is by his blood that we are cleansed forever. And the Father answered Jesus' prayer when at least one of the centurions recognized the truth: "when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent!'" (Luke 23:47). This centurion's redemption is the first fruit of the new covenant, when God began fulfilling his promise to Abraham, to bring all the nations into covenant with him. All who have faith like Abraham are now called the sons of God, whether Jew or Gentile and made members of Israel—God's covenant people (Galatians 3, Ephesians 2).

Here we see the heart of Christ's work. He was not forced to the cross but went voluntarily because it would be through his death that he would provide "an eternal redemption" for all who called upon him for mercy (Hebrews 9:12). He did so, precisely because he intended to reconcile the world—Jews and Gentiles—to one another and to God, even "while we were enemies" (Romans 5:10). On the cross, Jesus is himself the greatest example, not only of love but of the love of his enemies as well. And Christ does more than just forgive us; he makes us to be like himself. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church, likewise prayed this prayer of Jesus when he gave his final breath, saying, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). And just as God answered Jesus' prayer of mercy, God answered Stephen's as well, redeeming a man named Saul; who would go on to write most of the books in our New Testament and become the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Because of Christ's death on the cross, we can know that we will hear the words, "Father, for them"—but it also means that, like Stephen, Jesus will make us to speak as he spoke, pray as he prayed, to live and even to die, in such a way that God's grace is extended to many who would otherwise never have heard Jesus' name.

In Christ, we have been reconciled to God, but we have also been made the new priests of the world, carrying on Christ's ministry of reconciliation. In Jesus' name, may we all offer such forgiveness to our enemies and leave all vengeance to the Lord. And may we have great confidence that God can grant repentance to them, even as he has to us.

*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*

Genesis 2; Luke 23:39-43

What comes to your mind when you hear the word paradise? For many, it's the image of white sandy beaches, bright sunshine, and clear blue water. But in the Bible, paradise is synonymous with the Garden.

In the beginning, God created a world that was good and had everything necessary for an abundant life, but it needed to be cultivated. The world, in the beginning, was like an untilled field. Before his people had learned to plant and till and irrigate and reap, God himself planted a Garden as Adam looked on (Genesis 2:8-10). God was showing Adam what his task would be in the world and was ensuring that our first parents would have one place of abundance in the world, where they could feast in God's presence.

If they had trusted God, Adam and Eve would have become like fruit trees themselves, for the righteous man is like "A tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit" (Psalm 1:3). Their lives would have been fruitful—in righteousness, in rewarding work, and in "children...like olive shoots" growing all around them (Psalm 128:3). They would have become a righteous "orchard" in the midst of God's orchard. But it did not last.

Instead of trusting God, they listened to the words of the devil. Instead of living at peace with God in paradise, they found themselves shut out. Instead of bringing forth new abundance from the world, now it would bring forth thorns and thistles. For failing to guard the Garden as Adam has been tasked, now an angel would guard the Garden from them. Where the Garden had once been the place where God sustained their life, now to enter God's Garden would mean death (Genesis 3). But Christ came to make a way back to paradise for all who trust in him.

For most people outside the church, if they happen to believe in God and some final judgment, they assume that God will accept us on the basis that our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. Naturally, they think of themselves as good people. The problem is that this couldn't be further from the truth. Paul says that everyone who "does not abide by all things" in the Law is "cursed" (Galatians 3:10). God has one standard—perfection—and all who fall short of that standard stands condemned already. But where does this leave us? What hope could there possibly be?

The Lord's word to the man on the cross is the greatest comfort for all who know themselves to be guilty. This man stood condemned, and rightfully so. For his evil deeds, he suffered the penalty of death and, if he relied upon his own works, he knew he would stand before God among the cursed. Yet Christ did not come in order to redeem those who have perfectly kept the Law. Rather, Christ came to lift the curse and to open the way before us: For "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we [all] might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13-14).

God shows his love for the world, not by approving of the righteous—there are none—but by taking upon himself the penalty we all deserve so that we can be accepted. But he does far more than merely clean our slate—he makes us new creations here and now (2 Corinthians 5:17). While we fell in Adam, in Christ we are being renewed day by day. While Adam once walked in God's presence in the Garden, God now walks in us. In Christ, we have met paradise in person, and we can be confident that, by his work within us, he will use us to make the world a bit more on earth as it is in heaven.

*Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.*

Genesis 3; John 19:23-27

Part of the fall was that Eve—the mother of all the living—and all her daughters, would experience greater pain in having children. God said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16). It wasn’t just that childbirth would be painful, but that mothers in particular would suffer over their children’s sufferings throughout their life. How could they not—Mothers are connected to their children in an unparalleled way. The womb of every mother is like the world in the beginning, as the Spirit hovers over the waters, bringing life in the midst of that dark void. Motherhood is a unique glory—mothers are the gateway into the world—but it brings with it particular pain after the fall, for every mother now brings forth sinful boys and girls. Motherhood is one of the most significant battlefields in spiritual war. God promised Satan in the Garden, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). While the world suggests that motherhood is enslavement to male domination and a sort of wasted, lesser life that robs women of their potential, the Bible esteems mothers bringing forth children as the essential means by which the kingdom of Satan will be fought and destroyed. Children are like “arrows in the hands of a warrior” (Psalm 127:4). Our God is “a man of war” (Exodus 15:3) and he raises the faithful in each generation to do battle against the dominion of darkness, using godly women to bring them forth. Yet, the daughters of God’s people continued to be fruitful and multiply, knowing that one day the Child would come—the One who would crush Satan in an ultimate and final way, whose kingdom would devour Satan’s dark dominion and establish peace forever.

Mary, our Lord’s mother, surely experienced the greatest glory and, perhaps, the greatest pain of all. While the prophet says, “[T]o us a child is born” (Isaiah 9:6), Mary alone could say, “To me the Child is born.” To her the angel came calling her the favored one among all women, for to her would be born “the Son of the Most High [who] will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:28, 33). Because the Spirit would uniquely overshadow her, not only would he be born though she was a virgin, but he would be born holy where all others were born in sin. Jesus is God’s Son—and Mary’s. It would be difficult to imagine what it must have been like to have Jesus in your family. At twelve he had more wisdom and understanding than all the priests and teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). At times she and the rest of Jesus’ family sought to draw him away from his ministry, thinking he had gone mad (Mark 3:21). It’s clear that Mary, like Jesus’ other disciples, did not quite understand how Jesus would accomplish his victory. But she had been warned, “[T]his child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel [and] a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Luke 2:34-35).

The cross was the time of Jesus’ greatest suffering and Mary’s as well. As his hands and feet were pierced, her soul was pierced as she bore the penalty of the fall. In pain, she brought forth Jesus and in pain, she stood vigil at his cross in the hour of the power of darkness (Luke 22:53). At the wedding at Cana, Jesus had told her, “Woman, my hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). And when that hour finally came, he said, “Woman, here is your son,” and to John, “Here is your mother” (John 19:26-27). With the weight of the world’s sin upon his shoulders, Jesus bore another responsibility to fulfill all righteousness—to ensure Mary’s care when he was gone. Mothers, take comfort—the Lord is with you. As Mary brought forth Christ in the world, you, in all your trials and difficulties, sleepless nights and, often, thankless work, are bringing forth children whom God is making into the image of Christ. God regards your sacrifices. You do not labor in vain. You can be confident that the Lord will bless and keep you because, as unfathomable as it may seem, our God has a mother as well.

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*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Psalm 22; Mark 15:33-34

None of the last words of Jesus on the cross cause as much consternation as the words spoken here, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Too often we hear the idea that Jesus was indeed forsaken by the Father on the cross, but is this true?

Jesus is the Living Word of the Father, the exact radiance of his glory, and the full revelation of God in the flesh (John 1:1, Hebrews 1:1-3). As one might expect, Jesus speaks the words that God has spoken, and the same is true for this so-called “cry of dereliction.” At the hour of his death, the Lord was not expressing that God had abandoned him but was calling to mind the words of David in Psalm 22. David was not merely a king, but also a prophet (Acts 2:30), and Psalm 22 is a striking prophesy of Christ’s crucifixion.

David speaks of a man surrounded by those who seek to devour him like “roaring lions” (Psalm 22:13). Like Satan, the roaring lion who seeks to devour Christians (1 Peter 5:8), the sons of the devil had determined to put Jesus on the Cross (John 8:44), but they did so according to God’s plan (Acts 2:23). They “pierce[d his] hands and feet,” “divide[d his] garments among them,” “cast lots” for his clothing (Psalm 22:16-18), which the soldiers fulfilled (Matt. 27:35). David prophesies that they would mock him saying, “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him” (Psalm 22:8), even as the Pharisees and priests cried out, “[L]et him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him” (Matt. 27:42-43). And they did this, not to one who was guilty, but to one innocent from birth, whom God had brought forth—even from a virgin’s womb: “[Y]ou brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God” (Psalm 22:9-10).

In John’s gospel, Jesus prayed to the Father, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose, I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again’... Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’” (John 12:27-28, 30-32). Jesus was not sent to be rescued from the cross, but so that, in death, the gates of Hades itself would burst, unable to contain the Lord of Life. For it is “through death [he] destroy[ed] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

And the Father does precisely as he intended—answering Christ’s cries in fulfillment of all he had promised. And he did so, in order that “[a]ll the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations... They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people not yet born, ‘He has done it!’” (Psalm 22:27-28, 31).

Because Christ was not forsaken but even conquered the grave, you can know with certainty that you will not be forsaken either. Trust in Christ and you “will not be put to shame” (Romans 10:11).

*I thirst.*

Psalm 104; John 19:28-29

Orthodox priest Alexander Schmemmann, in his book *For the Life of the World*, opens by describing the creation of the world. In the beginning, “man is presented, first of all, as a hungry being, and the whole world as his food.” After creating Adam and Eve God spread forth his hands to the world, saying, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Genesis 1:29). To be created is to be invited to a feast that God has prepared and, as Schmemmann says, a feast “is the image of life at its creation [and] at its end and fulfillment: ‘that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom.’” (Luke 22:30). When God called his people out of Egypt, Pharaoh was told that he must let God’s people go because they “must hold a feast to the Lord” (Exodus 10:9). God’s love for his people comes with the blessings of abundance, “He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil” (Deuteronomy 7:13). Wine is a good gift of God, given “to gladden the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15). Yahweh is the true God of feasting and wine, while Dionysus is a demonic pretender.

Yet, in our sin, God’s gifts can be misused — “wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1). Instead of eating and drinking as an act of worship, with thanksgiving, we have turned to “the bread of wickedness and [the] wine of violence” (Proverbs 4:17). Throughout the Bible, the cup that God gave to gladden the heart also came to signify God’s wrath: “Wake yourself [and] stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering” (Isaiah 51:17).

While John came into the world fasting, mourning, and singing a “dirge,” Christ came “eating and drinking” and turning water into wine (Matthew 11:17-19, John 2). When Jesus was asked why John’s disciples fasted but his disciples did not, he said, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” (Matthew 9:15). Yet, after the Lord’s Supper, Jesus said that his time for fasting had arrived, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). The message of the Gospel is that the “time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe” (Mark 1:3). Jesus came so that God’s kingdom would be established, in order that “all the dominions [of the world] shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27). Yet, the only for Satan’s power to be broken and for guilty men and women to eat and drink at Christ’s table in his kingdom is for sin to be swallowed up in victory.

On the cross, Jesus ended his fast, but it was a better end. Jesus called for a drink saying, “I am thirsty,” and he was given spoiled wine—a drink as bitter as the sin that Christ bore in his body. But in drinking it, he proclaimed to his disciples that with his final act, the Kingdom had come. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,” Revelation says, and this is because the Lord himself has drunk the cup of God’s wrath for us and in our place (Revelation 11:15).

While the priests of God were once forbidden to drink wine in God’s presence, Christ invites his disciples to eat and drink at his table, giving his own blood as wine, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20, Leviticus 10:9). Because Christ thirsted for righteousness but was given the cup of our sin, now he makes us to be partakers of his banquet, free of charge: “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

*It is finished.*

Revelation 12:1-12; John 19:30-42

The history of the world is the story of humanity growing up—from infancy and ignorance in the garden to full maturity—and the earth was to be cultivated by us, for God had given us dominion. God created us saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” (Genesis 1:28). God is Lord and Creator, and he made us to be lords and creators—to make the uncultivated world into a garden. Our fall did not change God’s plan but it did mean that our natures had fundamentally changed. We were created in “the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness,” but our fall meant that all humanity became “by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 4:24, 2:3). We were made to be like God, to reign and rule in righteousness, but we became those who are obedient to “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2). Instead of becoming more like God, we chose to become like the devil—and we were subjected to the devil’s tyranny.

If you consider where in the Bible Satan shows up, an odd pattern emerges—he’s often standing in God’s throne room. The name Satan means “adversary.” Satan is like a prosecuting attorney in the court of God — “the accuser of [the] brothers” (Revelation 12:10). Because of our fall into sin, Satan has everything on his side because we are fundamentally guilty. With Job, Satan calls for a test, saying that Job would curse God if the Lord removed his blessing (Job 1:9-11). Likewise, after the exile, Zechariah saw a vision of Satan “standing at [God’s] right hand to accuse [Joshua the high priest],” but Satan is sent from God’s presence after the Lord says to Joshua, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you” (Zechariah 3:1, 4). In Revelation, John is shown a vision of Satan’s schemes and his defeat when Christ ascended into heaven, and what we see is that God coming into the world in Jesus Christ was the beginning of God’s cosmic revolution. Using Herod, Satan attempted to “devour” Jesus when he was born because Jesus was born “to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Revelation 12:5). The cross was Satan’s last-ditch effort, possessing Judas and using the priests and Pharisees (who Jesus called Satan’s sons) to have Jesus murdered (Luke 22:3, John 8:44). But God’s son “[was] caught up to God and to his throne [and] war arose in heaven [and] the dragon and his angels [were] defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven” (Revelation 12:4-5, 7-9). Just as Jesus had promised, Satan and his angels “were thrown down” from heaven, and the Lord spoke, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:10-11, John 12:31-33).

This is the full context of the cross. Instead of being righteous before God and suitable helpers, fit for him, we had become Satan’s servants who warranted nothing but condemnation. But now “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all, [and] he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet” (Hebrews 10:10, 12-13). When Christ spoke, “It is finished,” he meant that his work—to redeem humanity and to break Satan’s power—was complete. God himself gave his blood—Holy, Holy, Holy is he—so that our redemption would be eternal, in order that Satan would be silenced and cast out of heaven forever. Now, instead of Satan standing at God’s right hand, Jesus, the Son of David, has taken up his throne and advocates for us before the Father. And now he waits to return until the great commission is fulfilled—when all his enemies are bowing and all the nations have become his disciples. Because Christ said, “It is finished,” you will never face the devil’s accusations. Because Christ said, “It is finished,” God has now “raised us up with [Jesus] and seated us with him in the heavenly places, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:6-7). Because Christ said, “It is finished,” you should fear no evil.



*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*

Psalm 31; Luke 23:44-46

In Christ's day, the shepherds of Israel were thieves and hirelings—obedient only to Rome and to their wicked desires. Israel's kings were no better than Pharaoh. Herod "the Great" slaughtered the innocents in an attempt to kill Jesus, as Pharaoh once did in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18). Herod's son, Herod Antipas, beheaded John the Baptizer, serving his head upon a platter (Matthew 14:1-12). Herod's grandson murdered the apostle James, but Jesus sent an angel to kill him after the people idolatrously praised him as speaking with the "voice of a god, and not a man" (Acts 12). They did not heed the warning, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish [for] his wrath is quickly kindled" (Psalm 2:12).

The priests and Pharisees were no better. These final words of Jesus, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," is a quote from Psalm 31. Christ breathes his last, acknowledging that God alone is the firm foundation upon which a secure life can be built: "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. [For] you are my rock and my fortress [and] into your hand I commit my spirit" (Psalm 31:1, 3, 5). Although Jesus had warned that unless a man built his house upon his word the waves and winds would destroy it, they murdered him as a blasphemer; allying themselves with Rome to do it (Matthew 7:24-29, Acts 2:23, 3:15). The priests of Israel had imagined that their temple, made by human hands, was their rock—the very mountain of God, it was called (Psalm 48:1)—not understanding that the true Rock and Redeemer of Israel—the true Temple—had just been nailed to the cross (John 2:19-22). But as Psalm 31 says, David's Son "hat[es] those who pay regard to worthless idols" (Psalm 31:6).

Jesus proclaimed that their temple had become a den of thieves; that their temple was no longer God's house, but "your house" (Matthew 23:38). Like every house that was filled with leprosy and uncleanness, Jesus declared that "there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Luke 21:6, Leviticus 14:40). And with his final words, we see the beginning of the temple's destruction at God's hands, as darkness covered the land and, with an earthquake, the curtain of the Holy of Holies was torn in two. God's Spirit has forever abandoned temples made of worthless stones and was now going to replace it with a living Temple—the very body of Christ. God always intended his people to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Because of Christ's victory, that is indeed what we have become. Jesus himself is the cornerstone—"a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious" and he has made his Church to be "like living stones [that] are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

God's promises to Israel did not fail—you are Israel. Only those who trust in Jesus are called "Abraham's offspring" (Galatians 3:29). Only those who are being built up upon Christ the foundation are now called "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). And, as God had promised to David, his Son would come and build his Temple, not in Jerusalem below which "is in slavery with her children," but the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:25-26). In taking on human nature and shedding his blood on our behalf, Jesus has sanctified us so that we would become the dwelling place of God. And that New Jerusalem—the heavenly "bride of the Lamb," is an image of the Church, God's city. For "on the gates [are] the names of the twelve tribes of Israel [and on its] twelve foundations [are] the twelve names of [the] apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:12, 14). Because Christ committed his spirit to the Father, being obedient to the point of death, now his Spirit has been committed to us. Because Christ died in darkness, the new creation has dawned upon you and me.

## *New Creation's Dawn*

Psalm 80; Luke 24:1-12

One of the effects of the fall was that God's presence became deadly for sinners. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God himself sacrificed an animal in order to cover them in its skins—an image of Christ's coming sacrifice (Genesis 3:21). But, as we said before this week, after the fall humanity was banished from the Garden, never to walk within God's paradise again. To ensure this was the case, he set cherubim before the Garden's entrance, so that none could enter. But through the course of the Bible, God is working in the world to reestablish an Eden on earth, a place where God could walk among his people. After the Exodus, we see that God had raised up his people to take dominion of a new land like Eden in Canaan, the land promised to Abraham. While it was a land that would be made desolate when God's people exterminated the idolatry that dwelt there, God promised them that it would be for them "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains of springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees, [where] you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing... a land flowing with milk and honey [which] drinks water by the rain from heaven (Deuteronomy 8:7-9, 11:9, 11).

Although the land would be abundant like Eden and God would walk among them, God's presence was still hidden from them. God consecrated Aaron and his sons as priests like Adam and instructed them to create a tabernacle, in which God promised to dwell in the midst of the people (Exodus 29:41-46). But God would remain in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary, in which only the high priest could ever go; and then, only once a year. It was a glorious room, covered everywhere in gold, but the only light in the tabernacle were the candles of the menorah. God was with them, but he was hidden from their sight; the Lord of glory, shrouded in darkness. But like the Garden before, God's presence was signified by the presence of the cherubim—on the curtain before the Most Holy Place, reminding them of Eden's barred entrance, and with two cherubim of gold on either side of the mercy seat (Exodus 26). After his death, the women had prepared Jesus' body for burial, but they could not complete the task in full because the Sabbath had come. They returned to the tomb to finish the work they began, finding the stone rolled away and the body that had been lying on a central platform was missing. But in an instant, there appeared two men in "dazzling apparel," who asked them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." (Luke 24:4-5). God is "enthroned on the cherubim" and "shine[s] forth" in glory, but until the resurrection of Christ that glory was hidden from us (Psalm 80:1). On the day of Christ's resurrection, the disciples were greeted by the cherubim standing at the location of the true mercy seat—the place of Christ's tomb.

The coming of Jesus into the world, to die and to rise, was the return of God's full presence into the world—and it was far more glorious even than Eden. Because Jesus has destroyed our sin in his body, sprinkling his blood for our purification, that sin has been put away forever. Because Christ had conquered death and was raised on the third day, he has taken up the eternal throne and has poured forth his Spirit as fire, making his people to become the living Temple (Acts 2:1-36, 2 Chronicles 7:1-3). Because Jesus has taken up human flesh, you—even you—have become the dwelling place of God, "If anyone loves me, [my] Father will love him, and we will come and make our home in him" (John 14:23). We are not alone. In Christ, "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Although our bodies are wasting away, cracked like jars of clay, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in [our] body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [And this] light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:7-10, 17).





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