



THE PROMISED ONE | THE PROMISED SAVIOR

December 24, 2025

Over the last several weeks, I have been suggesting that the Bible tells one long unfolding story that finds its center and its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. The Bible is a little bit like a mystery novel: The clues are scattered throughout the book, but you don't see how they all fit together until you get to the final chapters. And so during this Advent season, we have been considering how Jesus fulfills all the ancient promises of Scripture. As the apostle Paul said himself in 2 Corinthians 1, "All the promises of God find their yes in him." All the promises of God find their yes in Jesus. And so I'd like us to reflect on why it matters that Jesus is the promised Savior.

Here's why this is so important. As we approach Christmas, we might find ourselves starting to feel a little cynical. And there are a number of contributing factors to this. It could be that some of us sentimentalize Christmas because we focus on the feelings that it brings. We associate Christmas with warm feelings. Perhaps nostalgia about the past, or time together with family and friends. Others of us don't sentimentalize Christmas, but we might commercialize Christmas by focusing on consumption. We spend all of our time buying, shopping, and looking for gifts and throwing parties. And then still others trivialize Christmas, because they treat it as a general kind of holiday. Christmas becomes a sort of secular holiday, celebrating winter, snow, lights, or perhaps love and romance.

None of these things are wrong in and of themselves, but taken together, they might make us a bit cynical, sapping our joy, stealing our energy, and leaving us feeling apathetic, indifferent, maybe a little exhausted, or perhaps even a bit depressed. So what is the antidote to this cynicism? I would suggest that the antidote is to center our hearts and our minds on the fact that Jesus has come to us as our promised Savior. So what I'd like us to do is focus our energy and our thoughts on the first chapter of the Gospel of John. And as we consider Jesus as our promised Savior, we will see that Jesus brings: 1) *light to our minds*, 2) *love to our hearts*, and 3) *life to our whole being*.

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know

him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-14

Light to Our Minds

So first, Jesus brings light to our minds. Consider again the fifth verse of John 1. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Now, the most obvious question we have to ask ourselves is, what is this darkness? The image of darkness suggests that there’s something wrong with us — all of us. And it affects the whole world. We might use expressions like “bringing truth to light,” or “shedding light” on a subject, or being “an enlightened person.”

So what is this darkness? It’s a picture of our ignorance and our confusion, especially when it comes to our understanding of God, ourselves, and the world around us. We don’t know who we are. We don’t really know why we’re here. We don’t know what our purpose is or how it is that we’re meant to live. We think that this world is the result of nothing more than accident or chance — blind forces of nature — and therefore we can’t really make any sense of it. We’re all just fumbling around in the dark, lost and confused, spiritually blind.

And isn’t it interesting that even after all the breakthroughs that we’ve made in science and medicine and technology, the human condition hasn’t changed? As we look around the world and consider all the divisions among us and all the things that make us distinct, nevertheless darkness, ignorance, confusion — this common element — is all around us. Every era, every society, every culture suffers from this same fundamental problem, and no one’s been able to solve it. Not the poets, not the philosophers, not the artists, not the politicians, not the scientists. They’ve all tried. They’ve failed. They’ve maybe given us a glimpse into the truth of who we are and why we’re here, but no one has really solved the enigma.

That is, until we read in John 1:9, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” In other words, John is telling us that Jesus doesn’t just bring light; Jesus is the light. Jesus is the one who illuminates the truth of who God is, who we are in relationship to him, and how we’re supposed to live our lives in this world. Jesus reveals the truth that we could never discover on our own.

The gospel writer John has a rather striking way of drawing this out. In the very first verse, he says, “In the beginning was the Word.” Now the term that he’s using is literally the Greek word Logos. Jesus is the Logos. But what you have to understand is that in the first century, this was a philosophically loaded term. For centuries, Greek thinkers had engaged in the quest to find the logos, which they defined as ultimate truth, ultimate reality, the rational principle behind the universe that makes sense of

everyone and everything. But the fact is that in Jesus' day, by the time John wrote this gospel, people had largely given up the search. All these great thinkers down through the centuries, they realized there was no consensus, there was no agreement on what this logos was. And so they concluded that the best that philosophy could probably do was help you cope with the harsh reality of life, not actually unlock the key to understanding human life.

Heraclitus believed in the logos, but he said everything about our existence is marked by change. You can't ever step into the same river twice. The Stoics, for their part, continued to believe that there was a logos, but they didn't think any of us could ever discover it, and therefore they concluded that all we can do is keep a tight, stiff upper lip and live a life of virtue. And the Epicureans gave up the search altogether. They said there is no logos, no rational principle behind the universe. All there is is randomness — just atoms flying around in space — and therefore, make the most of your life. Avoid pain and enjoy pleasure, just don't go overboard.

But then John has the audacity to say, oh no, there is a Logos, there is a Truth, but this Logos is not some abstract principle or an abstract idea. This Logos, this Truth, is a person, and this person has entered our world in the most unlikely of ways. He's come to us as a little helpless baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger.

And you see, this is what separates Christianity from every other religion, every other philosophy in the entire history of the world. Because Jesus shows up and he doesn't say, "I will show you the way"; he says, "I am the way." He doesn't say, "I will bring the truth"; he says, "I am the truth." He doesn't say, "I will tell you how to live"; he says, "I am the life." In the midst of all of our darkness and great despair, God doesn't send us better instructions on how to live; no, he sends us himself. And the message of Christmas, therefore, is that the only key that can unlock the story of our lives has entered history and has become a real human being in the person of Jesus.

Love for Our Hearts

So as our promised Savior, Jesus is the light that illumens the darkness. Jesus brings light to our minds. But light alone is not enough. We not only need light for our minds; we also need love for our hearts. Because once the light comes in, we see something else. We see our own brokenness. Our spiritual blindness leads to both active rebellion against and passive indifference toward God.

And that's really all the Bible means by the word sin. Sin means that we miss the target. It means that we cross the line, but as a result of that, we end up harming one another and harming ourselves, whether we intended to or not. And sin means that the world in which we live is not only a dark place, it's also a dangerous place. Because the fact of the matter is that this world may rob you. It may rob you of your innocence, of your purity, of your joy, of your satisfaction, your contentment, your hope, your security.

All around the world tonight, we know that people are suffering. They're suffering not only from the harm that they may have caused to themselves, but the harm that other human beings have caused them. So as a result, our individual hearts are often

ruled or plagued by anxiety, by guilt, by shame, by loneliness, and by fear. And so my question for you tonight is, how would you describe the condition of your heart? And how do you ever heal a broken heart? Especially when you consider that while some of the wounds have been caused by other people, some of our wounds are self-inflicted. We've done it to ourselves.

A once agnostic thinker who wrote a book describes how, when he was in his fifties, he recalled something that he had done in his twenties, and even 30 years later, it continued to cause him considerable shame. Now he knew that Christianity teaches that forgiveness is available, forgiveness is possible, but he concluded at that time that forgiveness was not for him. He didn't deserve it. He figured, "It serves me right, and therefore I should feel awful about this for the rest of my life."

In a similar way, there's an atheistic philosopher who teaches at Amherst, and she has written that one has to recognize that when one gives up belief in God, one also has to give up other things too, and many of these things are not insignificant. "Most importantly," she says, "you lose the guarantee of redemption."

Suppose that you do something morally terrible, something for which you cannot make amends, something, perhaps, for which no human being could ever be expected to forgive you. I imagine that the promise made by many religions, that God will forgive you if you are truly sorry, is a thought that would bring enormous comfort and relief. You cannot have that if you are an atheist. In consequence, you must live your life, and make your choices with the knowledge that every choice you make contributes, in one way or another, to the only value your life can have.

And my question for us tonight is, is that really enough for us? Because who of us could say that we haven't done or said something — or have failed to do or say something — that we can't take back? Something that we can never change, that we can never undo. Something perhaps for which we can never make amends. See, I know that we have all felt the weight of this, and in our quieter moments of reflection, it might be enough to crush us. But what I want you to hear is that the message of Christmas is that God's love makes it possible. God's unconditional love makes it possible for us to confront the reality of who we are and what we've done, and it makes it possible for us to experience true healing and restoration, because God's unconditional love can bind up a broken heart.

That is the fundamental message of Christmas: God did not choose to remain at a safe distance from us, but rather he came to us, as one of us, to rescue us ... because he loves us. And this love is not cheap, because this love cost him everything. John 1:11-12 sums up both the tragedy and the hope of the human condition. In verse 11 we're told that Jesus came into this world, he came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. We rejected him. That's the tragedy. But then here's the hope: "But to all who did receive him," who *do* receive him, "who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." How does this happen? Not by trying to figure it all out on our own. Not by doing more or trying harder, but by receiving. By receiving him, we simply offer empty hands that receive what God gives. And what God gives us at Christmas is himself.

God has entered our world, but he will not use force to gain entry into our lives. And that's why Jesus comes to us not as some conquering invincible hero but as a poor, weak, vulnerable baby wrapped up in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. The one who scattered stars across the universe finds his tiny little fingers bound up within those swaddling cloths, unable to move. He will not force entry into our lives. We have to receive him.

And you see, that baby in a manger grew up. Because this man came to this world on a mission, and from the very start, the shadow of the cross falls across the cradle. Every other child born is born to live, but this child was born in order to die. Because that was the only way. That was the only way that God could shower his unconditional love upon us, despite who we are and despite what we've done. Jesus was condemned so that we might be forgiven. Jesus was excluded so that we might be embraced. Jesus, on the cross, was forsaken so that we might be adopted as God's beloved sons and daughters — so that he might shower upon us his unconditional love. And all that God asks of us is that we simply receive him.

His love is not a reward for our good behavior. No, it is a gift for the undeserving. But once you receive this gift, now finally, for the first time, you know who you are. Now finally, for the first time, you know why you're here. Now finally, for the first time, you can experience a love that can heal the most broken of hearts. You can experience an unconditional love, despite all your failings — an unconditional love beyond all imagining.

Life to Our Entire Being

So as our promised Savior, Jesus brings light to our minds and love to our hearts. But lastly and very briefly, he also brings life to our entire being. This is the whole purpose of the Bible. The whole reason why Jesus was born all those years ago in Bethlehem was so that we might discover that there is another kind of life. There's another kind of life that is now available to us. It is life with God. It is the life of God.

In verse 4, we read, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." Have you experienced this? Do you know what kind of life I'm talking about? Have you tasted it? This life is available to you. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. It does not matter what has been done to you. Even if this world has robbed you of your innocence, your purity, your joy, your satisfaction, your sense of security, your hope — it doesn't matter, because this gospel of good news is for you. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." This promised Savior is for you. There is a different kind of life available to you now — life with God, the life of God — if you would only receive him. Life that begins now and lasts into eternity. Life that not even death can stop.

But let me ask you, does that sound too farfetched? Does that sound too hard to believe? Well, let me close with this. That once agnostic author I mentioned earlier, who described never being able to forgive himself for something that he had done in his past, wrote a book entitled "Taking Religion Seriously." Through it, he traces his slowly evolving views of religion and Christianity. And though he never quite lands on what you might call orthodox Christianity, I think he nevertheless demonstrates the

path that others may wish to follow. So let me just share a couple brief excerpts of his as we close. He writes:

Millions are like me when it comes to religion: well-educated and successful people for whom religion has been irrelevant. We grew up in secular households or drifted away from the faiths in which we were raised and never looked back.

In my case, I attended Presbyterian Sunday School and, later, church services into adolescence but then went off to Harvard, where I was as thoroughly socialized to be secular as earlier generations of Harvard students had been socialized to be devout...None of the professors I admired was religious (at least visibly). I didn't have a single friend who was religious. When the topic of religion came up, professors and friends alike treated it dismissively or as a subject for humor...

If asked, I would have said I was an agnostic, but I didn't spend much time thinking about religion because I couldn't see the point. If God exists, he could not be the kind of God who has anything to do with this flyspeck world, let alone the lives of the individual human beings clinging to the surface.

I've [since] changed my mind about God in general...and about Christianity specifically...but I don't proselytize. Rather, I urge upon you that religion is something that should be taken seriously by nonbelievers and that can be taken seriously...by reading a lot, thinking about what you've read, and bouncing your reactions off people who know more than you do...

And that's the story that he tells throughout this book: the story of his own process. And toward the end of the book, he concludes,

Taking religion seriously has done far more in retrospect than I realized while it was happening. I have periodically discovered that I was thinking differently about God and life than I had thought some years earlier...I have been surprised by belief. Some specifics:

1. The Design of the Universe

I live day to day believing that I am part of an intentional universe, not Richard Dawkin's universe of "no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." That's a big change from the way I lived my life thirty years ago...

2. The Moral Law and the Role of Love

I have found C.S. Lewis's argument for the Moral Law to be exasperatingly sticky...I have internalized a gut-level belief that he was right: Our impulses to "do the right thing" are God's way of revealing himself to us, and what God has revealed is the pervasive role of agape [love] in living a good human life...

3. The Grace of God and the Forgiveness of Sins

Whereas I still feel awful about my sins—and I've grown more comfortable with using the word sin—I also have a sense that I have received forgiveness. God's grace has become real to me.

4. The Person of Jesus

My plunge into the historicity of the Gospels was triggered by C.S. Lewis's trilemma. Am I really required to choose just three alternatives: Jesus was a liar, a lunatic, or the Son of God? All that reading cut into my wiggle room. I lost the option of believing the claims of Jesus's divine nature were a later invention of the church. I now accept that Jesus of Nazareth represented himself as having a unique relationship with God.

Now, that's just one person's perspective on how one might take Christianity seriously. But perhaps it might inspire you to do the same. And on this Christmas Eve, we are reminded that Christmas is not an invitation to enjoy a tradition; Christmas is an invitation to experience a transformation. In just a few moments, we're going to light candles — hundreds of candles that in their own little way will push back against the darkness. And so as we sing by candlelight, let those candles remind you that Jesus is our promised Savior, and therefore *the* light is shining, *the* love is here, and *the* life is now available to you. Now is the time to receive him. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.