

For God So Loved

A Journey of discovery through the Bible
showing how God's love is constant in his
dealings with sinful and rebellious mankind.

Written by Carey Pomerantz

www.thebibleinfullcolor.com

Introduction

God's love is seen throughout the Bible in countless ways. Like the innumerable stars shining through the blackness of the night sky, God's love shines through the blackness of mankind's sinful ways.

We often think that the Gospel is contained only in the New Testament whereas the Law is to be found only in the Old Testament. In reality, Law and Gospel are found throughout the Bible. One thing that is constant throughout the Bible is God's love.

In the passages above we see the entire story of the Bible summed up in a few illuminating words. They are the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the core of the New Testament. God's love is so magnificent that it overcomes tremendous obstacles created by sin. God's love has sustained mankind before Christ's mission of salvation on earth and it is made complete in Christ since that mission was completed on the cross. God's love insures the future of all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

Past, present and future - all tied together with the ribbon of God's eternal and unfailing love!

John 3:16 -

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

I John 4:8 - God is Love

I Corinthians 13:8 - Love never fails

Proverbs 3:12 - The Lord disciplines those he love

For God So Loved

What wondrous words!
They raise our souls
Like wings on birds.
For in our darkness
Came glorious light,
And brought us sunshine
In darkest night.

For God So Loved

With love unfailing,
The lowly sinner
Whose soul is ailing,
And raised us up
With him we're one,
By the blood of Jesus -
God's own Son.

For God So Loved

The soul rejoices.
We praise our God
With hearts and voices.
While we were yet
Still daily sinning,
God worked his plan
Our souls he winning.

For God So Loved

Great mercy divine,
We are branches,
He is the vine.
He nourishes our souls
With his love,
And bids us grow
Toward the Light above.

For God So Loved

We know not why,
We turned from him
"Rebellion" our cry.
Who dearly loves us
We push away,
Yet he gathers us in
All we who stray!

For God So Loved

Let us oft repeat
Twas love that earned
Vic' try from defeat!
Love paid the price
So fearfully high,
To draw all sinners
To God's love night

CONTENTS

<u>Book of the Bible</u>	<u>Pages</u>
Old Testament Introduction	5
Genesis	6—20
Exodus	20—28
Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua	28—31
Judges	31—34
Ruth	34—36
1 st and 2 nd Samuel	36—43
1 st and 2 nd Kings	43—52
Ezra and Nehemiah	52—53
Esther	53—56
Job	56—58
Psalms	58—59
Proverbs	59
Song of Songs	60—61
The Major and Minor Prophets ..	61—64
 New Testament Introduction	 64
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John	65—93
Acts	93—106
Romans	106
1 st and 2 nd Corinthians	106—109
Galatians	109—111
Ephesians	111—113
Philippians	113
Colossians	114
1 st and 2 nd Thessalonians	114—116
Hebrews	116—117
1 st and 2 nd Timothy; Titus; Philemon; James; 1 st and 2 nd Peter; 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd John; Jude	117—118
Conclusion	118—119

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version © Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The NIV and New International Version trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

The Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

In the Old Testament we see the history of creation and the story of mankind. We see God selecting one nation to carry out his eternal plan and we see the interaction between God and his chosen people.

In the Old Testament God gives us his unbreakable Law with the message that if we obey the Law all will be well with us. As is so often seen, mankind could not obey the Law and fell foul of God who is ever holy and righteous. There was no middle ground between God and man. Obey God or perish. God's love, however, provided for mankind and he worked all things for our welfare. In God's own time, he sent his Son Jesus to fulfill what we could not - perfect obedience to the Law.

The main emphasis of the Old Testament is the Law which is given to us to show us our sins and justified condemnation. This may seem harsh to us but if not for the Law, we would not realize our need for a Savior. While many of the dealings between God and man in the Old Testament seem to be of an earthly nature, there were eternal meanings as well. The love of God is seen throughout these sometimes harsh Old Testament accounts.

The Book of Genesis

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he created the entire universe to provide a home for us. God created everything that we could possibly need or want and then gave it to us as a perfect gift of his love. God filled our world with beauty and wonder which reflected his own beauty and wonder.

Meaning for us today: No matter where we look, we see the wonder of God's creation. It is a constant reminder of God's love and presence in our lives and a source of encouragement when we are troubled. All of our needs are provided for and have been since the beginning of time.

Psalm 19:1 **"The heavens declare the glory of God and the skies proclaim the work of his hands."**

Psalm 66: 5 **"Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!"**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MAN that he created both man and woman in his own perfect image. He gave man and woman to each other so that neither would be alone. All through life's journey men and women would share the joys and sorrows, the work and the quiet times together. They would help, support and love each other. The love for each other would be only a shadow of the love God has for all people.

Meaning for us today: An often abused gift is the wonderful relationship of a husband and a wife. God created this relationship for the mutual benefit of men and women and the children that they would have. Marriage provides a loving, safe and strengthening environment for us all. This is no coincidence. God knew that life brings difficulties and he created this solution to help us cope. It is a gift we should cultivate and treasure.

Ephesians 5:22-33 *gives us a beautiful picture of how God sees the relationship between husband and wife.*

FOR GOD SO LOVED ADAM AND EVE that they walked and talked with God as friends and enjoyed all the glory of his creation together. Everything was provided for them in abundance.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and sin entered the world, God's love still ruled his actions. God could have destroyed Adam and Eve like a potter would destroy a defective clay object. Life would not be perfect as it had been for Adam and Eve but life would continue. God's love provided for Adam and Eve in their physical needs and for their spiritual needs, the first promise of a Savior was given to them.

Meaning for us today: We can take great comfort in the fact that no matter how badly we have sinned and abused God's love, forgiveness is always at hand. Punishment for sin happens but this is not a bad thing for us to experience. God corrects our ways in order to bring us

closer to the recognition of our relationship with him. We can be thankful that God does not punish us as severely as we deserve or no one could survive. We should always be thankful that God the Father sent his Son Jesus to take the eternal punishment we deserve and earned our salvation.

Romans 5:20-21 (see also 5:12-21) **“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that when he saw how evil mankind had become, in his great love, God did not destroy all life on earth. God was grieved that he had made man and had every right to wipe mankind from the face of the earth. God, however, would preserve his creation after washing it clean of its wickedness. The Great Flood would be a picture of Baptism in which our wickedness (sins) would be washed away.

Meaning for us today: We tend to see current events as being global and eternal in scope. The things we see in our lifetime are nothing compared to the destruction God brought about in the Great Flood. If God did not have love and mercy, we would not be here today. We can take comfort that God promised not to destroy all life on earth as he did in the Great Flood but we should not take this for granted. This is the punishment mankind's sins deserve yet God does not bring this upon us. We should learn from this and live as if each day might be our last so that we can be found faithful.

1st Corinthians 16: 13a (see also Luke 12:35-40)

“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED NOAH that he spared him and his family from the flood that would destroy the rest of mankind. God saw that Noah was a righteous man who was worthy of receiving salvation from the coming punishment. God gave Noah instructions and helped him fulfill them. God protected Noah and his family from his great anger which was seen in the Flood.

Except for those on the ark, all life was destroyed and God presented Noah with a world washed clean. God put his rainbow in the sky as a promise never again to destroy all life on earth in his anger. God protected Noah and his family from harm and blessed them. God gave Noah and his family mastery over all living things just as he had with Adam and Eve.

Meaning for us today: Christians are not spared from worldly trouble and sorrow. We suffer just like anyone else and sometimes more when our faith in Jesus is ridiculed. Like Noah and his family, however, we are saved from the eternal destruction that awaits an unbelieving world. We can take great comfort in our salvation that was bought at so great a price by Jesus on the cross.

Romans 8: 18 **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”**

Romans 8:35-39 **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or**

persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

FOR GOD SO LOVED ABRAHAM that he promised to make a great nation from him. God protected Abraham throughout many dangerous events in his lifetime and made him prosperous in all he did. A great nation did, in fact, arise from Abraham. That nation is Israel from which came our Savior Jesus Christ.

Meaning for us today: God has made many promises to us and they can be found in the Bible. God always keeps his promise and we can take great comfort in that fact. The promise that God made to Abraham is fulfilled in us today. Israel was that great nation to come from Abraham's line and, following Jesus' death on the cross, all believers are included in God's great nation. We today are the heirs of the promise made to Abraham.

Galatians 3: 29 **"If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."**

Galatians 3: 14 “He (Jesus) redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED SARAH that he kept her safe during many dangerous travels. Although old and childless, God caused Sarah to conceive and bear a son which was the desire of her heart. God sent angels to tell Sarah of his promise of a child which made her joy all the greater when the promise came true. Not only did Sarah have a child but she knew without doubt that a loving God gave her this child.

Meaning for us today: Life is full of trials, dangers and disappointments but God sustains us throughout. We may not receive all that we desire in life but we do receive many blessings every day. We also receive the assurance of salvation through Jesus. These are promises that God has already kept and are there for our joy and comfort if we but look at the wonders of God’s love.

Psalms 55: 22 “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”

Romans 5: 1-5 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance,

character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED LOT that he joined his future with that of Abraham and he prospered. Lot and his family were the only ones spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as well as from the actions of the people of those doomed towns.

Meaning for us today: As a Christian, our future is also joined with someone chosen by God. Through faith we are joined with Jesus and the salvation that he earned for us. Our future is secure by the grace of God. We will be spared eternal destruction thanks to Jesus sacrifice for us on the cross.

1st Corinthians 6: 17 “**He who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.**”

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he agreed to spare the extreme wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten people were found living there who were righteous. The sins of those cities were so great that God wiped them from the face of the earth. God’s love was so generous that he would have spared so great a blemish on the earth for the sake of only ten righteous people. For God to allow such wickedness for the sake of so few was an act of love indeed. So wicked were Sodom and Gomorrah that not even ten righteous people could be found living there. We

must stand in awe of God's love and mercy that two cities would have been spared for the sake of so few.

Meaning for us today: We sin every day and deserve eternal punishment for those sins. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, we have been given every opportunity to lead holy and God pleasing lives but in every case we fall short of the glory of God. Just as God would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of a few righteous people, so today he spares us for the sake of the Righteous One - Jesus Christ our Savior.

Ephesians 2: 3-5 **“All of us also lived among them (*the worldly*) at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED HAGAR AND ISHMAEL that he saved them from perishing in the desert. Hagar was a servant in the household of Abraham who was chosen to bear a child for him (*this was a custom where the wife who could not have children could offer her servant to bear children for her*). The child was Ishmael and God promised that a great nation would be made from him (*many Arab nations trace their ancestry to Ishmael*).

With the birth of Isaac - the child promised by God to Abraham and Sarah - problems arose. Sarah did not want

her son, the child promised by God, to share the divine inheritance with Hagar's son Ishmael. They were sent away into the desert by the command of God who promised to take care of them. God's promise to Hagar regarding her son was fulfilled and she knew that a loving God controlled their lives.

Meaning for us today: All throughout our lives we make plans and are part of the plans of others. Sometimes those plans work out and sometimes they do not. No matter what earthly plans are made and how they turn out, God's divine plan is certain. God has a plan for each of us and his plans always succeed. This does not mean that we will have no problems or failures; it means that whatever God has planned for each of us will come to pass. It is a great comfort to know that God is in control of our lives and whatever happens in life, it is under God's control.

Ephesians 2: 10 **“For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED ABRAHAM AND ISAAC that he spared them both when he tested Abraham's faith. God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham's faith was strong enough to pass the test and as he was about to sacrifice his son God stopped him. Abraham would not have to perform so horrible a task and Isaac did not have to die.

This is a picture of what would happen many years in the future when God the Father did indeed sacrifice his own Son Jesus for the salvation of all people.

Meaning for us today: Our faith will be put to the test in the course of our lives. Some of this testing may be painful such as the loss of a loved one. Some of this testing goes unnoticed by us and may take the form of turning from temptation or yielding to it. At other times our faith may be tested by the rejection or ridicule of those around us. In every testing of our faith God provides a way to succeed. Like Abraham, we must put our trust in God and move ahead with all the courage we can summon.

Isaiah 48:10-11 **“See, I (God) have refined you though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake I do this.”**

1st Corinthians 10: 13 **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED REBEKAH that he took an ordinary girl and made her the wife of Isaac to continue Abraham's line and inherit God's promise. Isaac loved Rebekah and they prospered under God's care. As with Sarah, God protected Rebekah from harm during dangerous times.

Meaning for us today: We are all alike in God's eyes. We are all sinners who have failed to keep God's commands. We are also all alike in God's love. Jesus died for everyone - the great and the ordinary - to earn salvation for all. Like Rebekah, we are all ordinary people who are raised to great heights by God's love and salvation. We are all part of God's plans for this world and the next.

Ephesians 2: 10 **"For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED JACOB AND ESAU that despite their ungodly and scheming ways, they both were blessed and protected from each other and their enemies by God. Jacob tricked Esau out of his rightful inheritance whereas Esau despised his birthright and his father Isaac's wishes.

After many years and many trying times the brothers were reunited and former hatred was forgotten. God's love provided for both brothers and softened angry hearts.

Meaning for us today: We often think that we are in control of our lives; however, despite our schemes and plans, God is really in control. While this may be difficult for our ego to accept, it is comforting to know that God - in perfect wisdom - is managing our lives. Under his care, we are safe.

Isaiah 50: 10-11 **"Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now, all**

you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED JACOB that he gave him the inherited promise made to Abraham as well as his loving protection from harm and great prosperity.

Throughout Jacob's twenty years with Laban, he was tricked and cheated including being tricked by Laban into marrying his two daughters - Leah and Rachel. Even so, God caused Jacob to prosper greatly and protected him and his wives from Laban's anger when Jacob and his family fled from Laban. Jacob went on to have twelve sons. These sons would be the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel and the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Jacob had wrestled and schemed all his life with his family. Now he also wrestled with God face to face. God taught Jacob that he was in control of Jacob's life rather than any plans or schemes of Jacob's. God renamed Jacob and called him Israel.

God's love for Jacob extended to his favorite son, Joseph. Despite the fact that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and told Jacob that Joseph was killed by a wild animal, all turned out well. Jacob lived to see his son Joseph again not as a slave but as a very powerful man who by his authority was able to save his entire family from a terrible famine. Tragedy turned to rejoicing is a frequent

occurrence in the Bible and reminder of God's love through the ages.

Meaning for us today: Again we see the schemer being fooled by another schemer. The wisdom of mankind is faulty, shallow and foolish when compared to that of God. No matter how crafty we may be, there is someone who is craftier. Not so with God. His wisdom is perfect and he has the power to bring all of his plans to completion.

Proverbs 28: 10 **"He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance."**

Proverbs 2: 7-8 **"He holds victory in store for the upright; he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones."**

1st Corinthians 3: 18-20 **"Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise are futile.'**

FOR GOD SO LOVED JOSEPH that he turned every bad event in his life to great success and prosperity. Through Joseph the infant nation of Israel was saved from famine and resided in Egypt where they were welcomed *(even though this led to Israel's slavery by the Egyptians*

many years later, it was all part of God's loving designs for his chosen people and part of the greater plan for all mankind's salvation through Jesus).

Out of jealousy, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Out of treachery, Joseph was sent to prison for a crime he did not commit. By God's love and saving power, Joseph emerged from these disasters to become Pharaoh's (*King of Egypt*) most trusted servant. Joseph was given authority only surpassed by Pharaoh himself. Through Joseph Egypt was saved from a disastrous famine and, in fact, prospered by it. Joseph was greatly rewarded in many ways; the most important being in seeing that his faith in God was not misplaced and in his ability to save his family and be reunited with them.

Meaning for us today: When you put your trust in God, all of life's events work for your welfare. Whether good times or bad, the end result will be to your benefit. This does not mean that nothing bad can happen to you or that you will always see a "happy ending" to a problem. Instead, we can rest assured that God will convert everything in life for our good. We become stronger in our faith and more confident in God through difficult times. While not pleasant, difficult times are a blessing in disguise since they draw us closer to our God.

Romans 8: 28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Psalm 50: 15 **“Call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you and you will honor me.”**

Psalm 9: 9-10 **“The Lord is a refuge for the
oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.
Those who know your name will trust in you, for
you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek
you.”**

The Book of Exodus

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ISRAELITES that he heard their cry of misery and freed them from slavery. About four hundred years passed since Joseph brought his family into Egypt to save them from famine. The old generation had died and the new generation of Egypt did not remember all that Joseph had done for their nation. At the same time, according to God's promise, the Israelites prospered and multiplied until they became a threat to Pharaoh's peace of mind. Pharaoh's plan was to enslave the Israelites and thereby keep them under control. Conditions worsened steadily for the Israelites and God, in answer to their prayers and his plan, brought about their freedom. God chose Moses to be the instrument of his plans for the Israelites.

Meaning for us today: Many things enslave us. The Ten Commandments list many things that become our masters. Sin enslaves us in invisible chains of steel. Satan is a slave master that never lets go without a fight just as the Egyptian Pharaoh was a slave master that would not let go without God's intercession. Just as the Israelites could

not achieve freedom without God's mighty power, so also we can not be free from sin without Jesus' mighty saving power. With God we become the conqueror rather than the conquered and with his help we can be free of the chains of sin.

Psalm 20:7 "Some trust in chariots and some in horses but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

Psalm 40:1-3 "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

Psalm 40:17 "Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer."

FOR GOD SO LOVED MOSES' MOTHER that he saved her baby from the slaughter of Israelite newborns that Pharaoh had ordered as a means of controlling the Israelites. The baby was placed in a basket and set adrift into the Nile River. The baby was found by the Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him as her own. The baby's mother was employed to nurse and raise the child. This baby was Moses whom God chose to bring about the freedom of the Israelites.

Meaning for us today: The Christian seems up against overwhelming forces sometimes. We are surrounded by the power and corruption of the world. It seems that we cannot stand up to such opposition. God, however, sees things differently. No matter what the opposition, God's will always is done. The world may appear to be victorious but in reality it is God who always succeeds in his plans. God can turn seeming total defeat into brilliant victory - and he does so every day.

Romans 8: 31a, 37 **"If God is for us who can be against us? In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MOSES that he saved him from the slaughter of the innocents as a baby and placed him into Pharaoh's house to be raised and educated. It was in Pharaoh's house that Moses got his formal education. There were still important lessons that Moses needed to learn and God arranged for those lessons.

Moses was forced to leave Egypt after killing an Egyptian. He became a shepherd for forty years during which time he learned how to care for a large flock of sheep. This education would prove vital in the handling of the large population of Israelites. Moses was now ready to fulfill God's plan of love for his chosen people.

God went far beyond what could be expected in helping Moses fulfill the role he was to play in God's plans. Every objection raised by Moses was solved by God. Every danger to Moses was removed during his dealings with

Pharaoh. Every doubt of the Israelites about Moses' calling was removed. God treated Moses like a much loved son and granted his requests for mercy for the wayward and rebellious Israelites when God sought to punish them severely.

Through numerous acts of rebellion and unbelief on the part of the Israelites, Moses was protected and granted favors of mercy. God made his presence known and guided the Israelites through many difficult days ahead. God's love for the Israelites and Moses in particular was very clear to see.

When Moses' life was over, he was not ill or weak even though very old. God himself buried Moses as a final act of love for his servant.

Meaning for us today: God had much to teach Moses before he was ready to accept the high calling for which God planned. God nurtured Moses and saw that he learned all that was needed in order to lead the chosen people out of slavery. Moses was not a born leader. He acted rashly and had to leave his comfortable situation. When God called him he was too timid to accept God's mission and tried to find every excuse to shun what God planned for him.

Out of this seemingly unsuitable man God created a great man of faith and leadership. Moses would become a shining example of faith in action and would serve as a role model for all time. God did, indeed, turn simple clay into a beautiful work of art that would shame any work placed next to it.

1st Corinthians 1: 26-29 **“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED AARON that he chose him to assist Moses in bringing about the freedom of Israel from Egyptian slavery. Aaron would act as the voice of Moses since he could speak well. Aaron was well respected and prospered during his lifetime. He and his sons would be the priests to serve in the Tabernacle - a very high calling.

Meaning for us today: The world would have us believe that the only success is to be in charge, to be the boss. In sports, only one head can wear the victor's crown. God has a different reality. Everyone has a place in God's kingdom and the glory is the same for those who lead as well as those who follow. We are all workers in God's vineyard with only one leader - Jesus. The rest of us are workers each with a different talent and ability. Moses had weaknesses which Aaron could compensate for. In many cases the servant was vital to the success of the master. We must use our God given abilities wherever we can and in whatever capacity we find ourselves. God will be pleased with even the lowliest worker if he labors for the glory of God.

Romans 12: 4-6a **“Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given us.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE EGYPTIAN PEOPLE that he gave them nine plagues to change their thinking before the final and deadly plague. While it is true that the pharaoh was a god to the Egyptians and could not be disobeyed, individuals could have seen what was happening and chosen to follow the true God. Even pharaoh was allowed to harden his own heart several times before God sealed his fate and hardened his heart.

Meaning for us today: Whether we realize it or not, God is constantly shaping us and nurturing us according to his will. God has many ways of teaching us the truth about sin and salvation - some subtle and some painfully obvious. God uses things like correction to bring us back to the straight and narrow road that leads to salvation and only the foolish person will ignore or deny the lessons being taught.

God sent nine very powerful and obvious messages to the Egyptian people to lead them to the truth about who the true God really is. The Egyptians refused to learn despite these gentle lessons. The final lesson was very painful.

We should learn from this Biblical account of God's lessons being rejected by sinful mankind. God asks little of us since he asked so much of his Son Jesus. Out of love

and gratitude we should be eager to learn from the Bible and apply God's lessons in life.

Proverbs 15: 5 **"A fool spurns his father's discipline but whoever heeds correction shows prudence."**

Proverbs 3: 11-12 **"My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in."**

Matthew 11: 29 **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ISRAELITES that he spared them from the plagues that tormented Egypt. The final and deadly plague that was used to force the Egyptians to free the Israelites was the death of the firstborn males in each household. The Israelites were spared by the love of God and given an annual memorial by the institution of the Passover Feast.

The Passover Feast is still celebrated today by Jews the world over and is held dear by Christians as well. The Passover Feast was a direct reference to Jesus and his role as the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

God saved the Israelites from the Egyptians by a miracle at the Red Sea. God also fed them with manna and quail as well as water from a rock. These were all miraculous

events. There could be no doubt that God saved his people which should have made their faith unshakable. God provided for the physical as well as the spiritual needs of the Israelites.

God so loved the Israelites that he forgave them many times when they turned from him in disobedience and idolatry. Several times God wanted to destroy the Israelites for their extreme sinfulness but each time he was swayed to mercy by Moses.

God so loved the Israelites and all future people by giving us the Ten Commandments. This served to make crystal clear what God expected of all people - there was no guessing. We know exactly what God wants even though we fail to obey his commands. These commandments serve to show us our failing with respect to God and make our gratitude for a Savior even greater.

God promised and delivered the Israelites into the Promised Land. God's love and power cleared the way for the people even when up against overwhelming odds.

Meaning for us today: The story of Moses and the Israelites is as vital today as it was thousands of years ago. The story of the exodus is our story today. We were enslaved by sin. God sent us a leader to free us from bondage. Even after we were given our freedom we continued to sell ourselves back into the slavery of sin and if not for God's love and mercy, we would be eternally condemned.

God promised a Savior and he gave us his Son Jesus. Jesus took our sins upon himself and gave us the gift of salvation. Every day the forgiveness of sins earned

by Jesus covers our failings just as Moses interceded for the wayward Israelites.

Left to our own abilities we would be eternally condemned. God, however, in the person of Jesus, goes ahead of us to prepare our place in heaven. As God delivered the Promised Land to the Israelites so he will deliver a place in heaven to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior. We may wander in the desert of sin now but we will reside in paradise at the end of our journey.

1st Corinthians 5: 7 “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

John 1: 29 “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

John 14: 2 “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

The Books of Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua

FOR GOD SO LOVED JOSHUA that he chose him to succeed Moses as leader of the Israelites. Joshua was allowed to climb the holy mountain with Moses and guard the tent of meeting used before the Tabernacle was constructed - both very great honors. Joshua was given a very strong faith in God which helped him all his life. Under Joshua’s leadership the Promised Land was conquered after many battles and became Israel’s new homeland.

The book of Deuteronomy in chapter 9 gives a great picture of God's love as he reminds the Israelites that the Promised Land is given to them not for their righteousness (*they were not righteous or faithful frequently*) but because of God's promise and love for his people.

God put in place many social rules to insure that the Israelites lived in peace with each other. Lands were assigned by God as were the laws governing the land. Joshua would not be burdened with this complicated task. God also told Joshua ahead of time that the Israelites would break his covenant. Punishment would be severe but God promised Joshua that he would be with him. Joshua would be successful in military and political matters.

Meaning for us today: God chose Joshua to assist Moses in leading his people. Joshua carried out his job with faith and dedication. When it came time for a new leader to arise for Israel, God chose Joshua. The servant became the new master.

Matthew 25: 21 **"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"**

1st Corinthians 10: 31 **"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."**

Colossians 3: 22-24 **"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything and do it not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as**

working for the Lord, not for men since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Colossians 4: 1 “Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED RAHAB that although she was a prostitute and an inhabitant of Jericho, a city that was to be conquered by Israel, she was moved to help the spies sent by Joshua. For this act of kindness and for her statement of truth about God, she and her family were spared the slaughter commanded by God. As a further show of God’s love for Rahab, she lived with the Israelites as one of them and, in fact, is listed in the Book of Matthew as one of the ancestors of King David and Jesus - very great honor indeed.

Meaning for us today: Saving faith is found in some unlikely places. Who would have thought that a prostitute and a citizen of an enemy nation would be such a good example of faith in the True God? Rahab not only was saved from the coming slaughter of the city, she was given the honor of becoming a direct ancestor of Jesus. We may be very surprised by who will be in heaven and, perhaps, who will not be.

Matthew 9: 22 “Jesus turned and saw her. Take heart, daughter, he said, your faith has healed you.”

1st Corinthians 13:12 “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully.”

The Book of Judges

FOR GOD SO LOVED ISRAEL that despite its rebellion against God’s commandments, he sent special leaders to guide the nation. These leaders were called Judges. Judges were called in times of great oppression to save Israel and peace was maintained during their lifetimes.

Meaning for us today: When the world seems to be in rebellion against God, we must rally to our Great Leader, Jesus. The Judges were chosen by God to free the Israelites from their enemies, so too Jesus was chosen to free us from the slavery of our sins. We would be foolish indeed to turn away from so precious a gift.

Acts 10:42 “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he (*Jesus*) is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE JUDGES that he made great heroes of them in Israel. They freed their people from oppression by their enemies and were given peace for the remainder of their lifetimes. They had the honor of being God’s servants when many others turned to idol worship.

Meaning for us today: We may not be called upon to free large numbers of captives or do mighty deeds. We may

sometimes feel that we are doing nothing worthwhile. God, however, may have a different perspective. By our lifestyle we are a witness to either God or the world. When others see us, what do they see? We may possibly be setting a good example that may change the life of another.

When we live according to our Christian values we are like candles in the darkness. We may not think that we shed much light but then, it may not take much light to brighten a dark place. Our one small light is joined by the light of others and together we can make our loyalty to God and his ways seen by all.

Like the Judges who stood up for what was right during times of national distress in Israel, we too can stand up in times of national moral distress and point the way to God's demands.

Colossians 3:9 "You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Colossians 3: 12 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

FOR GOD SO LOVED OTHNIEL that after freeing Israel from eight years of oppression by Cush, he gave him and Israel forty years of peace.

FOR GOD SO LOVED EHUD that he was able to save Israel after eighteen years of oppression by Moab and enjoy eighty years of peace.

FOR GOD SO LOVED DEBORAH that he made her into a great warrior who grew very powerful and wise. She defeated the Canaanites who had oppressed Israel for twenty years and brought forty years of peace to Israel.

FOR GOD SO LOVED GIDEON that he gave him the power to save Israel from seven years of oppression by the Midianites. God sent an angel to Gideon to assure him that even though he came from the weakest clan in Israel and he himself was least in his family, he would rise to lead the people to victory. God did a number of miraculous things to show the people that Gideon was his chosen leader. Forty years of peace and ripe old age were given to Gideon.

FOR GOD SO LOVED SAMSON that even though he was a wild and ungodly man, he was made a strong warrior and powerful ruler over Israel. Israel was oppressed by the Philistines for forty years. In a series of acts, Samson defeated the Philistines and humiliated them. Samson's

folly was his undoing and he was captured and blinded by his enemies. God granted Samson's last wish for revenge and he died killing a large number of his enemies.

The Book of Ruth

FOR GOD SO LOVED NAOMI - a woman who lost her husband and two sons. God provided her with a loyal and loving daughter-in-law to help her in her time of grief and in her return to her homeland. Ruth, the widow of one of Naomi's sons was not an Israelite yet she vowed to go with Naomi to Israel and make Naomi's people and God her own. In time, Ruth became a source of great joy to Naomi.

Meaning for us today: Sadness and affliction are a part of life. Jesus suffered while he lived on earth and knows firsthand how we feel. God often sends someone to comfort us in times of distress just as he sent Ruth to Naomi. In time and with faith, the pain eases and the joy of our future happiness returns.

Psalm 34: 19 "A righteous man may have many troubles but the Lord delivers him from them all."

Psalm 147:3 "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

John 16: 20, 22 "I (*Jesus*) tell you the truth; you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve but your grief will turn to joy....Now is your time of grief but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy."

FOR GOD SO LOVED RUTH that he brought her out of an ungodly nation and great sorrow and restored her joy. Ruth served Naomi like a servant because she was too despondent to take care of herself. While doing this, Ruth met a man named Boaz. The two fell in love and were married. Ruth was to become the ancestor of King David and Jesus.

Meaning for us today: Ruth, like Naomi, had lost her husband and was grieving. Ruth, however, selflessly remained with Naomi and helped her through this devastating time. If Ruth had not shown such loving kindness, she would not have met Boaz, remarried and become one of the ancestors of Jesus. God rewarded loving kindness with loving kindness.

We should try to share with others the love and mercy that God has shown us. Gratitude for our own forgiveness and salvation should be our motivation rather than the hope of a reward. In Christ, we already are assured of our heavenly reward; not for our righteousness but for the sake of Jesus' righteousness.

1st John 4: 7, 13b **“Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God...but if we love each other God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED BOAZ that he gave him a loving and faithful wife without equal. This is a great blessing to any man.

Meaning for us today: Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth's desperate situation but instead, he acted honorably and with generosity. Boaz was a man of integrity and a role model for all of us. We may take encouragement from the outcome of the story of Ruth, Boaz and Naomi. Happy endings can and do happen thanks to God's love.

Proverbs 12: 4 **"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown."**

Proverbs 18: 22 **"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."**

Read Proverbs 31: 10-31 and compare with Ruth.

The Books of 1ST and 2ND Samuel

FOR GOD SO LOVED HANNAH that he gave her the desire of her heart. Hannah was childless and in despair. God heard her prayer and granted her a child. That child is Samuel.

Meaning for us today: Life is full of trials, dangers and disappointments but God sustains us throughout. We may not receive all that we desire in life but we do receive many blessings every day. We also receive the assurance of salvation through Jesus. These are promises that God has

already kept and are there for our joy and comfort if we but look at the wonders of God's love.

Psalm 55: 22 "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall."

Romans 5: 1-5 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us."

FOR GOD SO LOVED SAMUEL that he gave him a very special role in the history of Israel. Samuel was to be the bridge between governments by judges to government by kings. Israel had been pulling away from direct rule by God and had sought rule by men. The judges were selected by God to show what this new type of rule would mean for Israel. Instead of God's wisdom and power ruling the nation, they would be under the control of imperfect people with all of the problems that come with such rule.

Rule under the judges was temporary and left the nation without stability. Israel wanted a king - another example of their rebellious nature. They should have

wanted God as their only ruler as the covenant required. God chose Samuel to warn the Israelites about the danger of their choice of ruler and to bring the changes about.

Samuel was chosen by God to anoint Saul as Israel's first king. Samuel also called upon the nation to renew their vows as set forth in the covenant established with God. Samuel was to be the voice of reason and righteousness in a wicked and rebellious nation.

When King Saul proved unworthy, Samuel was told to ordain David as the new king. God's promise to Abraham was passed along to David and in time, Jesus would be born to David's line.

Though his life was not an easy one and he suffered tragedy like everyone else, Samuel played a major part in Israel's history. Few men had so great an honor bestowed upon them.

Meaning for us today: We can be encouraged by the stories of the great people of the Bible. They faced difficult times with faith and courage. While their earthly lives may not always have had a happy ending, their eternal lives do. We could do far worse than to follow the example of these great people in our everyday lives. We may not anoint kings but we just might be an example for someone else and may have the joy of pointing the way to the Savior.

Revelation 2: 10 **“Be faithful even to the point of death and I (*Jesus*) will give you the crown of life.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED KING SAUL that he made him Israel's first king. This was a great honor bestowed on a man truly unworthy of this gift. God gave Saul success and every opportunity to walk in a God-pleasing way. Saul failed to be a faithful servant. If God were any less loving, Saul would have been captured or killed by Israel's enemies long before his reign ended.

Meaning for us today: Christians, like King Saul, have been given an honor that we are unworthy of. Saul was made king of Israel and Christians have been given forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Through study of the Gospel and prayer, we can grow more appreciative of our high calling and strive to live for the glory of God. We may not be kings but we are part of God's great kingdom. We should remain awake and watchful so that when Jesus returns, we are found to be ready. Let us not follow the example of King Saul which leads to condemnation.

Romans 8: 37 **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."**

Revelation 1:5b-6 **"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."**

Luke 12: 37 **"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED JONATHAN that he caused him to befriend David and save his life several times when his father sought to kill David. Jonathan was King Saul's son and had the good fortune to see his friend spare his father's life on several occasions. Jonathan knew that David would reign in Israel and had the honor and joy to help David attain that high calling. David did not forget the bond of friendship with Jonathan even after the death of his friend. David provided for Jonathan's family and gave them places of honor in his kingdom.

Meaning for us today: True friendship is a treasure beyond price. The Bible has many accounts of friendships and the marvelous results of those friendships. True friendship weathers many storms. True friendship can be difficult and even painful at times, yet the love involved in friendship keeps the relationship alive. We can learn a great deal about what it means to be a friend by reading the account of David and Jonathan. We can examine our own friendships to see if they are beneficial to us or are harmful. We can also examine ourselves to see if we are worthy to be called a friend.

Proverbs 27: 6, 9-10 "The kisses of an enemy may be profuse but faithful are the wounds of a friend...Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel...Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father."

John 15: 13-15 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does

not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

FOR GOD SO LOVED KING DAVID that he protected him from the deadly plans of King Saul. David faced constant persecution by King Saul. David remained a God-fearing man and acted in a God-pleasing way. God's love kept David from harm despite overwhelming opposition.

When David became king in Israel he faced constant warfare. His was never an easy or peaceful time. David had to flee from enemies frequently during his lifetime. David also committed grave sins such as murder in order to steal another man's wife.

While God punished and forgave David's sins, he also gave David great comfort. God promised that David's kingdom would never end. This came true in an earthly sense in that a descendent of David always ruled over Israel. This also came true in an eternal sense in that Jesus was born to David's line and Jesus will reign forever.

God's love for David extends even to this day. Every time we read the book of Psalms, we think of David. The trials and hardships of his life gave David the perfect education to write the beautiful Psalms that help countless others face their own difficulties. It is as if David is still with us today.

Meaning for us today: Life is full of trials and dangers. When you think about how many opportunities there are in daily life to be injured or killed, you come to appreciate just

how much God protects us. Like King David, we are watched over and protected every minute of every day.

God's love extends to us as it did to King David. By inspiring David to write the Psalms, God has given us a truly comforting and inspirational book to read during times of hardship.

God promised David that his line would endure. We have an even better promise. Through Jesus we have been given the gift of eternal life. In life and in death we will endure forever.

Psalm 34: 4, 7 "I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears...The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them."

Psalm 23 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters; he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

FOR GOD SO LOVED NATHAN that he sent this prophet to save David from his sin of murder and adultery. Nathan's message caused David to repent and avoid death

by God's hand. Nathan was the messenger of God's love rather than God's wrath.

Meaning for us today: God puts many people into our lives to help and encourage us. Some of these people, like Nathan, are sent to us to turn us from going astray. Good advice may come from the mouth of someone we know but the words might just be coming from God.

2nd Samuel 7:14-15a **"I (God) will be his father and he will be my son. When he does wrong I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him."**

Job 5: 17 **"Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty."**

Psalms 119: 67-68 **"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good and what you do is good; teach me your decrees."**

The Books of 1ST and 2ND Kings

FOR GOD SO LOVED KING SOLOMON that he made him king of Israel. God told Solomon that he could ask for anything he wanted from God. Solomon asked for wisdom so that he could rule God's people. God gave him wisdom and added tremendous wealth, honor and long life as gifts to Solomon. God also chose Solomon to build the great Temple and gave him the means to do this.

Solomon fell into folly in his old age. Solomon had many wives from different countries. He began to follow false gods and so brought ruin to Israel. God did not punish Solomon directly but he did tell him that the kingship would be taken from his family. Because of Solomon's worship of false gods, God split Israel into two parts - Israel and Judah. Both parts would be enslaved by enemies and Israel would be dispersed and lost. Only two tribes making up Judah would survive. It was from here that Jesus would come many years in the future. God's love for Solomon sustained his lineage.

Meaning for us today: What do we ask for in prayer? Do we ask for things that are God pleasing or only self pleasing? God told Solomon to ask for anything he wanted just as we are told to ask anything in Jesus name. Solomon wanted to please God and asked for the wisdom to lead his people. This was pleasing to God and the request was granted along with many other blessings. We should learn from Solomon. Our focus should be on what we can do for the glory of God first and after that what we would want from God. We might just be surprised by how much more God is prepared to give us than we expected when we seek his kingdom first.

Matthew 6: 31-33 "So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

1st Kings 3:10-14 “The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this (*wisdom*). So God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for - both riches and honor - so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.’”

FOR GOD SO LOVED ELIJAH that he made him into a great prophet. God provided Elijah with all he needed in miraculous ways. Ravens fed him by God's command, a starving widow was given a miraculous store of food and an angel of the Lord fed and sustained him when he was in despair and God appeared to him to reassure him that there were still seven thousand who were faithful and Elijah was not alone. God worked many miracles through Elijah to prove to everyone that he was a man of God's calling.

When the time came for Elijah's life to end, he did not die. God took him directly to heaven.

Meaning for us today: God provides for those who work for his glory. This does not mean an easy or trouble free life but rather that the worker in God's vineyard will not lack anything needed.

Luke 10:7b **“The worker deserves his wages.”**

Colossians 3:23-24 **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, nor for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WIDOW AND HER SON that he saved them from starvation during a drought. Because she showed kindness to Elijah, God provided her with food that did not run out during the drought. When the widow's son fell ill and died, Elijah prayed to God and the boy returned to life. The widow had the reassurance that it was the true God that loved her.

Meaning for us today: God takes care of those who do not seem to have the means to take care of themselves, just as he did for this widow. Her act of kindness to Elijah followed the teaching of Jesus as seen in the Bible passage below. When we follow God's teachings we may be very surprised by the grace and mercy that surrounds us especially if we look for God's love in our lives.

Matthew 10:42 **“If anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”**

Matthew 25:34-40 **“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.'

FOR GOD SO LOVED ELISHA that he made him the inheritor of Elijah's ministry. Elisha was able to perform many miracles; he turned a pot of stew that was poisonous into a safe meal, he fed one hundred people with only twenty loaves of bread and there were pieces left over, he raised the dead and healed the leprous warrior Naaman. Elisha saved Israel from an army from Aram by causing them to become blind and be captured. Elisha then restored their sight and had the king of Israel feed and release them. This brought peace to the land without bloodshed.

Elisha would enjoy God's protection even in adversity.

Meaning for us today: God provides for those who work for his glory. This does not mean an easy or trouble free life but rather that the worker in God's vineyard will not

lack anything needed. God gives us the special abilities we may need to accomplish the tasks he assigns us to do.

Matthew 10:19-20 **“Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”**

Psalms 73:24 **“You shall guide me with your counsel and afterward receive me to glory.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WIDOW OF A PROPHET that he had Elisha save her from creditors by giving her a miraculous supply of oil. She was able to sell this oil and pay her debts. She and her sons were able to live on what was left over.

Meaning for us today: God takes care of those who do not seem to have the means to take care of themselves, just as he did for this widow. God provided for her needs and those of her family. God still provides for us every day.

Psalms 68:5 **“A father of the fatherless and a protector of the widows is God in his holy habitation.”**

Psalms 104: 27-28 **“These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them they gather it up; when you open your hand they are satisfied with good things.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE SHUNEMITE WOMAN who welcomed Elisha into her home that he gave her the desire of her heart - a son. She had no children and her husband was old. When the woman's faith was tested by the death of her son, God gave her the faith to remain loyal. The woman sought out Elisha and he was able to restore the boy's life by a miracle. When a famine struck, Elisha told the woman to take her family elsewhere until the famine ended. God restored her property to her on her return including the income her property earned in her absence.

Meaning for us today: This woman welcomed Elisha into her home because he was a man of God. She made a room available to him whenever he was in town. This woman acted as Jesus would tell us too many years later. Once again, we see that whatever is done for one of God's people is the same as doing something for God himself. We should try to open our hearts to others and do what we can to help. As we grow in grace we will be able to do more than we ever thought possible.

2nd Corinthians 9:6 **"But this I say, he which sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."**

Matthew 25:34-40 **"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and looked after me, I was in prison and you came**

to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.'

FOR GOD SO LOVED NAAMAN a warrior from Aram that he caused a servant girl to send him to Israel to see Elisha to cure him of leprosy. Naaman was cured and became a believer in the true God of Israel.

Meaning for us today: When all seems hopeless God is full of hope. Whether we are inspired by the Bible or by a faithful Christian, God leads us in the path we should follow. Help may come from sources we did not expect.

Psalm 25:12 **"Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him."**

Psalm 48:14 **For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."**

2nd Corinthians 12:9 **"My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED HIS CHOSEN REMNANT that he gave them God-fearing kings. The northern ten tribes had

kings that did evil in the sight of God and they led these tribes into oblivion. The remnant tribes of Judah and Benjamin were in the south and would continue David's line according to God's promise. Jerusalem was located in the territory of Judah.

Meaning for us today: Whatever God has put under our control should be managed in a God pleasing way. If we abuse this responsibility we not only sin ourselves but we lead others to sin. The kings of the northern ten tribes of Israel led their people into oblivion. We should strive to serve God in all we do and look forward to the glory prepared for us.

Joshua 24:15 **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."**

Psalms 2:10-11 **"Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED HEZEKIAH who was a king of Judah and who was righteous and faithful, that he saved Judah from conquest by Assyria. When Hezekiah was terminally ill, God healed him and extended his life another fifteen years. There would be peace and divine protection for the rest of Hezekiah's life and he would be spared the conquest by the Babylonians. God shows mercy and love to those that seek and worship him.

Meaning for us today: This is a case in which God not only spared a king but also his entire kingdom for the sake of faithful obedience. If we center our lives on God we can

be assured that his love and protection will be with us. We may still have to suffer hardship and tragedy, but God will sustain us and at the end of our lives, he will lead us to heaven where there are no tears.

Ezra 8:22b “The good hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him.”

Psalm 121:7-8 “The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

Psalm 125:1-3 “Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore.”

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

FOR GOD SO LOVED EZRA that he put him in charge of the spiritual welfare of the Jews returning from exile in Babylonia. The time in exile had brought about harmful changes in the Jewish religion and Ezra was assigned to correct this. If not for Ezra's efforts, worship of the true God might have been replaced with the idol worship of the surrounding nations. If this had happened, there would be no Israel for Jesus to be born into.

FOR GOD SO LOVED NEHEMIAH that he put him in charge of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the restoring of the social order in the city. Having been in exile, the Jews upon returning to Jerusalem had to start all over. Nehemiah was an important part of establishing order and security for the fledgling city.

Meaning For Us Today: Ezra and Nehemiah were two men the Lord put in charge of rebuilding Israel after the exile. Ezra was to guide the spiritual building and Nehemiah the physical and social structure rebuilding of God's chosen remnant. In much the same way, we have a responsibility to help guide the spiritual and social environment in the community we live in. In everything we do, we set an example for others to see. We can be an influence for good or sinfulness. What do we stand for - God or Satan? Our actions may lead others to follow - in which direction do we want ourselves and others to go?

Matthew 5:16 **"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."**

Joshua 24:15 **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."**

The Book of Esther

FOR GOD SO LOVED MORDECAI that he made him guardian of his cousin, Esther. Esther was an orphan. Mordecai treated Esther like his own daughter. Esther would go on to become a queen. Mordecai would learn of a

plot to assassinate the king and stop the act. Mordecai would be promoted to a position second only to the king. Because Mordecai would not bow down to the king (*God was the only one he would bow down to*), a plot was set to not only kill Mordecai but all of the Jews as well. God protected Mordecai and the Jews. God used the king's gratitude towards Mordecai to save both he and the Jews from those who would annihilate them.

Mordecai would be held in high esteem for his integrity and loyalty to the Jews.

Meaning for us today: Kindness, loyalty, faithfulness and integrity may seem like outdated values in the modern world but where would we be without them? Mordecai serves as an example of the positive influence such behavior has on those around us. If our actions lead others to seek our Savior, we have been worthy of the name "*Christian*".

Matthew 5:16 **"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."**

Deuteronomy 12:28 **"Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you so that it may always go well with you and your children after you because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED ESTHER that he took her, an orphan, and made her queen. Through her guardian Mordecai and her own efforts, the king was saved from

assassination and the Jews were saved from annihilation. The king gave the Jews complete protection from persecution and the right to fight and destroy their enemies. Esther's loyalty to her God and her people yielded great benefit to all.

Meaning for us today: We do not know what God plans for each of us. Nothing is impossible for God and amazing things often happen from very ordinary beginnings. Bible stories are not just tales of the past; they are hopes for the present and future as well. We never know when we may be a part of a larger plan God is bringing to completion.

Jeremiah 28:11-12 **"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.'**"

Psalms 146:9 **"The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow but he frustrates the ways of the wicked."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE JEWS that he caused a Jewish girl to become a queen in Persia. Through her loyalty to the True God and her people, the Jews were saved from annihilation and were given royal protection from their enemies.

Meaning for us today: We are very much like the Jews in this Biblical account. Through the actions of one man we too are saved from annihilation and given divine protection from our enemies - sin and eternal death.

Romans 5:15 “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man (*Adam*), how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”

THE BOOK OF JOB

FOR GOD SO LOVED JOB that he made a special example of faith out of him. God allowed Satan to inflict terrible suffering on Job as proof that Job’s faith was not based on earthly comfort. God protected Job from being killed by Satan. Job lost nearly every earthly comfort and possession yet he remained faithful.

While this may not seem like a loving act by God, it really was. After the time of testing was done, God restored to Job all that he had lost and more. Even more important, Job’s faith was made even stronger which is the goal of every believer. To this day, we still remember Job. Job suffered much as Christ suffered and came through like refined gold. God’s love and trust in Job was seen to be justified and we can be sure that heaven’s doors were open to him.

Meaning for us today: Life is full of pain and sorrow but we must be careful about how we think of this. We tend to blame rather than accept when these difficult times occur. Troubles may come as a result of our sins but troubles may come as a way of testing and strengthening our faith. When we are in the midst of trouble, we often turn to God for help. We are encouraged and strengthened when we see God at work in our lives. Ease and prosperity

may seem like a show of God's love (and often are), but times of unease and trouble are God's loving way of bringing us closer to him and preparing us for eternal ease in heaven.

Job 36:21 "Beware of turning to evil which you seem to prefer to affliction."

Job 14:1 "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

2nd Corinthians 4:17 "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal."

FOR GOD SO LOVED ELIPHAZ, BILDAD AND ZOPHAR that he forgave their incorrect interpretation of God's actions in his dealings with Job. God also forgave them for their bad advice to Job during the time of his testing. God could have been far more severe to these three friends of Job but was merciful.

Meaning for us today: When we see a friend or loved one in distress, we should refrain from being judgmental. We do not know the origin of the trouble or its purpose. If we condemn the sufferer or call the trouble of Satan's making, we may be in conflict with God's purpose. We should, instead, advise a sufferer to seek God's forgiveness, love and mercy and help him to stand firm the

hope of salvation through Jesus. This advice will ease the pain of the sufferer.

Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Job 38:1-2 “Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said, ‘Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?’”

The Book of Psalms

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he gave us a beautiful book of comfort for troubled times. The Psalms were mostly written by David who led a life of trouble and persecution. David wrote these Psalms as a prayer book for help, comfort and gratitude for God’s loving mercy and protection. In times of trouble, we can all find something in the Psalms to ease our burden and pain. The trials of one person (*David*) give great comfort to us all just as the sacrifice of one person (*Jesus*) gives comfort and salvation to us all.

Meaning for us today: Suffering is as common today as it always has been. The comfort found in the Psalms is as real today as it has been for many hundreds of years. Like God’s love and mercy, the Psalms do not grow old or weak with the passing of the years. No matter what your trouble is, there are words of comfort somewhere in the Psalms.

Psalm 9:9-10 “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.”

Psalm 121:2 “My help comes from the Lord.”

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he gave us this book of wisdom to guide us in life. In the book of Proverbs, we have access to the wisdom of Solomon - the wisest man who ever lived. By studying and practicing the wisdom found in Proverbs we can avoid or solve many of life's problems in a God pleasing way.

Meaning for us today: The wise person learns from those who are wiser than himself. In the book of Proverbs, we learn from the wisest man who ever lived (*except for Jesus*). Solomon's wisdom comes from God; therefore, the wisdom we learn from Solomon is also from God.

Psalm 111:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Ephesians 5:15-17 “Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is.”

The Book of Song of Songs

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he gave us this book of love poetry to serve as an example for us to follow. While sensual in nature, this book shows the deep and passionate love of a man and a woman. This love is but a shadow of the love and passion that God has for us and his creation. It was for love's sake that God the Father sent his Son Jesus to save us from divine wrath and eternal punishment.

If we reflected God's love more in our actions, we and all around us would live better lives. If men and women loved each other as shown in Song of Songs, families would be more loving and secure.

Meaning for us today: If we take our lessons in what love is from modern movies and television, we will destroy one another. Love as depicted in modern shows is selfish, abusive, temporary and hurtful. This is not how God portrays love in the Bible. If we take our lessons in what love is from the Bible we would support and build each other up.

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." 1st John 4:16b-18a

Mark 12:31 **"Love your neighbor as yourself."**

John 15:9 **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."**

1st Corinthians 13:4-8a “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

The Books of the Major and Minor Prophets:
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

FOR GOD SO LOVED ISRAEL that he sent these men to deliver his message of repentance and future salvation to a wayward and rebellious nation. God could have chosen to send punishment and annihilation to the Jews but he wanted them to return to him. The prophets were the voice of God calling for the return of the chosen people to their God. Punishment would come, but mercy and forgiveness would follow.

Meaning for us today: The Bible is our prophet for today's troubled times. A prophet would teach lessons from the past and call for repentance and devotion to God. The Bible does the same thing. The Bible teaches us about the past relationship between God and mankind and calls upon us to believe in Jesus as our Savior, repent, and love God with all our heart. No human message is as powerful or has the ability to save us from eternal punishment. We need

look no further than our Bible for God's message for all of mankind.

John 17:17 **"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."**

Matthew 22:29 **"Jesus replied, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.'"**

Romans 10:17 **"Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE PROPHETS that he selected them from the whole population to be his messengers. The life of a prophet was not easy and often ended in martyrdom. God's message was not easily accepted by a sinful and rebellious population and the prophets often bore the brunt of the people's anger. Nevertheless, prophets knew they had a high calling and a life spent in God's service. This and the help God provided made for a worthy life.

Two prophets who had difficult times, yet demonstrated God's loving protection, are Daniel and Jonah.

In the book of Daniel we see those who are faithful to the True God being persecuted to the point of execution. Daniel was placed in a lion's den to be devoured. God rescued him and caused his holy name to be praised by the idolatrous king. In the same book we see three other faithful

men condemned to death for not turning away from God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into a blazing furnace yet God saved them unhurt and again caused his holy name to be praised by an idolatrous king.

Jonah was a prophet that did not want to do God's will. He thought he could escape God and took to sea. During a furious storm it became apparent that Jonah was the cause of the ship's peril. Jonah ordered that he be thrown overboard and he was. A great fish swallowed Jonah and he spent three days in the fish's belly. Jonah knew he sinned and repented. Jonah trusted in God's love and mercy and was not disappointed. God caused Jonah to be delivered from the belly of the fish and deposited on dry land. Jonah then proceeded to follow God's commands and deliver his message to Nineveh. Even when Jonah was angry that God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh, God did not punish Jonah. Instead, God lectured him on mercy.

Meaning for us today: Being a servant of God is frequently difficult and often dangerous. Even so, if life must be difficult or dangerous, is it not better to face these challenges in God's service than in serving worldly pursuits? God's love is eternal and more than worth every effort we make in this world. God will not abandon those who believe in him now or in heaven.

Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Romans 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or

persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

In the New Testament we see God fulfilling his Law through his Son Jesus. It is the ultimate show of God's love.

Mankind would not and could not obey God's Law. Mankind's best efforts were still laced with sin and failure to measure up to God's commands. In his unimaginable mercy, God fulfilled his own Law by sending Jesus to live in perfect obedience to the Law and then to sacrifice his sinless life to pay for the sins of mankind.

In our look at God's love in the New Testament we will use the name "*Jesus*" equally with "*God*". Jesus, the only Son of God, is True God and fully entitled to that name

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (*John 3:16*). Could any other statement show God's love better than this? God the Father would reconcile all people to himself through his Son Jesus.

It took unimaginable love for the Father to send his Son to live, suffer and die for unworthy mankind. It took unimaginable love for Jesus to leave heaven to live, suffer and die to earn the salvation of all mankind. Jesus would suffer God the Father's wrath and the torments of hell in our place because of love.

What does God ask in return for this awful sacrifice? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved (*Acts 16:31*). The terrible price has been paid for our sins and all God asks is that we accept salvation as a free gift.

Meaning for us today: We are very fortunate to live at this time in history. We have the work of Jesus and the Apostles recorded in the New Testament. We need not wonder if Jesus really is the Savior based on rumor, popular opinion or hearsay nor is the story of our salvation different from town to town. We need not fear the religious leaders who would deny Jesus and have us follow them in unbelief. God's word is set before us complete. The hard work of building the church in the face of persecution and death has been done. It is up to us to maintain the church and carry on the work of so many before us.

John 4:38b **"Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."**

Matthew 28:19-20 “Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age.”

Ephesians 2:19-20 “You are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ISRAELITES that for the sake of his promise of a messiah, he caused Jesus to live amongst them and give them the first opportunity to enter into the new covenant. After Jesus died on the cross, the kingdom of heaven was opened to all who believed in him as their Savior. Whereas the Israelites were the chosen people for many years, now all are God’s chosen people and are invited to partake in the salvation earned by his Son Jesus.

Meaning for us today: Since so large a part of the Bible deals with the Israelites, some people feel as if, not being Jewish, they are not really part of God’s family. This is certainly not true. God made a promise to the Jews that a Savior would be sent to them. God fulfilled that promise through Jesus. The promise of a Savior was not only for the Jews but rather, first for the Jews and then for everyone in the world. Jew and Gentile are alike now in God’s eyes. With faith in Jesus as the Savior, Jew and Gentile are God’s family. Without faith in Jesus as the Savior, Jew and Gentile are not part of God’s family.

Matthew 3:9 “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”

Luke 2:10-11 “The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:30-32 “My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people; a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

John 9:16 “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED ELIZABETH AND ZECHARIAH

that he selected them to be the parents of John the Baptist. Elizabeth and Zechariah were childless and well along in years. It would take a miracle for them to have a child and that is exactly what God did for them. God gave them the miracle of a pregnancy in older age. Their son, John the

Baptist, would be the herald of Jesus and would be held in high esteem by the Savior of all mankind.

Meaning for us today: God is not stopped by any earthly circumstances from doing his will. Nothing can successfully oppose God. God chose Elizabeth and Zechariah to be the parents of John the Baptist and neither old age nor sterility could deter him. Not only is God able to do the impossible, he can turn the impossible into great triumph and glory in our lives. God did not stop doing miracles back in the ancient days. God still works in our lives every day.

Luke 1:37 **“Nothing is impossible with God.”**

Matthew 19:26 **“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”**

Genesis 18:13-14 **“The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord?’”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MARY AND JOSEPH that he selected them from all the people on earth to be the earthly parents of Jesus Christ - God the Savior. Such a wondrous event must have been difficult to understand and must have come with a great burden of responsibility. God's love provided for Mary and Joseph as they raised Jesus.

Meaning for us today: We cannot understand the wisdom of God nor can we comprehend his plans. What we

do know is that God works in our lives for his good purpose. Whatever God plans for us he will accomplish. We must live by faith and strive to work for God's kingdom. It may be that our lives will touch other lives and great things may occur. Our part may be seemingly small but the end result may be wonderful.

Jeremiah 28:11-12 **"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.'**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE HUMBLE that he revealed the birth of the Christ child not to kings and rulers of the Temple but to humble shepherds. God's love begins with the humble and downcast, to the weak and lowly rather than the rich and powerful. Throughout his ministry, Jesus sought out sinners rather than those who thought themselves righteous.

Meaning for us today: Unlike sinful mankind, God does not look at our wealth but rather our hearts. Great things are done by very weak people. Our focus in life should be on the heavenly rather than on earthly matters.

1st Corinthians 1:26-29 **"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the**

wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

Psalm 69:32 “The humble shall see this and be glad; and your heart shall live that seek God.”

Psalm 149:4 “The Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED SIMEON that he revealed the Savior to him as he had promised. Simeon lived long enough to see his Savior and to know him for who he is. Simeon could leave this life with joy knowing that he saw God’s salvation in the flesh.

FOR GOD SO LOVED ANNA who was a widow who spent most of her life in the Temple fasting and praying that he revealed Jesus to her. Anna was eighty-four years old and was blessed with the sight and knowledge of her Savior just like Simeon.

Meaning for us today: Simeon and Anna waited faithfully to see the promised Savior all their lives. We are truly blessed in that we do not have to wait. We have the Bible and in its pages we can see Jesus our Savior. Jesus reveals himself through his holy word and all we need do is open the Bible and read. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. What a comfort it is to possess such knowledge.

Luke 2:30-31 **“My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED JOHN THE BAPTIST that he made him the herald of the Savior. Even Jesus acknowledged this high honor bestowed on John. The life of John the Baptist was not easy or comfortable but no higher calling could be hoped for. What an honor it was to be chosen as the modern Elijah to announce the arrival of the Promised Christ. John even had the rare privilege of baptizing Jesus as the crowning event of his life.

Meaning for us today: When God opens a door for us we should not hesitate to enter. Only God knows the purpose for which he is calling us. Faith should be the center of our lives and with faith we can accept the gift of salvation and accept whatever task God sends our way. God will give us the means to do his will.

Matthew 9:9 **“As Jesus went on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him and Matthew got up and followed him.”**

1st Thessalonians 1:2-3 **“We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE DISCIPLES that he gave them special teaching and insights into the new covenant created by God the Father. Jesus selected twelve of the many disciples and gave them extra special attention. These twelve were the apostles who would become the seeds of the Church which would spread throughout the world. The life of the early disciples and apostles was very difficult and often led to persecution and even death. All living things die but to die in the service of God is truly meaningful and a blessing. The Jews were persecuted and murdered by other nations and for other reasons but they did not have the comfort of knowing their salvation was assured.

Meaning for us today: In a day and age when we think that we are just a number in the system, a face in the crowd or a small gear in a big machine, we can look at what twelve simple and unsophisticated men did. These twelve men guided by the Holy Spirit and empowered by him spread the gospel all around the world. The Bible and the church we have today came from the work of these small faces in a large crowd. We may not be apostles, but only God knows what far reaching effects our lives may have. A life of faith may touch countless other lives by example. Someone in trouble may find his way to the Lord by what we say or do.

Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in

the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise you Father in heaven.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE AFFLICTED that he healed many who were sick or disabled. Jesus did not only heal the physical ailments of these people, he healed their spiritual ailments as well. Many times we read about Jesus curing someone of a disease or disability and then declaring that their faith made them whole. In other words, healing their bodies was insignificant compared to healing their souls and forgiving their sins. Not only did Jesus heal the afflicted but by doing so, he brought many who witnessed such acts to faith in God’s plan of salvation.

Meaning for us today: Weakness and affliction can be a real blessing. When we are strong and healthy, we can become conceited and self-serving. When we are weak and afflicted, we often turn to God for help. When we put our trust in God, we are doing what he commands us to do. By learning to trust God through the difficult times, we strengthen our faith and are made better Christians. Weakness and affliction serve to prepare us for our last day whether it is when Jesus returns again or when we lay on our deathbed. God may not heal our infirmities but he will heal the penitent soul as Jesus did so many times.

2nd Corinthians 12:7-9 “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord

to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.'

Luke 5:20, 23-25 "When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.' ...'Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...' He said to the paralyzed man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God."

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE COMMON PEOPLE that he spent a great deal of time preaching to them. The religious leaders were too proud and powerful to humble themselves yet the common people, who were humble, were elevated by Jesus to positions of honor in God's Kingdom. Jesus was often criticized for spending time with tax collectors and sinners (*people held in low esteem by society*) yet these people knew of their need for forgiveness of their sins and welcomed Jesus and his message of salvation.

Meaning for us today: Unlike sinful mankind, God does not look at our wealth but rather our hearts. Great things are done by very weak people. Our focus in life should be on the heavenly rather than on earthly matters.

1st Corinthians 1:26-29 "**Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God**

chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”

Psalm 69:32 “The humble shall see this and be glad; and your heart shall live that seek God.”

Psalm 149:4 “The Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE SAMARITAN WOMAN that he revealed himself to her and brought her to a saving faith. Through her, many in the Samaritan town where she lived came to believe in Jesus as the Savior. This was remarkable in that Jews and Samaritans were antagonistic towards each other. A Jew would not have dealings with a Samaritan, nor would a Samaritan have dealings with a Jew, even though they had common ancestors. This woman was truly blessed since Jesus came to preach to the Jews and only rarely to others. Gentiles would be welcomed into the kingdom of God after Jesus’ death on the cross when salvation became a gift to all people alike.

Meaning for Us Today: In a surprising display of evangelism, Jesus spoke to a Samaritan (*an opponent of Judaism*) who was a woman (*something a rabbi would not do in public*). Through this act, Jesus not only brought this woman to faith but also brought many in the town where she lived to faith as well. One small act had the ripple effect

of saving many. We should remember this example that Jesus set for us in our daily lives and not be afraid to do the unconventional to point the way to our Savior.

2nd Timothy 1:8a **“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”**

1st Peter 3:15 **“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE PHARISEES, SADDUCEES AND TEACHERS OF THE LAW that he frequently rebuked them and pointed out their errors so that they might turn from their sinful ways and return to true worship of God. Over time these men added many new laws and rules to the Jewish religion which were not ordained by God. These laws and rules began to take the place of the truth. Jesus tried very hard to correct this error. Many of these leaders were sincere in their beliefs and Jesus tried to bring them to the truth.

Not every show of God's love is gentle. God often uses rebuke, hardship and punishment to bring sinners back to himself. This is not hatred on God's part but rather love. It may not be pleasant yet the end result is salvation which is joy beyond our greatest hopes and dreams.

Meaning for us today: There are many who will ridicule or argue against the Christian faith. The motives of these people may be unclear as is their experience with Christians in the past. Jesus was faced with just this

situation. Many Jewish scholars would not accept him as the promised Savior. Jesus did not try to water down the gospel to suit these people. Instead, Jesus told the simple truth and let the power of his word work faith in his opponents. We should never back down before unbelievers or water down our stand for Biblical truth no matter how unpopular we may become. Those who would oppose Christians oppose the One whom we believe in. We should not be afraid to stand against the tide of this sinful world.

1st Peter 3:17 “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

John 15:18-19, 20b, 23 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world...If they persecuted me they will persecute you also...He who hates me, hates my Father as well.”

Romans 1:16-17 “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew then for the Gentile. For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”

FOR GOD SO LOVED CHILDREN that he did not allow adults to stop them from coming to him. Jesus even preached that we must become like children in order to enter the kingdom of God. Children are trusting and often

lack the prejudices and doubts of adults. We are to be the same way in our trust and faith in Jesus. What a beautiful example of the proud mind being taught to imitate the simple mind.

Jesus also taught that children should be protected and shielded from sin. Those who harmed or led his little ones astray would face severe punishment.

Meaning for us today: All too often, children are not given the nurturing or the discipline they need. The results are obvious. Jesus did not think little of children. As a matter of fact, he elevated these little ones to a high place in his ministry. We teach a lot to children and, perhaps, we can also learn from them.

Proverbs 22:6 “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

Mark 9:36-37 “He (*Jesus*) took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’”

Mark 10:14b-15 “He (*Jesus*) said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth; anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’”

FOR GOD SO LOVED HIS ENEMIES that he did not destroy them, as he could have, but rather showed them mercy and patience. Jesus stopped his disciples from rash actions against those who opposed him and reminded them of the need for love and mercy. Jesus knew that even after his death on the cross, some of his enemies would come to faith and be saved. Jesus set an example for all of us to follow in his treatment of those who hated him and sought to kill him.

Meaning for us today: Hatred, like cancer, eats away at a person. Giving in to hatred only wears us down and stops us from living a content and joyful life. If Jesus, who could have called upon all the power of heaven to destroy his enemies and instead showed mercy, should we not do the same?

Proverbs 11:17 **“The merciful man doeth good to his own soul but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.”**

Matthew 5:7 **“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”**

Hosea 6:6 and Matthew 9:13 **“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WEAK OF FAITH that he made it very clear that it was his faith in God the Father that is bestowed on all believers and which earns our salvation. Being sinful we are by nature weak in our faith. Jesus knows that and overcomes our weakness with his strength.

We are assured that God will not let us endure more than we are able and that he will not extinguish a weak faith.

Even the apostle Peter who spent a great deal of time with Jesus was weak in his faith and denied Jesus. Peter was restored to his position as an apostle by Jesus after he was resurrected. This is a great comfort to us all. If an apostle could fail in his faith and be restored, so can we. The Beatitudes also stresses the blessedness of the weak for they will be strengthened by God.

Meaning for us today: In these difficult times it is easy to become discouraged and feel helpless. If we depended on our strength for salvation, no one could enter eternal life. Thank God that our weakness is made up for by the strength of Jesus' faith. The power of this faith is given to us all through the Holy Spirit no matter how weak we are. Clinging to our Savior, we will be drawn up to heaven.

Matthew 5:3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

Matthew 26:41 **"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak."**

Romans 14:1 **"Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters."**

Mark 9:24b **"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"**

Luke 17:5 **"The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'"**

Mark 5:36b **"Don't be afraid, just believe."**

John 12:32 “But I (*Jesus*), when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE STRONG OF FAITH that he worked great miracles for them. The Syrophoenician woman's strong faith earned the healing of her daughter, the centurion's faith earned the healing of his servant, children were brought back from death and given back to their believing parents, Mary and Martha saw their brother restored to life again and there were many other examples of God's love. It should be well noted that if healing or reversal of death does not occur it is not because God does not love us. God has plans we do not know about. Sometimes God uses affliction or death for our good or the good of others. If Jesus did not suffer greatly and then die on the cross how then could we have salvation?

Why do bad things happen to believers? Only God knows his plans and the result of these things. The believer must trust in God and his wisdom as a child. One day, in heaven, all our questions, doubts and grief will be resolved and we will see how these things worked for our benefit. In the case of death, we should not be like the critics who proclaim that everyone wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die to get there. Death is but the beginning of eternal life for those who put their trust in Jesus. Of course we grieve at a loss but when the pain of that loss subsides, we can be comforted that our loved one is with God forever. Even if there is doubt about a loved one's faith, we must trust in God. Who knows whether a person comes to faith in the last moments of life? The thief on the cross was one

such person and assured by Jesus that he would be with him in paradise that very day.

Meaning for us today: We can pray for any number of things. The prayer for more faith carries the assurance that it will be granted. With faith, everything else can be endured and accomplished.

Hebrews chapter 11

Romans 1:17 **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”**

1st Peter 1:8-9 **“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”**

2nd Timothy 4:7-8 **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MANKIND that he has kept the time and day of his return unknown. We would be in total chaos if we knew when the Lord would return. Even in his

withholding of this vital information God shows great love. This causes us to seek him daily and to work at strengthening our faith so as to be found ready for him. By this we find comfort and encouragement in our salvation already earned for us by Jesus.

Meaning for us today: If Jesus did not reveal the time of his return; we should not waste valuable time chasing after theories about this. Jesus told us to be watchful and ready for that day no matter when it comes. That is the important concept - not when Jesus will return. If sinful mankind knew the day of Jesus' return it would be a disaster. Many would despair and many would abuse the time left. God wants us to be constantly serving him and strengthening our faith in him. We are led to this end by not knowing the day of his return and following his commands throughout our lives.

Mark 13:32-33, 36-37 “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come...If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping, What I say to you, I say to everyone; ‘Watch!’”

Luke 12:37, 40 “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes...You also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

2nd Peter chapter 3

1st Thessalonians chapter 4 and 5

Acts 17:27 **“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE SINFUL WOMAN who anointed him while at dinner that he forgave her sins and honored her by telling of her wherever the Word is preached. This woman was in despair over her sins and approached Jesus without a word. Jesus knew her grief and turned it to joy. Jesus then turned this gift into something special. Jesus said that the woman prepared him for burial. A sinner, yet held in honor - that is what we can all share in our Lord's love and mercy.

Meaning for us today: We can take encouragement in this account of a sinful woman. We too are sinful yet we are forgiven. Fear is turned to confidence and grief to joy by the love of God through Jesus our Savior.

Psalms 103:8-10 **“The Lord is compassionate and gracious; slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”**

Isaiah 1:18 **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED LAZARUS THE BEGGAR that he sent dogs to minister to his wounds. Even though Lazarus

had misery and pain until he died, he was taken to heaven and for all eternity was in joy. The rich man who led a life of comfort and who did not help Lazarus spent eternity in hell and begged to have Lazarus ease his suffering and help prevent a similar fate from befalling his family.

Meaning for us today: Now, perhaps more than ever, the pursuit of wealth is the main goal in life. We think of wealth as security against life's problems and a chasm between us and the rest of the world. God, according to this account, does not view wealth the same way. The rich man had his wealth only in this life whereas the beggar has his wealth throughout eternity.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

1st Timothy 6:9-10 “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE TAX COLLECTOR that he heard his heartfelt plea for mercy and forgave his sins, while the Pharisee who was self righteous went unforgiven. Earnest repentance of sins draws God's love in great measure.

Another tax collector, Zacchaeus, who earnestly sought Jesus, was rewarded with a visit by him. Zacchaeus was moved to repentance and faith by Jesus and received salvation.

Although tax collectors were looked down upon and hated, Jesus sought them out and helped them come to faith. One such tax collector, Matthew, became an apostle and helped spread the good news of salvation to the whole world.

Meaning for us today: Don't we hold certain occupations in contempt and scorn? Don't we treat people in those jobs as if they were lower than ourselves? Jesus did not have this attitude. Jesus sought out many who were considered contemptible and unclean and raised them above their critics. We are all alike in sinfulness and should remember that none of us can compare favorably with God.

Romans 3:22-24 "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

John 8:7b, 10-11 “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her...Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared.”

Matthew 18:11 “The Son of Man came to save what was lost.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED HIS MURDERERS that he prayed for their forgiveness while on the cross. Jesus could have cursed and destroyed those who brought about his shameful death on the cross but he showed love instead. Jesus knew what he was doing when he allowed this to happen but his enemies did not know what was taking place. Even the hatred of God’s enemies is turned to love by God’s power. Hatred put Jesus on the cross to die. Love made that death the salvation of all mankind.

Meaning for us today: This is an extremely difficult example to follow. Jesus is perfect love; we are not. However, we have this role model to try to follow and we should attempt to cultivate love and mercy to those who wish us harm.

Luke 23:34 “Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.’”

Luke 6:27-28 “But I tell you who hear me; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN HIM

that he appeared to them following his resurrection. This act of love on Jesus' part reassured them that his words were true and that their faith was well placed. Armed with this knowledge, the believers could go out to the whole world and preach the good news of God's salvation. Jesus died to earn our salvation. Jesus was resurrected as the guarantee that his death on the cross was enough of a sacrifice to save all who accepted his great gift.

Had Jesus not appeared to his disciples, they might have lost faith and thought that the Savior was still to come. With his appearance, Jesus proved he is the Savior and put doubts to rest. We who live two thousand years after this great act of love are the inheritors of this gift. God's love reaches through all time and is eternal.

Meaning for us today: We are blessed to have the entire account of Jesus and his work of salvation in complete form - namely, the Bible. We have the assurance that Jesus did what he came to do - save us all from our sins. Jesus appeared to his disciples in person, and, through their writings, he appears to us as well. Our faith is built on a firm foundation and we need not doubt Jesus' existence or fulfillment of our redemption.

John 20:29 "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

Acts 17:27 **“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CRIPPLE AT BETHESDA

that he healed him not only from his physical affliction but from his superstition as well. Belief in anything other than the true God can endanger a person's soul since it is the same as idolatry. This man was made whole in body and soul by Jesus.

Meaning for us today: Superstition will have us sitting and waiting for good to happen while life passes us by. Faith does not have to wait for good to happen - it already has what it needs. Jesus lived and died to give us salvation and eternal life. Jesus is not fictional or variable as superstition is known to be. Jesus makes clear what he has done for us and what is expected from us. Jesus is God and has the power to bring to pass what he says. No idolatry or superstition can make this claim.

Superstition can tell you what may happen; Jesus can tell you what has happened and what will happen without doubt!

Acts 4:10 **“Salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE HUNGRY that he fed both their physical hunger as well as their spiritual hunger. Jesus

fed two large groups that had come to hear him preach by way of a miracle. Jesus also fed those hungry for forgiveness and righteousness with his words of the promise of salvation.

Meaning for us today: God provides for our every need. He feeds us with food for the body as well as the soul. We tend to overlook our spiritual hunger but God does not. The Bible has food for every spiritual hunger and need. Just as we eat meals to sustain our bodies, we should also read our Bible to sustain our faith.

Matthew 5:6 **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.”**

Matthew 6:25-34 **“Do not worry...”**

Matthew 4:4 **“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED US TODAY that he prayed for us before his death on the cross. In the book of John 17:20-26, Jesus prays for all who will come to believe in him through the message preached by the apostles and disciples all over the world. Jesus calls us blessed who have believed in him without seeing him in the flesh.

Meaning for us today: We, today, are the ones Jesus prayed for as are those believers not yet born. The Bible is not just about the past - it is as valid now as it ever was since God is the same today as he was in the past.

John 15:9 **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”**

John 14:23 **“Jesus replied, ‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.’”**

Matthew 28:20b **“And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED MARY MAGDALENE that he appeared to her first after his resurrection. Mary was distraught over the disappearance of Jesus' body from the tomb. Jesus himself comforted Mary and sent her on ahead to the apostles to announce his resurrection. Mary had faith in Jesus and that faith was rewarded. Her faith made her the first to see and hear the risen Lord. Other, more powerful apostles and disciples had to wait a little longer.

Meaning for us today: It is not riches or power that impresses God; it is faith. Jesus could have appeared to Herod, Pilate or the Temple leaders following his resurrection yet he chose Mary Magdalene. Jesus wanted to bring comfort to the faithful; not proof to the faithless. The faithful are in this world but not of this world and God does not lose sight of those who believe in him.

John 5:39-44 **“(Jesus talking to the Jews) You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept praise**

from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"

1st Corinthians 2:9b-10 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.' But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."

FOR GOD SO LOVED THOMAS that he made a special appearance to reassure him that the resurrection had really occurred. Thomas is often called "*Doubting Thomas*" but that is not entirely correct. In John 11:16 it is Thomas who urged the apostles to accompany Jesus to the grave of Lazarus so that if he was to be killed there, they could die with him. This is the attitude of a faithful and courageous servant.

Meaning for us today: Thomas shows the two sides of mankind - the faithful and the doubting sides. As one side increases, the other decreases. We should strive to increase our faith through Bible reading and decrease the doubts that we may have. Jesus makes a special appearance to us through the Bible.

Matthew 8:26 "He (*Jesus*) replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?'"

Matthew 14:29b-31 “Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But, when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’”

THE BOOK OF ACTS

FOR GOD SO LOVED MATTHIAS that he chose him to replace Judas Iscariot as an apostle. This was a tremendous honor since the apostles were the seeds from which the Church would spread and grow.

Meaning for us today: We never know when the opportunity to serve in God’s kingdom may occur. It may be something as simple as helping out someone in need or as complicated as serving in some capacity in the church. We should always be ready, willing and able to heed God’s call.

John 4:35b-38 “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages; even now he harvests the crop for eternal life so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE APOSTLES that he poured out his Holy Spirit upon them and empowered them to do miraculous things in his name. God loved the apostles and gave them the courage to do a difficult and often dangerous job. God did not abandon the apostles and often rescued them from danger.

Some of the apostles would be killed for their belief in Jesus but they had the honor and joy of spreading the good news of salvation to the whole world. They were also assured a place in heaven which outweighs any earthly trouble.

Meaning for us today: Compared to what the apostles and disciples had to face during the early years of the Church, we have it very easy. The most we have to face is a little discomfort, scorn and ridicule from the world. That is a small price to pay for the joy and hope that we have through Jesus. We should not hesitate to stand up and be counted as a Christian even if this is not popular.

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

Acts 5:41 “The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Philippians 1:27-30 “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being

frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved - and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE DISCIPLES that he increased their faith and enabled them to form churches all around the world. In an age of unbelief these disciples would live a life of faith and joy in the knowledge of their salvation. All was not pleasant for these early Christians and many died for their beliefs. Persecution and death awaited many, however, they knew they were serving Jesus and could take comfort in their salvation. Those who killed the disciples could not claim the same comfort in their false religions.

Meaning for us today: The Church is a wonderful gift Jesus gave to mankind. In the early days of the Church, many suffered and died for their faith. This gift was bought for us with the blood of Jesus and countless other Christians. It is precious and must be cherished. What would our faith be like without the Church?

Ephesians 2:19-22 "You are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED SAUL that he changed him from one who persecuted the Church to one of the greatest apostles of the church. Saul was renamed Paul and made several missionary journeys that were blessed with great success. Many came to believe in Jesus and many new churches were begun due to Paul's ministry. God protected Paul and saved him from overwhelming opposition often. Paul died a martyr's death but went to that death with the satisfaction of a job very well done and heaven just ahead.

Meaning for us today: We never know who God may choose to do his will. Consider Saul, a man who fanatically persecuted the church in his home town and elsewhere. God took this man of fanatical conviction and turned him from serving evil to serving God with the same fanaticism. We may be surprised at just whom God picks to serve him and should not be quick to judge people based on worldly wisdom.

2nd Timothy 1:9 “God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”

Acts 9:13-15 “Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man (Saul) and all

the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE GENTILES that he brought them into the family of the Chosen People. No longer would the Jews have claim to being the Chosen People now that God fulfilled his plan of salvation through Jesus. All people were God's Chosen People through Jesus. Jew and Gentile were equal in God's sight as either believers or unbelievers in Jesus and his work of salvation.

Meaning for us today: Unlike in the early Church where there was conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians, today all are alike and equal. No one should feel inferior due to birth or background.

Galatians 3:26-29 "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH that he sent Philip to teach him about Jesus and salvation. The

Ethiopian eunuch came to faith in Jesus and was baptized by Philip. Salvation had come to one who had not even heard about Jesus the Savior.

Meaning for us today: No one is excluded from the love of God.

Job 34:18-19 “Is he not the one who says to kings, ‘You are worthless,’ and to nobles, ‘You are wicked,’ who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor for they are all the work of his hands?”

Job 31:15 “Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One form us both within our mothers?”

FOR GOD SO LOVED LYDIA that he placed Paul in such a way as to teach her about Jesus. Lydia became a Christian and opened her home to the apostles and disciples in Philippi. She became an influential woman in the early church.

Meaning for us today: This woman welcomed Paul into her home because he was a man of God. She made a room available to him whenever he was in town. This woman acted as Jesus would tell us to, many years later. Once again, we see that whatever is done for one of God’s people is the same as doing something for God himself. We should try to open our hearts to others and do what we can to help. As we grow in grace we will be able to do more than we ever thought possible.

2nd Corinthians 9:6 “But this I say, he which sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.”

Matthew 25:34-40 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me.’”

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE JAILER IN PHILIPPI that when he was going to kill himself, God stopped him. Paul and Silas were in prison when God caused an earthquake that released them and sprung all the prison doors open. The jailer thinking that everyone had escaped was going to kill himself out of fear and despair. Paul stopped him. The jailer was given faith in Jesus and took Paul and Silas to his home. The jailer and his whole family were baptized that

night. From despair to glory is a common occurrence in the Bible.

Meaning for us today: Life is full of trouble but God provides many reasons for rejoicing. Often, when things seem their worst, God provides an escape from distress and gives great comfort. Before giving up in despair, we should give God a chance to show his love and power.

1st Corinthians 10:13 **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”**

Psalms 50:15 **“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED JASON that when a riot broke out in Thessalonica over the preaching of Paul and Silas, Jason was spared any harm. Jason had invited Paul and Silas into his home and with them, became the object of the crowd's anger. God protected Paul, Silas and Jason from any harm.

Meaning for us today: There is no danger on earth that God is not fully capable of protecting us from. Even in a riot, God's faithful were kept in safety.

Proverbs 16:7 **“When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.”**

Psalm 9:9 “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.”

Psalm 41:1-2 “Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble. The Lord will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED TITIUS JUSTUS that he made his home the center for the church in Corinth. The Jews in the Temple rejected Paul’s message so he went next door to the home of Titius Justus, a Roman believer in God. For a year and a half Paul stayed in Corinth (*possibly with Titius Justus*) preaching the good news of salvation in Jesus.

Meaning for us today: We should not be conceited about our faith. As God called us to faith, he can call others should we reject his word.

John 15:1-2 “I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Romans 11:20-21 “They were broken off because of unbelief and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.”

FOR GOD SO LOVED APOLLOS, a Jew in Ephesus, that he led him to a greater understanding of Jesus and his work of salvation and made him an important evangelist. Apollos had a thorough knowledge of Scripture and could argue intelligently about how Jesus was the Savior spoken about in the Old Testament.

Meaning for us today: Knowledge of the Bible is a great blessing. It upholds us in difficult times and enriches us in happy times; it makes us grateful for all things and strengthens our faith; it gives us advice and the rules we need for life. Apollos had a good knowledge of the Bible and was able, through the Holy Spirit, to use that knowledge to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior. Apollos was a well oiled tool ready to be put to use. It would be good for us to be able to say the same about ourselves.

John 5:39 **“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”**

Matthew 22:29 **“Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’”**

Acts 17:11 **“The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”**

FOR GOD SO LOVED EUTYCHUS that when he fell to his death from a third story window, Paul was given the ability to restore his life. Eutychus came to hear Paul preach and, during a long sermon, he fell asleep and fell from the window seat he was sitting on. God had mercy on him. The other believers in the room were also blessed by this miracle, having Eutychus restored to them alive and seeing God's love and power at work.

Meaning for us today: Even if Eutychus was not restored to life, he would have had a blessed death while seeking to learn more about his Savior and strengthen his faith. God's act of love restored Eutychus and strengthened the other Christians. We may not see such a miracle in our own lives but we do see God's love at work every day. We should go through life with our eyes open so as to see the glory and mercy and love of God and so find the strength to continue our journey towards heaven.

Psalm 19:1 **"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."**

Psalm 96:3-4a **"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise."**

2nd Corinthians 1:20 **"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ROMAN COMMANDER IN JERUSALEM that he made him an important part of Paul's missionary work. When a riotous crowd was going to beat and possibly kill Paul, the commander saved him. He

allowed Paul to speak to the crowd in safety and again saved him when the crowd became violent. The commander, upon hearing that Paul was a Roman citizen, prevented his flogging. Upon hearing of a plot to ambush and kill Paul, the commander moved Paul secretly to Caesarea thereby removing him from his enemies. This would be the first step in Paul's journey to Rome.

Meaning for us today: The Roman commander acted honorably and responsibly with the man in his custody. We should act the same way with the great gift in our care - our Christian faith. The Roman commander risked an uprising and rebellion because he saved Paul from the mob, because it was the right thing for him to do. We should be willing to risk displeasure for the sake of doing the right thing according to the Bible.

Isaiah 33:15-16 **"He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil - this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress."**

2nd Corinthians 4:2 **"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE SAILORS AND SOLDIERS ESCORTING PAUL TO ROME that he spared their lives during a violent storm at sea. Not one life was lost in the shipwreck. The centurion in charge even prevented the killing of Paul and some other prisoners to prevent their escape. In all, 276 lives were spared by God's mercy.

Meaning for us today: God's love and mercy is so great that he spared 276 lives for his own glory and the spreading of the gospel. Many of those saved were criminals and pagans, yet they, like the faithful on board the ship, were saved for the sake of God's grace. Every day of our lives, we too, are spared for the sake of God's grace.

Matthew 5:45 **"He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous."**

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE PEOPLE OF MALTA that he sent Paul there on his way to Rome. While in Malta, Paul healed many sick people and preached the Gospel.

Meaning for us today: Missionaries are special people who are willing to go and preach to those living in darkness in remote places. They face hardship and deprivation for the sake of the gospel. Just as Paul preached wherever the opportunity arose, we should support those who follow in his footsteps. Our prayers, letters of encouragement and financial support are vital to these special men and women.

Psalms 68:11 **"The Lord announced the word and great was the company of those who proclaimed it."**

John 17:18 **“As you sent me (*Jesus*) into the world, I have sent them into the world.”**

The Book of Romans

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE ROMANS that he sent Paul to preach in Rome and spread the Gospel to the greatest empire on earth. Paul would try to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians by showing that they were both Christians worshipping the same God. Differences in religious practices as well as cultural differences threatened to split the church.

Meaning for us today: The church has often been troubled over spiritual issues but these are not the fault of God. When mankind tries to alter God's word, problems and divisions are the result. The church was established to spread the gospel and maintain the Christian faith. As members of the church, we must refrain from trying to modernize fundamental truths in order to be politically correct or fall in line with modern practices. The church must stand firmly on God's word even if the world does not accept this. The world is defying God and we must choose which side we are on.

John 3:19-21 **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that he deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so**

that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

John 14:17 “If you love me you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

The Books of 1ST and 2ND Corinthians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CHURCH IN CORINTH that he had Paul write two letters to them in order to assist them in solving some serious problems in the church. As with all of the early churches, there were many fundamental problems to overcome. The early churches had to carve a place for themselves in an unbelieving world. There were no precedents to follow and there were many opposing opinions regarding methods of worship that had to be reconciled. Jew and Gentile Christians did not agree on several things and it took a great deal of effort to blend both groups into one church.

The church in Corinth was dealing with divisions in its members. Some people claimed loyalty to certain apostles or disciples when they should all have claimed loyalty only to Jesus. There was also a problem with sexual immorality in the church. Christian liberty was being abused and this was very harmful to Christians (*causing them to sin*) and non-Christians (*who saw the church as hypocritical*).

God uses Paul to give the church in Corinth valuable advice on proper living within the church and within the

community as a whole. Errors in practice are exposed and rebuked. Encouragement is given to the church especially regarding the gifts that each person is endowed with. We all have different strengths and weaknesses and should use our gifts the best way we can. Everything should be used for the glory of God.

Forgiveness is urged so that sinning members of the church could once again be welcomed. The church is encouraged to separate from the ways of unbelievers so that false teaching is not made a part of the church. Generosity and faith are main pillars of the Christian life.

God wanted the church in Corinth to be united and healthy. God's words of rebuke and comfort were given to achieve this.

Meaning for us today: The situation in the church in Corinth is very similar to the problems we may encounter in our own churches. Differing opinions, immorality and misguided loyalties can cause serious divisions in the church. We should remember who the head of the church is, what he asks for, and who should our loyalty be given to. Using the Bible, the church can correct its problems and be an example to the sinful world. We should do all we can to insure the church is maintained according to what the Bible teaches and this applies to our private lives as well.

Romans 16:17-18 "I urge you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ but their own appetites."

Luke 12:1 “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.”

Matthew 15:3, 9 (*Isaiah 29:13*) “Jesus replied, ‘Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?...They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’”

Galatians 1:7b-8 “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.”

The Book of Galatians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE GENTILE CHRISTIANS that he had Paul strongly rebuke the Jewish Christians who insisted on maintaining Jewish religious practices. These Jewish Christians were called Judaizers and caused great discomfort and division in the church. They insisted on trying to fulfill the Law while accepting the Gospel. Jesus fulfilled the Law and gave us the Gospel in its place. The Law was not abolished but was rather fulfilled by God himself.

God's love earned salvation for everyone. Only faith was required to reach out and accept the gift that Jesus paid so dearly for. The traditions of man and the practices which detracted from Jesus' complete work of salvation were to be forcefully opposed by the church. To accept this error into the church meant to lose the comfort and joy of

God's love and salvation since something was left for mankind to do. We could never know if we had done enough under this type of thinking. Jesus said, "*It is finished.*" and that is the great comfort for all who believe in him.

Meaning for us today: Any teaching in our church that differs from the gospel message is dangerous to our salvation. We must study our Bibles regularly in order to detect errors and reject them before they can cause harm. Jesus did all that way needed for our salvation; we must insure that sinful mankind does not alter or replace the gospel message.

1st Corinthians 16:13 **"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."**

Ephesians 2:8-9 **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."**

Matthew 15:3, 9 and Isaiah 29:13 **"Jesus replied, 'Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?...They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'"**

Galatians 1:7b-8 **"Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned."**

2nd Timothy 4:2-4 “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

The Book of Ephesians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS that he blessed it with peace and righteousness. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he did not do so in order to correct a problem or error. Paul wrote a beautiful letter to enrich and deepen the Ephesians’ understanding of God and salvation through Jesus. The letter to the Ephesian church is full of comfort for Gentiles in that Paul makes them equal heirs to God’s salvation with the Jewish Christians. This question of equality between Jewish and Gentile Christians was a difficult and divisive issue in several early churches.

The guidelines Paul gives to the Ephesians for daily life are some of the most inspiring guidelines we have to this day.

Meaning for us today: The deepening of understanding is an important part of our faith. How can we have faith if we remain ignorant of the Bible’s message? We have an advantage today over the early church in that we have the Bible in complete form and widespread use. We

must continue to read the Bible to deepen our knowledge and understanding of what God has done for us and what he expects from us. To not read the Bible is to let someone else interpret it for you. This leaves you vulnerable to misunderstanding at best and misuse at worst.

Deuteronomy 4:2 “Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.”

Joshua 1:8 “Do not let the Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”

Psalm 119

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Galatians 1:7b-8 Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.”

2nd Timothy 4:2-4 “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching

ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

The Book of Philippians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI that he caused Paul to write one of the most beautiful letters in the Bible to them. The book of Philippians is often called the epistle of joy since it uses the word “joy” so often. When many other churches needed stern letters to correct a problem, the Philippians received a letter to bring joy to all their hearts even in the midst of persecution, opposition and Judaizers (*Jewish Christians who wanted to retain the Jewish religious customs and practices*).

Meaning for us today: The Christian’s life is often challenged by opposition from unbelievers and worldly thinking but Christian joy stems from faith and hope in the saving work of Jesus and the sure knowledge that Jesus has overcome the world. Joy can exist even in times of trouble just as Jesus exists in good times and bad.

2nd Corinthians 7:4b “In all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.”

Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

1st Peter 4:13 “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

The Book of Colossians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CHURCH IN COLOSSE that rather than abandon them to false teaching, he caused Paul to write an inspirational letter to help them. It was very easy for false teaching to work its way into the early church. There were few qualified teachers and preachers. There were many who wanted to bend the church to their own way of thinking. There were also many honest questions and debates about how to live the Christian life.

Meaning for us today: God's love is evident in all of the letters of the New Testament. If God did not love his church as a husband loves his bride then he would not have worked so hard to strengthen, encourage and correct the church and its members for his glory and our reassurance.

Ephesians 4:11-13 "It was he (*Jesus*) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

2nd Timothy 4:2-4 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching

ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

Matthew 5:19 “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”

The Books of 1ST and 2ND Thessalonians

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA that he provided much needed teaching for this new church. Paul was not able to spend much time with the Thessalonians and as a result, this young church did not have a solid foundation upon which to build. Paul wrote two letters to this young church to help them understand more about the last days and Christianity in general.

Meaning for us today: God’s love extends beyond the awesome sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God’s love seeks to deepen the believer’s understanding of what this sacrifice means and how it changes the world in general and the believer in particular. Much of the New Testament consists of letters to individuals and small groups to help them cope with the difference between the world’s ways and God’s ways and these lessons are just as valid today.

Ephesians 4:11-13 “It was he (*Jesus*) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,

attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

2nd Timothy 4:2-4 “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE HEBREWS that he caused this wonderful book to be written for their benefit. (*The Book of Hebrews was also written for our benefit.*) This book was written for Jewish believers in Jesus and was meant to strengthen their faith in the deity of Christ. This was a sensitive area of belief for Jewish converts since their entire religion is built around the worship of the one True God only. It was important for the Jewish Christians to know with certainty that Jesus is, in fact, True God along with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

There was a lot of pressure for Jewish Christians to revert back to Judaism or to alter Christianity to conform to Jewish religious practices and theology. In either case the result would be a threat to their salvation. God wanted the Jewish Christians to be reassured and strengthened in their faith.

Meaning for us today: The book of Hebrews is a wonderful comfort to Christians. If there is any doubt that Jesus is Lord and God, this book will put those doubts to rest. The world today would have us bend and alter the identity of Jesus as well as alter the Bible's teachings to fit its wayward thinking. This is something we cannot be a part of. The Bible gives us the truth - all else is a lie.

John 8:31-32 **"If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."**

John 17:17 **"(Jesus said) Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."**

2nd Timothy 4:3-4 **For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."**

The Books of 1ST and 2ND Timothy; Titus; Philemon; James; 1ST and 2ND Peter; 1ST, 2ND and 3RD John; Jude

FOR GOD SO LOVED HIS WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM that he caused a number of letters of instruction to be written to help them in their faith and in spreading that faith to the whole world as Jesus commanded. Some of these letters were written to specific missionaries while

others were written to believers in general. In either case, these letters served to help workers in God's kingdom to spread the good news of God's love and salvation.

Meaning for us today: These letters are as vital and meaningful today as when they were first written. These letters may have been addressed to an individual but all Scripture is the pure word of God and his message is for every believer in every generation.

Hebrews 13:8 **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”**

Romans 15:4 **“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”**

2nd Timothy 3:16-17 **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

CONCLUSION

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD that he caused the Bible to be written for all generations. In this wonderful Book we can learn the history of God's love and his workings since the beginning of time to bring salvation to all who put their faith in his chosen Savior.

God the Father sent his Son Jesus to achieve what we could not - perfect obedience to the Law. Jesus then gave his life for the salvation of all who believe in him and

what he did for us. God then gave us many assurances in the writings that are collected in the New Testament. The many and varied books are no less meaningful or vital to our faith today then when they were written nearly two thousand years ago. Together with the Old Testament they form a beautiful tapestry depicting God's awesome power and love in the face of mankind's rebellion and failures.

God is love and he gives us the proof in his gift of the Bible.