

Lesson 12 Lecture

2 Thessalonians 1-3

Today's lesson covers the entirety of the Apostle Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonica church. It's really a "follow-up" epistle from his first letter that Lin and Carol did such a good job covering our last two times together. It's been about a year since the first letter, and the reason for the follow-up is the enemy has sent people into the church to deceive, distort, and corrupt Paul's teaching. His teaching has had a profound impact on this church. How can I say this? - Because they're being persecuted and going through trials. Does that sound like an odd statement? Biblically, it shouldn't. So much of today's churches are pedaling an environment where "if you come here, everything is going to be hunky dory". There is no evidence of this promise of churches in Scripture whatsoever.

The truth is an active and alive church should be a battlefield. There is a spiritual war that rages on moment by moment – it's going on right now. The battle is good vs. evil – God's forces against Satan's forces. In every war, the enemy is trying to take something that wasn't meant to be his or the other party is trying to take back what was once theirs. What is it that the enemy, Satan, has that was never meant to be his and God wants back? People – you and me. Our original design was to be God's possession, but our original birth parents, Adam & Eve, handed over humanity's ownership to Satan upon their sin in the Garden of Eden. God declared war on Satan because of his temptations and deceptions, and this war has been raging on to this very moment.

Now for those of us who have confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we can take comfort that our souls are secure in the Father's hands. We can say this because Jesus secured the victory of salvation at the Cross-for those who come to faith in His sacrifice for our sins. 1 Corinthians 15:57 proclaims, "*But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" 1 John 5:4 adds, "*for*

everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” If you have confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you are a participant in this victory. Your eternal future is secure. Praise the Lord!

This is indeed great news – glorious news. Unfortunately, there is still some bad news we need to deal with. We are victorious with Jesus in faith; however, that doesn’t mean we are immune from the attacks of the enemy that are targeted to tear down our faith, tempt us into sin, and rob us of the joyful and victorious lives Jesus purchased for us on the Cross. In a battle, where are the most casualties? - On the frontline. An alive and engaged church is one that recognizes this truth. It prepares people for battle, and cares for the ones wounded in battle. If you remember the movie and subsequent TV show M*A*S*H, the doctors’ jobs was to attend to the ones wounded in war for the most part to get them back into battle. Only those who died or were too wounded to remain in battle got to go home. Followers of Christ were never meant to be disengaged from battle - focusing on their comforts. If that’s where we are, then Satan will leave us alone. Why? - Because we’re no threat to him in the war. It is those who are testing their faith by engaging in the battle that threaten Satan. We find out where we are in our faith when we’re in a battle.

Paul confirms this truth as he tells the Thessalonians that he is boasting about their faith is growing and their love for each other is increasing – not because of an awesome worship service, not because of a great sermon from the pastor, and not because of the number of programs the church offers. No – their faith and love for each other is getting stronger because of they are persevering through the persecutions and trials they’re facing.

In church history, persecution never hurt the church – it did the opposite. That makes me wonder if the opposite is true – if the church isn't being persecuted, is the church actually suffering – decaying due to its easy life-style? When things are going well for you, are you seeking God desperately? It's pretty easy to take things for granted, isn't it, when life is comfortable. That's why I'm suggesting the power and the effectiveness of the church diminishes during times of lack of persecution. Given the rapid build-up in today's American society against Biblical principles, the church is undoubtedly about to be faced with persecution unlike it has ever seen before. That is why I am anticipating one final revival or reformation of the church before the Lord comes again.

Verse 5 tells us, *"All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."* The last portion of this verse is one we should take note *"and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering."* From Paul's perspective, there is an undeniable link between suffering and being counted worthy of the kingdom of God. This is not a new theme in the New Testament - we see the following similar connections to dedicated faith and suffering:

2 Timothy 3:12: *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"*

James 1:2: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds"*. Notice James doesn't say "if", "possibly", or "maybe" – he says "whenever" as if it is going to be an eventuality

1 Peter 4:12: *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."*

These verses pretty much obliterate the nonsensical and unbiblical prosperity doctrine that is so prevalent in the modern American church. Can God financially bless us? Absolutely. However, other than Malachi 3:10, which was an isolated promise of a financial blessing to stir the hearts of the people to tithe, there is no evidence whatsoever that God's blessings will be guaranteed to be in the form of a financial windfall. Our flesh loves financial blessings, but as we draw closer to the Lord, we learn those financial blessings are ultimately meant to bless others by giving them away to those in need. When we do this, even greater blessings happen – the amazing peace and joy of knowing we're making our heavenly Father happy. There is no greater blessing God offers than His approval. He told Jesus He was well pleased with Him at His baptism. For those of us who confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Father loves us as He loves His Son. What does that mean? He is well pleased with you. Do you need to hear that? God is well pleased with you. He sees your struggles. He sees your sufferings. He sees your trials. Yet, you still come back to Him. You come to this Bible study. If you don't listen to anything else I say today, listen to this truth – God is pleased with you.

Verse 6 is a reassuring verse for those of us who are feeling the heat of persecutions and trials. It begins with a proclamation of one of God's most important character traits –He is just. We could spend several lectures on this critical topic alone, but in the interest of covering the entire reading, I'll narrow my comments just a bit. The Greek word for "just: is "*dikaios*", and its root is "*dike*", which means justice, which results in judgment, punishment, and vengeance. God has seen every wrong committed against you by the ungodly, and He has not forgotten one of them.

You see, though, people are not our enemies. We only have one enemy – Satan. He works his evil through people, but these are people who have been deceived and believe Satan's lies vs. God's truths. That is why Jesus clearly

instructs us to love our enemies for the purpose of revealing the truth of God's love for them and to give them the opportunity to turn to Him and be saved. That's our job – to love our enemies. God's desire is that all should come to faith in Him and repent, and He's looking to us to be the model of loving those who most view as unlovable.

The sad truth is, not all will repent and believe. Those that don't – those that relentlessly attack the faithful – God is going to deal with them. I believe He already is. God is just, loved ones. He will repay those whom have caused you pain and suffering. I would guess each of you right now is thinking of at least one person who falls into this category. They need to hear the truth of Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* We're so blessed because of the grace of God in saving us. God's judgment on us is His Son dying on a Cross. Sin must be judged because God is just – for the faithful, our judgment is handled by Jesus.

Verses 8-9 tells us the fate of those are not believers, *"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might"*. God is just, loved ones. He does not forget the unrepentant – they will be judged. Until then, we're charged with loving them. That's a tall order for some of us who have been deeply wounded. The flesh can say what has been done to us is unforgivable, but forgiveness isn't about the flesh – it's about the spirit. Until the early believers received the Holy Spirit, this concept of separating the flesh and the spirit remained a mystery. Jesus forgave us in the spirit, and He did this while we were still sinners. He commands us to do no less. For those of you harboring unforgiveness, I urge you to go before the Lord to reveal to you whom you need to forgive and then ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to do it. I guaranty if you do this, God will bless you – but I'm not

going to promise you He'll do it financially. There are far better blessings than financial ones.

Let's take a quick look at verse 11, *"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith."* Do you ever get caught up with all things you need to do for God – all the things you feel are necessary to become what you think He wants you to be? Look at this verse – who is doing the work? ***"God may make"*** and ***"by his power he may bring to fruition"***. Does that lift some burden off of you? It should – ***God*** is the one leading the charge into shaping you into the image of Jesus. This doesn't mean you don't have a role in the process, but your only role is to love Him and love others as you love your self. He'll take care of the rest.

Getting into Chapter 2, Paul expresses his awareness of the fruit of the false teaching to the Thessalonians that has duped them into thinking that the Day of the Lord had already come. Chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Joel describes the Day of the Lord as when God will intervene in human history and bring about judgment and justice. It will begin with the Tribulation, extend through the Millennium, and conclude with the replacement of this earth by a new creation. To make things more complicated, this false teaching was being presented to the people as if it were coming from Paul himself. We need to be extremely careful of who we listen to for Biblical advice. There are a lot of wolves out there walking around in shepherd's clothing seeking to fleece and destroy the flock.

Verse 3 of chapter 2 exhorts the people, *"Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction."* According to this verse, there must be two things that must occur prior to the beginning of the Day of the Lord. The first event is what Paul calls *"the rebellion"*. In other versions of the

Bible, the phrase “falling away” is used instead of rebellion. The Greek word that either of these interpretations are taken from is “apostasia”, which is where we get our word “apostasy”. This means a defection from the truth; to fall away or forsake.

Paul is telling us a clear sign of the imminent arrival of the Day of the Lord will be a sad time when people who thought they were rooted in Scripture and believed they were walking in faith will yield to the deceptions of the enemy and wilt under the pressure of choosing to forsake living and standing firm by Godly principles in exchange of succumbing to the acceptable trends and norms of modern society which fly completely in the face of Scripture. I believe this falling away is in its final stages of completion. The eviction of God from our schools, the nationwide adoption of abortion as an acceptable form of birth control, and now the recent supreme court ruling anointing the gay community to desecrate the definition of marriage that is so clearly laid out in the Bible. It is tragic and stunning to see how much of the church has not only not resisted this recent ruling but is embracing it. Standing up for Biblical principles is going to get tougher and tougher, loved ones. My prayer for each of you is that you will not fall victim to this falling away – the societal pressure is only going to get worse. Be strong – God will give you the strength if you ask Him for it.

The second event that is a precursor the beginning of the Day of the Lord is when *“the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed for destruction.”* In other Bible versions, this man of lawlessness is otherwise described as “that man of sin, the son of perdition”. Perdition means “waste”, and the term “son of perdition” is used twice in Scripture. Here, it is linked to the Antichrist. The other time is seen in Jesus’ High Priestly prayer in John 17:12. The son of perdition he is talking about in that verse is Judas Iscariot. The same evil spirit that entered Judas will enter the Antichrist.

Verse 4 tells us more about this man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, *“He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”* The word “anti” not only means “against” - it also means “in place of”. You see, Satan doesn’t want you to not believe in God – he wants you to believe he is god!

I guess now is as good a time as ever to cover this period known as the Tribulation and talk about the various arguments that are made about the timing of this event known as the “Rapture”. I’m going to be quoting a lot of Scriptures, so don’t worry if you can’t keep up – the full text of the lecture is on the website. Beginning in chapter 9:24 of the Book of Daniel, we learn of a period of time that will have to take place prior to the second coming of the Messiah – Jesus. *“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place.”*

“Sevens” means seven-year intervals. That means there are 490 years – 70 x 7 years – that must be completed before Jesus can return. The first question we need to ask is when does the clock start ticking on these 490 years? Daniel reports this in 9:25, *“From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes.”* Therefore, to start the clock, there needs to be an order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Scripture tells us when this order was given – in Nehemiah chapter 2, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes’ reign and in the month of Nisan, Nehemiah asked to rebuild Jerusalem, and the King granted him the permission to do it.

Daniel, though, in the second half of 9:25 introduces to us that this 490 years will not be consecutive – there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens - or 483 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem - until the Messiah comes. It turns out

that is exactly how many years it was until Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on a donkey as the Messiah. Verse 26 of chapter 9 then with stunning accuracy prophesies what we all know came true, *“After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing.”* At the end of the 483 years, the Anointed One – the Messiah – would be killed.

What about the final 7 years? From the time of Jesus’ crucifixion to this very day, the nation of Israel has been, in effect, “put on the shelf” to allow the “church age” to fulfill its time.” A fair question we need to ask is ‘when is the church age over?’ Let’s now jump ahead to Revelation 2 & 3 where Jesus gives messages to each of the 7 types of churches that have consisted and consist today – these are the seven lampstands that were referenced earlier in chapter 1 of Revelation.

We then arrive at chapter 4 of Revelation, and the first verse begins with *“After this”*. The Greek word for “after” is *“meta”* and for “this” is *“tauta”*. “Meta” speaks of a sequence and “tauta” means “after” or “following”. So we put all of this together, and we see in chapters 2 and 3 Jesus has spoken to the church age, and we arrive in chapter 4 with the notion that we’re reading this account in a progressive sequence of time, and in chapter 4 we have concluded that sequence of time – what is next is following what has just concluded. Chapters 4 and 5 are an interlude to give us some perspective of what is going on in heaven. It is during these two chapters we see the Lamb of God taking the scroll that will open the seals that are holding it together – these seals represent the wrath of God that will be unleashed on a Christ-rejecting world that will contain such horrors and judgment that Jesus Himself describes as *“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.”* (Matthew 24:21)

Getting back to Daniel 9 in verse 27 we read about the final 7 of the 70 sevens, *“He [Antichrist] will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the*

middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." The final seven years is really split into two 3½-year periods. The first 3½ years is known as the Tribulation. During this time, the Antichrist will become the dominant world leader, and he will be given the power to do amazing things – verse 9 of chapter 2 of today's reading tells us, *"He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie."* Satan will give the Antichrist great power, and, tragically, millions of people will flock to him. We need to be on guard when we think something miraculous is happening – it may not be of God.

The Antichrist's primary feat will be to come up with a plan that will allow the Jews to rebuild their temple on the place they believe is where it belongs. Many orthodox Jews are determined to rebuild the temple. The problem is that the temple mount is under Islamic control. In the middle is the Dome of the Rock – a sacred site - it was from *this* rock that Mohammed ascended into heaven after his overnight ride into Medinah. This is a problem because if the Jews press violence to take control of the temple mount, it will set off a holy war.

The Antichrist will solve this issue and offer a covenant to Israel – there's plenty of room on the north side of the temple mount – all they have to do is put a wall across the center of the mount – leaving the Dome of the Rock on the south side. Solomon's temple was actually north of the Dome of the Rock – so that will make the Jews happy. People will think the Antichrist is a genius for coming up with this idea, but the Bible already knew the plan. Ezekiel 42:20 tells us, "So he measured the area on all four sides. It had a wall around it, five hundred cubits long and five hundred cubits wide, to separate the holy from the common." The "common" is referred to in other versions of the Bible as "the profane place". The

Dome of the Rock has profanities around the top against Jesus – things like God is not begotten, neither does He beget – a blatant shot at the Divinity of Jesus.

At the end of the first 3½ years of the final seven years, the temple will be rebuilt, but the Antichrist will enter the temple and demand to be worshipped as God. This is the abomination of desolation that Daniel was referring to. This will be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, and then literally all hell is going to break out on earth. Revelation chapters 6-19 give a terrifying account of the devastation that is going to occur. In the first 4 seals, ¼ of the Earth's population will be wiped out. There is believed to be over 7 billion people on Earth today, that means 1.75 **billion** people will be killed in the first 4 seals. In another series of judgments, 1/3 of the remaining people will be killed – this means another \$1.75 billion people will be killed – at the end of the final 3 ½ years of the seventieth seven – known as the Great Tribulation – close to **half the world's population** will be slaughtered in judgment. The numbers are too staggering to even comprehend.

Does God have your attention? So the big question everyone is asking, 'Are we as believers in Jesus Christ going to be here when this happens?' Let's get back to some verses we covered in last week's reading:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."*

1 Corinthians 15:50-53: *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the*

twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

Both of these sections of Scripture are referring to an event known as the Rapture. There are those that don't believe in the Rapture because the word can't be found in the Bible. Well, neither is the word “donut”, and I believe it donuts! The reality is, the Greek word for “caught up” in verse 17 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is “harpazo”, which means to seize, pluck, pull, or take by force. The Latin translation for harpazo is “raptus”, which is where we get the word “Rapture”. There are 3 positions on when the Rapture is going to occur:

1. **Pre-Tribulation:** the rapture occurs before the last seven years prior to Jesus' second coming – the church is gathered to meet Him in the sky.
2. **Mid-Tribulation:** the rapture is half-way through the seventieth seven year period – the church is taken out before or at the time of the abomination of desolation and escapes the Great Tribulation that occurs in the final 3 ½ years
3. **Post-Tribulation:** the rapture occurs after the Great Tribulation at virtually the same time Jesus physically returns for the second time.

There are problems with each of these scenarios – none of them are without their respective challenges. Sadly, many church bodies have split over this component of doctrine. The truth is, and this may sound blasphemous – it just doesn't matter. I'm not at all saying that understanding Scripture isn't important, but there are components that are worth fighting over – the Divinity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the purpose of the crucifixion, the truth of the

resurrection, and the infallibility of God's Word – these are foundational issues to which there should be no unyielding position.

However, on less clear topics – even the timing of the rapture – there is an overriding commandment in the New Testament – unity. We are repeatedly reminded the importance of remaining united on the core issues of Scripture. We can agree to disagree on the non-essentials without violating the critical issue of unity in the Body of Christ. It is only on the essential issues that a church must take a position to the point it is willing to allow those elements that challenge the core truths of Scripture to depart.

As for which of the three scenarios is correct, I believe the pre-tribulation position carries the most compelling arguments. Let's take a look at some of the more common Scriptures that support the Pre-Tribulation position:

- In chapter 18 of Genesis, Abraham is challenging the Lord's intention to judge and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah due to its great sin. In verse 23 Abraham asks the Lord, *"Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"* He goes on to say in verse 25, *"Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* The Lord ultimately agrees to allow the righteous to be removed in delivering Lot before He judges the wicked.
- In verse chapter 2 verse 6 of today's message we read, "And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time." What is holding back the Antichrist is the church and the Holy Spirit. Getting back to my earlier discussion about the sequence of events described in chapters 2-4 of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 speak to the entirety of the church age and chapter 4 begins with "After this" or "Meta tauta" – meaning the church age is completed. After the heavenly interlude of chapters 4 and

5, what is the first thing that happens when the Jesus breaks the first seal? Revelation 6:2 says, “I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.” This is the unleashing of the Antichrist – the first thing that happens with the Tribulation is the Antichrist is revealed. What was restraining him up until this point? - The church and the Holy Spirit. If the restraints are gone, so must we be.

- The Tribulation period will be a time of God’s wrath, so the question *within* the question that asks when the church will be raptured is will God pour His wrath out on His children – those of us who have confessed Him as our Lord and Savior? Let’s take at what the Scriptures say:

Romans 5:9: *“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!”*

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10: *“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:9: *“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Romans 1:18: *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”*

I included the last verse because if you assume God's wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, then you can assume the opposite, God does not exhibit His wrath against the Godly and righteous – those who proclaim the truth. As confessed followers of Jesus Christ, we receive His righteousness because we are covered by His righteous blood. Having His righteousness exempts us from His wrath.

For me, the arguments for a Pre-Tribulation rapture are the most convincing. However, there are legitimate challenges to this position – some of which I don't have an answer. What I can safely say is that the Mid-Tribulation and Post-Tribulation supporters do have one thing in common – they hope they're wrong. Nobody who reads the details of what is going to go on during these final seven years is going to want to be here. I encourage you to do your own homework on this topic. More importantly, just focus on loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love others as you love yourself. If you do these two things, God will take care of the rest.

The balance of this 2nd epistle to the Thessalonians consists of Paul exhorting the people to stand firm in their faith and to be wary of those who are idle – not working for their living. Paul's pretty blunt on this subject – he plainly states, “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” We as Christians need to be the example to the world to be hard-working people who provide for themselves and not be a burden on society.

Well, that's enough from me, but I do have a present for you – I have a Christmas message from Jesus, so for those of you taking notes, please put your pens/pencils down and close your eyes as your Lord has something to say to you:

My Beloved Child,

I am so very glad you are here, and I am also so appreciative of you taking time to study My Word. In a couple of weeks you will be celebrating My birth. I know it is your tradition to give gifts to those who are having a birthday – you try so hard to find something they *want*. Well, My enemy and your enemy, the Devil, has deceived people into making the celebration of *My* birthday about hustle and bustle, buying gifts with money they don't have, partying, and stress. Even My churches have turned the celebration of My birth into membership recruiting events and extravaganzas. Do you think this is what I want? My Christmas wish-list is very short – in fact I only want one thing – I want you. I want more and more of you until I have all of you.

My Father's plan was from when I arrived in the manger to the time I gave up My Spirit on the Cross, I was to have one primary goal – to save *you* from the slavery to and eternal consequences of your sin. But the plan was more than that – from the moment I created you in My mind, I have had nothing but good and wonderful things planned for you. You were never an accident or a mistake. I created you for My good pleasure – to have a close and intimate relationship with you. You were designed for Me to hear all your thoughts and feelings, and you were made so I would guide you and be a part in all your adventures, celebrations, and joys. The original plan I had for you contained no sin and all of its terrible consequences – the pain, the suffering, and the death.

Yes – I see all of the effects sin has had on your life – I see your rejection; I see your sorrows over the losses of your loved ones, I see all your fears over your circumstances, I see your abandonment, I see what you're going through with your illness or debilitation. I see it all – I know you're hurting. I'm here to tell you I am bigger than all of it. When I'm involved, nothing is impossible – it's never too late for hope in Me. I may, or may not, completely deliver you *physically* from what you're suffering. I know that is difficult to hear – especially when you know I have

the ability to rescue you from anything from which you're hurting. My ways or not your ways, and My thoughts are not your thoughts. What I am assuring you right now is that everything that I am doing or allowing in your life is crafted for your good. There is a plan, and I am in control. Whatever darkness you may be experiencing, I am the Light of the world, and I will *always* break through the darkness. You may not see Me or even hear Me, but I can assure you, I am with you always.

When you confessed your faith in Me, you became a *new* creation – one that is holy and righteous before My Father. I forgave you for every past, present, and future sin – there is *no sin* you have committed, are now committing, or will ever commit that is above or beyond My ability to forgive. As that new creation, why are you still walking around as if you're still shackled by the sins I have already forgiven? You are free! This new life I purchased for you with My blood was never meant to carryover the pain of the old life. As for the sins that have been committed against you, I can heal you from the painful effects of those as well. However, I can't do it if you don't ask Me. I not only redeemed your present and future life, but I can redeem even the most painful moments of your past. Again, though, you have to ask Me.

Because of My love for you, I can't take My eyes off of you, and I won't *ever* let you go. You can never be unsafe because you are forever safe with Me. There are many of you who feel alone this time of year, but with Me, you are never alone. You are My child – I gave My life for you, and you are forever in My family. People in My family are never abandoned – I am with them always. Just as Joseph and Mary, My earthly parents, looked over Me in the manger with all the love and adoration they did, so do I look upon you at this very moment. I love you.

You heard today there's a time coming when I'm going to call all of My children home. I want you to know that time is coming very soon, and I am so

excited. I have been at work preparing for that time – preparing a place for you that is customized to bless you. Until then, come to Me. I want to hear from you. I have so much more of Me to give to you and to reveal more of My love to you. I am your Creator, and it was My choice to create you. I am your Savior, and it was My choice to save you. I am your God, and it is My desire to be everything you need. There are only two things I can't do – the first is to lie or sin; the second is to force you to love and trust Me. That is your choice. As you celebrate this season of My birth, I give Myself to you as your gift. All I want for My gift – is you.

Merry Christmas.

Jesus.

Let's pray.