

DECEMBER 2016

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me
in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.*

Luke 24:44

SEEING JESUS IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

A devotional from



MOODY
GLOBAL MINISTRIES™

TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

Our Prince of Peace



Peace is something we all desire, but it is rarely seen in the world around us. If I were to ask you to choose one word to describe

2016, I am pretty sure you would not say *peaceful*. We have seen too much terror, a wearying amount of violence, and conflict both within our nation and across the globe.

If so many people desire peace, why is it not easily achieved? Evangelist D. L. Moody observed, “A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do is enter into it.”

Moody was right. The only way to truly experience peace is through a relationship with God. His peace is not a quality to achieve, but a gift. Peace is also part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a byproduct of a growing, fruitful relationship with our Father (Gal. 5:22).

God’s peace is also not dependent on our circumstances. Whether we experience disruption in our personal life or in the world around us, we can know peace. Peace is not the absence of trouble; it is the certain presence

of God. He offers us calm, even in the storm. “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8).

The biblical meaning of peace never implies that our lives will be tranquil; rather, that as we dwell in Him, we will be made whole or complete. Jesus, the promised Messiah, was God’s gift of peace to us that first Christmas. “His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Through Him, we can know God and experience peace within our own hearts.

One of the Minor Prophets, Micah, referred to the coming Messiah: “This One will be our peace” (Micah 5:5). This month’s devotional will walk through the Minor Prophets, some of the least studied and appreciated books in the Old Testament. And in these books, we will learn more about Jesus, God’s Son.

He is our peace. Through Christ alone, we can experience peace in our relationship with God and with others. It is His gift to us. Jesus said, “Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). May you dwell in His peace this Advent. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

Jesus in the Old Testament

Throughout the centuries, some have claimed that Jesus is entirely absent from the Old Testament. But Jesus Himself criticized the religious leaders of His day for failing to pay heed to the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures about Him: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39–40).

The Old Testament witness about Christ takes several forms. First, it includes explicit predictions that describe the nature of Christ’s ministry, suffering, and resurrection. These predictions are not limited to the prophets; they can also be found in the Psalms. Psalm 22 provides a clear description of Christ’s suffering. Psalm 16 promised that Israel’s Messiah would not be abandoned to the grave or see decay but would be exalted to the Father’s right hand.

Second, some Old Testament passages seem to foreshadow events in Jesus’ life. These passages offer a kind of double vision by way of analogy, describing historical events that point beyond themselves to particular incidents in the life of Christ. Just as the people of Israel went down to Egypt and later returned to the Land of

Promise, Joseph took Jesus and fled to Egypt until Herod’s death. According to Matthew, this “fulfilled” what the prophet said in Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Matt. 2:15).

Some were looking for a miracle that would prove that Jesus was the Messiah. He told them that the only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

A third category of passages describes the Old Testament appearances of Jesus Christ before His birth in Bethlehem. On these occasions, He appeared as the Angel of Jehovah. This mysterious being is spoken of as God (cf. Gen 12:7; 16:7, 13; 17:1; 19:1). As the Angel of Jehovah, Jesus appeared temporarily in human form. In the Incarnation, Jesus made humanity a permanent part of His nature: the good news that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). This is what we celebrate at Christmas! ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *The Scriptures Testify about Me: Jesus and the Gospel in the Old Testament*, edited by D. A. Carson (Crossway).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

My Christmas List

When I was a young boy, I remember writing out my Christmas wish list. It was a big deal figuring out which items to include. Should I ask for an Erector set, a clock radio, or a BB gun?

As an adult, my Christmas list looks different. The things I appreciate most cannot be wrapped and placed underneath the tree. And, as we enter this season of celebrating our Lord's birth, I am reminded of how much I have been given. God has blessed us with extraordinary gifts. Join me in thanking God for these gifts:

Salvation—God has given us the ultimate gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). While Christmas often focuses on the birth of our Savior, we are mindful of what happened next. In His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and secured our salvation.

His Word—What a privilege to be able to read and study God's Word. I find it such an encouragement to know that thousands of you are opening the Bible with me each day as you follow along with our monthly *Today in the Word*

devotional. We are promised that God's Word does not return void. Instead, God says it “will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

Our Family in Christ—Whether your earthly family is present with you, you can be assured that you are part of a family of believers that spans the globe. “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord” (2 Thess. 2:13).

Thank you for being a part of our *Today in the Word* family during 2016! I hope your life has been enriched by this time spent in God's Word, that you have not only learned more about Scripture but have taken the next step in your personal faith journey.

Your financial support of this ministry is helping many others grow in faith as well! Jim, one of our readers, says he is thankful for *Today in the Word's* daily provision of God's Word. “It is an essential component of my daily diet—it provides joy and sustenance.”

We look forward to another great year of devotionals in 2017 as we grow together in God's Word. ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Seeing Jesus in the Minor Prophets

The prophets in ancient Israel proclaimed the coming Messiah, but the people didn't want to hear them and told the prophets to be quiet (Amos 2:12). For the next 400 years, the prophets were silent. The silence was unbroken until the powerful New Testament prophet, John the Baptist, and the coming of the promised Messiah in the flesh. Even then, Jesus' disciples were slow to understand who He was. In Luke 24, the resurrected Jesus joined the two of them unrecognized, as they went to the village of Emmaus. The Lord noted they were "slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25) and gave the much-needed Bible study: "He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

This month, let's imagine we have joined these two on their way to Emmaus, as we learn what the Minor Prophets said about Jesus Christ. May the Lord Himself, by His Holy Spirit, reveal to us what these twelve prophets—minor in the length of their message, but major in its truth and power—declared about Christ's humanity and divinity, His character and actions, as well as the salvation, peace, and righteousness He brings.

May we see Jesus each day of our study and may our hearts echo the words of the two disciples when they recognized their Lord: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). ■

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THURSDAY
DECEMBER

1

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

Seeing Jesus in Scripture

Have you ever been gazing at a crowd of people passing before you without really paying attention to the details? Then suddenly your friend waves to you from the crowd, and you realize he had been standing there all along! Your eyes were looking, but until that moment you did not really see.

The disciples walking on the road to Emmaus had been reading the Scriptures in a similar way. They knew the Law and they had read the prophets, but not until they were walking with the risen Jesus did they come to see—really see!—what the Scriptures were about. They had thought Jesus was a mighty prophet who had met an untimely death on the cross. They had hoped He was the promised Messiah, but now they were confused by reports of an empty tomb and a missing body. Nothing seemed to make sense.

Then Jesus reoriented their vision: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The suffering and death of Jesus the Messiah were exactly what the prophets had predicted, because the Scriptures were written about Him. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had said something similar to the Jewish leaders questioning His identity: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39–40).

The Old Testament is about Jesus, especially the prophetic books. His life, ministry, suffering, death, and salvation are all anticipated and predicted within these pages. Those who read the Scriptures without looking for this will fail to read the way Jesus instructs us.

APPLY THE WORD

This month’s study focuses on seeing Jesus in the Minor Prophets. This might require us to reorient our vision. Yet as Jesus said, these Scriptures testify about Him, and in Him is eternal life! As we embark on this journey, ask God for the spiritual vision to see the wonderful ways He has prepared for the coming of Christ through the Minor Prophets.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer at Moody, is thankful for your prayer support for the ministry of his teams. Today, he asks you to pray for the Investment Accounting staff: Andrea Palmer-Reed, Daphne Hussey, Marilou Logan, Rohan McLachlan, and Tonya Reed.

*I will send my messenger, who will
prepare the way before me.*

Malachi 3:1

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

2

The Way Is Prepared

Transitions are significant turning points in the lives of people and nations. As the last of God’s prophets to ancient Israel, Malachi represents an equally important transition from the old covenant to the new.

The people had returned from exile and the temple was rebuilt, but Malachi proclaimed a “messenger” who would come to “prepare the way before me” (3:1). Who was this messenger, and when would he arrive? Details are few, but Scripture declares he would, like the prophet Elijah, turn the hearts of the people (4:5–6). All of this, declared Malachi, was in preparation for the arrival of the Lord Himself!

It would take 400 years of prophetic silence, but God’s promise through Malachi was fulfilled with the arrival of John the Baptist. As the angel Gabriel declared to Zechariah: “He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and

power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). God’s promises are always true; the “messenger” of Malachi had arrived.

Notice two important implications. First, it implies Jesus’ divinity. The “messenger” of Malachi prepared the way for the Lord Himself. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, meaning that Jesus is none other than God arriving in the flesh! Second, as the “messenger” of Malachi, John the Baptist called for repentance (cf. Matt. 3:1–2), a preparation for the coming of our Lord Christ. But just as Malachi concluded with an open-ended call for Israel to respond, so too John the Baptist’s call remains open to us today. How will we respond to the announcement that our God and Lord has arrived?

APPLY THE WORD

Christmas is our celebration of Christ’s coming in the flesh. As that day approaches, how will you prepare? How you might change your priorities to make more room for Christ in your life? Whether through increased time in prayer, Bible reading, or service to others, commit these upcoming weeks to God in thanksgiving for His saving Incarnation.

PRAY WITH US

Tonight is the first day of Candlelight Carols performances, produced by Moody’s Music department. Please pray for all the Moody students who participate today and tomorrow. May our Lord be glorified by this production!

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

3

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Joel 2:13

A Call to Repent

On his deathbed, the nineteenth-century German writer Heinrich Heine supposedly quipped: “Of course God will forgive me. It’s his job.” Like Heine, many take a flippant view of God and His forgiveness. But a consistent theme of God’s prophets is that forgiveness is linked only with repentance.

The prophet Joel expressed this message with great zeal. His entire ministry was to call God’s people to repentance, to move from mere outward displays of religiosity to genuine inward change. Notice the emphasis on the heart: “Return to me with all your *heart*” (v. 12); “rend your *heart* and not your garments” (v. 13). Joel was not opposed to outward expressions of repentance: “fasting and weeping and mourning” (v. 12). But repentance is not simply a formula of outward actions; it must also include a genuine turning of the whole person back to God.

Notice that God’s attributes underlie the entire message. He is “gracious, compassionate . . . and abounding in love” (v. 13). God is not obligated to forgive. Yet because of His character, He promises forgiveness and mercy in response to our true repentance.

That picture of a gracious God who offers forgiveness in response to genuine repentance is what we see fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Rather than turn His back on sinful people, Jesus’ ministry was for their benefit: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32). Moreover, Jesus’ parables repeatedly demonstrate that when we repent, God forgives joyfully: “There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Praise God that Joel’s message of repentance has been made tangible in the person of Jesus!

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus’ proclamation of forgiveness through repentance remains true today. As you continue your preparation for Christmas, take time to acknowledge your sin in a spirit of repentance before God. It can be painful to confess our failings to God, but take comfort in the words of Joel and Jesus: our gracious God joyfully forgives!

PRAY WITH US

Would you uphold in prayer Moody’s president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, as he speaks at Candlelight Carols today? May this celebration in drama and music, as well as Dr. Nyquist’s message, give comfort, encouragement, and joy to everyone in attendance.

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might.

Micah 3:8

In the Power of the Spirit

It has been said that as the leaders go, so goes the nation, and as the pulpits go, so goes the church. That was certainly true during the time of the prophet Micah.

Ministering in the eighth century B.C., Micah's message was directed primarily at the leaders of God's people: judges, priests, and prophets. Perversion of justice ran deep: "Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money" (v. 11). Despite the rampant corruption, these leaders acted as though nothing was wrong. Into this context, Micah delivered a message empowered "with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might" (v. 8). It was a call to turn back from sin, and a warning of judgment to Israel's leaders.

This image of a prophetic, Spirit-empowered ministry was fulfilled most fully in the person of Jesus. At His

baptism, the Spirit descended upon Him while the Father declared Him "my Son, whom I love" (Matt. 3:17). During Jesus' ministry, His strongest words of criticism were directed against none other than the leaders of the time, especially priests and scribes of the Law.

One Gospel scene, in particular, brings these elements together. After Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, the religious leaders began accusing Jesus of performing exorcisms by the devil's power. In response, Jesus denied the accusation and then declared: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). Those who stand against Jesus, stand against God Himself and His kingdom. The prophet Micah represented a Spirit-filled ministry of warning against Israel's leaders. Now Jesus stands as the fulfillment and embodiment of that same prophetic message.

APPLY THE WORD

Corruption among the world's leaders continues today, and the warnings of Micah and Jesus remain relevant. So does our need for prayer. Create a list of local and national leaders in the government and church and pray for them by name each day this week, asking God to direct their hearts toward true justice as they lead and serve.

PRAY WITH US

Anthony Turner, VP and dean of Student Enrollment Services, oversees marketing, admissions, financial aid, and career services. He invites you to praise God for blessing our ministry to students throughout their study at Moody.

MONDAY
DECEMBER

5

I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6

Genuine Religion

Amos and Hosea were contemporary prophets to the nations of Israel and Judah during a period of material prosperity and external religiosity. Inwardly, however, the people's hearts were empty, their religion was shallow, and care for the poor was absent.

Both prophets criticized a religion that lacked true compassion. In our reading from Amos, God declares His hatred for their religious festivals, assemblies, offerings, and songs because their lives failed to display any spiritual fruit. Instead, Scripture exhorts: "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24). Likewise, Hosea condemned the people's love for God as "the early dew that disappears" (Hosea 6:4). What God really wants is deeper: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Outward religion without heartfelt action is of no interest to our God.

Jesus' ministry repeatedly emphasized this contrast between empty religion and genuine faith-in-action. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Himself quoted Hosea 6:6 in an encounter with the Pharisees. The Pharisees attended synagogue regularly, tithed faithfully, and applied the strictest measures of the Law to themselves. Yet when they saw Jesus proclaiming the gospel to so-called tax collectors and sinners, they took great offense. Their concern for outward religion had trumped concern and compassion for the poor, the outcast, and those in need of God's forgiveness.

Jesus' life fulfilled the prophetic call of Hosea and Amos. He demonstrated God's concern for true justice, mercy, and knowledge of God. His response to the Pharisees underscored this call to exercise our relationship with God through spiritual fruit in our lives rather than mere formality.

APPLY THE WORD

How many of us lead religious lives that ignore God's concerns? Does church attendance trump Christ's deeper concern for the poor and sinners? Ask God to help you express your faith in Him in tangible ways. Look for opportunities to serve at a soup kitchen, visit prisoners, or share the gospel with others, all as way to show your love for Christ.

PRAY WITH US

Student Accounts staff—David Crail, Janet Mitchell, Keeley Rohrbach, and Paulette Phillips—work diligently behind the scenes to keep students' records up to date, paying careful attention to every detail. They welcome your prayer support today!

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

6

God's Ultimate Desire

In a typical court of law, a defendant sits on one side of the courtroom, the prosecutor sits on the other side, and the judge sits in the middle. Today's reading also presents a courtroom scene, with Israel as the defendant and God as both prosecutor and judge.

His case against Israel is simple. He had delivered them from Egypt and slavery, provided leaders and blessings, and acted in mighty ways. Yet they had forgotten God's salvation and drifted away. How would God's people respond? Scripture lists their pathetic answer: perhaps God just needed to be assuaged with burnt offerings, calves, rams, and oil! Demonstrating the depth of their decline, they even suggested offering God their firstborn as a sacrifice.

The prophet was quick to dismiss these suggestions. God had already declared what He desires from His people: "To

act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (v. 8). He does not want punctilious, arrogant law-keeping, and He certainly does not want child sacrifice. He desires a life built around His own heart—to act with justice in our lives; to orient our hearts to love mercy for others; and to walk with faithfulness and humility with Him. These are the deep desires and concerns of God's heart.

We have no better illustration of these three things than the person of Jesus. His life was imbued with a concern for justice to the poor and oppressed. His words and actions were filled with mercy to sinners. And His death on the cross was the ultimate proof of His faithful walking with God to the end. As God, Christ's life of justice, mercy, and faithfulness brings salvation. As man, Christ becomes an example of a life fully given over to the ultimate desires of God's heart.

APPLY THE WORD

Justice, mercy, and walking with God are not works we do to save ourselves. They are a way of life in response to God's grace already shown in Christ. Write out the words of Micah 6:8 on a notecard and carry it with you this week as a reminder of Christ's own life and His call to follow Him into the very heart of God.

PRAY WITH US

Moody's provost and dean of Education, Dr. Junias Venugopal, leads our education ministry to undergraduate and graduate students. Please thank God in prayer for his thoughtful approach and capable service in the field of Christian education.

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

7

So was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew 2:15

God’s True Son

The parent-child connection is one of the deepest relationships in life. A parent loves a child unconditionally, but that love means that the parent will also discipline that child when they disobey.

Like many Old Testament passages, our reading in Hosea describes Israel in terms of a parent-child relationship. Notice the repeated emphasis on God’s love: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son . . . I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love” (Hosea 11:1, 4). Yet, Hosea also highlights Israel’s disobedience: “The more they were called, the more they went away from me” (Hosea 11:2). God had called Israel to be His chosen people so that His covenant love might be made known to the world. As Hosea points out, however, in the end Israel failed miserably and repeatedly at being the faithful son.

When we turn to our New Testament reading, it might surprise us that Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, not in reference to wayward Israel in need of discipline, but in reference to Jesus Himself. Joseph took Mary and Jesus down to Egypt where they stayed until King Herod’s death. Then Scripture declares: “So was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’” (Matt. 2:15).

Matthew makes his intentions clear by quoting Hosea: Jesus is the new Israel, the true Son of God. Where Israel failed in its covenant relationship with God, Jesus is declared a beloved Son, pleasing to the Father (Matt. 3:17). Israel repeatedly disobeyed God’s will and failed to witness God’s salvation to the world. Christ, however, the true Son of God, offered His perfect obedience to the Father’s will, and with that, the love of God was made known to the world.

APPLY THE WORD

Just as Christ fulfilled Israel’s role as God’s true Son, so He fulfills all righteousness on our behalf. In fact, without the True Son standing before the Father for us, we have no access to the Lord. But in Christ, we are brought into relationship with God. Give thanks today to our Lord and Savior that because of Christ’s Sonship we now have eternal life.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers the Financial Aid department on Moody’s Chicago campus: Frank Slomkowski, Heather Shalley, Timothy Krug, and Zerrekka Lloyd. May they thrive in their service and in God’s care as they extend help and care to Moody students.

In that day . . . every one of you will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.

Zechariah 3:10

God's Servant and Branch

In ancient Israel, the three major offices were prophet, priest, and king. The prophet delivered God's word, the priest presided over worship, and the king ruled God's people. Previously, we have seen how Jesus fulfilled the role of prophet. Today's reading points to Christ as priest and king.

Through Zechariah, God promised to send "my servant the Branch" (3:8). On that day, guilt will be removed from the land and "every one of you will invite his neighbor . . . under his fig tree" (3:10). Later in Zechariah, we learn that in some way Joshua the high priest himself represents the Branch: "He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne" (6:13). The promised servant will harmoniously combine the office of priest and king.

Zechariah's immediate message is about Joshua the high priest; yet, as

Christians we can see that it is also about Christ. Jesus actually fulfills Zechariah's words about the servant and Branch. In John 1, for example, as Jesus began gathering disciples, Philip called Nathanael while sitting under a fig tree (remember Zech. 3:10). When Jesus pointed this out, Nathanael realized the significance. He proclaimed Jesus as "Son of God" and "king of Israel" (John 1:48–49). The promised Branch had arrived!

Likewise, the book of Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the great high priest in fulfillment of all priests (Heb. 7:11–28), and His church as the new temple (see 1 Cor. 3:16–17). The book of Revelation depicts Jesus as the glorious "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16). In short, the Scriptures abound with the idea that Jesus is the promised "servant and Branch" of Zechariah. In Him are fulfilled the offices of priest and king.

APPLY THE WORD

With the coming of God's "servant and Branch," Scripture promises that "every one of you will invite his neighbor" (3:10). Philip did this with Nathanael, and countless others did the same after encountering Jesus. Whom do you know through work, at school, or in the neighborhood who needs to hear the good news of Christ?

PRAY WITH US

Debbie Zelinski, vice president of Human Resources, brings to Moody a wealth of leadership experience. Please pray for her and her team, as they help each Moody employee reach their highest potential in their service to the Lord at the workplace.

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

9

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 1:27

Ruler Out of Bethlehem

Most of us are unaware of the hyoid bone, a small U-shaped bone in our throats. Seemingly insignificant, the hyoid bone gives us the ability to speak. How often God uses small things for great purposes!

Today's reading in Micah gives another example of this important lesson. Israel and Judah were experiencing a vacuum of godly leadership and now faced judgment. In fact, Micah prophesied Israel's coming destruction: their enemies would "strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with the rod" (Micah 5:1).

But there was also the promise of a new ruler, not from one of the great cities of the land, but from Bethlehem, "small among the clans of Judah." From this seemingly insignificant town would come a "ruler over Israel." Yet this was no ordinary, earthly ruler. His nature was divine and eternal, "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This

ruler would gather God's people again. He would stand "in the strength of the LORD," and "his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth" (Micah 5:2–4).

Only Jesus fits this promise, and the Gospel of Matthew confirms it (Matt. 2:1–8). Fast forward to the days of King Herod and the birth of Jesus in the town of Bethlehem. Seven hundred years after the prophecy of Micah, the Magi stood before Herod asking for the newborn king of the Jews. When Herod inquired of the priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born, they pointed to Bethlehem, quoting Micah: "Out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6). Amazing as it sounds, this vulnerable infant, born so long ago in the small town of Bethlehem, was none other than our eternal God coming in fulfillment of His promise hundreds of years before.

APPLY THE WORD

God is not afraid to use the small and weak things of the world for His purpose, as His own Incarnation shows. Find someone you know who may struggle with their own sense of worth, and use today's lesson to encourage them. Remind them that our gracious God identifies with, and even uses, what the world might not value. That includes you!

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for the Human Resources staff, please mention during your prayer time Alexander Wilson, Serene Hudson, Corrie Ladd, and Jill Douglas. We all value their important contribution to the Moody community!

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:11

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

10

The Good Shepherd

The world of the Bible was a thoroughly agricultural world. Because farming and caring for livestock were a regular way of life, the metaphor of shepherding became a common image used for God throughout Scripture.

Psalms 23 is probably the most famous use of this image in Scripture, but the shepherd metaphor appears in the prophets as well. In today's reading from Micah, God promises that despite the coming judgment, He will gather together His people Israel. Drawing on the shepherding metaphor, He declares: "I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture" (Micah 2:12). As their shepherd-king, God "will pass through before them, the Lord at their head" (Micah 2:13). This is a wonderful picture of safety, security, and provision for God's people.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Jesus used this metaphor for Himself.

In John 10, Jesus twice declared: "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Later, Jesus repeated the promises of security and safety when He declared that He would give His sheep eternal life and "no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). Wonderfully, this invitation was not just to Israel, but to the whole world: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also" (John 10:16). It is a reassuring picture of God's gentle, loving care for us.

Yet there is another, darker, aspect to Jesus' use of the shepherd imagery. Not only will Christ gather His people and give them eternal life, He will die for them. When the wolf comes, says Jesus, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Our great Shepherd, Jesus, will give everything so that we might have life forever in Him.

APPLY THE WORD

The image of Jesus as our loving, sacrificial shepherd may not be one we often consider, but Johann Sebastian Bach wrote an aria (as part of a larger cantata) capturing this theme: "Sheep May Safely Graze." Find a version of this beautiful musical piece online and reflect on the Shepherd's love for you and His sacrificial gift of eternal life.

PRAY WITH US

When you spend time with the Lord today, please add to your prayer list these Human Resources employees: Marcy Torres, Mia Gale, and Peter Miller. The Lord sees their faithful service, and we express our gratitude for them in prayer.

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

11

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . this is your true and proper worship.

Romans 12:1

The Worshipped King

The use of sacrifice was an integral element of Israelite worship. God prescribed animal offerings to be pure and blameless, representing the pure intention of the worshiper's heart. The Israelites did not always adhere to these instructions, and in the book of Malachi we see God's displeasure with their sacrifices.

Instead of giving God their best, they profaned the Lord's table by bringing injured and diseased animals. They would vow to offer an acceptable sacrifice but then "cheat" God by substituting a lesser animal. If no human ruler would accept such actions, why would God? This was no small matter. As God explains, worship was intended to make His name "great among the nations" (v. 11). Because God is a "great king," His "name is to be feared among the nations" (v. 14). Instead, their polluted worship dishonored God and sullied His name.

For Christians, after the coming of Jesus the Jewish system of animal sacrifice ceased. But this does not mean that God no longer desires worship and sacrifice. There is a new "Lord's table" (see 1 Cor. 10:21) at which Christians offer their praise and thanksgiving in celebration of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Likewise, prayers across the globe ascend before the Lord's heavenly throne like incense (Rev. 5:8), fulfilling the words of Malachi 1:11: "In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations."

Scripture also reminds us that our entire lives are a kind of sacrifice before the Lord. Paul urges us: "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Rom. 12:1). God no longer desires animal sacrifice. He wants our whole lives offered to Him in pure and holy worship.

APPLY THE WORD

This Sunday as you enter into worship, keep today's lesson in mind. Your prayers are like incense ascending before Christ's throne. Your praise and thanksgiving are like a sacrifice before God. And above all, as you go into the world with the message of God's love, your entire life can be offered as a "living sacrifice . . . your true and proper worship."

PRAY WITH US

Your prayers are important for Moody's Donor Development and Channel Strategy department, headed by vice president Bruce Everhart. Please pray for him and his teams as they expand Moody's outreach to our donors.

They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

Hosea 3:5

MONDAY
DECEMBER

12

The True and Faithful King

Infidelity is one of the most destructive sins within a marriage. It betrays intimacy, faithfulness, and the basis of the entire relationship. To be guilty of adultery is to be guilty of a grave violation of trust and commitment.

How shocking, then, that in the book of Hosea, God likened His people Israel to an unfaithful adulteress. In fact, Hosea was instructed to marry a promiscuous woman as a living parable, illustrating God's relationship with His people. Yet, despite this woman's continued infidelity, Hosea was told to seek out his wife and purchase her back from the prostitution market. Upon her return, Hosea informed her that she was to remain faithful to him, "and I will behave the same way toward you" (v. 3).

This picture of God's faithfulness toward an unfaithful people then shifts to kingly imagery. Although Israel "will live many days without king or prince," one day

they "will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king" (vv. 4–5). Amazingly, God promises that when that happens, He will receive them, not with anger, but with "his blessings" (v. 5). Combined, these metaphors paint a clear image of God's relationship with us. Although we are unfaithful to our God, He remains a faithful, protective, and generous king.

When will this happen? According to Scripture, it has already begun with the person of Jesus. The angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary that she would bear a son: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and . . . his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32–33). With the arrival of Jesus, the true and faithful king has come. God has called His unfaithful people back to Himself. If we return to Him, He promises to receive us with His joyful blessing and faithful love.

APPLY THE WORD

What is your image of God? A cruel, unrelenting taskmaster? A lenient and permissive parent? The biblical picture of God is our faithful king who calls us to Himself and offers His blessings. What blessings has He bestowed upon you? List some of those today, then give thanks to our God and king for His generous and faithful love.

PRAY WITH US

Our Pastoral Ministry major equips students with practical skills in preaching, leadership, and pastoral care. Please pray for the faculty—Winfred Neely, Pamela MacRae, and Michael Boyle—as they help students follow God's calling for their lives.

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

13

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

A Humble King Arrives

When the Jews successfully revolted against their Seleucid oppressors in the second century B.C., they brought palm branches to Jerusalem in celebration. Later, palm branches would appear on Jewish coins commemorating their revolt against Rome. Within ancient Jewish history, palm branches symbolized victory and nationalism.

That background helps us understand today's reading in John. Going out to meet Jesus, the crowds shouted "Hosanna! . . . Blessed is the king of Israel" (v. 13). In their hands were palm branches. The word *hosanna* (meaning "save") anticipated national release from the Romans. By waving palm branches and declaring Jesus "king of Israel," the crowd identified Him as military leader who brought victory over oppressors.

How did Jesus respond to this nationalistic hope for military victory? He did not secure a majestic war horse

and gather an entourage of soldiers. He found a donkey to ride. Scripture tells us this was in fulfillment of Zechariah: "Do not be afraid, Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt" (v. 14; cf. Zech. 9:9).

The broader context of Zechariah 9 helps explain the significance of this action. There we learn that God's promised Messiah would be "righteous and victorious" (Zech. 9:9), but not in the way of war. Riding on a donkey conveyed humility and peace: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations" (Zech. 9:10). Christ came to fulfill the kingly promises of Zechariah: not as a military conqueror but as a humble king, ready to suffer death on the cross. Only then would true victory over sin and death be won. Only then would true peace be secured.

APPLY THE WORD

After recent elections, it is tempting to view our political leaders as those who provide peace and deliverance from our problems. Today's reading corrects that view: Jesus alone is the victorious king over oppression. Pray for your political leaders, but give our national welfare into the strong hands of our true and humble king Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Keeping Pastoral Ministry faculty in our prayers today, ask the Lord to guide Kirk Baker, John Koessler, Laurie Norris, and Craig Hedrickson as they impart biblical wisdom to their students, modeling to them true pastoral care and grace.

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

Zechariah 13:7

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

14

The Rejected Shepherd

Like many Old Testament prophets, Zechariah was instructed by God to enact a “living parable” as a way to illustrate God’s message to His people. In today’s reading, God told Zechariah to take the role of a shepherd to demonstrate God’s relation to Israel.

This was not a happy task. Zechariah was to care for a flock “marked for slaughter” (11:4, 7) as a symbol of God’s last dealings with His people. Despite Zechariah’s care for them he was met with opposition. The “flock detested me” (11:8). Then Zechariah broke the symbolic rods, Favor and Union, illustrating the flock’s disarray and lost favor with God. In the end, Zechariah was removed and his worth set at thirty pieces of silver, the value of a lowly slave (11:12; cf. Ex. 21:32). Later, in Zechariah 13, the fate of the shepherd and flock is predicted: “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (13:7).

Without help from the New Testament, these passages would be difficult to understand. According to Scripture, however, Zechariah’s actions portray the coming shepherd-Messiah, Jesus. We have already seen that Jesus fulfilled the role of shepherd for God’s people. Matthew 26 demonstrates Christ’s fulfillment of the rejected shepherd and the scattered sheep of Zechariah.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, there was mounting opposition from the religious leadership. In the end, Jesus’ own disciple—Judas Iscariot—handed Him over to the chief priests. The price of that transaction is a clear echo of Zechariah 11: “They counted out for him thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:15). Later, Jesus predicted His own coming arrest and the disciples’ scattering, quoting Zechariah 13 directly (Matt. 26:31). It is sobering, but true: Christ the Shepherd’s rejection, betrayal, and abandonment all fulfilled God’s words in Zechariah.

APPLY THE WORD

How amazing that Christ came two thousand years ago knowing that He would be rejected, betrayed, and abandoned! Yet that was not the end of the story. His rejection became our salvation, and those scattered disciples soon became fearless evangelists to the world. Thank God today that He can turn our brokenness into His glory!

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for Moody’s vice president of Information Technology Services, Frank Leber, as he oversees Moody’s Internet and computer maintenance services on our Chicago campus. Pray for him and his family during this Christmas season.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies and *Open Line* Host

Q Why are the genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke so different? Are there contradictions?

A The two genealogies emphasize different perspectives. The Gospel of Matthew tells the virgin-birth story from the perspective of Joseph, Jesus' adoptive and legal father. The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, recounts the birth of Jesus from Mary's perspective, including Jesus' physical descent from His mother. Both Joseph and Mary were of the house of David but descended from two different sons of David. The Matthew genealogy (1:1–17) traces the line of Jesus from David through Solomon, while the Luke genealogy (Luke 3:23–38) traces Jesus' ancestry from David through Nathan.

People have raised two objections to this explanation. First, two names are repeated in the two genealogies: Shealtiel and Zerubbabel, but it is most likely that these were common names. Zerubbabel means “offspring of Babylon” and would have been common among Jewish people born during the Babylonian captivity. The textual evidence indicates that these shared names don't refer to the same people: Matthew's genealogy says that the father of Shealtiel is Jeconiah (Matt. 1:12); in Luke's Gospel, the father of Shealtiel is Neri (Luke 3:27).

The second objection is that both genealogies appear to refer to Joseph as the person whose ancestry is listed (Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:23), but the descriptions are different. In Matthew, Joseph is called the son of Jacob; in Luke, Joseph is the son of Heli. How to explain this seeming discrepancy? Many scholars argue that Luke 3:23 could be understood to read: *Jesus was thought to be the son of Joseph, the son (in-law) of Heli*. Heli was most likely the father of Mary, and the rest of the genealogy would be her ancestry.

We should understand why these two genealogies are important. Both legally and physically, the Lord Jesus descends from King David. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8).

Q I'm not sure how to keep Christ in Christmas, since it has become so commercialized. I've heard some of the Christmas traditions, such as the Christmas tree, come from pagan practices. Wouldn't it be best just to stop celebrating Christmas?

A Celebrating the Incarnation of Jesus is so meaningful that I think it would be mistaken to stop commemorating it. Whether you have Christmas lights or trees is really

One fun way we kept our focus on Jesus was by turning Christmas into a celebratory birthday party.

irrelevant, as long as we center our celebration on God's gift of His Son.

As for the tree and other practices coming from paganism, this is likely true. At the winter solstice, the Romans celebrated a festival called Saturnalia, in honor of the god of agriculture, Saturnus, by decorating their houses with greens and lights and exchanging gifts. Christians took these practices and gave them a Christian perspective. Although some wonder if this celebration is legitimate, we have a great New Testament lesson to help guide us. In the first century, some believers equated purchasing meat sacrificed to idols from the meat market with engaging in pagan worship. Paul rejected this line of thinking. He wrote, "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: . . . food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor. 8:4–8). Eating food offered to an idol is neither right nor wrong; in these neutral areas we should follow our consciences. It is the same with Christmas paraphernalia, like trees and greens and lights. If you are not engaged in pagan worship and your conscience is free, then enjoy these aspects of the holiday.

That being said, we need to consciously choose to emphasize the Incarnation over the commercialization. My wife and I didn't want to eliminate gift-giving

altogether because we thought it reminded us of God's great gift of the Messiah Jesus for us—"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15)—and the gifts the Magi brought to the Lord Jesus. But we did choose moderation. We never overwhelmed family members with great quantities or lavishly expensive gifts. And we taught our kids to give to others, especially those more needy than us.

Another way to keep our focus on Jesus is by including Him in the celebration. We attended our congregation's worship service as part of our Christmas holiday. On Christmas morning, we read all the biblical narratives related to the Messiah's birth. And although we exchanged gifts, we emphasized that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17), so He is the one for whom we are most thankful.

We also turned Christmas into a celebratory birthday party with a "Happy Birthday" banner across our fireplace mantel. My wife made a birthday cake for the Lord, and Christmas was the only morning of the year that our kids were permitted to eat cake for breakfast. December 25 may not actually be Jesus' birthday, but it is as good as any day to celebrate the Incarnation of the King.

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

15

*They will look on me, the one they have
pierced, and they will mourn.*

Zechariah 12:10

Pierced for Us

Crucifixion brought death by asphyxiation, the weight of the hanging body gradually suffocating the one crucified. Soldiers could speed death, however, by breaking the legs, thereby preventing the natural intake of breath.

That is the scene in today's reading. Having been unfairly tried and flogged, Jesus was hung on a Roman cross. The Jewish leaders, however, did not want their Sabbath and Passover desecrated by dead bodies hanging around. So they asked to have Jesus' legs broken and the bodies removed. When the soldiers came to Jesus, they found Him dead already. So instead of breaking His legs, they thrust a spear into His side, just to ensure He was really expired. The flow of blood and water was proof that Jesus was dead.

Scripture assures us that the events just described were true. But notice

the purpose for the recounting: "so that you also may believe" (v. 35). This was not a description of yet another man's death at the cruel hands of the Romans. This death was an explicit fulfillment of Scripture: "Not one of his bones will be broken" (v. 36; cf. Ex. 12:46), and "They will look on the one they have pierced" (v. 37; cf. Zech. 12:10).

Jesus not only fulfills the image of the sacrificial Passover lamb (whose bones remained unbroken), but also God's word to Israel in Zechariah 12. There, God promised to intervene in a great day of battle against Israel's enemies. Yet God also declared that they "will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn" (Zech. 12:10). The one hanging pierced on a Roman cross was none other than God incarnate. Through His death and resurrection, God secured a great victory for us over sin and death; yet it came at great cost.

APPLY THE WORD

How often do we mourn over our sin and the One we have pierced? Slowly reread today's passage and place all your sin and brokenness before Christ on the cross. Realize that while our sin pierces like a spear, Christ bears it "so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). Giving thanks, renew your commitment to live for Christ.

PRAY WITH US

Paul Wilson, who oversees Student Services at Moody Theological Seminary in Plymouth, Mich., will be grateful for your prayers today. May God give him strength and perseverance in his service and good communication with the students.

Now something greater than Jonah is here.

Matthew 12:41

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

16

Greater Than Jonah

Biblical typology is when a figure or event in the Old Testament is fulfilled and completed by a figure or event in the New Testament. In reading Scripture this way, scholars describe the Old Testament event as the “type” and the New Testament event as the “antitype.” Sometimes those connections are only hinted at, but other times, Scripture makes them clear.

In Matthew 12, Jesus makes an explicit typological connection. Despite His continued demonstrations of power and authority through His miracles and teaching, some of the religious leadership were not satisfied. They approached Jesus and demanded a sign that He was who He claimed to be. Jesus declared that this request was wicked, but He did not stop there.

Jesus would give only one sign: the “sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights

in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (vv. 39–40). Jesus claimed that Jonah was a type, one ultimately fulfilled in the resurrection! This does not mean that the Jonah narrative was untrue, only that it pointed beyond itself. As Jesus said, “now something greater than Jonah is here” (v. 41).

This typology also holds lessons of warning and hope. Jesus warned His unbelieving audience: because Nineveh repented at Jonah’s preaching, they will “stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it” (v. 41). The greater One had arrived; reject Him at your own risk! But there is also hope. Just as Jonah preached to the (seemingly wicked) Gentiles in Nineveh, so too the message of Christ’s gospel is intended for the whole world, not just the Jews. In this way as well, Jesus is “greater than Jonah.”

APPLY THE WORD

Early Christians used imagery of Jonah to represent Christ’s resurrection. Do an online search to find depictions of the Jonah narrative in early Christian catacomb frescoes and sarcophagus burial carvings. Consider printing one, or make your own art using this theme, as a reminder of Christ’s glorious conquest of death for us.

PRAY WITH US

Our Operations teams are a vital part of the effective ministry of Moody. Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer, requests your prayers today for the men and women who serve to keep Moody Global Ministries running smoothly.

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

17

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

Victory Over the Enemy

At just twenty-one verses, Obadiah is the shortest of all the Minor Prophets. Obadiah is also unique because its message was directed not primarily at Judah or Israel but at the nation of Edom, descended from Esau, the great enemies of God's people.

Of course the message also held interest for Judah because Obadiah's oracle proclaimed the coming defeat of their enemies. Edom was a proud and formidable nation, bordering Judah on two sides. Relations with Edom had often been strained throughout Israelite history, but at the writing of Obadiah, their sin had reached its climax. They had acted with violence against Judah and gloated over Jerusalem's destruction under Babylon (cf. Ps. 137:7).

Edom may have been proud and fortified, but God declared their end: "As you have done, it will be done to you" (v. 15). The once-secure land of Edom

would be overtaken and "there will be no survivors from Esau" (v. 18). The final verse of Obadiah offers a reassuring picture of victory and hope for God's people: "Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's" (v. 21). Deliverance was coming for God's people, destruction for their enemies.

In no small way, this conflict between God's kingdom and His enemies finds its completion in the person of Jesus. When Christ was born, Herod the Idumean (i.e., the Edomite) was king, one determined to rid the true King from David's line at all costs. But Christ's kingdom would ultimately triumph. We may not see His kingdom clearly right now, but Scripture proclaims that the forces of darkness have been defeated: "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

APPLY THE WORD

Who in your life needs to be reminded that God will ultimately prevail over Satan's kingdom of sin, suffering, and death? Take time today to write an encouraging note, make a phone call, or pay a visit to this person. Use the lesson of Obadiah to bring a biblical message of hope to one who needs that reminder. Christ's kingdom will prevail!

PRAY WITH US

They usually stay in the background, but the results of their work bless everybody! We invite you to pray for Custodial Services on our Chicago campus, starting with a prayer for Cathy Sywulka, Danielle Hooper, Danny Hutcherson, and David Boskovic.

See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.

Zechariah 3:4

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

18

Cleansing from Sin

The opening lines of Count Zinzendorf's eighteenth-century hymn speak of being clothed in Christ's righteousness: "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness / My beauty are, my glorious dress; / Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, / With joy shall I lift up my head."

The imagery of the hymn echoes the scene in today's reading. Zechariah's message was for God's people who were returned from exile, yet realized their own sinfulness before God. The vision of chapter 3 addressed that very issue. Joshua the high priest, as representative of the people, stood before God "dressed in filthy clothes" (v. 3). Satan stood beside him, accusing Joshua before the Lord. Yet, despite his obvious sin before God, the Lord interceded for Joshua, rebuked Satan, and exchanged his filthy garments for clean linens. The metaphor was clear: "See, I have taken away your sin" (v. 4).

This promise of forgiveness, however, was not just for Joshua but the entire nation; God would send His servant, the Branch, and "remove the sin of this land in a single day" (v. 9).

This beautiful picture of sinful, filthy rags being exchanged for clean, pure garments was "symbolic of things to come" (v. 8): the heart of Christ's gospel. Unlike Joshua the high priest who stood before God in his own sinfulness, our great high priest Jesus stands before God in perfect righteousness. Not only that, Christ also clothes us in His righteousness. As the apostle Paul declares: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). On our own, we stand before God condemned in our sin. In our union with Christ, we discover that we are no longer condemned but forgiven and cleansed.

APPLY THE WORD

The lesson today is a reminder. Whose clothes do we wear before God: our own sinful rags, or the righteousness garment of Christ Himself? If you have never yielded your life to Christ and asked Him to exchange your sin for His righteousness, delay no longer. Give it all to Christ and you will be both forgiven and cleansed!

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for the Custodial Services staff today and tomorrow, please add to your list Dean Gentry, Do Tran, Edgardo Bartolome, Ernest Brown, and John Pettett. We thank them for keeping our campus always clean and enjoyable.

MONDAY
DECEMBER

19

How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

Matthew 23:37

Gathered Together in Love

At age 47, Samuel Morse was a failed artist living in poverty. Abandoning his painting career, he turned to other projects and eventually invented the telegraph. By the end of his life, Morse was hailed as one of America's greatest innovators. What a reversal of fortunes!

A similar reversal is depicted in the words of Zephaniah. Despite earlier pronouncements of coming judgment, Zephaniah ends with a stunning picture of restoration and renewal for God's people. Look at the emotion of joy described. Israel is called to "sing" and "shout aloud;" they should "be glad and rejoice with all your heart" (v. 14). Why? "The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy" (v. 15). But it was more than punishment being removed. The joy of Israel involved the very presence and love of God: "The Lord your God is

with you . . . He will take great delight in you; in his love he will . . . rejoice over you with singing" (v. 17). God's gathering love is echoed again at the end of our reading, where Israel is told, "I will gather the exiles . . . I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home" (vv. 19–20). What a reversal of fortunes indeed!

That picture of a tender, loving God who longs to gather His people to Himself is repeated in the ministry of Jesus. Standing before Jerusalem, Christ cried out, "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Matt. 23:37). Many in Jesus' day were unwilling to respond to Christ's gathering call, but for those who do, we have joy in knowing we belong to Him and He delights in us.

APPLY THE WORD

This is a week of great anticipation as we await the celebration of Christmas and Christ's coming. Make your time with God this morning especially joyful, remembering the words of Zephaniah and God's tender love for you. As you sing and pray, imagine His gathering love around you and His rejoicing over you with singing.

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer time for custodians at Moody in Chicago, ask God to give joy and strength every day to John Williams, Nicole Lee, Oakley Smith, Paul Henle, and Thomas Pizano. May they walk in His love and share it with others.

*To all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God.*

John 1:12

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

20

Made Children of God

Choosing a baby name is an important moment for all parents. Sometimes the name has family significance; other times, the sound is pleasing; many times, though, parents choose a name because of its meaning.

The importance of a name's meaning is especially true in today's reading. The children of Hosea and Gomer were each given a name that conveyed a message about God's people. The first daughter was called Lo-Ruhamah ("not loved"), "for I will no longer show love to Israel" (v. 6). Afterward, Gomer gave birth to Lo-Ammi ("not my people"), "for you are not my people, and I am not your God" (v. 9). These are not your typical baby names! But the reason was clear: Israel had broken covenant with God and their relationship with Him had been seriously jeopardized.

Nevertheless, hope remained. First, Scripture echoes God's original

promise to Abraham, declaring, "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore." Second, God would renew His covenant with Israel: "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God'" (v. 10). There would be serious consequences for Israel's covenant violation, but God would remain true to His original word to Abraham and his children.

Yet there is more to this last promise. The notion of those who were "not God's people" refers also to the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 9:24–26). God's love would be offered to the whole world, not just Jews. Through Jesus Christ, relationship with God is available to Jew and Gentile alike: "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:12). Because of Christ's work, we are now "children of the living God."

APPLY THE WORD

By Christ's adoptive grace, we can call God by the name: "Abba, Father," and we are made "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15, 17). Address God in prayer today with the intimate term, "Abba." Through Christ's own Sonship, take all of your cares and concerns to God, confident in your relationship with Him as your Father.

PRAY WITH US

Pray for Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing and Communications, as she leads Moody's outreach to the broader public in the local communities, nationwide, and across the globe. Pray for God's guidance and encouragement along the way.

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

21

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Ephesians 2:21

A Renewed Temple

The temple was central to Jewish identity. It was the place God chose for worship, and was also a sign of God's presence with His people. So even though Israel had returned to their land from the Babylonian exile, the lack of a temple was a glaring problem.

This is why the message of Haggai was so important: God promised a new temple for His people. The prophet gathered together the governor, the high priest, and all the remaining people to declare his message. The old temple may be destroyed, but God's presence was not lacking. They should take heart that God would not only enable them to rebuild the temple, but "the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house" (Hag. 2:9). Solomon's temple had been grand (cf. 1 Kings 6), but the glory of the new temple would far

surpass the old and would be a place of great peace.

During the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, a new temple was indeed built. Yet all who saw it knew that it was *not* as grand as the old temple. Many of the older priests, comparing it to the first temple, actually wept (see Ezra 3:12). Had God's promise failed? Absolutely not! The glorious new temple Haggai described finds its fulfillment not in a building made of stone but in the living temple of God's church. Jesus Christ is our cornerstone; Jews and Gentiles, reconciled together, are made to be "a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). God's presence and peace *do* remain with His people because Christ's church has been "built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). Gloriously, amazingly, we are God's new temple!

APPLY THE WORD

Scripture reminds us that we are to be God's holy temple. Unfortunately the world often sees only the sin and hypocrisy of the church. How might your own church failed to be a witness about Christ in your community? In repentance, seek God's forgiveness as well as His strength to renew your commitment to be God's holy temple in the world.

PRAY WITH US

Digital media enables us to bring the gospel to more people in more places worldwide. We are thankful for the service of Moody's digital media specialists. Would you pray today for Danny Russell, Dave Quigley, Drew Smith, Katie Fore, and Jax Gorman?

With your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Revelation 5:9

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

22

Freedom and Salvation for the World

Many students of history know the famous cry of Patrick Henry, “Give me liberty, or give me death!” The notion of freedom is a bedrock of many nations, including the United States.

According to commentator James Montgomery Boice, today’s reading from Micah also includes a “list of freedoms” that only God can provide. Micah proclaims that in the last days, God will establish His temple for the whole world—the nations will stream to it. First, there will be freedom from ignorance. God will “teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths” (Micah 4:2).

Second, there will be freedom from injustice. God Himself will “judge between many peoples and will settle disputes” (Micah 4:3). Third, there will be freedom from war, as swords will be turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Finally, there will

be freedom from fear: “Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

Moving to our passage from Zechariah, we see an additional freedom: freedom from strife and division. Rather than a world divided along ethnic and national lines, Zechariah depicts a world in which people from a variety of nations come together to seek the Lord. Jew and Gentile alike will join together to “entreat the LORD” (Zech. 8:21). In many ways, that picture began to be fulfilled in Acts 2 when the disciples preached the message of Jesus to a crowd of people from various nations and languages. Ultimately, the realization of true biblical freedom will come in the end. There we will gather and praise Christ with the words of Revelation 5: “With your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9).

APPLY THE WORD

God’s salvation is meant for the world, not just a small group of select people. Thank God for faithful missionaries taking the message of the gospel to the nations of the world. In this season of giving, ask your church what missionaries you might pray for and support financially. Then commit to do so on a regular basis.

PRAY WITH US

Again, we invite you to pray for the Digital Media team on Moody’s Chicago campus: Pete Distler, Elizabeth Doogan, Emily Alvarado, and Kiel Russell. May the Lord bless them as they help communicate Moody’s vision and mission over the Internet.

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

23

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.

Jonah 4:2

God's Grace for the World

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, a densely populated city filled with great wickedness. They were certainly no friends of Israel. Yet it was to these people that God sent the prophet Jonah.

Most of us know the story of Jonah, the runaway prophet who was swallowed by a great fish. We often miss an important message of the book, however, by overlooking a significant detail. The reason for Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh was not fear of danger or ridicule. Rather, he was worried that God might be too gracious to Israel's enemies! Look at Jonah's words after the Ninevites repented and God relented. He explained his fear and his reason for fleeing: "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:1–2). Rather than celebrate God's character,

Jonah was so angry that he asked God to take his life.

In response, God asked: "Is it right for you to be angry?" (4:4), and then demonstrated His grace by providing a shade plant for Jonah. When the plant later withered, Jonah complained again: "It would be better for me to die than to live" (4:8). God then used that plant to illustrate His own concern for the Ninevites: "Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people?" (4:11).

God's concern extends much further than our own, even to those whom we may consider too wicked to deserve forgiveness. Jesus, too, extended His grace to those whom many considered far beyond God's covenant and care; He commissioned His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

APPLY THE WORD

As we approach the Christmas celebration of God's love made incarnate, are we like Jonah—stingy about extending God's grace to others? Who are the "Ninevites" in your life? Pray for them today, asking God to give you a chance to share Christ's love with them in tangible ways. Be prepared, then, to act when God answers that prayer!

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayer time for the Digital Media team, please add Lane Anderson, Noelle Bud, Mikhail Filatov, and Rachel Heller to your prayer list. Pray that their hearts would be filled with the joy of the Lord this Christmas season.

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Joel 2:28

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

24

The Gift of the Spirit

Saying good-bye is difficult, especially if we are leaving dear friends or family. We often temper the heart-wrenching moment by offering words of comfort and promises of return.

When Jesus prepared His disciples for His own departure, He also comforted them with a promise of His Spirit (see John 14:16). But it was not until later on the day of Pentecost that His promise was realized. With Jesus resurrected and ascended back into heaven, the disciples gathered together for prayer. Suddenly a rushing wind filled the house, tongues of fire rested on their heads, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began speaking in other languages.

Some bystanders thought they were drunk, but observe Peter's explanation. This was an outpouring of God's Spirit, intricately connected to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These

events were also a direct fulfillment of the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (v. 17; Joel 2:28). What God had promised, both long ago through the prophet and more recently through Jesus, was now fulfilled before their very eyes. They were witnesses to these very things.

Notice, too, the significance of the prophecy quoted by Peter. In these "last days" (i.e., the days of the Messiah Jesus), God's Spirit would be poured out on all, not just a select few as was common in the Old Testament. It was for both young and old: sons and daughters, old men and young. It was for slave and free; and it was for men and women alike. Perhaps most important, God's Spirit was for the salvation of "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord" (v. 21; Joel 2:32), and it empowered the disciples to preach as witnesses to Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

God's gift of the Spirit is for all members of Christ's church. Each of us is gifted by the Spirit to serve one another and witness to Christ's grace (see 1 Cor. 12:4–6). Ask God for wisdom to see the Spirit's gifts of service and witness given to you. Commit to finding ways to use those gifts in the church and world.

PRAY WITH US

Equipping people with the knowledge of God and His Word is the mission of Moody's media ministries. This Christmas Eve, your prayers will encourage Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, as he oversees Moody Radio and Moody Publishers.

SUNDAY
DECEMBER

25

Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light.

Micah 7:8

From Darkness to Light

Anyone who has spent time deep inside an underground cave knows pitch-black darkness. Even the hand in front of your face is invisible. Yet despite the seeming power of the dark, a single ray of light can dispel the darkness immediately.

Our reading for today uses a similar picture of light vanquishing darkness as an image of God's victory over sin. Micah's prophecy had promised God's judgment. Because of the people's sin, they had "fallen" and "sit in darkness" (v. 8); they "bear the LORD's wrath" (v. 9). Yet there was also hope: "Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light" (v. 8). The image is repeated: "He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness" (v. 9). Our sin is like darkness, oppressive and seemingly all-powerful. But God's righteousness is like a beam of light. No darkness can withstand it.

The end of the chapter shifts to God's character and the effects of His darkness-diffusing light. He "pardons sin and forgives the transgression" (v. 18); He delights in mercy and compassion. His love and faithfulness "will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (v. 19). There is no God like our God, who shines into our darkness and brings us into the light of love and forgiveness.

Micah's words about light dispelling the darkness of sin are ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus, who Himself said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Our sin, like darkness, can feel like an oppressive and unconquerable weight of misery. But the promised light has come. Jesus alone can shine in our hearts and vanquish the darkness of sin.

APPLY THE WORD

Today is Christmas, the celebration of the true Light who has come into our dark world! As you worship, exchange gifts, and gather with family, keep a candle lit throughout the day as a reminder of Christ the "light of the world." Each time you see it, pause to give thanks that the darkness of sin has been vanquished by His love and grace.

PRAY WITH US

As we celebrate Christmas today, review what we have learned so far in our study with *Today in the Word* this month. Thank God in prayer for sending His Son—the promised Messiah of Israel. May He fill you with hope in the coming year.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Ephesians 2:17

MONDAY
DECEMBER

26

Peace to His People

Scan the headlines of recent newspapers or news channels and it will not take long to realize that our world is full of crisis, war, and terror. We live in a world without peace. For many, peace is also lacking on a spiritual level. There is emptiness, depression, addiction, and strained relationships.

That makes our reading from Ephesians 2 all the more important. Scripture tells us four different times that through Christ there is now peace, and that peace comes in two significant areas. First, there is vertical peace with God Himself. Those who were once separated from Christ and alienated from God's covenant "have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (v. 13). We are no longer strangers to God; those who were once distant and separated from God have a new relationship with Him.

Second, there is now horizontal peace between two previously antagonistic

groups. Jew and Gentile alike have been brought together in Christ. Previously outsiders, Gentiles have now been brought together with God's people. He has "made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14). Through the cross, God has created "one new humanity out of the two, so making peace" (v. 15).

That image of peace was proclaimed in several prophets of old. Through Haggai, God had declared a new temple, which is the church, and "in this place I will grant peace" (Hag. 2:9). Likewise, Micah promised a new shepherd-king who would defend God's people and provide safety and security. As God declared through Micah: "He will be our peace" (Micah 5:5). The world may still seem in chaos and turmoil, but God's people have a peace "which transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). We have been brought into relationship with God and one another!

APPLY THE WORD

God's people should demonstrate reconciliation and peace; yet the church is often filled with strife and division. With whom are you at odds in the family of God? Seek out that person today and find ways to begin healing the relationship towards true peace in Christ. In doing so, you are living into the picture and promise of Ephesians 2.

PRAY WITH US

Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, invites you to praise the Lord for Moody Radio's wonderful anniversary—90 years of ministry since WMBI first went on air in June 1926. Thank Him for giving us this privilege to serve Him through this technology!

TUESDAY
DECEMBER

27

I will betroth you to me forever . . . in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.

Hosea 2:19

Bridegroom of the Church

Few expressions of intimacy and love are more powerful than a wedding day. In that ceremony, the bride and groom profess their love for one another and publicly, before God, exchange their vows of lifelong faithfulness, commitment, and support.

In the book of Hosea, the institution of marriage was a powerful metaphor for God's relationship with His people. Much of Hosea's message focuses on Israel's infidelity to God, but today's passage highlights the beauty of God's faithfulness in the marital relationship. Despite their failure, the Lord promised a day when "you will call me 'my husband'" (v. 16). The old gods will be removed, the covenant restored, and the marriage relationship will be renewed.

Three separate times, God declares, "I will betroth you." Notice that in this marital metaphor, it is God who takes the initiative, not Israel. He is the one

who restores the relationship and declares His eternal righteousness, love, compassion, and faithfulness for His bride (vv. 19–20). Unfaithful Israel simply receives God's unconditional love; they certainly did not earn it!

That beautiful picture of God's faithful love toward His bride finds its fullest expression in Christ's love for the church. In fact, that metaphor becomes the entire background for Paul's exhortations about marriage in Ephesians: "This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). Christ is the husband to His bride, the church. His sacrificial love is expressed in His willingness to die for her, cleanse her, making her "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:27). Like Israel, we are not always faithful. But Christ our Bridegroom is, and His cleansing love and faithfulness will never fail.

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes we can become discouraged at our own sin and unfaithfulness toward God. Scripture never sugarcoats our failings, but it also reminds us that God's cleansing love and faithfulness to us is more powerful than our sin. As the Christmas season continues, give thanks that He alone forgives and makes us "holy and blameless."

PRAY WITH US

Since WMBI aired its first broadcast in 1926, Moody Radio's ministry has grown to 37 owned and operated stations across the country. Let's pray for WRMB, Moody Radio in South Florida, and its staff: Audrey Altman, Brigitte Sylvestre, and Jon Garrison.

Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple . . . Who can stand when he appears?

Malachi 3:1–2

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER

28

Purified Worship

A city council sent repeated notices to its citizens about a burn ban: no outdoor fires were permitted within city limits. One resident repeatedly disregarded these notices until eventually a city official showed up at the door—a uniformed police officer ready to make an arrest!

In a similar way, God had repeatedly sent warnings and reminders to His people through the prophets. The message of Malachi is one such example. It warned of the people's unfaithfulness to the covenant and the priests' failure to preserve proper worship and faithful instruction in the law of God. In Malachi 3, however, God intensified the message. A day was coming when not only another "messenger" would arrive, but "suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1). God Himself promised to show up! The time of secondhand messages would be

over. His zeal for the temple and for proper worship would come, purifying and refining the dirt and dross of sin. When that happened, "who can endure the day . . . who can stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

What a powerful scene when we come to John 2 and witness the fulfillment of God's promise in Malachi. Rather than preserving a peaceful place of reverent worship, they had turned the temple into noisy chaos: the outer courts were a marketplace that may have included unfair selling practices. Seeing this distortion of worship, Jesus "made a whip of cords, and drove all from the temple courts" (John 2:15), chastising the leadership for their failure. In the person of Jesus, God had indeed arrived at His temple for cleansing! Lest we think that God does not care about our worship, both Malachi 3 and John 2 demonstrate otherwise.

APPLY THE WORD

How much attention do we give to worship? God considers it an essential part of our relationship with Him. Anticipating the coming times of worship this Sunday, take a moment to prepare your heart and mind for God. Confess your sin, read Psalm 95, or just find a quiet time to devote your whole self to the Lord in praise and thanksgiving.

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for Moody Radio's WRMB station, please add to your list Eric Johnson, Becky Borgstrom, and Dolores King-St. George. We pray they would always keep their focus on Christ and follow the Holy Spirit's guidance in their ministry.

THURSDAY
DECEMBER

29

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:8

The Day of the Lord

Sometimes Old Testament prophecy is like an approaching mountain range. From a distance two mountains appear to be quite near each other. Once closer, however, one discovers that one mountain was near and the other still farther beyond. The distant perspective made it appear as if two separate peaks were actually joined together.

Zephaniah's promise of the "day of the LORD" is similar. His message came in a period of spiritual decline among God's people, and it was serious. It would be a day of "wrath," "anguish," "trouble," "darkness," and "gloom" (v. 15). Because of the people's sin and wickedness, the "day of the LORD" would be a time of great judgment, not just for God's people but for the whole earth: "In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed" (v. 18).

Shortly after Zephaniah's prophecy, the Babylonians conquered God's people,

destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and took the people into exile. In one sense, the promised "day of the Lord" had arrived. Nevertheless, like another mountain further beyond, another "day of the Lord" was still to come: the day of Christ's return in judgment. Repeatedly in the New Testament, Christ's return is described as "day of the Lord" (2 Thess. 2:2) or "the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). In that day, the ultimate fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy will be realized. Christ will return as judge of the whole earth, both the "living and the dead" (Acts 10:42; 1 Peter 4:5).

Despite this sober message, we can have hope. For those who belong to Christ, that day will also be a day of restoration and transformation. Scripture promises: "He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8).

APPLY THE WORD

Scripture reminds us of the coming "day of the Lord" to encourage us to "live holy and godly lives" (2 Peter 3:11) and to await Christ's return with watchfulness. Assess your priorities and commitments and make a resolution to refocus your heart around Christ and His will, confident that "he will keep you firm to the end."

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for the staff of WMFT, Moody Radio's station serving Alabama and Mississippi. Pat Bosley, Shane Dorrell, and Jill Simmons broadcast the love and hope of the gospel and change lives every day.

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.

Nahum 1:7

FRIDAY
DECEMBER

30

None Will Stand

The British Museum houses an ancient artifact from the ninth century B.C., the famous Black Obelisk, which depicts the Israelite king Jehu on his knees, paying tribute to the Assyrian king. Later history would underscore the Assyrian oppression with further taxation, invasion, and the eventual destruction of northern Israel.

The book of Nahum, however, is a prophecy against Nineveh, the capital of those cruel Assyrians. Through Nahum, the Lord pronounced His “vengeance” and “wrath against his enemies” (v. 2). He was longsuffering, but eventually He would come “in the whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (v. 3). So powerful is the Lord’s might that the waters will dry up, the blossoms wither, and the mountains quake at His presence. None of the wicked would stand, but this was not just a message of judgment on

God’s enemies. It was also a promise of protection for God’s people: “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him” (v. 7).

The people and city of Nineveh were utterly destroyed in 612 B.C. But their end also represents the fate of all of God’s enemies. Echoing the imagery, warning, and comfort of Nahum, Christ Himself promised to come as judge. When He arrives, “all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” and His angels “will gather his elect from the four winds” (Matt. 24:30–31). Likewise, the book of Revelation depicts the return of Christ as judge. The wicked will cower and hide in fear, but the end is assured: “The great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?” (Rev. 6:17). What a warning to the wicked, but great hope to God’s own!

APPLY THE WORD

Sometimes wickedness seems overwhelming and we begin to doubt God’s care for His people. Scripture assures us of Christ’s coming judgment upon wickedness and God’s ultimate protection for us. In the face of the world’s danger, chaos, and fear, fix your mind and heart on the verse of the day as a reminder of the final outcome.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Dr. Bryan O’Neal, who started his service as VP and dean of Moody Bible Institute Distance Learning this year. We have “the privilege of viewing the entire globe as our campus,” he said, “and we embrace the challenge.”

SATURDAY
DECEMBER

31

*He who is coming will come and will not delay . . .
But my righteous one will live by faith.*

Hebrews 10:37–38

Assurance in Delay

Singer/songwriter Andrew Peterson understands the challenge of waiting for God's victory in the face of darkness. In his song "The Dark Before the Dawn," he sings of the frightening storms of life and then confesses the longing within his heart: "I've been waiting for some peace / To come raining down out of the heavens on these war-torn fields / All creation is aching for the sons of God to be revealed."

The prophet Habakkuk knew of a similar longing and waiting. Having lodged his complaint before God that the wicked still seem to prosper, he gets an answer in chapter 2. God promises that His revelation will come to fulfillment. All that is needed is "an appointed time." God's word "will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come" (Hab. 2:3). The message continues: the enemy may indeed seem to prosper in his

arrogance. God's seeming slowness to respond does not signify approval of the wicked, however. Instead, "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4, ESV). As God's people live in that space between promise and fulfillment, faith is what carries us through. In short, God is saying, *Trust me. My word is good; my promise is secure!*

That message of faith is carried on in the book of Hebrews, addressed to a group of believers who also suffered the challenge of waiting for full redemption in Christ's return. In fact, the author of Hebrews quotes from Habakkuk, telling his readers: "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay. . . . But my righteous one will live by faith" (Heb. 10:37–38). Christ's coming is a secure promise, despite a world of brokenness and sin. We must not give up hope, but in faith await God's final redemption.

APPLY THE WORD

Andrew Peterson's song proclaims faith even in darkness. The refrain runs: "Oh, I believe, I believe that the light is gonna come / And this is the dark, this is the dark before the dawn." As we end this study, find a copy of Peterson's song. Retreat to a quiet place, take all your anxieties to God, and refresh your soul with the hope-filled music.

PRAY WITH US

We ask you to pray today for Joe Gonzales, Edward Jones, Patti Broderick, and Cherie Carson in Student Programs. Their ministry is vital in the lives of Moody students in Chicago, and we pray that God would grant them wisdom and guidance every day.



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