

# He Will Save His People

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Date: 07 December 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] You can take your copy of God's Word if you're able to remain standing for the reading and turn to Matthew chapter 1. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. You may be seated. Since we are officially in the Christmas season, and with our Christmas program scheduled for this afternoon, it seems only fitting that we take a break from our study in Habakkuk and turn our attention instead to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 45 ] Most of us know the story of his birth quite well. Even if we haven't grown up in the church, this story is everywhere this time of year.

It's in the books we read, the movies we watch, the songs we hear. As much as popular culture would love to secularize the holiday and remove all traces of Christianity from it, Christ cannot be avoided.

We even hear unbelievers singing about his birth on the radio. People love to quote the angel without context who said, peace on earth and goodwill to men.

And we can't even reference the name of the holiday without mentioning that glorious title of Christ. It's right there in the name Christmas.

Even so, hearing about and knowing the story of Christ's birth doesn't necessarily mean we truly understand it. You see, I fear that many people have spent their entire lives under the influence of Christianity without being Christians or truly knowing who Christ is or why he came.

[ 3 : 05 ] We know the story of the virgin birth. We know that Jesus, I guess, brought peace on earth somehow, some way. We know about the shepherds and the wise men and the star and so on.

But what does it all mean? Who is Jesus? Why did he come? Why the virgin birth? What are we really singing about when we sing, Oh, Holy Night or Away in a Manger?

Well, in the passage we've just read, we learn that Mary was betrothed or engaged, if you will, to Joseph. But before their marriage was consummated, Mary became pregnant.

Not by Joseph or any other man, but we're told she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. This is a miraculous, supernatural conception.

And as we might expect, Joseph was troubled by this. He didn't yet understand the miracle of her pregnancy, so he planned to divorce her. He wanted to leave her, assuming she was pregnant by another man.

[ 4 : 12 ] But, we're told, as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And, of course, this is the fulfillment of a very old prophecy spoken through Isaiah long, long ago.

God said, behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. You've heard it said before, this is the reason for the season.

Christmas isn't primarily about decorations or gifts or family. or traditions of, or any of the sentimental attachments we may have to the holiday.

Christmas began because Christ was born. The Christ was born. We are still celebrating Christmas some 2,000 years later because God fulfilled this promise to be with us in human flesh.

[ 5 : 35 ] As Paul writes to the Galatians, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Or, as the angel tells Joseph here, Mary will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, meaning Yahweh saves, for he will save his people from their sins.

And in response to this story of Jesus being born and laid in a manger, many people will nod and smile and think, what a nice story.

Who doesn't love a baby? Especially a miraculous baby. And because of their sentimental attachment to the holiday, the story of Jesus' birth gives them warm, fuzzy feelings inside.

They sing about him. They belt out. Excuse me. Hark the herald angels sing at the top of their lungs. It's fun. They might even decorate their house with little nativity sets.

[ 6 : 51 ] You know, because that's what mom did. And that's what grandma did. And that's what you're supposed to do at this time of year. But come New Year's, they stop singing about Jesus.

They put Mary and Joseph and little baby Jesus back in the box, and they carry that box back to the attic. And the warm fuzzies are gone.

Life moves on. You know, they'll pay their passing tribute to Jesus again next December, and maybe one day in April. They'll put on their best pastel-colored shirt or their nice spring dress, and they'll find an Easter service to attend.

But in the meantime, Jesus carries approximately the same weight in their lives as Santa Claus. He makes for a great story, but that story, you know, it has its time and place.

And most of the year isn't it. And if that's how we treat Jesus, clearly, we do not understand this story at all.

[ 8 : 04 ] This is far more than a quaint holiday tradition. When the angel comes to Joseph and says, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

That is a life-changing, eternity-shaping announcement to the world. All of history depends on this. Your very soul depends on this.

The souls of your parents, of your siblings, of your children, of your grandchildren depend on this. So please hear me. We have to move beyond the sentimentality of this story.

In fact, we have to move beyond the story of Jesus' birth alone to really understand why this matters and how important it truly is. When we see God make this announcement through the angel, we see him move beyond Jesus' birth, doesn't he?

When he makes this announcement, he doesn't say, congratulations, I'm giving Mary a baby boy and leave it at that. No, he's coming into this world for a purpose.

[ 9 : 14 ] He has a mission. Namely, he will save his people from their sins. And he would not accomplish that in the manger. He would not accomplish that through his birth.

His virgin birth was significant, but his birth alone would not accomplish the salvation of his people. So the story may begin here, but we have to move beyond this story of his birth to understand why his birth is even significant.

Even here, we see some important clues as to what is happening. First, the virgin birth would indicate that something is utterly unique about this child being born.

and to be clear, this miraculous conception is not some sort of divine publicity stunt as though its only purpose is to get everyone's attention.

Frankly, very few people at the time even knew about it. Throughout the Lord's life, we realize that most people looked at him and just assumed he was Joseph's biological son, the carpenter's son.

[ 10 : 22 ] You see, if Jesus had been conceived in the ordinary way between a man and a woman, he would have inherited what all of Adam's children have inherited, which is his sinful nature.

And if Jesus had been born a sinner, he could not have become the spotless lamb to die for sinners and save his people from their sins. Second, the angel of God insists that this child be called by a very specific name, Jesus.

Now, if you know your Bible stories, you know that when God gives someone a name and sometimes gives them a new name, that name has a purpose. And in this case, the name Jesus means Yahweh saves.

Yahweh is the proper name of God which is usually translated Lord in all capital letters in our Old Testaments. Yahweh saves.

That's the name God himself wants this child to be called. Third, we're reminded here that the Lord's virgin birth is not really a new and surprising concept because this was prophesied a long time ago in Isaiah chapter 7.

[ 11 : 46 ] In other words, God is fulfilling a major plan through this child's birth that has been in the works for a very long time.

And fourth, what did the prophecy say about him? Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

Emmanuel. Why Emmanuel? Well, Matthew helps us by telling us what that means. It means God with us.

Now, we might assume that that's figurative language. You know, he's with us spiritually, not physically. But it doesn't take much digging in Scripture to realize that that's not really the case.

In John's Gospel, the Apostle John tells the story of Christ, skips his birth altogether, and instead goes all the way back to the beginning of the world and says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[ 12 : 53 ] And then he goes on to say, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

So when Isaiah prophesied this child would be Emmanuel, God with us, he actually meant that quite literally. Jesus was God in the flesh.

The Word became flesh. You see, we have all of these clues in the Christmas story that this is far more than a nice sentimental story of some kind.

Something massive is happening here. In fact, if we take our time and read through the Old Testament carefully, in its entirety we would realize that everything, everything in human history has been leading up to this point.

And then we have to realize that the story doesn't end with his birth. It continues on. And frankly, it can't end with his birth. Again, what did the angel tell Joseph?

[ 13 : 58 ] He will save his people from their sins. And that's the most explicit clue of all. The story does not begin and end here. So if our approach is to celebrate Jesus and his birth in December and pack up that nativity set on January 1st and leave him as a baby in the manger for the rest of the year, we have missed the point of Christmas entirely.

A baby in a manger, even a miraculous one, cannot save anyone. A seasonal tradition cannot forgive sins. A sentimental nod toward Jesus once or twice a year cannot reconcile us to a holy God.

In other words, we have to move beyond the Christmas story, we have to move beyond the birth of Jesus in order to fully understand why we celebrate the birth of Jesus in the first place.

You see, Christmas is God breaking into human history for a very distinct, clearly declared purpose of saving sinners.

And that means at least a few things. On the most fundamental level, number one, it means we are sinners. Number two, it means we need saving.

[ 15 : 24 ] And number three, it means Jesus is the one who came to save. Now, that doesn't answer all of our questions, does it?

Whom have we sinned against? What kind of trouble are we really in and what exactly do we need to be saved from and how does Jesus save? Well, to answer these questions, I invite you to turn over with me to Romans chapter 3.

Romans chapter 3. In Matthew 1, the angel announces Christ's purpose.

And in Romans 3, the apostle Paul provides a detailed explanation of how that purpose is fulfilled. And this passage is perhaps one of the clearest, richest, most concentrated expressions of the gospel in all of scripture.

In fact, I've heard theologians refer to this as the very heart of the Bible. So let's consider it. First, let me read this. This is Romans 3, starting with verse 21.

[ 16 : 42 ] 1. But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

I love those first two words. But now this is the great turning point in history. You see Paul has spent the first two and a half chapters of this book building his case against the human race.

He shows how the Gentiles are guilty, they are sinners, the Jews are guilty, the so-called moral person, the so-called religious person, every last one of us.

[ 18 : 10 ] Everyone is guilty. In fact, he sums up our condition in verse 19 when he says, now we know that whatever the law speaks, it speaks to those who are under the law or accountable to the law and that is the law of God so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

Now you'll notice that we're not held accountable to some arbitrary standard of so-called righteousness. You see, when most people evaluate themselves, they think, well, I'm a relatively good person, I've never killed anyone, right?

But God does not judge us according to a relative standard or a subjective standard. He's not using our modern-day cultural standard of what makes for a good person and he's not grading us on a curve.

Our holy, righteous creator is utterly sinless, morally pure in every possible way and completely set apart from all creation.

His purity is absolute so while he is certainly loving and merciful, he cannot ultimately tolerate or ignore anything that violates his holy law.

[ 19 : 44 ] Sin, and that is sin according to his law, is repugnant to his very nature and cannot be tolerated. You see, God is our standard for what is good and right.

And he's the moral lawgiver of the universe and his laws and his commandments reflect his own perfect character and nature. And that's the standard we are held to by him.

And when, that's what Paul means when he talks about the righteousness of God. And when he says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, he means that we've all missed the mark.

Our mouths are stopped because we have no excuses we can possibly give. We are guilty. The case is open and shut. There's no defense we can make.

But this is not how most people view God. We tend to think of God as a lenient grandfather who somewhat indulgently overlooks our faults.

[ 20 : 57 ] God. But the true God is utterly holy. He's a consuming fire of holiness. When Isaiah was permitted into the Lord's presence, his first response was not praise or thanksgiving as we might expect.

No, as the angels sang out, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, Isaiah desperately cries out in a moment of terror, woe is me, for I am lost.

I am a man of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. In the presence of God's perfection, Isaiah was immediately and painfully aware of his own sinfulness.

How far short he fell from the glory of God. God but maybe you think I don't really feel that. As I said, I'm a relatively good person.

I think God will accept me just as I am. Listen to what Jesus said. You must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

[ 22 : 17 ] Now you may seem better than the next guy. You may not be Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson, but are you perfect?

More than that, are you as perfect as God is perfect? The answer is no. None of us are.

There are no distinctions, Paul says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. have you ever told a lie? Exodus 20, verse 16, you're guilty.

Have you ever stolen something? Doesn't matter the value? Exodus 20, verse 15, you're guilty. Have you ever looked with lust? Matthew 5, verses 27 and 28, you are guilty.

Have you ever felt hatred? Or maybe unjust anger towards someone? 1 John 3, 15 says, you've committed murder in your heart. You're guilty.

[ 23 : 22 ] Have you ever spoken of God carelessly or maybe irreverently? Exodus 20, verse 7, you're guilty of blasphemy.

James 2, 10 goes as far as to say, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point is guilty of all of it.

Because you've fallen short of the perfection of God. And this brings us to a sobering but necessary truth and that is the justice and wrath of God against our sin.

Because God is holy, He cannot shrug off our sin. It would violate His very nature. A holy God cannot ignore or deny sin without denying His own righteousness, without denying Himself.

In Psalm 7, we read, God is a righteous judge and a God who feels indignation every day. He is not indifferent to evil. He is not neutral about sin because He is a righteous judge.

[ 24 : 40 ] always, always doing what is right. Exodus 34 says that the Lord is forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but in the very same breath the text says He will by no means clear the guilty.

In other words, we need to put out of our minds the idea that the way God might forgive us is by simply overlooking our sins as though they never happened at all.

You see, true justice demands that every violation of the law receive a just and proper penalty. If He failed to punish our sin, He would cease to be a just and righteous judge.

He would cease to be God Himself, who He is, and that cannot be. And what is the penalty for sin? A few chapters later, Paul writes, the wages of sin is death.

Now, this includes our physical deaths, of course, but it also means our spiritual deaths, complete separation from God. Revelation calls it the second death, the death that follows the death we're so familiar with.

[ 25 : 55 ] In short, it's a conscious eternity under God's righteous wrath, or in a word, it's hell.

literal eternal hell. Now, I know this isn't pleasant to think about. In fact, some of you are thinking right now, this Christmas message has really taken a turn, hasn't it?

But you have to understand that we must talk about the consequences of sin. We must. This is the reason Jesus came. This is the reason that baby was born some 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

And if I don't talk about it, I'd be like a doctor who knows you're dying from some terminal disease, but I don't want to tell you because it might upset you. That would be horrible of me.

We need to know what's at stake here. We need to know the danger we're in. The most loving thing we can possibly do for someone is warn them about the wrath to come.

[ 27 : 05 ] Keep in mind that no one in Scripture spoke more about hell than Jesus himself. He called it a place of outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

He called it a place of unquenchable fire. He called it eternal punishment. And this is our just punishment because the horrors of hell correspond to the severity of sin against an infinitely holy God.

The book of Hebrews says it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment. What can we possibly say when that day comes?

Paul says every mouth may be stopped because we're all guilty. We have no excuses.

We're told in Scripture no creature is hidden from God's sight but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

[ 28 : 20 ] We will die as we know and we will stand before that judgment seat. And as I said the case is open and shut. we are guilty. The debt of sin must be paid.

But now Paul says but now this makes me think Paul is trying to jump in front of us before we reach that heavenly courtroom and face that judgment.

He says but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

In other words God has mercifully provided a way for sinners to be made right with him that doesn't come through keeping the law or the commandments.

Why? Well because as we've seen we can't keep the law not perfectly. we will always fall short and that's why Paul says this righteousness is manifested apart from the law and he clarifies that the law itself not to mention the Old Testament prophets and really the entirety of the Old Testament actually pointed to this plan of God.

[ 29 : 42 ] They testified to it. This was always the plan and purpose of God. He always meant to provide a way to save his people apart from keeping the law because he knew we could not keep the law.

And what is this plan? Well we heard it from the angel. Jesus will save his people from their sins.

Jesus or as Paul says here the righteousness of God has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

And this brings us to the very heart of the gospel. How does God save sinners like you and me? How does he forgive the guilty without compromising his own holy justice?

[ 30 : 55 ] And how can he say to condemned lawbreakers not guilty you're not guilty and still be a righteous judge? And Paul answers all of those questions with some of the most precious words ever written.

We are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

Well, notice, first of all, Paul uses that legal term justified. So we can imagine the scene here. We have blatantly guilty sinners standing before the judge, mouth stopped, no excuse to give, when suddenly the judge hammers his gavel and says, not guilty.

That's shocking. How can this be? The evidence was stacked against us. We broke the law as clear as could be.

We were guilty. How can condemned people be declared not guilty by a righteous and just judge? Well, notice how Paul grounds this justification in Jesus Christ.

[ 32 : 11 ] There is redemption in Jesus Christ. That word redemption means a price has been paid to set captives free. Christ paid the ransom price.

How? Paul says God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood. Well, what in the world does propitiation mean?

Well, it means a sacrifice that ultimately satisfies wrath. It's an act that turns away God's righteous anger.

But unlike pagan worshippers of the past, this is not men trying to appease their gods by offering sacrifice after sacrifice and only appeasing them for a short time.

Here it is, God himself who puts forward his own son to appease himself for us on our behalf.

[ 33 : 12 ] Just think about this. At the cross, when Jesus died and became that sacrifice, that propitiation, God's love and God's justice met one another without compromising the other.

Justice says, the soul that sins must die. And love says, Father, forgive them. So at the cross, justice isn't denied.

It's satisfied because sin is punished. At the same time, love isn't withheld. It's really unleashed. You see, God doesn't set aside his wrath.

He pours out his wrath on Christ due to our sin. He doesn't overlook or ignore our sin. He punishes it in his own son, Jesus.

So instead of destroying the sinner, he saves him through the blood, the death, the suffering of Christ. And Isaiah, he saw this coming long ago when he wrote, he was pierced for our transgressions.

[ 34 : 26 ] He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed. Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised so that we could have peace.

His wounds, our healing, his punishment, our pardon, his death, our life. That's propitiation. that's substitution.

This is the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. When Jesus hung on that dreadful cross and he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He was experiencing everything that we sinners deserve. He was experiencing the horror of judgment and of God's wrath.

He was experiencing the agony of separation from God the Father. He was experiencing the curse that should have been ours to bear.

[ 35 : 38 ] And then when the full price was paid, what did he say? It's finished. It's finished. He might have said, it's paid in full.

There's nothing left to pay. There's nothing to earn here. There's nothing you can add. Salvation, it is finished. Everything's been done.

Then once Jesus died, you might know the story, the veil in the temple, which represented that separation between God and sinners, was torn from top to bottom.

It wasn't torn from bottom to top. It was torn from top to bottom. It was God himself who ripped it open. The veil was torn and the way into his presence was now open because the flesh of Christ was torn.

God's wrath was satisfied through Christ's willing sacrifice of himself. And God's justice was upheld, his mercy was poured out, and his love was displayed with breathtaking clarity.

[ 36 : 50 ] God's resurrection And then three days later, the father raised Jesus from the dead. And that resurrection serves as this public declaration from God himself that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted, his mission was accomplished, his redemption was complete.

Jesus was right when he said, it is finished. And even death itself in that moment surrendered. That's the gospel. That's why Jesus came.

That's why the angel told Joseph, you shall call his name Jesus. Yahweh saves, God himself saves, for he will save his people from their sins. That's why we celebrate the Lord's birth this time of year.

We celebrate his birth because he is the God-man, fully God and fully man who lived a sinless life, kept God's perfect law, perfectly, died in our place, bearing the wrath of God that we deserved and rose again triumphantly over death itself.



So, with that in mind, if I'm playing the doctor, I've informed you that you have a fatal disease, that there is a cure in our Lord Jesus Christ, but we need to go one step further.

[ 38 : 14 ] I have a prescription to write. Sadly, many people have heard everything I've just said, maybe multiple times throughout their life.

They know about more than the birth of Christ. They know we're sinners, supposedly. They know that Christ died to save, but they automatically assume that if salvation is necessary and Christ did it, well, I should be good then, as though everyone is saved.

Everyone's okay. I've been to enough funerals, I know. Listen to people. Even unbelievers assume their loved ones are in heaven, as though heaven is just our default destination unless you're really, really bad.

But that's not the case as we've seen. Well, what does Paul say? how is the righteousness of God manifested? How does it come to us? Well, it's not by keeping the law.

No, it's through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. In other words, the Lord's saving benefits are not automatically applied to everyone.

[ 39 : 29 ] They are received through faith alone in Christ alone. Now, what does that mean? Well, it is not merely saying I believe Jesus is real or yeah, I believe he died on the cross.

Certainly not. Even unbelievers of the first century who witnessed some of these things, who heard the eyewitness testimonies at the very least, who rejected Christ as Lord and Savior, they readily acknowledged that Jesus lived and that he died on a cross.

the Bible says even the demons believe. They're not confused about the facts of the gospel. No, faith is personally resting on Christ alone for our salvation.

It begins with a humble, contrite heart that confesses one's own sinfulness. It turns away from that sin. And that selfishness and turns to Christ like a drowning man grasping for a lifeline.

He's like that tax collector in Luke 18 who would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat on his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. You see, he came completely empty-handed.

[ 40 : 54 ] He had nothing to offer, nothing to claim, no excuses to give, but Lord, help me. There's no other way unless you show me mercy. And according to Jesus, that man went down to his house justified.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but everyone who humbles himself will be exalted. Paul says God is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

sinfulness. He doesn't justify, according to Scripture, the relatively good person. He doesn't justify the one who has no sense of his sinfulness.

He doesn't justify the person who lives his life with no thought of his need for salvation. And he doesn't justify the person who thinks that he can earn his way into favor with God by good works or keeping the commandments or what have you.

No, he justifies the one who knows his desperate need for salvation and turns to the only source of that salvation, Jesus Christ.

[ 42 : 10 ] He trusts in him alone for salvation, not to mention for hope, for joy, for contentment, for everything that comes with this life that Christ gives.

And if you came to Christ like that, trusting in him alone, it's because something extraordinary has happened. Something amazing has happened.

God has caused you to be born again. He's given you a new heart and he has put his spirit within you and you're not the same anymore. You're not the same. Yes, you still sin, but it's now a battle with sin because the direction of your life has changed.

Your affections have changed. Your flesh wants to pull you back into sin while your heart and your mind want to draw you closer and closer to Christ whom you now love more than anything.

Paul says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. You see, our justification through faith is just the beginning.

[ 43 : 18 ] In Philippians 1, Paul says he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The life of a genuine believer will bear fruit. And I mention this because I have known people, many people, who readily confess to being Christians.

Yes, I trusted in Christ, sure. But their lives remain virtually unchanged. They say they are Christians, but they don't commune with their Savior.

in prayer. They don't read his word. They don't strive to learn from him. They have little interest in taking their place in his body. That is the church.

And they don't spend even a few hours a week worshiping our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness.

And as Paul tells Titus, to purify for himself, a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. You see, we are redeemed to do good by following him, by following his commandments, by joining with his church and singing his praises and advancing his kingdom.

[ 44 : 37 ] We're not saved by keeping God's commandments, but we are saved to keep his commandments. commandments. And those who sincerely love him will want to keep his commandments.

And in the end, God the judge will judge them on the merits of Christ, not their own sinfulness, and they shall inherit eternal life.

So I implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Pray to him, confess your sins, plead for forgiveness, trust in this Jesus born some 2,000 years ago by way of a miracle who died and rose again for your salvation.

And then rise to your knees and follow him. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for the precious gift of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that in the fullness of time you sent him, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law. Thank you that he is Emmanuel, God with us, and that the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

[ 46 : 01 ] And that at the cross, your justice and your love, they met together and were perfectly satisfied. We praise you that the righteous judge has himself provided the righteousness we do not have and the sacrifice we could never offer.

Lord, we confess our sins before you. We confess that we have fallen short of your glory, that we've treated your holiness lightly. Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love, and for any here today who remain outside of Christ, trapped in unbelief and false assurance, please open blind eyes, soften hard hearts, and grant repentance and faith.

Cause them, even now, even today, to cry from their heart, God be merciful to me, a sinner, and to rest holy on Jesus in his finished work.

And for those of us who belong to Christ, I ask that you would deepen our love for him who loved us and gave himself for us. Make us a people who are zealous for good works, eager to obey, always quick to repent, joyful to worship, and Lord, bold to speak of this great salvation to others.

In this Christmas season, help us to remember not only Jesus in the manger, but Jesus on the cross. Help us to remember his empty tomb, and help us to remember that he will come again.

[ 47 : 33 ] And may all that we do be done in the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.