

RAMAH MONTHLY

*The Life  
of Jesus*

*a monthly devotional  
for Ramah Baptist Church*

September 2025  
The Gospels

# INTRODUCTION

Saints,

Press on in your study of God's Word. You'll never regret one moment spent knowing Christ through the Scriptures. This month's readings bring us into the Gospels and the life of our Lord. Rather than working through one Gospel at a time, the plan moves us throughout all four while following a general chronological timeline.

There are no weekend devotions this month. Instead, soon we will have a printed version of the messages from our Fall Preaching Conference. We trust these will encourage you.

The Scripture text for Sunday's sermon are listed in the back of the booklet, so that you can read and pray over the text in advance each weekend. You'll be amazed at how much more you get from the Lord's Day service when you prepare your heart in advance.

At the end of the booklet is this month's hymn we will be learning together including an introduction from Pastor Laramie and a recording link to listen to the hymn. Again, you'll be amazed at how much more you'll grow in singing God's praise with just a short amount of preparation.

We pray this resource better equips you in knowing, loving, and serving our great God.



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FOR GOD    FOR THE CHURCH    FOR THE WORLD

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## ***Monday, September 1***

**Read:** Psalms 99–101

**Psalm 99** The Lord reigns over all things. The psalm speaks of Yahweh seated on his throne, reigning in strength, justice, and equity. He is king! Yahweh is a holy king, emphasized three times in this psalm (99:3, 5, 9). All of creation should respond in humble worship when confronted with our great God. Can you believe that God has allowed us to worship him? He has entered into a relationship with a particular group of people, ultimately all who will come to him through Christ. Verses 2–3 hint that the day is coming when Gentiles will be able to praise the Lord. We get a preview of that sort of intimate, personal relationship in verses 6–7 with the mention of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. They spoke to God, and he answered them! Not only does God answer his people, but he forgives them (99:8)! Let us worship this holy God!

**Psalm 100** climaxes a series of psalms that have celebrated God as King. It is a psalm of thanksgiving. How appropriate that we give thanks and praise our Shepherd-King (100:3). We have complete assurance that Yahweh alone is God and no one else. He is our Creator and Savior. We belong to him and are dependent on him, just as sheep depend on their shepherd for absolutely everything. Yahweh is a good shepherd. His lovingkindness is steadfast. His grace is enduring. From generation to generation. Forever. We as his sheep should praise our King. We gather with his people as verse 4 pictures. We don't forsake the gathering of ourselves together as the author of Hebrews preaches (Heb 10:25). When we gather, we most certainly sing praises with thankful hearts. We sing his praises, even if our singing can best be described as "joyful noises." We also serve our great God, both in the gathering and throughout our lives.

**Psalm 101** David's personal reflection on the type of king he desired to be was not written only for himself. In some ways he measured up and in some ways he failed, but David knew there would be another king after him. The people would have longed for a king to come who also measured up to these standards as God's Word shaped their expectations of a king. Christians reflecting on the text realize that as hard as we strive to reach these standards on our own, we will certainly fail. Only the true Son of David, King Jesus can perfectly embody or live out this psalm. But Jesus can also strengthen his people to live by his Spirit and press toward the goal of this text with thankful hearts.

God continues to move his grand story along. We saw God's people go into exile, where the Lord was faithful to his faithful remnant. He brought back a small group into the land of Judah, where they rebuilt their land and themselves according to God's Word. But much time has passed. Over 400 years of silence from God. No prophet has been sent. The promised king has not come. Will God keep his promises to his people?

Dr. Luke begins his carefully-investigated narrative of God's fulfilled promises with two parallel miraculous birth promises. We first meet a righteous older couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. The text is clear that they are blameless (not perfect) before God, but their childlessness would have been viewed in their culture as punishment from God. In God's perfect timing an angel announces to Zechariah that they will indeed have a child, even in their old age. While the Jewish people may have wondered if God's Spirit had been active among them these last centuries, this child will most certainly be filled with the Holy Spirit. God has much for this son of the priest who will go forth in the spirit of Elijah. This son, John the Baptist, will go forth as the final old covenant prophet. He will be the forerunner of the promised Messiah. God has spoken. He has promised. Yet the righteous priest doubts God's promises.

If that story were not wonderful enough, we read next the promise to young Mary concerning the holy child she will carry in her womb. God has not forgotten his people. God promises that he is still bringing forth a promised king who will reign over the house of Jacob forever. He will rule from the throne of his father David. There will be no end to the kingdom of this promised child! This is the promise of God.

Notice that both Zechariah and Mary asked questions concerning these promises, yet Mary's question is answered while Zechariah is silenced until the birth and naming of John. This would imply that Zechariah's questions arose from a place of doubt while Mary's questions were from a place of (perhaps weak) faith. Yet God kept his promises to both! God will remove the disgrace of Elizabeth, and he will remove the disgrace of his people. May we be like Mary, saying, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

This promised child will be named Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves." God's big story is the story of the God who saves. He has not forgotten his promises. He will keep every single one.

## *Wednesday, September 3*

Read: Luke 2:1–39; John 1:1–18

Luke's orderly sequence in chapter one has woven together the stories of Jesus and John the Baptist. We've seen the announcements of their births and the praises that erupted in response to the God who has looked upon the "humble state" (1:48) of his servants and visited and "accomplished redemption for His people" (1:68). Now in chapter two, Luke zooms the lens of his pen in on the birth of Jesus alone.

We've seen God's perfect providence at work in both big and small details throughout his story, but don't miss how God's sovereignty shines in this narrative. A pagan king decrees a census at just the right time. The census is implemented throughout the land at just the right time. This man Joseph from just the right family travels to just the right place at just the right time—the time when Mary must give birth. God's promises about this Son of David's mother (Isa 7:14) and even his birthplace (Mic 5:2) are perfectly being fulfilled. This promised king is welcomed, not in a palace but in a manger. Not by royal officials but by rural shepherds. From his earliest days, this child along with his parents are pictured as being perfectly obedient to the law of God. What a contrast to the many wicked kings in the nation's past.

Luke gives the historical narrative of Jesus's birth, but John helps understand even further the theological significance. The babe born in Bethlehem is God. The eternal Word of God, the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ our Lord became flesh and dwelt among us. He came to us because we could certainly never go to him. He became like us in our humanity, so that he could make us like him. He came in grace and truth, and he came to explain the Father.

How should we respond to these passages of Scripture? Like the shepherds, let us glorify and praise God because in Jesus we have found the Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Like Mary, we must treasure these things and ponder them in our hearts. Don't let familiarity with Jesus cause you to fail to see Jesus as he is. Like Anna, let us give thanks to God for the ways that he specifically fulfilled all of the promises leading to our Lord's first coming. Like she patiently waited then, let us patiently and expectantly wait now for his second coming.

God's promised king continues to fulfill ancient prophecies even in his earliest days. Matthew 2 tells us of at least four fulfillments of Scripture accomplished in three successive scenes. As the scenes grow darker, the supernatural preservation of the Messiah shines brighter.

The first scene is most familiar, bringing to mind three regally dressed men riding camels right up to the feeding trough where baby Jesus lay. When we study the text carefully, it seems like as much as two years have passed, and Joseph's family is now living in a house instead of that temporary shelter on the night of Mary's delivery. We realize three gifts are mentioned but the men are not numbered. The magi whom we often refer to as "wise men" were probably something along the lines of astrologers from the Far East. For all that we think we know about these men but the Bible doesn't actually make clear, we are told this important fact: they came looking for the King of the Jews. Herod thought he was the king of the Jews! Is someone attempting a coup? What a sad state of affairs in the capital city when the religious leaders could point to the prophecy concerning Bethlehem but were too apathetic to make the short journey to Bethlehem. Herod's question does not raise any questions for them. Everything is business as usual for the religious elite, but for these pagan stargazers, they have seen the star sent from heaven and they worship the child the star leads to, the true King of the Jews.

Herod soon recognizes that the magi have not obeyed his treacherous request that would have revealed Jesus's location. The angel of the Lord instructs Joseph how to safely lead his family as God preserves this promised son from the puppet king's plans. Not willing to allow any threat to his throne, wicked Herod orders the slaughter of all baby boys in Bethlehem under the age of two. Matthew tells us that both events—Jesus's escape to Egypt and the death of the children in Bethlehem—in some sense fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Even the fact that Jesus was raised in Nazareth instead of Bethlehem after returning from Egypt is also another meticulous detail fulfilled in God's perfect plan.

God preserved the promised Messiah. He comforted the weeping mothers of Bethlehem. He led Joseph as this new father sought to protect and rear the most unique of all children. Saint, don't you think that God can also preserve, comfort, and lead you? For all of this and more, let us worship Christ the king.

## *Friday, September 5*

Read: Luke 2:40–52; Psalm 103

When Christians speak of how Jesus saves us, we often point to his death, burial, and resurrection. That is most assuredly true! We are saved by the death of Jesus Christ. We are saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Did you realize we are also saved by the life of Jesus Christ? Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins, because he not only died the death we deserve but also because he lived the perfect life we could not live. We are only given one scene in Scripture of Jesus's life between infancy and adulthood, but it gives us great insight into the perfect active obedience of Jesus Christ. Luke tells us in 2:40 that Jesus is growing physically and mentally and the grace of God is upon him. Luke gives us one scene as an illustration of this truth.

Joseph and Mary faithfully traveled to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Passover, but it was customary for sons to celebrate their first Feast at age 12. This prepared them for their bar mitzvah at age 13 when they became a “son of the commandment.” Jesus's faithful parents are raising him faithfully as well. After the days of the Feast are completed, the family begins their journey home. Realizing Jesus is not among their caravan of relatives and acquaintances, Mary and Joseph turn back to Jerusalem where they eventually locate their son in the temple. Luke has told us that Jesus is being filled with grace and wisdom, but this wisdom seems to be beyond his years. He is respectfully listening to and asking questions of the teachers. His understanding seems beyond their understanding. His response to his anxious parents seems beyond their understanding. Jesus clearly knows by age 12 that his greatest obedience is to his heavenly Father, even above his earthly father. To be clear, Jesus has been obedient and respectful to his parents. Their separation was not due to rebellion but rather misunderstanding. Jesus continues in submission and obedience to his earthly parents as well as his heavenly Father.

Jesus will perfectly obey throughout his entire life. He will obey when tempted in the wilderness. He will obey when rejected and scorned. He will obey all the way to the cross. And by his perfect active obedience, we live. In his incarnation, Jesus did not stop being God, but he has taken on full humanity. Unlike the first human, this human will obey the Father perfectly. Because of his perfect obedience, he can impute righteousness to our disobedient accounts. Now we can obey in his strength. Let us treasure all these things in our hearts.



## *Monday, September 8*

Read: Matthew 3:1–4:11; Psalm 104

The forerunner, the baptism, and the temptation—this reading covers three significant events in Jesus’s earliest days of ministry. Luke told us of the remarkable conception and birth of John the Baptist, but here Matthew tells us about his remarkable ministry. Echoing Elijah, John dresses like a prophet. He eats like a prophet. He preaches like the prophet Isaiah said a future prophet would preach. John preaches the same message that Jesus will soon preach: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” As the last prophet in the long line of old covenant prophets, John’s ministry matters in paving the way for the ministry of Jesus.

John came preaching, but Jesus came to John to be baptized. Whether John fully understands Jesus’s identity before the baptism or not until after the voice from heaven speaks at the baptism, John knows something is not right with this picture. John has been baptizing people in connection with their confession of sin, so why would Jesus need to be baptized? He is emphatic in his attempt to prevent Jesus’s baptism. Yet Jesus knows that it is fitting and necessary that he be baptized to “fulfill all righteousness.” Just as Luke showed us that Jesus perfectly obeyed the law from his earliest days, now Matthew shows us that Jesus is still fulfilling the law and righteousness of God. Furthermore, Jesus is identifying himself with the people he came to save. Jesus doesn’t need to repent, but you do. Jesus doesn’t need to be cleansed, but you do. Jesus doesn’t need to have his sins forgiven because he’s never sinned, but you have sinned and you need to have your sins forgiven. Jesus is identifying himself with the people he came to save, and the Father speaks with pleasure from heaven. As the Spirit rests on Jesus to empower him for ministry, we realize that all of this is the work of our triune God.

Immediately afterwards the Spirit thrusts Jesus into the wilderness for this dramatic three-fold temptation by Satan. Sometimes we walk away from this narrative concluding, “Jesus answered Satan with Scripture; therefore, the big point of the passage is that I also memorize Scripture so that I’ll stand strong in the face of temptation.” It’s true that Christians should memorize Scripture, but is that the point? No, something far greater is going on. The first Adam was tempted in a garden and failed. Israel was tempted in the wilderness and failed. The second Adam, the true Israelite, our Savior Jesus Christ was tempted in the wilderness and was faithful! The only reason we can ever stand strong against temptation is because of the work of Jesus in us! Praise the Lord!

The Apostle John gives us insights into some of Jesus's earliest days of ministry that the other Gospel writers do not mention. Of course, John himself tells us that there are many other things Jesus did that were not recorded in Scripture (21:25). The Apostle tells us of John the Baptist's proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John gives us more insight into Jesus's earliest disciples, even mentioning that Andrew and Peter had also been disciples of the Baptist. We learn of Jesus's supernatural knowledge because he tells Nathaniel things only Nathaniel himself could have known. This blunt man from Cana (21:2) who doubted that anything good could come from Nazareth quickly identifies Jesus as the Son of God, the true King of Israel. Jesus assuredly says that this is only the beginning of heaven communicating with earth. Just as Jacob got a glimpse of heaven coming down to earth through his ladder dream, Jesus the Son of Man will continue to reveal the Father in heaven to his disciples on earth. This is only the beginning. They will begin to receive further identification and confirmation concerning the Christ in just a few short days.

Nathaniel's home town of Cana is the location for one of Jesus's earliest but best known miracles—turning water into wine. The week-long wedding celebration is about to end on a note of disappointment rather than a prolonged note of joy due to the groom prematurely running out of wine. Since Jesus and his disciples are all guests at the wedding, it's probably that they were close friends or relatives of someone in the wedding party. Perhaps that explains Mary's involvement with the wine situation. Jesus is not disrespectful to his mother, but he does seem to be distancing himself from the mission at hand. He has a mission from heaven that is on a divine time table. Nevertheless, Jesus does manifest his glory through this first sign. Only God creates. Creating wine from water points to Jesus as being the Creator God.

The Apostle speaks often in his Gospel about the signs of Jesus. The other writers spoke of miracles but John is intentional in his choice of words. The miracles of Jesus are not mere displays of power. They point to the identity of Jesus as God. The other Gospel writers certainly are making those same connections, but John's evangelistic fervor causes him to be selective and intentional about the signs of Jesus. He has written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in his name (20:31).

## *Wednesday, September 10*

Read: John 2:13–3:21; Psalm 106

While Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem during his passion week just days before his death, John informs us that our Lord also cleansed the temple at the beginning of his ministry. The money-changers provided a vital service for those traveling from around the world to Jerusalem to worship, yet their trade was being conducted in such a way as to actually hinder the worship that was supposed to be taking place. In this powerful act of forcing the money-changers out of the temple, Jesus angered those with authority over the temple who were likely profiting from the arrangement. Jesus takes worship seriously, and the leaders have corrupted the worship of God.

Failing to understand Jesus's rebuke, the leaders ask for a sign that would permit Jesus's actions. They also fail to understand Jesus's response. He does not refer to the physical temple but his physical body. The disciples didn't fully understand at the time, but they did after the resurrection. John also lets us know that it seemed that many others did understand the signs Jesus performed. He tells us that many believed. Or did they? Jesus sees the heart and knows what is in man. Jesus did not entrust himself to those who professed faith. Some truly believed and others did not. Time would tell.

Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus is an illustration of his divine knowledge. Nicodemus is a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Pharisees. His prominence among the religious elite likely explains why he comes to Jesus at night. He doesn't want anyone to see him talking to this troublemaker and table-turner. Nicodemus not only respects Jesus but acknowledges that no one can perform the signs Jesus performs unless God is with him. Jesus gets to the heart of the matter: to enter the kingdom of God, you must be born again. Rather than understanding that Jesus means he must be born from above, Nicodemus thinks he must be delivered a second time from his mother. Jesus clarifies that he means a spiritual birth, a spiritual cleansing. The wind blows where it wants to blow. You cannot harness the wind or control it, but you can see the wind's work. Likewise, the Spirit cannot be harnessed or controlled, but we can see evidence of its work. As a learned teacher in Israel, Nicodemus should have understood the connection to Ezekiel's promise of the Spirit's work. He should have understood the incident of Moses and the bronze serpent. The Scriptures testify that we each individually must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. These same Scriptures testify of God's love through Christ for sinners just like us. Truly believe in Christ today.

Jesus has boldly confronted the religious establishment of the Jews in his day. He drove out the moneychangers from the temple because they were corrupting the worship of God, even as he was being challenged by the leaders of the temple who allowed and oversaw that corruption. Immediately afterward, John tells us of Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus, a leader among the Jews. Even the highest of Jewish leadership must be born again. Their religious credentials will not save them but their corruption of the worship of God will certainly condemn them. Now in chapter 4 we're told of Jesus confronting the Samaritan religion, but we also receive more confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah, indeed a loving Savior for the nations.

It seems Jesus had a divine appointment to pass through Samaria, but we must remind ourselves why that is significant. Remember that the nation of Israel divided after the death of King Solomon with the ten northern tribes forming a political union. Samaria became the new political capital (1 Kin 16:24), but sometimes the entire kingdom was referred to as Samaria. After the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. many Jews were deported from the land while many non-Jews were brought into the land. This led to a lot of intermarrying which eventually led to lots of ethnic prejudice between those who were purely Jews and those who were not. The Samaritans eventually stopped worshipping Yahweh in Jerusalem and created their own methods of worship on Mt. Gerizim there in Samaria. While Jews did sometimes travel through Samaria on their way from Judea to Galilee, the animosity between Jews and Samaritans was typically strong.

For all these reasons the disciples are shocked at the conversation between Jesus and this Samaritan woman at the well. It breaks all social and religious protocol. Modern readers might find the conversation a bit confrontational for Jesus deals with the issue of her many previous husbands as well as the differing view of worship among the Samaritans. His attitude towards her is actually quite loving, but none of this should cause us to miss Jesus's point. He is the Messiah (4:26). True worship of God should not be confined to a particular place or people, but instead should be marked by both "spirit and truth" (4:24). The truth insists that our worship have the correct object—God alone—and be regulated by his word alone (the truth). The worship of God is not merely an intellectual exercise, but is also to be done "in spirit." The truth should shape and produce the inward response of our heart (spirit). Will you worship God in spirit and in truth?

## *Friday, September 12*

Read: Luke 4:14–44; Isaiah 61

The prophet Isaiah received great insight from the Lord into the characteristics and work of the Servant of the Lord hundreds of years before Jesus was born and ministered in Capernaum and beyond. This Messiah will be empowered to serve by the Spirit of Yahweh. Isaiah says the Anointed One will be anointed for a seven-fold ministry: 1) to bring good news to the afflicted, 2) to bind up the brokenhearted, 3) to proclaim release to captives, 4) to proclaim freedom to prisoners, 5) to proclaim the favorable year of Yahweh, 6) to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God, and 7) to comfort all who mourn. What a message the Messiah will bring! Wouldn't any preacher desire to proclaim this message? Yet Isaiah looks to the future to a particular preacher who is yet to come. Luke helps us identify just such a preacher.

The Spirit of God came to rest upon Jesus at his baptism to empower him for ministry. The Spirit threw Jesus into the wilderness for the temptation by Satan. The same Spirit brings Jesus to Galilee where he preached in synagogues and was glorified in them. Every synagogue, that is, except one: Nazareth. The synagogue was the local assembly of worship in Jewish communities in contrast with the singular temple in Jerusalem. The synagogues are not mentioned in the Old Testament but were well-established by Jesus's day. It was common practice that portions of Scripture scrolls would be read and explained by the teachers. As the visiting preacher that day, Jesus is handed the Isaiah scroll. Verse 17 demonstrates that Jesus intentionally selected his text. He read what we would call Isaiah 61:1–2a. He moves from standing reverence for God's Word to being humbly seated in the position of one who is teaching the Scriptures. Luke builds the tension as he tells the story: "the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him." What will Jesus say about this passage?

Our Lord straightforwardly says that he is the fulfillment of the passage he read. It has been fulfilled that day in their presence. At first everyone marvels and speaks well of Jesus. Knowing their true thoughts, Jesus reminds them that Israel rejected prophets from God many times. When Israel rejected messengers from God, the Lord sent them to the Gentiles. Recognizing that Jesus is suggesting that they might not receive God's grace while Gentiles could receive his grace, the people are enraged. Murderous opposition to Jesus is present from the beginning. Jesus paused in his reading because the day of Yahweh's vengeance has not yet come, but one day it most certainly will. Are you ready?

The Gospels repeatedly emphasize that Jesus taught and preached with an authority that was unlike any other religious leader of the day. When Jesus spoke, people listened. His message was validated by the many healings and other miracles he performed throughout his ministry. We often get caught up in the power of these miracles and miss their purpose. The Scriptures had promised that God's coming Messiah would perform many healing miracles. Here comes Jesus doing exactly what Scripture promised! He must be who he says he is.

Mark 1:21–45 records a fast-paced narrative of many healings. A demon-possessed man yells at Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum. The demon has good theology! (Has anyone else correctly identified Jesus yet?) He knows who Jesus is, and he knows his days are numbered. Yet today is not the last day, but the demon still must obey. Even the unclean spirits obey Jesus. Jesus goes next door to Peter's house and quickly heals Peter's sick mother-in-law. The merciful Savior not only heals but strengthens her to serve him. (Is there any other disciple who has begun to serve Jesus at this point? What an example she is.) Both publicly and privately, Jesus is healing many. It's almost like he's wiping out all the disease in the whole city. This Jesus has authority over diseases and demons. His fame is spreading throughout the land.

The next morning Jesus prioritizes prayer, but Peter prioritizes the physical needs of the people. Jesus offers a needed correction: he came to preach more than he came to heal. Yes, Jesus will still heal many, but the healings serve to prove who he is but are not the focus of what he came to do. To put it differently, the healings of Jesus are the side dish. The preaching of Jesus will be the main course. We often spotlight the miraculous things Jesus did without listening to the message those miracles pointed to. Jesus came to preach: "Repent and believe the gospel."

Even still, these moving pictures of Jesus's compassionately healing people also provide analogies for the spiritual healing he offers sinners. Here comes a leper racked with the effects of his illness in the same way that sinners are racked with the curse of our sins. One word from the willing Jesus makes all the difference. Immediately we are made clean. The clean Savior substitutes himself for the unclean sinner and brings healing. Perfect, permanent, eternal healing. As Jesus announces the kingdom, he is giving a preview of the kingdom, a sampling if you will. For all the blessings that the King will bring in his kingdom, we wait 'til the end of the story.

## *Tuesday, September 16*

Read: Matthew 5–7

Jesus has come preaching the kingdom of heaven, but what does it look like to be a citizen of the kingdom? How do you enter the kingdom? Jesus addresses these questions and more in what we commonly call “The Sermon on the Mount.”

The Beatitudes (5:3–12) serve as Jesus’s sermon introduction. The blessed man that we have been musing on since Psalm 1 is ultimately pictured as the blessed kingdom citizen of the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes do not function as a contract where we can earn our entrance into the kingdom, but they reflect the characteristics of kingdom citizens. May the king of the kingdom continue to make us more and more blessed.

It seems the main idea of Jesus’s sermon is found in the demand for superior righteousness in 5:17–20. Jesus did not come to overthrow or abolish the Law or the Prophets. Instead, Jesus is the only one who can fulfill or accomplish these Scriptures, and often he himself is the fulfillment of those Scriptures. Since Jesus is not lowering the standard of the kingdom, then we must have a far superior righteousness to that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom. We’re in trouble! This becomes more apparent as Jesus expounds Old Testament law in 5:21–48 and shows that our sin problem extends past external actions of “keeping the law” right down to our hearts!

In chapter 6 Jesus preaches about the practice (6:1–18) and priorities of righteousness (6:19–34). Jesus begins with a warning against striving to have a superior righteousness that is simply trying to be noticed by others. Don’t be a hypocrite, the king says; otherwise you will have no reward in heaven. Jesus illustrates the demand for unhypocritical righteousness in the areas of giving, prayer, and fasting. To help those who listen to his sermon understand the priorities of righteousness, he contrasts two kinds of treasure, two conditions of the eye, and two masters (6:19–24) while also showing the results of proper priorities (6:25–34). After discussing the disciple’s relationships (7:1–12), Jesus moves to his conclusion (7:13–27). He presents two roads and gates, two trees and fruits, two confessions, as well as two hearers and builders. Each hearer must consider their standing before the king of the kingdom. Will you enter the kingdom through Christ the King?

Who preaches this way? The King who has all authority. He began the sermon seated in the position of authority and his conclusion left everyone astonished at his teaching with authority. Will you come to the mountain and learn of Jesus, the King of the Kingdom?

Jesus's fame is spreading and the crowds are growing. He preaches with authority and heals with authority. Is there anything he can't do? In the healing of the paralytic, the truth we have already discussed is made plain: Jesus's physical healings are provided to validate his ability to bring spiritual healing. His miracles verify his message. His authority is so great that he even has the ability to forgive sins!

Jesus is preaching to a packed house. Literally. There's no room for anyone else to enter; they will have to listen from outside. But what about these four men who are coming with a cot? They have a paralyzed friend. Jesus has healed so many, perhaps he could also heal this man. Oh it's no use, they'll never be able to get close to Jesus. These faith-filled friends are not deterred by the crowds. Their confidence in Jesus leads them to unroof the roof. They remove enough thatch tiles to create an opening large enough to lower the paralyzed man right in front of Jesus. Perhaps Jesus had ignored the distraction while preaching until it could be ignored no longer. Presented with yet another man needing a touch from the Master, what will Jesus say?

This man's physical needs have not actually been the point of the story. They provide the background to move the story along. The drama has only been building with the story of this man and his friends, but Jesus makes the point plain when he announces: "Child, your sins are forgiven." It's not just another healing story after all. The one who teaches with authority is now claiming to have authority to forgive sins. Christians might take this for granted today, but the scribes had many questions. They didn't ask them out loud, of course, but in their hearts they had lots of questions! "Who talks this way?!" they angrily wondered. They know that only God can forgive sins, and so they recognize that Jesus is claiming to be God. What so many cults and skeptics alike have missed, the scribes rightly understand: Jesus claimed to be God! Ironically, it is the scribes who are blaspheming or speaking against God, not Jesus. He is who he says he is.

Jesus's identity is verified by the paralytic's healing. If Jesus can bring the physical healing that no one else can bring, most certainly he can bring the spiritual healing that no one can bring. His ability to forgive sins does not guarantee all physical healing in this life, but it does preview the permanent healing of his kingdom. Both the forgiveness of sins and the healing that will one day be complete come only through faith in the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.



## *Thursday, September 18*

Read: Psalms 113–116

Psalms 113–118 form a series of six psalms of praise to God. They are commonly referred to as the “Egyptian Hallel.” Hallel means “praise” in Hebrew. These songs would have been sung at a variety of times throughout the year, but most often at Passover. As the Jewish people celebrated their deliverance from Egypt generations earlier, each present generation would sing these praises to God as if they had personally been delivered from Egypt. Psalms 113 and 114 would have been sung before the Passover meal while Psalms 115–118 would have been sung afterwards. One of these psalms, quite possibly Psalm 118, would have been the hymn that Jesus and his disciples sang after their Passover meal (Matt 26:30).

**Psalm 113** begins the series with the command to praise the Lord. Servants of Yahweh should most certainly praise him, but the psalm also foresees the day when God’s name will be praised forever by all! Yahweh is higher than his creation, yet he is merciful to his creation. He helps the poor and needy as well as caring for the barren. He is the giver of good gifts. Praise the Lord!

**Psalm 114** is more explicitly related to the Exodus than the others in the Egyptian Hallel. God brought his people out of bondage in order to keep his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The earth trembles at the presence of God. Praise the Lord!

**Psalm 115** gives voice to the people proclaiming the glory of God and not themselves. He is worthy of worship and not the idols made by human hands. Israel, of course, failed to heed this counsel after the Exodus. They quickly desired to return to Egypt and even made an idol to try and get them there. Oh how true verse 8 is in the life of God’s people. Israel trusted in false gods on many occasions and became like them. Yet God preserved his faithful remnant, those who truly trusted in Yahweh as their help and shield. Some in each generation did remember the failures of their forefathers as well as God’s promises to Israel and Aaron, and they committed to bless Yahweh from this forth and forevermore.

**Psalm 116** is a prayer of thanksgiving upon being spared from death. Verses 3, 8–9, and 15 all point to that personally painful experience, and yet the psalmist does not keep his praise of God private. The text clearly shows that the psalmist’s praise will be complete only when given among the congregation. How many times has God shown his mercy in our lives? Let’s not keep it to ourselves. Praise the Lord!

Roman soldiers were not known for their care and compassion, yet we meet a centurion who deeply cares for the well-being of his slave. As the fame of Jesus spreads and the centurion hears, he sends a delegation of Jewish elders to Jesus pleading for the Lord to come heal his slave. As much as the slave is well thought of by the soldier, the soldier is well thought of by the Jewish community in Capernaum. The centurion has endeared himself to the Jews by his personal support of the nation by building their local synagogue. We begin to see that the Roman is sincere in his humility, for he dared not approach Jesus with the initial request and when Jesus draws near to the house, he again sends word to Jesus: “I know I am not worthy of you.” The Roman leader recognizes that he is a Gentile and cut off from the people of God. If John the Baptist was not worthy to untie Jesus’s shoes, this man is not worthy of Jesus coming under his roof. Yet, this soldier understands authority. Being well-acquainted with human authority, he trusts that Jesus has heavenly authority. If Jesus will simply say the word, he knows his servant will be healed. That’s the authority of Jesus! Of course, the centurion was exactly right, and that’s exactly what happened. The Lord points to this man as an example of the faith that must mark all who are in the kingdom—Jew and Gentile alike.

Healing the sick from a distance is quite a feat. What about the dead right in front of you? Will Jesus be able to heal this widow’s son? It’s clear that this mother’s situation is dire, not only due to the death of a son but because this is her only son. Who will care for this widow? A great crowd of her fellow townspeople are supporting and encouraging her now at his funeral, but what will happen in the days ahead? As we see on many occasions, Jesus is moved with compassion and resolves to change the situation. Touching a dead body would make you ceremonially unclean according to Jewish custom, yet Jesus is not made unclean. Instead the unclean corpse is brought back to life. This Jesus of Nazareth is able to bring the dead to life. He is not made unclean by unclean sinners; instead he cleanses what seems impossible. He does the things only God can do. The people are slowly recognizing that something is taking place in their midst. This man is at least a prophet. Perhaps God is visiting his people. Will you see Jesus clearly and worship him?

## ***Monday, September 22***

**Read: Luke 7:36–50; Psalm 120**

Great sinners require great forgiveness, but Christ is a great Savior who is able to forgive even the greatest of sinners. Our Lord taught this lesson vividly at Simon the Pharisee's house. A casual reading might remind you of the occasion when Lazarus's sister Mary also anointed Jesus with a flask of alabaster, but a careful reader will notice these are two different occasions. That happened during Passion Week outside Jerusalem in Bethany. This event in Luke 7 takes place earlier during Jesus's ministry in Galilee. That took place in the house of Simon the (former) leper while this takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee. That involved Mary the sister of Martha, but this involves an unknown woman clearly known as a great sinner. Similarities aside, the differences set the two stories apart, with this narrative emphasizing Jesus's ability to forgive even the greatest of sins for those who come to him in repentance and faith.

While dining at Simon the Pharisee's house, an uninvited guest arrives with a valuable gift, not for the host but for the guest of honor. This woman—a known sinner—weeps profusely as she takes her alabaster jar of perfume and anoints Jesus's feet. Simon failed to offer this act of hospitality when Jesus arrived at the party, but this woman is overwhelmed with gratitude just to be in his presence and gladly cleanses his feet with her tears, hair, and perfume. When Jesus healed the widow's only son, the people wondered if a prophet were in their midst. When this woman worships Jesus, the Pharisee concludes he can't be a prophet. A true prophet would not allow a sinful woman to touch him, for that could make him ceremonially unclean. Jesus knows Simon's thoughts (like a true prophet) and challenges him. Like Nathan the prophet used a parable to convict David, Jesus tells a story to reveal his host's lack of hospitality.

Simon rightly answers that the one who has been forgiven a greater debt will love the lender more. This woman who is a great sinner will have a great number of sins that need to be forgiven and yet will love more than Simon can comprehend in his self-righteousness. Just in case the other guests have misunderstood, Jesus looks to the woman directly and says, "Your sins have been forgiven." This woman's lavish love has been a result of the great forgiveness she received. Our Lord is eager to forgive sinners. All who come to Christ—even with the greatest of great sins—will find in Jesus a great Savior. Have you come to Christ in faith seeking forgiveness? He stands ready to save even you.

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Was it to make things simpler and plainer like when a preacher uses an illustration in his sermon? Many people assume that Jesus was making his teaching clearer with parables, and yet that's not quite what he himself taught. When questioned alone by the twelve, Jesus explained that parables actually serve multiple purposes. For some the parables reveal, but for others the parables conceal. For those inside the kingdom, the parables will clarify, but for those outside the kingdom the secrets have not been given. This understanding of the parables is not a new teaching from Jesus, but is what God prophesied through Isaiah.

Parables are sometimes described as earthly stories with heavenly meanings. The literal idea is to lay two things alongside one another for comparison. Jesus often says, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." He uses common objects or situations with a bit of a twist to make a spiritual point. When explaining the purpose of parables to the twelve, he pointed to the parable of the sower as being almost foundational to the other parables. If we do not understand this one, will we understand any? Jesus gives the interpretation of the parable of the soils; how can we not understand it? The word of God is sown like seed among many types of soil. Some people hear the word, but it does not penetrate the soil of their mind at all. Some people receive the word with great external expression, but the word does not actually take root in their minds. They soon fall away. Others may seem promising and yet the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches choke out the word in their lives. Perhaps most shocking of all is that the word does take root in some people. Some people hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, even much fruit! Oh that God would give us greater understanding and fruitfulness!

Mark gives three more short parables from Jesus. The light of the gospel is not to be hidden, but rather to be proclaimed and revealed. We can rest in the sovereignty of God as we share the gospel seed, for the gospel spreads while we sleep just as grass grows at night. We may not see it, but we can trust God that he will build his kingdom. We are to be faithful laboring in the harvest, and we are to labor in confidence. What may start as tiny as a mustard seed will most certainly grow into gospel shade for all the nations. The seed of God's Word is powerful. Let us sow it freely in confidence.

## *Wednesday, September 24*

Read: Luke 8:22–39; Psalm 107

Understanding the identity of Jesus shows us the authority of Jesus. These two dramatic scenes in the ministry of Christ reveal who he is and how we should respond. While their familiarity may cause us to assume we already know the meaning, a careful reading often provides a richer understanding of the text. Luke sets the scene with Jesus and the disciples getting a boat for the purpose of crossing the Sea of Galilee. While Jesus sleeps on the boat ride, a great storm quickly appears to the point that seasoned sailors are fearing for their lives. They awaken Jesus believing they are all about to die. They have faith that Jesus can do something about the situation, and yet they are filled with fear. Jesus rebukes the winds and the waves and the waves obey. This must not be what the disciples expected, because they wonder aloud, “Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?” (8:25).

They arrive on the other side of the lake, safe and sound after all. No sooner do they make landfall than they encounter demon-possessed men, with Luke emphasizing the leader and his broken condition. Demons dwell in him, and he does not dwell in a house but among the tombs. He lives with the dead people. His sad physical condition is surpassed by his desperate spiritual condition, for the man is filled with a legion of demons. The words of Jesus calmed the storm on the sea and the words of Jesus calmed the storm of the demon-possessed man as the Lord gives permission for the demons to enter the swine. We ask with the disciples, “Who then is this, that he commands demons and swine, and they obey him?”

We know the stories are connected because Matthew, Mark, and Luke all re-tell the events consecutively. The disciples question in verse 25 is answered by the demon in verse 28. Who is this man? Jesus the Son of the Most High God. Jesus’s miracles continue to demonstrate and validate his identity. His identity explains his authority. Only God can calm the stormy seas, and yet Jesus is God. Only God has authority over the darkest demons, and yet Jesus is God. It makes perfect sense that Jesus is able to calm the storm and cast out demons. We should respond to these truths by worshipping and trusting Jesus. Yet we often have little faith like the disciples. We fail to fully recognize Jesus like the disciples, so we forget his authority and are instead filled with fear not faith. When we remember who Jesus is, how else can we respond but to tell others the great things God has done?

Psalms 120–134 are often labeled “the Songs of Ascent.” They’re connected with the journey many Jewish pilgrims made each year to Jerusalem for the various feasts. Because of the city’s high elevation, people always spoke of going “up” to Jerusalem, no matter what geographical direction they were coming from. This large group of psalms has a variety of authors and historical contexts, but their organization reminds us of the intentional editorial process that assembled the 150 psalms in the order we have today. Ultimately the Holy Spirit is responsible for each psalm individually as well as the entire psalter collectively.

**Psalm 122** This psalm of David is a joyful celebration of Jerusalem. David acquired and set apart this land as the capital of Israel. Solomon fulfilled David’s desire to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. The worshipping pilgrims would praise God for dwelling among his people as they travelled to that symbolic dwelling place in Jerusalem. Many people that Christ will rule from the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem during a perfect earthly reign. Even so, the earthly Jerusalem ultimately points us to the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22–24). We don’t have to be in a particular location to draw near to God; instead we must simply be found in a particular person—Christ.

**Psalm 123** is a short psalm of lament. It is corporate in nature rather than individual. The people of God look to their King, the One enthroned in heaven. In the same way that a slave is dependent upon his master, so the people of God are dependent upon God. The people are saturated with contempt, but we’re not told why. Perhaps the faithful remnant are scorned by unbelieving Israel. Perhaps the nation is heckled by their half-breed cousins, the Samaritans. Perhaps it is the age-old conflict between Jew and Gentile. Whatever the source of scorn, the people plead with God for mercy. His mercy alone will comfort. His mercy could convict the contemptuous. His mercy will sustain his saints.

**Psalm 124** is a fitting psalm of thanksgiving for the redeemed of all the ages. As a psalm of ascent, you can imagine faithful pilgrims calling to one another with the opening refrain. The details of the text are broad enough to cover a variety of situations in Israel’s history. Time and again, Israel was almost entirely destroyed. Enemy nations raged. The people plotted in vain. How many times were the people of God almost wiped away? Yet the Lord was faithful. If the Lord had not been on their side, where would they be? If it had not been Yahweh who was on your side, where would you be?

## *Friday, September 26*

Read: Matthew 9:18–32; Psalms 125–126

Many people reject Jesus because he doesn't meet their expectations. This was certainly true for the Pharisees in the first century and many people still today. Yet the Bible presents Jesus as the perfect answer to faith-filled expectations. For those who come to Jesus in faith, it is the difference between life and death.

We see this illustrated in the father of the dying daughter in verses 18–19. Matthew doesn't give us his name (Jairus) or the scope of his authority (synagogue). We're just told of his daughter's impending death, and we immediately begin to feel his desperation and grief. Yet, he is a desperate man with a determined faith in Jesus. On the way to care for this daughter, Jesus encountered a suffering woman who becomes a daughter (9:20–22). Without a clear diagnosis, we're just told that she has suffered with ongoing bleeding for twelve years. She's living, but she's as good as dead because her unending uncleanness has separated her from everyone and everything. Yet this dying woman has a determined faith, because she has been telling herself repeatedly, "If I can just get to Jesus, he can save me." She expects this man to be able to do something that no one else has been able to do. In weak, imperfect but determined faith she reaches out and touches him. Just as Jesus looked at the paralytic man on the cot and said, "'Take courage, son, your sins are forgiven you,'" Jesus looks at this woman saying, "Daughter, take courage, your faith has saved you." Immediately, all of her expectations have been fulfilled in Christ. But what about Jairus? He still has faith-filled but unmet expectations of Jesus. Arriving at Jairus's home, they find the funeral has already begun. The mourners do not expect Jesus to have any authority over death, so they laugh at his evaluation. Yet Jesus raises this twelve-year old girl to life, and the father's expectations are met and fulfilled in Christ.

Jesus has all authority. He has authority over disaster, demons, disease, and death. He has the authority to forgive sins. The big story of the Bible makes that clear, and we've seen much of those themes wrapped up even in this one narrative. Looking to the broader context, Matthew 8–9 have been illustrating these truths with story after story. The melody of the text has been the authority of Jesus, but the harmony most certainly is faith. The object of our faith is Christ, for he has all authority. And he doesn't save based on the intensity of our faith. He far surpasses the expectations of our weak faith, and that makes all the difference between death and life.

# Hymn of the Month

## “How Sweet and Awful Is the Place”

Isaac Watts’ hymn “How Sweet and Awful Is the Place” (1707) draws us into the wonder of God’s saving grace. In Watts’ day, “awful” meant awe-inspiring, not dreadful, and the hymn captures the reverent joy of entering Christ’s presence at the gospel feast. This banquet imagery recalls Isaiah’s promised feast for all peoples (Isa 25:6), Jesus’ parables of the wedding supper (Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:16–24), and finally the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9).

The hymn opens with Christ present among his people as everlasting love spreads out its rich stores (st 1). From there, the praise of the gathered church turns personal: “Lord, why was I a guest?” (st 2). Paul answers with astonishment of his own: God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world. . . In love he predestined us” (Eph 1:4–5). Such grace is staggering, especially when we remember how many turn away and “rather starve than come” (st 3; cf. John 3:19).

Watts reminds us that the same love that spread the feast also drew us in (st 4; John 6:44). Left to ourselves, we would still refuse and perish in sin (Eph 2:1–5). The only explanation is grace. That recognition moves us outward in prayer for the nations: “Send Thy victorious Word abroad, and bring the strangers home” (st 5; cf. Ps 67:2). The hymn closes with longing for the day when every tribe and tongue will join in one song of redeeming grace (st 6; Rev. 7:9–10).

Give thanks that God has seated you at his table, and ask him to send forth him Word until every seat is filled.

-Pastor Laramie



Scan this QR code  
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of this song on Youtube.

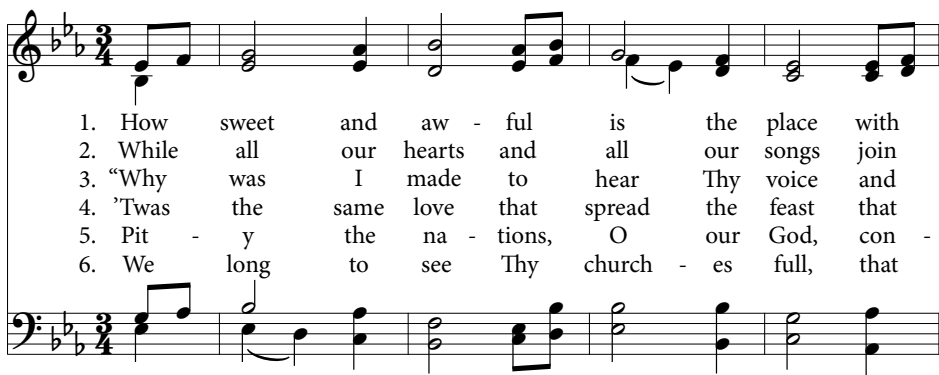


# How Sweet and Awful

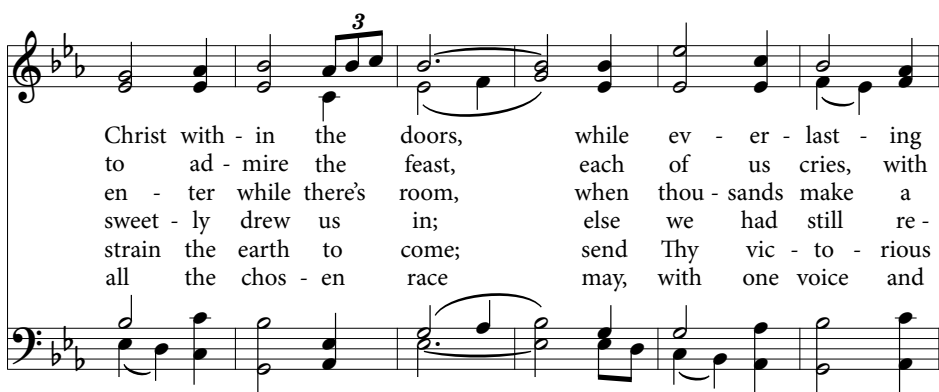
Isaac Watts, 1707, alt.

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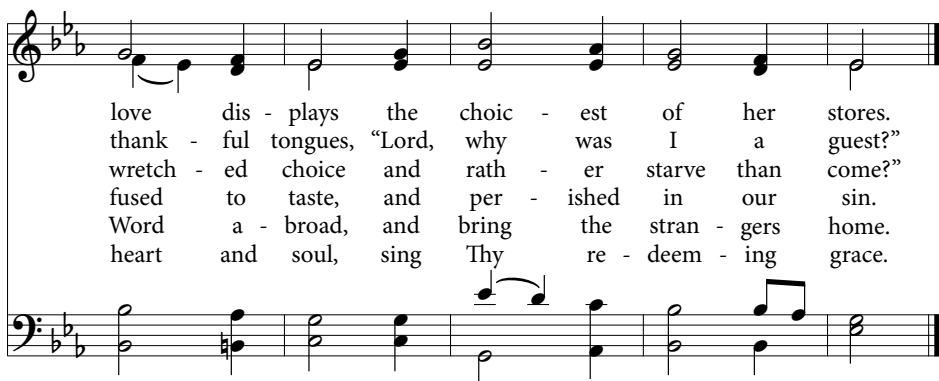
Irish melody  
harm. *The English Hymnal*, 1906



1. How sweet and aw - ful is the place with  
2. While all our hearts and all our songs join  
3. "Why was I made to hear Thy voice and  
4. 'Twas the same love that spread the feast that  
5. Pit - y the na - tions, O our God, con -  
6. We long to see Thy church - es full, that



Christ with - in the doors, while ev - er - last - ing  
to ad - mire the feast, each of us cries, with  
en - ter while there's room, when thou - sands make a  
sweet - ly drew us in; else we had still re -  
strain the earth to come; send Thy vic - to - rious  
all the chos - en race may, with one voice and



love dis - plays the choic - est of her stores.  
thank - ful tongues, "Lord, why was I a guest?"  
wretch - ed choice and rath - er starve than come?"  
fused to taste, and per - ished in our sin.  
Word a - broad, and bring the stran - gers home.  
heart and soul, sing Thy re - deem - ing grace.

## Sermon Texts in September:

### September 7:

Matthew 19:27–20:16

### September 14:

Matthew 20:17–28

### September 14:

Matthew 20:29–34

### September 28:

Matthew 21:1–11

**Equipping the Saints, Sunday afternoons at 5:00 p.m.**

Understanding various views of the End Times

September 7–21



## *Weekly Calendar at Ramah*

### **Sundays:**

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

Worship Service: 11:00 a.m.

Equipping the Saints: 5:00 p.m.

### **Wednesdays:**

Prayer Meeting: 5:45pm



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