

A Special Advent Devotional

“Finally!”

The Promise of Messiah is Fulfilled

A Daily Devotional from Pastor Paul

Monday

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

John 8:3-7

It's advent season. Our theme is “Finally!” It's the perfect time of year to celebrate that fact that Israel *finally* received its Messiah after thousands of years of waiting. *Finally* sin was atoned for. One day the Lord will *finally* return to take us home. Jesus is simply amazing. And so we continue to celebrate his life and ministry.

Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Though many refuse to believe, he is the one sent by his Father to save the world. He is a friend to the weak. His earthly ministry provides clue after clue about his divine nature, and this story provides a stark example of this truth.

Technically, the Pharisees had a lawful right to stone this woman. But the kingdom that Jesus was introducing is not about the “letter of the law.” It's about the heart. He is God. He knew everything about these men and that they were rotten on the inside. Not only did he save the woman, he rebuked the crowd with stern authority.

Jesus certainly hates sin, but he saw who this woman really was. He looked into her soul and freed her, even as hypocritical zealots tried to kill her. That's what Jesus does. He is a friend to the weak. His earthly ministry was one of rescue, healing, and hope. The Lord is a servant bent on bringing justice to our world. Peace and respect for human dignity will never ultimately come from governments or political philosophies. It only comes from Jesus.

As a follower of Christ, you are meant to distribute justice wherever you go. You are the Lord's representative. You are to love others the way he loved them, and give them a glimpse of Messiah. So, today, grab a cup of coffee for someone, give out an encouraging word, pray for the oppressed, buy food for a family in your neighborhood, or find another way to serve the way Jesus served.

Messiah has *finally* come. Remember that he gave you everything you have. Pass some of that along to others.

A Personal Prayer for Today

Dear Jesus, I so look forward to a time when you will rule in perfect peace and justice. This world is so messed up. Sometimes I can't see truth past my own politics and my own selfishness. But you can. So please help me to look at the needs of others from your perspective. Help me to be a friend to the weak so that they see a glimpse of you.

Amen.

Please Pray for Ridgewood Church

Pray that the Lord will provide financially for our church. Our budget for this year is \$1.492M. God is calling us to reach our community for Christ, but we need his help. Ask him to provide beyond anything we can imagine!

Tuesday

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Isaiah 42:1

This is the first of four "Servant-songs" that are found in the book of Isaiah. The theme for each is the mission of the coming Messiah and the way in which he would accomplish it. He would usher in a Kingdom of peace and justice. He would

finally atone for sin. Thus, men, women, and children could be forgiven just for the asking. Jesus offered a chance at redemption.

Unfortunately, during the first century, this was not the norm. The Romans ruled Palestine with an iron fist and religious leaders used the law to promote their own agenda. People longed for freedom and many thought Jesus would be a political change-agent. They thought Messiah would lead a rebellion against a powerful occupying army.

To the disappointment of some, but for the blessing of the many, Jesus came to implement a different kind of change that flowed out of the wellspring of his divine character. He loved the people who no one else cared about. He healed, he pastored, he converted, and he spoke in defense of the weak. He laid down his life to save the many, though few believed in him.

We are condemned by sin. But Messiah came to deal with your malady. Now it's your turn. Are you spreading the message that Jesus saves? This is the time of year when people are open to hearing about spiritual things. He has appointed you and me to be the bearers of good news. Can you think of one person you can tell today?

A Personal Prayer for Today

Lord, I am glad that you loved me enough to save me. Help me find the courage and opportunity to spread this message to others. There is no other way to find eternal life. There is no other way to overcome the devastating effects of sin. May I be a faithful messenger who you can depend on.

Amen.

Please Pray for Ridgewood Church

Please praise the Lord for helping us build our Ridgewood Playground! A great deal of work has been done and will be finished in the spring. Please pray that the final \$50,000 will be raised in order to complete the project. This will be a wonderful tool to help lead children and families toward a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Wednesday

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break...

Isaiah 42:2-3a

For many people, success in life is all about status. They want to be seen. They want to be acknowledged. They want everyone to know that they've reached the top of the mountain. They want their ego constantly stroked.

But Jesus isn't that kind of leader. Isaiah writes: "A bruised reed he will not break." He cares about everyone. To him there is no class, no caste, no rich, or poor. He sees all of us the same. He created us. He came to save everyone. He's only concerned with what's on the inside. He sees each person as one who is created in his Father's image. This gives all of us inherent value.

Sometimes I struggle to personalize the love of Jesus. I don't think that I'm good enough for him to desire a relationship with me. But the truth is; you and I are bruised reeds. He will build you up, encourage you, stay by your side, plot your course, show you the right path, and challenge you. But he will never break you.

What a joy it is to have a Savior that you can rely on. We serve a Messiah who is a friend of the weak. That means that you can always depend on him. Now may be a good time to tell him that you trust him with all of yourself. When you submit to him, you'll find him in a deeper way. And then, you may *finally* find peace and joy in a world that offers none of it.

A Personal Prayer for Today

Jesus, you are a gentle friend. You are a speaker of kind words, and a voice of soft encouragement. You changed the world with your power, yet you lift me up with a heart of compassion. You rule the universe yet you reside in my heart. Thank you for accepting me, even with all of my weaknesses and warts. Thank you for not only loving me through them, but also helping me to change them. All the while I trust that you will never lead me to a place that shatters me. I trust you.

Amen.

Please Pray for Ridgewood Church

Plans for our Ridgewood Preschool are underway. We have found our director and are putting the final pieces into place. A successful preschool will help Ridgewood to leave a lasting legacy that will help send the good news of the gospel into our community.

Thursday

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

Isaiah 42:3b-4

Jesus came to earth and ushered in a new kingdom, and reigns today in the hearts of believers. He is set on bringing hope to a lost and tired world. He is preparing a future that will include the kind of justice and peace that continues to elude us in this sinful world.

At a moment of the Father's choosing, Jesus will return to take his children home with him to heaven. At this time, he will begin to reign on his rightful throne that was promised long ago, as God gave his covenant to Israel. Genesis 22:18 tells us

that in Abraham “all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” That blessing to the nations is Jesus.

His kingdom will be different than anyone has seen before. There will be dignity awarded to every human being. The world system will change drastically. There will be no more discrimination, or racism. Jesus will *finally* bring about a program of equity that will bless every person as it glorifies God.

Did you know that Jesus is coming again? When he does, he will end the world as we know it. Are you ready? Have you received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Are you planning on giving your life to him? Do you desire to tell others? Take a moment now and pray a prayer of confession, of submission, of thanksgiving, and for courage. It’s time to get to work. The King of the Universe has been here once, and he is coming back again!

A Personal Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, come soon. Take me home. But in the meantime, use me greatly. Thank you for the hope for a better tomorrow. Thank you for this perfect plan. Thank you for including me. I love you so very much!
Amen.

Please Pray for Ridgewood Church

Please pray for our missionaries who faithfully bring the gospel to the nations each day. They are amazing and gifted servants. Pray for their safety, fund-raising, and that their efforts will produce the fruit of souls saved.

Friday

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...”

Luke 4:18

Earlier this week we talked about the woman in John 8. She'd been caught in adultery and she must have been stunned. How could she be forgiven for what she'd done? Who was this man who pronounced forgiveness over her? What an example of grace, and compassion. It was this kind of moment that marked the earthly ministry of Jesus. He came as “good news to the poor” and “set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

The words “proclaim liberty to the captives” should ring in our ears as we move through our spiritual journey. Sin is ugly and has huge ramifications. But forgiveness and freedom are available to all. The Lord's divinity provides the power for him to forgive sin, while his humanity provided a perfect sacrifice to pay for it. He did that on the cross. There, he *finally* atoned for sin. Thus, he has the power to set captives free. That includes you.

Stop judging others and take it easy on yourself. Ask for forgiveness. Ask to be free. It doesn't matter what you've done. You could have done time, committed adultery, stolen money, gotten hooked on pornography, or were a terrible parent. You may still be trying to figure out who you are. You may be in the midst of a terrible divorce, an ugly dispute at work, or you may just feel like giving up. Turn to Jesus. In him, you will *finally* find a friend who accepts you just as you are.

A Personal Prayer for Today

Lord, I confess my sin to you today. I am too self-reliant. My thoughts are often sinful. I need you desperately. You are just, kind, and gracious. Thank you for choosing me to be your child. It is my honor. It is my joy.
Amen.

Please Pray for Ridgewood Church

Please pray for our children and student ministries. It's important that our kids understand truth in this crazy culture. Please ask the Lord to protect each child and student, and that they would be open to the gospel.