

# **2015 Devotionals**

*by*

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Written for Brentwood Baptist Church  
Brentwood, TN  
Scriptures taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

## **The Lamb is Worthy**

### **Revelation 5:8-14**

*When He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth. Then I looked, and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures, and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. They said with a loud voice: The Lamb who was slaughtered is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

The Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John is arguably the most astonishing piece of literature ever written. In the opening verses of chapter 4 John simply writes, "There in heaven was an open door....Immediately I was in the Spirit, and there in heaven a throne was set." God in His gracious wisdom and sovereignty not only let this human man step into the throne room of eternity, but He also told him to write what he saw so that we who came after John would be given a detailed view of God's intentions for the final stages of human history.

Much of Revelation focuses on what will happen on earth during those days, clearly drawing a line between the destiny of people who have been redeemed and those who have not. But as today's passage demonstrates, in the final count it's not really about us, but about the supreme exaltation of Christ.

This scene in Revelation 5 follows the announcement by one of the elders in the heavenly throne room that "the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals." Amazingly, the Lion appears as a Lamb, a *slaughtered* Lamb no less. In this one mighty contradiction, the full meaning of redemption crashes in on John's senses: death has been conquered through a greater death.

And now the glad rejoicing of the heavenly beings who witnessed this victory reverberates through the palace, "The Lamb who was slaughtered is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" This proclamation is then echoed from all corners of creation, "Blessing and honor and glory and dominion...to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

But what can this mean? Does not the eternal Christ already have all power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and dominion? What is there to receive that He doesn't already have?

While I realize we're treading in the realm of mystery here, I want to propose a possible explanation. In His act of creating the human race, there was a certain real divestment of the divine power and riches and wisdom and honor and dominion to those who were made in His image. Several of Jesus' parables reflect this process: a master entrusts his property to the stewardship of his servants for a period of time.

It is reasonable then, after the season we call history comes to a close, to realize that we who were given these divine treasures must not only give an account for how highly we valued them and how wisely we managed them, but we must now “return” them to their proper Owner.

And thus this glorious scene, when every being that exists both in heaven and on earth realizes that the Son of God is *worthy to receive* everything that has worth. By the Father’s great design, those treasures Christ possessed before creation have now in a sense increased in value. Because of the long and supremely costly season of His investment, His beauty and riches will now be carried in the faces and hearts of millions upon millions of His image-bearers throughout all eternity.

### **Application**

In that triumphal hour of worship we will finally understand what it means to say we are one with Christ. His glory in us, His wisdom in us and the “dominion” He grants us are nothing that we have or are separately from Him. How should this insight impact our thoughts about ourselves and what we value in this present season of time?

How might the understanding that everything of worth belongs to Jesus and we are merely His stewards help to clarify the nature and meaning of our present-day worship?

## To Walk as He Walked

### 1 John 2:3-6

*This is how we are sure that we have come to know Him: by keeping His commands. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," without keeping His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly in him the love of God is perfected. This is how we know we are in Him: the one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked.*

The modern mindset has tried to convince us that we have the power to establish our own truth. If we just believe hard enough, if we wish on the right stars, if our dreams are sincere, then not only will they come true—they ARE true.

The problem with this is that we know better. Saying something is true just isn't enough, no matter how many times we say it. So, consciously or unconsciously, we're always looking for evidence—which, of course, is exactly what we should do.

In this section of John's first letter, he seems very concerned that his readers test themselves to see if in fact they are believers, that they have actually "come to know Him." One of the four tests he describes is in today's passage, but if you're willing to go back to your Bibles for a moment, I'd like to point out all four.

First, 1 John 1:6 tells us, "If we say, 'We have fellowship with Him,' and walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth." Walking is an action word. It's what we do, where we go, whom we follow. If we have something to hide, we tend to stay in the shadows. The light is only welcomed by those who are willing to be exposed. Authentic fellowship with Christ means we have understood His gifts of grace and forgiveness, and in fact we eagerly desire Him to "cleanse us from all sin."

Today's passage applies the test of obedience. To walk as Jesus walked means to be at one with His Spirit who lives in us. It's important to realize that the oneness precedes the obedience, or said another way, the obedience is evidence of the oneness. Those who truly "have come to know Him" are those who love to keep His commands. To be sure, our perfection is a process, but it's one that He accomplishes only with our willing participation and consent.

Third, 1 John 2:9 points out the specific obedience Jesus is looking for. "The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother is in the darkness." The primary fruit of the reality of God's life in us is our ability to love as He does. Natural love is easily given to those who are lovable, but supernatural love enables us to love those whom we otherwise would hate. If we hate someone because of who they are or what they've done to us, it's a clue that we're still walking in the darkness.

The final test for the authenticity of our relationship with Jesus is found in verses 15 and 16 of chapter 2. Here John writes, "Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world."

This is the hard one, for there is much in us that wants to love the things of the world. Our flesh, our eyes and especially the temptation to define our lifestyles by the world's standards are powerful beyond our natural ability to resist. If we try to resist these things in our own strength, we will either become discouraged and ready to give up on Christianity, or else we will become proud of our self-generated perfections.

The only way to avoid these two ditches, according to John, is to be authentically inhabited by a "love for the Father." In other words, our focus will be on Him, not on ourselves and our goodness or self-discipline.

Drawing near to God by the power of the Spirit of Jesus accomplishes two important things. As we "walk in the light" under the glaring scrutiny of the standards of His holiness, we are immediately cast on His mercy for our very survival. But strangely enough, this process, while painful, becomes increasingly sweet as we discover that in fact we are made for the light and for Him.

And when this happens, the world will begin to look shabby. We'll lose our taste for its enticements, because we have begun to taste something far richer and more satisfying. You see, not only will we be walking as He walked, but also we'll be walking with Him!

### **Application**

Another evidence that is implied, I think, by John's list is that we will be drawn to people who are also serious about their walk with Christ, and we'll distance ourselves from those who are not. Think about your closest friends. Do they share your love of the light, or are they nudging you into the shadows?

For the people in your life who do not know Christ, are you willing for God's light to be visible in you in such a way that they will either be attracted to it or else will back away of their own accord? And if the latter happens, are you willing to let them go? See 1 John 2:19.

## Our Blessed God

### Ephesians 1:3-14

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, in Christ; for He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure that He planned in Him for the administration of the days of fulfillment—to bring everything together in the Messiah, both things in heaven and things on earth in Him. In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, so that we who had already put our hope in the Messiah might bring praise to His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in Him when you believed—were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory.*

In an earlier era of human history it seemed pretty obvious to anyone who thought about it that the sun, moon and stars circled around our earth. It was only after certain enlightened minds, aided by new scientific tools, began to look further that they realized their error, that in fact the sun was the center of things and the earth was not. They further began to understand how very dependent they were on the sun for the light, heat and energy that sustained their very existence.

In the opening lines of Ephesians Paul is essentially pointing out the centrality of God and the truth that, much like the sun, He is the source and sustainer of our spiritual existence. If you count the times Paul refers to “He,” “Him,” “His,” or to the various names of God, you’ll see they are mentioned nearly three times as often as “we” or “us.”

In fact, the entire focus of this glorious eulogy is summed up in the first phrase: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But what does that mean? How can God—who not only possesses every physical blessing but also is characterized by every perfection—how can He be further blessed?

The answer is spelled out in this passage. God is blessed when His glories are manifested more extensively throughout heaven and earth. And the greatest glory of all is found in the story of His relationship with us, His image-bearers and the future bride of Christ.

Because the story is so familiar to most of us, we rarely grasp the immensity of its significance. The sovereign God of the universe has chosen for no reason other than His own glory to bless us—to bless *us*—“with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” As Paul goes on, he uses important words like “chosen,” “adopted,” “favored,” “redeemed,” and “sealed” in an attempt to explain what we have been given.

But in a larger sense, God’s desire to give doesn’t find its culmination in what we have received or even in what we have yet to receive. If you look closely, you’ll see that the higher desire of the Father is to give the most astonishing gift possible to the Son whom He loves.

Paul says the “mystery of His will” is that “He planned...to bring everything together in the Messiah.” He later says it this way: “In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, so that we who had already put our hope in the Messiah might bring praise to His glory.”

This is how the Father is blessed, by bringing eternal joy to His Son. But of course, when God is most pleased and blessed, that blessing pours out into the entire universe. So there’s nothing wrong with our thinking about its impact on us as well.

What are some of the things Paul mentions that we’ll receive? One day we’ll be “holy and blameless in His sight.” Given the weight and weariness of our sinful flesh, that’s huge! One day we’ll be “lavished” with a grace that provides “all wisdom and understanding.” We’ll know more about God and His glories than we can scarcely now imagine.

But our greatest blessing, beyond anything we can humanly comprehend, is that we are chosen to be “adopted through Jesus Christ *for Himself*.” Our inheritance, our future destiny, is that we are a “redeemed possession” of our Messiah. We will belong to Him.

And when that happens, and as that happens, our lives become filled with the promises of this wonderful Scripture. We have forgiveness. We have hope. We know truth. And we will be filled with praises, the praises of the glory of our blessed God, now and into the unfathomable expanses of eternity.

### **Application**

Think about the astonishing fact that God has chosen to let us in on His grand and glorious plans. We’re used to various thinkers not only trying to explain history or current events, but even trying to anticipate the future. But however educated their ideas are about all these things, nothing touches the accuracy of God’s revelation. Let this become a source of awe and praise as you grow in your knowledge of Scripture.

The Spirit, writing through Paul, used various images that are connected to our earthly way of life, such as adoption, inheritance, and down payment. While they are indeed helpful in communicating divine truths, how are they actually more like shadows of those truths? In other words, think about how much more fully we become family through God’s adoption, how much richer will be the inheritance we receive, and how much more the down payment provided by the Spirit Himself completely guarantees that full inheritance.

## The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us

John 1:1-14

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man named John who was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Humanity encountered Jesus as a man, as flesh, as we are. We knew Him as a baby, as a carpenter, as a teacher, as one who ate and slept and grieved and prayed even as we do. We saw Him suffer and we watched Him die. And yet we also saw that He was a man unlike us—one who was without sin, one whose wisdom confounded the wise, one who could heal the blind and silence the storms, one to whom death itself ultimately bowed.

Who was this Man?

When John used the word *Logos* to identify Christ, it was as though he was grasping for a concept big enough to carry the immensity of the Man whom he had intimately known—and yet whom he had never really known.

The Greek word *logos* speaks of the rational principle that governs and develops the universe. It implies order, continuity, integrity and authority. In classical logic, *logos* is the art of persuasion by a demonstration of reasoned proof and logical appeal. The New Testament writers often used *logos* to simply mean word or communication or wise saying. Christ was all these, and yet infinitely more than these.

He was the *Logos* “in the beginning,” that is, at the opening point of history. God created everything we are and know through a spoken Word—Christ Himself. Paul later wrote, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). He also tells us that “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times [God will] gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). He is the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:8).

John also described Christ as life (*zoe*) and light (*phos*). Christ’s nature pulsates through our veins, and He illuminates our vision, our ability to apprehend and engage our world. This was our heritage as a race at creation, and individually at the moment of our birth. And yet there is a strange darkness that separates us from what we should see and the life we were created to live. It was this darkness, wrought by the sin of both our ancestors and ourselves, which necessitated the entry into history of the *Logos* as a human man.

If we try to expand our minds, hearts, emotions and wills to their furthest possible reaches, we will never come close to grasping the miracle that took place in one small town, in one small moment in history, when the infinite Creator of the universe “shrank” to the size of a human baby. Yet this is the miracle of which John speaks. Let’s read it again.

“The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

### **Application**

If you have come alive in Christ, it means that God has given you the ability to see the Light through the darkness and that you have been given the right to become His child. But John tells us this was not because you willed these things, but because God has willed them in you (verse 13). If this has not brought you to a place of humble and astonished gratitude, ask the Spirit to bring you to that place.

## The Exalted Christ Pours Out His Spirit on His People

Acts 2:29-36

*“Brothers, I can confidently speak to you about the patriarch David: he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to seat one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah: He was not left in Hades, and His flesh did not experience decay. God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this. Therefore, since He has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, He has poured out what you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says: The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah!”*

It is natural for us to see life as being linear, like a long continuous thread. This thing happens, then that happens, then because of that, this happens. But in this astonishing account of the birth of the church, Peter is filled with the Spirit of God and is thereby able to see life as God sees it—as a broad tapestry of events joined across history by a Master Weaver who stands above time.

In today’s passage this interweaving is especially fascinating. If we look closely at the prophetic Psalms that are passing through Peter’s mind, we will find an interesting overlap in David’s prophetic vision. Consider for example Psalm 16, which Peter has just quoted.

*I saw the Lord ever before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced. Moreover my flesh will rest in hope, because You will not leave my soul in Hades, or allow Your Holy One to see decay.*

David is somehow speaking simultaneously of both himself and of the “Holy One” who would be his descendent. After all, Peter notes, David’s body is in a tomb they can still see and has most certainly undergone decay. Yet his body also would *not* decay, for in his body when he spoke these prophetic words was the Son who would enter Hades and return to life before decay could begin.

It seems Peter is calling his brothers to a new understanding of their Jewish heritage. He is asking them to realize that the Patriarchs, including David, were not the foundation of truth, much less its final statement. Rather, they were forerunners, announcing through their very lives the coming reality of One who was and is eternal truth.

But this folding back of history upon itself in the matter of David’s relationship to the Messiah is only an example of the Master Weaver’s timeless design. The greater message in Peter’s words was that the same Spirit of God who quickened David’s heart and who had now exalted Christ to His heavenly throne is the Spirit who was at that moment “cutting to the hearts” of the people gathered in Jerusalem, calling them to receive Jesus as their Lord.

And gloriously, this is the same Spirit who thousands of years later still draws us to the cross and empowers us enter the tapestry of history as part of God’s redemption story.

## **Application**

In the fearful uncertainties of our day, it should help us to realize that God's design for this tapestry we call history is perfect and has never been interrupted or thwarted. How can we learn to lean into and find comfort in the biblical picture of His complete sovereignty over all human events?

Although David is usually known as Israel's greatest king, here Peter refers to him as a prophet. God's Spirit gave him the ability to see things in advance (v. 31). Have you ever stopped to think that God did not owe us these "advance notices" about His plans? How does this demonstrate not only His sovereignty, but also His great love for us?

## Christ's Spirit Within You

John 14:16-18

*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn't see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.*

Anyone who claims that Christianity is similar to other religions or is somehow derived from other religions has failed to understand the extraordinary significance of these few sentences spoken by Christ to His eleven faithful disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem.

Think about it. Here we see a clear distinction between the members of the Trinity. Jesus prays to the Father to send the Spirit: three individual Beings with three different actions.

And yet, Jesus also tells them that in the Spirit's coming, He Himself would be coming to them so they would no longer be orphaned. A few verses later He restates this promise, this time including the Father. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

One of the most serious blindnesses a true Christian can have, in my estimation, is the failure to grasp the ramifications of this reality. If all we know about our salvation is that we will be spared the punishment of hell, we are woefully lacking in our understanding.

Earlier Jesus spoke these words to a festival crowd in Jerusalem: "The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." John then explains to his readers, "He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were going to receive." (John 7:38-39)

The phrase "deep within" refers to a person's belly. Place your hand on your abdomen. Do you realize, if you are a true believer, that within your own body the Spirit of God, representing all three Persons of the Trinity, is *actually there*?

All living humans since Adam have God's breath in them, because that's what gives them life itself (Genesis 2:7). But a person who is reborn into Christ also has a radically different sort of Life, and it is this Life that can give us the assurance of our rebirth.

What does the flow of this "living water" Life look like? To begin, the Spirit transforms our temperaments. Romans 14:17 sums up the difference as "righteousness, peace and joy." 2 Timothy 1:7 lists "power, love and a sound mind." There are many other Scriptures which describe the astonishing new nature that becomes ours as the God of the universe "cleans up" His dwelling place—your body!

Moreover, God's Spirit equips us to do the work He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). He gives us words to speak (Luke 12:12), boldness to speak them (Acts 4:31), and (as our passage today reminds us) He enables us to perceive truth in a world filled with subtle and sinister lies.

What this means is there is no such thing as a “nominal” Christian, that is, a Christian in name only. Christians are those people who have come alive with new Life, a Life so astonishing and so powerful that they will glow with His beauty and overflow with His love. They will walk this earth boldly declaring His truth and willingly receiving the rejection Jesus received, knowing that—far from being orphaned—they are here today as His representatives, but soon they will be forever home with Him.

### **Application**

If you have been born again by the Spirit of God and are now one of His many temporary earthly houses, you should eagerly search the Scriptures to see what this miraculous transformation has given you and also what it requires of you.

If you can honestly admit that what I have been describing is not part of your experience, don't ignore the possibility that you may not yet have become one of His.

You will know the Spirit of God lives in you when your mind, your will and your emotions are clearly in the process of becoming more and more like Christ's (Romans 8:29). Even though your old nature still leans the other way, the Holy Spirit will give you the power to live as Christ lived. One of the strongest evidences that God's Spirit is alive in you is that you will have (as He does) a strong aversion to sin and a deep desire to please the Father.