

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to
the day of eternity.*

2 PETER 3:18

Christ our Treasure

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EDITORIAL

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

On behalf of the Sovereign Grace Leadership Team, I want to invite you to read the first edition of the Sovereign Grace Churches Journal. Written by Sovereign Grace pastors around the world, this resource aims to equip our pastors, strengthen the members of our churches, and celebrate the gospel values we share.

The theme of this first issue is “Christ Our Treasure.” We chose this theme because the primary passion and driving influence in our family of churches is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus is able to be our all-sufficient Savior. Through his perfect life and substitutionary death on the cross, he has offered a perfect sacrifice that made atonement for our many sins, purchasing our redemption and reconciling us to God. In response to this great salvation, we want to be a people who treasure Christ together. We plan to continue this theme in the journal’s second issue, which will explore the difference that treasuring Christ makes in the church and all of life.

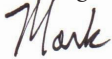
In this first issue, Jeff Purswell expands our view of Christ in a rich reflection on the Gospels entitled “Four Masterpieces: Jesus in the Gospels.” But our view of Christ isn’t limited to the New Testament, which is why Bruce Chick’s article “What a King Should Be: Reading 1 and 2 Kings” shows how the failure of the Old Testament kings revealed our need for the ideal King, Jesus Christ. Shawn Woo’s article, “In My Place: The Good News of

Penal Substitution,” eloquently and gloriously unpacks the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement. Doug Hayes also does a wonderful job of remembering and honoring our friend and fellow pastor, Wilbroad Chanda, who is now in glory.

I want to thank each of the pastors who have contributed articles to this first edition of our journal. I also want to thank our Executive Editor, Jeff Purswell, and our General Editor, Jared Mellinger. Jared has done the bulk of the work in assembling this journal, and I thank God for him and his labors on your behalf.

As you read through this journal, my prayer is that every article would help you treasure Jesus Christ with all of your heart, mind, and soul.

Treasuring Christ with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent initial "M".

TREASURING CHRIST TOGETHER: A DENOMINATION CENTERED ON THE SAVIOR

MARK PRATER

My wife Jill and I have been a part of Sovereign Grace for over 30 years now. Our lives have been transformed by the Christ-centered preaching we have heard and the Christ-centered fellowship we have enjoyed. Our small denomination is far from perfect, but there is no place I'd rather be laboring for the gospel.

The story of Sovereign Grace Churches over the past three decades is the story of a joyful, steadfast people who are centered on the Savior. 1 Corinthians 2:2 is the resolve that marks our history and continues to shape our culture: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Our churches are defined most deeply by our commitment to treasuring Christ together. This intentional emphasis on the person and work of Jesus Christ has marked our past, shapes the present, and is vital for our future as a denomination.

Building on the Main Thing

God, in his kindness, has continued to mature us over the years, but the

most important things have remained unchanged. I'm so grateful for our founder, C.J. Mahaney, who consistently pointed our family of churches to Christ and him crucified through his leadership and preaching. His preaching, example, writing, and leadership have been foundational in building Sovereign Grace. We treasure Christ more because God has used C.J. to help us grasp the significance and glory of the cross.

C.J.'s preaching also influenced the Christ-exalting songs that have been written and produced by Sovereign Grace Music, which we have been singing in our churches for over 30 years. And I remember life-changing discussions in small group meetings where we discussed C.J.'s book, *Living the Cross Centered Life*. That little book captures his life-message and has taught the pastors and members of Sovereign Grace to keep the gospel the main thing in our daily lives.

*Our mission is a
Christ-centered
mission with a
Christ-exalting
purpose.*

Motivated by God's faithfulness to us in the past, we endeavor to continue building our churches on the gospel. We want to plant and build churches marked by a commitment to Christ and an affection for Christ as we seek to treasure Christ together. We count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus

our Lord (Phil. 3:8).

The world around us defines itself by what it is against. But we want the people who walk into our churches to know what we are for. We are *for* the supremacy of Christ in all of life. We are *for* Jesus being exalted in our homes, our relationships, our workplaces, our communities, and in each of our churches. We are *for* seeking the glory of the Lord, not our own fame, in all that we do. By God's grace, we want to pursue an abiding joy in Christ, overflowing gratitude for Christ, and sacrificial generosity motivated by Christ. These are tangible expressions that we treasure Christ above all.

A Sure and Steadfast Anchor

Staying centered on Christ and his glorious gospel has provided a strong foundation for us. That foundation has proven to be unshakable as we have endured the various trials that God in his good and wise providence has

brought us as a family of churches. As we have navigated the storms, we have become all the more convinced that Christ is the “sure and steadfast anchor of our souls” (Heb. 6:19).

When sin seems to cling so closely, we continue to look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” so that we can run with endurance the race he set before us (Heb. 12:1-2). Because we have faced tribulation, accusation, and distress, we are even more certain that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35, 39). When God has used our trials to reveal our many weaknesses, we have been comforted knowing that we have a great high priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). By his shed blood, he has made a way for undeserving sinners to draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

Our churches, along with churches throughout the world in many denominations, are among the evidence that Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Focusing on Christ has made us a resilient family of churches as we have faced many dangers, toils, and snares together.

I don't know what trials may await us in the future. What I do know is that Christ loves his church, and remaining centered on him is the sure foundation we must continue to build upon. This will prepare us for whatever God's good sovereignty brings our way.

Making Christ Known

As we look to the future together, how does a small denomination that got its start in the United States fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations? By collectively staying centered on Christ, which fuels our commitment to see Jesus Christ known and honored among the nations.

Our goal is not simply to increase the number of churches in Sovereign Grace. Rather, we want to plant churches and partner with other like-minded churches who share our passion for seeing people from every tribe, tongue, and nation know Christ as their Savior and honoring him with their lives.

Our mission is a Christ-centered mission with a Christ-exalting purpose. For the day is coming when we will stand among a great multitude that no

one can number comprised of people from all tribes, peoples, and languages who will gather around the throne and sing, “salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9-11).

Until then, Christ’s mission remains in force, calling us to reach the lost with the message of Jesus Christ. But we will only be able to fulfill our mission if we remain centered on the reason for our existence, which is the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

What else would we rather be centered on? Christ alone is a treasure of inestimable worth. Year after year, the churches of Sovereign Grace have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Christ has saved us, he has brought us together as his people, he has guided and protected us over the decades, he is with us today, and he is the goal of all our future labors.

As a family of churches, we have always been about Christ and him crucified. My prayer is that by God’s grace, we will continue to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified for generations to come so that God alone receives the glory for all that we do together as a denomination.

MARK PRATER

Mark Prater is the Executive Director for [Sovereign Grace Churches](#) and serves as an elder at [Covenant Fellowship Church](#) (Glen Mills, PA).

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

JARED MELLINGER

“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8).

I grew up watching the Disney cartoon DuckTales, with Uncle Scrooge diving into his vault full of gold. He was the richest duck in the world, and he kept his three cubic acres of gold in a large storage building called the money bin. He had unimaginable riches, but even Scrooge McDuck’s money bin had a bottom. His wealth was measurable.

In Ephesians 3:8, Paul uses one of the greatest phrases in all of Scripture when he refers to “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” To say that the riches of Christ are *unsearchable* means they are immeasurable, unfathomable, unable to be exhausted. The riches of this world are limited, but the riches to be found in Christ are without limit.

And these are the riches God wants us to spend our lives diving into as believers.

Ordinary, Unimpressive Leaders

To become more impressed with Christ, we need to become less unimpressed with ourselves. I find it remarkable and instructive that Paul refers to himself as “the very least of all the saints.” Here is a man of unique importance in world history: confronted and called by the risen Christ, an author of New

Testament letters, an apostle to the gentiles. Yet he considers himself not only least among the apostles but also the very least of all the saints.

This is an honest and God-honoring self-assessment. Mature Christians will always see more weakness, sin, and shortcomings in ourselves than we do in others. The gospel teaches us to take a low view of ourselves and our accomplishments. We do not feign humility; true humility is simply a matter of being honest about how lowly, unworthy, and unimpressive we really are.

There is blessing and freedom in knowing ourselves to be the very least. I love that the first generation of Sovereign Grace leaders has often spoken of being ordinary pastors. As a second-generation leader, I am prepared to take pastoral leadership to whole new levels of ordinary and unimpressive. Each

one of us should strive to see ourselves accurately, as the least of all the saints.

*No one ever has
or ever will tire
of delighting in
Christ.*

We Preach Christ

Thankfully, “What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5). We are weak and unworthy; Jesus is majestic and awesome. We are poor and needy; he is full of abundant provision. And to every minister of the gospel, this unmerited privilege

has been given to *preach* the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The most challenging part of my job as a pastor, and the task at which I most encounter my weakness and inability, is seeking to unfold the beauty of Christ and the depths of his love for sinners. No ministry task is more exhilarating, challenging, and daunting than attempting to convey the unsearchable riches of the Savior. And yet, grace has been given for this purpose.

When Paul wrote letters to churches, his writings were full of Christ. When he preached, his sermons were full of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). Richard Sibbes once said that the primary work of a pastor is to lay open Christ. The Puritans filled volumes with sermons describing the glory of Christ in the gospel because this is the pastor’s calling and the message most needed by Christians and non-Christians alike.

A Treasure of Great Beauty

This is why we are commanded to look to Jesus (Heb. 12:2), to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4), to come to him (Matt. 11:28) and to abide in him (John 15:4), and to seek the things that are above, where Christ is (Col. 3:1). The Christian life is lived believing, studying, and enjoying the riches of Christ. Are you applying your mind and heart to the study of the unsearchable riches of Christ? There is no greater theme.

Consider the unsearchable riches of *the person of Christ*—we are not dealing with abstract ideas and dry propositions, but with an actual living person. Consider the unsearchable riches of *Christ crucified*—the Son of God loved you and gave himself for you! Consider the unsearchable riches of *the risen Christ*, who triumphed over death that we too would rise with him. Consider the riches of his glory, the riches of his grace, the riches of his offices and names, the riches of his return, and his eternal reign.

He is preeminent in everything (Col. 1:18), the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), the one in whom the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:9), the Savior who is all and in all (Col. 3:11).

He is a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, a stream of water in a dry place, and shade in a weary land (Isa. 32:2). He is the beautiful king (Isa. 33:17; Ps. 27:4), the beloved Son in whom the Father eternally delights (Matt. 3:17), the soul-satisfying bread of life (John 6:35), the treasure hidden in a field that we in our joy have sold all we have to attain (Matt. 13:44).

There's a treasure great in beauty
Far surpassing earth's great wealth
He is Jesus, Prince of Glory
Source of all grace, peace, and health
There's a fountain ever-flowing
Satisfying all who drink
He is Jesus, spring of joy
To all who hail Him as their King.¹

1. "HE IS JESUS." MUSIC AND WORDS BY STEPHEN ALTROGGE, 2003 SOVEREIGN GRACE PRAISE (BMI).

Searching Out the Unsearchable

The Christian's greatest responsibility is also his greatest privilege: to search out the unsearchable riches of Christ. No one ever has or ever will tire of delighting in Christ. The well of his glory will never run dry. Trends come and go in culture and ministry, but Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We must pray that our hearts would daily be directed, not toward the things of earth or passing trends, but to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thess. 3:5).

There is simply no better way to spend our time and energy. No subject will ever be more glorious, more soul-strengthening, and more satisfying. Jesus lives forever to satisfy us with his love, to comfort us with his presence, to fill us with his joy.

God is calling the churches of Sovereign Grace to behold even more of the excellency of Christ than we ever have before. Let's press on to cultivate a deeper sense of the preciousness of Christ and the greatness of his love for us. Let's count everything as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8), and pray that we would grow in the knowledge of him (2 Pet. 3:18) for the glory of his name.

How do we view ourselves? The very least of all the saints. How do we view the pastor's calling? To preach Christ. And how do we view Christ? He is the king of unsearchable riches. Praise God; all that we need is found in Christ our treasure.

JARED MELLINGER

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OUR PROPHET, PRIEST AND KING

JOSH BLOUNT

“In what different ways does Jesus fulfill Old Testament promises about himself?” asks Question 58 of our family’s catechism book. To which my kids respond (on a good night): “He came to be a prophet, priest, and king!” The three offices of Christ are simple enough for a child, yet profound enough to be studied by the greatest of theologians and scholars.

In the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards said, “There is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.”¹ Christ is the Lion and the Lamb, exalted and humble, majestic and meek, full of justice and grace. The three offices of Christ are yet another way to behold the “diverse excellencies” of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian should grow in their knowledge of Christ, which includes understanding and treasuring his distinct work as prophet, priest, and king. This knowledge of Christ nourishes and transforms us in our daily lives.

What does it mean that we have a Savior who is our Prophet, Priest, and King?

A Prophet Who Reveals

In one sentence, here is the meaning of Christ’s prophetic office: “Long ago,

1. [HTTPS://WWW.MONERGISM.COM/THETHRESHOLD/ARTICLES/ONSITE/ADMIRABLE.HTML](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/admirable.html)

at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). There’s a past—“long ago”—and a present—“now.” There’s a continuity between the past and the present—“*our fathers*,” and “*us*”—and what unites us with the fathers is that we are both those to whom God speaks.

But what divides *then* from *now* is Jesus. “At many times and in many ways” —there’s a summary of all Old Testament revelation, of every genre and era. But now, a different kind of speech: “... he has spoken to us by his Son.”

The writer of Hebrews is reflecting what the Father himself proclaimed at Jesus’ baptism. As Calvin put it, “The Voice that thundered from heaven, ‘This is my beloved Son...hear him’...exalted him by a singular privilege

beyond the rank of all others.”² The prophetic word—the word that plucks up and breaks down, builds and plants (Jer. 1:10) that gives life to dead bones (Ezek. 37:4)—*that* word became a man. Jesus is our final Word, and we need no other!

*Who interprets all
of life, all of reality
for us? Jesus.*

Who reveals the Father’s will to us? Jesus. Who interprets all of life, all of reality, for us? Jesus. Whose words

comfort our suffering, correct our sin, and call us out as his chosen people? His words. This Prophet does not need to say, “Thus says the Lord...” but instead, “*I say to you...*” His words to us—ours for all generations through his commissioned apostles (John 14:26) and the written Word—give us life. They define us, past, present, and future. We have a prophet—his name is Jesus.

A Priest Who Saves

Perhaps this office seems more familiar to us. Christ, our Great High Priest, has offered himself as a sacrifice in our stead. Once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that we might be reconciled to God.

This, as Calvin said, “is the principal point on which ... our whole salvation

2. CALVIN, *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION*, 2.15.3.

turns.”³ If we have no priest, we have no salvation. But we do have a Priest! What all the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings pointed to, in one supreme act of obedience Christ has fulfilled. The Old Testament sacrifices were necessary but temporary. Our Priest’s sacrifice was also necessary but eternal: “he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26).

And yet, there is more. Our Priest’s work is not done. He will never need to make atonement again, yet he ever lives to make intercession for us. “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

Have you drawn near to God through Christ? Your Priest will save you to the uttermost. No extremity of life in a fallen world can thwart him. Your Savior is praying for you. When you sin, his very presence at the right hand of God as the exalted yet nail-scarred Son testifies to all of heaven: those sins are remembered no more. When your faith is weak, he is praying for you so that your faith will not fail. We have a Priest—and his name is Jesus.

A King Who Reigns

Lastly: the one who speaks to us, whose sacrifice and prayers save and sanctify us, also rules the world. And he does so *for our benefit*.

Make no mistake—it is not as though the eternal Son lacked power and then at some point received power. From eternity past to eternity future, Father, Son, and Spirit are absolutely sovereign. Yet, something new has happened in human history. At a point in time, on a single Sunday morning, the crucified Savior was raised to life. The Son took on our flesh to taste death (Heb. 2:14). The good Shepherd walked into the valley of the shadow of death and laid down his life for his sheep. And then—*he rose*.

At a point in time, on a single Sunday morning, our King crushed the head of the serpent, triumphed over the rulers and authorities, and delivered us from fear of death.

And then, forty days later, our King sat down on his throne. Visibly and bodily ascending into heaven, he assumed his rightful place of honor—but

3. *INSTITUTES* 2.15.6.

now, and forever, as the Incarnate Son. This whole movement, from the opened tomb of Easter Sunday to the opened heavens of the ascension, is what Paul describes in Ephesians 1:20-22. And yet, it ends with a surprise. God the Father has put all things under Christ's feet ... and given him as head of all things to us, the church (1:22). Our King rules for his glory and our benefit. "He rules," Calvin wrote, "more for our own sake than his."⁴

And the kingship of Christ points us to his coming kingdom. We taste the kingdom now, but we have not inherited the kingdom. Yet. The day of Christ is coming. Lord's Day by Lord's Day, it is one week nearer. And even now, living between the times, our King rules. "Thus it is that we may patiently pass through this life with its misery, hunger, cold, contempt, reproaches, and other troubles—content with this one thing: that our King will never leave us destitute, but will provide for our needs until our warfare ended, we are called to triumph."⁵ We have a King—and his name is Jesus.

Have you pondered and praised the diverse excellencies of our Savior? All that we need is found in him! "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

Consider the perfection of our Savior. Learn to apply his offices to your daily life. Hear and treasure his Word. Rest in his sacrifice, and rely on his intercession. Submit to his rule, and rejoice in it. And spread the good news—he came to be a Prophet, Priest, and King!

Jesus, Your name is glorious
Our Prophet, Priest, and King
Jesus, You're reigning over us
And forevermore
Your praises we will sing⁶

4. *INSTITUTES* 2.15.4.

5. *IBID.*

6. "JOIN ALL THE GLORIOUS NAMES," ORIGINAL WORDS BY ISAAC WATTS, MUSIC AND ALTERNATE WORDS BY BOB KAUFMAN, 2000 SOVEREIGN GRACE PRAISE (BMI)

JOSH BLOUNT

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THE WONDERFUL NAMES OF JESUS

CARLOS CONTRERAS

When a beautiful diamond is observed, it is carefully examined with a magnifying lens, and the viewer marvels as its many facets radiate and reflect the light shining upon it. In the same way, Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God” (Heb. 1:3). As we carefully look at him through the many facets of his names found in Scripture, we can behold the glory of our Lord (2 Cor. 3:18).

Jesus is the name that an angel told Joseph to give the baby in Mary’s womb. Jesus means “the Lord saves” because “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). But Jesus is not the only name for the Son of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is revealed in many wonderful names, titles, and images throughout Scripture.

My goal is not to cover all of the names and titles of Jesus in Scripture, nor to attempt to rank them and cover the most important ones, but to selectively reflect on a few of the many ways Scripture refers to Jesus. Each designation calls us to worship, to trust, and to obey the glorious one behind the names.

The Light of the World

In the book of John, Jesus refers to himself with a whole range of names that point to his unique identity. His “I am” statements echo both God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:14), as well as the litany of “I am” proclamations in Isaiah’s Book of Comfort (chapters 40-55). Among these statements, Jesus announces, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).

When Jesus was born, light came into the world: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4). Jesus is the life-giving light who delivers us from the kingdom of darkness and makes us children of the light. Those who follow him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life (John 8:12).

We once dwelt in deep darkness, and we loved the darkness because our works were evil (John 3:19). But the true light has enlightened us, giving us the light of life and guiding our path. I must remember this as I confront the daily darkness of living in this fallen world. Trials, failure, and the uncertainty of life can darken our hearts with sorrow, worry, and despondency. But the light of the world has come, and he promises to turn the darkness before me into light (Isa. 42:16).

The Good Shepherd

*As our shepherd,
he lovingly
oversees his church
and each one of us.*

It is also in the gospel of John that Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). He is the one who leads the sheep (John 10:3) and lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). In Psalm 23, David calls him “my” shepherd and concludes, “I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1). If Christ is our shepherd

leading us and caring for us, what more can we want?

As our shepherd, he lovingly oversees his church and each one of us. We hear his voice and follow him; He gives us eternal life, and we will never perish (John 10:27-30). All who belong to him are secure in his sovereign care, and he has promised that no one can snatch us from His hand (John 10:28).

It is this name that I must always remember when I see our congregation and evaluate my own work as His under-shepherd. I must remember that ultimately it is Christ who leads his sheep—it is he who cares for them and feeds them and protects them. What a wonderful feeling it is to rest under the knowledge that he is our great shepherd and that we will never be led astray under his tender care.

The Prince of Peace

Centuries before his birth, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the one to come as the “prince of peace” (Isa. 9:6), for in him God has reconciled sinful men to himself and each other (Eph. 2:14-18). As a prince, he conquers his enemies and reigns victorious; as the prince of peace, his victory issues not a reign of terror for his subjects but a reign of peace, unity, and joy.

Because Jesus is our Prince of Peace, we are no longer children of wrath. God is for us. We were reconciled to God through our Savior’s death while we were still sinners and thus enemies of God (Rom. 5:8-10). Now that we are reconciled, we can be sure that we will be saved by his life, for Christ lives as our peace and intercedes for us at the right hand of God. He also gives us peace with each other, empowering his church to live in harmony and to maintain the bonds of peace. How we need our Prince of Peace every day!

The Rock of Refuge

There are various ways Christ is described as a rock or stone, each with distinct significance. Peter calls Jesus a Living Stone upon which we are being built up (1 Pet. 2:4-5). Paul identifies Jesus as the “Rock”—the spiritual rock from which Israel drank and was refreshed (1 Cor. 10:4). The Psalms speak of a stone that would be rejected (Ps. 118:22). The prophet Isaiah points forward to Christ when he describes the one who will be like “the shade of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). Jesus Christ is, therefore, our foundation and strength, our strong fortress and deliverer, our stronghold and shield in whom we take refuge.

I can’t count the times I have needed him to come to be my refuge. The enemy “prowls around like a roaring lion” to intimidate us (1 Pet. 5:8), but Christ in us is greater (1 John 4:4). When people oppose us or speak against us falsely, when the economy falters, or we experience loss, we can quickly fall into fear or despair. But it is then that Christ emerges as our great rock of refuge, able to keep us from stumbling (Jude 24).

It is the power of Christ that guards and keeps us. He stands with us to strengthen us in his might so that we can stand firm against all this life throws at us (2 Tim. 4:17). I sometimes look back on my life and consider the many difficulties I have faced. Every difficulty is a testimony to the security and faithfulness of Christ our rock, and I can only praise him.

O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer
Strong defender of my weary heart
My sword to fight the cruel deceiver
And my shield against his hateful darts

My song, when enemies surround me
My hope, when tides of sorrow rise
My joy, when trials are abounding
Your faithfulness, my refuge in the night¹

A Glorious Savior

Jesus is my song, my hope, and my joy. So much more could be said of the glorious names, titles, and descriptions of Jesus. He is the bread of life who alone can satisfy (John 6:35), the true vine who causes us to bear lasting fruit for his glory (John 15:1), the Resurrection, and the Life who gives us eternal life (John 11:25). He is Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8), the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5), and the bright morning star (Rev. 22:16).

He is the Lord our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6). He is Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). He is the man of sorrows who was smitten by God (Isa. 53:3-4) and the lamb of God who takes away our sin (John 1:29). But death could not hold the Prince of life (Acts 3:15)! He is the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), the last Adam who swallows up death in victory (1 Cor. 15:45), the Redeemer who lives forever (Job 19:25). He is the head of the church, the overseer of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25), the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

What a glorious Savior! There is no one like him! Jesus is named with many names in Scripture, and the more we learn of him, the more we treasure him. Resolve to study his names and know them well. Explore the majesty and the preciousness of our Lord. In every name he is given, there is something distinct to thrill our hearts and transform our lives.

1. "O LORD, MY ROCK AND MY REDEEMER." MUSIC AND WORDS BY NATHAN STIFF, 2017 SOVEREIGN GRACE WORSHIP.

CARLOS CONTRERAS

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JESUS LOVES ME? EXPERIENCING THE HEART OF CHRIST

BEN KREPS

In the world of Christian children's songs, I think we can all agree that one song stands above the rest in prominence and familiarity. It's a song that first appeared in the 19th-century book, *Say and Seal* by Anna and Susan Warner. In the story, a young boy named Johnny is sick. His teacher, Mr. Linden, visits him at his sickbed. Struggling to communicate, little Johnny whispers a request for his teacher to sing. Mr. Linden responds by singing these words:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so:
Little ones to him belong,
They are weak but he is strong.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Yes, it does, and Jesus comes to us through the Scriptures and tells us so in the Gospel of John when he says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:9).

In this verse, Jesus unfolds his very heart—the essence of his love and his desire for us to experience his love. Dane Ortlund writes in his valuable book *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*,

The Jesus given to us in the Gospels is not simply one who loves, but one who is love; merciful affections stream from his innermost heart as rays from the sun¹ . . . In short: *it is impossible for the affectionate heart of Christ to be over-celebrated, made too much of, exaggerated*. It cannot be plumbed. But it is easily neglected, forgotten. We draw too little strength from it.²

Let's not neglect or forget the love of Christ. Instead, let's celebrate and draw strength from the one who is love and who loves us with the deepest affection.

*There has never
been a moment
that the Father has
wavered in his love
for the Son.*

The Essence of His Love

John 15:9 is simply stunning. Most of us probably don't think this way on a daily basis. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." What kind of love does Jesus have for his own? The same love that the Father has for him. What kind of love is that?

It is Eternal. Jesus describes the eternal love that the Father has for the Son later in John when he says, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). There has never been a moment throughout all eternity that the Father has wavered in his love for the Son.

It is Perfect. As all that is in the Father is perfect and free from fault or blemish, so his love for the Son is perfect and unwavering.

It is Boundless. As God in all his glory and attributes cannot be contained, so the Father's love for the Son is boundless in its feeling and expression. As the 19th-century preacher Archibald Brown once wrote: "Grasp, if you

1. DANE ORTLUND, *GENTLE AND LOWLY: THE HEART OF CHRIST FOR SINNERS AND SUFFERERS* (WHEATON, IL: CROSSWAY, 2020), 27.

2. *IBID.*, 29.

can, what that love is that dwells in the heart of the Father toward the Son—and then, and not until then, will you know what is the love in the heart of Jesus toward you.”³

This love is an ocean with no distant shore, a mountain with no peak or summit, a galaxy with no boundaries, a vast plane of beauty that stretches to eternity. This is the essence of the love of Christ for you—the same love that is in the heart of the Father for the Son.

The Experience of His Love

This love of Christ is not merely a feeling in his heart but the impetus for his cross. Romans 5:8 says, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

His great love is for the sinner, for the undeserving. If we want to know the greatest expression of his love, we must look to the cross on which the Prince of Glory died to atone for our sins and to bring us to God. This is the fullest revelation of the love that is in his heart for you, and this love, revealed at the cross, flows from the heart of the risen Christ and reaches into our daily lives.

As Jesus reveals the essence of his love, he also invites us into a lifestyle of experiencing his love. “Abide in my Love” (John 15:9). Take residence in my love. Make your home in my love. This is the most gracious of invitations to the undeserving. As we see his great love and follow him in trusting obedience, we enjoy a deepening experience of his mighty love. Wonderfully, we learn that the Holy Spirit is eager to help us to experience the love of Christ when Paul provides a prayer for all of us to pray, asking that the Spirit may give us “strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19).

The Effect of His Love

Have you ever considered that Jesus is even more concerned about your joy than you are? He says two verses later in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.” The

3. [HTTPS://WWW.GRACEGEMS.ORG/29/CHRISTS_LOVE_FOR_HIS_REDEEMED.HTM](https://www.gracegems.org/29/CHRISTS_LOVE_FOR_HIS_REDEEMED.HTM)

effect of understanding the essence of his love and abiding in his love is fullness of joy. He aims to implant his joy into us. This is a joy that reaches into our daily experiences of failure, suffering, and loss.

“What,” I think I can hear one of you saying, “Do you mean to say that Jesus loves me just as much when I am depressed, and deep down in the dark valley—as when I am full of sunshine and standing on the mount of God?” Yes, I do, dear friend, quite as much. *His love was never begotten by anything he saw in you*—and can therefore never be changed by anything about you.⁴

In your difficult trial, in seasons of suffering, in experiences of failure and the battle against sin, Christ has not and will not ever stop loving you. He will never abandon, never forsake, never cast you out. His love is such that if your entire world collapses, he will still be present to love you and to take you to himself forever. That is reason enough for the fullness of joy in every season!

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Let every Christian hear the Savior and know and believe his Word. He loves you; he loves you now and forever.

4. IBID

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THE PERSON AND SAVING WORK OF CHRIST

THE SOVEREIGN GRACE CHURCHES STATEMENT OF FAITH

Editors' note: Sovereign Grace Churches is a confessional family of churches. Our Statement of Faith represents a summary of the teaching of Scripture on key points of doctrine essential to the beliefs, conduct, and witness of our churches. Sections on "The Person of Jesus Christ" and "The Saving Work of Jesus Christ" are included here to celebrate the glory of Christ our treasure. The full Statement of Faith, with Scripture references included in each section, is available on our website at sovereigngrace.com.

The Person of Jesus Christ

Incarnation and Two Natures

In the fullness of time God the Father sent his eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world as Jesus the Christ. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, taking on himself a fully human nature with all its attributes and frailties, yet without sin. In this union, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in the one person of the divine Son without confusion, mixture, or change.

Our Redeemer acted in and through both his human and divine natures, in ways appropriate to each, with both natures being preserved and neither diminished by the other. Yet both his human and divine natures are united and find expression in the one person of the eternal Son. Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is fully God and fully man, able to be our all-sufficient savior and the only mediator between God and man.

Earthly Life and Ministry

As God's incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God, fulfilling God's saving purposes and all Old Testament prophecies about the One to come: he is the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant, and God's appointed Messiah. As such he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and lived a sinless life in complete obedience to his Father. Jesus entered into full human existence, enduring the common infirmities, temptations, and sufferings of mankind. He perfectly revealed the character of God, taught with divine authority and utter truthfulness, extended God's love and compassion, and demonstrated his lordship through the working of miracles and the exercise of divine prerogatives.

Death, Resurrection, and Reign

Having fully obeyed his Father in life, our Savior was also obedient unto death. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dying a substitutionary death for the sins of his people. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead on the third day, vindicating his identity and saving work as God's Messiah and guaranteeing the defeat of death, our future resurrection, and the glorification of our physical bodies. Forty days later Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, where he is now enthroned at the right hand of God, reigning over all things, and interceding for his people as their Great High Priest. One day he will return to judge all people and angels, putting all his enemies under his feet and dwelling with his people forever.

The Saving Work of Jesus Christ

The Humiliation of Christ in His Saving Work

In the entirety of his life and death, Jesus Christ humbled himself to serve as our mediator in obedience to his Father's saving purposes. As the second

Adam, his sinless life of wholehearted obedience to God's law obtained the gift of perfect righteousness and eternal life for all of God's elect. In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people, Christ offered himself by the Spirit as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God's law by paying the full penalty for their sins. On the cross, Christ bore our sins, took our punishment, propitiated God's wrath against us, vindicated God's righteousness, and purchased our redemption in order that we might be reconciled to God and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.

The Efficacy of Christ's Saving Work

God the Father was pleased to accept Christ's sacrifice as a complete atonement for sin, raising him to new life and vindicating his identity and work as the Messiah. For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness requires no further sacrifice for sin, nor is there any human achievement or merit to be added to Christ's accomplishment. The atoning work of Christ is wholly efficacious, securing the full salvation of all the elect by purchasing the forgiveness of sins, the gifts of faith and repentance, eternal life, and every other blessing that comes to God's people. As the sole and sufficient atonement for sin, Christ's saving work is to be proclaimed to all people without exception as the only means of reconciliation with God. There is no other mediator between God and man than our Savior, Jesus Christ, and he will receive with redeeming love all who come to him in faith.

The Exaltation of Christ in His Saving Work

The exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, ascension, and reign reveals the full glory of his mediatorial work. Raised by the power of God, Christ triumphed over sin, death, and Satan, and, as the firstfruits of the new creation, gives eternal life to all who are united to him by faith. Having ascended to the Father's right hand, Christ pours out the Spirit on his people and intercedes on their behalf as a Great High Priest, constantly advocating their cause and granting them access into God's presence. As the exalted Lord, Christ reigns with all authority as universal king and head of his church, governing the affairs of men and nations and empowering his people to be victorious over sin and Satan. The consummation of Christ's saving work will occur when he returns to judge the world in righteousness, deliver the kingdom to his Father, and receive eternal worship as King of kings and Lord of lords.

IN MY PLACE: THE GOOD NEWS OF PENAL SUBSTITUTION

SHAWN WOO

There is no greater message in all the world than this: the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice in place of sinners, bearing the wrath of God that we deserve to redeem us by his blood. This is the good news that has changed our lives forever. It's called the doctrine of penal substitution.

John Stott describes the importance of this doctrine when he writes, "The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives that belong to God alone; God accepts penalties that belong to man alone."¹

Over the last century, many contemporary scholars have questioned the merits of penal substitution as a model for understanding the atoning work of Christ. Some argue that it is unbiblical; others protest that it's illogical, incoherent, or immoral.

1. JOHN R. W. STOTT, *THE CROSS OF CHRIST. 20TH ANNIVERSARY*, (DOWNERS GROVE, IL: INTERVARSITY PRESS, 2006), 159.

Our concern is not primarily scholarly; it is pastoral and practical. Doctrine exists for doxology and devotion. But for the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary death to function in our lives, we must understand the Scriptural basis of penal substitution.

The Satisfaction of God's Wrath

I've heard it said that it was God's love and not God's wrath that drove Jesus to the cross, but this is a false dichotomy. God's free and sovereign love is indeed the ultimate impetus behind the atonement: "for God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But continuing that thought, John writes, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the *wrath* of God remains on him" (John 3:36).

*The lamb was
substituted to
save Israel, God's
firstborn Son.*

Love answers the question of why God wills to save, but it does not answer the question of why God saves in this particular way. Once God "in love ... predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:4-5), the atonement became a consequent necessity by the wrath

of God toward sinners.

As God's enemies (Rom. 5:10), we were accursed objects of his righteous wrath (Eph. 2:3). Yet, it is in this very state of alienation that Christ, by his death, reconciles us to God. On the cross, he drank the cup of God's wrath (Luke 22:42) down to the dregs so that not a drop of it remains for those who have peace with God.

The mistake is sometimes made of viewing God the Son as the merciful one and God the Father as the wrathful one. But there is no internal conflict between the persons of the Trinity. The Father and Son are united in their wrath against sin and their love for sinners.

God in love sent Christ to willingly propitiate and satisfy the wrath of God. Christ is, therefore, the "propitiation for our sins" (1 John. 2:2; 4:10). Paul explains that "God put forward [Christ Jesus] as a propitiation by his blood,

to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Rom. 3:25). God had formerly passed over sins, calling into question his righteousness, but with the satisfaction of his wrath by Christ's propitiatory sacrifice, God's justice is now vindicated.

David Wells sums it up this way: "In Pauline thought, man is alienated from God by sin, and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated."²

Sacrificed as Our Substitute

The entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of Christ as our substitute. When God's "firstborn son" (Exod. 4:22; see also Ps. 89:27; Jer. 31:9), Israel, was enslaved and cruelly oppressed in Egypt, and when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let them go, God struck down all the firstborn sons of Egypt, but passed over the Israelites who slaughtered a "lamb ... without blemish" (Exod. 12:5) and smeared its blood on the doorposts and the lintels of their houses.

The lamb was substituted to save Israel, God's firstborn Son. And every year thereafter, the Israelites commemorated that deliverance by eating a Passover lamb. They also sacrificed every firstborn male animal and redeemed every firstborn Son in remembrance of the Passover (Exod. 13; Num. 18:15-16).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering on behalf of the Israelites (Lev. 16:5) to make atonement for the people (Lev. 16:24). He sacrificed one goat as a sin offering for the people (Lev. 16:15), and then, after laying both his hands on the head of the other live goat, and confessing over it "all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins," he sent it away into the wilderness so that the goat might "bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area" (Lev. 16:20-22).

The sacrificial animals were substituted for the sins of Israel since "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). "For the

2. DAVID F. WELLS, *THE SEARCH FOR SALVATION* (EUGENE, OR: WIPF AND STOCK PUBLISHERS, 2000, 29).

life of the flesh is in the blood, ... for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev. 17:11). God's justice demands that life be given to atone for sin. Every sinner needs a substitutionary sacrifice.

Although the sacrificial system functioned for the nation of Israel, it was never efficacious in itself but pointed to a greater reality to come. The centuries of sacrifices were merely "a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities" (Heb. 10:1), for "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). It is only through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all that those who are being sanctified are perfected for all time (Heb. 10:10-14). "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Jesus, God's only Son, has been sacrificed as our substitute to make atonement for sin. He is "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). He is the promised Messiah upon whom "the LORD has laid ... the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "One has died for all, therefore all have died" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Hallelujah, What a Savior

This is amazing love—the good news of penal substitution. Because Christ died the death we deserve, fear and shame are gone, and our future is secure. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We live every day in the good of knowing we have peace with God through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Our Statement of Faith explains this glorious truth:

In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people, Christ offered himself by the Spirit as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God's law by paying the full penalty for their sins. On the cross, Christ bore our sins, took our punishment, propitiated God's wrath against us, vindicated God's righteousness, and purchased our redemption in order that we might be reconciled to God and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.

Penal substitution faithfully and gloriously expresses the meaning of Christ's saving work. The questions that should concern us the most are not the questions and objections of the critic but the questions of sinners like us

who deserve only judgment. *Why should the innocent Son of God be condemned in the place of a sinner such as I? Why should the King suffer for this ungrateful subject who caused his pain? Why should Jesus pay for my debt? Why should he bear my punishment? Why should he die for a wretch like me?*

Why should I gain from His reward?

I cannot give an answer.

But this I know with all my heart:

His wounds have paid my ransom.³

3. TOWNEND, STUART. HOW DEEP THE FATHER'S LOVE. THANKYOU MUSIC, 1995.

SHAWN WOO

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WHAT A KING SHOULD BE: READING 1 AND 2 KINGS

BRUCE CHICK

Every book of the Bible reveals something unique about the glory of Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus explained to his disciples on the road to Emmaus how all of Scripture concerns himself. The hearts of his disciples burned within them as the Lord opened the Scriptures (Luke 24:32), and our hearts should experience the same as the Spirit of the living God enables us to behold the glory of the Lord in every page of Israel's history.

In 1 and 2 Kings, we learn that none of Israel's kings ultimately fulfilled God's plan for a just and merciful leader. It was as if the regal robes sagged over every king's slender shoulders with whopping necklines and drooping wrinkles, like a preschooler wearing his father's oversized t-shirt. No matter how hard commendable kings like Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah tried, even they fell woefully short of the ideal due to their sinful hearts.

Yet even in these historical accounts, the word of God fills us with hope and leads to the burning heart of seeing Christ. "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). 1 and 2 Kings reveal God's merciful character and prepare the way for a true and better king.

Yearning for the Ideal King

Israel was a privileged nation that experienced many blessings from God, but it longed for something better. Most kings were far from commendable (only five were commended by the author), and not only did they not wear the mantle well, but they were often hell-bent on despising their calling and dragging Israel down with them to the deplorable depths of the surrounding nations.

For the better part of over 400 years, the book of Kings (the Hebrew Bible does not divide the books into two) describes a divided Israel searching for someone to fill out these robes who would worship God with total commitment, purge idolatry, and uphold the Law of God both personally

*His mercy not
only trumps their
failures but yours
and mine as well.*

and nationally. But instead, these royal leaders often made things worse. And the divided nation found itself unified only in disappointment and a communal yearning for the ideal king.

The bottom line for all 42 kings was that not one set of shoulders were broad enough to shoulder what a king *should be*. All were inadequate.

So why should a Christian read such a depressing, antiquated book like Kings that depicts both people and rulers who are consistently disloyal and besmirched with failures?

One reason is to behold and appreciate afresh the unmatched character of God's faithfulness displayed in the lives of an underserving yet beloved people. Sometimes, we see best when we do not see what is best. As you read Kings, you will undoubtedly be keenly aware of the frustration and longing that all of Israel deeply felt. Still, you will also encounter the wonder of the unsurpassed character of Yahweh, revealing his excellency and beauty. And in beholding his character, hope is kindled in our hearts for the one these kings are preparing us for.

Beloved of the Lord

There is an aspect of God's character in Kings that shines forth as the sun,

beckoning his people like flowers to bend towards their source of life and hope. Repeatedly, we see the unfailing mercy of God on display.

At first glance, the modern believer might feel a little challenged to connect his life to these 42 kings, especially the book's first king, Solomon (1 Kings 1). Not many can relate to his varied skill set, riches, responsibilities, and gifting. But the connection with the reader is not tethered to the income, wisdom, or achievements of Solomon. Rather, it's found in the story of his father, King David, who intentionally committed adultery and murder and tried to secretly cover up an illicit pregnancy until outed by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12).

Tragically, David's sin resulted in the death of the innocent child born from the adultery he committed with Bathsheba. And yet, God's mercy is bestowed upon undeserving David with the birth of another child from Bathsheba whom David names Solomon, which means "peace." And because God wanted to communicate even more than the "peace" this child would later bring Israel, he sent Nathan the prophet to name the child Jeddediah, which means "beloved of the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

God was still committed to his covenantal promises. His affection towards his undeserving people had not changed. Solomon, despite the circumstances surrounding his parents, was to be "beloved of the LORD." No matter his accomplishments or moral failures later in life, every time the name of David's son was mentioned, it was a testimony and reminder of God's unfailing mercy to a failing people—a people *beloved of the LORD*.

You see, before Solomon was the envy of the Queen of Sheba, before he was a world-renowned architect, before he was Israel's most successful king, he was first a child of grace. This connects directly to the story of our lives. We too can marvel at the reality of being a 'child of grace' and 'beloved' by God because of His unmerited mercy shown to us in Christ, mercy shown to "brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose [us] as the firstfruits to be saved" (2 Thess. 2:13).

Mercy for Manasseh

Another example of God's merciful character shining forth in the middle portion of the book of Kings is the story of Manasseh. Despite a godly heritage (Manasseh's father was King Hezekiah), Manasseh ushered in a culture

of death to the nation of Israel unlike any king before him by purposely reversing every one of his father's godly reforms.

Countless prophets and innocents were slaughtered during Manasseh's reign. (Tradition names Manasseh as the king who ordered the slaying of the prophet Isaiah by sawing him in two). Altars to Baal and Asherah were erected everywhere, while Manasseh encouraged the practice of witchcraft, fortune-telling, homosexuality, and the worship of the starry host. He not only burned his son as an offering and provoked the Lord to anger with flagrant evil (2 Kings 21:6), but he also set up a phallic idol in the middle of the Temple where tapestries of illicit designs were hung in the holy places, constituting a brothel in the midst of the most sacred of sites.

His reign is a turning point in the history of Israel, a tipping point of no return. Israel will go into exile, and Manasseh's deliberate rebellious she-nanigans were to blame (2 Kings 21:11-15).

And yet, after Manasseh was humbled by God through Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, he cried out to Yahweh, who was said to be "moved by his entreaty" (see 2 Chron. 33:15-17 regarding his genuine repentance). Manasseh's story proves that God's heart of mercy is shown even to the vilest of sinners. He longs to be gracious with the wayward and the undeserving! He is "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6).

Friends, this is astounding! Even Manasseh? Yes! And there is mercy for you and me as well. How? Because Jesus' shoulders were broad enough to bear the weight of the wrath of God for every heinous sin, and his innocent blood was shed that even the worst of the worst is not beyond the reach of his hand or the scope of his mercy.

The Triumph of God's Faithfulness

One more instance of God's mercy comes at the end of the book. The last four verses of the book of Kings strangely focus on Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah), the king who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was carried off to Babylon only to remain imprisoned for 37 years while in exile. Unexpectedly, after Nebuchadnezzar dies, his son Evil-Merodach frees Jehoiachin, exalts him among all other captive kings, provides for him at the king's table, and gives him a pension to provide for his own needs (2 Kings 25).

Surely, this is a kindness and mercy of God to a disgraced king. But it is much more. This mercy extends beyond King Jehoiachin to the entire nation because it reminds the reader that a living relative of David survived the invasions, sieges, and deportation. He was a living relative who had a son while in captivity (Shealtiel), who in turn had a son in exile (Zerubbabel), and these men carried on the Davidic line that would one day produce the long-awaited Messiah (Matt. 1:1-17).

God's highest mercy is his faithfulness to the covenant promises he made to his covenant people. Despite the hot mess the vast majority of the reigns of the kings of Israel embodied, God's faithfulness and mercy triumphed still. His promises are sure! His mercy not only trumps their failures but yours and mine as well. "Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds" (Ps. 36:5).

Only a King whose shoulders are broad enough to keep covenant even unto death, to safeguard all his promises and extend unfathomable mercies to his beloved could ever qualify to fill out the royal robes of righteousness that were befitting the ideal king. From Solomon to Manasseh to Jehoiachin, the book of Kings produces a longing Jesus alone could fulfill.

Only Jesus is what a king *should be*. Only he could shoulder such a burden and immaculately wear the royal robes so well. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

BRUCE CHICK

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FOUR MASTERPIECES: JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

JEFF PURSWELL

Those old enough to remember Y2K will recall the exhilaration surrounding the turning of a new millennium. The days leading up to 1/1/2000 buzzed with euphoric celebrations, historical retrospectives, futuristic prognostications, and—most feverishly—fears of a technological meltdown of apocalyptic proportions.

Getting in on the act was the *National Catholic Reporter*, which sponsored an art contest to create a new image of “the Jesus for the next millennium.” In an interview for NPR, the sponsor of the contest explained its rationale: “Artists are forward-looking people; and as we consider who Jesus might be and where Christianity might be going in the next century, we thought that an artist might have the answer.” And so it fell to visionary artists to create a portrait of Jesus suitable for a modern age—a “Jesus” borne not of divine revelation but a painter’s imagination.

Upon hearing this interview, my initial dismay soon gave way to a sober realization. This contest was not altogether different from what we are all prone to do—what *I’m* prone to do—when it comes to Jesus. Instead of looking to Scripture’s inspired portrayal, we craft our own personalized image of Jesus. Because an image we create is an image we can control. We want

a “Jesus” who is useful to us—shaped by our circumstances, catering to our desires, forwarding our personal agendas. The result is a portrayal that often looks suspiciously like ourselves.

Nothing demolishes such funhouse mirror, Christological creations like an encounter with the true Jesus. And the place where we can have such an encounter is in the four Gospels of the New Testament.

Looking for the Wrong Person

People derive many different things from the Gospels. Conservative scholars, battling attacks on the truthfulness of the Gospels, have at times focused on their historical details (a vital task, to be sure) to the detriment of their message. Preachers mine the Gospels for models of moral behavior to emulate

or avoid—Peter’s boldness (or pride), Mary’s submission, Zacchaeus’s tenacity. Neither focus is necessarily wrong, but both can divert us from the primary goal of these books.

*To read the
Gospels ... is to be
exposed to God
himself.*

Surely all of us have succumbed to a more subtle temptation when approaching the Gospels. In his book *Lost in the Cosmos*, the great southern writer Walker Percy perceptively asks, “Why is it that, when you are shown a group photograph in which you are present, you always (and probably covertly) seek yourself out?” Busted. However innocuous such self-focus may seem, it can utterly sabotage our reading of the Gospels. We hold in our hands a photo album filled with snapshots of incomparable beauty, but our eyes stray from the main character as we immediately try to find *ourselves* in the picture. “What are *my* storms that Jesus will calm?” “How can I overcome *my* temptations as Jesus did?” “If I have enough faith, maybe Jesus will heal *me*, too!” And all too quickly, the majesty of Jesus on display—his glimmering moral purity, or his deeply-felt compassion, or his uncompromising obedience, or his unrivaled authority—is eclipsed as we nudge ourselves into the frame.

To avoid the allure of man-centered or moralistic interpretations, we must keep in mind the purpose of the Gospels.

“We beheld his glory . . .”

Scholars have reached a virtual consensus as to the genre of the gospels—the kind of literature the evangelists intended to write and, therefore, how we are intended to read them. Although different labels are used, the gospels are perhaps best viewed as *theological biographies*.¹ The significance of such a designation is two-fold. First, the Gospels are supremely about Jesus!² Although they differ from modern biographies, they are nevertheless concerned about factual details concerning Jesus (“biography”). They faithfully record events in his life, the substance of his teaching, the focus of his ministry, the nature of his person.

But these are not *bare* details. The evangelists, under the inspiration of the Spirit, utilize these details, arranging them in various ways, applying them to their audiences’ needs, all to proclaim Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and Lord (“theology”). This informs how we are to approach the Gospels. We receive them as reliable accounts testifying to the greatest of all of God’s saving acts in history³, and we *listen* to them—carefully, reverently, expectantly—as they reveal to us the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, who came to disclose God to us and to accomplish the redemption of his people.

To read the Gospels, then, is far more than learning “facts about Jesus”; it is to be exposed to God himself in the person of his Son. In speaking of his apostolic ministry, Paul uses a somewhat curious phrase in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God *in the face of Christ*.” He doesn’t say “the glory of God *in Christ*” or “the glory of God *in the teaching about Christ*.” Why “face”? There appears to be something about the incarnation, the “in-fleshing” of God in the person of Jesus, that reveals the glory of God in a unique way.

That’s what we find in the Gospels. We not only learn precious truth *about* Jesus, but we *see* Jesus—acting in power, teaching with authority, loving with

1. THIS IS THE TERM PREFERRED BY CRAIG L. BLOMBERG, *JESUS AND THE GOSPELS: AN INTRODUCTION AND SURVEY*, 2ND ED. (NASHVILLE: B&H, 2009), 122. THE TITLE OF CRAIG KEENER’S MORE RECENT BOOK WELL CAPTURES THE NATURE OF THE GOSPELS: *CHRISTOBIOGRAPHY* (GRAND RAPIDS: EERDMANS, 2019).

2. IN HIS AUTHORITATIVE WORK ON GOSPEL GENRE, RICHARD BURRIDGE DRAWS THIS CONCLUSION: “IF GENRE IS THE KEY TO A WORK’S INTERPRETATION, AND THE GENRE OF THE GOSPELS IS BIOZ, THEN THE KEY TO THEIR INTERPRETATION MUST BE THE PERSON OF THEIR SUBJECT, JESUS OF NAZARETH.” *WHAT ARE THE GOSPELS?: A COMPARISON WITH GRAECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY*, 2ND ED. (GRAND RAPIDS: EERDMANS; DEARBORN, MI: DOVE, 2004), 248.

3. RICHARD BAUCKHAM’S FASCINATING BOOK *JESUS AND THE EYEWITNESSES: THE GOSPELS AS EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY* (2ND EDITION. GRAND RAPIDS: EERDMANS, 2017) EXPERTLY EXPLORES THE CHARACTER OF THE GOSPELS AS WHAT THEY CLAIM TO BE: EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY. FOR A THOROUGH TREATMENT OF THE HISTORICAL ACCURACY OF THE GOSPELS, SEE CRAIG L. BLOMBERG’S *THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF THE GOSPELS*, REV. ED. (NOTTINGHAM: APOLLOS; DOWNERS GROVE: IVP, 2007).

compassion, rebuking the proud, embracing the outcast, and suffering, resolutely but alone, for our sins. It is staggering to consider that, through the inspired words of the Gospels, we are afforded an experience like that described by the apostle John: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Why Four?

This implies the importance—indeed, the genius—of having four gospels, and not just one. If all that mattered was a simple timeline of Jesus’ life, then a detailed, summary account which compiled all the data, canceling out repeated items and smoothing out all the differences, might suffice as a historical record. But the Gospel writers give us far more. Each writer provides a brilliantly conceived, finely textured account of Jesus’ life and ministry on earth. Each writes from his unique vantage point and perspective. Each proceeds with his own theological emphases and pastoral concerns, portraying and applying the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus in distinct yet complementary ways.

Among the many masterpieces produced by Rembrandt are his self-portraits—which themselves are many, numbering over one hundred! Produced throughout his career, these works portray him from different angles, in different moods, with different colors and uses of light capturing different expressions and nuances of emotion. Far from being redundant, these works create something of a visual diary of his life in all its variety, development, and artistic expression, such that our understanding of Rembrandt and his work would be impoverished without them.

So it is with the Gospels. Like four masterpieces of the same majestic Subject but drawn from different angles and using a wide palette of colors, each one highlights different dimensions and perceives varied implications of the person and work of Jesus. As Leon Morris put it, “Jesus is such a gigantic figure that we need all four portraits to discern him.”⁴ Jesus was too big, his significance too momentous, his life too beautiful and complex to be captured in just one presentation. But with four, we get a nuanced, multifaceted portrait of Jesus in all its depth, texture, richness, and power.

4. LEON MORRIS, *STUDIES IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL* (MILTON KEYES: PATERNOSTER, 1969), 107.

Although we can hardly begin to scratch the surface here, even a glance suggests the splendor that awaits us in each of these masterpieces we call the Gospels.

Matthew: The Promised Messiah

The opening verse of Matthew signals a wealth of this Gospel's concerns. This book's subject will be "Jesus Christ"—"Christ," indicating his proper title as God's anointed one, the Messiah. As the "son of David," Jesus is the heir to David's throne, the long-awaited king of Israel who would rescue and rule over God's people. He is also the "son of Abraham," harking back to the founding of the old covenant people of God and also looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham that "all the nations of the earth" would be blessed in him (Gen. 18:18; 22:18). This is the promise later echoed in Jesus' concluding commission to go and "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). Already the reader encounters Jesus not as a novel preacher but as a long-awaited royal figure who fulfills the hopes of Israel, even as through him God's ancient promises expand to embrace the entire world—including us, the readers.

More encounters await. The very structure of this Gospel, organized around five large blocks of Jesus' teaching, portrays Jesus as a teacher *par excellence*, the authoritative revealer of God's will. His proclamation of the "kingdom of heaven" (32 times in Matthew) reveals that God's saving reign has now arrived, present in his very person. The theme of *fulfillment* pervades this Gospel. Jesus' life not only fulfills Old Testament prophecies but also patterns of God's actions in history; even the Mosaic Law is fulfilled in Jesus (Matt. 5:17-20), as the one to whom it pointed and in whom it finds its ultimate meaning. In all this and so much more, we encounter Jesus as *the long-awaited Son of David who brings the history of God's people to a climax, fulfilling all the Old Testament and inaugurating the kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection.*

Mark: The Suffering Servant

In the early centuries of the church, Mark's Gospel was often symbolized by the lion, an apt picture for the Jesus we encounter in this book. This Gospel lacks the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke and the opening theological reflection of John. Instead, Jesus breaks onto the scene, teaching "with authority" (1:27) and demonstrating that authority through healings

and exorcisms. The reader can't miss the repeated use of "immediately," punctuating this as a vivid, fast-paced account. But there is theology in Mark's style: through Jesus, God's kingdom is breaking into human history with decisiveness and force. Jesus' words and actions evoke highly charged responses and prompt human characters to constantly question (and misperceive) his identity (1:27; 4:41; 6:3). The reader, however, alerted both by Mark's headline in 1:1 and the testimony of supernatural voices (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7), realizes that the Son of God is powerfully exercising God's reign over Satan and rolling back the effects of the fall.

This exalted portrait is counterbalanced in the second half of Mark's Gospel, with its slower pace and inexorable march toward the cross. Here we learn, in perhaps the theme verse for the book, that this mighty Messiah has supremely come, not to rule as a tyrant but, like Isaiah's suffering servant, to die as a ransom for many (10:45; cf. Isa. 53:10-12). In so doing, he also blazes a trail for his followers, who are called to follow his example of self-denial (8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:42-45). The reader, then, receives another glorious portrait of Jesus, as *the mighty Son of God who comes as a suffering Messiah, dying as a ransom for God's people*.

Luke: The Savior of the World

It might surprise the casual reader to learn that, of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), only Luke uses the words "Savior" and "salvation." Indeed, for Luke, Jesus is supremely the Savior, and the theme of salvation pervades this Gospel like a recurring musical theme does a symphony.⁵ Its opening notes in the infancy narrative point to the universality of God's salvation, from the genealogy which reaches all the way back to Adam (3:38) to Simeon's recognition that God's salvation will be a light "to the Gentiles" (2:32). This reaches a climactic expression in the story of Zacchaeus, the final act of Jesus' public ministry before entering Jerusalem: "For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:10).

Luke's readers will also be struck by the compassion of Jesus. Jesus' humanity shines through as he reaches out to the outcasts and the disenfranchised of society. Women play a prominent role in this Gospel, and comfort, salvation, and blessing are especially promised to the poor (1:53; 4:18; 6:20;

5. THIS METAPHOR COMES FROM I. HOWARD MARSHALL, *LUKE: HISTORIAN AND THEOLOGIAN*, 3RD ED. (DOWNERS GROVE: INTERVARSITY, 1988), 97.

14:12-14; 16:19-31). We see Jesus feasting with “tax-gatherers and sinners,” and he makes a tax-collector the unlikely hero of a parable (18:9-14), as he also does a despised Samaritan (10:25-37). Even in the throes of execution, Jesus mercifully promises Paradise to a convicted criminal. The reader of Luke will find great reassurance (cf. 1:1-4), beholding Jesus as *the Savior of the world who seeks out the lost*.

John: The Word Made Flesh

It is not surprising that the symbol for John’s gospel among some church fathers was the eagle, for the author, as it were, takes flight to see beyond Jesus’s earthly life to the Son’s eternal existence. John’s “In the beginning” (1:1) intentionally echoes Genesis 1:1, placing this story in a cosmic frame and disclosing that Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the eternal divine Word “made flesh” (1:14).

Here we come to the core of John’s presentation of Jesus: in his incarnation, Jesus has revealed God himself. He is the ultimate self-disclosure of God—particularly his steadfast love and faithfulness (“grace and truth,” 1:17; cf. Exod. 34:6-7). The reader learns from John’s unique terminology for Jesus’ miracles (“signs”) that these are not simply miraculous displays of power, but revelatory pointers to his glory as God’s unique Son (2:11; cf. 20:30-31). And as the one sent from the Father, Jesus offers to those who receive him in faith “eternal life” (17 times in John)—true, spiritual life; resurrection life; the life of the age to come—which can, by the new birth, be experienced now (4:14; 5:24; 6:47, 54; 10:28; 17:3; cf. 10:10; 11:25-26). And so John presents a final glorious portrait of Jesus as *the eternal Son who perfectly reveals the Father and gives eternal life to all who believe in him* (20:31).

Despised and Rejected

Even the briefest glimpse at these four masterpieces would be incomplete without noting the most prominent feature of each of the portraits. With all of their richly textured diversity, they are united in their intense focus on the death of Christ on the cross. This involves not only the space devoted to the events of Christ’s death (Martin Kähler famously called the Gospels “passion narratives with extended introductions”⁶) but the way in which the cross casts its shadow far back into the narratives. Already in the first chapter

6. MARTIN KÄHLER, *THE SO-CALLED HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE HISTORIC, BIBLICAL CHRIST*, TRANS. CARL E. BRAATEN (PHILADELPHIA: FORTRESS, 1964), 80, N. 11.

of Matthew, we learn that Jesus “will save his people from their sins” (1:21). In Mark 2:19, Jesus speaks of the bridegroom being “taken away.” In Luke 2:35, Simon prophesies to Mary that, because of this child, “a sword will pierce through your own soul also.” And in John’s very first chapter, we hear John the Baptist’s pronouncement that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29). Christ’s sacrificial death is no appendage to these narratives but the climax to which each is inexorably heading.

Once we arrive at Jesus’ passion, the four evangelists each provide unique facets of the glory we behold there. With the centurion’s confession in Mark 15:39, we see Jesus’ death as not only the culmination of his work as a suffering servant (Mark 10:45) but also confirmation that he is “the son of God”—the first time in the Gospel this title appears on human lips. Matthew’s passion narrative contains a number of cosmic events—signs both of judgment and the arrival of the new age—to confirm that Jesus’ was no ordinary death but truly an eschatological event. Luke is the only Gospel writer to include Jesus’ ascension (which he will repeat in Acts 1), highlighting the ongoing authority of Christ through those who will proclaim the gospel “in his name” (24:47). For John, the ignominy of Jesus’ death is transformed into the moment of his greatest glory. The “hour” we have been awaiting (cf. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20) finally arrives—the moment when the Son of Man will be glorified (12:23). And thus, the hideous cross is transformed from an instrument of death to a royal throne from which Jesus reigns, vanquishing death and all the powers of the evil one.

Four Portraits, One Jesus

Endless displays of beauty await us in the four Gospels of the New Testament. Yet, despite their unique perspectives and presentations, behind them all lay the same, glorious figure. All four testify to one sent from God, with unique authority, possessing divine attributes and exercising divine prerogatives, who came to make God known, to vanquish all the ancient enemies of humanity, and to bring the saving power of God to a fallen world. Indeed, Jesus claimed that people’s eternal destiny hung on their response to himself. For all there is to admire and marvel at in these portraits, it will all be meaningless apart from faith in Jesus as one’s Lord and sin-bearer.

And so, through the portraits that are the Gospels, Jesus not only comes to us, but he confronts us. He challenges our conceptions of him. He corrects

our assumptions about him. He claims our exclusive allegiance. And he calls us to live differently in light of who he is and what he has done.

Those who receive this Jesus—the *authentic* Jesus—will find in the Gospels deep gladness with every sighting of him, satisfaction in savoring him, peace in beholding his power, strength in hearing his promises, and hope in awaiting his return.

This was the burden behind one of the most significant books written by one of the most significant pastors in the 19th century. J.C. Ryle was not content only to teach sound doctrine; he wished believers to be familiar with Christ *himself*. To this end, his exhortation continues to draw believers to the treasure we have in the Gospels. May it draw us as well:

The Gospels were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Ghost has told us the story of His life and death, His sayings and doings, four times over. Four different inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Saviour. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love, His power are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses. Ought not the sheep to be familiar with the Shepherd? Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with the Saviour? Beyond doubt, it ought to be so. The Gospels were written to make men familiar with Christ, and therefore I wish men to study the Gospels. ... Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word nor a deed, nor a day, nor a step, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labor to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.⁷

7. J.C. RYLE, *HOLINESS: ITS NATURE, HINDRANCES, DIFFICULTIES, AND ROOTS* (DURHAM: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 1979), 191-192.

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10 GREAT BOOKS ABOUT THE GOSPEL

C.J. MAHANEY

“The gospel cannot be preached and heard enough, for it cannot be grasped well enough,” wrote Martin Luther.¹

By God’s grace I have been a Christian for 49 years. I agree with Luther—I still cannot hear the gospel enough. Each morning I seek to preach the gospel to myself through my study of Scripture and the strategic reading of supplemental books about the cross. Here’s why: I awaken each day with a tendency to forget that which is most important, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because I am prone to forget, I must create practices that will enable me to remember what I must not forget.

So each day I seek to spend time in a location where I am not distracted, unhurriedly reading and meditating on Scripture and finding my way to a hill called Calvary. I want to meditate daily on Christ and him crucified. I need to fix my eyes, today, on the one who loved me and gave himself for me. I cannot live on yesterday’s recollection of the gospel.

The same is true for every pastor and every member in Sovereign Grace. We

1. EWALD M. PLASS, *WHAT LUTHER SAYS: AN ANTHOLOGY*, VOL. 2 (CONCORDIA: ST LOUIS, MO, 1963), 563-564.

need to review and rehearse the gospel each day or we will assume the gospel, forget the gospel, and prove vulnerable to all manner of temptation and sin.

So here are some of the books I have read and re-read as a supplement to Scripture that have provided insight into Scripture and have been a means of grace to my soul. As I read these books I am reminded of the gospel, I experience deepened affections for the Savior, and I am freshly amazed by grace. I invite you to join me in reading these great books and experiencing the transforming power of the cross.

1. *The Cross of Christ* by John R. W. Stott (20th anniversary edition: 2006), 380pp.

I'm not sure the opening line of a preface—not even the first chapter—of

May each

Sovereign Grace

pastor cast his

anchor here at the

cross.

any other book I've read has affected me. This one did.

Stott opens by writing, "I count it an enormous privilege to have been invited by InterVarsity Press to write a book on that greatest and most glorious of all subjects, the cross of Christ." If you looked in my book I have a check mark on the left, part of the sentence underlined ("that greatest

and most glorious of all subjects"), and to the right of that is a star. These marks are my simple and feeble attempt to communicate on this book the immediate impact of this sentence upon my soul.

I can remember thinking for just a moment, Is that sentence just hyperbole? Is that well-meaning exaggeration from someone who has just finished writing a book on this topic? Quickly I realized this was not hyperbolic, not a well-meaning exaggeration, but an accurate statement from a man deeply affected by this topic.

This opening statement reflects the clear teaching of Scripture. The only question left unanswered was, Does that statement reflect my heart, personally and pastorally? Do I view the cross of Christ as "that greatest and most glorious of all subjects?"

I can certainly say that if I wasn't fully convinced at the outset of this book, soon into it I was convinced.

This is one book I grab off the shelf when I pull away for an extended period of time in order to survey the wondrous cross. I have read from it and been deeply affected by it countless times.

But I don't assume everyone who reads this book will have the same experience. The important point is that we have a set of supplemental books that help us in our comprehension of the most important book (the Bible) and serve our souls in drawing our attention to Christ and him crucified. I would recommend that every Christian build a small library of books where that experience can take place and their hearts can be refreshed when necessary.

I really cannot turn a page of *The Cross of Christ* without wanting to read and quote from it. I think that in many ways you can locate the theological origin for my passion for the cross in this book.

2. *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever (2008), 192pp.

I love the title. It's rare to come across a title that in itself arrests my attention and affects my soul. So from the first time I looked at this title to each time I have returned to this book, I find myself pausing and allowing these six words to lead me to worship Christ: *In My Place Condemned He Stood*. I encourage you to reflect on the title until it stirs your soul.

The book is worth the price, not only for the pieces by Packer and Dever, but also for Ligon Duncan's chapter titled "Books on the Cross of Christ" and a lengthy annotated bibliography (pp. 145–180). What he provides for us here is the largest breadth of recommendations related to books available on the cross of Christ and the atonement. With each book there is a paragraph description of the uniqueness and contribution of each volume. These valuable appendices alone make this book a unique gift to pastors.

3. *Saved from What?* by R.C. Sproul (2002), 128pp.

"This may be the most important book that you will ever read in your life" (9), writes Lane Dennis in the foreword of this book. He's right. R.C. Sproul writes to address a major problem: "I think the greatest point of unbelief in our culture and in our church today is an unbelief in the wrath of God and

in His certain promise of judgment for the human race” (22-23). Notice that he doesn’t just think this is a problem for people out there; this is a problem in the church as well. If Christians are going to rejoice in being saved, it is essential that we can answer the question, “Saved from what?”

So, can you answer that question? Do you know what you’ve been saved from? Sproul explains, “when the Scriptures tell us that God saves us, that salvation is of the Lord, we tend to forget that salvation is also *from* the Lord.” The gospel is such good news because the bad news is so bad: “The last thing in the world the impenitent sinner ever wants to meet on the other side of the grave is God. But the glory of the gospel is that the One from whom we need to be saved is the very One who saves us. God in saving us saves us from Himself” (25).

Saved from What? left me amazed at the gospel, especially at the mercy of God in rescuing sinners like me from the wrath of God through the substitutionary death of Christ. I still turn to this little book to be freshly awed by the glory of the gospel. “We are saved *by* God, *from* God, *for* God” (121).

4. *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* by Graham A. Cole (2009), 296pp.

This is a technical but reader-friendly addition in the NSBT series (New Studies in Biblical Theology). And not only is it detailed and readable, but I found it to be deeply moving, too. Many times throughout this book as I read about the atoning sacrifice of our Savior I ceased reading, looked up from the book, and broke into song. (In the interest of full disclosure, this often happens when I read. I am a noisy reader and often break into song while reading.)

God the Peacemaker is a wonderful book that explains why God’s intention to restore shalom (peace) to his creation requires the death of Christ. Cole writes in the introduction:

We live in a troubled world. As I write, there are reports of a devastating cyclone in Myanmar, an earthquake in China, fighting in the Sudan and Iraq, shooting death after shooting death on the south side of Chicago. The list could go on and on. The waste of human life is enormous. ... Yet Christians believe in a good God who as the Creator has never lost interest in his world. The key evidence and the chief symbol of

that divine commitment is the cross of Christ. ... Central to the divine strategy is Christ, his coming and his cross. The troubles and calamities will end (19).

In recent years there have been many books that emphasize God's restoration of shalom, but too few that highlight the central role of the cross in this plan.

5. *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* by D.A. Carson (2010), 176pp.

In the preface Carson writes,

Nothing is more central to the Bible than Jesus' death and resurrection. The entire Bible pivots on one weekend in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago. Attempts to make sense of the Bible that do not give prolonged thought to integrating the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are doomed to failure, at best exercises in irrelevance (11).

This book is not only not doomed to failure but destined to serve readers in their appreciation of the gospel as Carson expounds on both the death and resurrection of the Savior. As Mark Dever says in his endorsement, "This professor can preach. These are model messages on crucial passages." They are crucial passages, presented as a model of exegesis and exposition. The book is developed around five core passages: Matthew 27:27–51, Romans 3:21–26, Revelation 12, John 11:1–53, and John 20:24–31. Pastors can easily adapt this structure and use these passages to develop a sermon series to serve their churches.

6. *Atonement*, edited by Gabriel N.E. Fluhrer (2010), 142 pages.

This is a compilation of messages delivered over the years at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Contributors include J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, and Sinclair Ferguson. In his preface, editor Gabriel Fluhrer opens the book with these pointed words: "This is a book about blood and it soaks every page" (ix). And a little later he writes,

Today, along with other great doctrines of the Christian faith, the doctrine of the blood atonement of Christ is under attack. It is derided as 'cosmic child abuse' and traded for a grandfatherly sentimentalism that muffles the piercing cries of the Savior being nailed to the cross. The

pride of our sin dilutes the simple, clear, and shocking teaching of the New Testament: God killed his perfect Son to save hate-filled rebels from the wrath they deserve (x).

The messages included in this book were finely chosen.

7. *It Is Well: Expositions on Substitutionary Atonement* by Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence (2010), 224pp.

This series of sermons was published out of concern over the neglect of the gospel in the life of local churches. In the preface Dever writes,

Have you wondered about the cross lately? Have you wondered where it is in your own church, or in your own life? It's our prayer that these meditations will help you re-center your life on God's sacrifice for us in Christ and join in the celebration that's going on eternally as the saints in heaven praise God for the Lamb who was slain for us (15).

Like Carson's, this book can provide a pastor with a sermon series on the gospel. The 14 sermons are presented in canonical order on these texts: Exodus 12, Leviticus 16, Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Mark 10:45, Mark 15:33–34, John 3:14–18, 11:47–52, Romans 3:21–26, 4:25, 5:8–10, 8:1–4, Galatians 3:10–13, 1 Peter 2:21–25, and 3:18.

8. *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* by Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach (2007), 384pp.

Sadly, this book was needed because of distortions and criticisms of the doctrine of penal substitution. The book was designed to protect the church from errors that (to a surprising degree) have become popularized through those who are professing evangelicals. And *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* is a unique gift to the church.

But this book has immeasurable devotional value as well. And through this book and the passages they teach from, you will—by God's grace—survey the wondrous cross where the Prince of Glory died and will be freshly amazed by grace.

This book is necessary to help protect the gospel in the church, but also it's a personal gift to Christians in their study of what Mr. Stott calls "that

greatest and most glorious of all subjects, the cross of Christ.”

9. *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness Of Jesus As Savior* by Stephen Wellum (2017), 352pp.

Let the following sentences from Dr. Wellum’s outstanding book whet your appetite for this book:

“The work of our Lord Jesus Christ is unique and incomparable, and central to it is his death” (193).

“At the center of the NT, indeed all of Scripture, is the atoning work of Christ” (194).

“The Gospels are deliberately written to stress the centrality of Christ’s death for understanding his identity and work. Apart from the cross, we cannot grasp him and the entire rationale for his coming” (195).

“From beginning to end, Jesus viewed his death as central to his work” (197).

And I could go on and on. I recommend every Sovereign Grace pastor read this book, particularly the two chapters on penal substitution.

10. *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement*, by Donald Macleod (2014), 272pp.

This book is a must-add to my list. What Mr. Macleod writes in the Preface explains why:

Any first-century missionary who prided himself on rapport with his audience would have kept silent about the cross. It was a ‘most vile death’, and the idea that the Son of God could save the world by dying would have seemed both scandalous and ridiculous.

Things are no different in the twenty-first century. Yet from first-century Corinth to modern Korea, the story of the cross, and the doctrine of penal substitution, have brought peace to millions who have faced the truth about themselves, and light, joy and power to drifting lives.

In my case, if I may paraphrase the dying words of John Knox, this is where I first cast my anchor; though the surrounding theological seas

have always had their own fascinations it is this rock that really matters. I owe it everything, and all that remains now is to see it from within the veil (9).

Regardless of the tumultuous theological seas that surround us at this time, may each Sovereign Grace pastor cast his anchor here at the cross. This book will help you to do just that.

BONUS: 11. *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* by D.A. Carson (2004), 144pp.

Finally, for me no list is complete without recommending D.A. Carson's fine book, *The Cross and Christian Ministry* for pastors or those who may aspire to ministry.

Page after page, my copy of this book is marked up. Sentences are underlined, checked, bracketed, starred—all simple reminders of this book's importance in my life.

From Carson's exposition of 1 Corinthians chapters one through four, it's clear the cross must occupy and enjoy the central place in my soul and in my pastoral ministry. But that cross is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place. And dismissed by what? According to Dr. Carson, "Relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight."

And here is another great quote from this book: "He [Paul] cannot long talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally tying it to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross-centered" (38).

Every time I preach, every text I address, every topic I teach, must be derived from and related to the cross. And at some point in my sermon that must be obvious to those who are listening. And if it's not obvious I have not truly preached the gospel or truly executed my unique pastoral role to serve them with the gospel. Dr. Carson goes on to discuss how this commitment to being cross-centered must shape not only our message but our style of ministry, too.

This whole book is peppered with choice wisdom to protect a pastor from assigning centrality and excessive authority to peripheral insights. *The Cross*

and Christian Ministry has defined (and still defines) pastoral ministry for me.

Reading about the Gospel

I am grateful that we have many wonderful (and affordable) books about the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need these books because we cannot read enough about the gospel. We cannot read enough about the gospel because we cannot grasp it well enough.

What a joy to recommend these books, each with the potential to impact your life as you preach the gospel to yourself daily!

Editors' note: A version of this article first appeared on the website of Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville.

C.J. MAHANEY

C.J. Mahaney serves as senior pastor of [Sovereign Grace Church of Louisville](#) (Louisville, KY).

YOUR LABORS ARE NOT IN VAIN: THE LIFE OF WILBROAD CHANDA

DOUG HAYES

One of the many endearing qualities of my Sovereign Grace ministry partner and dearly departed friend, Wilbroad Chanda, was his regular, conversational quotation of the word of God. He prayed the word, counseled the word, encouraged the word. In the mundane moments of life as well as in the pulpit, our brother Will thought and spoke in the language of the Bible.

As a result, I think I will always hear certain Scriptures in his voice. Certainly, that's true of the beautiful biblical encouragement (widely quoted by other Zambian Christians as well), "Your labors in the Lord are not in vain." I will likely never read that phrase again without hearing an echo of Wilbroad's big, booming baritone in my mind.

How fitting, then, to hear that passage (1 Cor. 15:50-58) read aloud at Wilbroad's funeral. His own labors—which the Lord deemed complete on January 18, 2021—were eternally valuable precisely because Christ was at the center of them. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ has not been raised, Wilbroad Chanda was a man most to be pitied; he toiled in futility. But because Christ in fact has been raised, the labors this man devoted his life to will resonate for all eternity. His labors indeed were not in vain. And they were many.

Connection to Sovereign Grace

I first met Wilbrod when he was nearing completion of his MDiv studies at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. After reading and benefiting from *Why Small Groups?*, he reached out to Sovereign Grace and ended up attending the Small Group Leaders Conference in November 2002. I was preparing for my first trip to Africa the next month, so I invited Wilbrod to my home after the conference. Thus began one of the most treasured friendships and gospel partnerships of my life.

After graduating from seminary and returning to Zambia with his wife and four sons, Wilbrod resumed leadership of Ndola Baptist Church, in the center of his nation's third most populous city. Though he was a faithful preacher at a large church with a full calendar, the Lord had additional labors in mind for him.

*He was passionate
about proclaiming
truth in every way
he could.*

Abounding in the Work of the Lord

When the HIV/AIDS epidemic devastated families in his community and left countless orphans and street children in its wake, Will and his wife Zicky responded by founding [Lighthouse Christian School](#)

in 2005, with an initial class of six kindergarten students and a vision to serve many more in the years to come. In 2006, [Covenant Mercies](#) began sponsoring fatherless children in Ndola to attend Lighthouse. Through the years, we have partnered together to grow the school and develop its campus. Nearly 500 students have received the gift of quality Christian education through Lighthouse to date, including approximately 300 enrolled at present. If not for this intervention, most would have discontinued their education in elementary school. Instead, many are giving glory to God and graduating from university today.

As the years went by, Wilbrod's desire to be part of the Sovereign Grace family grew. In 2009, this led him to leave a secure position in a well-established church, plant a new work called Christ Community Church, and ultimately lead that church into Sovereign Grace. In time, he completed the ordination protocols in our Book of Church Order, becoming the first

African pastor ordained by Sovereign Grace Churches.

Cutting it Straight

Many pastors would have been content with this resumé, but Wilbroad's godly ambition was not yet satisfied. He knew he'd been blessed to receive the theological education he'd received. And as those who sat under his teaching can attest, he was "in his element" in the classroom. Will was uniquely gifted by God to impart his learning to others who hadn't had similar opportunities for formal training. He knew the vulnerability of the untrained pastor to prosperity theology and other false teachings, and he knew their flocks would be vulnerable by extension.

So he established the Copperbelt Pastors College, named after his province in Zambia but modeled after the Sovereign Grace Pastors College. Their motto, "Study to Show Yourself Approved," comes from 2 Timothy 2:15a. But Wilbroad also loved (and unabashedly lifted) H.B. Charles' modern paraphrase of verse 15b, "cutting it straight." This became the unofficial motto of the Copperbelt PC, as he regularly reminded his students of their responsibility to divide the word of truth rightly.

A Man of Truth

I will never forget when I and two of my co-pastors from Covenant Fellowship joined Wilbroad for an evangelistic event he had organized in Ndola. A popular Christian singer was booked to perform, and let's just say this singer wasn't "cutting it straight" in his theology. While introducing a song, the singer assured the crowd that coming to Jesus would solve all their problems for them, and they would no longer suffer. Just then, that big, booming baritone rang out from the front row: "You *will* suffer." At least three times as the singer continued, Wilbroad persisted: "You *will* suffer." He desperately wanted people to know the real Jesus, not a distorted caricature sketched by false teachings that sound enticing but lack biblical truth.

And this, it occurs to me, is an apt portrait of our dearly departed brother. He was a man of truth. He was passionate about proclaiming truth in every way he could. But he didn't care about truth for truth's sake. He cared about truth for Christ's sake. And precisely for that reason, his labors were not in vain. The work of his hands will endure. It will endure through the well-equipped saints at Christ Community Church who now take the ba-

ton their pastor handed to them. It will endure in the ongoing partnership Wilbroad pioneered between his labors in Zambia and Sovereign Grace Churches—a partnership we are humbled by and grateful for. And it will endure through the reality of Christ’s resurrection. Though the seed sown in Wilbroad’s earthly life was perishable, the fruit it gave rise to is imperishable and glorious.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

DOUG HAYES

Doug Hayes is the Executive Director for [Covenant Mercies](#) and serves as an elder at [Covenant Fellowship Church](#) (Glen Mills, PA).

ONE DAY CLOSER: ANTICIPATING THE SIGHT OF CHRIST

MARK ALDERTON

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).

In John Bunyan's classic book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, recently-converted Christian is on a journey to Mount Zion, a biblical metaphor referring to heaven. He stops at a lodging place and is interviewed about his faith by the ladies of the house. The woman Prudence asks, "What is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?"

How would you answer that question? When you think of eternal life, what is attractive about it? What are you looking forward to?

Perhaps it is the prospect of being free from pain, disease, and death. Or it might be the thought of living in a place of unsurpassed beauty. Perhaps it is being able to do things you love for time without end.

These are glorious realities promised to the believer in Christ, and they do give us hope. But if this is all that heaven holds for us, it is not hope enough. In fact, it is not even a uniquely Christian hope. Even those who don't know Christ hope to be in "a better place" and experience such things.

The Christian hope is more than that. Our hope centers on a Person. It is the

promise that we will see God *face to face* in the person of Jesus Christ and be with him forever. This, and only this, can satisfy our soul's deepest longings.

We see why as we consider what the Scriptures say about the promise, fulfillment, and anticipation of this glorious future.

The Promise

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

The pure in heart are those devoted to Jesus Christ in this life. They will see God. And Jesus did not mean that we will see God like tourists at the Grand Canyon, wowed at the sight but then heading off to somewhere else. This sight is about seeing and communing with God forever in a relation-

ship of love and blessing. And the fact this is promised to us at all is a mercy and privilege beyond comprehension, given our sin.

*Our hope is that
we will always be
with the Lord.*

When Moses said to the Lord, "Please show me your glory," God's answer was, "You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live" (Exod. 33:18, 20). To see God in our sinfulness is to be ruined and undone (cf. Isa. 6:5).

Sinful man cannot see, much less dwell with God in all his glory.

This is why we need Jesus Christ.

In the person of Christ, God the Son took on human flesh to bear the punishment for our sins on the cross and to give us his perfect righteousness, thereby reconciling us to God. He has become the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5) who brings us back to God and into his favor. This reconciliation finds its full expression in seeing and being with God.

And here is a wonder of wonders: our communion will not be with God only as spirit, but with God in the person of Jesus Christ. In physical bodies, we will dwell with God, whom we can see and touch. The resurrected Christ said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). Indeed, you will touch Christ and see that it is he, your Savior.

The God-man has become for us the focal point of our communion with God forever. We will ever see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). When the Lord returns, and the dead in Christ are raised to life, we will see this glory with physical, glorified eyes.

The Fulfillment

Paul alerts us to the time “when [Christ] comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thess. 1:10).

Marveled at. On the day of the Lord, we will be amazed, stopped in our tracks, mouths gaping in astonishment at the King who has returned. And we will glorify him with our immediate response of worship. What else could we do at the sight of God in the flesh! This will not be Christ in his humiliation on the cross, nor Christ in merely a resurrected body, nor even Christ on the mount of transfiguration—all sights that the apostles had. This will be Christ in his full glory.

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). This is the King coming to claim his kingdom; this is the Son of God coming to put all his enemies under his feet, destroying the last enemy of death itself; this is the Bridegroom coming to claim his bride the church; this is the Savior coming to save—fully and finally—those who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb. 9:28).

At that moment, we will be changed in order to see and enjoy his glory in its full force. “When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The appearance of Christ will transform us to become like him with imperishable bodies and perfected senses with all the sin removed so that we have the capacity to enjoy the fullness of all that he is. And this is how it will be forever. We will “meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Friends, the Scriptures do not describe eternal life as merely a “better place” that even the non-believer could imagine. Our hope is that we will always be with the Lord. That is our bliss! “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). That is the language of home and love. To commune with God through Christ is the fulfillment of our deepest longings. As the hymn says, “O the deep, deep love of Jesus,

'tis a heaven of heavens to me.”

But we must wait a little longer before we see Christ.

The Anticipation

We do not know when we will see Christ in his glory. “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows” (Mark 13:32). So, we wait. But we do not wait idly; there is something we can do in the meantime. Like Moses, who endured his trials as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27), we must do the same and see Jesus today with the eyes of faith.

Soldiers far away from home carry pictures of their loved ones with them. This keeps the fires of affection alive and increases the anticipation of the long-awaited reunion. So also, for us, the Scriptures are the picture of Christ that we carry.

*For salvation is
nearer to us now
than when we first
believed.*

It is in them that before your eyes Jesus was publicly portrayed as crucified (Gal. 3:1). And it is in them where your eyes will behold the King in his beauty (Isa. 33:17). Such sights endear him evermore to us so that though you do not now see him, you believe in

him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory (1 Pet. 1:8). We bring the joy of our future sight of Christ into today by seeking to know him more day by day in his word. And as our love for him grows, so grows our desire to see him, not just to see heaven.

This brings us to how Christian answered the question that Prudence put to him. Why was he so desirous of going to Mount Zion? And why should you and I be so desirous? Here is his answer:

Why, is it there that I hope to see alive my Savior who hung dead on the cross. . . . For, to tell you the truth, I love Him because He eased me of my burden. I am weary of my inward sickness. I desire to be where I will die no more, with a company that will continually cry, “Holy, holy, holy!”¹

1. JOHN BUNYAN, *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* (WHEATON, ILLINOIS: CROSSWAY, 2009) 77.

Does your heart resonate with that? If so, be encouraged. We shall see him soon. “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). Every day it is one day closer. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

MARK ALDERTON

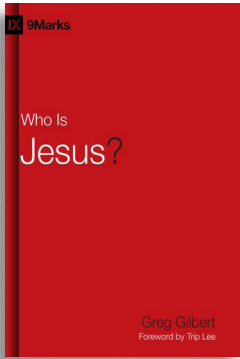
Mark Alderton serves as senior pastor of [Sovereign Grace Church of Aurora](#) (Aurora, CO).

Recomended Reading

“But to enjoy him we must know him. Seeing is savoring. If he remains a blurry, vague fog, we may be intrigued for a season. But we will not be stunned with joy, as when the fog clears and you find yourself on the brink of some vast precipice.”

JOHN PIPER

Desiring God: Meditations of
a Christian Hedonist



WHO IS JESUS?

BY GREG GILBERT

(CROSSWAY, 2015/138 PAGES)

JOEL BAIN

In Jamaica, almost anyone you meet knows about Jesus. A few years ago, I recall having a lively conversation about Jesus with a young, university-educated Jamaican woman on a flight back home. She grew up in church but was not a Christian. Like many of my countrymen, she was very concerned not to dismiss Jesus and heartily acknowledged him as a great moral teacher. But she misunderstood his identity and overlooked his claims. Greg Gilbert's book, *Who Is Jesus?*, is written to persuade others not to make that same mistake.

Gilbert's apologetic and evangelistic purpose is clear throughout this short book (138 pages), particularly at the beginning and end. But that doesn't mean that you should consign it to the giveaway pile or book table. This gem also has much to offer to mature believers, including those of us who labor to point people to Christ.

While reading this book, I found myself lost in my admiration of a portrait of Jesus that was familiar yet fresh, simple yet substantial, and thinking of others who need to hear his story told in this way. This is a delightfully winsome and worshipful articulation of Christological convictions.

After arguing that the question, "Who is Jesus?" is the most important question you will ever consider (chapter 1), Gilbert sketches a well-crafted picture of Jesus in chapters which each flow naturally into the next. He introduces Jesus through his extraordinary earthly ministry (chapter 2) and presents him as the long-awaited King of Israel and King of kings (chapter 3), fully God (chapter 4) and fully human (chapter 5), the triumphant last Adam (chapter 6), the lamb of God (chapter 7), and the resurrected and reigning Lord (chapter 8).

Gilbert interacts primarily with the gospel narratives while also mining the

riches of the Old Testament for key Biblical-theological insights. The stability and form of systematic theological categories are evident. But rather than compiling a textbook capturing the data, Gilbert has narrated a story that captivates the imagination. I was particularly served by his gradual unfolding of the meaning of Jesus' baptism—an account he returned to several times. “With his baptism and these words from heaven... God declares Jesus to be triply crowned—with the crown of heaven as God's Son, the crown of Israel as the long-awaited King, and the crown of thorns as the Suffering Servant who would save his people by dying for them, in their place” (108).

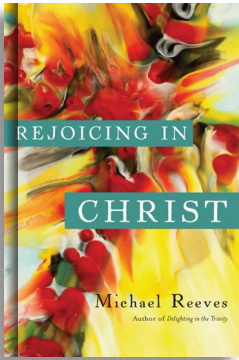
This title would be a great one for any Christian to read and rejoice in. It will help pastors ensure that our delight in Christ is not dampened by professional familiarity. It will serve those who have grown up in church but have lost or have never quite grasped the significance and magnificence of Jesus. And it is definitely a good book to give to and discuss with someone whom you'd like to introduce to Jesus.

*This gem also
has much to offer
mature believers.*

Who is Jesus? is a 9Marks book and is available in nine languages. It is a fine work that will help you to treasure Christ and to share this treasure with others.

JOEL BAIN

Joel Bain serves as senior pastor of [Grace Family Church](#) (Kingston, Jamaica).



REJOICING IN CHRIST

BY MICHAEL REEVES

(IVP, 2015/135 PAGES)

JACE HUDSON

My book review in a sentence is this: *Rejoicing in Christ* helped this burdened pastor and busy parent to slow down and savor Jesus for who he truly is—my all-satisfying joy. There you have it. And if you are similarly burdened and busy but also hunger and thirst for a delight-inducing taste of Jesus, then I'm confident this book will serve your soul.

Expounding on how Jesus is God's *beloved* Son, in whom the Father is *well pleased* (Matt. 3:17), Michael Reeves writes of Christ:

If there is nothing more precious to the Father than him, there cannot be any blessing higher than him or anything better than him. In every way, he himself *must* be the 'very great reward' of the gospel (Gen. 15:1). He is the treasure of the Father, shared with us. Sometimes we find ourselves tiring of Jesus, stupidly imagining that we have seen all there is to see and used up all the pleasure there is to be had in him. We get spiritually bored. But Jesus has satisfied the mind and heart of the infinite God for eternity. Our boredom is simple blindness. If the Father can be infinitely and eternally satisfied in him, then he must be overwhelming all-sufficient for us. In every situation, for eternity (21).

Jesus has satisfied the mind and heart of the infinite God for eternity. What a thought! My spiritual boredom is simple blindness. What an indictment! Reeves' book is a stirring call to see and savor Jesus for the all-sufficient joy that he is.

In five chapters, Michael Reeves covers the deity of Christ, his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as our union with him by the Spirit and his second coming. These are the usual topics in Christology, but Reeves illuminates them with fresh insights. One way he accomplishes this is by feeding us some of the finest historical thinking on Jesus. From Calvin to Chesterton, Sibbes to Spurgeon, Luther to Lewis, and so many

more, Reeves serves up the best and yet does it with a skill that keeps his work easily accessible.

Rejoicing in Christ is also an enjoyable read. Reeves is a clear and clever communicator who uses pithy language (Jesus needed “to be in real, pinchable reality” [43]) and quotable phrases (“That otherwise unremarkable tomb in Jerusalem thus became the womb of a new creation” [64]).

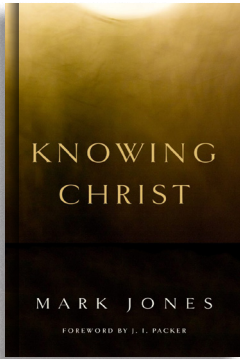
Michael Reeves closes his book with a thought-provoking question, “What do you *enjoy* most about the gospel” (121)? There are so many ways you could answer: the gift of salvation, the defeat of death, the adoption of the Father, or the hope of the new creation. Undoubtedly, each is precious but more desirable, delightful, and dear to us still is Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the treasure of the Father shared with us. He is our all-sufficient satisfaction in every situation, for all eternity. *Rejoicing in Christ* helps us do just that—rejoice in Jesus.

*He is the treasure
of the Father,
shared with us.*

A word of advice on reading this book: at only 135 pages, you could zip through it quickly. Don't. Instead, read this book slowly. Read it devotionally. Maybe read a couple of pages early in the morning or with your spouse before bed at night. Read this book like you'd eat a rich feast. Chew slowly, enjoy each bite, and savor Jesus!

JACE HUDSON

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KNOWING CHRIST

BY MARK JONES

(THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST,
2015, 250 PAGES)

MARK PRATER

In the Introduction to his book *Knowing Christ*, Mark Jones talks about the impact J.I. Packer's classic work *Knowing God* had on him as a young Christian when he first read the book at a Seattle Mariners' baseball game (The book, he says, was far more riveting than the game). To this day, *Knowing God* continues to have a significant impact on his Christian life. This caused Jones to ask, "What about knowing Christ, the Son of God?"

It's a good question, for we can only love Christ more by knowing him better. And that is the purpose of this book, which Jones explains in the Introduction: "This is a book for God's people, not the academy. This is a book designed to give God's people a glimpse of the person of Christ. In short, I write that people may know Christ better than they already do, and so love him more" (xiv). If you want to know Christ better and so love him more, this book is for you.

Reading *Knowing Christ* is like looking through a kaleidoscope; each of the short 27 chapters gives you a different glimpse of Jesus Christ, whether it's Christ's Divinity, Christ's Emotions, Christ's Sinlessness, Christ's Death, or Christ's Intercession.

Turning to each chapter is like turning a kaleidoscope that gives you a unique, breath-taking view of Jesus. I read this book devotionally several years ago, and it helped me know and treasure Christ more.

In the chapter entitled, "Christ's Humiliation," Jones writes, "The Son who thirsted was the same who made water; the Son who was too tired to carry his cross was the same who upholds the entire world; the Son whose side was pierced was the same who gave breath and life to the one who did it. The incarnation of the Son of God... was truly an act of humiliation" (119).

Then turn to the chapter entitled, “Christ’s Exaltation,” where Jones ponders what it was like to be in heaven when Jesus returned after his death, resurrection, and ascension. He asks, “What about the joy when Jesus arrived to take his seat at the right hand of the Father?” Quoting John Owen, he answers: “No heart can conceive, much less can any tongue express, the glorious reception of the human nature of Christ in heaven” (172).

There is much concerning the glory of Christ that no heart can conceive and no tongue can express. Those two chapters alone—on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ—present soul-stirring views of Jesus Christ that help you to know Him better and love him more.

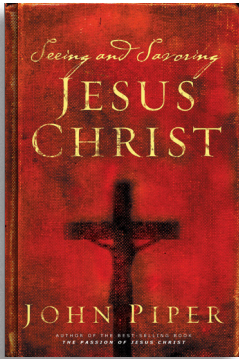
J.I. Packer wrote the Foreword for *Knowing Christ* in 2015. In 2020, J.I. Packer went to be with Christ and knows his Savior far better than ever before. In the Foreword, Packer asks, “Have we ever, up to now, worked our way through any book that fully displays our Savior as the brightest lights in the historic Reformed firmament have viewed him? Here is such a book: are we interested?”

Here is a book that will help us know Christ better so that we can love Him more. Let me ask, “Are you interested?”

*The incarnation
of the Son of God
... was truly an act
of humiliation.*

MARK PRATER

Mark Prater is the Executive Director for [Sovereign Grace Churches](#) and serves as an elder at [Covenant Fellowship Church](#) (Glen Mills, PA).



SEEING AND SAVORING JESUS CHRIST

BY JOHN PIPER

(CROSSWAY, 2004/125 PAGES)

DUSTIN SMETONA

Few men have had such a profound impact on us as John Piper. We have read his books. We have sat underneath his preaching and teaching. We have listened to his interviews and podcasts. We have taken his counsel.

While Piper continues to author new books, I am writing to persuade you to pick up one of his old books. Published in 2001 and republished in 2004, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* is arguably his most Christ-centered work on the central thesis that has driven his prolific ministry: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” This book focuses its full attention on the Son of God.

Page after page is suffused with the thoroughly biblical, soaring language we’d expect from Piper, as he describes the unique glories of Jesus Christ. Yet each chapter is relatively short, making it accessible for all readers.

Piper moves us from Christology to doxology with ease. His description of the power of Christ, for example, is deeply moving: “Fatalities, fevers, fish, food, fig trees. Anywhere you turn, Christ is the absolute master over all material substance” (46).

If we have eyes to see, we will behold Christ’s glory everywhere we look. There is nothing as satisfying as that glory, which is why our gracious God so eagerly shares it with us.

We need to believe this now more than ever. The Christian life is hard enough when there isn’t an invisible plague stalking the globe. It’s safe to assume there are weary and burdened pastors and church members reading this. Where can we find fresh reserves of strength?

Passion for Jesus Christ is the power to persevere. Who better to stoke the fires of this passion than John Piper as he directs our gaze down at our Bibles so that they can be lifted to our matchless Redeemer? Behold once again the all-satisfying glory of the Savior, and watch as your passion for that glory grows. This book increased my passion for Christ and my strength to persevere.

Piper includes a prayer at the end of each chapter. Let's make his prayer our own:

O Father of glory, this is the cry of our hearts—to be changed from one degree of glory to another, until, in the resurrection, at the last trumpet, we are completely conformed to the image of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Until then, we long to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord, especially the knowledge of his glory. We want to see it as clearly as we see the sun, and to savor it as deeply as our most desired pleasure ... Forgive the wandering of our affections and the undue attention we give to lesser things. Have mercy on us for Christ's sake, and fulfill in us your great design to display the glory of your grace. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

*Passion for
Jesus Christ is
the power to
persevere.*

Amen indeed. May we see and savor Jesus Christ for the glory of his name.

DUSTIN SMETONA

Dustin Smetona serves as an elder at [Sovereign Grace Church of Orange](#) (Orange, CA).