

98-12-20b

We resume now our study this morning. One of the rare occasions where we actually have a special and diverge somewhat from our normal course through, in this case, Genesis. But we find ourselves in Genesis, and as we've noted, there's a fascinating parallel there in Genesis 34, where you see Joseph having been sent by the father.

Actually, it's not 34. It's much later. But where Joseph sends his son, Joseph, to check on his brothers, and as he goes in chapter 37, he does not find them where they should be.

They have been sent by their father to Shechem, but they're not at Shechem. And when he inquires about their whereabouts, they have left for Dothan. When he goes there, they're gone.

But Shechem is the place of decision. As I mentioned, it's the place where Abram built his first altar, the first place he stopped as he came into the land of promise. This is the place where the brothers are not found, and as a result of their not being there and Joseph's sequent tracking of them down, he goes into slavery and, of course, emerges later to be the means of deliverance in God's plan for his brethren.

And you'll remember that in Joseph's later life as he rises to become the leader in Egypt and he is aware of the prophecy that we have studied in Genesis just in the past few weeks regarding the slavery that the people of God will endure for several hundred years in Egypt. Joseph knows this, and so he leaves instructions upon his death, and his body is not buried. He is not entombed.

He doesn't have his own little Joseph pyramid down there in the Valley of the Kings. Instead, his sarcophagus is left above ground as a reminder, as a symbol to Israel. And even in the great Cecil B. DeMille Ten Commandments movie, you remember the folks chanting about Joseph's coat of many colors as they carry his bones out of Egypt.

Those bones of Joseph were a symbol and a reminder to Israel of the promise of God, and Joseph intended them to be such. But with that in mind and with what we've seen about Shechem, turn to the end of the book of Joshua. The end of the book of Joshua.

This is Joshua chapter 24. We know what happens in Joshua. They enter the land.

They have conquest and so forth. The people settle into their tribal assignments in terms of land and inheritance. And at the end of Joshua, in Joshua 24.29, we have detailed for us the death of Joshua and the death of Eliezer, the son of Aaron.

It came to pass after these things. This is Joshua 24.29. It came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died being 110 years old, and they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Sirah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mahash. The mountains of Ephraim are

significant.

Sometimes God calls Israel Ephraim. He calls them Ephraim, my son, and so forth. The mountains of Ephraim are in the area of Shechem.

Shechem is next to the mountains of Ephraim. Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua who had known all the works of the Lord which he had done for Israel. Now look at verse 32.

The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried where? At Shechem. In the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph. So, the bones of Joseph continue to serve as a symbol.

Joseph says, I want my bones to continue to be a signpost, a reminder to the nation of Israel. You face a choice. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

Joshua challenges Israel at the beginning of this book. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Shechem sits there in the shadow of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

And it reminds Israel that they have a choice. Are they going to be people of faith regardless of their station in life, like Mary? Or are they going to assume the trappings of religion and the trappings of faith in God and even hold the scriptures up as their great icon and miss the point? God will resist the proud. God will give grace to the humble.

Now the fascinating thing is we're not quite finished with Shechem. Turn with me back to the book of John in chapter 4. John 4, 1. Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, though Jesus himself did not baptize, but his disciples did, that's a whole separate subject we'll take up sometime on baptism, he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But he needed to go through Samaria.

So he came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar. Well, Sychar is Shechem. Sychar is Shechem.

Jesus needed to go through Samaria because he needed to come to Shechem. The whole episode of the woman at the well, the woman at Jacob's well, the Samaritan woman, takes place at Shechem. And it's highly significant because he's going to mention the same things we've just seen.

Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being weary from his journey, sapped us by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

The woman of Samaria comes to draw water. And their conversation goes forward. And

as you get down to verse 19, the woman says, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. This goes back to what we opened our lesson with this morning. And when we think about the reason that Jesus came, salvation is of the Jews.

There has been a little bit of an anti-Semitic streak in the church going all the way back to the earliest days when the Jewish portion of the church had a bad attitude toward the Gentiles coming in. It's kind of like the Arabs and the Jews. Once you strike up combat, it's very difficult to ever reconcile and bury.

And because of that, we have to be a little bit careful about our tradition and our traditional understandings and the emphasis that we've had in our teaching in the church at large because we have diminished and we have minimized the Jewishness of Christ. We have not given due recognition to the fact recorded in this statement. Salvation is of the Jews.

The Jews are God's chosen people. And Jesus Christ is a Jew. And He is the King of the Jews.

He is the King of Israel, the Davidic King. And we are saved because God saved Israel. We are the second in line.

We are not the eldest son. We are the younger son. When you look at the pictures in the Bible of the father and the elder and the younger and so forth.

But in an odd reversal, Esau was the elder son and Jacob was the younger, but Jacob received the inheritance. Ishmael was the older son. Isaac is the younger.

But Isaac receives the inheritance. And time and again you look at the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. You look at many other examples in Scripture where the last shall be first.

The elder shall serve the younger. We, as it were, the younger son, have the opportunity to be the first to inherit. The first to seize and lay hold of these great blessings that God originally promised to Abraham and to his seed, his literal seed, the nation of Israel.

And so we want to acknowledge and recognize our place because it is a manifestation of God's grace. The more you recognize the role that Jesus Christ plays as the Messiah to Israel, the more profound our appreciation is going to be that we were included, that we

have been privileged by the expansion of God's offer of salvation beyond the nation of Israel. And because of their rejection, and of course you have that whole wonderful argument of Paul in Romans talking about the broken branches, and God has worked all things together for good, just as he does with Hagar and Ishmael.

It's a bad situation, but out of it comes a blessing and a promise. Out of the rejection of their king by Israel comes salvation and light to the Gentiles, and that's us. Even Jews in this age who come to Christ are church, not Israel.

The membership, if you will, in the nation of Israel and subscription or participation to the inherited covenant promises to Israel ended on the day of Pentecost and will resume the day after the rapture of the church. Anyone, Jew or Gentile, who expresses faith in Christ in this age is susceptible to, is an heir of newer and better promises and a different fate. Believers in this age have been marked out, have been pre-designated.

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 8.29, He says pre-destinated, but that word has picked up so much baggage we can hardly understand it. Pre-designated is what it literally means. Designated ahead of time.

You can say whoever is wearing a red shirt and sits in section C is going to get a \$5 gift certificate at a concert. You pre-designate that someone in a certain category, meeting a certain condition, is going to receive something. We have been pre-designated to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Israel was never designated to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Israel was never designated to be the firstborn among many brethren. They have a different, although not unequal or not inferior, but it's different.

We have newer and greater promises in this age and therefore we are under a whole different economy. We are free from the regulations of the law, but we are under a higher law. The law of love, the law of liberty, the law of supreme sacrifice is more difficult than a nicely detailed set of regulations where you can say, well, I only brushed my cloak this many times or I put a fence around the ditch I dug and I've reimbursed the man who was gored by my ox and all the other regulations of the law, both great and small.

We are responsible for our thoughts and intents. The law of Moses never addressed the thoughts and intents of the heart in terms of its regulations. It did in terms of the spirit of the law.

But we're in a different category, and so it's important to understand where we relate to God. Our salvation is ours and is our possession because God first came to save Israel, which, if you think about it, is basically the body of believers in the Old Testament. Believers in Old Testament days were in Israel.

If you were a believer, you came to Israel. If you remember Naaman, the Syrian general who came to faith in God, he asked permission to remain outside the land of Israel and was given that permission by God through the prophet. Because normally when you came to faith, you came to Israel.

That's where believers resided, and that's why all of the provision and regulation that God gave was oriented to believers. We've had a lot of misunderstanding about the role of the law. People thought they were getting saved by keeping the law.

Israelites never thought they were getting saved by keeping the law. They assumed their salvation. They accepted the fact that they were saved.

Their problem was obedience, and that's why time and again they are disciplined and chastised for lack of obedience, lack of faith, lack of active relationship with God. Not come to me, believe in me, I'm really here, it's not Dagon, it's not Baal, it's not the Ashtoreths, choose me in opposition to all of these pagan gods. They knew God was there.

Even when they worshipped the idols, they knew God was there and that they were being disobedient. They were doing this for other reasons. So anyway, when Jesus comes, he is coming to seek and to save that which is lost, and it is the nation of Israel, the lost sheep.

He says explicitly, I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And we see this pictured in Joseph as he comes looking for his brothers. He's not looking for the slave traders, he's not looking for anybody else, he's looking for his brothers.

His brothers are disobedient, they're not where they're supposed to be. When he does find them, with a message from the Father, they resent him, and they, in effect, in the picture, they kill him. They put his blood on the coat and bring it back to the Father and say he's dead.

But this is kind of as close as you can get to resurrection without actually killing someone and having them resurrected. Joseph disappears and goes into prison, which stands in for Sheol, the biblical Old Testament concept of death. And then he emerges and is crowned with glory and honor.

And through that crowning of glory and honor, he is able to rescue his brethren, his brothers. He doesn't go up and get everybody in Canaan, does he? He says, Jacob, you and the 70 in your household, you come down and I'll preserve you. And they are delivered, even as they live outside the land of promise, down there in Egypt.

And they will have to go through this time of waiting before they can seize possession. And we, with our salvation, have been delivered, and yet we wait for the possession of our heavenly homeland until the return of Jesus Christ. So there are wonderful parallels

there, but it's interesting to note that it all hinges on choice.

The place of Shechem, the shadow of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim for the people of God. This is why Jesus came. He said, I've come to challenge them, to get them to change their mind.

They've gone astray. They need to come back. And this is the challenge that we have every day.

One of the things we don't often associate with Christmas, but we need to, is like the words of that hymn, Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of life's wild and stormy sea, saying, Christian, follow me. I left out a phrase there, but Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of everything that's going on around us, and he's saying, follow me. There's the blessings.

There's the opportunity. There's the inheritance at stake. And it's a call.

Jesus came for that purpose when he was born and let go of his divine standing and emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. He came down here to deliver that challenge personally, first to the nation of Israel and by extension to us. So you find this in Jeremiah 31.

This is where we're going to see the mountains of Ephraim reappear, the place where Joseph's inheritance is and where his bones are buried. Right there, one side of the valley of Shechem is created by the mountains of Ephraim. And this becomes a name or a form of address that God uses for Israel.

So in Jeremiah 31.15, thus says the Lord, a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children. We have this quoted in the New Testament with the killing of the two-year-old and under children. And any time we see that, any time you have that New Testament allusion to an Old Testament passage, that's like a footnote that says don't just stop here.

Go back and read that whole passage. And so when we come back to the context of this during the time of the birth of Christ, what do we find? The Lord says in verse 16, Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.

The call that Jesus Christ issued to Israel is ultimately going to be answered. God is going to fulfill His covenant promise to take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. The believers and the faithful in every generation will be resurrected and will have the fulfillment of those promises in the millennial kingdom.

Verse 18, I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, you have chastised me and I was chastised like an untrained bull. Restore me and I will return for you are the Lord my

God. Notice this is a believer who under chastisement and discipline for departing has been asked to return and says I will return.

All in the realm of a father with his son. Surely after my turning I repented and after I was instructed I struck myself on the thigh. Now we strike ourselves on the forehead.

But it's the same sort of expression. Striking yourself on the thigh was an acknowledgement of a big goof, if you will. I struck myself on the thigh.

I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated because I bore the reproach of my youth. God speaks in verse 20, Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him.

I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord. Set up signposts. Make landmarks.

This, by the way, is what Joseph did with his own bones. Set your heart toward the highway, the way in which you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, turn back to these your cities.

How long will you gad about? O you backsliding daughter, for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall encompass a man. This is an oblique reference to the virgin birth.

That a woman, by herself, without any physical relationship, is going to encompass or give birth to a man, a man-child. And this is the new thing. It's never happened in human history before or since.

The virgin conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the call to Ephraim to return. This is the call to Israel to repent.

You find the same thing in Ezekiel 34. This is a very famous passage. We won't spend a lot of time in it, but God's rebuke against the unfaithful shepherds in Israel.

And he talks about the flock of Israel and the sheep and how they have been abused by their shepherds in verses 1-10. Then in verse 11, this gets back to the Old Testament antecedents for what Jesus Himself says. Thus says the Lord God, this is Ezekiel 34.11, Indeed, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

Notice He says, I will search for My sheep and seek them out. He doesn't say, I'm going to find some new sheep. I'm sick of these old sheep that don't pay any attention to Me.

I'm going to get some new sheep. He says, I'm going to seek My sheep. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.

And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel. Of course, you can't help but think about Jesus breaking bread for the 5,000 and the 4,000 in fulfillment of this.

In the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country, I will feed them in good pasture and their folds shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God.

I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick, but I will destroy the fat and the strong and feed them in judgment. Of course, fatness and so forth is associated with pride, with hubris, with the arrogant disregard or apathetic indifference toward God. As for you, verse 17, O My flock, thus says the Lord God, behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.

Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture, and to have drunk of the clear waters that you must foul the residue with your feet? Remember Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees. You not only have gone astray yourself, but you canvas heaven and earth to get a convert and you make him twofold the child of Gehenna that you yourself are. You not only go astray, but you lead others astray.

This brings them into double judgment. This was foretold here. As for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.

This is the corrupted spiritual teaching in Israel down through the generations and it came to a peak in the time of Christ. Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, in verse 20, behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep, because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns and scattered them abroad. Therefore, I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey, and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

We find this happening today. We have unfaithful shepherds. We have people who are taking advantage, who are muddying the waters of scriptural truth, who are polluting the food for the flock of God in the church.

And there will be a reckoning. So we love to look at the major scene and the soft glow of a light at night and think about Christ coming to earth, but it is not only the deliverance and salvation for Israel and for us, but it is also a reminder that God is coming in person because those to whom He has delegated responsibility have failed. And Jesus Himself comes to earth to call to repentance and to teach the clear truth of God's word because

others were no longer doing it.

And there is a judgment associated with that. And in coming to His people in the same way that when He comes the second time, you have lots of people in the church who get giddy over the return of Christ, little knowing that it is not going to be a happy time for some of us who are not ready, who misunderstand, who have created a false image of Christ in the mind as sort of a gentle, glowing individual walking through a pasture full of flowers, leading a child by the hand, meek and mild, and so forth, and not realizing the other side of that which John saw in Revelation where Christ is riding the blood-stained white horse with a sharp sword in His mouth and in His hand and who is also exercising His authority to reckon and to judge. We have nothing to fear from that when we live the life of faith, when we don't stray, when we don't disregard, when we don't make a false god out of the scriptures or out of a messenger or out of any one of the other alternatives.

But it will be salvation, yet so as by fire, for those who build on the foundation of Christ with wood, hay, and stubble. And again in Luke chapter 1 verse 16, our scripture reading this morning when we saw in the Song of Mary that the other fascinating thing, and it gets short shrift at this time of year, is what happens in the last part of Luke chapter 1. After the Song of Mary, the birth and circumcision of John the Baptist, then in verse 67, his father Zacharias is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies. And then you have the statement that his father makes in verse 76 of Luke 1. You, child, talking to John the Baptist, will be called the prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of God with which the dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in the darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.

So he recognizes what the role of John the Baptist will be. Then you get down in chapter 2, you have the birth of Christ, you have the shepherds of whom we have spoken earlier. And the interesting thing is that the people to whom God reveals this great news, we've already talked a little bit about who they are and what their station in life is, but also notice what they do.

They know others who think the way they do, who have the same priority and the same love for the things of God. And what we hardly ever focus on when we think about the Christmas story starts in verse 15. So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.

God reveals it, their act of simple faith, they believe it and they say, Well, let's go. Once the truth is revealed and it calls for action, they say, Well, let's go. And they do.

They came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. When

they had seen him, what did they do? They made known the saying which was told them concerning the child. Now it says widely in the New King James, but that's I think a later edition in the text.

It's not in the best of our texts. It says, They made known the saying which was told them concerning the child, and all those who heard marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told them. They're glorifying and praising God. What have they actually seen? They saw the manifestation of the angels.

They saw a tiny baby laying in very humble circumstances. But to them, it's a reality. To them, it's a fulfillment because this is something that their hearts were already prepared for.

These are men of faith. God is revealing the truth to those who are hungry for it, to those who are appreciative of it, to those who take it at face value and make it the object of their faith. This is going to continue when you have the circumcision of Jesus and the verses that follow in his presentation at the temple.

Look down at verse 25. Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple.

And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, this is his circumcision and dedication, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples. And here's the two-fold aspect of the coming of Christ that we've seen in so many of these passages.

A light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. Those two things are equal. The coming of Jesus Christ as King and Messiah to Israel, that's their glory.

And a light of revelation to the Gentiles. And Simeon is such a great student of the plan and purpose of God. He recognizes this.

He knows it. He's been waiting. He was so anxious to see the Messiah that God promised him he would have that privilege in his lifetime before he died.

And God honors him greatly. And his name and his words are recorded forever in the

pages of Scripture. But notice what he says next.

In the New King James, they set off verses 29 through 32 in a little poetic way. You can see it on the page. But what he says after this is equally important.

In verse 33, Joseph and his mother marveled at the things which were spoken of him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against. Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Now of all of the things this great man of God could say when he lays eyes on the Christ child in the temple, this is what he says to Mary and Joseph. He says, He is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel. And if we wanted to go into the details here, we've seen chiastic structures so many different places.

This is a chiastic saying. The outside things correspond. The inner things correspond.

And the two outermost things you have here, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many. The thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. This is how they're going to rise and fall.

Not by their deeds, not by their station, not by their religious status. It's by the thoughts of their hearts. What do they think? They're being called to change of mind.

The gospel of the kingdom of God is a call to change of mind. Then we have this very fascinating thing. You wonder at first why it's even here.

There are just three verses. Verses 36-38. There is one, Anna, a prophetess of the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher.

She was of a great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. And this woman was a widow of about 84 years who did not depart from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant, she apparently comes in just as Simeon has spoken his benediction.

She gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of him to whom? To all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Anna has friends, has fellow believers in Jerusalem who share her longing and her desire and her expectation of redemption being revealed in the person of the Messiah. And when she sees Jesus as a child in the temple, immediately she knows who he is and she goes and tells others she knows in the city who are waiting for that same expectation.

So there is the remnant in Israel. There are the 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. There are those who, like Simeon and Anna and that circle, like Mary and Zechariah

and Elizabeth who know God, who know his plan and his purpose and most importantly, who know his word.

And it's not just making the scriptures a God in and of itself, but know the truth of it and see the reality of it, recognize it for what it is and respond. And these are the people that God honors. These are the people that God blesses.

These are the people who, when they look at those two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, choose the mountain of blessing. And as a result, even though we may have been born out of time, even though we're Gentiles and not Jews, even though we are the latecomers and the pagans, we, like the whole human race, that was made lower than the angels, another pattern of reversal, we are crowned with glory and honor through Christ our Savior. So his coming means a great deal to us.

And in summary, many other passages we could go to, but Jesus Christ came for three purposes. Perhaps the best place to summarize this is in 1 John 4. There are passages we can go to in the Old Testament and the New that explicitly point out that Jesus came to save his people from their sins. He said, I have come to fulfill the law, not to destroy it.

I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly. I have come that a good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Christ came, Paul says, to die for the ungodly.

But what is the culmination of all of these and the central wrapping up of all of these things? We find it in 1 John 4. 1 John 4, 6. We are of God. He who knows God hears us. Those who knew God heard the angels.

He who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God.

And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. And then in verse 9, In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

A lot of times when we know Jesus' fate, we think about him being born in Bethlehem, we know he's going to the cross to deliver us from our sins and to give us eternal salvation, but we don't as often remember that he came to give us life and give it to us more abundantly. As it says in Galatians 1, he came to deliver us out of this present evil age. And then the next verse, it says, In this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

This is why we can have life, because our sins have been covered, our sins have been taken care of. And then down in verse 14, We have seen and testified that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world, not just of the Jews, but of the world. So these three things, he's been sent, and John explicitly says here, he has been sent that we might

live, he's been sent that our sins might be eliminated as a problem between us and God.

He's been sent to be the Savior of the world. This is the meaning of the appearance of Christ. This is the choice that faces us as the people of God, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ on a daily basis, to remember that challenge, to remember the place of Shechem and to respond to the call that Jesus Christ came and personally issued to his people and to us to live as the people of God, to seek our place and the fulfillment of our call in God's plan through that faith and through the strengthening that God gives us through his Word and through his Spirit.

Let's close here in prayer. Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our words so inadequate to express the greatness of what you have done and the utter change that has been wrought in our lives through salvation and the wonderful opportunities that go into the eternal future that are ours in Christ. We pray that these things will be real to us and live in our souls and that as we continue to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds and be more closely conformed to his image so that he will be the firstborn among many brethren.

In all these things, we know that your glory is manifested and the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is reflected in our lives. We ask and pray these things in his name. Amen.