

**Meadow Creek Presbyterian Church**  
**Reading Together**  
**The Golden Thread—The Story of Jesus**

**March 6 – Revelation 1: 9 – 20**

As we saw yesterday, Jesus came and brought light to all men,  
But in bringing us light, Jesus has also made us light.

**2 Corinthians 4:4-6** *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.... For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Think about what we just read from Revelation 1. In John's vision, he sees seven golden lampstands, and it is clearly Jesus who is walking among them. We don't have to guess what these lampstands represent, because Jesus tells John in verse 20 that the 7 lampstands represent the seven churches to whom the Book of Revelation was written. Through Christ, the churches become the light to a dark world. This symbolism shouldn't catch us by surprise; didn't Jesus tell us that we also are to be light to point people to God?

**Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

At one time we were living in darkness, but now the light of Christ has illuminated our lives, so Paul tells us we must live as children of the light.

**Ephesians 5:8** *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light*

How do we do that? The answer to that question lies in the very way the lampstand was constructed. It was one piece of solid gold that was hammered out to form one central branch with six other branches that extended out from the central branch. As we think about the way this lampstand was constructed, our attention is drawn to Jesus' words in John 15.

**John 15:4-5** *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

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Jesus is the central branch that holds the lampstand together and apart from him we can do nothing, apart from him we can provide no light to a dark world.

**March 7 – Exodus 27: 1 – 8**

The Altar of Burnt Offering was inside the courtyard of the tabernacle between the entrance gate and the tent that housed the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. This altar was the place where sacrifices were offered by the priests on behalf of the people. The purpose of the altar and its sacrifices was to show the Israelites that the first step for sinful man to approach a holy God was to be cleansed by the blood of an innocent victim. The only means to atone for sin and be made clean in God's sight was through acceptable sacrifices.

**Hebrews 9:22** *In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

This altar in the tabernacle was the place where these sacrifices were offered. The altar was the instrument on which the sacrifice was offered to God. In many ways the altar is symbolic of the cross. Just as an innocent animal was lifted up and placed on the altar as an offering for sin, Christ was lifted up on the cross and offered there as the ultimate sacrifice for our sin.

**John 12:31-33** *Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

One of the interesting details of this altar was the horns that were on each of the four corners of the altar. When the sacrifice was made, blood was dabbed on the horns of the altar.

**Leviticus 4:27-30** *"If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty. <sup>28</sup> When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect. <sup>29</sup> He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. <sup>30</sup> Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.*

Why did they do this? In Biblical times horns were a symbol of power and strength. Placing the blood of the sacrifice on these horns

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indicated the power of the blood to atone for sin. This is clearly a picture of the magnificent power of the blood of Christ. Jesus is the "horn of our salvation."

**Psalm 18:2** *The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

**Luke 1:68-69** *"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*

Jesus' blood alone has the power to cleanse us from our sin.

**March 8 – Exodus 28: 1 – 43**

As you read this description concerning the garments that were made for the priests to wear there is a temptation to either be so amazed at the details, or so bored by the details that we fail to see the significance of these garments. These garments were just as important as anything else in the tabernacle, because without these garments properly in place the priests could not even enter the tabernacle. In order to approach the Most Holy Place, the priest had to be properly clothed.

The same is true for us. We cannot come and stand before a holy God dressed however we feel like being dressed. In order to enter the presence of God we must be properly clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

**Galatians 3:27** *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Perhaps there is no clearer picture of this than in the book of Revelation.

**Revelation 7:9-15** *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ...<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.*

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The only way we can enter the presence of God and serve him is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

As you read this description of the priest's garments, you will notice that there were two different places on his garments that contained the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. One was on his shoulders (Exodus 28: 9 – 13). By wearing the names of the 12 tribes on his shoulders the priest was symbolically carrying the people of Israel into the presence of God in the tabernacle. In the same way it is Jesus who carries us and brings us home and into the presence of God.

**Luke 15:4-7** *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

The other place where the priest carried the names of the 12 tribes was on his breastplate (Exodus 28: 15 – 21). The role of the priest was to intercede with God on behalf of the people. As the priest entered the Most Holy Place to intercede for the people and make atonement for their sins, he wore their names on his breastplate, right over his heart, so they would never be forgotten.

Where does Jesus as our great High Priest where our names as he intercedes and makes atonement for us? The prophet Isaiah gives us a very powerful picture of where are names are engraved.

**Isaiah 49:15-16** *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! <sup>16</sup> See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;*

The same hands that hold the nail prints of the cross have our names forever engraved on them. Because of Christ we will never be forgotten before the throne of heaven.

**March 9 – Exodus 30: 1 – 10**

The golden altar of incense, which is not to be confused with the Altar of Burnt Offering, was in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. This altar was smaller and was only for the burning of incense as an offering to the Lord.

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God commanded the priests to burn incense on the golden altar every morning and evening, the same time that the daily burnt offerings were made. The incense was to be left burning continually throughout the day and night as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. God even gave special instructions for how this incense was to be made, and it was not to be duplicated for use outside of the tabernacle (Exodus 30: 34 – 38). Why would God care so much about this incense? Because the incense was a symbol of the prayers and intercession of the people going up to God as a sweet fragrance. God wanted His dwelling to be a place where people could approach Him and pray to Him.

The picture of prayers going up to heaven like incense is captured in David's psalm and also in John's vision in Revelations:

**Psalm 141:2** *May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

**Revelation 8:3-4** *Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. <sup>4</sup> The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.*

In this sense the altar of incense represents Christ, who is the one who intercedes for us in heaven before the throne of God. As you read about Jesus in the gospel accounts, it becomes clear that he was a man of prayer. He was constantly finding time to be alone with the Father; praying that the will of the Father would be done, but also praying for his disciples. Like the High Priest in the tabernacle, Jesus prayed for those who belonged to him. On the night Jesus was betrayed and sentenced to death, Jesus interceded for His disciples and all believers, asking God to guard them from evil and sanctify them by His Word, so that they may see God's glory and be a witness to the world (John 17:1-26). Today, Jesus still is our high priest at the Father's side, interceding for God's people:

**Romans 8:34** *Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

Since we have been forgiven of our sins through the blood of Christ, we also, in the name of Jesus, come boldly in prayer.

**Hebrews 4:15 - 16** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach the*

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*throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

More than that, Jesus told us that when we pray we should pray in his name.

**John 14:13-14** *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

When we pray in the name of Jesus, rather than in our own name, we are praying based on his righteousness—the work He has done and not on our own merit. It is his righteousness and his blood that was shed that makes our prayers acceptable to God.

**James 5:16** *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

Our prayers are only powerful and effective when we come in the righteousness of Christ—he is the righteous man. Our prayers are only a pleasing aroma to God when we follow the recipe for prayer and pray as Jesus taught us to pray in his name and for his glory.

**March 10 – Exodus 30: 17 – 21**

The basin for washing, was a large bowl filled with water. It was located outside of the Holy Place near the Altar of Burnt Offering. In order to serve in the tabernacle, the priest had to first wash themselves with water to be made clean. As much as anything, this cleansing was a symbolic washing that represented the priest being cleansed from the filth of sin that pollutes our world. This is very similar to when God met Moses at the burning bush and told Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. God's tabernacle was holy and in order to come into his presence the priests had to be made ceremonially clean. The basin for washing was a reminder that people need cleansing before approaching God. The priests atoned for their sins through a sacrifice at the Altar of Burnt Offering, but they cleansed themselves at the wash basin before serving in the Holy Place, so that they would be pure and not die before a holy God.

Even in this seemingly small detail we see a powerful connection to Christ. We are forgiven through Christ's work on the cross, but we are washed through His Word. We need to be washed daily in His Word to cleanse ourselves, so that we can serve and minister before Him.

**Ephesians 5:25-27** *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup>*

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*and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

The writer of Hebrews does a beautiful job of tying together the practices that took place in the tabernacle, in the Old Testament, with the work that Christ has done for us as our Great High Priest.

**Hebrews 10:19-22** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

**March 11: Exodus 32: 1 -29**

As Moses is up on the mountain receiving the law, his people, the Israelites are down below making idols to worship. Why would they do such a thing? Verse 1 tells us that it was because Moses was taking too long to come down from the mountain. When Jesus first ascended up to heaven the disciples thought that his return to earth would be immanent, but clearly that has not been the case.

**2 Peter 3:3-12** *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. <sup>4</sup> They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." <sup>5</sup> But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. <sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. <sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.*

As we await the return of Christ, like the Israelites, we have a choice, we can either live holy and godly lives always ready for the Lord to return at any moment, or we too can fall into idolatry worshipping the same things

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the world worships. It is an easy thing for us to follow the ways of the world and to be seduced by the same things the world is—comfort, money, success, and approval are all idols that we can worship and put in place of Christ at the center of our lives.

Think how disheartening it must have been for Moses to come down the mountain and see the idolatry and wickedness that was taking place in the camp of Israel. Look what God says to Moses in verse 10. God wants to destroy the Israelites and then make a great nation out of Moses (if God had done this, He would have still been faithful to His promise to Abraham, since Moses was a descendant of Abraham's also). It would have been easy for Moses to write off his people and take God up on his offer, but instead what does Moses do? He pleads with God on behalf of the Israelites. He becomes an intercessor for his people. In doing this, Moses gives us a picture of Jesus' work in heaven on our behalf.

**Romans 8:33-34** *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

Think how easy it would be for Jesus to be disappointed in us for our behavior and our idolatry. Think how easy it would be for Jesus to write us off. Where would we be if he did? Is there anyone you have written off and given up on? Don't they need you to intercede for them just as Moses did for his people and Jesus does for us?

**March 12 – Exodus 32: 30 – 33: 17**

*"The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?" — John Piper (God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself)*

Now there is a question to make us stop and think, and that is exactly the question the Israelites faced after they fell into idolatry by worshipping the golden calf. Was the Promised Land still the Promised Land if God was not there with them? Was their inheritance worth having if God wasn't part of it? Do you see that is exactly what God is



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offering to them? In spite of their sin, they could still have the Promised Land, they just wouldn't have God, because God wouldn't go up with them. He would send His angel to give them possession of the land, but God himself would not go. If I had to guess, based on their behavior, many of the people would have taken God up on his offer and gladly gone to the Promised Land without God's presence, but not Moses. Moses knew the Promised Land was worthless if God was not there with them.

In the same way, heaven is not worth having if Jesus is not there. Heaven without Jesus is just like having a good life here on earth. It's nice but it is empty, because the one thing we need more than anything else is to be in the presence of God. That is in our DNA—it is how we were created. But so often we are content to settle for just that. We would trade everything just for life to be good. But stop and think about this, if we value a good comfortable life more than Jesus, isn't a good comfortable life really the god that we worship? Moses knew that even though God had promised to give them the Promised Land, that promise was meaningless if God was not at the center of everything. There is no heaven without Jesus at the center of it.

**Revelation 22:3-5** *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

What God was telling the Israelites was that they couldn't have just a partial relationship with Him. He wasn't going to be their "on call God" in a moments notice when they needed Him, and then out of the way when they didn't. Either God was going to be the center of everything for them, or they weren't going to have him at all. Nothing has changed; the same is true for us. Jesus must be the center of our lives every moment of every day. He won't just be our part time savior. If we would take heaven without Jesus, then we really don't know Jesus at all, and we really don't have any relationship with him.

**Matthew 7:16-27** *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven,*

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*but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' <sup>24</sup> "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

If we do not want Jesus' presence to fill our lives today, is there any reason we should expect to be in Jesus' presence in eternity?