

November 23/24, 2024
"Light of the World"
Pastor John Dickson



SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2024 Challenge: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament

November: Read Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah to see how people, situations and events point to Jesus

Day 1 [Matthew 5](#) | Kingdom Attitude

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

Jesus begins his ministry and attracts a crowd. Matthew spends four chapters telling the reader who Jesus is and why they should pay attention to his words. Matthew is clearly presenting Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, but he's different than expected. As the crowd grows, Jesus goes to a mountainside and delivers what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. It's Jesus's core message, not about rules or earning God's favor, but about the kind of heart God wants his followers to cultivate. Jesus starts by discussing who is blessed. He tells them the good news means they can be blessed no matter their circumstances. Blessing is not for those with power but for the meek and poor in spirit. This is an unexpected, revolutionary concept in their world. Jesus redefines what it means to be blessed in his kingdom.

Jesus's message was revolutionary in the first century and is still revolutionary for us. Our skeptical world often sees "religion" as a negative influence. However, our attitudes can help shape how the world views the church and Jesus himself. Our attitudes flow directly from a relationship with God and living a life reliant on the Spirit. If we cultivate humble hearts, we will stand out from the world, and others will want to experience the blessing of following Jesus.

TODAY: Consider the type of kingdom Jesus came to build. It isn't a kingdom of political power or earning God's favor, but a kingdom of love and mercy. Consider using [Matthew 5:3-10](#) as a prayer to thank God for the Bible and how we can learn more about what it means to follow Jesus.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Nehemiah 9](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the recounting of God's faithfulness. Consider how Jesus ultimately demonstrates God's faithfulness ([2 Corinthians 1:20](#)).

Day 2 [Matthew 5:6-12](#) | Kingdom Actions

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Matthew 5:7

The crowd settles onto the hillside. They want to hear what Jesus has to say. They know Jesus is different. He's not just another rabbi. He's the one who heals the sick. Jesus continues his talk about those who are blessed in God's kingdom by discussing four actions. He says those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are merciful and peacemakers and even those who are persecuted are blessed in his kingdom. This message is radical because the blessing isn't based on circumstances. It's a blessing based on God and the new kingdom. These actions radically differ from what the religious elite of first-century Israel considered blessed.

Our world isn't much different than first-century Israel in this way. For most of us, to be blessed implies having an ideal or desired set of circumstances. We hunger and thirst for success, fame or wealth, not necessarily righteousness. We want to cancel or take revenge, not extend mercy. We can be selfish and manipulate people instead of having a pure heart. Instead of seeking peace, we can try to play people off each other, pitting them against each other to get what we want. We easily misunderstand what leads to a blessed life. The blessed life is found in Jesus and his kingdom. A kingdom built on love and mercy and empowered by his Spirit.

TODAY: Focus on the actions of being merciful and seeking peace. Our world seems to be short on these two things right now. Thanksgiving is just two days away. Your gathering of family or friends may need some mercy or peacemaking. Pray and ask God to help you bring mercy and peace this Thanksgiving.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Nehemiah 10](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Look at the people's covenant commitments. Reflect on how Jesus establishes the new covenant ([Hebrews 8:6-13](#)).

Day 3 [Matthew 5:13-16](#) | Kingdom Impact

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

Jesus is a brilliant teacher. He takes difficult ideas and boils them down into simple, profound truths. Here, Jesus gives two tangible examples of how those who cultivate a kingdom heart will impact the world. He says they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt and light were essential elements in a world without electricity and refrigeration. Salt was necessary for flavoring and preserving food from rot. Jesus calls his followers to flavor and preserve the world from moral decay. In first-century Israel, there weren't streetlights to light the way or provide safety in the dark. Jesus says his followers should give light to the world around them. His followers' actions are to reveal who God is and the way to him. The world should think God is amazing by seeing how Jesus's followers live.

Jesus calls us to be salt and light in our world today. Jesus's plan for the world to know him is through his church. As we share our faith in Jesus and live differently from the culture, we will draw a skeptical world to Jesus. When the world interacts with us, they should end up glorifying God because of how we live. That's a powerful statement and a strong challenge.

TODAY: Ask God to help you be salt and light in your spheres of influence. Open your journal and begin a list of ways you could be salt and light to those around you this holiday season. Thanksgiving and Christmas offer unique opportunities to let those closest to us "see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" ([Matthew 5:16](#)).

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Nehemiah 11](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus.

Day 4 [Psalm 100](#) | Thanksgiving

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

Psalm 100:4

It's Thanksgiving! Once a year, many of us come together with friends, family and others to give thanks. Millions of Americans will sit at tables filled with their favorite foods on this fourth Thursday of November. As the celebration begins, many will pause to give thanks to God. It's not a generic thanks; it's a thanks to *someone*. A thanks to the creator and sustainer of the universe. A thanks to the God who sent his Son to save us from our sins.

The words will come easily for some of us. It has been a good year filled with new arrivals, healthy relationships and a bright future. For others, the words may not be easy at all. There's grief over an empty spot at the table. Family tensions simmer. Hearts ache over life choices. Whether we come to the holiday with heavy or happy hearts, the words of Psalm 100 call us to thanksgiving. We're reminded that God is the creator, that we are God's, that God is good and that his faithfulness continues through all generations.

TODAY: We are grateful for you and that God has brought you to Ada Bible Church. We are praying for you. As you start your Thanksgiving day, thank the Lord for who he is and what he has done for you. Slowly meditate on Psalm 100 and use it as the basis for your prayer. Consider reading Psalm 100 as you gather around the table today.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Nehemiah 12](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Note the dedication of the wall and joyful worship. Think about how Jesus gives us his joy, and we can rejoice in the Lord ([John 15:9-11](#), [Philippians 4:4](#)).

Day 5 [Psalm 104](#) | Worship through Gratitude

Praise the Lord, my soul. Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.
Psalm 104:1

Psalm 104 is a fantastic example of worshiping God. Interestingly, the psalmist starts by telling himself to praise God. He's making a deliberate choice. Yesterday was Thanksgiving, a day dedicated to giving thanks. But a lifetime of praising and thanking God is a cultivated habit. In Psalm 104, it's like the psalmist is looking around and trying to worship God for as many things as he can think of. He takes time to examine his life and the world around him for reasons to praise God. It begins with a choice.

The worship in Psalm 104 reminds us that responding to God isn't about extraordinary circumstances. Developing a grateful heart won't happen if the only time we are thankful is when it seems like something good happens. Like the psalmist telling himself to praise God, we can develop a grateful heart through a gratitude habit. It's a skill we can develop to take gratitude beyond Thanksgiving Day. One helpful tool is a gratitude journal. It's a journal for writing down a few things that help us reflect on God's generosity in our lives. This practice slows us down for a few moments each day to think about God and what he's given us. It may not change our hearts instantly, but over time, something inside shifts.

TODAY: Pray and ask God to help you be thankful for the many ways he's provided for you. Choose to worship God by building the habit of gratitude through a daily journal. Start by writing down the three things you are grateful for today. Say a quick prayer, asking God for the gratitude habit to change your heart.

JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: Read [Nehemiah 13](#). Highlight anything that points to Jesus. Consider Nehemiah's final reforms and his purification work. Note how Jesus's blood purifies us ([1 John 1:7-9](#)).