



# Christ, the Everlasting Lord

KELLI B. TRUJILLO



*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government  
will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6

**O**f all the common signs of this season leading up to Christmas—lights strung upon homes, Nativity scenes set out on display, trees decorated with ornaments—the one I most look forward to is the music. The songs of Advent and Christmas invite us to picture the familiar events: the holy family at the crèche, angels singing to awestruck shepherds, wise men journeying toward the “little town” of Bethlehem. These beloved hymns and carols warm our hearts.

Yet within many of our favorites are woven lyrics that break through our familiarity and declare an astonishing theological reality: The newborn in the manger *is the Mighty God*.

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and “We Three Kings” exhort us to comprehend who this infant truly is: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity.” “Glorious now

behold him arise; King and God and sacrifice.”

“Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” sounds out this profound paradox in simple words: “Born a child and yet a King.” These lyrics resound with the truth of Isaiah 9:6–7: This child is the Promised One who will reign eternally on David’s throne, establishing his kingdom of justice, righteousness, and peace.

It’s an unfathomable mystery the New Testament also invites us to dwell upon. The author of Hebrews proclaims, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory” and the “heir of all things” (1:2–3). Paul emphasizes that “in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . . . In him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17). Jesus Christ is supreme over all things and the fullness of God dwells in him.

This is the promised child God’s people awaited and whose birth we are preparing to celebrate. This is the Lord for whom God sent a messenger to prepare the way, preaching a message of repentance. This is the Savior who, in his mission of love and redemption, would defeat the power of sin and death through his sacrifice on the cross and victorious resurrection. And this is the one whose return we await in hope, trusting in “the King of kings and Lord

of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:15–16).

This reality—that the child in the crèche is the Mighty God—is far beyond what we can fully comprehend. *And yet it is true.* In awe and humility, we heed the exhortation in “Oh Holy Night”—“Fall on your knees!” In humble gratitude, we worship him.

Let all within us praise his  
holy name.  
Christ is the Lord! O praise  
his name forever!  
His power and glory  
evermore proclaim!  
His power and glory  
evermore proclaim!

*Ponder* Isaiah 9:6–7;  
Colossians 1:15–20; and  
Hebrews 1:1–12.

*Optional: Also read*  
1 Timothy 6:13–16.

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Which description of Jesus’ might and power in these passages draws your attention? Why? How can this truth shape your worship this Advent season?

# A Path Through the Wilderness

MARLENA GRAVES



*A voice of one  
calling: "In the  
wilderness prepare  
the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the  
desert a highway  
for our God."*

ISAIAH 40:3

**I**n Isaiah 40, we find the Israelites deported to a strange land—exiled and captive in ancient Babylon. The city was located about an hour south of modern-day Baghdad, Iraq, and was considered the center of Mesopotamian civilization, a cosmopolitan desert city of hanging gardens that was famous for Hammurabi and his code. But God’s people didn’t want to remain stranded here. They wanted to go *home*, back to Jerusalem. Yet they were far, far away from home with no hope of return.

In this no-hope-possible context, they experienced an inbreaking of God’s grace. “Comfort,” the prophet cried—a Hebrew word with connotations of *courage* and *strength*. His message was something akin to “Be comforted, have hope! This is not the

end. You are going to see and experience something you could never have imagined in your wilderness life.” Like their ancient ancestors who had experienced miraculous provision and deliverance in the Egyptian wilderness, they too would see God make a path through the wilderness for them.

Pairing Isaiah 40:1–5 with Malachi 3:1–4 and 4:5–6, we see God’s promise to send a messenger to prepare the hearts of his people for deliverance. They would be cleansed as through fire so that they might see God, themselves, and the world more clearly. In this deliverance, that which had been torn apart through exile, like familial relationships, would one day be stitched back together (Mal. 4:5–6).

God kept his word; eventually the Israelites returned to Jerusalem. Yet this return was not the end of the prophecy. Centuries later, another prophet, John the Baptist, would clear the path for the Mighty God, our Lord Jesus Christ, to save his people from their exilic existence—exiled from God and one another due to sin. John would soften people’s hearts for Christ’s arrival.

And there is another layer of fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy (3:1–4): It points toward Jesus’ second coming when we will be refined—made pure—as all things are made new (see Rev. 21:5).

Fantastic deliverances in hopeless situations are not relegated to ancient history. Almighty God pulls off spectacular feats of deliverance daily. Indeed, God appears when all hope seems lost. We can trust in the mightiness of God. And, during Advent, we’re reminded to trust the Promised One who came to us as a newborn babe yet held all the power and might of the universe and beyond in his tiny hands!

Are you in the wilderness in need of deliverance—in need of God in his might to intervene? We may not know how or when deliverance may come, but *it will come*. God always comes. Ask God to prepare your heart for his arrival and the deliverance that always comes with it.

*Contemplate* Isaiah 40:1–5  
and Malachi 3:1–4; 4:5–6.

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How do you see God’s might in these promises? In their layers of fulfillment? How do these passages resonate with your own longings and desires?

# True Cleansing

MADISON N. PIERCE

*I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

MATTHEW 3:11

If we're honest, at first glance John the Baptist is about the worst hype man you could imagine. He's dressed in a belted hair shirt and eats locusts. As he comes into the wilderness of Judea, he begins to preach. We could certainly imagine a proclamation of the coming Messiah that would tickle the ears a bit more. He could remind people of the great promises associated with the Messiah—that the Messiah will bring justice, provide healing, offer stability. He could tell them the *good news*.

John, however, does something quite different. He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," and through Matthew's use of the quotation from Isaiah 40:3, we see that John tells the people with familiar and authoritative words to "make straight their paths"—or "straighten up" (see also John 1:23). John starts with what might be considered the bad news, really; he tells them that they need to change.



And many of them listen. How is this strange man so successful in ministry? Matthew gives us hints. He offers a selective description of John, and each detail is loaded with significance. His hair shirt with a leather belt? The attire of Elijah. His locusts and honey? The meal of the poor. Matthew presents this man in the style of the prophets of old, as an authoritative man of God who declares the word of the Lord.

The people approach John for cleansing—ritual washing that symbolizes their repentance—but he promises that more effective cleansing is coming. This cleansing from the Lord will come via “the Holy Spirit and fire.”

As John continues to explain the ministry of the coming one, his metaphors help us understand what it means to be baptized in Spirit and fire. It is purification (in part) through separating out what is good from what is bad. John uses the agricultural

metaphor we see in places like Psalm 1, a process well known to his audience. Farmers would use a winnowing fork to throw grain in the air. The heavy, edible parts would fall to the ground, but the chaff was lighter and generally would blow away. If any extra chaff was left over after this, the farmer would separate it out and burn it.

This is a more permanent cleansing than a washing, and I think that’s precisely the point. The people’s baptism by John is significant, but without the accompanying work of the Spirit, its effects are temporary. With just the baptism of John, they will need to wash again, but the work of Jesus through the Spirit is effective for all time.

*Reflect on Matthew 3:1-12.*

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How would you describe John’s message? Why is it good news? In prayer, consider what John’s words emphasize about Jesus’ power and purpose.

# Jesus Deserves All the Attention

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG

*He must become  
greater; I must  
become less.*

JOHN 3:30

**H**e must increase, but I must decrease” (KJV). I remember hearing this verse as a child and imagining Jesus growing bigger and bigger while John the Baptist shrank! The context of John’s statement clarifies his meaning: John’s disciples have told him that “everyone is going” to Jesus, so John declares, “He must become greater; I must become less.”

John’s ministry began before Jesus’ did, so John watched the number of Jesus’ followers grow from zero to a lot more than John had. This could have been heartbreaking, because “the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem” had been going out to the wilderness to see John (Mark 1:5).

The Gospel of John, however, consistently depicts John the Baptist merely as a witness—one who bears



testimony—to the identity and greatness of Jesus. Each portion of today's two passages shows John explaining who he is and isn't or who Jesus is. Jewish leaders from Jerusalem question John about his identity, and he denies being any kind of Messiah. He is just preparing the way for the Christ. Yes, he has a ministry of water baptism, but his status is greatly inferior to that of the coming one. John points out Jesus as God's sacrificial lamb, who will take away the sins of the world, and who will immerse people into the power of the Holy Spirit.

Later, when Jesus' followers have eclipsed John's in number, John insists this is fully appropriate. He likens himself simply to the best man in a wedding, where Jesus is the groom. John's analogy in 3:29 is striking, particularly when we understand its cultural context. Ancient Jewish custom

called for the best man to wait outside the bedroom when the bride and groom consummated the marriage. Traditionally, the groom would shout for joy to confirm their new marital intimacy, and the best man would share that joy.

The Christian life is all about deferring more and more to Jesus, the Mighty God. A generation later, Paul would say in Philippians 1:18 that "the important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

I have recently retired and need to learn this lesson more than ever. Being in the limelight is not the point. Humbly magnifying Jesus is. I need to shrink.

*Meditate on* John 1:19-34  
and 3:22-30.

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Consider what John the Baptist's example shows us about who Jesus is. How is John's posture instructive for your own spiritual life? How might you "become less"?

# Jesus Will Reign

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG

*So you also must  
be ready, because  
the Son of Man  
will come at an  
hour when you do  
not expect him.*

MATTHEW 24:44

Questions arise with the first word of this passage: “Immediately”!

Most of the rest of the content in verses 29–31 has almost always been understood to describe Christ’s return, depicted poetically in the language of Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4 as involving cosmic upheaval. (Some have instead taken it as a sort of invisible coming of Jesus in judgment through Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70—though the idea of gathering the elect from one corner of the world to another doesn’t fit that interpretation.)

When will Christ come back? This message on the Mount of Olives was provoked by Jesus’ disciples asking him when he would come back (Matt. 24:3). He itemized a long list of what must happen first (vv. 4–26) and now says, in essence, “Watch for these things to know when my coming is near,” just as a fig tree in leaf portends the arrival of summer.



Examples of all “these things” occurred by A.D. 70, so the church in every generation since has believed it might see his return. Jesus is not saying he will return in the disciples’ lifetime, merely that all the preparatory events will have occurred. “These things” in verse 34 have to be the same as “these things” in verse 33—which show that Christ’s return “is near” but not yet here. So they can’t include his actual return—just the signs that prepared for his return. When he returns, he will no longer be merely “near, right at the door,” but he will have arrived!

We can’t know the precise timing of all this, so we must always be prepared. Those who aren’t will be caught off guard by the suddenness and surprise of the final events. If we remain alert at all times, we don’t have to worry about a midnight burglar. Of course, Jesus isn’t coming back to steal anything from us; it is the idea of *unexpectedness* he’s highlighting in this comparison.

But what about “immediately after the distress of those days”? Perhaps the distress here is the distress that characterizes the entire period between Christ’s two comings. After all, 2 Timothy 3:12 promises persecution to all the godly (even amid the many joyous moments in the Christian life).

However we interpret it, here is testimony to Jesus as the Mighty God who will put all things right in his perfect timing. Today, many Christians have recovered the biblical call for justice in this life, and rightly so—we should do all we can to help others. But war, sickness, natural disaster, injury and disability, poverty, and broken relationships all require us to ultimately trust God for *complete* restitution and restoration in eternity.

### *Contemplate*

Matthew 24:29–44.

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What questions does this passage raise for you? What feelings does it stir up? Pray, reflecting on how it points your focus toward Jesus’ might and power.

# The Judge Who Is Faithful & True

GLENN PACKIAM



*I saw heaven standing  
open and there before  
me was a white horse,  
whose rider is called  
Faithful and True.  
With justice he judges  
and wages war.*

REVELATION 19:11

The grad student dialoguing with me was heavy with questions posed by her agnostic friends about hell and God's judgment. She found it hard to reconcile the God of love and the message of forgiveness with visions of fiery torment. As we talked, I explained that there are many orthodox Christian views of what the final judgment will be like, but the *main* thing Christians are asked to do is to trust Jesus as the Judge. She was visibly relieved.

For whatever reason—we might blame Dante or folk religion or medieval superstition—we often imagine God's judgment to be impersonal and cold, like a mass execution or a bomb detonated from a distance. But Revelation deliberately shows us *Jesus* involved in the judgment of the nations. I think there are two reasons for this.

First, justice and judgment are two sides of the same coin. To enact justice, one must execute judgment. If we want Jesus the Mighty God to set the world right, he must deal with injustice and evil together. Here the justice and judgment of Jesus are depicted in a vivid way that would have held sway in first-century minds: a warrior on a horse with a sword. But we must be careful with our assumptions here.

Which leads us to the second reason why Jesus is shown as the one who carries out justice and judgment: The Jesus who is returning is the same Jesus who came. *There is no change of identity between advents.* “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8); this conviction helps us consider *how* Jesus enacts justice and executes judgment. On the cross, Jesus died in solidarity with the sinner and the sufferer. He bore the weight of God’s judgment on evil.

If we were to ask how Jesus responds to injustice and evil, the answer is *he bleeds*. Judgment fell on him so that justice—wrongs being set right—could come to all. When we see Jesus coming like a warrior whose robe is dipped in blood, the blood could well be his own. After all, this is a king like none other. Jesus embodies might and power in a way we’ve never known before.

Yet this passage doesn’t leave us without a warning. There are those who resist this king, who insist on their own way, their own rule, their own empire. For them, life will meet its end. The gruesome images of being devoured depict the erosion of life.

The King of Kings brings life by his death. But if you resist his life and insist on protecting your own, instead of life you will get death.

Judgment and justice belong together. And the one who will carry out both is Faithful and True. Will we trust him with enacting justice and executing judgment?

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*Consider* Revelation 19:4–21.

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How can your knowledge of Jesus and his first advent speak into your understanding of the Second Advent? Of the justice and judgment of the King of Kings?

# The Greatest Hope of All

GLENN PACKIAM

Imagine a boy being bullied on the playground. Kids surround him, taunt him, push him onto the ground. He's fighting back the tears, but that's about all he can fight; there's no way to stop the terror and the torment.

Then, almost out of nowhere, a car pulls up. It's the kid's father. "Get in the car, son," the dad yells. Rolling out of the other kids' grasp, the boy scrambles to his feet and stumbles to the car. They speed off. As the boy looks briefly out the window, he is sure the bullies are laughing. The boy is safe, but there's no way to count that as a win. An evacuation is not a victory.

The end of the Book of Revelation—the end of the Bible itself—shows us a picture not of our evacuation or escape but of God's arrival. Jesus conquered sin and death on the cross. In John's

gospel, Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished" (19:30). Here, in John's revelation, the one who is seated on the throne says, "It is done." The first statement was an announcement of completion; the second is a proclamation of things coming to pass. The victory of Jesus on the cross was made manifest in his resurrection, but it will arrive in fullness at his return.

We know that the season of Advent is a time of waiting between two arrivals. But the truth is, it is also a waiting between two *victories*. Jesus the Mighty One has overcome, and Jesus the Mighty One is coming again.

And when he comes, he comes to  *dwell*. The vision of the end that Revelation provides is of God making heaven and earth new, uniting the new heaven and the new earth as one, and filling it with his presence



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*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.”*

REVELATION 21:3

and light. This is a victory that comes with an occupation—only in this case, the occupation is good news, the best news the world could receive! The Creator has redeemed his creation and has come to fill it with his glory. The story that began in Genesis has been perfected and completed.

Back to the playground. Creatively imagine a totally different scenario: Instead of the dad yelling for his kid to get in so they can drive away, the dad parks the car, gets out, and walks slowly over. The authority of his very presence drives away the bullies. He embraces his son. He calls out to other kids who are hiding, who are hurting, to come out into the light. He decides to settle in and remake the playground entirely, now with better equipment and brighter delights. Food and drinks arrive. Then comes the music. And ice cream. Laughter abounds. Somehow the place of pain has become the place of joy.

*Reflect on* Revelation 21:1-6 and 21:22-22:5.

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What stands out to you in this description of the Mighty One’s ultimate reign? What hope and comfort does it bring? How do you desire to respond to Jesus?