

November (C2C)
(Comments based on ESV text)

November 1 — **Contrasts** — Luke 8-9. I noticed a lot of contrasts in our reading for today. Jesus contrasted His physical mother and half-brothers with His spiritual family in 8:19-21. Contrary to what we would normally think, our spiritual brothers and sisters should be just as high on our priority list as our family brothers and sisters who are believers. Secondly, there was a contrast of saving one's life in one sense and losing it in another (9:24-25). The humble child was contrasted to the disciples' desire for position: "...he who is least among you all is the one who is great" (9:48). If we truly realized the unmatched value of a life lived for Christ, we would give ourselves much more attention and time to it. Finally, Jesus contrasted the spiritually dead and the physically dead in 9:60. Spiritual death lasts for eternity. We don't think much like God does, do we?! God said, "*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways*" (Isa. 55:8).

November 2 — **Short Message** — Luke 10-11. The only thing we know that Jesus told the 72 messengers to say is that "*the kingdom of God has come near to you*" (10:9) following their ministry of healing the sick. I would have expected their message to contain more content. It is as if they were only preparing the way for Pentecost as John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus' ministry. When they returned, they seemed surprised that God had also used them to cast out demons (10:17). Those 36 groups of messengers must have caused quite a stir in that land.

November 3 — **Not for the Birds** — Luke 12-13. Jesus mentioned sparrows (12:6) and ravens (12:24) in this passage for today. For both examples, He emphasized that we are of "*more value*" than them. He cares for us so much that He has even numbered our hairs (about 90,000 for redheads on the low end, and 150,000 for blondes). Like for the ravens, He makes sure we are fed. Rather than fretting about our physical needs, we should "*seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to [us]*" (12:31). That doesn't relieve us of responsibility but does point us to the right emphasis.

November 4 — **Repent or Earn?** — Luke 14-16. There is an interesting contrast between the two sons in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the young wayward son turned in repentance, he said that he had "*sinned against heaven and before [his father]*" (15:21). He said that twice in the same order (cf. 15:18). I would have expected this order: "...against you and before heaven." This suggests to me that our sin, even though directed toward mankind, is primarily a sin against God. The older son's sin was of a different kind. His focus was on his actions and his lack of reward: "*I have served ... never disobeyed ... [but you] never gave me*" (15:29). His had a selfish works-based mindset. Do you tend to be more of a repentant sinner or a complaining one?

November 5 — **Have Mercy!** — Luke 17-19. Three times in these chapters, people cry out for divine mercy. The ten lepers shouted, "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*" (17:13), which they received in healing, although only one returned, "*praising God ... and ... giving him thanks*" (17:15-16). In a parable, the hated tax collector who felt remorse over his sin cried out, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*" (18:13). The blind man Bartimaeus persisted in crying out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" (18:38), and when he was healed, he "*followed him, glorifying God*" (18:43). Both the leper and the blind man gave praise to God for having mercy on them—rescuing them from their troubles. Look for God's hand of help in your life today and then remember to thank Him for having mercy on you.

November 6 — **Ludicrous Leaders** — Luke 20-22. Jesus' religious opponents were constantly intent on out-smarting Him but they were always soundly silenced. They were stopped with Jesus' question about John's baptism (20:8); they "*became silent*" after their question about paying taxes (20:26); after their challenge about the resurrection, "*they no longer dared to ask him any question*"

(20:40). They were at an infinite disadvantage, not only in that they were arguing with Omniscience, but because they were coming from a sinful basis. One way this was shown was in their being hypocritical: they “*pretended to be sincere*” (20:20). They were also proud and selfish, seeking “*places of honor*” (20:46). Thirdly, they were cowards: “*they feared the people*” (22:2). How is that for being religious leaders?! Although we also sometimes struggle with pretending, with pride, and with fear; we have not given in to those things, nor are we bent on opposing Jesus.

November 7 — Risen Indeed! — Luke 23-24. I was struck in our reading today by the loving, tender heart of Jesus. Even surrounding the monumental sacrifice of Himself for us, He showed concern for others. After being severely beaten and while struggling on His way to Golgotha, He showed concern for the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” (23:28), many of whom would go through the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He showed concern for those who nailed Him to the cross by praying, “*Father, forgive them*” (23:34). After one of the thieves’ positive response, He promised, “*today you will be with me in paradise*” (23:43). He also showed concern by drawing near (24:15) to the sorrowful travelers on the road to Emmaus and “*interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*” (24:27). His concern was shown again when He appeared to the huddled disciples, declaring “*Peace to you!*” (24:36). From His suffering body to His resurrected one, He reached out in loving concern for others. Take this blessing with you today: “*Peace to you!*”

November 8 — John — John 1-3. The Gospel of John was written by the humbled Apostle John, “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (21:20), and it was penned much later than the three other Gospels. John includes many acts and teachings of Jesus not contained in the Synoptic Gospels. Although John certainly had access to the books written by Mark, Matthew, and Luke, he repeated very little of their information. The stated purpose of this Gospel is, “*so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (20:31). Philip may have lacked a lot of knowledge about Jesus when Nathanael (aka Bartholomew) questioned his invitation, so Philip simply asked him to “*Come and see*” (1:46, emphasis added). Ironically, what immediately convinced Nathanael that Jesus was “*the Son of God*,” was when Jesus told him that He “*saw*” him (under the fig tree before Philip invited him). That was evidence of supernatural knowledge! Jesus sees everything in us as well (“*he knew all people ... he himself knew what was in man*”—2:24-25).

November 9 — Worshiping While Reading — John 4-5. Jesus criticized the religious leaders (5:18) because, although they searched the Scriptures, they were thinking “*that in them you have eternal life*” (5:39). Perhaps they looked at reading the OT as something magical, or maybe mechanical—gaining “points” with God. But Jesus told them that those Scriptures “*bear witness about me*.” While we are in the process of reading through the rest of the Bible this year, we should remember to look for Jesus in it, not just informing ourselves about what He did and said, but discovering His Person—who He is. Seek a relationship as you read! Worship Him as you read! Jesus said that “*the Father is seeking such people to worship him*” (4:23). Let us not read mechanically but worshipfully.

November 10 — Spiritual Spectrum — John 6-7. A variety of people’s spiritual condition is shown in these two chapters. First, there were those who were attracted to Jesus by His miracles, and He said they were following Him only “*because you ate your fill of the loaves*” (6:26). There is some of that attitude today in people who go to church for entertainment or the promise of a better physical or material life. Secondly, there were the works-based people who asked, “*What must we do ...?*” (6:28). Jesus’ response was that the only “*work*” God requires is, “*that you believe*” (6:29). Thirdly, there were disappointed people who couldn’t swallow Jesus’ words: “*After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him*” (6:66). They didn’t understand because their hearts were not right with God (“*If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God*”—7:17). Finally, there were the brothers of Jesus who had not yet believed in him (7:5). In our day, we have people who have the post-Pentecost privilege of looking back on all these ignorant and

distorted attitudes, being thankful that Jesus promised that “*living water*” (7:38) and “*eternal life*” (6:40) for us to enjoy.

November 11 — **Who Is He?** — John 8-9. If anyone doubted who Jesus was, these two chapters should have cleared it up. Twice Jesus said, “*I am the light of the world*” (8:12, 9:5). He also identified Himself with the eternal “I AM” who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). He said to the Jewish doubters, “*before Abraham was, I am*” (8:58), and warned them that they would die in their sins “*unless you believe that I am he*” (8:24). Exactly who was He? Seven times in chapters 8-9, Jesus spoke about “*the Father*” or “*my Father*” and claimed that “*the Father … sent me*” (8:18). Who was His Father? The Jewish leaders seemed confused but Jesus made it very clear to them, saying, “*If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God*” (8:42, emphasis added). Also, in 8:54, Jesus equated “*my Father*” with God. Jesus said there were two reasons for their confusion: “*you cannot bear to hear my word*” (8:43) and “*you are not of God*” (8:47). The world around us today is also confused for the same two reasons: They are not connected to God and they cannot bear to hear what His Word says.

November 12 — **Glad and Sad** — John 10-11. There are more “I am” statements by Jesus in this passage, describing Himself as “*the door*” (10:7, 9), “*the good shepherd*” (10:11, 14), “*the son of God*” (10:36), and finally, “*the resurrection and the life*” (11:25). It is interesting that Jesus intentionally delayed going to Lazarus, telling His disciples that “*I am glad that I was not there*,” and then stating His reason: “*so that you may believe*” (11:14). He was glad even though it made Mary and Martha sad. Sometimes God’s purposes allow difficulties for us, like sorrow, in order to accomplish His greater and better plan. Was Jesus unmoved regarding their feelings? No, He even wept with them (11:35). His greater plan was that they “*would see the glory of God*” (11:40) and believe (11:14). The weekend before I wrote this in the Philippines, I attended a memorial service for a prominent 50-year-old Christian doctor in our city. The following week I spoke at the church where he was one of the elders. Several months ago, they had given me the theme: Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving during a time of sorrow? Yes, it can happen because the loving God who allows our sorrow, points us to His glory through our tears.

November 13 — **The Jews** — John 12-14. Have you noticed that the Gospel of John mentions “*the Jews*” very often? That expression is found in the other three Synoptic Gospels a total of 15 times but John uses it 60 times. It is used both positively and negatively, depending on which group of people was being referred to. John was not emphasizing or degrading race, since he was also a Jew, but simply revealing that his primary readers were somewhat uninformed Gentiles who lived decades after the events he describes. We should be careful that some statements we make might be taken as evidence of racial prejudice. It seems that some people are looking for opportunities to be offended.

November 14 — **Obey to Abide** — John 15-18. The beginning of this reading session records Jesus’ final “*I am*” statement: “*I am the true vine*” (15:1). It also begins an important passage about abiding in Christ. There may be other factors involved in how to abide in Christ but Jesus mentions only one here: “*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love*” (15:10). We can abide by obeying. One of my former students wrote to me last week, saying that she was “too far from the Lord” and then asked, “Please pray for my obedience.” She was not abiding and understood that it was connected to her disobedience. I advised her to submit herself to a godly woman for daily, then weekly, accountability to help her back to a life of obedient abiding, which she has arranged to do. All of us at times feel that we have grown cold in our relationship with God. At those times, we should look for areas of disobedience in our lives.

November 15 — **It is Finished!** — John 19-21. Jesus came, lived, and died in fulfillment of OT prophecy. Just before dying He “*said (to fulfill the Scripture), ‘I thirst’*” (19:28), which was predicted by

the psalmist David: “...*for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink*” (Ps. 69:21). Then He said, “*It is finished*” (19:30), and died. The prophecies of His life, death, and salvific mission were fulfilled. Even following His death, other prophecies were fulfilled about His bones not being broken (Ps. 34:20), being pierced (Zech. 12:10), and being buried in a rich man’s grave (Is. 53:9). The finishing of His earthly life was the beginning of spiritual life for us. Because of His substitutionary death, we are offered eternal life, and we have a mission to bring the message of salvation to those we encounter in life.

November 16 — **Acts** — Acts 1-2. The book of Acts, although not stated, was certainly written by Luke, who also wrote his Gospel. Both were written to “Theophilus,” which means “lover of God,” suggesting to some that it was a symbolic name representing all new believers who needed information. Strangely, Luke’s name appears only three times in the NT, all in Paul’s letters written from prison. Acts, probably written around 62 AD, presents a historical review of the early church, mixing long narrative descriptions of journeys and lengthy speeches or sermons (32 of them!).

November 17 — **Boldness** — Acts 3-5. Peter and John showed boldness when they told the lame man to look at them and then commanded him, “Rise up and walk!” (3:6). The Sanhedrin men were astonished at the boldness (4:13) of these same two men who had declared that “*there is salvation in no one else...*” than Jesus (4:12). Later, after all the apostles were beaten by the Jewish leaders, they prayed with the other believers for God to “*grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness*” (4:29), which God granted (4:31). Boldness comes out of a genuine, divinely changed life. Spiritual boldness for witnessing also comes out of confidence, knowing that Jesus is the only way to heaven. And boldness comes from answered prayer. Ask God today to give you boldness to declare His love and forgiveness to someone.

November 18 — **Rejection History** — Acts 6-8. Stephen emphasized two major points in his chapter-long speech before the Sanhedrin court. One was that God is not limited to a place (“*houses made by hands*”—7:48), as Stephen pointed out God’s meeting with Abraham in Mesopotamia (7:2), with Joseph in Egypt (7:9), and with Moses at Mount Sinai (7:30). The second, and primary, point Stephen made was that Israel had a consistent history of rejecting God-sent people, like they did with Moses, saying, “*Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?*” (7:27) and they “*refused to obey him*” (7:39). Stephen zeroed in on this rejection idea in his “killer conclusion,” saying that, like their fathers, the present “*stiff-necked*” Sanhedrin leaders also rejected God’s Messiah whom they “*betrayed and murdered*” (7:52). Not surprisingly, it wasn’t well received! And neither is our message by people who are bent on resisting God. Some will listen and believe, however, so we need to continue to proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

November 19 — **Granted Repentance** — Acts 9-11. I recently had my graduate school students in the Philippines study in detail 2 Tim. 2:24-26, which is like Paul’s prayer for some, that “*God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 2:25). I was surprised today when I read a very similar statement in the conclusion of the Jerusalem Christian leaders about Peter’s visit to Cornelius’ house, that “*to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life*” (Acts 11:18). The NT repeatedly emphasizes man’s responsibility for repentance, including the fact that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). But it seems that in only these two places is God’s sovereignty said to be involved in giving people repentance, the ability to turn away from sin and turn to Him. It is a cooperative effort.

November 20 — **The Hard Route** — Acts 12-14. Paul’s first missionary journey was a difficult one. He and Barnabas were driven out of Antioch Pisidia (13:50), had to flee Iconium to avoid being stoned (14:5), was stoned and left for dead in Lystra (14:19), and then fled to Derbe. They had traveled about 250 miles by land. Derbe was only about 90 miles from Paul’s coastal hometown of Tarsus, where they could have caught a ship to their starting place in Antioch Syria, but instead, they

retraced their long, hard, and dangerous route in order to strengthen the new believers (14:23). It was a choice of love over comfort. It reminds me of John W. Peterson's song:

*It's not an easy road
We are trav'ling to heaven,
For many are the thorns on the way;
It's not an easy road,
But the Savior is with us,
His presence gives us joy ev'ry day.
so I may praise him*

November 21 — **Reaching Out God's Way** — Acts 15-16. Acts begins taking on a more international flavor at this point. Timothy, whose father was a Gentile (16:1), joined Paul and Silas. God directed them negatively (saying, "No!") in their attempts to take the gospel SW into Asia (16:6) or north into Bithynia (16:7). Then God's positive direction came at Troas through a vision for them to proceed into European Macedonia (the northeast part of modern Greece). The "we" in 16:10 is the indication that Luke, the author of Acts, first joined the troop of Paul and Silas before they left Troas. Finally, Paul's first recorded encounter in Philippi was with Lydia, a woman from Thyatira, a city in the province of Asia, where God had prevented them from ministering earlier. God sees the big picture and we don't. He sometimes says "No" to what we want, because in His plan, He wants to accomplish something better. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

November 22 — **Mass Confusion** — Acts 17-19. Apollos was a gifted and educated man, but although he believed that Jesus was the Christ, he lacked knowledge and experience because "*he knew only the baptism of John*" (18:25). He was ignorantly confused but was filled in by Priscilla and Aquila regarding the full message of Jesus, and was baptized again. Later, Paul encountered twelve men who had also experienced John's baptism but were not even aware of the Holy Spirit (19:2-3), i.e., the availability of His indwelling presence. They, also, were confused but their lives were changed as the Spirit came to indwell them. The stubborn demon confronted by the sons of Sceva was also apparently confused saying, "*Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?*" (19:15). Then there was the muddle in the Ephesian theater where "*the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together*" (19:32). That near-riot was instigated by an idol-making silversmith whose livelihood was being threatened (19:24). What a contrast that was to a group of new believers, a few verses earlier (19:19), who burned their books of magic arts totaling 50,000 pieces of silver, about \$6 million today! Thankfully, we have the clear teaching of the New Testament now to minimize confusion.

November 23 — **Hard-Nosed Softy** — Acts 20-21. Many people consider the Apostle Paul to be an exacting, stern, no-nonsense kind of guy. Well, he was firm when it came to the truth of God's Word and obedience to His commands but he was also both loved and loving. We get a snapshot of this when Paul said farewell to the elders from the Ephesian church. After they knelt and prayed together on the beach, "*there was much weeping on the part of all*" (20:37). Paul was also one of those who wept because he loved them and was concerned about them. The elders loved Paul, too, and "*embraced ... and kissed him*" (20:37). It is not a contradiction to be both firm in your commitment to God and His Word and to be soft and loving toward others.

November 24 — **Fighting Words** — Acts 22-25. The mob who tried to kill Paul in the Jerusalem temple area listened to his appeal regarding his conversion until he said that Jesus was sending him "*far away to the Gentiles*" (22:21). The next verse says that "*Up to this word they listened*" (22:22). What word? "Gentiles." They were more tolerant of Paul's statements about Jesus being "the

Righteous One" (22:14) than they were of his reaching out to the Gentiles. That sounds like rank prejudice to me. Later, before the Sanhedrin, Paul issued another fighting word: "resurrection" (23:6), causing a raucous division between those on both sides of belief about that word. Still later, Paul delivered three more significant words that stimulated not a fight, but the alarm of conviction from Felix. Those words were "*righteousness ... self-control ... judgment*" (24:25). Some words are significant and trigger prejudice, controversy, and conviction. Today, "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (Col. 3:16).

November 25 — **Reactions** — Acts 26-28. There were a couple of interesting reactions to Paul's messages I noticed in our reading for today. One was from Festus as Paul was witnessing to him and King Agrippa, when he shouted that Paul was out of his mind. I love Paul's response: "*I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words*" (26:25). When we speak to others about Christ, we should make sure that our words are "true," without exaggeration or manipulation, and "rational," without including meaningless, emotional froth. The second reaction I noticed was that of being ignored. Paul had warned the centurion, captain, and owner not to leave the marginal Crete port of Fair Havens or the ship would be lost (27:10), but his advice was disregarded, resulting in the subsequent loss of the ship. Just before they were shipwrecked on Malta, Paul said, "*Men, you should have listened to me*" (27:21). It sounds arrogant but it was a fact. He had been "*speaking true and rational words*." We should continue to present the Good News clearly and accurately, even when many think we are out of our minds or simply ignore us.

November 26 — **Romans** — Rom. 1-3. Paul's letter to the Romans was probably written from Corinth on his third missionary journey about 57 AD, 10 years before his martyrdom in the city of Rome. It is a different kind of letter—long and full of compact theological reasoning—although it doesn't attempt to describe all of Paul's theology. A very familiar verse struck me in a little different way today. Paul wrote, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ...*" (1:16). Being ashamed of something reflects a condition of weakness. One might be ashamed of a physical deformity or ugliness or ignorance, but those are things connected with us. Paul's reason for not being ashamed is based not on himself but on God and His power. The gospel message is not about us but about God and His love, mercy, and grace. It has the power to change lives. Therefore, we can be unashamed because we are vitally connected to God and His powerful message.

November 27 — **We are the World** — Rom. 4-7. I saw something today that I had never noticed before: Abraham was promised that through his offspring "*he would be heir of the world ... through the righteousness of faith*" (4:13). The world!? I checked other translations and the Greek (*kosmos*) to confirm that is exactly what it says. Then I thought of Michael Jackson's song, "We are the World," and realized that we believers are, indeed, part of a world of faith that began with Abraham's tenacious faith in God. Abraham "*believed against hope*" (4:18) that God would keep His promise to give him a son to start this process, although he was already 100 years old and Sarah was barren as well as old. In the facts, his age loomed ominously, but in his faith, glowed God's promise. He didn't waver in his faith but in fact, it "*grew strong ... as he gave glory to God*" (4:20). We give glory to God by trusting Him, and by trusting Him, our faith is increased.

November 28 — **Fleshly Threat** — Rom. 8-10. Over 20 years ago I had a mole removed from my shoulder that had changed color. The pathologist found cancerous melanoma cells in it. The doctor said it was likely caused by skin damage from the sun many years before. I now consider the sun to be an enemy, and I avoid it. To me, it is potentially deadly. Living according to the flesh is also deadly: "*For to set the mind on the flesh is death*" (8:6). That mindset is also "*hostile to God*" (8:7) and "*cannot please God*" (8:8). We must treat our tendency to please our sinful flesh like I treat the sun: avoid its deadly threat!

November 29 — **God's Will** — Rom. 11-14. How can we determine the will of God? His general will is revealed in the Bible but what about many of our specific questions regarding decisions? We are told to “*not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*” (12:2 ESV). The single Greek word for “*by testing ... may discern*” is translated in several different ways: “*may prove*” (NASB), “*will be able to test and approve*” (NIV), and “*may discern*” (CSB). It was used in Scripture for testing metals to determine their quality (1 Cor. 3:13) and to “try out” the oxen he bought (Lk. 14:19). Knowing God’s will can be gained through examination of the situation but that is enhanced through a “*transformed ... renewal of your mind*,” a mind that has turned its back on being “*conformed to this world*.”

November 30 — **Glory to God** — Rom. 15-16. Paul closed this monumental theological work with praise to God. In one place, he quoted three OT passages about Gentiles praising God, each one progressively focusing on the incorporation of Gentiles into worship. In 15:9, the focus is somewhat on the Jew who says “*I will praise you among the Gentiles*” (emphasis added), perhaps reaching out to them. The next quote shows the Gentiles who rejoice in praise “*with his people*” (emphasis added), the Jews. Finally, we find the Gentiles alone in worship: “*Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles*” (15:11). Almost all of us readers belong to that Gentile category. Praise God that Paul was a vital part in bringing the message of the Jewish Messiah to us Gentiles! Appropriately, Paul closed his letter with praise: “*to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen*” (16:27).