

## Keep Singing!

**Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth** (Psalm 96:1).

**Scripture:** Psalm 96

**Song:** “Sing the Wondrous Love of Jesus”

Surrounded by a moat, reflecting pool, and 50 acres of lush gardens, the gothic-style Bok Tower sits atop Iron Mountain at Lake Wales, Florida. Author, publisher, and philanthropist Edward Bok, a Dutch immigrant, realized his vision of completing the Bok Tower Gardens in 1929, presenting it as a gift to the American people in appreciation for the opportunities the country had given him.

Another name Bok Tower enjoys is “The Singing Tower,” with its carillon—a set of tower bells—playing familiar Christian hymns several times a day. Spending time at this site is truly inspiring. In fact, one early visitor was so moved by the carillon playing “Onward Christian Soldiers” that he later painted a mural of a knight on a horse, charging with sword and shield, surrounded by shining beams of light signifying God’s glory.

Today’s passage reminds us to keep singing—to keep lifting our songs of praise to the Lord! The song in our own hearts and on our lips has the potential to inspire and uplift not only our own spirits but also the spirits of those around us.

**Father,** thank You for putting a forever song of praise in my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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March 31–April 6. **Neil Snelling** lives in Newark, Ohio, with his wife, son, and daughter, and also a dog and cat. He loves history and writing. He has managed a Christian radio station and is currently a high-school substitute teacher and mentor to students.

## Brought Near to Stay

**Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God** (1 Peter 3:18).

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:18–22

**Song:** “Near to the Heart of God”

I grew up going to church. Things changed, though, when I left home. Twin cousins and I shared an apartment while we were attending the same college. There was a church within walking distance from our apartment, but did I ever go? Sadly, I did not. Did I still believe in God? Sure, but I wasn't worshipping Him like I had enjoyed doing in the past, nor as He deserved.

In today's passage Peter reminds us that we have been brought to God through Jesus' righteous life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. Now Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father, victorious over sin and death and having received all authority. Jesus' hard-won victory has provided our victory as well. What tremendous reasons to honor Him, worship Him, and keep Him first in our lives!

My experience in college is an example of what can happen to us along our way if we are not careful. I allowed life to push aside my priorities as a Christian. Through Christ, we have been brought near to God and have been given precious promises, including the promise of eternal life with Him. Let's put Him first and keep Him first.

**Father,** I've been brought to You by way of Your Son's great sacrifice. When my priorities begin to shift away from You, please draw me back to Your side. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Hope Foretold

**See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted** (Isaiah 52:13).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 52:13—53:3

**Song:** “He Is Exalted”

Eighty years ago this month, Nazi military units in Berlin were feeling impending defeat closing in around them. Two military forces were approaching the historic German capital: US troops from the west and the Russian army from the east. Just before entering Berlin, American forces halted their advance to avoid an accidental conflict with the Russians. So it was left to the Russians to take the city. Photos from that fateful episode reveal fire, ruins, and rubble.

It was likely a similar scene in the sixth century BC when Babylonian forces ransacked Jerusalem and carried away many of its inhabitants as slaves. It would be decades before Jerusalem would be reconstructed and inhabited again and another temple built. However, by the time Jesus was born, the city was thriving again. It was a destination for people coming to worship at the temple and also a place of political importance. At that time, however, it was under control of the ruling Roman Empire, a thorn in the side of the Jewish people.

Isaiah’s prophecy gave the people of Israel hope, and it gives us hope today as well. Although crucified, Jesus rose from the dead and is now seated in the place of honor at His Father’s right hand. A time is coming when He will rise up to rule and reign in His eternal kingdom with all who belong to Him!

**Father,** I give thanks to You for the Savior who came in the person of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Coming of the Savior

**He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities** (Isaiah 53:5).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:4–12

**Song:** “Redeemed”

Isaiah lived and prophesied some seven centuries before Jesus came to earth. Yet in today’s passage we see that, by the Holy Spirit’s direction, Isaiah wrote accurately about the Messiah’s coming. The prophet predicted that the Christ would be condemned to die and that He would take the penalty of fallen humanity’s sin upon His shoulders.

The ancient Israelites sacrificed animals as sin offerings. These were temporary measures to *cover* sin, but they had to be repeated continually because they could not *remove* sin (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus became the ultimate sacrificial lamb whose blood would remove sin completely (John 1:29). While on earth, Jesus performed miracles and healed people to show us that He was sent from God the Father and to demonstrate how much God cares for us. Then, Jesus gave up His life on a cruel Roman cross for our sakes. This was all part of God’s plan to provide the gift of salvation for all who would receive it.

We cannot go through life alone. We cannot pay for our sin by our own efforts. We need Jesus. Later this month, during Holy Week, we will have the opportunity to remember Jesus’ journey to the cross. It’s a time to turn our hearts to remember the sacrifice He made on our behalf and to celebrate His victorious resurrection as we look forward to His glorious return.

**Father,** I bow my head to worship You and give thanks for Your Son’s precious sacrifice. How I long for His return! In Jesus’ name, amen.

## True Greatness

**[Jesus said,] Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all** (Mark 10:43–44, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Mark 10:41–45

**Song:** “Lord, Make Me Like You”

John Maxwell has written over 60 books on leadership. He is looked to as one of the greatest leadership experts in the world, but before he began teaching about leadership full time, he served as a minister at several churches. Maxwell’s first assignment was at a small country church in Indiana. To be appointed there, however, he had to be approved by the congregation. The final vote was 25 to 1 in favor of hiring him. Instead of being glad about such a strong vote of confidence, Maxwell confessed to his father, who was also a minister, that he was disturbed by the lone negative vote. His father encouraged him to turn his focus to the task ahead. And as Maxwell persevered in serving the congregation, it grew strong.

In today’s passage, Jesus made it clear that greatness is not achieved by popularity, position, or exercising power over others. The greatest achievement in God’s kingdom is service. Later Jesus would teach James, John, and the other disciples even more about this as He washed their feet and then went to the cross.

Our work as believers is not to win all the approving votes or have the esteem and admiration of others. It is simply to faithfully serve in God’s kingdom. This is the measure of greatness.

**Father,** train my heart to be humble and to be truly glad to serve others as Jesus served. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Christ Is Coming Again!

**Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him** (Hebrews 9:27–28).

**Scripture:** Hebrews 9:23—10:4

**Song:** “What a Day That Will Be”

It’s an annual event, one that people can count on. In mid-March, folks come in droves to the small Ohio town of Hinckley to watch the return of the turkey vultures. Attracted to the rocky outcroppings of ledges there, these giant birds descend on the area, portending spring’s arrival.

Later this month, Christians will be commemorating several important events in Jesus’ life as He approached the end of His earthly ministry. During Holy Week, we remember Palm Sunday, then the Last Supper and Jesus’ arrest, next His death, and finally Sunday morning when Jesus’ tomb was found empty—the resurrection! His atoning work on the cross was the purpose of Jesus’ first coming.

Now, as Christians, we await and look forward to Christ’s promised return—His second coming, which today’s passage affirms will take place. We can count on His promise that a day is coming when we will realize the fullness of the salvation He has provided to all who trust Him. What a day that will be!

**Father,** You sent Your Son the first time to this earth to redeem me and to show me the way to eternal life. Now, I look forward to His second coming. This is my blessed hope! In Jesus’ name, amen.

## It's All Gone

**Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus the Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:11–12).**

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10:11–14, 19–25

**Song:** “Grace Greater Than Our Sin”

I recently battled cancer. Fortunately, a surgeon was able to completely remove the cancerous part of my liver. What a relief! About a week later I went home to begin the recuperation process and, thankfully, had a speedy recovery.

In today's Scripture, we read how the priests (in their responsibility to offer sacrifices for the people's sins) worked day after day, and the people had to keep coming back to them to repeat the process. As ones who have trusted Christ for salvation, however, we recognize that He has completely removed our sin by His one sacrifice on the cross. The writer of Hebrews also says that the Lord will remember our sins no more (10:17). What a relief!

Even when a surgeon gets all the cancer out, there are no guarantees about our health in this life. Any number of other issues may pop up along our way, bringing difficulty and distress. However, we can be absolutely certain about the complete removal of our sin by the blood of Christ. It's a done deal, once and for all. Praise the Lord!

**Father,** thank You for the peace that comes from Your provision of complete forgiveness of my sin. In Jesus' name, amen.