



Stories of the Kingdom

STUDY GUIDE

**TRUTH
FORLIFE**

THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains ten sessions designed to help you grow in your understanding of the kingdom of God as you intently read or listen to the sermons from the series *Stories of the Kingdom* by Alistair Begg. Tracing the theme throughout Mark's Gospel, you'll study the various facets of God's kingdom and its profound implications for the Christian life. The content for each session focuses on a particular sermon Alistair preached on the subject from the Gospel of Mark.



FIND ALL 10 MESSAGES AT
[TFL.ORG/SK](https://www.truthforlife.org/sk).

Stories of the Kingdom: Study Guide
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The following description of the *Stories of the Kingdom* sermon series provides a good summary of this study's purpose:

The stories Jesus told described a King and a kingdom unlike any other. Jesus' words challenged His hearers to consider the magnitude of their sin and the depth of mercy that they could never deserve. Like those in Jesus' day, we, too, are prone to misunderstand how these stories testify to the realities of Christ's kingdom. In a culture that is reluctant to embrace absolute truth, it can be convenient to marginalize who Jesus is and why He came to earth. Like the rich young ruler, we may consider ourselves to be moral people with no need for a Savior. We may never have been struck by the weight and gravity of God's coming judgment, driving us to consider our need for mercy. In this series of messages from the Gospel of Mark, Alistair Begg shows us the necessity of knowing Christ as a gracious Savior, an eternal King, and the one who will ultimately judge the world in righteousness.

Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a brief summary statement or commentary on the sermon, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the sermon and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process the main ideas of the sermon
- 4) Giving Praise:** a hymn that can be committed to memory, incorporated in worship, and used as the basis for prayer about what you have learned and considered



SESSION ONE

“How Does God’s Kingdom Grow?” | Mark 4:1-12

Getting Started

Jesus often spoke in parables, or earthly stories that convey divine truth. In doing this, Jesus sifted the wheat from the chaff among His listeners. The same story would produce two different results. Where genuine faith was present, the parables were met with joy and astonishment. Where unbelief persisted, confusion and diversion were the result. Only by faith does a person recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

How would you define faith?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.’”

MARK 4:11

“Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ And he answered them, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’”

MATTHEW 13:10-11

Going Deeper

1. Using Mark 3:7-12 and 4:1 for reference, answer the following question: How does Mark describe the context of Jesus' public ministry?

2. Based on Mark 4:10-12, why did Jesus speak in parables?

3. Alistair says, "The kingdom has come in Jesus. In His words and in His works, the kingdom is being both established and revealed, but in a veiled and unrecognized way." In what sense is God's kingdom veiled in the world today?

4. What roles do faith and reason play in receiving Jesus' teachings?

5. In Mark 4:9, Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." How can you better position yourself to hear and obey God's Word?

6. What was the Jewish expectation for the Messiah? How did Jesus' ministry seemingly counter that way of thinking?

GIVING PRAISE

I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.

"I KNOW NOT WHY GOD'S WONDROUS GRACE"

BY DANIEL WEBSTER WHITTLE

SESSION TWO

“The Seed and the Soils” | Mark 4:1–20

Getting Started

The parable of the seed and the soils, recorded in Mark 4, is in some sense the key to understanding all of Jesus’ parables. The short story explains how God’s Word works. Every time the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed to a group, the responses to that proclamation will be many and varied.

Think about those in your life with whom you have shared the Gospel. How did they respond?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

ISAIAH 55:10-11

“Those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

MARK 4:20

Going Deeper

1. How does Isaiah 55:6-11 shed light on Mark 4:1-20? In context, what does “the word” refer to in this parable?

2. In His parable, Jesus describes four soils. Using Mark 4:15-20 for reference, explain what each soil represents.

3. How can we combat discouragement when we share the Word and encounter opposition?

4. What can Christians do to receive God’s Word more readily when it is taught, read, and proclaimed?

5. How can we know whether a person has truly received the Word in their hearts?

6. Why do you suppose that people have varied responses to God's Word?

7. Read John 15:1-4. What fruit has the Gospel produced in your life?

GIVING PRAISE

Who can tell the pleasure,
Who recount the treasure
By Thy Word imparted
To the simple-hearted?

**“LORD, THY WORD ABIDETH”
BY HENRY WILLIAMS BAKER**

SESSION THREE

“Careful Listening” | Mark 4:21-25

Getting Started

The Bible includes warnings to heed, promises to believe, and instructions to follow. When we regularly listen to and learn from God’s Word, our capacity for those things typically increases. The inverse is also true: less exposure to God’s Word often diminishes our ability to enjoy its benefits.

What is your Bible engagement like in a given week? What is one practice you wish to implement or change in relation to your study of Scripture?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He said to them, ‘Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.’”

MARK 4:24

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

PSALM 1:1-2

Going Deeper

1. How does John 8:12 clarify the imagery Jesus uses in Mark 4:21-22?

2. What frequently prevents you from paying attention to Jesus' teachings (v. 24)?

3. Why is it that so many derive little benefit from hearing God's Word?

4. Jesus says, "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mark 4:24), referencing the means He's provided us for growth in grace. What are the means God provides for our spiritual growth? What are the dangers of neglecting them?

5. Alistair says, “The most important truths in the Bible have no impact upon us until we are awakened to give them careful consideration.” What is God’s role in helping us understand His Word? What is our role?

6. What is the relationship of the parable of the seed and the soils in Mark 4:1–20 to Jesus’ instruction in verses 21–25?

7. Alistair reminds us that parables teach us truth about God and ourselves. What can we learn about both God and humanity from Mark 4:21–25?

GIVING PRAISE

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

“I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS SAY”

BY HORATIUS BONAR

SESSION FOUR

“The Kingdom of God” | Mark 4:26–34

Getting Started

Most societies throughout history have dreamt of a better world. We encounter the same anticipation in the Bible: from Genesis to Revelation, God’s people long to see God’s kingdom established. Jesus’ arrival marked the advent of the kingdom (Mark 1:15). His parables tell us what the kingdom of God is like.

What qualities do you think would produce a flourishing society and a better world?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.”

MARK 4:33

“All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.”

ISAIAH 40:17

Going Deeper

1. What can we learn from Jesus' approach to teaching in Mark 4:33-34? How did His parables factor into His earthly ministry?

2. According to verses 26-29, how does God come to reign in a person's heart?

3. The parable in Mark 4:30-32 is one of contrast. What are the contrasting elements in this story?

4. What does Jesus promise in His story about the mustard seed? How should this affect how we see the church's relationship to the world?

5. Alistair observes that as a whole, God's kingdom grows quietly, progressively, and inevitably. How should this truth shape our evangelism and prayer?

6. Jesus distinguished between how He spoke to the crowds and the way He explained everything to His disciples (Mark 4:34). Why did Jesus teach in this way? (See vv. 11-12.)

7. Revelation 21:1-4 describes the future, eternal city of God. What are some of its qualities?

GIVING PRAISE

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

"GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY"

BY WILLIAM COWPER

SESSION FIVE

“One Thing You Lack” | Mark 10:17-22

Getting Started

Many approach Christianity with a framework that says, “If there is a God and He is good, then I’m sure He will reward nice people as long as we do our best.” But Jesus’ encounter in Mark 10:17-22 shows us that the entry point into God’s kingdom is not always what we expect.

What are some common barriers to following Jesus?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

MARK 10:15

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”

MARK 10:21

Going Deeper

1. Using Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-24 as additional references, answer the following question:
What do we know about the man who approaches Jesus in Mark 10:17-22?

2. The man in the story knew God's commandments, though his knowledge wasn't sufficient for entering the kingdom (v. 19). What is the role of God's law in converting a sinner? (See Rom. 3:20.)

3. What does God's kingdom demand from us?

4. Who is fit for entry into the kingdom of God?

5. Alistair says of verse 21, "What Jesus is asking this man to do is to smash his idol." What are the idols that hinder you from following Christ with full devotion?

6. How is the teaching in Mark 10:13-16 related to Jesus' encounter in 10:17-22?

7. What danger does wealth pose to following Jesus?

GIVING PRAISE

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always,
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart;
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

"BE THOU MY VISION"

TRANS. MARY ELIZABETH BYRNE, VERSIFIED BY ELEANOR HULL

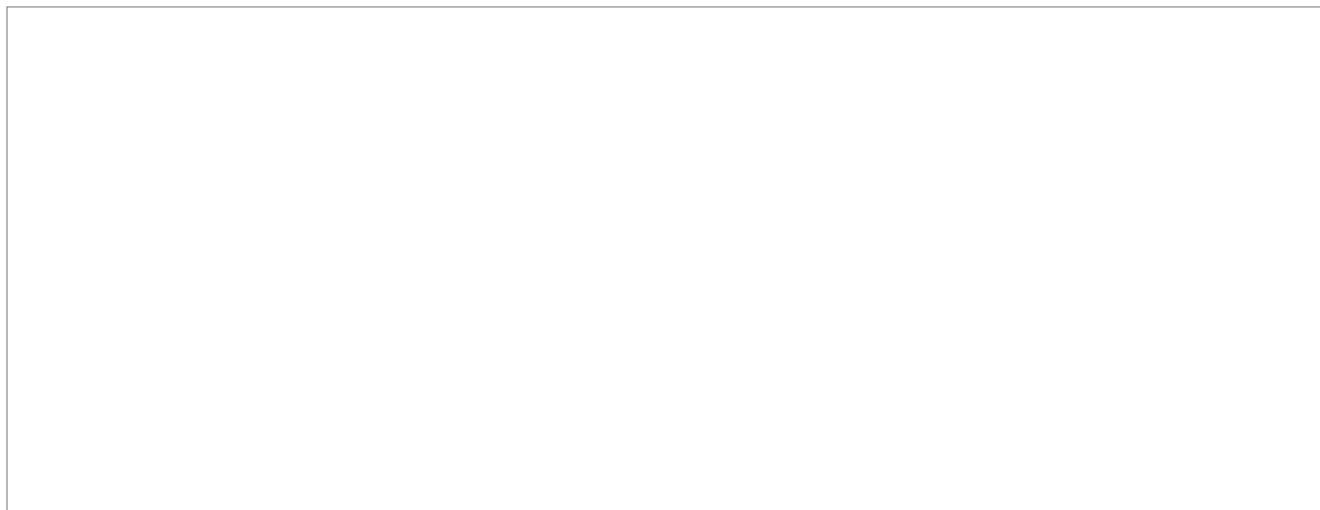
SESSION SIX

“Lessons from the Fig Tree – Part One” | Mark 11:12–14, 20–25

Getting Started

One commentator describes Mark 11:12–14 as a narrative that “bristles with difficulties.”¹ Jesus cursing the fig tree is an acted parable, an expression of prophetic symbolism. The fig tree foreshadows the divine judgment that would befall unbelieving Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

When you think of God’s judgment, what comes to mind?



KEY SCRIPTURES

“As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.’”

MARK 11:20–21

“He said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”’”

MARK 7:6

¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary, ed. C. F. D. Moule (1959; repr., Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 354.

Going Deeper

1. Alistair outlines several principles of biblical interpretation. What are they? How do they help when approaching a difficult passage like the one in Mark 11:12-14?

2. In Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a tree without fruit and a temple devoid of faithful worship. What deeper issue do these things reveal about Israel's condition?

3. The fig tree gave the appearance of bearing fruit but was barren (v. 13). Spiritually speaking, how can we guard against this kind of pretentious false piety in ourselves?

4. How does Mark 7:6-8 define the root problem of Israel's unbelief?

5. What does the instantaneous miracle of the fig tree withering teach us about Christ?

6. What is the context of Jesus cursing the fig tree? How does this help us understand its meaning? (See Mark 11:1-11, 15-19.)

7. The Old Testament routinely uses the vine and the fig tree as metaphors for Israel's status before God. (See, e.g., Hosea 9:10.) Why is this significant?

GIVING PRAISE

Spirit of God, who dwells within my heart,
Wean it from earth; through all its pulses move.
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.

“SPIRIT OF GOD, DESCEND UPON MY HEART”

BY GEORGE CROLY

SESSION SEVEN

“Lessons from the Fig Tree – Part Two” | Mark 11:23–25

Getting Started

Connecting the cursing of the fig tree with Jesus’ instructions on faith and forgiveness poses a challenge: What does one have to do with the other? What Jesus did in His dramatic act of cursing the fig tree serves as a model for how true believers might draw on the power of God.

In what ways has God revealed His power in biblical history?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Jesus answered them, ‘Have faith in God.’”

MARK 11:22

“Then Peter came up and said to him, ‘Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

MATTHEW 18:21–22

Going Deeper

1. Who is the object of faith in Mark 11:22? What qualifications does this provide for the promise in verse 23?

2. Jesus encouraged His disciples to trust God for all they need for doing God's work. What makes it difficult for us to trust God for this same provision?

3. What is the relationship between faith-filled prayer (vv. 23-24) and forgiveness (v. 25)?

4. Alistair says, "An unforgiving spirit may be the number-one killer of a genuine spiritual life." How does the sin of unforgiveness impact our prayer lives, our relationships, our view of ourselves, etc.? How can we root out unforgiveness?

5. How should we balance humility and confidence in prayer?

6. Using Matthew 21:21-22 and James 1:5-6 for reference, explain what praying in faith involves.

GIVING PRAISE

I sing th'almighty pow'r of God
That made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad
And built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
The sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command,
And all the stars obey.

"I SING THE ALMIGHTY POWER OF GOD"

BY ISAAC WATTS

SESSION EIGHT

“This Is about Us!” | Mark 12:1-12

Getting Started

Mark 12 is a parable of judgment against unbelieving Israel. In veiled language, Jesus foreshadows two promises to come in the unfolding story of redemption: His atoning death for sin and the creation of one body of believers comprised of believing Jews and gentiles.

What can we learn of Jesus' character in relation to His ministry to the gentiles?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

MARK 12:9

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

1 PETER 2:9-10

Going Deeper

1. To whom does the “them” refer in Mark 12:12? What do we know about their relationship to Jesus? (See Mark 11:18, 27, 33.)

2. What context does Isaiah 5:1-7 provide for interpreting Jesus’ parable in Mark 12?

3. How does Jesus quoting Psalm 118, referring to Himself as the cornerstone, affirm His deity?

4. In Mark 12:12, the unbelievers go away blinded by their animosity to the truth. What does this closing scene reveal about the condition of their hearts?

5. Many in Israel rejected Jesus as the cornerstone. What assumptions, attitudes, or actions that proved to be a stumbling block for them might be present in your own heart? How can you guard against those things?

6. Alistair observes that many reject the Son “not because the claims are misunderstood but because the claims are so clearly understood.” In your view, what is it that makes the Gospel so offensive to unbelievers? What makes it a message also of good news?

GIVING PRAISE

Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation:
One Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.

“THE CHURCH’S ONE FOUNDATION”

BY SAMUEL JOHN STONE

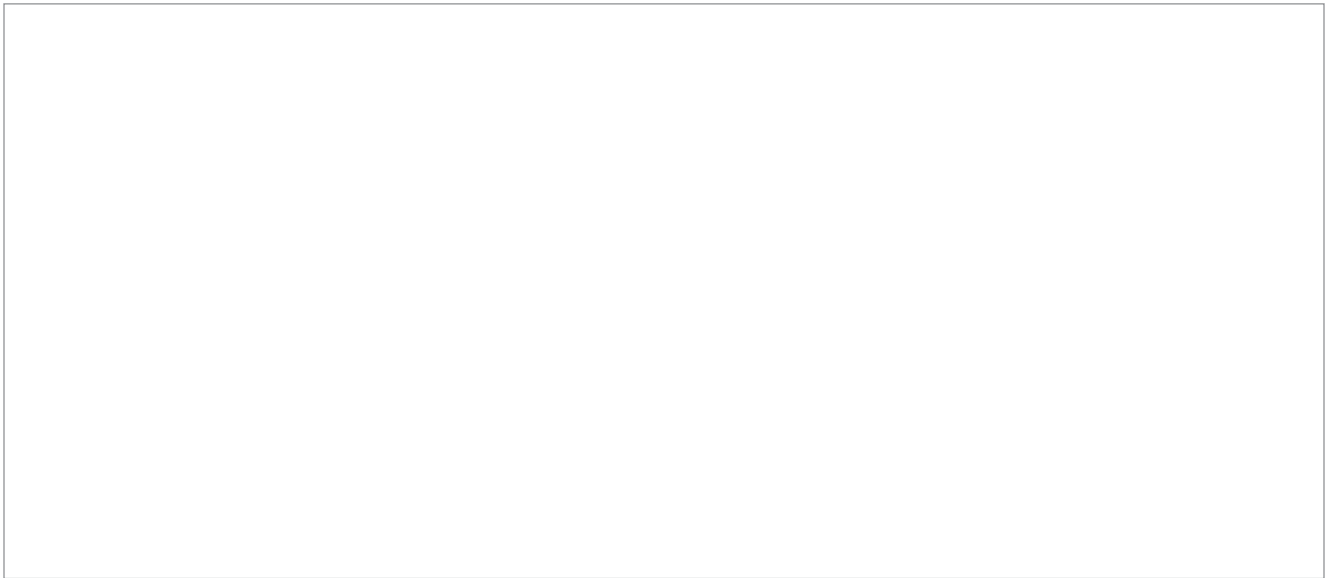
SESSION NINE

“The Coming of the Son of Man” | Mark 13:24–31

Getting Started

How are we to make sense of Jesus’ often misunderstood words regarding the end of all things? We may frame it in this way: In Jesus’ first coming, the end has come, and the end is coming. Eventually, at Jesus’ second coming, the end will finally come.

In what ways does God’s judgment further reveal His other attributes, like His divine love, mercy, and holiness?



KEY SCRIPTURES

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

MARK 13:31

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.”

ISAIAH 13:9–10

Going Deeper

1. Mark 13:24-25 uses Old Testament imagery. Using Isaiah 13:9-10 for reference, explain what these pictures signify.

2. In what sense should believers anticipate the future day of the Lord? Why is it good news that Christ will return in judgment and justice?

3. What is the promise contained in Mark 13:26-27? What comfort should it give the church in the time spanning Christ's first and second comings?

4. Alistair describes the signs in verses 3-27 as signs leading to the second coming rather than signs of the second coming. According to these verses, what can believers expect to be true of the age leading up to Jesus' return?

5. How should Jesus' promise in Mark 13:31 reframe our priorities as Christians? Put another way: How are we to live in light of the end?

6. What is God's part in evangelism—in “gathering the elect” (v. 27)? What is ours?

7. How does Romans 1:18–32 describe unbelievers' condition? What action does God take in judgment against unbelief?

GIVING PRAISE

Ev'ry island, sea, and mountain,
Heav'n and earth, shall flee away;
All who hate Him must, confounded,
Hear the trump proclaim the day:
Come to judgment! Come to judgment!
Come to judgment, come away!

“LO! HE COMES WITH CLOUDS DESCENDING”

BY CHARLES WESLEY

SESSION TEN

“A Wake-Up Call!” | Mark 13:32–37

Getting Started

The late British theologian and minister Charles E. B. Cranfield says of Mark 13, “If we realize that the Incarnation–Crucifixion–Resurrection–Ascension on the one hand, and the Parousia [Second Coming] on the other, belong together and are in a real sense one Event, one divine Act, being held apart only by the mercy of God who desires to give men opportunity for faith and repentance, then we can see that in a very real sense the latter is always imminent now that the former has happened.”²

How are you living in a way today that is preparing you for eternity with Jesus someday? What should you continue doing, and what should you stop doing to be better fit for Christ’s return and to “stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10)?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”

MARK 13:32–33

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

MATTHEW 25:13

² Cranfield, *Saint Mark*, 408.

Going Deeper

1. Verse 32 teaches that we are ignorant as to the timing of Christ's return. How is this limitation of knowledge a blessing rather than a burden?

2. What should we prioritize while we wait for Jesus' second coming?

3. What are some threats to our spiritual watchfulness? How should we guard against those?

4. John Calvin comments on verse 32, "It would be a proof of excessive pride and wicked covetousness, to desire that we who creep on the earth should know more than is permitted to the angels in heaven."³ How can we approach Jesus' words concerning the end with humility rather than pride or presumption?

³ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846), 3:153.

5. Read Matthew 25:1-13, 2 Corinthians 6:2, and Hebrews 4:1-2. How do these verses describe the urgency of salvation and earnestness with which we should approach our Christian devotion?

6. As we conclude our study on the kingdom of God, what have been a few of your key takeaways? How has this study urged you toward greater godliness?

GIVING PRAISE

Day of days, we wait and languish,
'Mid a world of sin and woe,
Watching for the blest appearing
Of the one who loves us so.
Home at last and reunited,
Far above the things of time,
'Twill be glory, glory, glory,
'Mid the realms of light sublime.

“CHRIST IS COMING BACK AGAIN”

BY OSWALD JEFFREY SMITH

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