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**THIS TEACHING LETTER BY DR.
KEN BOA IS MADE POSSIBLE
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THE PROMISES OF GOD

ONE SURE PURPOSE

We run our lives by making plans that fulfill purposes. Some people are content with two or three major objectives for the day written on a 3-by-5 index card, working out the details as the day unfolds. Others map out the day in fifteen-minute segments. But when we prayerfully try to determine God's purpose for our life, the planning process becomes more complex. Our planning has to accomplish much more than simply planning for just one day.

Which approach does God take for our lives? Does He plan all the details (who we marry, where we work, where we live), or does He plan to transform our character while leaving us wide latitude of choice in the who-what-when-where-how categories? Bible scholars differ about the way in which God's will controls the outworking of his plan for individuals—except in one case: The apostle Peter revealed an aspect of God's will and purpose that is true for every single Christian believer.

Peter wrote that God's purpose for all Christians is to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). He used terms that were originally applied to Israel—"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession"—to describe Christian believers.

In the Old Testament God intended that, by its holiness, Israel would be a light for the rest of the world's nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). That was His purpose, His will, for Israel. And now, Peter said, God has made that His purpose and will for the church as well. In a sense, this overarching purpose helps in determining other more detailed parts of God's purpose for an individual's life. If my decisions

about where I work, who I marry, where I live, and what I do with my time, talent, and treasure do not allow me to declare, verbally or nonverbally, the praises of God, then these may not be part of God's purpose for my life.

While we continue studying the Scriptures and praying to learn about God's detailed purpose for our lives, we must be careful not to miss Peter's description of our first priority. Bringing praise to God is our ultimate life purpose.

God's Promise:

When others see Him through you,
you are fulfilling your life purpose.

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DECEMBER 2023

REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers
to develop a clear mind and a warm heart

THE PURPOSE OF TRIBULATION

Lord Jesus, You taught Your followers that they would have tribulation in the world. But You also counseled them to take courage, because You have overcome the world. Just as the world persecuted You, it will persecute us, Your Body, and this is more evident around the world today than ever before. But as your servant Paul taught, we who are in Christ can exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, proven character and hope that does not disappoint. When we go out as agents of Your Great Commission, we know that in spite of opposition, nothing can thwart Your work. May we learn to mature in faith by trusting You regardless of the consequences we see in this life. We know we are headed for a glorious and eternal future with You that cannot be compared to the temporary results in this world

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Living between *Two Advents*

BY KEN BOA

*O come, O come Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.¹*

The words of this popular Christmas song capture the tone of Advent—intense longing for the coming of the Savior.

With Christmas festivities often beginning in November—or September, for that matter, when Christmas decorations appear in stores—it can be easy to skip over the season of Advent and go straight to the joy of Christmas Day and the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

However, Advent is a season of preparation that reminds us to long for Jesus. As the people in darkness waited for the Messiah’s first coming (Matthew 4:16), so now we await His return. We need to keep both of Jesus’ advents in mind as we prepare our hearts:

In His first coming, Jesus suffered and died as our Savior.

In His second coming, Jesus will return as Judge and reigning King.

The season of Advent invites us to look back to the humility of His first coming in order to prepare for the glory of His second coming.

Our Suffering Savior

The prophets anticipated Jesus’ first coming for hundreds of years. They awaited the Messiah who would save God’s people from oppression and exile, yearning for salvation.

The apostle Peter wrote of this in his first epistle:

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. (1 Peter 1:10–11 NASB)

The prophets looked ahead to Jesus’ birth, but we have the benefit of being able to look back and read about the incarnation, when the second Person of the Trinity, the One who holds the cosmos together, “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14 NASB).

This is a deep and profound mystery: How could the transcendent God, the infinite God who created the universe but stands outside creation, enter His creation as a finite creature? How could the One who upholds all things by His word of power (Heb. 1:3) become incarnate as a man, with all the limitations of our bodies and minds, without compromising His divine nature?

And as if simply taking on our human nature were not enough, He humbled Himself by being born in a stable to an impoverished family in a minor province in the Roman Empire. And then He submitted voluntarily to scourging and crucifixion to save people who were His enemies.

In our familiarity with the Christmas story, it is easy to overlook the wonder of the Incarnation and all it meant and would mean for the Incarnate One.

The Son of God took on the humility of humanity and came not as reigning King but as our suffering Savior. He was fully God and fully man, living in righteousness and dying for our sins so we might move from alienation to intimacy with God.

The season of Advent reminds us of the reason Jesus came to earth: to suffer and die for us, rising again so we might be made new in Him. Meditating on Jesus’ first coming reminds us to worship Him for this salvation, bought at so high a price.

Our Reigning King

However, Jesus’ first coming is not the end of the story.

Instead of immediately establishing an earthly kingdom, Jesus ascended into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:20). We are still waiting for Him to return as Judge and reigning King.

The prophets also anticipated His eternal reign (see Daniel 7:14), but the timeline between His two comings was not yet evident to them. Imagine Jesus’ two advents in terms of looking at two mountain peaks. From miles away the distance between them may look small,

as if you could ascend one mountain and step onto the next with ease. Up close, however, the true distance is revealed—there is a valley between the peaks.

We are living in the valley, waiting for Jesus to come again. He has given us salvation, and in Him we have “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3 NASB). However, we have not yet experienced the fullness of His promises—though we are being progressively sanctified, we wait for the day when we will be fully transformed into His image and His kingdom of peace and joy will be fully and finally established.

Advent looks both backwards and forwards. As the faithful in Israel waited for the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to Israel, so Advent calls us to remember those long years, and like the prophets to wait with patience and to long for the second coming of the Lord in triumph.

Even though we do not know when Christ is coming back, we can have confidence that He will return (2 Peter 3:8–9). The season of Advent reminds us to prepare for His coming, not continuing to live in sin but submitting to Him.

As we celebrate Christmas this year and the marvelous mystery of the Incarnation, let us shift our perspective to live every day in light of that Day when Jesus will return. In doing so, we can join in the final words that close the Bible, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 20:20 NASB).

¹“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” trans. J. M. Neale, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 1861.