

WE HAVE SEEN
HIS GLORY



A 35 DAY EASTER DEVOTIONAL
THROUGH THE LIFE OF CHRIST

We Have Seen His Glory

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INTRODUCTION

CONSIDER JESUS

Hebrews 3:1

How often do you consider Jesus? How often do you think about his life? How often do you bring to mind the things he did? How often do you meditate on his teachings? How often do you, with all your heart and soul, consider his death, burial, and resurrection? If we were honest with ourselves, then most of us would probably say, *Not enough*. Too often we are so enamored with the things of this world that Jesus is far in the back of our minds.

One of the greatest things about the Easter season is that it is a time to stop and reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The author of Hebrews commands us to consider Jesus. Have you ever thought that one of things God wants us to do to obey him is think about Jesus.?

This devotional is meant to help you do just that. There are verses and a short writing for 35 days. It will be best to read one a day starting 30 days before Easter. But you are welcome to read however you like.

May God bless you this season as you seek to daily consider the glory our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ!

DAY 1

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-22; Hebrews 1:1-4

There could be no better way to see the glory of Jesus than to read through these four great hymns.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right

to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

(John 1:1-18 ESV)

“though [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

(Philippians 2:6-11 ESV)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

(Colossians 1:15-20 ESV)

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

(Hebrews 1:1-4 ESV)

DAY 2

A SAVIOR KING IS BORN

Matthew 1:1-2:12; Luke 1:1-2:38

Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. And what I love most about Christmas is that it is a time to celebrate that our Hope has come. After thousands of years of waiting, in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son (Galatians 4:4). After centuries of the people of God looking forward to the One who was to come, Jesus finally came. Christmas is a time to remember the faithfulness of God and to rejoice in the salvation he brings through Jesus.

While these scenes of the Christmas story are familiar to us, their significance may not be. Here are three observations about who Jesus is and why he came from these first stories of our King.

1. Jesus fulfills all the promises and hopes of the Old Testament. Matthew starts his gospel by telling us that this Jesus is the son of David, the son of Abraham. This is not just a note on his family history. It is a declaration that the promised son - a promise given to both men - has now come. The angel tells Mary that this Jesus will sit on the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32). He is the coming King to reign forever (2 Samuel 7:13). He is the one through whom God will bless all the families of the earth - the beginnings of which

we see in the coming of the Wise Men - (Genesis 2:3). Every promise and every hope now finds its yes and amen in him.

2. *Jesus was humble in coming to the earth.* Beyond the fact that Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, humbled himself to come to the earth (Philippians 2:6-7), the way in which he came was a display of humility. He was born to working-class peasants. He was born in a barn and laid in a feeding trough. He lived in a back-woods town, hillbilly town. No great palace of kings. No great fanfare at his coming. Just a lowly family, treasuring their son and the quite truth that he would one day be King over all. What a humble beginning!

3. *Jesus was born to die.* Mary and Joseph, at the command of the angel, name the baby Jesus. The name is found in the Old Testament as Joshua. It means "the Lord saves." Jesus was born to be the savior of his people. Yet, he would save them in an unexpected way - by laying down his life. He was born to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). And the only way to do that was to be the perfect sacrifice himself. Even from the beginning of his life, his death was in view. Christmas and Easter are inseparably connected. As John Donne once wrote: "There is an inseparable line from the crèche to the cross." From the crèche to the cross, from the cave manger to the Calvary mount, from the swaddling cloths to the grave clothes, we see this truth: Jesus was born to die.

DAY 3

HIS EARLY YEARS

Matthew 2:13-23, Luke 2:39-52

We know very little about the early years of Jesus' life. We know that he spent some of these years growing up as an exile in Egypt. We know that after the death of Herod the Great, his family returned to Israel and settled in Nazareth of Galilee. We know that he grew up there, the son of a carpenter, living in relative obscurity from the rest of the world. We know that he was raised to know the law and to love the God of Israel, just like every other normal Jewish boy growing up in Palestine. We know that at least once his family made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. And other than these things we don't know very much.

Throughout the centuries people have been intrigued with this part of Jesus' life. What was he like as a boy? What was he like as a teenager? Did his parents ever have to teach him anything? How did he relate to his brothers and sister? These questions have led some to create stories about these years of Jesus' life. In one story the boy Jesus makes clay pigeons and then brings them to life. In another story, some neighbors complain about Jesus' family and he curses them with blindness. And in another, Jesus heals his brother James

who is bitten by a poisonous snake (these are stories from the *Gospel of Thomas*, which is not part of the Bible).

These stories are at best entertainment and are quite different than the picture of the boy Jesus we see in the gospels. Luke says this of him: "And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him," (Luke 2:40 ESV). This is about all that we have describing what Jesus was like. We see a story of him when he was twelve, but it just further displays this truth. He wasn't some boy wizard turning tricks to impress his friends. He wasn't a testy child who could summons disease and ailments at will. He wasn't just someone handy to have with you when you went hiking were snakes were found. No, he was a child - just like every other child - who grew in wisdom and was loved by God.

I think that this absence of material on the life of Jesus is meant to show us how normal Jesus was. Sure he was unique. Who else can boast of being both God and man? Yet, he was profoundly one of us. In every way he was one of us. He learned how to walk. He learned the trade of his father. He had friends. He was a big brother. He went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. He loved his mother. The author of Hebrews tells us that he was made like us in every respect (Hebrews 2:17). How amazing is it that in order to save us, God become one of us. He didn't just visit us. He didn't just appear like us. No. He became, in the very truest sense of the word, human.

DAY 4

A PREPARED WAY

Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:19-28

At the beginning of every gospel in the New Testament, we find an unusual character - John the Baptist. He stationed his ministry in the most unlikely of places, the wilderness. He was dressed in a garment full of camel's hair. His diet consisted of everyone's favorite dish, locusts and honey. If we were to lay eyes on him, we would probably think he looked more like a beggar or maybe a social outcast.

However, this man was no outcast wandering in the wilderness alone. He was a man with a powerful voice. A man with a great ministry by preaching on repentance and baptizing men and women in the Jordan River. In fact, he had such a following that the scripture says "Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him" (Matthew 3:5). Yet with such a great ministry it was never centered around his glory and his fame.

Instead, in our passage we see John the Baptist fully devoted to one thing, and that is fulfilling this prophecy from Isaiah 40 (similar prophecies can be found in Malachi 3):

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

valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

(Isaiah 40:3-5 ESV)

The Lord sent John the Baptist as a prophet to pave the way for Jesus Christ. He was the voice promised in Isaiah. The one called to make the path straight for the glory of the Lord. The voice that would be an arrow pointing to Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist preached repentance, but Jesus would grant the gift of repentance through his life and death.

John the Baptist would baptize with water, but Jesus would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John the Baptist preached forgiveness of sins, but Jesus was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world.

John the Baptist was ushering in the coming King who would be the very glory of God, and Jesus is that King.

John truly was a humble man whose greatest desire was that Christ would increase and he would decrease (John 3:3). It would be wise of us today to follow in his steps of humility. Yet it would be wiser, if we would set our gaze on the one he was pointing to, Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

DAY 5

HIS BAPTISM

Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23; John 1:29-34

Jesus is not one to do things as we might expect. The truth is there are some things Jesus says and does that are quite unexpected. One such thing is his coming to John to be baptized. We are told that men and women were coming to John to be baptized by him in the Jordan. And his baptism was one of repentance. Those coming to John were seeking to return their hearts to God, to seek him in repentance. John had a very fruitful ministry and was no doubt very busy teaching on the kingdom of God and on repentance. Its not hard to image his surprise when he sees Jesus coming to him to be baptized. We might expect Jesus to come and approve. We might even expect Jesus to join John in teaching and baptizing. But what Jesus did was quite unexpected.

Jesus wanted to be baptized by John. Even John himself was perplexed by Jesus' request. Why would the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world need to repent himself? Matthew tells us that John even tried to resist saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Matthew 3:14). But Jesus responded and said that he needed to be baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness." Jesus was coming to be baptized because it was what God desired for him to do. It was to fulfill what is right or pleasing

to God. But why would Jesus need to be baptized to please God? If he is not coming to repent of his own sin - which he by no means is - then what does his baptism mean?

First, Jesus' baptism was a way of identifying with his people. He wasn't baptized because he need to repent of his own sins. He was baptized as a way of joining with the people of Israel who were, as a corporate whole, turning to God. This was the purpose of John's ministry - to prepare the hearts of Israel for the coming of the Lord. And Jesus, who is that coming Lord, joins his people and identifies himself with them.

Second, Jesus' baptism was in a sense his coronation ceremony. All four gospels tell us that when Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit came upon him like a dove. What exactly this looked like is unclear. But what is clear is that Jesus was being anointed to do the work of God's Messiah. This scene was pictured in the Old Testament. At the coronation of the king, the priest would anoint them with oil, an act that signified the anointing of God's Spirit upon them. Every anointed king in the Old Testament was pointing to the One who would come. And now the Spirit has come upon Jesus and the Father has testified to fact that Jesus is his beloved Son, the true King (Psalm 2). Jesus is now ready to do the work for which he was sent. The Christ is now ready for his ministry.

DAY 6

HIS TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

After Jesus' spectacular baptism, one final question needed to be answered before Jesus could begin his ministry - what kind of Messiah would he be? As the Spirit leads him to the wilderness for testing, we cannot help but hear echos of the stories of Adam and Israel. Will Jesus be faithful to God's will or will he, like Adam and Israel, succumb to the temptation and join their failure?

Once Jesus' fasting is complete, Satan comes to him with three temptations. First, he tempts Jesus to turn stones to bread. Second, he tempts Jesus to put God to the test by jumping from the temple mount. Third, he tempts Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world if he will only bow down and worship Satan. All three temptations are quite similar to the many temptations that we all face. John gives us a very similar list in 1 John 2:16 - the lust of the flesh (stones), lust of the eyes (kingdoms), the pride of life (testing God). And in fact the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are (Hebrews 4:15). However, we will miss the depth and force of these temptations, if we fail to see what is at stake here for Jesus:

1. *Will he be a Messiah who will embrace or reject his dependence upon the Father?* Adam faced this temptation and sought to become himself like God. Israel too faced this temptation and directed their dependence towards the pagan gods and idols. But Jesus, facing the temptation to turn stones to bread, instead embraced his dependence upon God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," (Matthew 4:4). He will be a Messiah who will embrace his dependence upon the Father.

2. *Will he be a Messiah who will embrace or reject his humility?* The issue at hand within this temptation is not whether or not Jesus has the allegiance of heaven's hosts. Satan and Jesus both know that he does. The issue at hand is will Jesus exploit his equality with God or will he empty himself of these divine prerogatives. Jesus responds by saying that God is not one to be put to test. Paul's words in the book of Philippians ring true in Jesus' triumph over this temptation: "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [or exploited], but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," (Philippians 2:6-7). He will be a Messiah who will embrace his humility.

3. *Will he be a Messiah who will embrace or reject the cross?* This last temptation is very subtle. We look at this temptation and say, *How is worshiping Satan a temptation?* Why would that even tempt Jesus, who is himself God in the flesh? Why would God be tempted to worship Satan? The force of this temptation comes in what Satan is offering. He is offering Jesus all the peoples of the earth. But isn't this what God is offering Jesus (Psalm 2:7-8; Philippians 2:10-11)? Yes, but God offers the nations to Jesus only through the work of the cross. Satan is offering Jesus the world without suffering, without shame, and without the cross. Yet, no matter how painful or how difficult that suffering might be, Jesus for the joy set before him will not inherit the earth without the cross. He will love and obey only God. Even if that means a road to Calvary. He will be a Messiah who will embrace his cross.

DAY 7

SIGNS AND WONDERS

*Matthew 8:1-17, 9:1-8, 18-26, 9:27-34; Mark 1:29-34,
2:1-11, 5:21-43; Luke 13:10-17, 17:11-19, 18:35-43;
John 4:46-54*

It is commonly held among the popular culture that Jesus was merely a prophet. He was a good moral teacher. He was an incredible person, yes. But he was by no means the God-man as described in the Bible.

Not only does this understanding fail to account for the things Jesus taught, namely about himself, but it also fails to account for the things that he did. Jesus was a wonderfully gifted and insightful teacher and taught with authority. But he was not merely a teacher. His ministry was filled with amazing, miraculous acts. Even the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, who was not himself a Christian, described Jesus as one who did wondrous works. Jesus the teacher cannot be divorced from Jesus the miracle maker.

But why was Jesus so willing and ready to preform miracles? Was this some way of proudly demonstrating his divine powers? Or was he seeking to draw a crowd of bewildered followers? The answer to these questions comes when we understand the relationship between Jesus' miracles and his mission. In Luke chapter four, Jesus returns to Nazareth after

having just undergone his temptation in the wilderness. He visits a synagogue on the Sabbath and asks to read from the scroll of Isaiah. He opens to Isaiah 61 and begins to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

(Isaiah 61:1-2 ESV)

Jesus sits down after reading and tells his audience that what Isaiah spoke of and only saw from a far they are now seeing in him. This prophecy in Isaiah is now fulfilled in Jesus. Why would Jesus approach a blind man and restore his sight? Because the Spirit sent him to preach the good news of the gospel. Why would Jesus heal the paralyzed and the mangled? Because the Spirit sent him to bring liberty to those afflicted. Why would Jesus open the ears of the deaf, heal diseases, cleanse lepers, even raise the dead? Because the Spirit sent him to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor - to proclaim freedom from suffering, sorrow, and sin. These signs and wonders are the proof that Jesus was sent by God and anointed by the Spirit to do the work of the Messiah. And that work was to bring the good news of freedom and favor from God, a freedom and favor demonstrated in the working of miracles.

DAY 8

TWELVE ORDINARY MEN

*Matthew 4:18-22, 10:1-15; Mark 3:13-19, 6:7-13;
Luke 5:1-11, 6:12-16, 9:1-6; John 1:35-51*

The Last Supper is probably one of the most famous and recognizable paintings of the ministry of Christ ever. I remember a young boy at church once seeing a print of the painting and saying, "I know that picture, my mom has the clock," (referring to novelty clock, which probably would be very depressing to Da Vinci). Like this young boy, we all know the painting well. It is a iconic image of Christianity, an image that will not let us forget the fact that Jesus was constantly surrounded by his twelve disciples. Early in his ministry he called them. At one point in his ministry he sent them out in pairs to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. He taught them. He lived with them. He served them. It would be difficult to fully understand the ministry of Jesus without understand his disciples.

Here are some things that we can learn from the twelve disciples:

1. *The act of following Christ begins with him.* Much is made of the fact that Jesus' ministry was very similar to the ministry of the Rabbis of his day. One of the common titles of Jesus in

the gospels is Rabbi (which means teacher). Yet, Jesus took a very different approach at gathering his followers. A typical Rabbi would have had families and individuals in a sense applying to be taken under their teaching. But Jesus went about it another way. He sought his disciples out. The gospels tell us the stories of Jesus coming to these men and telling them to come and follow him. Some were fishing. Another was working as a tax collector. Others were disciples of John the Baptist. And none of them were seeking Jesus. He came to all of them first. They did not choose him; he chose them (John 15:16). The call to follow Christ is a call to new life. And it is a call that begins with Jesus.

2. God's new people began with these twelve men. It was by no accident that Jesus called twelve men to be his disciples. The number twelve was representative of the entirety of God's people - hence, the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus came to the earth to gather and to recreate Israel. Old Israel had been unfaithful and punished. Old Israel was dead and needed to be reborn. We see in the calling of these twelve men the beginnings of the God's New Covenant people. The disciples all came from very different backgrounds - a tax collector for the Romans and a zealot who hated Roman rule were quite different indeed. Yet, they were a picture of the New Covenant people who are unified in Christ and his gospel. The disciples were given the words of eternal life. Just as the Old Covenant people were formed around God's law, so too the New Covenant people would be formed around the gospel entrusted to these twelve men. And most importantly, the disciples were taught to know and love God through Christ, something that the prophet Jeremiah prophesied would be true of the New Covenant people (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

3. Jesus used ordinary men to turn the world upside down. When we read through the stories of the twelve disciples in the Bible and in historical traditions, it is easy to forget the fact that there was nothing special about these men. Sure the Lord was doing amazing things through their ministries. And sure they serve a unique and unparalleled role in

formation and establish of God's New Covenant church. But these men were just like the rest of us - ordinary. They struggled to understand Jesus' teachings at times. They were prideful and self-serving at times. They were fearful and cowardly at times. But God nonetheless worked through these men to do amazing things. And we can't help but find ourselves in their place. We are all ordinary. Yet, if we are faithful to the calling of a disciple, God is faithful to do great things through us. We don't need lots of education. We don't have to be super talented. We don't have to be the most skilled in our ministry. No. These twelve men are a wonderful reminder to us that God will work through us who are ordinary to do extraordinary things.

DAY 9

THE TEACHINGS OF A NEW LAW

Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:20-49

Jesus stands in the line of all of Israel's great prophets, including Moses the greatest. Yet, Jesus stands far and above all that came before. The author of the letter to the Hebrews starts his letter in this way: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," (Hebrews 1:1). God had revealed himself and his law through many different prophets and in many different ways. But there is a finality in the way in Jesus serves as a prophet. For many years men stood between God and his people and delivered to them what God had to say. Their words were always prefaced with, "Thus says the LORD." Yet, when God sends his Son into the world men are no longer speaking for God. He is speaking for himself in Jesus.

We see this truth perhaps the clearest in what the church for centuries has called the Sermon on the Mount. At the end of the sermon Matthew tell us that the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one with authority. There was something different about the way in which Jesus taught. The crowds were used to scribes and Pharisees teaching. And in many cases it was clear that they were teaching truth

and good doctrine. But when Jesus taught, there was an authority they had never heard before. He didn't just give his interpretation of truth; he was speaking truth. He didn't just explain the Old Testament law; he offered a new law that was deeper and fuller. He didn't just offer his opinions; he claimed that if anyone would hear his word and do it he would like the wise man who built his house on the rock, not the sand. In Jesus, God was giving his New Covenant people a new law!

The Sermon on the Mount has been loved by Christians throughout the history of the church. Its teaching cover all areas of the Christian life. From the disciplines of prayer and fasting to marriage and divorce, from dealing with anger, lust, and worry to matters of possessions and making oaths, from issues regarding the Old Testament to loving our neighbors, the Sermon on the Mount offers a store house of treasure for the Christian. In order to receive that treasure here are some helpful things to remember about this sermon:

- This sermon is not a way of earning your way into the Kingdom of God. It is by faith that we are saved. This sermon is not a call for work-based salvation. It is a New Covenant ethic that is to be obeyed by faith.
- This sermon cannot be divorced from the person and work of Christ. There are some very practical things, but we must never lose sight of who Jesus is and what he had done for us on the cross. Without his death and resurrection this sermon cannot change us.
- This sermon shows us the path to a blessed life. So many Christians live their lives depressed and defeated. Christians can be some of the most discouraged people there are. But this sermon gives us the means for finding fulfillment and happiness in life. If we will only seek to obey Jesus and keep his word, then we will be blessed.
- This sermon is not optional. Jesus is clear his people must be like the wise man who built his house on the rock. Jesus

intended for all of his disciples, from the greatest to least, to be hearing and actively doing what he teaches. We should never read through or remember the Sermon on the Mount without thinking, Jesus has spoken and I must obey.

DAY 10

THE DEMONS SHUDDER

*Matthew 8:28-34, 17:14-20, Mark 1:21-28, 5:1-20,
9:14-29; Luke 8:26-39, 9:37-43*

Early on in the Gospels, Jesus is very careful about revealing his identity. He is reluctant to “show himself” when his mother and brothers urge him to do so. He tells the recipients of his miraculous healings to seal their lips, to tell no one. Even his closest followers and friends spend a good amount of time in the dark about who he really is and why he’s come. But there is one group that knows who he is and what he has come to do, even from the beginning of his ministry – the demons. They know exactly who he is. “I know who you are – the Holy One of God,” (Mark 1:24). They know exactly what he has come to do. “Have you come here to torment us before the time?,” (Matthew 8:29). And they know their rightful place before Jesus. “I adjure you by God, do not torment me,” (Mark 5:7).

We must not forget that a significant portion of Jesus’ healing ministry consisted of freeing those captive to the minions of the present darkness. Jesus freed men, women, and children from demonic oppression. He restored health and peace of mind to many who had long forgot that way of life. On one occasion, he even cast a whole legion of spirits into a herd of

pigs. The demons were simply no match for Jesus. By his word alone they were silenced, cast out, and conquered. Long had they reigned and ruled over the earth. But when Jesus showed up everything changed. The light has shone into the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5). There is no victory for darkness with Christ in the world.

While these stories may seem strange to us, we can learn a great deal from them. First, we can learn that we are waging a real war, not against flesh and blood, as Paul says, but against the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12). We must never forget that there are real demons present in this world that are seeking to destroy the work of Christ and his gospel. And we must ready ourselves to fight the good fight for the sake of ourselves and those around us.

Second, we can learn that knowing who Jesus is and what he came to do is not the same as knowing Jesus in a saving way. We must never be satisfied with merely knowing about Christ. As James says even the demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). We must always know Christ himself and live lives that show the fruit of that personal relationship.

Lastly, we can learn that Jesus has an authority and power that is unmatched. Not even Satan himself, the prince of demons, can withstand the power of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. We must cling to the truth that Christ is seated in the heavenly places far above every rule and authority and power and dominion (Ephesians 1:20-21). We must cling to the promise that nothing - no ruler nor principality nor demonic spirit - can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38). We must cling to the hope that in Jesus we win.

DAY 11

TWO UNLIKELY ENCOUNTERS

John 3:1-21, 4:1-42

Things never go quite like we might imagine in the episodes of Jesus' ministry. Often we are surprised or even shocked at the things Jesus says and does or at the outcomes of these stories. Jesus just always seems to have a way to turn things upside down. As we come to the third and fourth chapters of the gospel of John, we are introduced to two very different characters. One was a Jewish ruler, a Pharisee. The other was a Samaritan woman. One was, no doubt, very moral and upright. The other was sexually immoral. One was Nicodemus. And the other was the woman at the well.

These two encounters, though both very unlikely, could not have been any more different. Not only was the person with whom Jesus met very different in each encounter. But the conversations and the outcome of the conversations were very different as well.

Take Nicodemus. Coming to Jesus by night so as to hide the encounter, he begins with a little bit of flattery, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him," (John 3:2). Jesus refuses to give in to his flattery and gets

immediately to heart of the issue. Jesus tells him that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Yet Nicodemus is confused by Jesus' statement. Jesus explains that the new birth is a work of the Spirit and done in the secrecy of the heart. Nicodemus, who was a teacher of the Old Testament and should have understood the Ezekiel 36 references, still doesn't understand. Jesus tells him that while the Spirit does his work, we are to look to Christ and believe in him as he is lifted up on the cross. We are left without any indication that Nicodemus understood and believed Jesus. It would appear that this encounter was unfruitful.

Now let's look at the woman at the well. As Jesus and his disciples are passing through Samaria, he stops by a well as they go into town for food. Jesus sees a woman there at the well and begins to talk with her. This is would have been a social taboo. Men didn't usually speak to women in these situations (it would seem very suspicious for a man to talk with a woman alone like this). And Jews wouldn't speak with Samaritans. The Jews hated the Samaritans, who were a mixed breed of Jews and Gentiles. We come to find out that this woman has been married four times and is currently living with a man not her husband. If anyone is unworthy to talk with Jesus, it is this woman. Yet, Jesus has compassion on this woman and gets to the heart of the issue. He reveals to her that he is the Messiah and that he can give her living water. She believes in Jesus and goes to tell everyone in her town. This encounter has proved fruitful.

These two people clearly illustrate Jesus' statement that he came for the sick not the well. He came to call sinners not the righteous. For it is sinners who recognize their need of forgiveness and their need for Christ.

DAY 12

CONTROVERSY

*Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6, 7:1-6; Luke 15:1-2, 19:1-10;
John 2:13-22, 9:1-17*

As Jesus' ministry progresses, we begin to see the fulfillment of John's words: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him," (John 1:11). While it was true that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, the One that the people of Israel had longed for and hoped in for generation upon generation, the great irony of Jesus' life is that his own people rejected him. He was their King. He was their Savior. He was their God, come to be with them. And they rejected him. It is very easy for us, standing on this side of Jesus' death and resurrection, to wonder why would they discard Jesus, the beloved Son of God. It's easy for us, who have been filled with the Spirit who testifies in us that Jesus is Lord, to scoff at the Jews for throwing aside their only Hope. It's easy to think, "I would never do that."

But as we look at these stories in the Gospels, understanding why Jesus was causing such controversy will help us to understand why they rejected Jesus and help us not to do the same:

First, Jesus was challenging their religious practices. A lot of this controversy surrounded the Sabbath. Jesus healed on the Sabbath many times. His disciples on one occasion even plucked grain to eat on the Sabbath. Now the Sabbath was a big deal. Honoring it is one of the Ten Commandments. The punishment for disobeying this command in the Old Testament was death. Yet, the Jews had failed to see that the Sabbath was given for their good. It was not given so that they could create a religious system, whereby they could earn God's favor. As Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This greatly challenged the Jews. They had come to love their religion. It had become to them a means of self-righteousness and self-exaltation. There is no wonder then why Jesus' claim that he was Lord of the Sabbath would cause controversy. We must be careful to not allow our religion - those practices that we think earn us favor with God - to separate us from Christ. We must be careful not to reject Jesus because of our religion.

Second, Jesus was challenging their view of God. Jesus also stirred up a good deal of controversy over his social interactions. Jesus made a practice of eating and association with tax collectors, prostitutes, and so-called sinners. This really upset the Jews. Why would a man who claims to be a servant of God do such a thing? Doesn't he know that God is holy? Doesn't he know that these people are an abomination to the Lord? The issue here is really an issue of the character of God. The Jews saw God as a holy God, unable and unwilling to relate with sinners. But Jesus understood that God is merciful. He opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. He understood that God is slow to anger, abounding in love, and rich in mercy. Jesus' association with "sinners" challenged the Jew's view of God. If we are not careful, we can fall prey to the same trap. Anytime that we look at someone with judgment and condescension, we are saying that God is not compassionate. He is not merciful. He does not give grace. We must be careful not to reject Jesus because we fail to see God's mercy and kindness toward sinners.

Third, Jesus was challenging their hardness of heart toward God. In one controversy concerning the ritual washing of hands before meal times (which was a man-made tradition, not part of God's law), Jesus got to the heart of the whole issue. Why were the Jews refusing to accept Jesus? Why was he causing such controversy? Jesus quoted from Isaiah to answer these questions. "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me," (Mark 7:6-7, compare to Isaiah 29:13). The people of Israel had long hardened their hearts to God. They may have been going through the practices of the law and God's prescribed forms of worship, but their heart was far from God. How is that they could get mad when Jesus heals the broken? Because their hearts were hard toward God. How is it that they could fail to see the compassion of Jesus to restore the lost? Because their hearts were hard toward God. We must always beware of the perils of a hard heart. We must love God, trust God, and obey God. We must be careful not to reject Jesus because we have hardened our hearts toward God.

DAY 13

TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLES

Matthew 13, 18, 21; Mark 4; Luke 14-16

Perhaps no part of Jesus' teaching is as memorable and interesting as his parables. The Gospels records over thirty different parables taught by Jesus. These parables cover a wide variety of topics - the Kingdom, prayer, forgiveness, redemption, wisdom, the gospel, judgment, and love. And they show us the wisdom with which Jesus taught. He was a master at telling stories and using illustrations to prove his point. He had an incredible ability to draw his audience in and completely turn their worlds upside down with his stories. Jesus' parables are no less than amazing.

Yet, often we see that these parables weren't always clearly understood. In fact, we might read through a parable ourselves and think, "What is he talking about?" It begs the question, "Why didn't Jesus teach in clearer ways?" While the parables are no doubt interesting and moving at times, it still seems a strange way to teach. After telling the parable of the sowers in Mark 4, Jesus' disciples come to him in private and ask what in the world he was talking about. Before he explains the parable, he tells them that they were given the secrets of the Kingdom, but those on the outside were not. He quotes from Isaiah saying, "they may indeed see but not

perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven," (Isa 6:9-10). Jesus was speaking in these ways in order to hide the truths of the Kingdom.

Now at first, this sounds wrong. Why was Jesus hiding truth? One reason is just as Isaiah said to be an act of judgment upon God's people. They had disobeyed and so God was going to judge them by hiding the truth of his Kingdom. But a much better reason has to do with the time-line of Jesus' ministry. When the Bible talks about mystery (which is the way in which parables are told), it doesn't refer to something that will never be understood. Mystery in the Bible refers to things that are hidden for a time, but then revealed. The same is true of the parables. The truth of the Kingdom was veiled in Jesus' teachings, but was revealed after his death and resurrection. Now that we understand the full truth about Jesus and his mission, we can fully understand the things he taught.

The parables about loving our neighbors mean nothing without the picture of love that we see at the cross. The parables about prayer mean nothing without the truth that we have a high priest who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand interceding for us. The parables about forgiveness mean nothing without experiencing the forgiveness that Jesus' blood brings. The parables about redemption mean nothing without feeling the weight of the redemption purchased at the cross. The parables about the Kingdom mean nothing without a King, who died to save his people and who has risen to reign in victory over and through them. Praise God for the wonderful teaching of the parables. But praise him even more that Jesus fulfills each one and shows us the path of obedience.

DAY 14

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

John 7-8

"No one ever spoke like this man!" That's what the officers had spoken to the chief priests and the Pharisees after Jesus had taught in the temple and the city during the Feast of Booths. This was a feast celebrated during September and October where the people of Israel would live in tents and celebrate the faithfulness of God in the wilderness. It was during this festival that Jesus shared teachings with authority concerning who he was and what he had come to offer.

First, Who was this man?

One of the most memorable sayings of Jesus comes from John 8:58: "Truly, Truly, I say to you, before the Abraham was, I am." This was a clarification to the Jewish onlookers that he was not just a descendent of Abraham like they were, instead he came before Abraham because he was the great "I am." The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that revealed himself to Moses by the burning bush was standing before them now in the person of Jesus Christ. This was an amazing statement and one that provoked his hearers.

In both chapters, he is proclaiming that he and the Father are one. He declares that his teaching was from God (John 7:16). He shows that it was his Father in heaven that sent him on this mission. (John 7:29). He explains that it was God the Father, that bore witness to him (8:18). He reveals his motive of always pleasing his Father. (John 8:29). All of these sayings are to summarize the truth that he is one with God the Father because he too is God.

Second, What has he come to offer?

First, Jesus states that he is the living water that has come to quench their thirst. The pinnacle of the Festival of Booths was the middle of the celebration, and it was during this time that Jesus cried out to his hearers "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." It was an invitation that echoed Isaiah 55, an invitation for those who thirst for salvation to find it in Jesus Christ. Many times people try to satisfy their thirsty soul through the avenues of money, sex, drugs, status, possessions, etc. However, none of the things offered by the world will ever satisfy. Only Jesus offers the living water that will quench their thirst forever.

Second, he is the light of the world. The world and the influence of sin are both described in scripture with the term darkness. However, when salvation breaks through the darkness it is often mentioned as the light of the world. Listen to Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the peoples; and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." Isaiah writes about the promised light that will break through the darkness, and bring salvation. This light is Jesus Christ.

Finally, Jesus offers freedom. The Jewish people truly believed that they were not slaves. They did not see chains around their ankles or shackles upon their wrists. They saw themselves as free men and as Abraham's descendants.

They never saw the slavery that Jesus saw. It was these shackles of sin and Satan that enslaved the Jewish people, and it's the same masters that enslave us as well. Yet Jesus brings us his promise to break the chains of slavery. He says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32).

What great news that we have in these two chapters! God has come in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, to shine his light through the darkness, to set the captives free from their captors, and to bring living water to thirsty souls. May we seek to receive and celebrate this gracious gift of Himself.

DAY 15

MORE SIGNS AND WONDERS

*Matthew 8:23-27, 14:22-33; Mark 4:35-41, 6:30-52, 8:1-10;
Luke 8:22-25, 9:10-17; John 2:1-12, 6:1-21, 9:1-17*

The last time that we looked at signs and wonders, we saw how Jesus' miracles were a testimony to his mission. He had come to preach good news to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom for those oppressed. The miracles he was working cannot be separated from his message of salvation and freedom from sin. So too these signs and wonders that we are going to look at today cannot be separated from his message. But this time the message is not about what he has come to do. Rather, it is a message about who he is. He is the Great I AM here in the flesh.

Now we don't need to take from this that everyone who preforms signs and wonders in the Bible is God in the flesh. Moses preformed signs. As did Elijah, Elisha, Peter, Paul, and other apostles. Yet, each of these all worked their signs by the power and at the will of God. Jesus did so in a quite different manner. After Jesus had calms the storm on the sea of Galilee, his disciples said this of him, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and waves obey?" (Matt 8:26). They recognize that something is different about Jesus. On another occasion when Jesus provides a miraculous catch of fish for Peter, James, and John, Peter responds by falling to his

knees and telling Jesus to depart because of his sinfulness (Luke 5:8). What a strange way to say thanks for all the business. Why would Peter do this? Why would the disciples say this? Because they understood that something was different about Jesus.

The majority of these signs deal with two major ideas - water and food. While these things are significant because everyone needs them to survive, for the people of Israel they carried much more weight. For the people of Israel these things were a reminder of the fact that their God was with them. But how? Water would take them back to the very first baptism - not Jesus' and not John's, but Moses'. The Bible describes the passing through the Red Sea - which was one, if not the, most significant events in the Old Testament - as the baptism of Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2). When Israel was pressed in on every side, with Pharaoh's army approaching, the Lord was with them. He stretched out his hand and the winds and waves obeyed. While Moses was the one to lift his staff, it was God who miraculously worked to part the sea and save his people. It is the Lord's voice that the waters obey.

Food, and more specifically bread, would have also taken the people of Israel back to the time of Moses. After God had faithfully and mightily saved his people, they headed into the wilderness seeking the promised land. Yet, the way was hard and food was scarce. But the Lord was with them. He sent from heaven bread - they called it manna - that would sustain them in harsh terrain. Everyday, when the people of Israel would rise, the ground would be filled with the testimony that the Lord was with Israel. He was the One who had sent bread from heaven.

Now that we see the significance of both water and food, we can see the incredible truth about who Jesus is and what made the disciples so amazed. They weren't amazed at the signs. They had seen them before. What they were amazed at was the fact that the Lord, the God of Israel who had saved the people through the Red Sea and had graciously

given them bread from heaven, was now standing in front of them. The same Lord who parted the seas was now calming and walking upon them (Job 9:8). The same Lord who sent bread was now miraculously feeding the multitudes. The disciples were amazed because they weren't standing in the presence of God's servant. They were in the very presence of God himself, in human form. These signs showed them that Immanuel had come. God had come to be with his people.

DAY 16

TEACHINGS ON DISCIPLESHIP

*Matthew 16:24-28; Luke 9:23-27, 57-62, 12:8-12, 14:25-33;
John 15:1-17*

No discussion on the teachings of Jesus would be complete without discussing discipleship. Of course Jesus was a great moral teacher. He taught us to love our enemies. He taught us to forgive. He taught us not to worry. He taught us to be humble and meek. But the teachings of Jesus do not come without the call to come and follow him. This was the way in which he called his first disciples. He approached them and said, "Come, follow me." We must always remember that Jesus does not want people to merely admire or agree with his teachings. He wants disciples. He wants whole-hearted followers.

The call to follow Christ is first a call to die. Jesus tells us plainly that, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me," (Luke 9:23). Following Christ is not about learning a new way to think and live. It's not about the key to finding success and happiness in your life. It is a call to die - a call to daily crucify oneself. We must die to our wants, our plans, our goals, our desires, even our own lives. No one can follow Christ without a total abandonment. Some men tried, but Jesus said they were unfit

to be his disciples (Luke 9:57-62). This means that Jesus is now our ruler and there is no part of us that is still ours. We have died and now belong to him who died (Galatians 2:20).

The call to follow Christ is also a call to dependence. It makes sense that if we have died to ourselves as a follower of Jesus, then we are in need of someone to give us life. This is exactly what Jesus says in John 15. He uses the imagery of a vine and branches. Just as branches depend upon the vine for nourishment, so too a follower of Christ must remain or abide in Jesus to bear fruit. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. To be a disciple of Jesus is to depend upon him for everything.

And the call to follow Christ is a call to action. No one follows Christ without participation. The whole point of discipleship is that we would not only learn to be like Jesus, but to do the things he does. He has called us for kingdom actions. We are called to be fishers of men. We are called to preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom. We are called to bear works of righteousness. We are called reproduce and make more disciples. There is no sideline in following Christ. For when we come to Christ, we set our hand to the plow and do not look back (9:62).

DAY 17

YOU ARE THE CHRIST!

Matt 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:8-21

We've come to a middle point in the ministry of Jesus. We have seen his baptism and his temptation. We have seen the signs and wonders he performed. We have seen teachings of the New Law, the parables, and discipleship. And our journey is much like that of the disciples of Jesus. They had seen all of these things as well. And just like us, they had been confronted with the things Jesus said and did.

As Jesus was gathered with his disciples, he began a conversation by asking, "Who do people say that I am?" He wanted to know what kind of reputation he had among the crowds. He wanted to hear from them what the general consensus was about his identity. Some of the popular opinions included John Baptist. Some thought Jesus was carrying on the ministry of John. Other may have thought that Jesus was John back from the dead. Another opinion was that he was Elijah. The Old Testament talks of another coming of Elijah (Malachi 4:5). Maybe this was him. Others said that he was just another one of God's prophets. Not a bad list. Much better than today's popular opinion of Jesus.

Then Jesus turns the question to his disciples. "But who do you say I am?" Jesus wanted to see if his closest followers were getting it. Did they see Jesus among this list or was he someone greater? Then Peter stood up and cried out, "You are the Christ, the Son of Living God." Jesus was not just another prophet. He was the prophet. He wasn't just another servant of God. He was the Christ, the very Son of God. And Peter got it. His disciples understood from everything that they heard and saw that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of God's people.

What about you? Have you made the good confession - that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? There is no greater confession that we can make than this. Is Jesus just another good teacher or miracle worker to you? Or is he your only hope of salvation and life? Is he the only one you trust to bring you to God and restore your soul? Is he the only one you love and worship? If it is true that he is the Christ, the Son of God, then he alone is worthy to save and satisfy us. Join the multitudes of men and women throughout the ages that have made the good confession. Say with Peter, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

DAY 18

HIS TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36

Something like this had never happened before. For around thirty-three years of his life Jesus had lived in the humble form of a man. The glory of his divinity had been for these years veiled by his humanity. That beauty upon which angels gazed had been covered by his plain form as he lived on this earth among us as one of us. But something was about to happen that would change the way three of his disciples would forever see him.

We saw yesterday that Peter had just made the good confession - that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The disciples had come to know who Jesus was. They had seen his signs and wonders. They had heard his teaching. And they understood his mission. But nothing could have prepared James, John, and Peter for what would happen next. Almost a week after Peter makes the good confession, Jesus calls with him these three to hike to the top of a mountain. No doubt they were probably wondering why they were making the trek. What was up there? What were they going to see?

We are told that when they reached the top of the mountain, Jesus was transfigured there among them. The view of his humanity was set aside and the disciples were given a view of the unveiled glory of Jesus - the Eternal Son, the Word who was with God in the beginning and who was himself God (John 1:1). His face shone like the blazing brightness of the sun and his clothes were pure white. And with him stood two men - Moses and Elijah. They were speaking about the things where about to take place in Jerusalem. Amazed at what was taking place, Peter speaks up and offers to build three tents for each of these men. But before he could finish what he was saying, a great cloud came upon them and God spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." And at that the cloud was gone, the men departed, and Jesus returned to his normal human form.

We can't help but wonder what such a vision would mean. Why would this happen? First, we are drawn by this vision to the past. We can't help but be reminded of Mt. Sinai in this vision. After six days they head to the top of a mountain, just like Moses. God descends upon the mountain in the form of a cloud and speaks, just like at Sinai. Jesus talks about his departure or exodus. Peter suggests that they build tents, just as the Israel did in the wilderness. The transfiguration is teaching us that Jesus is the New Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). He is now the giver of a new law and the One who stands between God and his people.

Second, the transfiguration draws our attention to the future. In his 2nd letter, Peter recalls the glorious vision and makes this conclusion about it: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty," (2 Peter 1:16 ESV). How can Peter be sure that Jesus will return in glory to this earth? He saw Jesus' glory on the mountain - the very same glory that he will have when he returns. The transfiguration is a picture of the coming glory that Jesus will have as every eye and heart will see him, confess that he is Lord, and bow the knee in worship.

DAY 19

A FACE TOWARD JERUSALEM

Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34;

Luke 9:21-22, 43-45, 51-53

Jesus had spent a good bit of his three years of ministry traveling. The cities of Cana, Caesarea Philippi, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Gennesaret were no strangers to Jesus. He had gone through the regions of Samaria, Judea and the Decapolis. He even traveled as far as Jerusalem on a few occasions. Jesus and his disciples were constantly on the go heading to a new village or town to preaching the good news of the coming Kingdom.

Yet, Jesus knew that his traveling days would soon be done. Around the time of his transfiguration, Luke tells us that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. His whole life he had prepared for what was to take place there. It was the reason that he was sent from Heaven. Jesus knew his destiny. His hour was approaching.

In order to prepare his disciples for what was about to take place, Jesus put aside the parables. He put aside his teachings on discipleship. And he spoke plainly and openly to them: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be

killed, and on the third day be raised." The hour of the cross was calling. Jesus heard and set his face toward it.

If there is ever any doubt about the purpose of the cross, these passages should remove it. The cross was not an unfortunate mishap. Jesus was not just at the wrong place at the wrong time. Three times Jesus predicted that this would take place. He obviously knew that it was going to happen. Yet, he embraced his purpose - a purpose set forth by the plan of God to redeem those under the curse of law and unite all things in him (Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 1:10). Jesus had come to die for his people and now it was time to do. His road now leads to the cross.

DAY 20

MORE CONTROVERSY

*Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 4:16-30;
John 5:8-18, 6:35-52, 8:34-59*

As we read through the Gospels, we see that Jesus was not well received by all. On Day 12 we looked at the controversy that Jesus raised over the things that he did. He healed on the Sabbath. He didn't follow the traditions of the Jewish people. And he wasn't liked because of it. Now while these things that Jesus did caused a great deal of controversy, they would not cause the same upheaval as would the things that Jesus said. Any one who says that Jesus was simply a good teacher is obviously unaware of many of things that Jesus said and the controversy that his words aroused.

Here are some of the things Jesus said and the controversy that surrounded them:

1. "Your sins are forgiven." It makes sense that this would be difficult to understand. Who can forgive sins but God. And here is this man from Nazareth telling people their sins are forgiven. Our only options here are to accept that Jesus is the sovereign Lord of heaven or he is a blasphemer.

2. *"There were many lepers in the time of the prophet Elisha."* This one comes from Luke 4. And it seems strange that the Jews would get so angry as Jesus was talking about the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. But Jesus was reminding them that God had long warned Israel that he would turn from showing them his favor and give it to the wicked nations. This was happening during the time of these great prophets. And it was happening now as Jesus had come. The Jews understood what Jesus meant and they were not happy about it.

3. *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."* Jesus was getting closer and closer to an outright blasphemy, in the eyes of the Jews. In this story in John 5, Jesus defended his work on the Sabbath by appealing to the fact that God is always working in our lives regardless of what day it is. But he is saying more. He claims an equality with God that no man should claim unless it be true.

4. *"You are of your Father the devil."* The Jews had come to pride themselves upon the fact that they were the sons of Abraham, God's very own people. Yet, Jesus points out that while they may be descendants of Abraham according to lineage, they were not doing the things that Abraham did. They were not believing in Christ. Rather they look more like Satan than Abraham. He tells them they are of their father, not Abraham, but the devil. There is no wonder why this would cause controversy.

5. *"Before Abraham was, I am."* Jesus, in the minds of the Jews, finally goes too far. Jesus tells us then that Abraham saw his day and rejoiced in it. But they couldn't understand what he meant. How can a man who is not even fifty years old know Abraham. And Jesus told them how: The weight of this statement doesn't come in the fact that existed before Abraham, but that he calls himself "I am." He could have said "I was." But he used the divine name of God (I AM that I AM, Exodus 3:14) for himself. At this they didn't just get angry, but they picked up stones to kill him. Making this claim - to be the Almighty God - is blasphemy, unless it is true.

There is no wonder why Jesus caused such controversy. Man in his natural state hates God. When he shows up in our world, there is going to be problems.

DAY 21

MORE TEACHINGS ON DISCIPLESHIP

*Matthew 18:15-20, 25:31-46;
Mark 9:33-37, 10:35-45; John 13:31-35*

As we saw on Day 16, the teachings of Jesus cannot be understood without understanding the call to be his disciple. We cannot look in from the outside upon Jesus' teachings. They are a call to follow him and a call to die. Of first importance for a disciple is his or her relationship to Christ. But of second importance in discipleship is our relationship to other disciples. Jesus has lots to say not only about how we are to relate to him, but also how we treat one another. The Christian life is not only about our relationship with the Lord. The "Jesus and me got our own thing going on" mindset is foreign to the Bible. Disciples are called into fellowship with Christ and his people.

Here are three essential characteristics of a disciple of Jesus:

1. *Humility.* The disciples had some the difficulty with this one. They often argued about who was going to be the greatest in heaven. Jesus told them that to be great in the kingdom of God you must become low. Our pride has to be crucified and we must relate with humility to one another. This means we forgive. We don't judge. We are patient and kind. We

bear the burdens of others. Or to put it in the words of Paul, we should “do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.. and look not only to [our] own interests, but also to the interests of others,” (Philippians 2:3-4 ESV). The call to follow Christ is a call to humility.

2. *Service.* Flowing from our humility is servant-hood. We are called to serve one another. Jesus demonstrated this as he took the form of a servant and washed the feet of his disciples. And he told them that they should do the same. A major mark of a disciple is servant-hood. So much so that this mark is what determines our destiny at the Judgment. In Matthew 25, we see a picture of Jesus separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep are the ones who served Christ by serving the least of their brothers - feeding them, clothing them, serving them in prison. But the goats are the ones who have not served Christ by neglecting the least of their brothers. The sheep enter into God's kingdom. The goats do not. The call to follow Christ is a call to service.

3. *Love.* We can serve and we can have a humble attitude toward other followers of Christ, but without this last characteristic we cannot be called a follower of Christ. Just before Jesus was to be killed, he taught his disciples about this love. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another,” (John 13:34). Now what was new about this commandment? Wasn't the second greatest commandment from the beginning that we love our neighbors? Yes. But it is now new because this love is qualified. It is the very love that Christ will show his people on the cross. We must have this love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus said that this would be the one thing that determine the authenticity of our discipleship. The call to follow Christ is call to love like he loved.

DAY 22

LAZARUS

John 11

Jesus was ever getting closer and closer to his fate. Every day was a day closer to Jerusalem. Every step brought him closer to the cross. The hour for him to be lifted up was quickly drawing nearer. Yet, Jesus knew his destiny and knew that while a horrid day awaited him there was still work to be done. And this work included his beloved friend Lazarus.

Lazarus was the brother of Martha and Mary, the woman who will soon wash his feet and anoint him with very expensive oil. We don't know exactly how, but Jesus was a very good friend of this family. John tells us that he love them. We learn at the beginning of John 11 that Lazarus has become ill and is at the point of death. Word comes to Jesus and he waits around a few days before going to him so that the glory of the Lord might be revealed. And after some resistance by the disciples, Jesus finally comes to him. But Lazarus has died.

When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has already been in the grave for four days. Mary and Martha approach Jesus and question him about his delay. He didn't delay because he didn't care - Jesus weeping over of death of his friend

proves this. He delayed that they might see the glory of God. Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again. And she says that she knows he will on the last day (a term referring to the day will God will return to finally save his people, even from death - Ezekiel 37). Martha understands rightly. But she doesn't realize that the resurrection doesn't belong to a day in the future. It belongs to a person. A person who is standing right in front of her.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." The resurrection belongs to Jesus. He has the power to raise the dead to life. And to prove it he calls for the stone to be move from Lazarus' tomb. And then with a loud voice he cries out, "Lazarus, come out." And that those three words the chains of death were broken and the breath of life filled Lazarus. And he come forward from the grave.

We see in this story a beautiful picture of Jesus. Not only does he love deeply and is he moved greatly at our death, but he is the One who holds the power of life in his hands. The power to bring the dead to life again. The very same power that he would use to bring about his own resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life. And he is the One who will one day look upon each of our dead bodies and cry out, "Come out." "Be alive." "Arise, your light has come!"

DAY 23

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

*Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44;
John 12:12-19*

While the raising of Lazarus was an amazing and awe inspiring work of Jesus, the story does not end well. For most the miracle was well received, especially Lazarus. But for the Jews they saw this as their last chance to do something about this Jesus. Fearing what ramifications Jesus might bring about (for they were fearful of losing their freedom of religion), the Jews go to Caiaphas the high priest for counsel. His wisdom was this: "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish," (John 11:50). And from that point on the Jews sought a way in which to kill Jesus.

As we saw on Day 19, Jesus for some time now had his face set toward Jerusalem. He knew what awaited him there. And his gaze was fixed upon his coming cross. The triumphal entry proves that such is the case. We are told that as Jesus drew near to Bethany and Bethpage, he sent two of his disciples on into the village and to find a tied up colt upon which no one has ever rode. His goal was to make an entrance into Jerusalem. Bethany and Bethpage were two small villages on the Mount of Olives, which was about a quarter of a mile

from the mount upon which Jerusalem sat. There was a major road that ran down the Mount of Olives, through the Kidron Valley (the valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem), and up to the city of David. This road was visible from much of the city and would not have been the path into the city if you were trying to go unnoticed.

But Jesus was not trying to go unnoticed. We are told that once the colt was brought to him, Jesus sat upon it and began his entry into the city. To us the animal seems insignificant, but not to the Jews. Riding the colt was a symbol of kingship. The kings of Israel at their coronations would ride into the city upon a colt. This is why Matthew quotes from the prophet Zechariah who spoke of a great king coming into Jerusalem. The people around Jesus picked up on this significance as well. They began to throw their cloaks upon the path that Jesus rode. They began to wave palm branches, a symbol of triumph and victory. And they began to shout the praises of their coming King: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" This would have been quite a spectacle. The shouts would have resounded through the Kidron Valley. The commotion would have no doubt been noticed by many in the city. The sight of Jesus upon the colt would have sent a clear and bold message - the King is coming into the city.

The Son of David was now here. The One who was coming in the name of the Lord to shepherd his people had now come. Jesus was here to save his people. The word Hosanna comes from the Old Testament. It means "save us now." It is both a shout of praise and a cry for help at the same time. Over and over the people cried aloud, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us now!" And that is exactly why Jesus had come. But he had not come to overthrow the Romans. He had not come to set up Israel as their own state. He had come to lay down his life. And it would be through the laying down of his life that he would indeed save his people. The hour had come for him to be lifted up.

DAY 24

TEMPLE CLEANSING

Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48

It is the Festival of the Passover. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people have come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. It is a busy Monday morning and the crowds are buzzing with what had happen just the day before. It was no doubt the talk of the town. A man by the name of Jesus of Nazareth came into town, mounted on a colt, as the crowds shouted "Hosanna in the highest!" This Jesus had done many great things and many of the people there had no doubt either seen his wonders or heard his teaching. What would such a man do during this festival? If he thought that he was God's king, then would he try to overthrow the Romans or gather the Jews to his side? What would be in store for Jerusalem with Jesus there?

Jesus had returned to the city from staying the night in Bethany at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And he went straight to the temple. But he did not come to pray. He did not come to teach. He did not come to politic. He had a different agenda. The gospel writers tell us that he began to drive the money changers and vendors out of the temple. He turned over their tables. His anger was kindled against them because they have made the temple "a den of

robbers." What would cause Jesus to do such a thing? This is very bad PR for someone trying to become Israel's next king? What made Jesus so angry?

1. *The poor were being abused.* We are told that part of Jesus' disgust was directed toward those who sold pigeons. The normal animal to bring to the temple was a lamb. But because of God's compassion for the poor, provisions were made for those who could not afford a lamb. Pigeons were a worthy substitute for the poor. Selling the pigeons could have been a good thing. Maybe people have traveled to far to bring their own lamb. Or maybe they just couldn't afford a lamb. But the problems was in the ways in which they were selling the pigeons. Prices were raised to maximize profits. The quality of animals was lowered to minimize overhead costs for the vendors. All in all the poor were being abused. The temple was no place to make a profit. They had rejected the purpose of the temple and so by doing God himself. This is why Jesus was angry.

2. *The foreigners were being abused.* Jesus disgust was also directed toward the money changers. People from all around would come to the temple to worship. And they would come with their own currency. Once again having people to change money could have been a good thing. People could have exchanged their money for the right kind that was required for gifts in the temple. But again the problem was in the ways in which they were changing money. They were being unfair in their exchanges. Rates were high to again maximize profits. Fees were high as well to ensure that business was good. All in all the foreigners were being abused. Again the temple was place to a profits. It was to be a "house of prayer for all nations," (Mark 11: 17). This is why Jesus was angry.

3. *They had made the temple a curse rather than a blessing.* Jesus, quoting from Isaiah, said the temple was to be a house of prayer. Men and women were to come to experience the blessings of knowing God. They were to be blessed by the teaching of the law. They were to be blessed by having a

priest intercede and relay their prayers to God above. They were to be blessed by the making of sacrifices to atone for their sins. The temple was to be a place of blessing. But the Jews had turned it into a money making machine. People were being abused rather than being blessed. It had become a curse. This is why Jesus was angry. And this is why he did what he did.

DAY 25

ONE LAST DEBATE

Matthew 21:23-22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-19

Jesus' actions in the temple were the last straw. He had gone too far. And it was time for the religious leaders to get rid of this miscreant. They decided to round up as many people as they could find and try to bombard him questions hoping that he might get entangled by his words. Now the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees were not known to share much company. On many counts they even considered each other enemies. But nothing unites enemies more than a common foe. And this foe's name was Jesus.

The first question came from some of the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians. After some introductory, very sincere flattery, they posed his first trap. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" This appeared to be a very tough question for Jesus. If he said "no," then they would accuse him of insurrection against Rome. If he said "yes," then they would accuse him of having no loyalty to the Jewish nation. Knowing their hearts, Jesus asked for a coin. And revealing their hypocrisy, someone pulled a denarius out of his pocket. "Whose inscription is on this?" Jesus asked. "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus told them to give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is his. It is not wrong to give someone what is

owed, no matter how cruel. But the greater crime is to not give God that which has his image on it, namely themselves.

Then the Sadducees stepped up and posed a question about the resurrection, which was odd because their sect did not believe in a resurrection from the dead. This whole episode is ripe with hypocrisy. "Suppose", they questioned, "a woman had been married to a family of seven brothers. She married each successive brother as his elder died. Whose husband would she be in the resurrection?" Jesus then scolded them for neither knowing the power of God nor the Scriptures. We will not be married in heaven, that is not married to other people; we, as the church, will be married to Christ. And more than that the Scriptures say that by the power of God we will not be among the dead but among the living. Jesus points out not only their hypocrisy, but their unbelief in the power of God to raise the dead.

After failing twice to trap Jesus, the Pharisees send forward one of their best - a lawyer, someone who made his living by studying and teaching the law of God. Maybe Jesus was just good at getting out of jams. But did he know the law? Maybe if they could show his unfamiliarity with the law, they could persuade the people not to follow him. Yet, Jesus responded with the great Shema, from Deuteronomy 6:5. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus knew the law and he knew that at the heart of it was a love for God, something that these men obviously did not have. And the second was like it, claimed Jesus. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus claimed that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two laws.

Love is at the heart of what God commands of us. But, all of us, just like these men, have a problem of the heart. We do not love rightly. But that is why Jesus was in Jerusalem. That is why he was preparing for what would take place in three short days. That is why his eyes are fixed to his cross. He has come to die that we would be made new and that we would be free to love God and love others.

DAY 26

HIS ANOINTING

Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:2-8

We turn now to an event that happened the day before Jesus came into Jerusalem. The gospel of John tells us that it happened six days before the Passover. Matthew and Mark place the story at this point because of the topic rather than the time line. As each day passes in this holy week, Jesus is getting closer and closer to his crucifixion. And as he spend time preparing for the cross, Jesus' beloved friend Mary will prepare him for the grave.

We are told that while Jesus was in the village of Bethany, he was reclining at table together with his disciples and dear friends. At some point during the meal, Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, came to where Jesus was sitting and anointed him with oil. She broke a flask of oil and poured it upon his head and feet. The oil, we are told, was made from spikenard, a very expensive type of ointment. The flask would no doubt have been very precious to Mary. Perhaps it was a family heirloom. Perhaps it was a prized gift. Mark tells us that the flask was the value of about three hundred denarii, which was close to the wages an average person would have earned in a year. And the flask was made so that once it was broken the perfume must be used. It was like

breaking the seal on a \$30,000 bottle of wine! This isn't something you do by accident.

It makes sense that the disciples, especially Judas, who was in charge of the finances for the disciples, would be upset over this action. What a waste! Think about how many hungry mouths that could have fed. Think about how many cloaks that could have bought for the naked. Think about how many debts that could have paid off. But Mary wasn't thinking about the poor. Her heart was fixed on another. Jesus turned to his disciples and scolded them. The poor would always be around. But Christ would not be with them much longer. Mary saw clearly what they failed to see - that Jesus would soon lay down his life for the sins of people. And she wanted him to be ready.

An oil like this would have no doubt been very potent, especially if the whole bottle was poured upon someone. During all the events of the holy week Jesus would have been covered with the aroma of this perfume. Anyone who came near would have smelled it. It could have been smelled on him as he rode into Jerusalem, as he cleared the temple, and as he debated with the religious leaders. His disciples could have smelled it as they ate the Passover, as Jesus washed their feet, and as he taught them in on the Mount of Olives. The men that arrested him, the council that tried him, and the guards that beat him would all have smelled it. And to every single person it would have been a familiar aroma - the aroma of someone prepared for burial. Jesus knew that he would soon lay down his life to death. And he rejoiced at Mary's costly act of love that will forever be remembered.

DAY 27

HIS LAST SUPPER

*Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20;
John 13:1-38*

Ever since Jesus was little boy, the Jewish month of Nisan would have been very special to him. For on the fifteenth day of Nisan the Festival of the Passover begins. The Festival of the Passover was week long memorial to the events that took place during the Exodus from Egypt. It was a time to remember how God has passed over Israel but brought judgment upon Egypt. The first night of the festival began with a special meal (this meal is sometimes referred to as “the Passover”). It was a meal the Jesus had eaten for many years. But this year the meal carried a great weight - it would be the last meal Jesus would eat before his death.

The gospel writers all agree that the first day of the festival fell on the Thursday just before Jesus’ death. And as that day came, Jesus instructed his disciples to make preparations for the passover meal that night. They secured an upper room, as Jesus directed. A lamb was sacrificed for the meal. And the bread and wine were prepared. Then later that evening Jesus gathered with only his twelve disciples to celebrate the past and a new Exodus that was soon to come. Jesus told his disciples that he had earnestly desired to eat this meal with

them (Luke 22:15). He had longed to be with them at his last supper. He had longed to serve them by washing their feet. And he had longed to announce for the first time that the New Covenant has now arrived.

That the Old Covenant was broken was no secret. It was broken even before Moses came down from the mountain to deliver it! The history of the people of Israel is a history of covenant unfaithfulness. God had saved his people from the bondage of Egypt and called them to live in covenant love toward him. But their hearts lead them away. They, to use the Bible's language, whored after other gods. This Covenant was surely broken. God's people needed a new one. And this is exactly what God promised to give. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both talk about the coming of a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36). This New Covenant would change hearts, forgive sins, and pour out God's Spirit. Where the Old failed, the New would succeed.

But God's people were left waiting. Years turned to generations. Generations turned to centuries. It seemed that God had forgotten his promise. Had Israel strayed too far for God to bring them this covenant? Was there ever coming a day in which God would come and save his people? When would the New Covenant come? All of these questions and more, no doubt, filled the hearts of God's people in Jesus' day, especially the disciples. They had seen the wondrous works of Jesus. They had heard his astounding teachings. They had confessed him to be the Christ.

And then as they were eating the Passover with him, they heard what their hearts had longed for. After breaking bread and explaining that it represented his broken body, Jesus took the cup and said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood," (Luke 22:20). It was finally here. God's New Covenant with his people had come. And Jesus was ushering it in. But it would not be without blood. When God inaugurated the Old Covenant, Moses was told to sprinkle all the people with blood. Blood has to be shed in order for a holy God and sinful man to be in

covenant together. This is why Jesus said it was his blood that was bringing in the New Covenant. Jesus knew that he was hours away from being beaten, from being pierced with thorns, and from being nailed to a cross. His blood was about to be shed. And it would bring with it a New Covenant of hope and salvation for God's people.

DAY 28

HIS TRIAL

*Matthew 26:57-27:26; Mark 14:53-15:14;
Luke 22:54-23:15; John 18:13-19:16*

Despite their extreme hatred for Jesus, the religious leaders in Jerusalem had decided that the Feast of the Passover was no time to deal with Jesus. That is until an opportunity approached them that was too good to pass by. One of his very own disciples approached them and asked what sort of payment they would give if he turned Jesus over to them. Exactly why Judas would do such a thing we do not know. Maybe he wanted to put Jesus in a squabble that would lead him to rise up against the Romans. Maybe he was greedy and wanted the money. Whatever his reason, we are told that the scribes and the leaders jumped at the opportunity and paid him thirty pieces of silver. From that point on Judas sought an opportunity to betray his master.

We are told that as Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas approached him and kissed his cheek. This was the sign to the guards as to which figure in the dark garden was Jesus. In an instance, the guards swept in and arrested Jesus. And so began what Jesus had three times foretold: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day," (Matthew 20:18-19).

The events that took place in the middle of the night were quite astonishing. He was brought before the Jewish council. He was spat upon and mocked. He was brought before Caiaphas the High Priest. He was beaten. He was brought before Herod. He was brought before Pilate. And he was condemned to death. While it is difficult to put an exact order

together of all these events what we can learn from Jesus' trial is crystal clear:

1. *His trial was a mockery of justice.* The meeting of the Jewish council in the middle of the night was not exactly protocol. It was the kind of thing done when matters are being kept secret. We are told that the council was seeking false testimony against him. And none was found. They couldn't even come up with a good lie about him! Then finally someone stepped forward and charged him with saying something about destroying the temple. Now while he was referring to his body, this sounded close enough to blasphemy to condemn him. Even the Roman portion of the trial was a mockery. Jesus was sent to Herod by Pilate. Herod, excited to see Jesus, hoped that Jesus would perform a miracle for him. And after Jesus refused to be Herod's court jester, Herod put royal clothes on him to mock this would be king. Then we see perhaps the greatest offense against justice when Jesus returns to Pilate. Pilate questions Jesus, finds that he is guilty of no crime, and then because of his fear of the crowds condemns Jesus to be beaten and crucified. He was not guilty, yet Pilate still condemned him to death. All the water in the world couldn't wash Pilate's hands clean of this horrific crime.

2. *Jesus was very clear about who he was.* He couldn't have been any more clear. He clearly told the council that he was the Son of Man - the figure from Daniel 7 who would come as God's king to reign over all the nations of the earth. He told Pilate that he was a king, but that his kingdom was not of this world. He is the King of Heaven. What is striking about these scenes is the hardness of heart toward Christ. Here, standing in front of them, was the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the very One to whom God would give the right to reign over all the earth. And in their pride and hatred they refused to bow the knee in worship.

3. *Jesus' trial was a display of great humility and meekness.* Hundreds of years before this trial the prophet Isaiah said this of him:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth."

(Isaiah 53:7 ESV)

Like a lamb, Jesus didn't argue back. He did not revile back. He did not mock back. He did not fight back. What humility! The very King of Heaven - the One who was in the beginning with God, who was himself God - this One humbly accepted that it was the Father's will that he be mistreated and condemned to death. For he knew that by his stripes we would be healed. And by his death we would be saved.

DAY 29

HIS DEATH

*Matthew 27:27-56; Mark 15:16-41; Luke 23:26-49;
John 19:16-30*

Just hours before Jesus was to be betrayed by one of his very own disciples, he went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He took with him Peter, James, and John. The burden of what was about to take place was heavy upon him. And he went to the only place that seemed natural to him - his Heavenly Father. It was there in the garden that he prayed the most difficult prayer of his life: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will," (Matthew 26:39). Three times he pleaded with the Father to let the cup of wrath pass. And three times he submitted to the Father's perfect will. Jesus' praying was so intense that he began to sweat droplets of blood. The weight of all the world was now upon his shoulders. His life purpose was now unfolding. The very thing that he had been sent for was about to happen. The hour of his death had come.

Jesus' death was one of the most brutal ways to die. He had already been beaten many times by the time that he arrived at the feet of Pilate. But his suffering would not end there. Jesus was flogged with the Cat o' Nine tails, which would have left his back a mangled mess of flesh. A crown of thorns was forced upon his head as he was beaten even more. Nails were driven through his wrists and ankles as he was hung on the cross. It would have been very difficult to even recognize Jesus at this point.

But that wasn't the end of his suffering. Death by crucifixion came by suffocation. The position in which criminals were

hung made it very difficult for them to breathe. They would have to push themselves up on the nails in order to take a breath. This would happen for hours until the person simply had no strength left. This is why they would often break the legs of the criminals – to speed up the process. Jesus suffered for hours in this way. With every breath he took he felt the bitter sting of pain and death.

But his suffering did not end there. It was no accident that Jesus was killed on a cross. In fact, there is an incredible amount of significance with his dying on a tree. We are told in the law that any person who is hung on a tree is cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23). We see a picture of this in Joshua as he kills five pagan kings and hangs their bodies in the trees. These men were cursed by God. And anyone walking by would have known it. The fact that Jesus was killed on a tree shows us that not only did he suffer under the hands of men, but he suffered under the almighty wrath of God. As he hung on the cross he bore the entire weight of the wrath of God toward the sins of his people. He was cursed by God. I heard it said once before that in six hours on the cross Jesus spent an eternity in hell for every person he would save. He started the fullness of our punishment in the face. And he bore it on the tree.

And this is at the heart of our faith. Paul puts it like this: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God,” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The life that we could not live, Jesus lived for us. The death that we deserved to die, Jesus died for us. At the cross we see the most beautiful of exchanges: Jesus takes our sin; we take his righteousness. At the cross we find the greatest display of justice and mercy: Jesus, the righteous One pays the penalty; guilty sinners go free. At the cross we see most triumphal of victories: Jesus dies; death is defeated. And at the cross we see the most amazing affirmations of love: we were sinners; Christ died for us.

DAY 30

HIS BURIAL

*Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54;
John 19:31-42*

"Father into your hands I commit my spirit!" And at that saying Jesus breathed his final breath on the cross. The moment for which Jesus had been sent had now arrived. His life's purpose was now being fulfilled. The earth trembled. The day was turned to night. It was as if all of creation knew what was happening to its Creator. And in that moment it happened- Jesus died.

At this point nearly all the followers of Jesus had jumped ship. Only the apostle John, a few women, and two unlikely characters remained. One was a man by the name of Joseph from the town of Arimathea. He was a rich man who was also a member of the Jewish Council. Unlike the rest of the bunch, he was deeply distressed over the events that had taken place that day in Jerusalem. And despite what ever ramifications he might face, in his courage he went to Pilate and asked that he might have the body of Jesus. Pilate, amazed that Jesus had died so quickly, granted Joseph's request. The other man was someone we have seen before. It was Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Council. Bringing a mixture of burial spices, he came to assist

Joseph in burying the body of Jesus. The men took Jesus' body, anointed it with the spices, wrapped it in a shroud, and put the body of their Maker in a grave cut in the rock of the ground.

On the dawn of the next morning some of the chief priests and members of the Council came to Pilate with another request concerning the body of Jesus. They told him how Jesus had told his followers that after he died he would rise again. For fear that the disciples would steal the body and claim that his resurrection had happened, they ask Pilate to guard the tomb. Pilate ordered that his men go and guard the tomb until the third day to ensure that no one stole the body. And so they did.

And this is where the story leaves us. On the Saturday between his death and his rising Day, we are left with a dead body, wrapped in grave clothes, buried deep in a tomb, sealed with a large stone, and guarded by the world's best soldiers. We are left with a Savior who has died to save his people, but is still held by the power of darkness. A King who is under the reign of death. And a man of sorrows who is still feeling the sting of the grave. But we are not left without hope. For we have a God who calls light out of darkness. A God who gives life to those who are dead. And a God who brings joy when morning dawns - a morning that no grave could ever hold.

DAY 31

HIS RESURRECTION

Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1-10

Morning dawned.

Two women by the name of Mary were up together early that morning. The damp dew had settled in. And the half light of the breaking dawn would have been plenty for them to make their way to the place where Jesus was laid. They came bearing spices that they might make sure that Jesus had received a proper burial. The brisk of the cool air was in their breath as they discussed how they would move the stone that sealed the grave of their Lord. What exactly they were thinking we do not know. They were no doubt heart broken over the events that had taken place just two short days before. They had seen the horrors of Golgotha with their own eyes. They had heard the cries of their beloved friend from his shameful cross. And they watched as his body was taken from the cross, wrapped in linen, and sealed in the tomb. Their pain was no doubt too deep for words. Their pain, however, would not tarry.

As they approached the tomb, the earth trembled and the stone that had once covered the tomb was now moved. And immediately they saw two men, arrayed in light at the

entrance to the tomb. The angels, sensing their fear, told them to be still and be not afraid. Then came the announcement that would change the world forever. "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said," (Matthew 28:5-6). He is not here, they said. He is among the living, not the dead.

What news! What glorious news! Their Savior who bled and died was now alive. Their King who laid down his life had taken it up again. Their master whose dead body laid under the curse of death had now defeated the grave. I can only image the amazement that would have filled their hearts, to be there for the very first announcement of Jesus' resurrection. Sin was defeated. Death was dead. And the grave was empty. Jesus was alive. And their hearts were filled with joy.

Nothing greater has ever happened in all the history of the world. The resurrection of Jesus is the most profound and world-altering event to ever take place. And it is the hinge-pin of our faith. At the heart of the Christian message is this: a man lived, died, and on the third day walked out of the very tomb in which he was laid. The resurrection is the proof that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by God. It is the sign of approval from a loving Father to his Beloved Son. It is the seal upon him that he is the Christ, the Son of David who is to reign over all of creation. It is the declaration that sin, Satan, and death have been vanquished by King Jesus. It is the evidence that Jesus is who he said he was - the God-man. It is the reminder that God keeps his promises, namely to bless all the families of the earth in Christ. It is the testimony that those in Christ will one day be raised to live a resurrection life just as he now forever lives. There is nothing greater to celebrate. There is no story greater to be told. There is no King greater to be worshiped. And there is no joy greater to be found than in this: Jesus died for our sins. And he was raised.

Morning had dawned indeed. And joy too.

DAY 32

40 DAYS OF APPEARANCES

*Matthew 28:9-15; Luke 24:9-32, 6-43; John 20:11-21:14;
Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:6-8*

The tomb was empty! Since the beginning of the world, every moment had lead up to this one. This one world changing event - the resurrection of Jesus. He was no longer among the dead. He was alive. Nothing could be more exciting and more life-altering for Jesus' followers than this truth. They had seen him crucified. And they had seen his body placed in the tomb. But to see that empty brought the deepest of joy and hope.

But not everyone was excited to hear about the empty tomb. Matthew tells us that after the Roman guards saw the empty tomb, they returned to the chief priests and told them the news. In yet another amazing act of hardheartedness, they paid the soldiers to keep quite about what they had seen. But what if someone were to ask about the body? They instructed the soldiers to say that Jesus disciples had stolen the body. With an empty tomb they could continue to spread the message of Jesus. And from that day on, the empty tomb was explained in this way.

But this is a very difficult explanation to accept. One, it would have been extremely difficult to sneak past the guards, move the stone, take the body, and sneak back past the guards again while carrying a dead body. Second, it is hard to imagine the disciples going through what they went through for a lie. Sure people do crazy things for lies. But hardly anyone does so knowing that it is a lie. Why would the disciples be willing to be tortured and executed for something that they knew to be a lie? It is hard to imagine one person doing so, let alone an entire group of men.

But there is still a greater reason for why this explanation holds no ground: Jesus was seen alive by hundreds of people. The greatest evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is that he was seen. Jesus spent 40 days appearing to his followers after his resurrection. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 15: "he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." Paul's point was this - the resurrection really happened, just ask the people who saw him. Most of them are still alive! That is not the sort of thing you say when you are trying to propagate a lie. That is the sort of thing that you say when someone was dead and alive again. It is the kind of thing you say when you've seen Jesus yourself (as Paul had). One pastor when asked why he believed in the resurrection said this: "I believe because I have seen it." The testimony to the resurrection is true. Have you heard it and believed?

DAY 33

40 DAYS OF TEACHING

Luke 24:33-35; John 21:14-25; Acts 1:3

Many people have been fascinated by the days between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension into heaven. A great number of speculations have been made about what Jesus was doing those days. The good news is that we do not have to make any speculations; we are told clearly. Luke tells us in the first chapter of the book of Acts that Jesus was busy appearing to his following and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God. Just what was he doing those forty days? He was teaching.

On the very day of the resurrection, we are told that two of the men who had followed Jesus were walking together on the road that lead to Emmaus. They had been discussing the events that taken place that weekend. Jesus approached them and inquired about their conversation. Amazed that this man, whom they did not yet recognize, was unaware about what happened in Jerusalem, they told him about what had happened to Jesus. After scolding them for not believing what the Law and the Prophets taught, he began to teach them as they walked. And what was he teaching them? Luke tells us that he, starting with the Law and the Prophets,

began to teach them everything concerning himself. What an amazing walk that must have been.!

Jesus didn't just appear to his follower and say I hope you guys understand everything. There was much to process. It even appears that the disciples hadn't completely believed in Jesus until after his resurrection. He had to remind them of all the things that were taught before he died. Everything would sound much different in light of his completed work on the cross and of his victorious rising. And so he taught. He taught them about how the Old Testament pointed to him, how it prophesied his death and resurrection, and how it was calling them to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim his gospel. He taught them about their task of being witnesses of his death and resurrection. He taught them about the coming of the Kingdom of God.

And there was much to prepare. Jesus had to prepare them for the coming of the Spirit. He had to prepare them for their task in establishing God's New Covenant people, the church. He had to prepare them for the suffering that they would endure as they sought to make his gospel known. And he had to prepare them for his departure. For forty days he taught them so that in his absence his message of love, forgiveness, and eternal life would go forward to any who would have ears to hear.

DAY 34

HIS FINAL CHARGE

Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8

Jesus' departure was quickly coming. He had spent a good bit of forty days appearing to his disciples and teaching them. But soon he would be going away to the Father. But what would they do with him? How would they carry on his mission and his teaching? How was the Kingdom going to come with only about a hundred and twenty people following Christ? Matthew tells us that Jesus gather his followers together. And gave them one final charge. One central command for them to fulfill in his absence. One great purpose for which they should focus their lives. It is often called the Great Commission. And it has three main components:

1. To be witnesses to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. The primal task of this commission is to be witnesses for Christ. The apostles and the other followers were to take what they had seen and heard and to pass it on to others. The call to be a follower of Christ is a call to be a story teller. We are tell how Jesus was sent from the Father and lived a perfect life among us. We are tell how he submitted to his Father's will and was killed for the sins of his people. We are tell how he defeated sin, death, and Satan

by rising again in victory. Jesus' final charge is that we would be gospel tellers.

2. To make disciples by calling people to repentance and faith. The gospel demands a response. Not only are we to tell the story, but we are to call men and women to accept this story. We are to tell about the forgiveness of sins that comes through faith in Christ. We are to call men and women to turn from their sin and their idols toward Christ. We are to make followers of Jesus. This is the central purpose of this charge. We are to make disciples.

3. To take this mission to all the peoples of the world. Jesus charged his followers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. There are no people on the face of the planet that are unworthy of hearing such good news. We should stop at no lengths to make sure that every family of the earth has the opportunity to receive the blessing of the gospel. We should be actively pursuing the nations with the gospel. So that the glory of Christ will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

DAY 35

HIS ASCENSION

Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12

Jesus' final days here on the earth were done. It was time for him to return to the Father. His work was completed. He had gone to the cross and the grave. He had risen in victory on the third day. And for forty days he appeared to them and taught them. Luke tells us that Jesus was gathered with his disciples when immediately they saw the heavens opened and Jesus ascended up into the clouds. And as they stared in amazement, two angels appeared to them and ask what they were looking at (you have to love questions like that in the Bible! "Um, we just saw Jesus disappear into the sky."). The angels told them that would one day see Jesus again coming in the same way.

So what does this have to do with the story of Jesus. Is it just a happy ending or a big finale? Why does it matter that this happened to Jesus? And why does that matter for us?

First, this is important because it shows us where Christ is and what he is doing. Jesus is, at this very moment that you are reading this blog, seated in heaven at the right hand of God. And he is interceding for his people. He is standing in the presence of God and pleading his blood on our behalf.

Jesus is reigning in heaven. His ascension shows us that Christ is in heaven.

Second, this is important because the Spirit could now come. Jesus told his disciples that it would be for their good that he leave and go to the Father because he would send the Spirit. And he does just that. Just a few days after Jesus ascended to heaven the Spirit fell upon God's people. Now Christ through his Spirit would be with all of his people over the whole face of the earth. His ascension allows for the ministry of the Spirit.

Third, this is important because it shows us that Christ will come again. Jesus' work is not done on the earth. He is returning one day to make all things right and new. He is returning to rule over all the peoples of the earth, as we bow the knee and confess his praise. He is returning to forever be with his people and to save them finally and fully. His ascension is a reminder to us that Jesus will one day return to us just as he left. And while only a faithful few say him leave, every eye will see him come.