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## **The New Testament**

### **The Dots Connected**

What a blessing the Connecting the Dots journey has been! Both Chris and I can certainly say we have learned more than we ever thought possible. In fact, every devotion we write causes us grief, as each one reminds us of all we missed in past devotions. When we started this journey, we didn't know it all and when we finished, we still won't know it all! I now understand why authors often go back to write revised editions. This is not to say the first edition was wrong, it simply says the author has learned much more since writing the previous edition. This endeavor has certainly been a learning experience. There were many things we did not cover in the first edition which began in 2014. We have added 26 weeks in both Connecting The Dots and The Dots Connected second editions.

St. Augustine said “The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.”

In the eight volumes of Connecting the Dots, we looked at the Old Testament in a two year chronological overview. The order was based on a children's devotional book written by Marty Machowski, titled Long Story Short. The New Testament devotional, The Dots Connected will be 26 weeks and will likewise follow the outline of Marty Machowski's devotional book, Old Story New.

The New Testament can be broken down into four section:  
**Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Prophecy or Apocalyptic**

Just as Connecting the Dots did not cover the Old Testament verse by verse, The Dots Connected is chronological and will not cover the New Testament verse by verse.

What you hold in your hands is Volume 1 of the second edition of The Dots Connected. It's time to get started! If you fall behind, catch up or just jump back in. The daily devotions will cover the material that we will be preaching on the following Sunday. This will put everyone on the same page when we gather for worship each week. There is power in God's people being in God's Word together.

Dennis Watson

*“For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s Field.”*

*2 Corinthians 3:9*

When Paul wrote these words to a divided church in Corinth, he reminded them of the apostles’ identity, as well as theirs. The apostles were God’s fellow workers, and the church was the field of God called to be cultivated. In much the same way, Young Meadows is really God’s meadow, one that we pray will be continually cultivated.

At Young Meadows, we believe the means of that cultivation is found in our mission statement, as believers are engaged in discipleship in worship, community, and mission. We’ve summarized our mission through the phrase: Rooted, Gathered, and Scattered. We believe the cultivation of the church comes as believers are more **rooted** in the word of God and work of Christ, as they are **gathered** together in true community, and as they are **scattered** around the city and world in mission.

It is the prayer of Young Meadows’ leadership, as God’s fellow workers, that the next three years “plowing” through the whole story of Scripture (in Sunday sermons and these weekly times of personal devotion) might lead to a cultivation in the lives of our members, as well as the surrounding community. May your personal times of devotion through this guide further feed and fertilize your soul, so that being “*rooted and built up in Him,*” (Colossians 2:7) you might walk in Him.

Your Fellow Worker,  
Jay Joye

## **A CHRONOLOGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE**

Several years ago, Young Meadows made a shift in our children's Sunday School curriculum and began using "The Gospel Story for Kids." Our desire was to expose our children to the overarching story of Scripture that progressed through four major "chapters": Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. We fell in love with the curriculum as our children were taught to see the Bible, not as individual and disparate stories, but of one story, "the one true story of the whole world" with one grand hero, Jesus Christ, at its center. Our goal was that every child attending children's Sunday School classes would work through the Bible twice between Kindergarten and 6th grade. Our hope was that knowing the broad overview of the Scripture, as well as seeing Christ at the center, would lay the foundation for a lifetime pursuit of following their Savior.

Within the last two months we decided that it was time for our adults to have the same purposeful exposure to that overarching story of the Bible. We sensed that it was a perfect way to encourage personal discipleship. After all, "what is good for the goose is good for the gander." For the very same reasons, our prayer for Young Meadows is that congregants would join us on a journey through the Scriptures throughout the next three years. Our current plan is to cover the Old Testament during Sunday sermons over the next year and a half. Following those 78 sermons, we will shift to the New Testament for the next year and a half.

In addition to Sunday sermons, the leadership wanted to encourage daily times of personal devotion, as we journey through the Bible's arc together. These devotions will help to supplement and reinforce the messages heard on Sunday. There are two options for devotional reading. The first option is this guide that you hold in

your hand. It is intended to be used by teenagers and adults during their personal times of devotion, as verses are assigned which will provide context and application. The second form is a devotional book that supplements our children's curriculum, which occurs in two units: Long Story Short (Old Testament) and Old Story New (New Testament). Both devotional options are structured similarly. Days one through four will include a section of scripture to read along with a brief devotional thought. Day three, each week, connects that week's study to Jesus and the gospel. The focus of the Bible is Jesus. The fifth day each week, we will look at a passage from the Psalms or from one of the prophets to discover how the passage points forward to Jesus. In addition, there will be some training offered throughout the year on how to actually have a personal time of devotion through your scripture reading.

In the end, our vision is to see our church grow in its understanding of the whole story of Scripture and Christ's place (as well as ours) in it. Our prayer is that as we hear sermons during Sunday services, process those same messages during small group, continue to engage with accompanying scripture in our daily personal times of devotion, engage weekly in conversation with friends, or perhaps share regularly in times of family worship, that we will be more transformed- as we behold the glory of the Lord and are transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

*"Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' "* **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

All scripture references are English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

## **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to Harps Crossing in Fayetteville, Georgia.

The pastors and leaders of this church granted permission to Young Meadows to use and adapt this devotional geared to teens and adults. We hope to continue updating their devotional over the years, making revisions and even deeper connections to the hero of this great story of the redemption of the whole world. We intend to take full advantage of sermon discussion questions as well as small group discussion areas to further flesh out many of the texts included in this devotional.

Harps Crossing has led their church through the whole Bible twice since its inception, and continues to encourage their congregation to use this devotional to supplement Sunday's sermon.

# PLANTED

in God's Word

## PRAY FOR ILLUMINATION

- Incline my heart to your testimonies. (Ps 119:36)
- Open my eyes to see wonders in your word (Ps 119:18)
- Unite my heart to fear your name (Ps. 86:11)
- Satisfy me with your steadfast love. (Ps. 90:14)

## LOOK AT THE TEXT

- What's the authors big idea?
- What things jump out at you from the passage?
- Are there words or phrases that are repeated?

## ASK QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT

- What do certain words/images mean
- How should the text be understood in its context?
- How does this passage point to the person, nature, or work of Christ?

## GAZE ON THE TEXT

Choose two or three most important insights or verses from your reading:

- **Adoration:** How does this lead me to adore God and His attributes?
- **Confession:** How does this lead me to confess to God? What wrong thoughts, feelings, and behavior happen in me when this is forgotten? How is this sin being caused by faith in something else?
- **Thanksgiving:** How can I thank Christ for being the ultimate answer to this sin?
- **Supplication:** What does this lead me to ask God for?

## TAKE-AWAY FROM THE TEXT

- Sin to avoid.
- Promise to claim.
- Example to follow.
- Command to obey.
- Knowledge of God or self.

## EXPERIENCE GOD

Jonathan Edwards said, "There is a difference between believing that God is holy and gracious, and having a new sense on the heart of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. Like there is a difference between having a rational belief that honey is sweet, and having the actual experience of its sweetness."

## DECIDE WITH WHOM TO SHARE



# **WEEK 1 THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR**

By Dennis Watson

Although we may think we have a good excuse for a particular sin, there is no excuse for sin except we are sinners. What do sinners do? They sin! Many of us have been stopped for speeding or running a traffic light. No matter what excuse you gave the officer, you were probably ticketed anyway. There is no excuse for breaking the law. There is no excuse for breaking God's law except that we are sinners. This is the human predicament and our predicament must be acknowledged! The acknowledgement is the prelude to being delivered and rescued—saved from our predicament. Pride prevents many people from admitting that they are plagued by sin. Everyone is, except Jesus. He is the only one who can remedy our predicament. This week we will look at a tax collector who acknowledged his sin and a Pharisee who was prideful and refused to.

## **Day 1-- Read Luke 18:9-12**

“I am just as good as anyone else.” I have heard this said many times and have, at some point, even said it myself. Most of us can come up with plenty of excuses for our sinful behavior. The easiest and most popular excuse is usually someone else made me do it.” No matter how bad a person's sin is, he can usually find someone whose sin, he thinks, is worse than his own. After all, we might be tempted to say, “I have never killed anyone, so I am a lot better than those who have.”

In the passage we read today, Jesus tells a parable about a religious man (a Pharisee) and a tax collector. Both of these men, as Jesus tells in the parable, went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was a religiously devout man who kept all of the laws. He was a great

legalist. On the surface he did everything right. The tax collector was a man with a despised trade. He worked for the Roman government collecting taxes that were due. Tax collectors were known to cheat people.

The Pharisee stood up and prayed, thanking God that he was better than other men, especially the tax collector. He was proud of his good behavior and his good way of living. He was convinced that he was so good that he had God's approval and he wanted to celebrate that goodness. He exalted himself for what he had done and gave no attention to the works of God. Since he compared himself to the tax collector he did not believe he needed forgiveness. Because of this, he missed the grace of God.

Just go ahead and say it, "I am sinful!" Perhaps the best known believer and follower of Jesus was the apostle Paul. He said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." He knew of his ongoing struggle, even as a believer! None of us are good! We are all desperate people and we all desperately need Jesus. "I need Thee every hour!"

Remember, that apart from Jesus, nothing good lives in you. Thank God that His grace is greater than your sin.

## **Day 2-- Read Luke 18:13**

There were two men in this parable. One man praying was a Pharisee and the other man praying in the temple was a tax collector. Tax collectors worked for the Roman government and were despised by the people. The Pharisee prayed a prayer characterized by pride and arrogance. Then there was the prayer of the tax collector, which was quite different from that of the Pharisee. The tax collector acknowledged his need as a sinner. He cried out in desperation for God to have mercy on him because he

was a sinner. While the Pharisee’s prayer was characterized by pride and arrogance, the tax collector’s prayer was characterized by brokenness and humility. He knew he needed grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

The Pharisee compared himself to the tax collector. The tax collector compared himself to no man. He knew only God was perfect and, compared to God, he was a desperate sinner in need of forgiveness.

The fact is, not one of us is good. Do not ever get over this. We are broken, needy sinners. We are all desperate people in need of God’s grace and mercy. Jesus expressed it this way in Matthew 23:12, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Do not compare yourself to others, compare yourself to Jesus. Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up.

Be reminded that your greatest need is what God has given you in Jesus—grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Enjoy what He has provided. You can never achieve forgiveness, it is received. Don’t be like the Pharisee who missed God’s grace. Be like the sinful tax collector. Enjoy His amazing grace!

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 18:14**

1. **OBSERVATION:** Which man is Jesus saying was justified?
  
2. What does the word “justified” mean? Sometimes we take for granted words that we hear a lot. Look up the meaning.

3. **Interpretation:** Looking at the whole passage, in what was the Pharisee looking to root his justification?

4. Back in v. 13, it says that the tax collector couldn't lift his eyes to heaven. What is being said of the man with that phrase? How does he view himself? How is that part of why Jesus says he is justified?

5. **APPLICATION:** How might you struggle to have an accurate view of yourself right now? How can you relate to the Pharisees' attempt to self-justify his life? What are some of the things you rely on to self-justify?

6. **PRAYER:** We can follow the example of the tax collector in praying simply, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" In this short prayer, there is a humble recognition that we are hopeless without God and are desperately in need of his grace for forgiveness and our justification. Pray that God would strengthen you to rest in the justification found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

#### **Day 4-- Read Luke 18:15-17**

In today's scripture, we read that people were bringing their children to Jesus in hopes that He might touch them and bless them. The disciples sought to prevent this from happening. As was always the case with Jesus, this became a teaching moment. After telling the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee praying in the temple, He used this situation with the children to teach the disciples more about how to approach the Lord. We cannot come

to Him on our own abilities and accomplishments; we must come to Him and receive His kingdom like a child. Children have no airs of superiority or accomplishment. With a child there are no reservations. Children come trusting, ready to follow, and willing to be instructed.

The reality is that none of us bring anything into the presence of the Lord that makes us acceptable to Him. We have no hope of living or even being in His presence at all because we are sinful. The only way to come before the Lord and enter into His kingdom is on His provision. His provision is the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for forgiveness of our sins. The children who were brought to Him were insignificant and needy. They had nothing to offer Jesus. His disciples did not get it. He was not in the world to receive but to give. The children brought nothing to Him, but He had much for them.

The group Casting Crowns has a song entitled “In Me.” There are two lines in this song that make this point in a beautiful way, “How refreshing to know you don’t need me, how amazing to find that you want me.” Powerful words! He does not need us, yet He wants us. We do not come to Him because we have something to offer. We come to Him and to His kingdom because we are the ones who need Him and His kingdom.

Thank the Lord for His provision to receive us just as we are.

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 53:11**

Isaiah 53 is one of the servant songs found in Isaiah 49-57. Isaiah 53 is about the suffering servant, Jesus. The verse for today expresses several things. First, it says that Jesus, the suffering servant, will by His own labor, suffering, and death on the cross satisfy the heart of His Father. It was His Father’s plan to hand Him over to die to make sinners righteous because the Father is

"...not willing that any should perish but all to come to repentance 2 Peter 3:9b. His death also satisfied the righteous demands of the law. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way:

God is angry at sin because it offends His holiness and violates His holy Law. In His holiness, He must judge sinners, but in His love, He desires to forgive them. God cannot ignore sin or compromise with it, for that would be contrary to His own nature and Law.<sup>1</sup>

We also see in this verse that Jesus, by His death, justifies many. The estimates indicate that two billion believers live in the world today. What about those who have been justified since Jesus died? Billions of people have been justified by the death of Jesus, our suffering servant.

When this was written it was prophetic. This means it was to take place at a time in the future. It says that at some point in the future, "He shall bear their iniquities." The word 'iniquities' means sins. Jesus took those sins away by dying for them. He received or took the death penalty for our sin. He died in the place of all sinners including you and me! The holy and righteous Son of God became our sin and guilt offering. He died in our place.

Give thanks to the Lord God for our suffering servant, Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary-The Prophets







## **WEEK 2 THE RAISING OF LAZARUS**

By Chris Watson

We often pray concerning certain situations. We pray and believe, trusting God will answer exactly how we prayed. Sometimes in the end though, God does not answer our prayers as we expected. We might ask “Does God not care?” “Can He not hear us?” “Is He too busy?” “Have we done something wrong that He won’t answer our prayers?” Not necessarily. At times, we pray and seek God, and yet, God sees fit to work differently than the way we pray He will. Therefore, we must trust Him. In the account of Lazarus this week, we see his family and friends wanted something for Lazarus that only Jesus could do.

### **Day 1-- Read John 11:1-16**

Lazarus was so sick that his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent word to Jesus. Jesus and Lazarus were close, as the sisters referred to Lazarus as “...the one Jesus loved.” Verse 3 I would expect Verse 6 to say something like, “ Jesus left immediately and went to where Lazarus was” when it in fact says, “He stayed where He was two more days.” Verse 6 (NIV) Jesus deliberately stayed where He was. He was setting it up so God would be glorified, as we will see in the next few days.

We often cry out to God for healing, for relief from a situation we are in, for an answer to something, or, as in Paul’s case, for a thorn in our flesh to leave us. Sometimes, God answers our prayer in the way we expect or ask, and, at other times, He may not. We know from the scriptures God knows best, He knows what we need.

Jesus told us to pray and ask specifically for what we want, but in the end to pray for His will to be done. We are ultimately to trust Him for whatever the outcome may be. Above all, it’s for God’s glory and He tells us that He causes all things to work together for

good to those that love Him and to those that are called according to His purpose. God may use what we call a delay to strengthen us, to work in us, or to get us ready for what He may be doing. It may be painful. It certainly was for Lazarus' family; they were hurting, but God was still working.

What are you trusting and believing in God for today? If He doesn't answer the way you want Him to, will you still trust Him? Will you follow Him? Will you put your hope in Him and ultimately obey Him? Remember, He knows best and He is in control. Trust Him today with whatever may be on your heart and mind.

## **Day 2-- Read John 11:17-24**

In John 11:15, Jesus told the disciples He was glad He wasn't there when Lazarus was on his deathbed. He was glad because what was about to happen would help the disciples believe. In God allowing the death of Lazarus, He was setting Jesus up to do His work and this would benefit the disciples' belief and faith.

In Verse 21 of today's passage, Martha told Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." With her words Martha was questioning Jesus' timing and His heart. She was mourning because she had just lost someone who was very close to her. She followed up her first statement with "...but even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give you." Verse 22 I'm sure part of her frustration was Jesus wasn't there when she thought He needed to be, but she still trusted Him, knowing that through God, Jesus could do anything at all.

I can identify with Martha, can you? At times, I have prayed and sought God for what only He could do. In some instances, I believed He should have worked in a certain way, but He chose not to. I still trusted Him but, like Martha, I was hurting and

disappointed it didn't work out like I wanted. Notice all the "I's"? It was all about what I wanted, my selfishness, my desires, my hopes, etc. God tells us to pray and seek Him and tell Him what's on our hearts, but to ultimately trust Him and pray for His will to be done. It doesn't mean we will understand it or embrace it. It doesn't even mean we like it, but, in the end, we must trust God asking for His will to be done and His name to be lifted high. God often works in ways we don't see to comfort, love, and encourage us as He walks this life with us.

Have you ever thought God was late in answering a prayer? Have you ever thought God missed it? Maybe you thought God was sleeping and just wasn't aware of what was going on? All of these thoughts have probably crossed our minds at some point or another, but, in the end, we know God knows and does best! We must trust His heart and trust His plan, even when we are hurting like Martha and it doesn't make sense. What are you struggling with today? Will you lay it at His feet, trusting and knowing that He knows best?

### **Day 3-- Read John 11:25-27**

1. **OBSERVATION:** What does Jesus affirm about Himself in this passage?

2. What is Martha's response to this revelation of Jesus? What significance is her response? What all is she recognizing about Jesus?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** Look up the other "I am" statements of the book of John. (John 6:35ff; 8:12; 10:7,9; 10:11, 14; 11:25;

14:6; and John 15:1,5) Write out the phrases. What does each of these say about Jesus and what do they matter to the believer?

4. Jesus doesn't say he is the source of the resurrection or brings the resurrection. He says He IS the resurrection and the life. What significance is this phrasing? Think about the significance to Martha whose brother Lazarus has just died.

5. **APPLICATION:** Jesus affirms two times that the one who believes in Him shall never die, but rather shall live. Write out what confidences we can have because of this promise. What assurances does it give you for yourself and loved ones?

6. **PRAYER:** Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" Revelation of Jesus demands a faith response. Essentially, Jesus is saying this life and resurrection is for those who believe. As Jesus asks Martha, He asks you today, "Do you believe this?" Do you believe He is the resurrection and the life? If you do, then as you live in communion with Him, resting in Him for eternal life, it should lead us to tell others about this resurrection and the life. Write out a couple names to be praying for opportunities to share Christ with and to ask them, "Do you believe this?"

### **Day 4-- Read John 11:28-53**

We know Jesus is totally God and He was also totally man. However, we are vividly reminded of this in the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Mary told Jesus, "Lord if you

would have been here my brother would not have died.” Verse 32 When Mary relayed this she was essentially saying, “Jesus, you got this one wrong.” Jesus knew what God was doing.

Even though Jesus knew what was to come, He was still overcome with emotion. The shortest verse in the Bible reads, “Jesus wept.” Verse 35 Did Jesus weep because He got it wrong, because He was too late, or because nothing could be done now? None of these statements are true. Rather, when Jesus saw the sorrow of Mary, Martha, and the other mourners, He wept right along with them. Jesus had compassion and mourned with them. The original language indicates Jesus cried tears of compassion for His friends. Romans 12:15 tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Jesus was doing just that.

Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead for His glory and for the others to see and believe. The rest of today’s passage tells us when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jews and religious leaders gathered and they “...plotted to take His life.” Verse 53

Think about Jesus weeping. Have you ever wept, really wept? Have you ever been at a loss for words? Have you ever been hurting and crying and felt you had nowhere to turn? I believe we can be certain Jesus weeps for us. I believe He weeps when we weep and He rejoices when we rejoice. I also believe He weeps because He sees the effects of sin. Had there been no sin in the world, Lazarus would not have died because there would be no death. The scripture tells us that Jesus saw the results of sin and His heart was troubled.

Isn’t it a relief to know God mourns when we mourn, and He feels our pain? He understands what we are going through and He is always there for us. Whether or not that healing we asked for occurs or what we are asking for ends up the way we want, our hope is always in Jesus. He knows what we are feeling and,

although we may feel the results of sin in general, God is in control and He is a great father. Thank the Lord for His compassion and that He knows what we are going through. He is our hope and our peace. We know death is the result of sin and sin is disobedience toward God. As you begin or end each day ask God to help you overcome sin through Him.

### **Day 5-- Read Hosea 13:14**

Hosea 13:14 was a prophecy that spoke directly about Jesus hundreds of years before His birth, His death, and His resurrection. Dictionary.com defines ransom as a sum of money or other payment demanded or paid for the release of a prisoner. As sinners, we were imprisoned by our sins, weighed down by sin itself and its effects. There was no hope of being saved from our sins; we would only go deeper in sin, deeper in trouble, and deeper in the mire. Scripture tells us we were bought with a price and we are not our own, Jesus ransomed us.

The payment for our ransom was Jesus' blood. Jesus' blood redeemed our sin, despair, and our condemnation. They were exchanged for sinlessness, hope, and freedom in Jesus. Scripture also reminds us that no other payment would suffice except for Jesus' blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.

Hosea also used the word redeem, which means to exchange or buy back. God, through His blood, exchanged our certain death for His life, our despair for His peace, and our guiltiness for His clean slate. What we could not do on our own God did for us, praise the Lord. No matter the amount of money we could pay or good deeds we could do, they would never be enough to fulfill God's demands for holiness. God has given us victory through His Son.

Paul put it perfectly in 1 Corinthians 15:53-57 when he wrote, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thanks be to God for what He has done! Thank God for His death and for redeeming us in His Son.







## **WEEK 3 JESUS AND ZACCHAEUS**

By Dennis Watson

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, but He had one more place to go before the event known as the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem took place, and He would face the final week of His life. He entered and passed through Jericho and in doing so, He encountered and healed a blind man and then found and saved Zacchaeus. We see in this week's passages Jesus did truly come "...to seek and to save that which was lost." **Luke 19:10** He did this as He lived. He traveled from town to town and in these travels, He encountered people—the lost.

### **Day 1-- Read Luke 18:35-43**

Jesus was traveling to Jericho and on the way crowds gathered along the road, obviously making a lot of noise. A blind beggar was seated along the road and asked what the commotion was all about. He was told that Jesus of Nazareth was coming down the road. Immediately, the blind beggar began to shout, "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me." (Verse 38b) His words gave him away as one who believed in the coming Messiah. He called Jesus The Son of David. This title makes us aware that the blind beggar believed Jesus to be more than just a man, but the promised Messiah and his only hope. The blind beggar believed Jesus could heal his blindness. He could not be discouraged from crying out to Jesus. His persistence got the attention of Jesus and Jesus ordered the man be brought to Him. When He asked the blind beggar what he wanted, the response was that he wanted to see. I believe the

blind beggar was oblivious to everything else around him. Jesus told the blind man two things—“Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” (Verse 42)

The blind man received his sight, and by his faith, he received much more; his faith had made him well. Not only could he see, but he was saved—delivered from his lostness. The blind beggar sought Jesus in his desperation. He knew Jesus was his only hope. He had nowhere else to turn and no one else to turn to. He was all alone in his desperation and Jesus healed him and made him whole.

When was the last time you desperately cried out to Jesus knowing you had nowhere else to turn and no one else to turn to? The old hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Until the blind beggar heard Jesus was coming, he had no hope. When he met Jesus, He became his only hope. Is He your only hope? Believe it or not, He is your only hope.

## **Day 2-- Read Luke 19:1-8**

The very first words of this passage say that "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho." He was traveling from Samaria to Jerusalem, but He took what appeared to be a detour to go to Jericho. He also entered and passed through when He came to earth; He was on a mission. The mission was to seek and to save that which was lost. He knew there were at least two people in Jericho which were lost whom He needed to save. Yesterday, we looked at a blind beggar. Jesus went there because He knew the blind beggar needed to be saved. He knew there was a chief tax

collector who also needed salvation. It may appear Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, but in reality, Jesus went seeking Zacchaeus. Tax collectors worked for the Roman government and had to pay a certain amount of money to the Roman government to cover the taxes of their region. Anything they collected over that amount was theirs to keep. These tax collectors were ruthless cheats. They were despised by the Jewish people who were citizens of Rome.

Perhaps Zacchaeus, a tax collector, was weary with his job, knowing that he was cheating people and getting rich off of them. He wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus, but he got much more. He was a small man, and in order to see Jesus, he had to climb up into a sycamore tree. There, he waited for Jesus and His entourage, hoping to hide in the tree beneath the cover of the leaves. When Jesus looked up into the tree and saw Zacchaeus, Jesus told him to come down quickly because He was going to his house right then!

This was the beginning of Zacchaeus getting much more than he bargained for. He joyfully came down out of the tree and took Jesus to his house. We are not privy to what went on between them, but we can imagine. It is obvious that Zacchaeus was convicted of the wrong he had done as a tax collector. He said that he was going to give half of his possessions to the poor, and repay those he had cheated, four times the amount he owed! Zacchaeus was a changed man. He repented and sought to do what was right.

Tomorrow we will read about his visit with Jesus.

I am so glad Jesus came seeking the lost. He found me and I am a new man! What about you?

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 19:9-10**

1. **OBSERVATION:** What phrases stand out to you in this passage?

2. What does Jesus refer to Zacchaeus as?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** Look back at the response of the people in verse 7 seeing Jesus go into his house. They clearly looked down on him. They saw him as a sinner. But Zacchaeus has come to Jesus and Jesus wants to come to his house. Think about what it would have meant to Zacchaeus for Jesus to stop and address him and then go to his house. Now what do you think Zacchaeus's response to v. 9-10 would be?

4. What is important about Jesus saying salvation has "come to his house, since he *also* is a son of Abraham?" What does this show about Jesus's mission?

5. **APPLICATION:** Jesus later gives the disciples (and us today) the Great Commission. V. 10 is a good description of that mission: “To seek and to save the lost.” Who is Jesus calling you to seek after this week to share the message of salvation in Christ alone? Write down a couple names to pray for the opportunity to share with and that Jesus would open their hearts.

6. **PRAYER:** To the crowds, it was almost despicable for Jesus to spend time with Zacchaeus. They looked down on him. If you are honest, who are some people you struggle to want to share Christ with, or even spend time with that God has put in your path. Spend some time praying for them this week. Pray for the eyes of Jesus to see them as Christ does and seek them out this week.

#### **Day 4-- Read Luke 19:11-27**

The popularity of Jesus was certainly at an all-time high. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, He had healed a blind man, and now He had spent a little time with Zacchaeus, who had become a changed man. Zacchaeus had cheated people in his tax collecting business, but now he was restoring to them four times the amount he had taken from them. The disciples and others knew Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and they believed it was at this time He would establish His rule as King. They did not understand He was going to Jerusalem to die a brutal death by crucifixion. He told

them a parable to show them the kingdom of God was not going to come soon.

The parable pointed to Jesus. He was the nobleman in the parable. He had been sent by God and had given to His followers the gospel represented by the mina. A mina was three months' salary for a working man. Remember this is about the kingdom. The noble man would leave and return expecting something to be done with the mina he had entrusted to ten people. The parable is teaching that Jesus has entrusted something to us—the gospel. He has gone away, but will return and expects we have been faithful with the gospel message He entrusted to us. Some will put it to work by faithfully sharing it and gaining a following of the gospel message. Those are faithful servants who are busy with His work, anticipating His return and the establishment of His kingdom. One servant was unfaithful because he feared his master. He did nothing; he hid the mina and was rebuked. What he had been given was taken away and given to the one who had been faithful and increased tenfold.

Jesus is coming again to set up His eternal kingdom. He is expecting that we will be faithful and obedient and put the gospel to work and achieve gain. Two servants in the parable were faithful, obedient, and put the gospel to work and achieve gain. Two servants in the parable were unfaithful, one was not.

Are you expecting Jesus to return? Are you living faithfully with the gospel He has entrusted to you? When He returns, will you have the opportunity to present to Him the fruit of the gospel?

## Day 5-- Read Isaiah 11:10-16

I had chinaberry trees in my yard when I was a child and they were great trees for climbing. They have a root system which has shallow feeders and those feeders will often have little trees or shoots grow from them. Isaiah wrote that from the root of Jesse, a banner would grow. That banner would be Jesus. The banner Jesus, will be for the rallying of the people of God, Israel. They will be gathered from all over the earth and brought to Jerusalem. It will be like a second exodus as the Lord God will open the way for His people to return to their land. The ultimate goal will be the kingdom of God in the millennium and the gathering of all of God's people, including the gentiles who come to Him by faith.

For the Jews who remained faithful, these words of the future regathering of Israel back to their homeland would have been extremely encouraging. Equally, this was and is encouraging to the non-Jews. Most of those reading this devotion today are non-Jews. We are gentiles. He will not only provide the banner, which is Jesus Christ, to gather scattered Israel; He will provide the banner for the nations, the gentiles, who through Jesus Christ have been grafted in. Eight hundred years before Jesus came as the prophesied banner which is from the root of Jesse, this picture was given. When that day comes, we will rejoice that Jesus, from the root of Jesse, is also our banner. Jesus put it this way, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." **John 14:6** Jesus is the banner who gathers and rallies His own to Himself.





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## **WEEK 4 THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY**

By Chris Watson

Have you ever had someone sing your praises one minute and, a minute later, turn around and think you are the worst person on earth? This week, we will see Jesus riding into Jerusalem to the people laying down palm branches and singing His praises. Then, just days later, possibly some of the same people were calling for His crucifixion. People, including myself, can be fickle and, too often, we choose to go along with the crowd rather than thinking for ourselves. Instead, we should choose to follow Jesus no matter what others think or do.

### **Day 1-- Read John 12:1-8**

It is thought that in today's economy, the amount of perfume Mary used to wash Jesus' feet would cost over \$35,000. Judas expressed his opinion that it was such a waste for her to use the perfume for Jesus when she could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor. Contrary to what he said, we know Judas was the keeper of the money for the disciples and from time to time he took money. He had no real concern for the poor; his thoughts were for himself and his desire to have the money available for the taking.

Jesus served and met many needs, the poor included. The Gospels direct us to care for the poor and needy, but the focus in this passage is Jesus' coming death. Mary's attention was on Jesus and she spared no expense while He was in her presence. She might

have sensed the time was near and she gave Jesus all she had in worship of Him. What about us?

I am not saying we must literally take all we have, sell it, and give the proceeds to God, His Church, or the poor, unless God leads you to that conclusion, but what about our attitude toward giving God all we have? What about laying ourselves at Jesus' feet with reckless abandon? Why not trust Him with all that we have: our lives, our families, our homes, our cars, and anything else we consider to be ours? After all, it is all His anyway; we are merely the stewards of what He has given us. Mary knew who Jesus was and she wanted to give Him all that she had, including herself. Will we do the same? If I am honest with myself, sometimes I give Jesus only some of what I am and have, the parts that I might not miss or that I'm comfortable with handing over to Him. But all? Everything? Yes! Jesus wants it all! He wants our hearts, minds, spirits, souls, attitudes, and even our possessions, to be under His control. Today, consider how you might release more of yourself to Jesus so that one day you will be totally under His control. Think of ways you can practically and obediently give Him all that you are and all that you have.

## **Day 2-- Read John 12:9-19**

**Jeremiah 33:17** tells us, "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel." Many Jews would have been familiar with this passage and we know some were already beginning to believe and follow Jesus. So many, in fact, that to the religious leaders, it seemed almost as if the whole world was following Him (John 12:19). Granted, we now know that some of

the followers were calling for His crucifixion within just a few days.

Our passage today reminds us of the real issue, it looked as though the religious leaders were losing their positions of power and influence among the people. Many of their followers had transferred their attention to Jesus and away from their religious leaders. Again, John 12:19 reminds us this really bothered the Pharisees and the other religious leaders more because of their status and the potential loss of that status than out of concern for the people and their spiritual lives. In fact, one of the reasons these leaders wanted to put Jesus to death was because they perceived Him as a threat or competition to their positions.

Jesus competes with no one. Scripture tells us we cannot serve both God and money (or whatever else you might be tempted to put before God). In other words, we cannot serve our own pride, greed, desires, will, or selfishness and seek to serve God. God will not compete; He wants our entire being.

God won't compete with our agenda. At times, we make everything about us. It's what we want and what we want to accomplish even if what we want might be considered good. While in the process, we leave God and His wisdom and direction totally out of our decision-making. But it's not about me and it's not about you; it never has been and if we think it is, we are wrong. It's not my kingdom or my family or my church. Everything is God's. Therefore, I cannot be selfish about what I want or, like the Pharisees, start panicking about what I'll do when the focus is rightfully turned away from me and back to Jesus and His plan.

Don't we want to be in His heart, His will, and His plan? Isn't that what really changes people? We are simply instruments or tools in His process. We must be able to turn to God and say, "It's not about me, as if You should do things my way. You alone are God and I surrender to Your ways."<sup>2</sup>

Is your life all about you? Have you had pity parties about not getting your way? Have you ever decided to take your toys and go home? Ask God to change your heart. Ask Him what He wants, what His plan is, and what He wants to accomplish in and through you. Surrender to Him and ask to be part of His plan.

### **Day 3-- Read John 12:20-33**

**1. OBSERVATION:** What phrases stand out to you in this passage? What seems confusing, surprising or interesting?

2. What's unique about who is seeking Jesus out in this passage? What is the response of the disciples? How might this shape the disciples' understanding of Jesus's mission on earth?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** This is the third time there is a voice from heaven that calls out in a way confirming Jesus's identity. The other two are his baptism (Matt. 3:17) and the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). What do you think the significance of each time is, especially thinking of the setting and audience?

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<sup>2</sup> "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," Paul Oakley, 1996, Integrity Music.

4. Jesus uses strong language in this passage. “Whoever *loves* his life loses it, and whoever *hates* his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” What is Jesus communicating the nature of being a Jesus follower means by this extreme language?

5. **APPLICATION:** The crowd that “stood there and heard it said that it had thundered.” Others said it was the voice of an angel from heaven. There’s multiple reactions. We see the unbelieving remark at this supernatural event as being merely an act of nature (thunder).

6. **PRAYER:** The call to follow Christ isn’t an easy one, but it is worth it. Pray today that God gives you the strength to follow him, to not love this world but rather to love Christ more each day.

#### **Day 4-- Read John 12:34-50**

Jesus gave people many reasons to believe in Him during His ministry on earth. In addition, the Old Testament scriptures point directly to Him. Though He did many signs and wonders, the



people still didn't believe in Him and it is implied that they didn't really want to believe (John 12:37-43). Adam Clark says, "Why? Because they did not believe the report of the prophets concerning Christ; therefore they credited not the miracles which he wrought as a proof that he was the person foretold by the prophets, and promised to their fathers. Having thus resisted the report of the prophets, and the evidence of Christ's own miracles, God gave them up to the darkness and hardness of their own hearts, so that they continued to reject every overture of Divine mercy; and God refused to heal their national wound, but, on the contrary, commissioned the Romans against them, so that their political existence was totally destroyed."<sup>3</sup> The people were given many chances to believe and put their trust in Jesus and, yet, they continued to deny Jesus and do things their own way.

Praise God, some did believe! (John 12:42-43) but they did not make a public confession because they didn't want to be put out of the synagogue and they enjoyed the prestige they had there. They saw Jesus as the light in a dark world. They sought to follow Him, but still retain the approval of men. Honestly, we cannot have things both ways. Either we follow God, whether or not others follow along with us, or we follow men and their philosophies. When we truly believe in Jesus and His good news, we cannot keep it inside. Jesus told His listeners He was the light of the world and whoever believes in Him should not abide in darkness, meaning we should not continue in sin, nor should we hide the fact that we believe in Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Clarke Commentary

Scripture tells us (Matthew 10 and Luke 12) we are to confess our Father before men and follow Him. If we deny Jesus, He will also deny us before His Father in heaven. In other words, there is no such thing as a closet Christian. We cannot be Christians and keep the news to ourselves. To the contrary, we will be compelled to share the news with others. We will desire to be in the light as God is in the light and share with the world and other believers what God has done for us. Are you ashamed of your faith, of your God? Confess Him before men and confess Him to the world. They need to know. Do what the four men did when they brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus; they abandoned all and did what they could to help their friend regardless of what others thought or said. We must stand on the Truth and for the Truth and that Truth is the person, Jesus Christ.

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 6:9-10**

To some, the Gospel is great and glorious while to others, it is a stumbling block. To some, it is the best news ever and to others, it is something to ridicule. Why is that? By the grace and love of God, some have seen the gospel as salvation and hope for now and eternity. Yet, others are so blinded and caught up in sin and in their own desires, they cannot hear or grasp the reality of the gospel.

Some people's hearts have become hardened to the preaching of the gospel. While the hearts of others have been softened by the very same gospel and they have received salvation from God through Jesus' death on the cross. It all goes back to darkness and light. If someone lived in a dark room for years and someone comes in and turns on a light, the person who had lived in darkness for so long might beg for the light to be turned back off. This

person would have no concept of light and it would probably hurt his eyes. The same is true of spiritual blindness. Many live in spiritual darkness (sin) daily. They are used to it and they even enjoy it. When the gospel is preached, they don't want to hear it because it makes them uncomfortable and they try to avoid exposure to God's Word. They want people to stop talking about it because they would rather continue to live in the darkness, comfortable with their sin, than to have their sins exposed to others and have to deal with those sins.

Matthew Henry adds, "God sends Isaiah to foretell the ruin of his people. Many hear the sound of God's word, but do not feel the power of it. God sometimes, in righteous judgment, gives men up to blindness of mind, because they will not receive the truth in the love of it. But no humble inquirer after Christ, needs to fear this awful doom, which is a spiritual judgment on those who will still hold fast their sins. Let everyone pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, that he may perceive how precious are the Divine mercies, by which alone we are secured against this dreadful danger."<sup>4</sup>

We must constantly seek to be in the light and our prayer must be for God to open the eyes of those in the darkness, to pull them from their blindness, and to allow them to see the Truth for what it really is.

How can God use you today to shine His light in a dark world?  
Who has God prepared for you to share the Gospel with today? Be the light!

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry Concise Commentary







## **WEEK 5 THE WIDOW'S OFFERING**

By Dennis Watson

Jesus was concerned about the inconsistency between what was in a person's heart and how they presented themselves to the public. The religious leaders in His day had an appearance which differed from their heart conditions. They looked like servants of God to the eye, but in reality, they were cheating widows and praying prayers only for show. The disciples were prone to be impressed with the appearance of the temple, but it was soon to be destroyed. There was a misalignment between what was on the lips and what was in the heart. This week, we will look at passages that address this discrepancy which can be a danger in religion.

### **Day 1-- Read Luke 20:45-47**

Jesus spoke directly to His disciples, but did so in a way that all around Him could hear Him. He warned them about the religious leaders. First, He warned them about the display. He said that the religious leaders liked to walk around with the long flowing robes, each one relishing the appearance of his position and flaunting it. Second, He warned them about the danger of seeking attention. The religious leaders enjoyed being greeted in the marketplace. Third, He warned them about seeking prominence. The religious leaders liked their special seating in the synagogue and at the feasts. Fourth, He warned them about the religious leader's propensity for taking money from the poor widows. Last, He warned them about praying only for show, not focusing on God. Jesus told them that for these reasons, the religious leaders would face greater condemnation.

What do you suppose the real issue was? I think it was their inconsistency. They expressed one message with their lips, but their lives expressed a completely different message. How did they get to this point? They may have grown cold and were going through the motions, to the extent they even slipped into wrong and illegal behavior. Could it be that they learned this at home? Too often, religious inconsistency is learned behavior. Parents who live one way at church and another way at home or away from church, professing a belief they don't live out in their daily lives, demonstrate a lack of depth in their faith. Jesus was warning the people against practicing what they don't really believe. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were often fakes. They did the right things, but frequently from impure motives, rather than from a real and living faith in the one true God whom they were supposedly serving. Over time, their real motives became evident to those around them.

Please pray that we will all have true depth in our walks with Jesus and we will live from the inside out. Make sure you are living a consistent, godly life.

## **Day 2-- Read Luke 21:1-4**

In stark contrast to the religious leaders Jesus warned about in yesterday's passage, today, we meet a widow. Jesus used what she did as an example to follow. Jesus saw the people putting their gifts into the temple treasury and, as He often did, began to use this as a teachable moment for His followers. He pointed out that the widow had put into the treasury what amounted to 1/8 of a cent,



yet, He commended her gift, because "... she had given out of her poverty, put in all the livelihood that she had." (Verse 4b) She had given all she had, whereas, others gave out of their abundance or surplus. Jesus knew that for the temple expenses, her gift would not go very far, but this was not His point. Jesus measures differently than you and I. He measures not what you give, but what you keep for yourself.

As believers, followers of Jesus Christ, we live by grace, not by law. The tithe (one tenth) is the beginning place and grace always goes beyond the law. What you keep for yourself should indicate grace giving. This widow was trusting God with her whole being. She gave from the abundance of her heart. God told Samuel, "... man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" **1 Samuel 16:7**. For many people, the tithe often comes out of their surplus. When I think of this, my mind goes to a man of God who set an example for us and we would be safe to follow his example. Truett Cathy was the founder and president of Chick-fil-A. He was a godly man who taught Sunday School to young boys for 50 years. He was also a billionaire at the time of his death late in 2014. More than this, he was a giver. He gave much more than he kept for himself. He made a life by giving, rather than keeping.

Jesus applauded the widow and used her as an example of abundant giving. Have you ever thought about getting to the point of giving more than you keep? The tithe is the starting line, not the finish line. The heart of the giver displays the desire to give more and more. What is on the inside matters more than the outward

display. The woman demonstrated the connection between her heart faith and her actions.

Why not begin to consider what you give and what you keep? It is a good time to think about growing in your faith by growing your giving.

**Day 3-- Read Mark 12:41-44**

1. **OBSERVATION:** What stands out to you about this scene? Try to put yourself in the setting. Visualize it.

2. How does this scene fit in the context of the rest of Ch. 12 and beginning of Ch. 13?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** The rich people in this passage put in large sums of money. Yet Jesus still says the poor widow put in more. Why does Jesus draw this conclusion for the disciples?

4. Is Jesus calling us to be poor and literally give every last penny we have away in this passage? Why or why not? What is the main point of this scene?

5. **APPLICATION:** Jesus highlights the faith element of the poor widow who comes not for show, not for recognition, but gives out of her poverty. There is a faith element that God will provide. How might this passage shape how you give right now? Are you trusting God with your finances? Do you give out of what is comfortable or do you give from faith?

6. **PRAYER:** Pray that God would grant us the faith to not trust in money, our possessions or even status among others. Rather, give us the faith to live only in a manner that pleases God and that causes us to live an uncompromising, uncomfortable life in Christ!

#### **Day 4-- Read Mark 13:1-2**

I remember watching the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium being built. I was always excited to go up the interstate through downtown Atlanta with my parents and see what progress had been made. I was thrilled to see and anticipate its completion which would coincide with the Milwaukee Braves coming to Atlanta to become the Atlanta Braves. Later, I watched as it was systematically destroyed by implosion in 1997. When I was a teenager, my daddy would take me to games. The stadium was impressive and I was amazed. Yet, only thirty-two years later, it was demolished. Jesus' disciples were equally amazed by the

temple and its huge stones. His disciples were more impressed with this marvel than they were with Jesus. They missed the idea that the temple was to point to Jesus, the true temple in Whom the presence of God lived. Jesus referred to His own body as the temple (John 2:21).

Jesus shocked them back into reality by telling them there would come a day that the temple would be destroyed and not one stone would be left upon another. Some of the stones were massive, some as long as thirty feet, yet, they would be thrown down. About forty years later, this prophecy became a reality when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

The disciples seemed to miss this idea. Like the old Atlanta Stadium, the temple no longer exists. The disciple's eyes were on the wrong thing. They were missing the real deal, Jesus, and His plan for a far greater temple not built with human hands. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 6:16**, “For you are the temple of the living God.” Peter wrote “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” **1 Peter 2:4-5**

Jesus was the temple of God. He has made His followers into a living house, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Don't become overwhelmed with man's buildings. Be in awe of what God has built in the body of Christ. Give thanks for the living building of God, the body of Christ.

## Day 5-- Read Isaiah 29:13-14

We began this week talking about the discrepancy between what is in a person's heart and how that person lives life. Being a Jesus follower is more than trying to be good and going to church. In fact any attempts we make to be good might be an indicator of the real problem. When we choose to be crucified with Christ, we choose to let Him live in and through us. This is an ongoing experience as we daily count ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. In today's passage, Isaiah wrote about the problem which faces religious people, they "...honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me." **Matthew 15:8**

I only know to call this a disconnect between what we profess and the very essence of our lives. This is called hypocrisy, saying one thing while doing and/or living another.

Followers of Jesus should seek to live by heart. By that, I mean the relationship with Jesus which rules the heart should be the overflow of living. For instance, I often hear Jesus followers say, "I will never be able to forgive that person." Yet, they claim to be a forgiving people. They may even teach forgiveness as God's way for all of His people. Do you see this disconnect? We are hard on the religious leaders of Jesus' day, but fail to see our own hypocrisy. Every thought, attitude, and act should flow from the place where Jesus resides on the throne of our hearts. Jesus is salvation! He rules in our hearts. He made it clear that to follow Him is to deny self and take up one's cross.

Ask the Lord to enable you to live with Jesus as Lord over all aspects of your life, even in those areas which seems impossible to submit to Him. What is impossible with man is possible with God (Matthew 19:26).







## **WEEK 6 JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLE'S FEET**

By Chris Watson

In the gospels, we see Jesus ask His disciples to follow Him, but we never see Him ask His disciples to do something He had not already done or was not willing to do Himself. Jesus was the perfect model; He did not instruct His followers to do something and then leave them on their own to do it. Rather, He guided and led them by His own example. We see this very vividly in our account today.

### **Day 1-- Read Mark 10:32-45**

The rest of this week's devotions will be devoted to servanthood and the example Jesus gave while washing His disciple's feet. In our passage today, Jesus was sharing what was to come with His disciples. He told them that He would be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, and killed, but He would rise again on the third day. We might logically expect to read of the disciple's sadness or of questions they might have had for Jesus. This is not what happened. Instead, James and John were more concerned about their position in God's kingdom.

Do you see what just happened? The situation went from Jesus soon to be betrayed, mocked, and killed to, "Thanks Jesus, but will we be able to sit at your right and left in Your kingdom?" In other words, their concern was about who would be the greatest when all was said and done. I am quick to think, "Really, guys, you turned Jesus' death into who of you would be the greatest in His kingdom?" Yet, I have done similar things, myself. At times, I

have sought to turn the focus from Jesus to myself. I have tried to take the glory for myself or shift the spotlight from Jesus to me.

Jesus was coming to the end of His life and two of His disciples were wondering who was the best among them. Jesus gave an answer they were not really seeking. He told them the greatest among us shall be our servant and whoever desires to be first shall be last and Jesus follows up by telling them He came to serve, not to be served. Jesus was like no other king they had seen or heard of before. He came to do the King's business and to serve others at the same time. He instructed His followers to do the same thing.

Is this life about you or is it about Jesus? Are you concerned with being in the spotlight or being thought of as the greatest or the best? Ask God to help you be a servant and serve Him while keeping the focus where it belongs, squarely on Jesus. After all, He is our life. How can you serve someone today? Think and pray for some practical ways that you might make much of Jesus today.

## **Day 2-- Read John 13:1-5**

In yesterday's devotion, we were reminded Jesus came to serve, not to be served. In fact, He came to give His life as a ransom for many. In today's passage, we see Jesus carrying out a service to those closest to Him, His disciples. He was doing for them what was usually done by the lowliest of servants. Adam Clarke notes, "This was the office of the meanest slaves. When David sent to Abigail, to inform her that he had chosen her for wife, she arose and said: Behold, let thy handmaid be a Servant, to Wash the Feet

of the Servants of my lord, 1 Samuel 12:41.”<sup>5</sup> The foot washing job was truly one for a servant to perform. When Jesus began washing the disciples’ feet, they would have known He was serving them and they would have been reminded of the conversation between Him and the two disciples who were so concerned about being first in the kingdom.

Jesus, by example, was showing the disciples exactly what He was sent here to do. In Jesus’ time, there were no sneakers or closed-toed shoes. Sandals were the footwear of the day and they walked almost everywhere they went. The disciples’ feet could have been caked with mud, covered with dry and nasty dirt, or just plain smelly from walking all day. As Jesus washed their feet, He was demonstrating to them that nothing was beneath Him. Jesus was the servant of all servants.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus modeled servanthood for us. In following Him, we are to serve others, including those who believe as we do and those who don’t along with those who look like us and those who don’t. God has called us to serve when it is easy and to serve when it is difficult. In this account, Jesus served those who were closest to Him. How can you serve those closest to you today? Whether that includes your spouse, children, parents, siblings, co-workers, or best friend, how can you serve them today and do it in such a way which brings glory to God?

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Clarke Commentary

### **Day 3-- Read John 13:6-11**

**1. OBSERVATION:** Compare and contrast Peter's and Judas' experience of the foot washing?

2. Why was Peter so reluctant to have Christ wash his feet?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** What purpose did this foot washing serve?

4. How does the foot washing serve to highlight the character of Christ? What aspects do you also see reflected in Christ's work on the cross?

**5. APPLICATION:** In what ways do we also refuse to receive the grace of Christ as is displayed in His washing of the disciples' feet?

6. What difference does Jesus' foot washing make for how we live our lives today?

## **Day 4-- Read John 13:12-17**

Jesus didn't wash His disciples' feet for only one purpose. He showed them how to serve and then told them to do so to one another. He was demonstrating by His own example we are to serve everyone. Jesus later told the disciples the world would know them as His by the way they loved one another.

One way we can love others is by serving them. We can serve anyone; our co-workers, our bosses, our family, our friends, even those we might consider our enemies. If we think there is anyone we cannot serve, we should remember Jesus even served Judas. This disciple who would soon turn his back on Jesus and betray Him to the authorities who had been looking for any reason to crucify Him. How can you serve those around you today and this week? How can you begin serving others as a lifestyle? Take some time to brainstorm how you can serve others in any of the following categories that may apply to you.

Spouse: Children: Parents: Grandchildren: Classmates:  
Brothers/Sisters: Co-workers: People you see at the ball field or as you're going about town:

After thinking of some ways to serve, be intentional about serving at least two people today. Think about who that should be and go for it! Remember you are to serve and love them as you would serve the Lord.

## **Day 5-- Read Psalm 40:4-10**

Take additional time to read Hebrews 10:1-10. In reading the Hebrews passage, we see that Verses 5-7 come from Psalm 40. We know the sacrifices made in Old Testament times pointed to the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus. In fact, we are reminded of this, specifically, through the Passover and the Passover Lamb. The writer of Hebrews tells us these sacrifices were a reminder of the sins that needed to be washed away and were prophetic as they pointed to the cross.

In Hebrews 10:4, we are reminded the blood of animals could not take away sin; they merely covered over the sin. Hebrews 11, known as the Faith chapter, gives example after example of people who were made right with God through their faith in Him. When Jesus died, He died for all of the sins committed since the creation of the world and not just for the ones that were committed after His death. He died for the sins of Abraham and Moses, just as He died for my sins and the sins of those that will come after me. Just as Abraham and Moses placed their faith in the one true God, we have to place our faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

Scripture again reminds us without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins and the only blood that could take away our sins is the blood of Jesus. He is the one and only perfect, spotless, holy, and blameless sacrifice. We don't sacrifice animals for our sins anymore, thankfully. Instead, we trust in the shed blood of Jesus to wash away our sins rather than simply covering them.

I still don't fully grasp how Jesus' perfect blood washes away my sin, but I know it does. I don't understand why He would want to

do this for me, but I'm grateful for the love and grace that led Him to do so. I didn't deserve Jesus' sacrifice, love, mercy or grace, but He gave it to me anyway. Thank Him for the gift of His salvation and grace.







## **WEEK 7 THE LAST SUPPER**

By Dennis Watson

This week, we look at the event known as The Last Supper. This was the Passover meal which Jesus shared with His disciples before He was crucified. The Passover reminded the Jews of the Exodus from Egypt, but this Passover pointed to the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Jesus was the Lamb of God, the sacrifice God provided for the removal of sin. The disciples did not fully understand all that was happening, but would later grasp what they had seen.

### **Day 1-- Read Luke 22:1-6**

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were anything but godly.

They were seeking to kill Jesus. They did not want to do it in the daytime because they feared the people who were following Him. They sought to do their wicked deed at night. These men were hypocrites of the worst kind! Apparently, Judas knew of their plot and chose to join them. In Verse 3 of today's passage, we read that "...Satan entered Judas." Judas was one of the twelve closest followers of Jesus, yet, he was like the religious leaders as he had the appearance of godliness, but did not possess the real thing. Can a believer be demon-possessed? Talk about an oxymoron! Jesus and Satan cannot abide in the same place. Since true believers are inhabited by Jesus through His Holy Spirit, Satan cannot abide in the Jesus follower, too. Judas was a thief; he kept the money box for the disciples, but would often take from it for himself (John 12:6). This should be a warning for church people and religious

people today. Some of the meanest people I know call themselves Christians. I am not judging anyone's salvation, but if a person can regularly do the enemy's work, that person needs to do some soul-searching!

After Satan entered him, Judas went to the religious leaders and agreed to help them with their plot to kill Jesus by handing Him over to them. For this, he was to receive thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). The plot involved waiting until the crowd left Jerusalem. They wanted to get Jesus alone, so the people would not know what they were doing; they planned to take Him secretly. Judas would bide his time and let the religious leaders know when the time was right. This time never came, because Jesus forced them to act immediately. The deed was done on Jesus' timeline, not that of the plotters.

Doesn't it seem odd that Jewish religious leaders were plotting this deed at the time of Passover? They did not realize what they were doing. They were preparing to slay the true Passover Lamb. In all occasions and in all things, God is in control. It was not Judas who handed Jesus over to wicked men. Jesus was "... delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." **Acts 2:23** God is in control!

It is amazing how God accomplishes His plans!

## **Day 2-- Read Luke 22:7-13**

The time to celebrate the Passover had come. It was time for the Passover lamb to be killed and for faithful Jews to observe the Passover meal. The Passover observance looked back to the event

known as the Exodus. Jesus gave instructions to Peter and John to go and make preparations for the meal. They were to go into the city of Jerusalem and find a man carrying a pitcher of water. He would show them the place where they would have the Passover meal. It was unusual, in that culture, for men to carry the water jugs as this was considered woman's work. Therefore, it was quite obvious when they saw the man they were seeking.

I used to cut grass in our neighborhood when I was a child. I also cut our grass, but I didn't always cut it with a willing heart. Sometimes, I couldn't get our mower started. The problem was not so much with the lawn mower as it was with the one pretending to try to crank it. You see, my heart was not in it and I was not really giving the rope a sincere pull. Conveniently for me, there were times I couldn't get the mower to start.

How much information do you need to follow Jesus obediently? It isn't more information we need as much as we need hearts willing to obey. God provides the means and the methods and we must provide the willingness to obey. He will not provide anything until we are first willing to obey and we start doing what He's showing us to do.

Peter and John would not have found the man carrying the water pitcher had they not obediently set out to follow and obey their Master's instructions. They would not have received the assignment if they had not had willing and obedient hearts. They went eagerly to follow the instructions of Jesus and found things exactly as He told them.

What do you need to do to show that you are eager about following and obeying? Is there something you keep talking about doing, but have not yet taken that step of obedience? It's time, start moving!

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 22:14-22**

1. **OBSERVATION:** Some have said that the Lord's Supper points both backwards and forwards. Where do you see references to both from the passage?

2. Perform a quick google search and explore the details of a Jewish Seder meal. How do Christ's actions in His suffering magnify the elements of the Seder meal?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** Why would Jesus be so eager to eat the Passover meal with His disciples?

4. In what ways was Jesus the perfect Passover lamb?

5. **APPLICATION:** If you were a disciple of Jesus gathered around the table in the Upper Room, what thoughts might you have had as Jesus spoke? What questions would you have had? What thoughts do you have as you participate in the Lord's Supper in worship services?

6. How does the Lord's Supper lead you to long for Christ's second coming?

#### **Day 4-- Read Luke 22:24-34**

In a horse race, a jockey will maneuver his horse into a position to make a move near the end of the race to get in position to win. This is where the saying "jockeying for position" comes from. Jesus had just spent a very significant time with His disciples. He had washed their feet and shared the Passover meal with them giving the Passover Meal new meaning. They were more concerned with their own self interest and advancement. Some of the disciples were jockeying for position as they began to debate which of them would be the greatest. Jesus had to explain to them that they were behaving like unsaved Gentiles and not like God's children. He sought to help them understand that they were not to be concerned with position, but with servanthood. He had shown them this by His own example. He did affirm them for their faithfulness, letting them know they would have a future reward in His kingdom.

It must have been hard to hear that all of them would be sifted by Satan, not just Simon Peter. (Matthew 26:31, Mark 14:27) Simon Peter, who was their leader and spokesman, seemed to be the strongest of them all and if he failed, what would the rest of them do?

Peter did his usual boasting, insisting he was ready to go to prison and even to death with Jesus. Jesus told Peter "... before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." (Verse 34) Jesus also told him He would be praying his faith would not fail. Peter's faith did not fail, but Peter did. Jesus told him that after failing he would turn again and he would later be able to strengthen his brethren when they needed him.

Sin is a troubling thing, no doubt. It seems to rear its ugly head at very strange times. Ask the Lord to enable you to live so close to Him that your greatest concern will be His will, not yours.

### **Day 5-- Read Zechariah 11:12-13**

In Zechariah 11, we read about the coming Messiah, but the majority of the nation would reject Him. For their rejection of Him, the nation would be scattered throughout the world. However, there would be a small remnant left of those who did not reject Him.

Judas went secretly to meet with the religious leaders to plot against Jesus. Although he thought it was a secret, the Lord knew about it hundreds of years before it happened. This is an amazing prophecy with such attention to detail. Here is how the fulfillment is described in **Matthew 26:14-16**. "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him." This was a very low price for such a deed as the religious leaders were not willing to pay very much.

The prophecy went even further and the fulfillment matched. Zechariah prophesied, “So I took thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.” (Verse 13b) In Matthew 26, we read Judas felt such remorse after Jesus was taken that he tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the religious leaders, but they refused to take the money back. Judas then took the silver and threw it down in the temple and went and hung himself. This is a sad historical account, but it was prophesied to such great detail and fully carried out. Since it was blood money, the religious leaders could not put it in the temple treasury, so they bought a field referred to as the potter’s field. It was a place used to bury foreigners.

Once again, Connecting the Dots and seeing the The Dots Connected is amazing. It is a continuing reminder that God, not man, is in control. Even man at his worst is still under God’s control. His will is not to be thwarted or prevented. Thank the Lord for His sovereignty.







# **WEEK 8 JESUS PROMISES TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

By Dennis Watson

We are never alone, praise God. Upon Jesus' ascension into heaven, He left the Holy Spirit with us, which is Jesus in spirit form. We don't see Jesus with our eyes, but we know He lives in the hearts and minds of every believer. He didn't leave us with just His Word and exhort us to figure the rest out, but gave us His Word and the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct us. What great news!

## **Day 1-- Read John 14:1-14**

The disciples were beginning to understand more and more what Jesus was trying to tell them, yet, they were still unsure about some of His teachings. Jesus told them not to be troubled. "After having answered St. Peter's question (prediction of denial), He addresses himself again to his disciples, and tells them not to be afflicted at his leaving them, nor to lose courage because of what he said concerning Peter's denying him; that if they reposed their confidence in God, he would protect them; and that, howsoever they might see him treated, they should believe in him more firmly, as his sufferings, death, and resurrection should be to them the most positive proof of his being the Messiah, the Savior of the world."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus was giving His disciples instructions which were to be encouraging and enlightening, not just in their present time, but in the future, as well. He knew what was coming and He wanted to

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<sup>6</sup> Adam Clarke Commentary

leave them with truth and hope. The words He spoke to His disciples then are still true for us as disciples today. This was and is a timeless promise. As believers, our hearts need not be troubled by what is happening in the world today. As of the first writing of *The Dots Connected*, the Syrian Crisis was happening in our country and our government was trying to decide how to deal with millions of Syrian refugees entering our country. There was also a terrorist attack in Paris and a plane was brought down by what is now believed to be a bomb. These troubles are just a few of what we see in the news each week, not to mention the difficulties we face with our families, at home, and at work. These are real troubles. Jesus tells us that if our hope is in Him, we can have true peace now and in the future, regardless of our circumstances.

Just look at the words He gave His disciples. “And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” **John 14:3** No matter what situations or trials we face as believers, we know how the story ends; we know, in time, we will spend eternity with Jesus, where there will be no more pain, sorrow, wars, crime, cancer, or death. What a peace we have in this truth. In knowing Jesus, we already know the Father, so we will be ready to spend eternity worshipping Him.

Do you have that peace? If you do, are you trusting in Him daily? Do you find yourself on edge? Rest in the peace of Jesus. Trust Him and know He is our peace, regardless of the troubles we may face.

**Day 2-- Read John 14:15-20**

Depending on your translation, Verse 16 may refer to the Holy Spirit as Helper, Counselor, or Comforter. The actual Greek word is *parakletos*, which means counselor, intercessor, helper, one who encourages and comforts. In the New Testament, this word refers exclusively to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ.

As Jesus was telling the disciples what was coming and they were beginning to truly understand more and more of what He was telling them, they were probably troubled indeed. Jesus shared with them that He would still be with them, always, and that He would leave the Holy Spirit with them. We know the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

Jesus speaks to our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord, He left us both His Word and Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. Like me, you may have thought how wonderful it would have been to have lived when the disciples did and have walked and talked with Jesus face to face. We need to remember we have the same access to Jesus the disciples had. We may not be able to see Jesus physically, but we can talk to Him and He can talk to us all the same. In fact, I have heard the Holy Spirit speak to my heart on many occasions and it was just as clear to me as if Jesus had been physically speaking to me. In other words, I knew Jesus was speaking to my heart. I am sure that other believers have experienced this as well.

Have you seen the Holy Spirit working in your life? Have you been troubled? Know that the Holy Spirit is right here with you and me. He has not left us here alone, praise God. As you face your week, know and be thankful that the Holy Spirit guides, leads,

instructs, and comforts us at every moment. Be thankful that, until we see Jesus again, He has left us His Holy Spirit as our counselor, comforter, and intercessor.

### **Day 3-- Read John 14:21-24**

1. **OBSERVATION:** How would you respond to someone who says that v. 21 proves that God only loves us if we obey His commandments?

2. How does Jesus manifest His love and Himself to those disciples who love Him?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** What would it look like to keep His word? Where are you failing to do so?

4. How does the Father and the Son make their home with those who love and keep His word?

5. **APPLICATION:** Recount the roles of the Spirit in the life of the believer. What experience of His work can you testify to this week?

## **Day 4-- Read John 14:25-31**

The Holy Spirit is so many things. Not only is He our counselor, but He is also our teacher (John 14:26). He teaches us the truth. Think of the two best teachers / preachers of God's Word you have ever heard. Should their teachings not compare to those of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is to be our best teacher. He may use a human teacher or preacher, but it is the Holy Spirit doing the work. In my life, I have learned that the two best teachers are God's Word and the Holy Spirit. I definitely read, study, and learn from other teachers, but the two that rise to the top are God's Word and Holy Spirit, which go hand in hand.

The Holy Spirit teaches us many things, including what gives us peace and what does not (John 14:27). The world and the things of this world offer false peace at best. Barnes notes the things that do not bring forth peace:

1st. Not as the objects which men commonly pursue---pleasure, fame, wealth. They leave care, anxiety, remorse. They do not meet the desires of the immortal mind, and they are incapable of affording that peace which the soul needs.

2nd. Not as the men of the world give. They salute you with empty and flattering words, but their professed friendship is often feigned and has no sincerity. You cannot be sure that they are sincere, but I am.

3rd. Not as systems of philosophy and false religion give. They profess to give peace, but it is not real. It does not still the voice of conscience; it does not take away sin; it does not reconcile the soul to God.

4th. “My (Jesus) peace is such as meets all the wants of the soul, silences the alarms of conscience, is fixed and sure amid all external changes, and will abide in the hour of death and forever. How desirable, in a world of anxiety and care, to possess this peace! And how should all who have it not, seek that which the world can neither give nor take away!”<sup>7</sup>

As believers, we should not seek after false peace and hope, but rather seek after the Giver of true hope, Himself, Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Where do you seek peace? Are you trying to gain from others what only God can give? Will you place your hope and find your peace in Jesus, our Helper?

### **Day 5-- Read Joel 2:28-32**

God prophesied through Joel that the Holy Spirit would come to all believers at a future time. In Acts 2:14-21, we read of Peter preaching this passage of Joel to the believers on the day of Pentecost. Earlier in Acts 2, we see the Holy Spirit being poured out on what we now refer to as the New Testament Church. Peter then shared the words from Joel. Both passages account for what the Holy Spirit will do as He works through the believers. Joel prophesied about what took place as recorded in Acts 2 hundreds of years before it happened. This prophecy was fulfilled then and

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<sup>7</sup> Barnes Notes on the New Testament



continues to be fulfilled today; God continues to pour out His Spirit on us.

We read in **Joel 2:32**, “And it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on the name of the lord shall be saved.” Part of the reason the Holy Spirit is poured out is so others can be saved. Scriptures tell us no one comes to the Father unless he is drawn to the Father. The Holy Spirit (Father – Trinity) is the one who draws people to Himself. Who does He draw? Scripture says whoever, but what does whoever mean? Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. When they call on the name of the Lord, they receive God’s Holy Spirit, the same Spirit we see mentioned in both Joel and Acts.

They can only call on the One they have heard and they can only hear if someone tells or preaches the truth to them, according to scripture. If you are a believer, you are that someone (preacher). We are commanded to share the truth everywhere, whether that be across the street or around the world. If you are a believer, you were once a whoever. Someone told you or preached to you the gospel of salvation and God drew you to Himself. Scripture tells us that the gospel will be preached to every nation and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

How might God use you to tell the world about Him? How might you give? How might you pray? How might you go? Be praying for a willing heart to respond when God shows you how He wants to have you on mission with Him.





## WEEK 9 JESUS IS ARRESTED

By Dennis Watson

The arrest of Jesus was in God's timing. Everything we read about Jesus in the Bible is in God's timing. Jesus agonized in prayer in the garden. This week, we look at Jesus' prayer and the account of some of His disciples sleeping at a very intense time. We will see the betrayal of Judas and the scattering of His followers.

### Day 1-- Read Mark 14:32-42

After His time at the Passover meal with His disciples, they went to Gethsemane where they often went to get away from the crowds. He left the larger group and took Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden. As He was walking along with them, He became troubled and told them, "... My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Verse 34) He then asked them to stay there and watch and pray while He went further still to pray alone. Luke records that as He agonized in prayer "... his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

**Luke 22:44** Jesus asked His Father to take the cup from Him, if there were any other way, but more than anything else He wanted His Father's will to be done.

Our Lord's struggle in the Garden can be understood only in light of what would happen to Him on the cross. He would be made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and bear the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). It was not the physical suffering that almost overwhelmed Him with "anguish and sorrow," but the contemplation of being forsaken by His Father (Mark 15:34). This was "the cup" that He

would drink (John 18:11). According to Hebrews 5:7-9, He asked to be saved, not “from death,” but out of death; that is, raised from the dead; and the Father granted His request.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus knew what was coming. We have already read that He told His disciples several times His hour had not yet come. The time of His death had now come. He had taken three of His closest disciples with Him. He knew the hour had come and He wanted these three with Him as He prayed. However, three times He returned to find them sleeping. He had told them to be alert and prepared because the time of the betrayer was coming. Yet, they slept.

Like those disciples, we are instructed to be watching and praying, because the time is short. The time in Gethsemane was no time for sleeping. It was a time to be alert and to be praying. The same is true today. We need to be watchful and prayerful, so that we can join God in what He is doing. He is at work. We need to pay attention and be prepared to point people to Jesus.

## **Day 2-- Read Mark 14:43-50**

Immediately after Jesus spoke to Peter, James, and John, after finding them napping for the third time, Judas entered Gethsemane. He was followed by “... a great multitude with swords and clubs,” on behalf of the religious leaders. (Verse 43) Judas had told them he would kiss the man they sought to arrest.

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<sup>8</sup> Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

How do you fight Spiritual warfare? Paul made it clear we are in a real battle which must be fought with weapons which are not of this world. We are not fighting flesh and blood, but principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. It appears that neither Jesus' enemies nor at least one of His disciples understood this. His enemies came in a large mob with clubs and swords. Peter likewise drew a sword and proceeded to cut off the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest. Jesus asked them why they came as a mob. He had been right there in broad daylight with them all week. His arrest and crucifixion was on His time schedule, not theirs. He rebuked Peter for cutting off the servant's ear, telling him that He must drink the cup His Father had given Him (John 18:11). This scene was a difficult one, but it was part of what Jesus had come to accomplish. Difficult? Yes! Yet, it was still part of the divine plan of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fearing for their lives, the disciples ran away and scattered. Jesus had told them this would happen. They deserted Him, leaving Him all alone with just His Father (John 16:32). However, soon the Father would forsake Him, too.

Thus, the journey to the cross had begun. All things were now in place. This is a sad story for a moment, but since we know the outcome, it does not stay sad. It was all part of the journey, a journey that would take Jesus through a mock trial, a beating, the crucifixion, and, ultimately, a victorious resurrection. We should always study His death with the backdrop of the resurrection.

Give thanks to God for His glorious plan to save.

**Day 3-- Read John 10:1-18**

1. **OBSERVATION:** What two metaphors does Jesus use in this passage to refer to Himself? How do they differ?

2. How is our identity as a sheep such a fitting designation? How does it highlight the Shepherd's role towards us?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** What are the three ways that Jesus contrasts the Shepherd and the Thief?

4. In what other ways does Jesus describe the actions of the Shepherd?

5. **APPLICATION:** Where might you apply Christ's treatment of the sheep to your own life?

## Day 4-- Read Mark 14:53-65

There were three parts to the Jewish trial of Jesus. The first was a preliminary hearing before the former High Priest, Annas. Then, the trial moved to the full council of the Sanhedrin to hear witnesses. The final phase was the vote of condemnation. He was then sent to Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate for the Roman trial. Pilate gave into the mob and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

Today's passage covers the second part of the Jewish trial before the High Priest, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin. This group was determined to convict Jesus and to sentence Him to death. They had false witnesses to testify against Him, but their testimonies were not in agreement. The High Priest, Caiaphas, became frustrated with the witnesses and lashed out at Jesus, but Jesus remained silent. The High Priest then asked Jesus a direct question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Verse 61) Jesus gave the answer that condemned Him, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Verse 62) The High Priest tore his clothes and accused Jesus of blasphemy. Tearing of clothes was a sign of grief and sorrow. The religious leaders knew that when Jesus called Himself the Son of Man He was claiming to be the Messiah. They should have known prophetic scriptures, such as Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 8:4. The High Priest believed Jesus to be just a normal man. He looked like a normal man. They all believed Him to be an ordinary, normal man. Now, because of His claim, they needed no more testimony. They had what they needed for their purposes. Jesus claimed to be God which was enough for them to hand Him over to be crucified.



Jesus was innocent of any and all wrongdoing. They knew they had nothing against Him. They could not even get false witnesses to accomplish what they wanted. The accusation of blasphemy was what condemned Him to death. Jesus merely claimed to be who and what He was.

The religious leaders refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah. Many people today also refuse to believe. For some, no proof or sign will ever be enough. Others, though, are hungry to believe. Pray for those who refuse to be drawn to Jesus by God's Spirit.

### **Day 5-- Read Psalm 41**

On Friday each week, we connect the study of the week with an Old Testament prophecy or a psalm. Connecting the Dots and The Dots Connected are all about seeing how God has been involved in history which finds its complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament journey, we saw Jesus on every page in some way. The Lord God is the author of history and the focus of history is Jesus. He is the fulfillment of history and all things and all people will ultimately find meaning in Jesus.

One of the things which keeps coming up is God's control and sovereignty. Since Jesus was God in the flesh, He knew what was going to happen. He knew about Judas' betrayal. In fact, Jesus quoted from a psalm of King David, written when he, too, was being betrayed not only by his friends, but also by his own family. In **John 13:18**, we read Jesus' quote of Psalm 41:9, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." He said this regarding

Judas, His betrayer. Jesus did not use the part of **Psalm 41:9** which reads, “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted.” Jesus knew what was in man, so He knew what Judas would do to betray Him.

Jesus was vulnerable only in that He intentionally placed Himself in the position of vulnerability. He was not subject to any attack of man or the enemy. God was and remains sovereign, completely in control. Jesus knew He was in the hands and will of His Father who sent Him. It is tempting to be sad and have pity on Jesus when considering the events of His arrest, trial, beating, and crucifixion. However, this was the “...joy set before Him” (**Hebrews 12:2**). He was surrendered to His Father’s will. Nothing happened by chance, accident, or coincidence. Every aspect of Jesus birth, life, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection were known and even purposed by God. Nothing took place without His foreknowledge.

Give thanks to God for His sovereignty and His plan to save sinful man---you and me!





## **WEEK 10 PETER DENIES JESUS**

By Chris Watson

If you were told you would deny Jesus, how would you react? Would you be like Peter and deny the possibility, fighting it to the end? Jesus is the One who told Peter he would deny Him. If we heard such a thing from the mouth of Jesus, we would know it was true and then we would have to wrestle with that truth. As believers, we must remember we are human and we do fail God. We may not desire to do so, but we do. Thanks be to God for His grace and love. This week, we will look at the account of Peter denying Jesus, as Jesus prophesied.

### **Day 1-- Read John 18:12-18**

Peter was an all-or-nothing kind of guy. Remember, this is the same man that walked on the water at Jesus' command and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant in an attempt to protect Jesus. When Peter was in, he was all in. And, yet, in today's passage, we see Peter deny Jesus the first of the three times which Jesus predicted he would. Why did Peter deny Jesus? To be honest and to be fair to Peter, he was human, just like you and me. He failed, just as we do. It's important we never put any human on a pedestal, as if he or she could do nothing wrong. This kind of worship is reserved only for Jesus. Peter, in his weakness and fear, denied Jesus.

“To his credit, although all the others had fled (Mark 14:50), Peter still followed Jesus after His arrest, but he kept his distance so as not to be identified with Him (Mark 14:54). There's no question

that fear gripped him. From the courtyard, he watched Jesus being falsely accused, beaten, and insulted (Mark 14:57-66). Peter was afraid Jesus would die, and he was fearful for his own life as well. The world hated Jesus, and Peter found that he was not prepared to face the ridicule and persecution that Jesus was suffering. Earlier, Jesus had warned His disciples as well as us today, ‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first’ (John 16:18; cf. Matthew 24:9). Peter quickly found he wasn’t nearly as bold and courageous as he had proclaimed, and in fear he denied the One who had loved him.”<sup>9</sup>

What Jesus had prophesied was now beginning to unfold, including Peter’s denial of Him. Some have said Peter failed Jesus and while that may be true, Jesus didn’t fail Peter. Although Peter denied Jesus three times total, Jesus never left and Peter came to his senses in time.

Have you ever surprised yourself by something you have done or have said or maybe an attitude you had? Unfortunately, I have. During that time, Jesus never went anywhere and He surely didn’t disown me, praise God. Rather, through the Holy Spirit’s conviction, I recognized my sin and my error and God drew me back to Himself. We live in a fallen world and because we are sinful ourselves, we face sin daily. As Paul tells us, that is not an excuse to sin. Thanks be to God He forgives us. It’s most important when we sin against God to acknowledge our sin, confess it, learn from it, and move on with God. Peter did this and God desires no less from and for us. Whether you find yourself far away from God today or walking in step with His will, thank Him for His

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<sup>9</sup> [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)

forgiveness and for the fact He doesn't give up or quit on us, even when we sin against Him.

## **Day 2-- Read John 18:19-24**

One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control and Jesus definitely showed self-control in our passage today. Actually, He was under the control of the Father, just like we are to be as Christians.

Jesus always spoke truth; this is what He was telling those who asked about His disciples and doctrine. However, the religious leaders didn't like this and one of the officers struck Jesus with his hand. This was only a sign of things to come and how He would be treated as a criminal.

I don't know about you, but my response most likely would not have been the same as that of Jesus. Jesus knew there was something greater at stake than the way He was being treated by those He came to save. He knew He was headed to the cross. He knew the pain and agony He was about to endure. While the religious leaders physically put Jesus on the cross, it was actually His love for you and me that sent Him there. The leaders just played into God's overall plan.

Jesus asked what He did wrong for the officer to strike Him. Praise God that Jesus never fought back; rather, He acted with grace, truth, and love, just as God would have Him to do.

Thank God that Jesus knew the big picture. He knew this situation was just one part leading up to His death for our sins. Jesus had in His heart the mind of God, not the mind of a sinner like me. Thank God that Jesus took the ridicule, mockery, undeserved punishment, and death for us. Take time to thank God that Jesus was not a reactor, but He was an obedient Son to the Father. Take time to



praise the Lord, even when He was being questioned and beaten, He had us in His heart and mind. He thought of sinners like you and me when He was going through this trial.

### **Day 3-- Read Matthew 26:69-75**

1. **OBSERVATION:** Recall Peter's bravado in Matthew 26:33-35. What specifically did he say?

2. If Peter would have responded with humility, what would His response have been?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** How might the events in the Garden of Gethsemane (ch. 26:51-54) impact Peter's denial in verses 69-75?

4. Why does Peter flip flop so quickly in the span of a few hours? What leads to this? Where do you see this same motivation influencing your actions?

5. **APPLICATION:** Why did Peter cry? In what ways are we guilty of the same denial? How does our belief in God's omniscience over all of our actions impact how we see our denials of Him?

## **Day 4-- Read John 18:25-27**

In John's account of Peter's denial of Christ, one of the men who came to arrest Jesus recognized Peter. In fact, he asked Peter, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive garden?" (Verse 26) Peter denied it and said he was not. Peter was not only carrying out what Jesus had prophesied, but he was lying to the servant as well. Cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant could have landed Peter in serious trouble and Peter didn't want trouble, so he lied to the servant in an attempt to protect himself.

We have often told our son, Landon, that he will be in more trouble if he lies to us, even when telling the truth might get him in trouble, too. God tells us we shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set us free (John 8:32). We know from scripture that Truth is a person, the person of Jesus Christ. In this instance, Peter is denying the person of Truth, Jesus, with his lies.

Do you have a difficult time telling the truth? It may not be what we like to call a big lie, but perhaps something small, something we refer to as a white lie or a little lie. Maybe we tell something that's mostly true, either leaving out something or adding untruth to it. Of course, we know that a lie is a lie, is a lie. There is no such thing as a big or little lie; they are all wrong. Yet, at times we seek to justify ourselves and leave out some of the truth or skirt around the truth in some way. Since we know the Truth, the person of Jesus, may we seek to be truthful at all times, knowing He sets us

free. Seek to always be a person of truth. Ask God to help you speak truth in all cases, even when it's difficult.

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 53:7**

We know Isaiah 53 as “The Suffering Servant” passage. Note how this scripture describes what Jesus went through. From what you know and from what you have learned by looking through the gospels, take time to think about each of the following phrases and write down what you think Jesus went through.

How was Jesus oppressed?

How was Jesus afflicted?

What are some ways / times that Jesus did not open His mouth?

When a lamb or sheep has its wool cut off, the sheep doesn't try to get away or fight against the shearing. Rather, it quietly lets the shearer do his work. Our passage today makes the comparison between the sheep and Jesus. Jesus went through such affliction and oppression, and, yet, He did not open His mouth. He endured it for you and for me. He did it because He loved us and He knew the bigger picture, as we noted earlier this week.

Thank Jesus for what He went through for us and how He died and still loves us so much as His children.





# **WEEK 11 THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE CRIMINALS**

By Dennis Watson

The most pivotal time in human history was the crucifixion of Jesus. For many, it was a tragedy, but according to God's plan, it was the greatest triumph of all time. It was a turning point for people. Specifically, it was a turning point for all mankind. Man's greatest predicament was settled, the predicament of sin and death. Personally, the settlement was eternal salvation for some while for others it was eternal damnation. God provided forgiveness, but forgiveness must be received. One criminal received forgiveness and the other rejected it. The Roman centurion we will read about this week received forgiveness, but Judas rejected it even after betraying Jesus. This is a great week for you to make sure you are a recipient of God's forgiveness.

## **Day 1-- Read Luke 23:32-34 and Mark 15:39**

Forgiveness is a powerful word that describes a powerful concept. Jesus came to forgive sins and, in His death on the cross, sins were fully forgiven and removed. There were two criminals crucified along with Jesus. We will look at them more this week. While He was hanging on the cross, He spoke the most remarkable words in the presence of those who chose to be His enemies. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Verse 34) Instead of retaliation, He chose to forgive. You might ask, "What motivated Him to forgive instead of retaliate?" It was the purpose of His Father to forgive sin, not holding it against sinners, which was His motivation. This is why He came. He came to bring

what could not be achieved by human merit, but could be received by faith.

No matter where a person is or at what time it is in their life—early, middle or the very end of life, the forgiveness Jesus came to give is offered to all who believe. Sin forgiven does not necessarily mean forgiveness received. There was a Roman centurion at the foot of the cross and when Jesus died he received the forgiveness offered. When Jesus died, the centurion made his own confession of faith which was all he knew to do at the time. He said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” **Mark 15:39**

Warren Wiersbe says of the centurion:

"I believe that this was the confession of faith of this centurion and this was as far as he could go at this time. He couldn't have said anything that would have revealed his faith more than this. He acknowledged that Jesus is God's Son. He acknowledged who He was and certainly what He was doing. I do not believe that this man had all the details of theology. This man had never read Strong's theology or any of my books, but this man knew enough to take his place beneath the Cross of Christ. And, you know, that is all God has ever asked any sinner to do. He asks us to come in faith to Him. That is what this man is doing. We must remember that he was a pagan Roman, and he had the cruel job of crucifying men. He was certainly made very tender at this time."<sup>10</sup>

Have you received the forgiveness He offers? If so, are you amazed enough at His forgiveness to be giving it to others? Those

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<sup>10</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

who are forgiven much, will forgive much. Give thanks for the wonderful and incredible gift of forgiveness.



## Day 2-- Read Luke 23:35-38

The people came to a crisis of belief. Just a few days earlier, the people lined the roadway to Jerusalem as Jesus passed by crying out, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

**John 12:13** A few weeks before, they had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Now, the crisis of belief has put them in a difficult place. The One they believed to be the deliverer was hanging on the cross and the religious leaders and Roman soldiers were mocking Him. What had happened? Had they been led astray? Had they been taken in by a scam? I believe the people were not sure what to do or what to believe. Their expectations had been shattered.

It was the perfect storm. All things were converging to bring about a disaster. He was their King, Deliverer, and Savior, but here He was nailed to a Roman cross, dying. They saw the sign above His head written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, “This is the King of the Jews.” **Matthew 27:37** Was that an indictment or the truth? It looked like the indictment for which He was hanging on the cross. It was intended to be mockery, but it was the truth. Little did they know that what looked like a tragedy was the greatest victory of all history! It was time for the people to hang on and let God finish. He always gets the last word!

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt all alone, trusting and waiting on the Lord, but in the end, it appeared you were left looking foolish? Well, to many, Jesus looked foolish. The religious leaders mocked Him with words, but He was untouched. He was on a mission. In these cases faith stands, waits, and allows God to finish. He is faithful. What looked like a period at the end of a

sentence at the end of a book was merely a pause—a comma until all had been finished.

Keep your eyes on the Lord. He has the last word. Let Him finish!

### **Day 3-- Read Mark 15:25-32**

**1. OBSERVATION:** Verse 31 starts with the word, “likewise” which alerts us to the continuation of something. What was being continued?

2. How were the onlookers mocking Jesus? What were they challenging Him to do?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** What do you think it means that Jesus was “numbered with the transgressors?”

4. Why do you think Jesus chose not to save Himself/

**5. APPLICATION:** How have you experienced betrayal and/or mocking?

6. How does it comfort you to know Jesus understands your suffering?

7. How can you fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings today?

**8. PRAYER:** Write a short prayer of lament over your own betrayal. Remember to include your hope that your Savior understands your suffering.

#### **Day 4-- Read Luke 23:39-43**

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, one of the thieves mocked Jesus asking Him to get them all off the crosses and save them if He really was God's anointed. Luke called this blasphemy. This word describes railing and mocking. He was not sincere, he was slandering Jesus. Then, the other thief lashed out at the one blaspheming, asking if he feared God at all. He also acknowledged both of them were there because they deserved the punishment for their crimes, but Jesus had done nothing wrong. He said "... But this man has done nothing wrong." (Verse 41B) I believe he was acknowledging the complete holiness of Jesus. He was acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. He then made a request of Jesus, the Messiah, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (Verse 42) Both of the thieves had access to the Savior, but only this one made the appeal for salvation. Jesus told him, "This day you will be with me in paradise." **Luke 23:43**

Here is how Warren Wiersbe speaks about this man's faith:

The one thief imitated the mockery of the religious leaders and asked Jesus to rescue him from the cross, but the other thief had different ideas. He may have reasoned, "If this Man is indeed Christ, and if He has a kingdom, and if He has saved others, then He can meet my greatest need which is salvation from sin. I am not ready to die!" It took courage for this thief to defy the influence of

his friend and the mockery of the crowd, and it took faith for him to trust a dying King! When you consider all that he had to overcome, the faith of this thief is astounding.<sup>11</sup>

Like all of us who have been saved by Jesus, this man was saved totally by grace. He did not deserve it. He had no time to join a church or be baptized. He had no time to do good works or do anything to earn his salvation. Clearly Jesus saved this man totally by grace through his faith.

Salvation is a free gift which must be received. Have you received it? Share the gospel with someone today.

### **Day 5-- Read Psalm 22:17-18**

In the Old Testament, we talked about connecting the dots. As we go through the New Testament, we are seeing the dots connected. Day five each week we look at either a psalm or prophetic book to see how it connects to the gospel and Jesus. All of Psalm 22 is a prophetic look at God's servant Jesus and how He would suffer and die. It is clear that most of the Jewish people knew the Psalms. Do you suppose anyone was aware of these prophecies?

Again, the dots connected enable us to see the fulfillment in what happened to Jesus. As people passed by, they stared at Jesus hanging on the cross. The soldiers divided His upper garment into four pieces and each one took a piece. His inner garment, or tunic, was woven of one piece and they agreed not to divide it, but to cast

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<sup>11</sup> Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

lots (draw straws) for it. The Roman soldiers knew nothing of the scripture they were unknowingly fulfilling. (Verse 18)

In these verses, especially backing up to Verse 16, David was describing something he did not know about. David described crucifixion. However, crucifixion was not a Jewish means of capital punishment and it's unlikely that he ever saw it take place. David the prophetic psalmist saw what would happen to the Messiah centuries later.

I am amazed each time we see God's Word so clearly written so many years in advance. Once again, it is a reminder that He is in the driver's seat.





## **WEEK 12 THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

By Chris Watson

It is natural to mourn a death, especially the death of someone we are very close to. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the mother of Jesus and His disciples? They had seen what had happened to Jesus up to this point and then they watched Him die on the cross. They knew enough to know His death was coming and Jesus told them that it was meant to be. I am certain they had many questions just trying to understand it all. This week, we look at something so painful to read and understand, yet so beautiful because it saved us from our sins.

### **Day 1-- Read Matthew 27:27-31**

The soldiers of the governor along with other Romans soldiers gathered around Jesus. They began to patronize and mock Him. They were mocking Jesus since He claimed to be King of the Jews. They placed a scarlet robe on Him. After they placed the robe and the crown of thorns on Him, they gave Him a staff to mock a scepter which would be carried by a real king. Everything the soldiers and leaders did to Jesus was to mock Him. They didn't believe He was God's Son whom He claimed to be. After they dressed Him like a king they began to mock Him even more, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spit on him, took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they mocked Him, they took off the robe and put His clothes back on Him. (Verse 30b-31a)

Can you imagine the mockery, injustice, and ridicule Jesus went through? If that was the customary punishment for crimes, we



might understand and say that it was justified treatment, but Jesus was holy and righteous, He had never sinned. We are the sinners! We deserve what Jesus went through, but Jesus became our substitute. He is our substitution atonement. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. Our death would have only brought eternal destruction apart from God.

Why would Jesus endure such pain, strife, and ridicule? He did it for you, for me, and for any other person who would call on the name of the Lord for salvation. Everything Jesus did was to glorify God, which would lead to His crucifixion and God being glorified through Christ's obedience.

Revelation 17:14 tells us that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is no other king higher than Jesus; there is no other king that deserves glory and praise. Jesus is worthy to be praised, not just because He died for our sins, but because He is God. He alone is blameless and holy. It was all for God's glory so you and I could be reconciled to God.

We see in Romans 10 we were once enemies with God, but because of what Jesus did, we are now friends of God through Jesus, if we will call on His name. Take time today to thank Jesus for what He did, what He went through leading up to His death. Thank Him that we can now have eternal life, the hope of heaven. We are no longer enemies of God.

Give Thanks!

**Day 2-- Read Matthew 27:32-44**

Today's passage is Matthew's account of the crucifixion. In the gospels, each writer shares a different perspective of the crucifixion. Matthew's account is the only one which mentions Jesus was given wine mixed with gal, something intended to help ease the pain.

Notice in Matthew's account, the mockery and ridicule of Jesus only increase in intensity. "They said you can build the temple in three days, save yourself!" "You save others but you can't save yourself?" They even mocked God saying, "Let God save Him." When I read and study this passage, I find myself getting angry with the way Jesus was treated. But then, I have to realize the reason He was there in the first place was because of my sin. Yes, it was God's will, but it was my sin that put Him there.

Note two things in this passage. Verse 35 talks about casting lots for His clothes and this is prophesied in Psalm 22:18. In Verse 37, we read they placed a sign over His head that read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Little did they know how true those words were. Again, this was just mockery as they didn't believe He was King of the Jews, nor did they want to believe it. They were not the only ones that didn't believe it; neither did the two thieves on either side of Jesus. It was bad enough He was crucified for no reason, let alone having thieves crucified next to Him. The thieves began to join in the mockery with the rest of the people.

Notice the things for which they mocked Jesus. They couldn't find any bad in Him, only good. They mocked Him for claiming to be the Son of God, which He was. They mocked Him for being a King, which He was. They mocked Him for saying He would

destroy and build the temple in three days, which He did. They mocked Him for being the King of the Jews, which He was. They mocked Him for healing and saving people, which He did. The things they mocked Him for were all true, every one of them.

They could truly find no fault in Him. Remember Pilate's words in **Luke 23:14-16** "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him."

No one could find true guilt or wrong in Jesus because there was none. Take time to thank Jesus for being the perfect sacrifice and doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Thank Jesus that though He was ridiculed, He endured it all for our salvation.

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 23:44-49**

- 1. OBSERVATION:** In verses 44 and 45, which word is repeated?
2. Read Exodus 26:31-33, where was the veil placed in the temple?
- 3. INTERPRETATION:** List the sequence of events depicted in these verses. What words would you use to describe this scene?
4. What is the significance of the veil being torn? Read Hebrews 10:11-14 and Hebrews 7:25 for confirmation.

**5. APPLICATION:** Once again we see that God is using the darkest and most disturbing scene in history to work for the good of all believers. What are you experiencing today that feels dark and disturbing? How can you take hope in your own circumstances?

6. Spend some time meditating on Jesus in the throne room of God interceding on your behalf.

**7. PRAYER:** Pour out your heart to Jesus, tell Him what is dark and disturbing in your life. Trust that He listens and He intercedes to the Father for you.

#### **Day 4-- Read Matthew 27:45-56**

“Jesus’ cry, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” found in **Mark 15:34**, has puzzled many. Jesus is actually quoting the opening line of Psalm 22 and using it to express His deep agony on the cross. He is suffering the penalty for our sin, in our place. The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Death includes two dimensions—physical and spiritual. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. Since Jesus was dying for our sin as our substitute, He was experiencing the agony of separation from His Father. It was the agony of hell. There is an unfathomable mystery here. Jesus was both God and man united in one divine Person. He could not suffer and die with respect to His deity, but

He could suffer the agony of separation from the Father and actually die physically with respect to His humanity. And He did, that we might, through repentance from sin and faith in Him as our Savior and Lord, be forgiven of our sin and reconciled with God.”

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Jesus’ question “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Verse 46) makes it evident He was separated from God. He had taken on the sins of the world and was feeling the wrath of God. When we think about this, we see the true love and grace God has given. The fact God punished His only Son, Jesus, for what I deserved is incredible, but God is holy and righteous and this had to be done. Our sin had to be paid for and either we pay the price, which we could not do and we would spend eternity in hell, or Jesus paid it for us so we could have the hope of Heaven and a relationship with God.

This passage helps us to see God takes sin seriously and yet His love overrides our sin. Praise the Lord! As you go throughout your day, take time to thank God for His love. Seek to really focus on the grace that has been given to you and the hope that is now yours.

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 53:5**

Take some time to slowly read Mac Powell’s song below that goes hand in hand with our scripture today.

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<http://billygraham.org/answer/did-god-really-forsake-jesus-when-h-e-was-dying-on-the-cross/>

He was pierced for our transgressions

He was crushed for our sins

The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed

We are healed by Your sacrifice And the life that You gave

We are healed for You paid the price By Your grace we are saved

We are saved

He was pierced for our transgressions

And crushed for our sins

The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed

We are healed by Your sacrifice And the life that You gave

We are healed for You paid the price By Your grace we are saved

We are saved

He was pierced for our transgressions

He was crushed for our sins

The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed And by His wounds, by His wounds

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Think of the ministry Jesus had on this earth. Everything He did, healing, teaching, and dying for our sins was all for God's glory and it brought the opportunity for us to know God through Him. Thank God for His free gift of salvation and the hope we have in Him.







## **WEEK 13 THE RESURRECTION**

By Dennis Watson

The gospel rests upon two great truths: the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. These two events are game changers. His crucifixion is the final punctuation of Jesus becoming a man. The resurrection of Jesus confirms Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus was seen alive after His resurrection by more than 500 people, including His disciples. This week, we look at the resurrection of Jesus. Paul makes it clear that if there is no resurrection, our faith is futile.

### **Day 1-- Read Matthew 27:57-66**

Both Joseph and Nicodemus had become believers in Jesus Christ. In John 19:38, we read that these men participated in taking the body of Jesus and placing in it a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. It is not clear why a wealthy man like Joseph of Arimathea owned a tomb at this location. There is speculation that Jesus made arrangements with him before His death to use the tomb.

It seems the disciples of Jesus had forgotten about Jesus saying He would be resurrected after three days, but His enemies, the religious leaders, remembered. They urged Pilate to secure the tomb of Jesus by using the Roman seal on it. The Roman seal included wax and a cord, and when used, it would be obvious if the tomb was tampered with. They also insisted that guards be placed at the tomb. Why were they so concerned? Did they think the

disciples would come and take His body trying to make people think He had risen from the dead?

This is one of those small details that is often missed. The Lord God allowed an event to confirm Jesus' body had not been taken. The Roman seal was very significant because when Jesus was resurrected, there was no way it could be said that His disciples returned to the tomb and moved His body. This is another case where what man meant for evil, God used for good. Clearly, Jesus was raised from the dead. No one could tamper with His body after the tomb had been sealed and was being guarded by the Roman soldiers.

Our mighty God is a God of details. Here we are two thousand years later with many confirmations Jesus was raised from the dead, just as God had said. Tell someone today that Jesus is alive. He defeated sin, death, and the grave, and He lives in you!

Give praise to the Lord for His amazing plan!

## **Day 2-- Read Matthew 28:1-10**

Matthew tells us these events happened after the Sabbath. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath (Saturday) began at sundown on Friday evening and concluded at sundown on Saturday evening. He also tells us these ladies went to the tomb as the first day of the week was dawning. This would have been early Sunday morning. The ladies were the first to find what had taken place. There was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the opening and was sitting on it. The stone did not need to be rolled away for

Jesus to exit the tomb, but it happened this way so others would see what had taken place and tell others. The tomb was empty! The appearance of the angel was bright and his clothing was white as snow. “The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” (Verse 4)

One of the amazing things about this biblical, historical account is that the women were the first ones to discover the empty tomb and they were the first ones to see that Jesus had been resurrected. The angel told the women to go and tell the disciples. Women, in that culture and on that day, could not testify in court but the Lord used women to first proclaim that Jesus was alive! They announced the good news to the others.

J. Vernon McGee explains the focus of Matthew in his gospel: “Matthew presents Jesus as the King. The features of the resurrection story which contain the element of the spectacular and sensational are given. There is a fanfare of trumpets in the account given in Matthew. He was born a King. He lived as a King. He died a King, and He rose from the dead a King. Matthew tells of the earthquake, of the angel's descent, of the stone rolled away, of the frightened guards, and of the effort by the religious rulers to cover up the fact of the empty tomb.”<sup>13</sup>

On their way to tell the disciples, Jesus met the women and told them to tell the disciples that He would meet them in Galilee.

Tell someone or several people that Jesus is alive! This is what makes our faith alive and vibrant!

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<sup>13</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 24:1-12**

**1. OBSERVATION:** In the Jewish calendar, what day is the first day of the week?

2. I see the word “they repeated many times in these verses, who is the write drawing attention to in the passage (verse 10)?

3. Who met the women at the tomb?

**4. INTERPRETATION:** In Jewish culture, women were not allowed to testify in court. Why do you think Jesus chose women to convey the news of the most important event of our faith?

5. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19, 24 tells us why the resurrection is so important, what reasons does it give?

**6. APPLICATION:** Which of the four things is it hardest for you to believe has been accomplished for you?

**7. PRAYER:** Spend some time marveling and rejoicing in prayer at the resurrection of Jesus..

## Day 4-- Read Matthew 28:11-15

How could the guards not believe after what they had experienced? The answer is pretty clear; they were looking out for their own hides. While believers were rejoicing in the risen Savior, unbelievers were plotting how to stop the good news of the resurrection. The soldiers realized they were in a lot of trouble. For a Roman soldier to fail his duty as a soldier, the punishment was death (see Acts 12:19 and 16:27-28). The soldiers did not go to Pilate or their superior officers. They chose to plot with the Jewish religious leaders. They understood the Jewish religious leaders wanted to cover this up and they would most likely make a lot of money in the process. It was important for the religious leaders to put out this fire. For the soldiers, it would save their hides and pad their wallets.

At this point, I have to ask a question; what makes a person ignore the truth? For the soldiers, what they had seen and experienced was not worth the possible punishment. They had to make a decision based on their value system. They had experienced the earthquake and seen the angel; they had probably even seen the risen Jesus. Their value system led them to ignore the facts and side with the Jewish religious leaders. For a sum of money, they agreed to deny what they had personally seen and experienced. They were instructed to say that while they were sleeping, His disciples came and took His body. In exchange, the Jewish religious leaders gave them money and vouched for them before the governor, making them secure.

This plotting still goes on today. To choose not to believe typically begins with a value system which is driven by self-preservation.

Acknowledging the resurrection of Jesus, as a fact by faith, would require surrendering to Him not only as Savior, but as Lord. Like the guards, many people are not willing to give up their lives. They think there is too much at stake. However, there is more at stake than they realize. Eternal life is at stake and is a high cost to pay to preserve life in the temporal realm.

The guards exchanged the truth for a lie which was a high cost for self preservation.

### **Day 5-- Read Psalm 34:19-20**

Death by crucifixion was a slow, agonizing process. Often the person crucified was not dead before sundown, so their legs were broken, hastening their death because they would suffocate.

According to **John 19:30**, Jesus cried out from the cross and His last three words were “It is finished.” Notice He cried out before the process of breaking the legs took place. Remember, it was God who was in control. In today’s passage, it was prophesied that not one of His bones would be broken. In John 19, it is recorded that the guards broke the legs of the two thieves, but when they went to Jesus and saw He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead one of the guards pierced Jesus’ side with His spear. His hands and feet were also pierced as was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Psalms 34:20 tells us the word guard means to exercise great care over. The Lord God, Jesus’ Father, was able to keep or guard His Son and keep His bones from being broken as was prophesied. The Lord is able to keep our enemies in check. Their own evil deeds will destroy them. Warren Wiersbe often says, “Sin is its own

executioner.” The sinful acts of God’s enemies will come back on them and ultimately crush them. Jesus’ enemies plotted to destroy Him. Not only did it not work, the plot destroyed them.

The entire crucifixion and resurrection was God’s plan from before the creation of the world. To be on this end and see how God connected the dots is an amazing faith producing work. He tells us in **Romans 10:17** that “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Continue to dig into His word, be amazed and let your faith grow.







## **WEEK 14 DOUBTING THOMAS**

By Chris Watson

It has been said, “We all have our doubts.” We doubt if the meteorologist will get it right, we doubt if someone will hold up their end of a bargain, we often doubt things will work out the way we would like them to, and, like Thomas, we may have doubts concerning faith issues. The issue is not about our doubts themselves, but what we do with those doubts. Do we dwell on them or learn and grow from them? Do we take them to the Lord? Thomas, a Christ follower, had doubts that after His crucifixion Jesus was, in fact, alive. In this week’s study, we will see those doubts went away when He saw Jesus face to face.

### **Day 1-- Read Luke 24:13-35**

“The two men walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus were discouraged disciples who had no reason to be discouraged. They had heard the reports of the women that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was alive, but they did not believe them. They had hoped that Jesus would redeem Israel, but their hopes had been shattered. We get the impression that these men were discouraged and disappointed because God did not do what they wanted Him to do. They saw the glory of the kingdom, but they failed to see the suffering.”<sup>14</sup>

How much more evidence did these two need? Witnesses had seen the empty tomb, angels had announced Jesus was alive, and other witnesses had seen Him alive and heard Him speak. The proof was there, yet, these two failed to believe or put any weight on what Jesus had said prior to His death or on what the prophets had written about the Messiah. They saw the glory, but not the suffering. They saw the crown, but not the cross.

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<sup>14</sup> Be Courageous, Warren Wiersbe

Jesus later opened their eyes and they realized Whose presence they were in, though they had failed to understand it earlier. God's Word is 100% true. We can count on it, live by it, trust it, and let it guide us. However, we are not to take mere bits and pieces of His Word, but the whole counsel of Scripture. When we take the whole counsel of Scripture, we can then, through God's leading, see what God has done and is doing (at least, to an extent). However, if we focus only on a portion of the truth, as these two disciples did, we may miss the whole boat. Of course, God is the One who truly opens our eyes and He often uses His Word to do so. Treasure God's Word, ingest the Truth and instruction it gives, and consider all of Scripture. When we do this, God allows us to see the rest of the story.

## **Day 2-- Read John 20:19-23**

What must it have been like to be in that room when Jesus entered? The disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews. Remember, the Jews and religious leaders were the ones who put Jesus to death, though they should have been the ones bowing down and worshipping Him. As the disciples hid in the room, Jesus entered and His first word was "Shalom" which means peace. In essence, He was saying, "Don't be afraid; it is I."

What happened next must have been quite an experience. Jesus showed them His hands and His side, just in case they had any remaining doubts that He was truly Jesus. I imagine this was a lot for the disciples to take in, but there was more to come. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." John 20:21 There, in that closed room, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go out into the world. He then breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. Jesus would soon ascend to Heaven, but He left the Holy Spirit with them. If He had not done so, they would have remained ordinary men. With God's forgiveness and the Holy Spirit inside of

them, they had everything they needed to carry out Jesus' commission.

Jesus then proceeded to say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." John 20:23 This isn't saying that the disciples had the authority per se to forgive sins, but rather it goes along with the end of Verse 21 in which Jesus told them, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Jesus was preparing His disciples for what was to come, including His impending departure. He was giving them His Spirit (just as He has done for us) and the authority (just as He has done for us) to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He didn't ask them, solicit their input, or seek to know in any way whether or not this met with their approval; He simply sent them because they were Christ followers and they desired to share the greatest news ever.

Thanks be to God that He has also given us His Spirit and commissioned us to go into the world, which includes our homes, workplaces, schools, ball fields, and perhaps across the ocean to preach the gospel and to share with others that Jesus can forgive sins so all who believe can have peace with God. Just as the disciples were commissioned to do this, we are commissioned, too. Have you trusted Jesus? If so, you have His Spirit and His command to go and tell. Can you think of someone with whom you can share the gospel this week? How will you use today to be on mission in your home, at your workplace, or at school? This year, what mission trip might you be a part of so you can tell the world about Jesus and what He has done?

**Day 3-- Read John 20:24-29**

**1. OBSERVATION:** We call Thomas the Doubter, but if we look at the word repeated in the passage, what was Thomas' issue?

2. What caused Thomas to finally believe?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** Looking back at Luke 24:11-12, was Thomas much different than the other disciples?

4. How did Jesus handle Thomas' unbelief?

5. How did Thomas respond to Jesus?

**6. APPLICATION:** Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Doubt says, 'I cannot believe,' whereas unbelief says, 'I will not believe unless you give me evidence or meet my demands.'"

7. Where do you struggle with doubt today?

8. Where do you struggle with unbelief today?

**9. PRAYER:** Spend some time today confessing your unbelief to the Lord and bringing your doubts to Him. Be still in His presence and allow the Spirit to remind you how Jesus has shown you Himself to you.

## **Day 4-- Read John 20:30-31**

We know we do not have all the details of Jesus' life and miracles. If we did, we would have many more books. What we do have is exactly what God intended. We have enough to know who Jesus is, and we have enough to know the Truth.

We have the Word of God, as Verse 31 says, so we may believe in Jesus and in doing so have life in His name. In John and the other Gospels, we see Jesus' works, His walk, and His words. As C.S. Lewis proposed, we have a trilemma, a choice between three options. Jesus was a liar, a lunatic (crazy), or Lord. The more we read of God's Word and the more work He does in our lives, we know more certainly He truly is Lord; He is all we have ever needed or will ever need.

The word life is used 36 times in John's Gospel. Jesus offers sinners eternal and abundant life if they place their faith in Him. As we read God's Word, we can know more of Jesus and grow in our belief. In a recent article by Dr. Al Mohler, entitled "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem," he shares that we as believers often don't truly know the Word of God simply because we are not reading it. You are reading God's Word as you are doing today's devotion and for this I am thankful. We need to study God's Word and understand more fully what it says. In his article, Mohler says, "60% of Christians can't name five of the ten commandments, 82% believe the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse, and 12% believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife."

This helps us see how much we need to absorb God's Word. We need to study it day in and day out, learn it, grow in it, and live it out. Again, John said these things are written so, "... you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Verse 31 The more we read and

study and teach others God's Word, the more the Word is proclaimed. God's Word can never be overly read, overly studied or overly proclaimed! Are you truly soaking up God's Word?

## **Day 5-- Read Psalm 80**

Psalm 80 is a prayer for Israel's restoration. The nation of Israel had turned her back on God and was seeking after other things, including false gods. In this psalm, Asaph cried out to God to do what only He can do. Three times Asaph asked God to shine His face on His people. We know that the Son of Man, (Verse 17) Jesus, is the light of the world. This was also a foreshadowing of what God would do to save Israel and anyone else who would call on the name of the Lord.

We are reminded that Israel is God's chosen people and as Gentiles we have been grafted in. Jesus has made the gospel for all people, but from the beginning of time, His chosen people were the people of Israel. We need to pray for Israel. We need to pray for their (the Jews) eyes to be opened and for them to see the Messiah for Who He really is. Many Jews have not been told or allowed to hear the rest of the story and when they do hear it, they are amazed. Take some time to watch this video link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XSBR047MMk> and see how Jews are really beginning to connect God with Jesus/The Messiah.

Jesus is the only One who can restore Israel. Jesus is the only One who can save and restore us. When we call on God's name, we are saved and we know even in our wandering, God loves us and disciplines us as His children. He wants the best for us. Take some time to thank the Lord for saving you. If you have walked away, repent and return to Him. Take some time to pray for those who have walked away or who do not yet know Him.







## **WEEK 15 ANOTHER MIRACULOUS CATCH**

By Dennis Watson

This week, we will look at several significant events, the most significant being the restoration of Peter. Jesus had been crucified, had been raised from the dead, and had appeared to His disciples and to others. He was now showing Himself, once again, to a group of His disciples. It was more than just an appearance. It was an appearance with a particular purpose. The purpose was to restore Peter and prepare him for what would happen on the upcoming day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

### **Day 1-- Read John 21:1-4**

Fishing again? Really? Could it be that Peter was so quickly returning to his former employment, or was it just that fishing was what he knew and the stress pushed him to a point of needing a break? At least he was still in Galilee. Jesus appeared to His disciples after He rose from the dead and told them He would meet them in Galilee. The seven disciples who were fishermen returned to fishing, with Peter leading the way. Peter was the strongest leader of the group. So when he went fishing, the others followed his lead. Always keep in mind that other people are watching you. They will follow you. Where are you leading?

Peter led the way on the fishing trip, but they fished all night and caught nothing, as had happened on another occasion. Jesus stood on the beach as they returned, but they did not recognize Him. There are at least two reasons they did not recognize Him. First of all, they were not looking for Him, they were busy fishing. It seemed natural for them to give up their new work of fishing for men and return to their former fishing occupation. The second reason they did not recognize Him was because His appearance

had probably changed. He had been beaten beyond recognition and His beard plucked out.

There have been times in my life when it seemed nothing was going right and everything was going wrong. I was not looking for Jesus and if He had appeared before me, I probably would not have recognized Him either. Several times in the Bible we read that if a person seeks the Lord, he will find Him, if he seeks Him with all his heart. (Deuteronomy 4:29 and Jeremiah 29:13). For whatever reason, the seven disciples who were fishermen were not looking for Jesus. Instead, it seems they had buried themselves in their work, but even that was not going as planned.

Their whole lives had been turned upside down. Jesus had been crucified and buried. They knew He had risen from the dead, but everything was not adding up for them. They were not able to connect the dots. I am thankful we know the outcome and have the promise of the ultimate outcome. When things seem to be going wrong, remember that God is still in control and is working out His plan. Let Him finish.

## **Day 2-- Read John 21:5-14**

This was a case of been there, done that for the disciples. They did not recognize the man on the shore, but He gave them very familiar instructions that they surely should have recognized from just two years earlier. He called out to them, asking literally, “You didn’t catch any fish did you?” (Verse 5) I don’t think He was inquiring about how the fishing was going. It was more like He was making the statement they had not caught anything. They told Him, “No.” Jesus instructed them, as before, to cast the net again, this time on the right side of the boat, and, as before, there was an abundance of fish caught - 153, to be exact! This time, the net did not tear as in the previous account and they made it to shore with all the fish. John recognized Jesus and said to Peter, "It is the

Lord!" (Verse 7b) Peter, with his characteristic impulsive style, jumped in the water and swam to shore. The others followed in the boat with the fish.

Consider a few things. First, they did not recognize Jesus because they were not looking for or expecting Him. It seems as though they should have been looking out for Him because He had told them He would meet them in Galilee. We should always be expecting Jesus. We should be looking for Him. Secondly, apart from Jesus, we cannot do anything. Jesus told us this in John 15:5. We must abide in Him, and by His power we will be able to accomplish things. He supplies and we must do our part of obedience. Someone told me the other day that God supplies the manna, but we have to go get it. Thirdly, Jesus told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. Would this really make a difference? Jesus often gives us instructions which make no sense to us. However, we are to obey Him and leave the outcome to Him. Too often, followers of Jesus miss out on seeing Him at work because we think what He tells us to do makes no sense. As the old hymn says, "Trust and obey." Just do what He says!

This obedience is an ongoing, eager willingness to obey. This is not a begrudging obedience like a child who obeys because she has to, but an obedience that comes out of trust in God and a desire to see His will and His best carried out. This is a willing and expectant obedience. This eagerness entails wanting to know what to do from the Word of God so we might experience His best.

Be eager to see Jesus, to hear Him, and to obey.

### Day 3-- Read John 21:15-23

This is one of the most comforting passages of scripture to me.

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)

2. Go back and look at Peter's betrayal of Christ found in John 13:36-28 and then John 18:12-27.

3. What parallels do you see between Peter's denial of Christ and between Christ's restoration of Peter?

Write out the parallels between the betrayal and the restoration.

4. If you have extra time you can look at the passages in the synoptic gospels:

Matthew 26:31-35 / Matthew 26:69-75

Mark 14:27-31 / Mark 14:66-72

Luke 22:34 / Luke 22:54-62

5. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? In what ways is the betrayal of Peter like your own betrayal of Christ?

6. Why do you think that all four gospels include the betrayal of Christ narrative? Why is the restoration of Peter in the Gospel of John so critical to our faith?

7. Does Peter have to do anything in this passage to be loved by Christ?

8. Does Peter have to do anything in response to Christ's questions?

9. What does Christ command Peter to do in light of Christ's love and Peter's subsequent affirmation of his love?

10. **APPLICATION:** Why might this passage bring comfort? How does God through Christ specifically bring comfort to you in this passage?

11. What do Christ's commands to Peter have to do with you?

12. What deep truths of the Christian life are at stake in this passage and what do they mean for you?

13. **PRAYER:** Write a short prayer of how you experience God's love and God's enjoyment of you today. Thank God for his tenderness with you and his calling to be one of his sheep.

#### **Day 4-- Read John 21:24-25**

Jesus very graciously restored Peter and prepared him for his coming leadership role which we find recorded in the book of Acts. Jesus told Peter that he would also die by crucifixion. Peter then asked Jesus about John because he wanted to know what would happen to him. Jesus told Peter that was not his business. Peter was to get about following and doing what he had been called to do. This same problem plagues Jesus' followers today. Many people get bogged down looking around to see what is happening with other people. In doing so, we lose our focus. We may need to be reminded of what Jesus asked Peter, "...what is that to you?" (Verse 22) Let's focus on what He has called and commissioned us to do.

John closed his account of the gospel of Jesus Christ by confirming the reliability of his witness. John uses the words witness and testify forty-seven times in his gospel. John had witnessed these events himself and wrote them for us. He tells us in John 21:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."

He tells us he could have included much more, but he had written what the Holy Spirit told him to write. Often in preaching, there is so much more that could be said, but I seek to say only what the Spirit leads me to say and no more. John said that if everything about Jesus and His ministry were written, the world could not hold all the books. It must have been difficult trying to figure out what to put in. What a relief to have the Holy Spirit directing the project.

The gospel of John ends with the account of Jesus, Peter, and John. These two men were transformed by Jesus. They were ready to walk right into the future which would be recounted in the book of Acts. Jesus is still transforming lives today. He has done this for you and for me that we too, might walk into the next adventure of sharing the gospel with a world in need.

## **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 32:1-4**

We have been on this journey now off and on for 8 years. We have been connecting the dots through the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we see the dots connected, but there is another time of anticipating the dots connected as we look forward to the end time events described in both the Old and New Testaments. Today's passage in Isaiah fans the flame of that anticipation. To begin, take a look at one of my favorite passages from the book of Revelation. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the



kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" Revelation 11:15

Today's passage anticipates this. In Isaiah 32:1, we read "a king," while Isaiah 33:17 refers to "the king." A few verses later in Isaiah 33:22, we read "our king." This progression is intentional. Jesus is a King. Ultimately He will be the King. This is pictured in Revelation 11:15. Jesus will come and reign in perfect righteousness. His people will know and understand. His people will be safe and secure. Don't forget the progression in Isaiah 32 and 33. Jesus is not just a king or the King; He must be acknowledged as our King.

Is Jesus your King? He is a king. He is the King. He ultimately will be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Most importantly, He is our King. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord!





## **WEEK 16 THE GREAT COMMISSION**

By Chris Watson

My dad, Dennis Watson, has often said if all God wanted to do was save us, He would have done it and immediately taken us to be with Him. God left us here for a purpose. In our readings this week, we will see a large part of our purpose is to go into all the world and make disciples, not just converts. Going into the whole world includes crossing the street as well as crossing the ocean. As you read this week's devotions, ask this question, "How is God making disciples through me?"

### **Day 1-- Read Matthew 28:16-17**

These eleven men had been with Jesus for almost His entire ministry. They had walked and talked with Him, watched Him heal many, seen Him feed thousands, and a few of them were even with Him at the Transfiguration. In Verse 17, "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted." We know one of those doubting was Thomas, but others also doubted. After years spent with Jesus, hearing His teaching and seeing His work, some still doubted even while they worshiped Him.

Is this not what happens today? Many people who are strong in their faith face doubts. Again, these men had been among the chosen twelve and, yet, some of them doubted. I have doubted God before, have you? I have doubted whether God knew what He was doing and I have doubted if God was really in control. I have doubted if God would be on time and I have doubted whether God even knew what was going on. Deep down, I knew that He did, but I have still struggled with these thoughts at times.

The disciples wanted to fully believe too, yet, they doubted. The important thing here is where do you take your doubt? Do you seek

to have it answered by others or by God? When you doubt, do you search the internet or do you search the Scriptures? Do you ever go back and remember a time when God was faithful, even though you may have doubted His faithfulness at that particular time?

Remember the man who had the son with the evil spirit? He truly believed Jesus could heal his son. Everything else had failed; Jesus was his only hope. He believed. He said so himself, but he followed it up with, “Help my unbelief.” Mark 9:24 Maybe this needs to be our prayer today: “God, I trust You. I believe You. I know You are in control, but in these moments where doubt, sometimes from the enemy, creeps in, please help my unbelief.”

Maybe you can agree with me and say a prayer like this. “God, I know You are faithful. You have been faithful in Scripture and faithful in my life. In fact, I can think of many times where You were faithful and directed or answered me at just the right time. God, as I continue my week, help me to fully believe and follow You. If I begin to doubt or waver in my trust and belief in You, please help my unbelief.”

## **Day 2-- Read Matthew 28:18-20**

The word authority is synonymous with power. We understand from Verse 18 that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. All of Matthew and the Gospels confirm this. There was authority in Jesus’ teaching and He demonstrated His authority in the healing of many. He confirmed His authority as He forgave sins and He displayed His authority over the enemy and death. In His words at the end of Matthew, He delegated this authority to His disciples. It was God’s authority, not theirs, but He was passing it on to them because the task He was giving them could not be done on their own.

Notice, in Verse 19, Jesus didn't say, "Go and make converts." He said, "Go and make disciples." This meant they were to go and make followers of Jesus Christ. Again, we know God does the work, but we are often the channel He chooses to use for that work. We are to make disciples of our families, those on the other side of the world, and everywhere in between.

With this being said, how are you making disciples? Who are you teaching, mentoring, and who are you sharing the Gospel with?

For the most part, making disciples doesn't happen inadvertently or by chance, but rather by intention and out of love for Jesus. How are you disciplining your spouse, your kids, your grandkids, neighbors, and those around the world? How are you leading them to Jesus? Jesus makes disciples, but He uses us in the process.

As you work through this morning's devotion, answer these questions:

- Who am I currently discipling?
- Who would God have me to disciple?
- Who is discipling or mentoring me? If there is no one doing this with you, pray that God would give you someone.
- Logistically, how can I begin discipling others?

### **Day 3-- Read Luke 24:46-49**

**1. OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)

2, What is a witness?

3. What kinds of things should a witness be prepared to talk about?
4. What promises does this passage offer in relation to being witnesses?
5. How does this passage connect Luke's account in the gospel to his account in the outworking of the Gospel in the 1st and 2nd chapter of Acts?

Bonus question: what does the TaNaK mean and how does it relate to verse 44?

**6. INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

7. What is necessary for the words we offer in testimony to be effective according to this passage?

8. Why does it seem that offering our testimony is ineffective to convert people? If you were to write out your testimony, would it say more about you or more about who Christ is?

9. "Witnessing is not something that we do for the Lord; it is something that He does through us, if we are filled with the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between a 'sales talk' and a Spirit-empowered witness. People do not come to Christ at the end of an argument," said Vance Havner. "Simon Peter came to Jesus because Andrew went after him with a testimony. We go forth in

the authority of His name, in the power of His spirit, heralding His gospel of His grace.”<sup>15</sup>

10. Why would God choose to use his children as his instruments to share the gospel with unbelievers when he is responsible for breathing life into them?

11. Where else in scripture do we see the nature of being God’s witnesses?

**12. APPLICATION:** Who is God calling you to share the truth of his Gospel with? Write down that name:

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With this person in mind and taking everything that you know of the scriptures (“The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” and the New Testament too), write out as simply as possible an explanation of who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done, and why it is important.

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<sup>15</sup> Be Courageous, Warren Wiersbe



13. **PRAYER:** Pray that God would strengthen you to be his witness. Ask God to show you who you need to share the promises of God with- that God sent his Son Jesus to suffer the punishment that we deserve and that in him repentance for the forgiveness of sins finds a full and unconditional pardon. Pray specifically for one person you want to share the good news of Jesus with- that the Spirit of God would prepare their heart and mind to hear and receive the good news of the gospel. Pray that God will give you a real opportunity to share the gospel with this person.

#### **Day 4-- Read Genesis 18:17-19**

The Great Commission began when God promised Abraham that he would be a great blessing to all nations. Long before Jesus or Abraham were born, God knew He would send Jesus to die on the cross for every nation. Jesus was in Abraham's lineage. Abraham became a blessing to Israel and to the entire world as he was the far off great grandfather of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

God's plan to save us from our sins was not Plan B because Plan A was wrong. He knew we would sin and choose to disobey Him. Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection was not an afterthought. God knows everything and this was in His plans from the beginning. When He blessed Abraham, this was setting the stage for Israel and for Jesus, the Messiah, to come and die on the cross for the sins of the world.

When Jesus died on the cross, He died for all the sins in the past and for all the sins in the future. He died for the sins of Moses, Elijah, Paul, Peter, me, you, and anyone who came before or who comes after us. Thankfully, Jesus' offer of salvation is to any and all who would receive it. It is for Jews, Muslims, Gentiles, the white, the black, children, adults, or anyone who will call on the name of the Lord.

Take some time today and thank God that He sent His Son Jesus to pay for our sins. Thank God for your salvation and what He has been and is doing in your life right now.

## Day 5-- Read Micah 5:4-5

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, Micah wrote about an elaborate and miraculous plan of the coming Messiah. Notice the beginning of Verse 4, "And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord." God provides for us both physically and spiritually. He feeds us and guides us. Read Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

The Lord is a good God and He gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want. As we know, needs and wants can sometimes be very different. Note, the end of Verse 4 in today's reading, "... and they shall abide." How are we fed spiritually? By abiding in Him. When I think of the word abide, I get a picture of what we do to get ready to send out a letter. After writing the letter, we fold it up and put it inside the envelope. The letter is abiding in the envelope. It is surrounded by the envelope, covered by the envelope; wherever the envelope goes, so does the letter. We should be like this picture of abiding, being in Jesus all the time.





## **WEEK 17 THE ASCENSION**

By Dennis Watson

The book of Acts is the account of the huge transition from the life of Jesus on earth to the spread of the gospel message of Jesus throughout the earth. The small band of followers had grown to 120. They had experienced the ups and downs of faith that all believers experience. Jesus had prepared them and was now about to empower them for the task of taking His message to the world. The followers had to wait for the promised Holy Spirit to come and when He came, the world was changed forever. More importantly, the eternal destiny of billions has been changed! Dig in this week as the gospel message explodes onto the world scene.

### **Day 1-- Read Acts 1:1-5**

Get ready, get set...go! For three years the disciples had been with Jesus. They had seen miraculous things and seen Jesus lead and challenge them. He had been rejected, even by His own. They watched as He was mocked and crucified. After He was raised from the dead, they saw Him on several occasions. They heard His departing words to take the message of the gospel to the whole world and make disciples. He was with the people for forty days after His resurrection. He had gotten His followers as ready as they could be. He told them to wait in Jerusalem until He sent His Holy Spirit to empower them for the task He had given—to go to the world and make disciples. They were ready, but not yet set. The setting was to wait for the power. Ten days later, after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit came. They had been readied, now they

were set. The book of Acts is the go part. They sputtered a bit, but the church was off to a booming start.

Luke had written his first volume to a man named Theophilus and then he wrote a follow up volume to tell him what took place after Jesus was crucified and resurrected. In volume two, also known as Acts, Luke began where the four gospels ended—with the resurrection. Probably one of the best known events of all of history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He demonstrated that He was really alive. He ate with His disciples. He showed Himself, even His scars, to them. He continued to teach them and work miracles in their presence.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of all the biblical historical events. Now that He had resurrected and ascended back to the Father’s side in heaven, He was going to send the Holy Spirit to inhabit and empower His followers, enabling them to complete the task of seeking and saving the lost. When Jesus gives us a task, He gives the means to accomplish that task. In this case, the means was His Holy Spirit. They waited in obedience. Now, as Paul Harvey would say, we see “the rest of the story.”

We are blessed to be the recipients of the work of waiting and surrendering on the part of that little band of followers. Let us be equally obedient so future generations will likewise be blessed by our waiting and surrendering.

**Day 2-- Read Acts 1:6-8**

Luke recorded the disciples had gathered with Jesus and asked Him a question before He ascended to heaven. The question is ageless and unchanging—“When?” When will You restore the kingdom? This was the question about the summit of Jesus’ ministry. They wanted to know whether He would now restore the kingdom of Israel. They wanted the political upheaval which would defeat Roman rule and exalt Israel’s rule and kingdom. They were guilty of small thinking. Like us, they wanted Jesus to fix their little corner of the world. Many times, for purely selfish reasons, I have wanted Jesus to come and take the church out of the world and establish His kingdom. This is small-minded thinking. Jesus came for something much larger and far-reaching than that. He gave them a short answer which said, in my own words, “That is not for you to know. but soon you will be given power to get with the task of being my witnesses to the whole world.” He was seeking to lead them beyond small-minded, selfish thinking to others-thinking and kingdom focus.

I have to confess, I am often guilty of small-minded, selfish thinking. I want Jesus to come and get me out of this crazy world. I want Him to come and establish His eternal, righteous reign. In thinking this way, excuse my language, it is as if we are saying, “To hell with everyone else, come take care of me.” The longing is there. I long for His appearance. However, we must all remember that God is patient, “Not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9

Jesus shaped a vision in the minds of His disciples. A vision of the whole world, starting right where they were in Jerusalem, becoming disciples of Jesus. He had to transform their



small-minded thinking into a vision far beyond themselves and their own little piece of real estate.

This is what we need. We need a vision of all people having an opportunity to come to know Jesus personally and to become His disciple-followers. Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp the fact that a disciple of His was a disciple-maker.

Think about it—you are, as His disciple, a disciple-maker.

### **Day 3-- Read Acts 1:9-11**

**1. OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)

2. Cross Reference this passage with John 16:7. Why does Jesus say he must ascend into heaven?

3. What is Jesus doing in heaven? Look at Hebrews 4:14-16 and Romans 8:34.

4. What do the angels tell the disciples?

**5. INTERPRETATION:** What emotions do you think the disciples were feeling as they watched Jesus be hoisted into heaven? How would you feel if you were in their position?

6. Why was it necessary for the angels to tell Christ's followers to stop looking into heaven?

7. How does the disciples desire to know if Christ will now restore the kingdom to Israel (v 6) relate to today's passage in v11?

8. What will it mean for Christ to return?

9. What emotions does it stir in you to anticipate Christ's return?

10. Why might Christ's return be terrifying for some?

**11. APPLICATION:** "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." 2 Timothy 4:8

Do you long for His appearing?

What do you long for most in Christ's return?

**12. PRAYER:** How can you long for Christ's return and yet live in promise day to day? Ask God to let you rest in Him but also let your heart ache and long for the return of His son. Give voice to your emotions and feelings regarding the anticipation of the return of Christ and share these with God. Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide your walk on Earth that you would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord bearing fruit in good works and increasing in knowledge of the Lord [Col 1:10].

**Day 4-- Read Acts 1:12-14**

It was the Sabbath when the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Since it was the Sabbath, they were allowed

to travel less than a mile in distance, so it was a short trip. Jerusalem was crowded with people coming for the celebration of Pentecost. The people were staying in or around Jerusalem. Jesus had given them His plan—stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes and then you will be empowered and equipped to be witnesses in the whole world. It was time to move forward. The events of the past were in the past. There had been Peter’s failure and Judas’ betrayal and death. Jesus’ brothers had not believed He was the Messiah, but after the resurrection they believed. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there along with other women and the eleven remaining disciples.

Oftentimes, we get stuck in the past due to hurt or a failure and it does not seem possible to move forward. Jesus had taught and prepared His disciples for the next phase of His ministry in the world. There is, for all of us, a need to move forward. In order to do this, we must abstain from clinging to the past—the failures, successes, hurt, accomplishments, and disappointments. Now is the time to move forward. When is the now in which we are to move forward? Every day! This group had a task. It was a task they could not do alone, so the Lord sent His Spirit to empower and equip them.

The next step for them was to pray and wait. They gathered together in an upstairs room. It was the eleven remaining disciples, the women, Jesus’ mother Mary, and His brothers. There were 120 people gathered, united in prayer, and waiting for the promise He had given—His Holy Spirit. They probably felt powerless, but were anticipating the coming power which must have contributed to the unity and humility of their prayers. They were waiting on

Him to send the power. I heard someone say they were waiting on Him to empower. Now, He is waiting on us to obey in the mission.

Let's pray that we will get about the task He has prepared and equipped us for. May He not be waiting on us to obey!

### **Day 5-- Read Zechariah 12:10-11**

The Lord has dealt very graciously with you and me. Are you aware of that? I am assuming, if you are reading this, at some point in your life, the Holy Spirit of God convicted you of your sin and convinced you that you needed a Savior. However, these passages today are dealing with God's chosen people, the Jews. He is speaking of the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In addition to us, the Jews will be the objects of the outpouring of the divine "... Spirit of grace and supplication." (Verse 10) The Lord God through His grace will enable them to look on Him, "... whom they pierced." (Verse 10) They will be broken and convicted of their sin and will mourn and grieve. In other words, they will recognize Jesus as the Messiah of God, their Savior, and many will turn to Him.

In his gospel, John wrote of the soldiers piercing Jesus' side. The passage in John 19:37 quotes Zechariah 12:10, connecting the event of the soldiers piercing Jesus' side to the prophecy of Zechariah. Although the people crucified Jesus, God poured out His grace on them. This outpouring makes people aware of who Jesus is and their need for Him, leading to a change of heart and a crying out for mercy.

For all who come to believe in the reality of Jesus, they mourn His crucifixion and the brutal treatment He received. We do mourn, but we also rejoice as we turn to God and cry out for mercy which is how all people who come to Him arrive at salvation. The gospel is all about the good news that Jesus was crucified, pierced, and put to death to bring forgiveness of sin.

Jesus was put on the cross because of sin—the sin of all people. We were not there when He was crucified, but He died because of our sin too, not just for the sins of the ones who were there and did the actual deed in the historical setting. It was as though we were there participating as well.

Give thanks to the Lord God for the salvation He offers to all through the death of Jesus Christ.







## **WEEK 18 PENTECOST**

By Chris Watson

We are helpless and hopeless without the Spirit of God; we are absolutely dependent on the Lord to move. Many believers and churches try to carry out God's work on their own and often wonder why they feel like they are spinning their wheels. Only the Spirit can do the work in our lives and in the lives of others. As you read through the devotions this week, ask whether you are depending on yourself or on the Holy Spirit.

### **Day 1-- Read Acts 1:15-26**

Psalm 41:9 and Psalm 55 are clear prophecies concerning Judas. In Acts 1:16 and Acts 1:20, when Peter stood up to address the crowd, they knew who he was talking about. He also gave a little more information concerning Judas and his betrayal that led up to Matthias taking Judas' spot. How did they choose Matthias?

“It will be observed that the brethren did not themselves select Matthias; but, having first appointed two persons between whom the choice should be made, they prayed the Lord to show which one he had chosen, and then cast lots, understanding that the one upon whom the lot fell was the Lord's choice. The reason that they did not make the selection themselves was evidently because they thought proper that the Lord, who had chosen Judas, should also choose his successor. If it be inquired why, then, they ventured to confine the Lord's choice to these two, the most plausible answer is that suggested by Dr. Alexander, that, after careful examination of the parties present, they were the only two who possessed the

qualifications named by Peter. Whether the selection of these two was made by the body of disciples, or by the apostles alone, it is unimportant to determine. The case does not, as many have supposed, furnish a precedent on the subject of popular election of church officers; for the selection of the two persons between whom an election was to be made, was not the election itself; and when the election took place, it was made by the Lord, and not by the disciples or the apostles. One of them cast or drew the lots, but the Lord determined on whom the lot should fall.”<sup>16</sup>

The disciples did not carry out this process alone; they sought the Lord. They realized they did not want to get this wrong and they needed God’s direction. In what do you need God’s direction? Are you trying to make a decision on your own? How do you make decisions? Do you first make a choice and ask the Lord to bless it, or pray about it and ask God to guide your steps? The latter is obviously what God wants. In making any choice, seek God’s counsel, ask what He desires and what His plans are. After all, He knows best.

## **Day 2-- Read Acts 2:1-6**

“Pentecost means ‘fiftieth’ because this feast was held fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:15-22). The calendar of Jewish feasts in Leviticus 23 is an outline of the work of Jesus Christ. Passover pictures His death as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7), and the Feast of Firstfruits pictures His resurrection

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<sup>16</sup> A Commentary on Acts of Apostles, with a Revised Version of the Text

from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Fifty days after Firstfruits is the Feast of Pentecost, which pictures the formation of the church. At Pentecost, the Jews celebrated the giving of the Law, but Christians celebrate it because of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church. Now, if Pentecost was fifty days later—seven weeks plus one day—then Pentecost also took place on the first day of the week. Christians assemble and worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, because on that day our Lord arose from the dead, but it was also the day on which the Holy Spirit was given to the church.”<sup>17</sup>

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. God was obviously at work in the Old Testament and up until this time in history, but at this particular point, the Holy Spirit was poured out. The Holy Spirit’s coming meant that God’s Spirit now dwelt among followers of Jesus; it would not be temporary (John 14:16-17). The Spirit could not have arrived earlier, as it was essential that Jesus first come into the world, die, be buried, rise again, and ascend before this took place.

In Verse 4 we read, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Anything which happened after this, if they were indeed yielding to the Holy Spirit, was because of the Spirit’s work, not due to that of the people. Today, we often try to make things happen, draw attention to ourselves, see what we can do, and try to get the glory for it, but God won’t share His glory. When God works and speaks, it’s always for His glory, never for any glory of our own. Could it be, sometimes, while we desire to be under the control of the Holy

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<sup>17</sup> Warren Wiersbe, BE Series

Spirit, we are also seeking glory or have a sense of pride in ourselves, quenching the Holy Spirit?

Ask God today to rid you of yourself and fill you completely with Him so only He will shine through. Just imagine if it could be said of your family, workplace, and church, that they were filled with the Holy Spirit. What would happen if everyone yielded themselves to the Spirit? Just think how God could use those who are not only filled but yielded to His Spirit.

### **Day 3-- Read Numbers 28: 26-31**

Today, we return to the Old Testament to look at Jesus. God gave the people specific instructions through Moses for making offerings and sacrifices.

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What is the day of firstfruits?
3. Why was it called Pentecost at the time of Christ?
4. **INTERPRETATION:** Numbers 28:31 tells us the offerings were to be without blemish. How does this point to Jesus?
5. How is Jesus work completed?

6. In this passage Moses institutes the day of firstfruits and a series of sacrifices to cover the sins of the people. Why was there no need to offer sacrifices on the day of Pentecost in the New Testament in the book of Acts?

7. **APPLICATION:** Consider Hebrews 10 and the value and permanency of Christ's sacrifice. How does this lead you to praise God? Take your thoughts and emotions to the Lord in the Prayer section.

8. **PRAYER:** Have you ever taken the time to simply express your love and thanks to God for the gift of salvation? This is not thanking God for His blessings, making requests, or praying for someone else, but taking the time just to be thankful for your salvation through His death on the cross! Use this space below to write out a prayer to the Lord for His salvation that was made possible through Jesus.

Now think and pray through how you can live your life based on your thankfulness today for what Jesus has done for you!

#### **Day 4-- Read Acts 2:7-12**

Warren Wiersbe writes that the believers were praising God, not preaching the Gospel and that they used known languages not an unknown tongue (Acts 2:6, 8). Luke named fifteen different geographical locations and clearly stated that the citizens of those places heard Peter and the others declare God's wonderful works in languages they could understand. The Greek word translated language in Acts 2:6 and tongue in Acts 2:8 to *dialektos* and refers to a language or dialect of some country or district (Acts 21:40; 22:2;

26:14). Unless we are instructed otherwise in Scripture, we must assume that when speaking in tongues is mentioned elsewhere in Acts or in 1 Corinthians, it refers to an identical experience: believers praising God in the Spirit in languages that are known.

Why did God do this? Pentecost was a reversal of the judgment at the Tower of Babel when God confused man's language (Gen. 11:1-9). God's judgment at Babel scattered the people, but God's blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit. At Babel, the people were unable to understand each other, but at Pentecost, men heard God's praises and understood what was said. The Tower of Babel was a scheme designed to praise men and make a name for men, but Pentecost brought praise to God. The building of Babel was an act of rebellion, but Pentecost was a ministry of humble submission to God. What a contrast!

Another reason for this gift of tongues was to let the people know the Gospel was for the whole world. God wants to speak to every person in his or her own language and give the saving message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The emphasis in the Book of Acts is on worldwide evangelization, "... unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8 "The Spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions," said Henry Martyn, "and the nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we must become."

Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit and realize our true dependency on Him. Are you drawing nearer to God daily? Spread the gospel to your family, your friends, and your co-workers, we all need Jesus.

## Day 5-- Read Ezekiel 36:24-28

This prophecy was fulfilled mainly in the restoration from Babylon, but will ultimately be fulfilled in the restoration from all other countries. Remember, Israel is God's chosen people. Ezekiel 36:27 of today's passages says "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." While this passage mainly is spoken to and about Israel, it also applies to us as believers.

Verse 25 talks about the cleansing. Jesus died for our sins on the cross. We were cleansed or forgiven for our sins when we put our faith in Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice. Verse 26 reminds us that when we put our faith in Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit and a new heart. Think about this for a minute. We give Jesus our sin and ourselves and, in exchange, He gives us new hearts and His Spirit. What an exchange! As we read in Verse 27, God gives us His Spirit so we can walk with Him and obey Him.

If you have ever heard someone tune a guitar, you have heard them try and get just the right sound to come out for each chord. The reason for this is when a song is played it sounds complete and together. Each chord is tuned differently, but they are all in tune so when played correctly together, beautiful music comes out. We need to be so in tune with the Holy Spirit that when God speaks and works in us, His music comes out and does what only He can do. Are you in tune with the Holy Spirit? Does God need to do some major or minor tuning in you? Though it may be painful at the time, it is worth it. Remember, He wants to grow and use you for His glory.







## **WEEK 19 PETER & THE PROPHET JOEL**

By Dennis Watson

Jesus had been diligent to prepare Peter for what He had in mind for him at the inception of His church. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached the first gospel message and 3,000 were saved. He spoke of Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in Jesus. This is an exciting transition continuing as the Holy Spirit comes upon the people and the church is empowered for the mission. What an exciting week of Scripture!

### **Day 1-- Read Acts 2:13-20**

Peter had been personally prepared for this day by Jesus. Peter had made the great confession of Jesus as The Christ. Right after this confession, he sought to correct Jesus when He spoke of His death and resurrection. Peter had denied Jesus just before the crucifixion. Jesus went to great lengths to restore Peter after a great and miraculous catch of fish following the resurrection. Peter was prepared for this. The Holy Spirit had come upon the small band of followers and Peter was filled with the Spirit. In response to the accusation that the people were drunk because of all of the excitement, Peter began to preach and tell what had just taken place. He did this by referring to two Old Testament prophecies.

The first prophecy Peter used was from Joel 2:28-32. It is the clearest passage in the Old Testament which deals with the promise of the Holy Spirit. In the Hebrew Bible, these verses make up a separate chapter. In this passage, the promise of the Holy Spirit is followed by end-time prophecy. The entire prophecy of Joel was

not fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, but the prophecy in Joel did include that which they had just seen happen—the coming of the Holy Spirit. It was the start to Joel’s prophecy being fulfilled and the rest will happen at the very end of history as we know it.

Peter was led by the Spirit to see in the prophecy an application to the church. He is saying the Spirit Joel wrote about was with them that day. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was given to only a few select people, but now He was given it to many. These 120 Jews, both men and women, received the very same Spirit who had empowered Moses, David, and the prophets. A new day had come. Something totally new was upon them. This was the beginning of the last days, the beginning of the church, empowered by God’s Holy Spirit. Pentecost began what Joel had described. However, the prophecies of Joel quoted in Acts 2:19-20 were not yet fulfilled. They had only begun.

Almighty God had finished the work of redemption and salvation. Now the work of taking the message of redemption and salvation to the whole world had begun. He provided the redemption, salvation, and, now, the power.

Thank God for His empowering Holy Spirit!

## **Day 2-- Read Acts 2:21**

Peter explained this was the beginning. We now know, with the advantage of hindsight, this was the beginning of Jesus’ body—the Church. The Church was birthed into existence by the power of God and the empowerment of His Spirit. Peter connected the event

on the Day of Pentecost with the prophecy of Joel, but then, he gave us a new word, also from Joel, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Verse 21) Is this an oversimplification? Peter quoted from Joel 2:32. Paul quoted the same verse from Joel in Romans 10:13. I don’t think it is an oversimplification; rather, it is the gospel simply stated. The thief called on Jesus. Jesus told him he would be with Him in paradise that very day. Peter cried out to Jesus and Jesus saved Peter from drowning.

Some are concerned about easy believism. Is it easy? Yes! Some are concerned about cheapening the gospel message. The gospel is not cheap. The gospel is extravagant! It was bought and paid for by the blood of the only begotten Son of God. It cost Him everything. It costs us nothing. As the old hymn says, “Jesus paid it all.”

This is the extravagant love of God with no strings attached. Not exactly how we do things, is it? Simply put, any and all who call on the wonderful name of the Lord revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ will be saved! Have you called on Him? If not, why not cry out to Jesus for salvation right now?

### **Day 3-- Read Acts 2:22-24**

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. Outline the arguments of this passage as you would a Sunday sermon.

3. Peter gives two points in his sermon for why Jesus was delivered up to death. What are they:

I.

II.

4. Peter tells us the result of the sacrifice of Christ in verse 24, what is this result?

5. **INTERPRETATION:** The one overarching reason for the death of Jesus on the cross was "... the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." (Verse 23) That settles it all. It was not man's decision at all, but God's decision from before time began. God knew it all beforehand. He not only knew it, but He purposed it. The word foreknowledge is the word "prognósis" from which we get our word prognosis. God knew the sinful condition of man, so He determined from before time to treat the sin. The condition of man was sinful and God's prognosis was to send Jesus to deal with it through His death.

6. Are there any problems with this idea of God purposing to send his son to the cross? Why is this necessary?

7. If you have extra time you may want to explore the implications of the Covenant of Redemption. A good starting place is R.C.

Sprouls article at Ligonier entitled: “What Is the Covenant of Redemption?” found here:

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-covenant-redemption>

In this article he lists 8 promises offered by theologian Charles Hodge that the Father gave the Son in their pact from eternity. Consider the implication of these 8 promises on the life of a believer and how we have access to the blessings of the Father through Christ.

8. How is man responsible for sending Christ to the cross? Who is it that falsely put Jesus on the cross? Do we bear responsibility for Christ’s sacrifice?

9. The other reason for Christ’s death was sinful man. The problem was sin and that sin, by God’s design, put Jesus on the cross. So, who was guilty of putting Him on the cross? Peter says, “Him you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” (Verse 23) The you was the Jewish religious leaders. The you was the Roman authorities. The you was the Roman soldiers. The you was you and me. All sinners put Jesus on the cross. It was as if we were there participating in the shouts to crucify Him. It was as though we were there shouting obscenities at Him. It was as if we were there gambling for His clothes. It was as though we were there driving the nails in His hands and feet and piercing His side. Guilty! When man was at his worst, God accomplished our best.

10. What is our response at discovering that you and I are just as guilty as the men and women of Israel for delivering Christ up to be sacrificed?

**11. APPLICATION:** I can't wait until next week to read the next section of Peter's sermon. If our hearts are cut to the quick as the people of Peter's day were, what must we do?

Remember this simple response to the brokenness of sin, practice it in order repair the broken relationships around you, teach it to you children or to the person you are discipling:

RB 


Repent, Believe, Love


What do you need to **Repent** of today?

How do you need to **Believe** in the promises of forgiveness offered by Christ?

How will you **Love** based upon the forgiveness you have been given?

**11. PRAYER:**

Practice **RB**  with God right now in your prayer. Pray each aspect laying your sins before him, resting in the assurance of his

forgiveness and loving as you have been loved. Ask God to show you who you can share **RB**  with this week starting today.

#### **Day 4-- Read Acts 2:25-32**

In his sermon, Peter used at least two Old Testament prophecies as his text. We have already looked at the passage in Joel 2. Now, we see Peter also quoted from David in Psalm 16. This is a passage we may not have fully understood unless Peter gave this commentary in his sermon. Acts 2:24 closes with Peter saying God raised Jesus up because it was not possible He could be held by death. Then, considering his Jewish listeners, he once again delved back into their scriptures, quoting from David in Psalms.

As Peter preached, he was directed by the Holy Spirit who had just come upon the believers. He had come because Jesus had promised that He would come and teach and remind them of Truth. Peter, who was full of the Holy Spirit, was prompted by the Spirit to use Psalm 16. Peter could probably point to Mount Zion from where he was standing. Mount Zion was where David had been buried, so he could direct their attention to David's Psalm which spoke of the resurrection and that David died and was still buried there. So, it was obvious that David was not referring to himself in Psalm 16. Peter said David was talking about Jesus and His resurrection. Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in regard to his Jewish listeners, told them in no uncertain terms that David was speaking prophetically of Jesus. Peter asserted this was what had taken place and this was what allowed the people to be empowered by the Spirit. This Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried, had been raised up by the power of God. It was an event prophesied by



their own scriptures. He was confirming it had been prophesied. Now, we have seen it, too.

The first sermon preached in the church age was an Easter sermon. The resurrection is what our faith is all about! For there to have been a resurrection, there had to be a death. Give thanks for His death and the fact that He is alive. We serve a risen Savior!

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 49:7-13**

We read yesterday in Psalm 16 that David wrote about Jesus and His resurrection. He used the name Holy One and Peter then applied that to Jesus. The name Holy One is used in 29 different verses in the book of Isaiah. We now know we could insert Jesus' name each time this name is used. Jesus is the Holy One. On the last day of each week, we look at one of the Old Testament Prophets or a Psalm to see Jesus. Today, we see that Isaiah spoke of Jesus, the Holy One who saves.

In today's passage, Jesus, the Holy One, would once again be rejected, but we also see He would be the basis of salvation. He helps, preserves, and restores the earth. For Israel, He provided their heritage. He sets prisoners free. He causes those in darkness to be brought into the light. Hunger and thirst will be eliminated. These words should make us think of Psalm 23, in which the shepherd is shown to guide his sheep by springs of water. In all of this, there is to be celebration and worship.

As gentiles, we have been grafted into God's kingdom. This inestimable blessing should cause us to rejoice and celebrate. According to this and other passages in the Bible, He is not

finished with Israel. They will come to Him and surrender to Him and there will be great worship. Jesus, the Holy One, will be confirmed to them as their true Savior. There is much to enjoy now and to anticipate as God finishes what He has started.

Keep your eyes open. Enjoy the unfolding of what the Holy One is doing and going to do.





## **WEEK 20 NEW BELIEVERS**

By Chris Watson

The early church often saw many believers, sometimes thousands, come and place their faith in Jesus. It wasn't anything any human was doing; rather, God was speaking through them as they were sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I want to be so in tune with the Spirit that God uses me often to share the gospel. Whether they believe or trust in Jesus is up to God, but I want to be an instrument which is used by Him. What about you?

### **Day 1-- Read Acts 2:36-39**

Peter had just delivered a very heartfelt, powerful, and convicting sermon. He came to the end of the sermon and said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." (Verse 36) We get the picture they were intently listening to Peter's sermon, hanging on every word. The more he preached, the stronger the conviction grew in the hearts of his listeners. He delivered the final blow when he told them they crucified the Christ, the Lord of all. Can you imagine what went through their minds when they heard this? I am sure it took time to really penetrate, but they understood it enough they were distraught. Scripture tells us they were cut to the heart. They asked what they could do because they realized they put Jesus on the cross. They all understood their sin had caused His death and they wanted to know what they needed to do to make it right.

Peter responded to them with the same invitation which has been given to us; we are to share this invitation with others. When

anyone realizes they have sinned against God and their sin separates them from God (God cannot look on sin), they realize something must be done about it. One must repent, which is to turn from their sin to God, believing He died for their sins, putting their hope in Him. Peter went on to tell them, "Be baptized." Some say you must be baptized to be saved; however, taking the whole context of scripture, this is not what Peter was saying at all. Warren Wiersbe says, "It is unfortunate that the translation of Acts 2:38 in the King James Version suggests that people must be baptized in order to be saved, because this is not what the Bible teaches. The Greek word eis (which is translated "for" in the phrase "for the remission of sins") can mean "on account of" or "on the basis of." John the Baptist baptized on the basis that people had repented of their sins (Matthew 3:11). Acts 2:38 should not be used to teach salvation by baptism. If baptism is essential for salvation, it seems strange that Peter said nothing about baptism in his other sermons (Acts 3:12- 26; 5:29-32; 10:34-43). In fact, the people in the home of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before they were baptized! (Acts 10:44-48) Since believers are commanded to be baptized, it is important that we have a clean conscience by obeying (1 Peter 3:21), but we must not think that baptism is a part of salvation. If so, then nobody in Hebrews 11 was saved because none of them was ever baptized."

In order to be saved I must repent and believe, exactly what Peter taught. If I have repented and believed then I will be obedient and follow the Lord in baptism. What about you? Have you repented and believed? If not, why not today? Call on the Lord to save you from your sins. If you have been saved, have you been baptized? If not, confess your disobedience and take care of the baptism as

soon as possible. Thank the Lord for His grace and love. Although we put Jesus on the cross, He is able and will save us. This is incredible grace and love.

## **Day 2-- Read Acts 2:40-41**

Do you remember there were about 120 people who waited for the promised Holy Spirit? However, after the Holy Spirit came and Peter preached, 3000 people were saved and followed Jesus. Jesus told His disciples “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” John 14:12

Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit and, obviously, at Peter’s sermon, the Holy Spirit was moving. It wasn’t Peter or his sermon that saved anyone or drew people to Jesus, but God used Peter and His sermon to draw people to salvation. Peter and the others could only be used by God because the Holy Spirit allowed it. Peter and the others were vessels or willing followers of Jesus that God used to carry out the work of the Holy Spirit. Just think, because of Peter’s obedience and the Holy Spirit working, 3000 were saved that one day.

How might the Holy Spirit want to work through you? Again, God desires to do great things in and through us for His glory, most importantly to see lost people become followers of Jesus Christ (John 14:12). The Holy Spirit wants and desires to work through us just like He did Peter; we must be willing and available. You probably won’t ever preach to a crowd of over 3,000 people, but that’s not the point. Rather, who can you influence right now? Who

can you share the love of God with at your home, work, school and ball field? Who needs to hear the gospel? Who needs to hear the truth? The good news is that God does the drawing and the work, while He uses us to share the gospel. Who will you show Jesus to and who will you share the gospel with today?



## Day 3-- Read Acts 2:42-45

1. **OBSERVATION:** I have left the devotional section in today's observation section so that you can spend your time considering the interpretation, application and prayer sections.

2. The verses we read today and tomorrow are a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Reread Verse 42. Note it says they continued steadfastly (continually) in:

The apostle's doctrine – This is the doctrine given by Jesus, the truth of the gospel. It was understood that salvation was by God alone, that only God was to be glorified, and that the gospel was to be spread to others.

Fellowship – This creates the picture that believers loved to be with other believers; they enjoyed the fellowship of each other, but especially the oneness they shared in their belief and need of Jesus. This conveys what we see in Verse 45, their fellowship included meeting each other's needs. This is a vital practice of the local church.

Breaking of bread – Warren Wiersbe tells us this probably refers both to regular meals and enjoying the Lord's Supper with each other, as they were reminded of His provision and direction.

Prayers – Prayer is conversation with God that involves both speaking and listening. As believers, we need to pray individually, but also pray corporately with God's people. Who are

you praying for? Who is praying for you? How might God want to begin a passion for prayer in you?

Our passage today ends with the words, "...as anyone had need." (Verse 45) In other words, the Church sought to meet the needs of others. This is just one of the reasons we need a church body. We all have needs, some which can only be met by God, and yet, God also uses His Church to meet needs. Consider how can God use you to meet the needs of others as we go into the next sections of the devotional?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** How is the context of our culture the same or different than that of 1st century Jerusalem?


4. How does this church set a pattern for the practices of every church?

5. To what degree, or in what ways should Young Meadows emulate this body of believers?

6. In what ways does Young Meadows need to be different from this early church?

This passage provides a beautiful picture of a change in individual hearts and in the community. After the people repented from their sins, what kinds of changes does this passage denote characterized their lives?

What other passages in the scriptures describe the changes that occur in the life of a believer when they have repented and believed in Christ as the only means by which they are saved?

**7. APPLICATION:** Last week we looked at the application of RB  . If you have repented of the sin in your life, what changes have you observed in your life?

Fill in the blank. Before repentance, my life was characterized by \_\_\_\_\_, but now I see that God is transforming me and it is characterized by\_\_\_\_\_.

What do you do if when you were filling in that blank you thought of a sin that you are still struggling with? How can you confess even that sin? How can you rest in the forgiveness of Christ for even that sin? Is there someone that you trust that you could share that struggle with?

This passage of Acts describes a group of believers who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is growing and is flourishing in their service to one another.

What would flourishing look like for you?

How has God called you to serve others and how would this contribute to the flourishing of the church?

**8. PRAYER:** Thank God for his Spirit which is doing the work to change you. Thank God for the provision of his church. Pray for the flourishing of the church. Pray for God's Spirit to be active in you and in the church. Pray specifically for the things that you identified in the application section. Pray that the church would be characterized by love for one another.

#### **Day 4-- Read Acts 2:46-47**

This passage is a great picture of the New Testament Church. They shared together, laughed together, ate together, shared the Lord's Supper together, and Scripture tells us they did it with both gladness and simplicity of heart. This passage also tells us they were not doing it because they had to or because someone was forcing them to do so, it was what they wanted to do. Christ's love compelled them.

In addition, they were constantly praising God because of what He had done for them. The Scripture tells us they had favor with all people. The culmination of all of this was the Lord was constantly adding to the number of those being saved. Note that salvation and the Church working together and loving God only happened because of what God was doing; the people were simply surrendering to Him.

This is truly a beautiful picture. This was God's Church loving on each other, meeting the needs of others, all while seeing other people come to know Jesus. Others began to see the changes in those who followed Jesus and we can be sure they were sharing the reason for these changes and because of this, people were coming to know Jesus. The love they had was showing in action and the people were sharing the message with those who didn't know Jesus.

What about us? Is this what our church looks like? Are we breaking bread together, meeting each other's needs, and doing so with gladness of heart? I think at times we are. The other question is, are we seeing people being added daily to God's Kingdom? Is our life exemplifying Christ and are we using our words to share the gospel with those which are lost? Imagine what God might do through our actions and our words, if we spoke His name at all times. How does God want to use us as vessels to proclaim His love and truth so many will be added daily to God's Kingdom?

### **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 35:4-7**

This week, we have been reading of the Holy Spirit coming on the people leading to the beginning of the New Testament Church. Isn't it exciting to think that something so powerful which began over 2,000 years ago continues today? Not only that it continues today, but you and I are a part of this miracle known as the Church. Jesus' Spirit did some incredible things in the beginning of the Church and, praise the Lord, He still does such things today.

Our passage today, points to a time in the future where Jesus will return again. It tells us God will come and save us. God has already saved us through Jesus' death and resurrection, but we will eventually spend eternity with the Lord in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21). One day there will be no more pain and no more sorrow. There will be no more struggles and no more difficulties. God will take care of all of this and we will spend eternity with Him. It's hard to imagine what that would be like because it will be so different than what we experience now. Just think, there will be no need for hospitals, policemen, lawyers, or preachers.

Take some time today to thank God for what He has already done in your life and what He will do in the future. Thank Him for what the future holds, especially eternity with Him. As you pray through this, ask the Lord to show you who needs Him, so they can join Him in eternity. Someone shared with you, who do you need to share with?







## **WEEK 21 THE LAME BEGGAR WALKS**

By Dennis Watson

The emphasis in the passages this week is the name of the Lord Jesus. It is through the power of His name the lame man is made to walk. It is His name that is the power behind the message Peter preaches after the lame man is healed. When Peter, John, and the lame man were taken into custody, they were questioned by what name they had done this. Then, they were told by those in authority not to speak anymore in His name. Remember, the name of Jesus is the name that is above every name!

### **Day 1– Read Acts 3:1-8**

The fledgling church was off to a booming start. The Holy Spirit had come and the people were empowered. Peter preached and thousands came to salvation through Jesus Christ. Now the first occasion of persecution was about to come. Peter and John continued, as did all the early believers, to go to the temple. Remember, at this point, all of the new believers were Jewish. As they came to one of the gates of the temple area they encountered a man who had been lame and unable to walk since birth. He appealed to them for alms. In those days, people in his condition could do nothing but beg for alms. As Peter and John approached the man, he anticipated that they would give him some money. Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have but what I do, I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Acts 3:6 The man was immediately healed. He was not only walking, he

was leaping and praising God. There was no keeping him down or quiet.

A new breakthrough! A door swung open. This was not simply the case of a man that was healed. It set the stage for another message by Peter. There are two things for us to consider today. First, the wonderful and powerful name of Jesus. The song expresses it, “There is strength in the name of the Lord. There is power in the name of the Lord. There is hope in the name of the Lord.” What a wonderful reminder. We see it here right at the beginning of the church.

Secondly, there is the testimony that opens doors. This opened the door not only to tell about Jesus, it also precipitated the first persecution for the church. We will see over the next few days that Peter was given a platform to tell how this miracle of healing came to be. Afterwards, Peter, John and the man who was healed were taken into custody and brought before the authorities.

Today, we have platforms brought to us by God working in our lives and in the lives of others. Are you taking advantage of these to tell people about Jesus? Tell people what He has done in your life and use it as an occasion to tell of His might and power.

## **Day 2– Read Acts 3:9-16**

The people saw a changed man. They saw him walking around and praising God. What they saw was a walking billboard pointing to Jesus. This is the way it is when you are experiencing the life changing power of true salvation. They remembered this was the

man who had been begging alms at the Beautiful Gate. They were amazed at the transformation. The changed life set the stage for a moment to proclaim the gospel message. A crowd gathered at Solomon's porch to see what was going on. When Peter saw all of the people, he took full advantage of the moment and began to preach to the crowd.

Peter's message was twofold. The first part was an explanation regarding the healed man and the second was an exhortation to repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. Today, we will look at Peter's explanation.

Peter did a quick review of who Jesus was. He connected Jesus to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He said although Jesus had been sent to them by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they had rejected Him and set a murderer free and chose to have Jesus crucified. He said this because his audience was Jewish. He addressed them as men of Israel. Then, he told them it was by faith in the name of this man, Jesus, that the crippled man had been healed and made strong.

Healing comes through the name of Jesus. His name is power. Luke spoke of the name of Jesus at least 33 times in the book of Acts. In Bible times, a person's name represented him and his character. His name is above every name. Peter introduces those listeners to something new about the man, Jesus, who they had crucified. His name has power over what plagues people—sickness, disease, death, and hell.

It was not just that Jesus healed the crippled man, Luke tells us even the faith for the healing came through Jesus. Jesus is a

miracle. Keep in mind that faith, too, is a miracle which comes from God through Jesus Christ. Rejoice in the healing Jesus has brought to you. Rejoice also in the gift of faith.

### **Day 3– Read Acts 3:17-26**

1. **OBSERVATION:** Who is the audience that Peter is speaking to?

2. What does Peter say are the three benefits of repentance?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** How had the people and the rulers “acted in ignorance”?

4. How had the audience missed that Jesus was the prophet God had promised to send in Deuteronomy 18:15?

5. **APPLICATION:** Where are we ignorant of Christ’s work?

6. What is keeping us from enjoying the benefits of repentance?

## **Day 4– Read Acts 4:1-22**

Peter preached the message and obviously many were convinced. On that day, 5,000 men believed the word. However, while they preached, the Jewish religious leaders came up and had the three of them, Peter, John, and the man who had been healed, taken into custody. The religious leaders were upset about their preaching the resurrection of the dead in Jesus. They did not make a charge against them, but asked them about the authority they had to do this healing and preaching. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly and confidently told them it was by the authority of the name of Jesus they healed this man. He goes on to tell them that Jesus, whom they crucified, was the stone the builders rejected. Again, Peter is connecting Jesus to their scriptural roots. He tells them Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Then he drives home a very significant biblical truth in Acts 4:12, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” It was true then and it is true now. It was not politically correct then, nor is it now. Peter and John were not concerned with political correctness, nor should we be.

The religious leaders were surprised by the boldness of Peter and all that he knew. It was obvious these men had been with Jesus. They were in a quandary as to what to do with the three men. They could not deny a great miracle had taken place, they simply told them to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and John told them they had to keep preaching because they had a greater responsibility to God than to mere men.

What a great lesson for us. Peter and John were not disrespectful. They gave their answer as to what they had done and the miracle

that had taken place. They did not demand their rights. They just gave the answer. They respectfully and truthfully presented the truth about what had taken place and about Jesus. We need to do the same. Don't cry out about your rights. Just present the truth kindly and respectfully and leave the rest in the hands of the Lord. There are times when obedience to God will leave us in conflict with governing authorities.

Pray and be prepared as we move forward in a nation that is less and less sympathetic to the things of God.

### **Day 5– Read Psalm 49:7-15**

It does not matter how much wealth of the world you have; you cannot pay enough to eliminate your sin and guilt. This Psalm tells us that sin debt cannot be paid off by any amount of wealth or by any man. There is no way to get salvation by any human means. You cannot buy it with wealth, you cannot trade anything for it and you cannot earn it by good works. In the passage today, the words redeem and ransom are used. Redeem means to buy back or make an exchange. Ransom means to pay the penalty. No human being can pay to redeem someone from the enemy and there is no amount a person can pay to discharge the penalty or fine for sin. The only redeeming and the only ransom has to be accomplished by someone who is worthy. The only one worthy is one who lived a perfect sinless life. Since all men born of man are sinful, none of us can accomplish this. So, we will all see the pit or die. All people are hopeless.

However, there was One who was sinless. He was not born of man. Jesus is the only One. He was born of the seed of the woman conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born like all people, except His conception was miraculous. He was not born with Adam's sin heritage. He was perfect. He never sinned. He, alone, was worthy.

Paul tells us Jesus gave His life as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). In Acts 4:12, we read there is no other name by which we must be saved. God paid the ransom to redeem all people. It is through the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, that we can be redeemed and ransomed—saved.

Rejoice that our hope is found only in Jesus Christ!







## **WEEK 22 ANANIAS & SAPPHIRA**

By Chris Watson

I never want to quench the Spirit, meaning I never want to get in the way of what God wants to do. This week, we encounter a husband and wife who lied to the Lord. When given a chance to make it right, or at least confess, one of them stuck to the story and God did what He needed to do. As you read through these devotions, make it your prayer to be in tune with the Holy Spirit and not a Spirit quencher.

### **Day 1– Read Acts 4:32-37**

Over the years, I have often heard, “I don’t know what I would do without my church family.” I echo that sentiment. Some don’t understand this feeling, either because they are not part of a church body or because they have never experienced or gone through something difficult and truly felt the love of God’s church around them. Many have and they realize the importance of their church family. Paul admonishes us to keep meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). Others in Scripture also remind us that we are to love each other and be there for each other.

Today’s passage reminds us again of the importance of the church. Those in the New Testament church didn’t see their possessions as belonging to them alone, but to God first and then to others. The New Testament church didn’t follow a socialist model; rather, we see that everyone did their part so when needs arose they were met. Sometimes, many in the church are too prideful or wonder what people will think if they go to someone about their needs, whether

they are physical, mental, spiritual, or financial. However, if we don't express our needs to others, those needs might not be met. We must be vulnerable enough to share our needs and to accept guidance, help, and instruction.

Luke tells us they were meeting each other's needs. (Acts 4:25) We all know our needs and our wants are often very different. The people in the early church were not living lavishly or in some way which was out of the will of God. Instead, they sought to meet the real needs of each other.

How might God want you to meet the needs of others? Do you know someone who has a financial need? Would God have you provide for that need? Do you know of someone who has a spiritual need? Would God have you pray for that person and perhaps even offer godly counsel, through His direction? Does someone need help moving or with something else at their house for which you have a particular ability to provide? Ask God to show you how He would have you help your brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **Day 2– Read Acts 5:1-6**

Matthew Henry says it best, “The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was, that they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, when they were not true disciples. Hypocrites may deny themselves, may forego their worldly advantage in one instance, with a prospect of finding their account in something else. They were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and his providence. They thought they might serve both God and

mammon. They thought to deceive the apostles. The Spirit of God in Peter discerned the principle of unbelief reigning in the heart of Ananias. But whatever Satan might suggest, he could not have filled the heart of Ananias with this wickedness had he not been consenting. The falsehood was an attempt to deceive the Spirit of truth, who so manifestly spoke and acted by the apostles. The crime of Ananias was not his retaining part of the price of the land; he might have kept it all, had he pleased; but his endeavoring to impose upon the apostles with an awful lie, from a desire to make a vain show, joined with covetousness. But if we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall put a fatal cheat upon our own souls. How sad to see those relations who should quicken one another to that which is good, hardening one another in that which is evil! And this punishment was in reality mercy to vast numbers. It would cause strict self-examination, prayer, and dread of hypocrisy, covetousness, and vain-glory, and it should still do so. It would prevent the increase of false professors. Let us learn hence how hateful falsehood is to the God of truth, and not only shun a direct lie, but all advantages from the use of doubtful expressions, and double meaning in our speech.”

The sin these two committed was they had lied, not just to Peter, but more specifically to the Holy Spirit. Instead of keeping it all or even letting Peter and the others know they were keeping some, they lied and said they were giving the entire sum to the apostles. We may or may not be able to fool others with our actions. We may put up a good front, look all spiritual, and seem to have all the answers. However, God knows. God knows our hearts, He knows whether we are His children, and He knows if we are seeking to put on a front or trying to truly walk step-in-step with Him.

Are you living rightly before the Lord? If not, you may be able to fool your spouse, kids, parents, classmates, and peers, but you won't fool God. Is there something you need to get right before the Lord even now? If so, spend some time with Him doing so. And whether you have anything to confess or not, ask God to always help you live in tune with the Holy Spirit.

### **Day 3– Read Acts 5:7-11**

1. **OBSERVATION:** Why did Ananias and Sapphira lie?
  
2. Verse 11 tells us that great fear came upon the church. Of what were they afraid?
  
3. **INTERPRETATION:** In verse 8, why does Peter ask Sapphira a question to which he knows the answer?
  
4. Why did God kill Ananias and Sapphira?
  
5. **APPLICATION:** How does this passage affect the way I view my sin?
  
6. In what ways do I say I believe while my actions indicate unbelief?

## **Day 4– Read Acts 5:12-16**

Notice in Verse 13, “... yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.” It has been debated on who the rest were, but from what I see in reading and studying the rest were those who were not quite sure about Jesus. They were interested, questioning, and even fearful as to what had just happened to Ananias and Sapphira. These may have included some of the fringe folks, even some of the leaders and such.

Many were being added to the number of those saved, many were being physically healed, and those who were under the control of unclean spirits were being healed as well. The healing was just as it was in the gospels; it was not only for the sake of healing, but for God to be made known and for people to call on Him for salvation. We read in Luke 17, about ten lepers being healed. Scripture says only one of them came back to thank Jesus; only he seemed to give glory to God. Jesus told him, “Arise, go your way, your faith has made you well” Luke 17:19. In the Greek, it’s translated, “your faith has saved you.” In essence, all ten were healed, but only one was given eternal life! Why is this? Because the Samaritan leper put his trust in God, he recognized who God was and not only came back to give thanks, but put his faith in Him, as well. The others received only the physical healing, but this one leper received both physical and spiritual healing.

Again, Jesus healed people and allowed the disciples to do so, not only for physical healing, but so they would put their trust in Jesus for salvation, the spiritual healing. Often, when God works in your life or does something totally incredible, it’s not just for you, but

for others to see and give God the glory. The healing may even cause others to begin asking about your God. How has God worked in your life? How is He working now? You might never know, but it's probably true that non-believers are watching your life, seeing what you do, and, hopefully, seeing God work. Use this as an opportunity to grow in Jesus and to share with others, believers and nonbelievers alike, what God is doing.

### **Day 5– Read Isaiah 56:7**

In Matthew 21:13, Jesus quoted today's verse from Isaiah. Many were doing things in the temple which should not have been done, including cheating people out of their money. Jesus, in His righteous anger, told them His house (temple) would not be a den of robbers, but rather a house of prayer.

Today, we are God's temple; Jesus lives in us and He is with us everywhere we go. If I am God's temple, then how I take care of the temple physically, spiritually, and mentally is important. If Jesus resides in me, I want to honor His dwelling place. When I think of this, it is quite convicting. One of the biggest needs we have as believers is communication with God; this goes right along with taking care of the temple. We know this as prayer and our scripture today reminds us that we are to be a people of prayer.

What does your prayer life look like? Is it up and down like a roller coaster? We have all been there. Is it nonexistent? Many have been there, too. Or is it in tune with Jesus? Prayer is not intended to change God, but through prayer, God changes us. Prayer enables our hearts to beat as one with His heart, our minds to be



transformed by His mind, and our worries and cares of the world to be put on Him. At times we may treat prayer with complacency or wonder whether it makes any difference. Perhaps the only prayer we have to offer is the one we prayed when we asked Jesus to come into our heart. Prayer is not meant to be drudgery, burdensome, or something we have to do, but something we need and want to do. There are times when I don't have the desire to pray, but those are the times I need to be on my knees the most. Once I begin praying, God changes me.

I am currently reading *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney. He shares how to take the things you read in God's word and turn them into prayers for yourself and others. I would highly encourage you to read it. The intent, though, is for us to pray without ceasing, as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. As a child I wondered how this was possible; as an adult, I now wonder how it's not possible.

I need God to change me, work in my heart, and guide me. Prayer does this. How is your prayer life? What are you believing God for? Who are you praying for? Who are you praying to be saved? Are you praying for your spirit to be in tune with His? Spend some focused time today seeking God in prayer.





## **WEEK 23 THE DEATH OF STEPHEN**

By Dennis Watson

Jesus told His disciples they would be persecuted, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” John 15:20 The new church had needs which required a new group to be formed—deacons. The deacons were selected for the purpose of serving the needs of the widows in the church who were being neglected. The disciples did not want to be distracted from the word of God, so they had the people select seven men to take on this role. One of these first deacons was Stephen. This week we look at the ministry and the martyrdom of Stephen. Persecution breaks out and leads to the church surging beyond Jerusalem.

### **Day 1– Read Acts 6:8-15**

Stephen was more than a deacon. He worked miracles, he was full of faith and power, and he became a lightning rod among the first believers. Through his life and actions, persecution broke out against the church with historical ramifications.

There are some really strong contrasts here regarding Stephen and his accusers. The first contrast I see is Stephen was honest, upright, and filled with the Spirit and others around him were false witnesses. These false witnesses took Stephen’s words and twisted them to make it appear he was saying something he was not saying. The second contrast I see is how viciously his accusers attacked him while finding it difficult to resist the wisdom and Spirit with which he spoke. The third contrast is that while his accusers were red-faced and angry, they “... saw his face as the

face of an angel.” (Verse 15) Stephen was calm and confident because of Whom he represented.

Stephen’s demeanor is an example for us. He was not acting calm. He did not adopt the appearance of an angel. These grew from within him as the Holy Spirit guided him. He was an ambassador of Christ. He was not there on his own account, but he was there to represent the truth of Jesus Christ. As we abide in Christ and He abides in us, we do not have to defend ourselves or become agitated at those who go on the attack against us. It is not us they are attacking. Stephen’s attackers were not really attacking him, they were attacking the message of Jesus. The same is true today. When you feel attacked because of your faith or your stance on the truth of the Bible, don’t argue or fight back. Present the truth. Say what you believe and, like Stephen, explain why you believe it. Then, leave the outcome to the Lord God.

Give thanks when you, like Stephen, are given a platform to present the truth of Jesus Christ!

## **Day 2– Read Acts 7:1-50**

Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin which was the highest Jewish council in the first century. The council had seventy-one members and was presided over by the high priest. Stephen was likely brought before them because the council was angry that many priests had also come to believe the gospel. Chapter 7 opens with a short question from the High Priest, probably Caiaphas. He asked whether the accusations against Stephen were true. Stephen then launched into a history lesson, most of which would have been familiar to all on the council. They

had accused him of speaking against the Law. The religious leaders saw this as a threat to their faith and the starting of a new religion, but Stephen reviewed their history and connected Jesus to their heritage.

He linked the promise which was given to Abraham to Jesus. The promise to Abraham was all of the people of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants would be more than the sand on the seashore and stars in the heavens. Stephen was saying that Jesus did not start a new religion, but that Jesus was the link from Abraham to the complete fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. Jesus was for the Jewish faith the true sacrificial lamb. He was the hope, not only of Israel, but for all people. He did not inaugurate something new, but brought to completion what was prophesied in the Law and by the prophets.

Not only did Stephen make the connection to Abraham and the other patriarchs but also to Moses. Stephen said Jesus was the One Moses spoke of when he said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren, Him you shall hear.”  
Acts 7:37

Stephen traced the tabernacle and the temple in their history, but reminded them their God did not dwell in buildings made by hands. He was letting them know Jesus was the living tabernacle of God.

I would like to think if I had been a Jew living then I would have been able to connect the dots and realize God had done all of this and Jesus was the focus of all of the events Stephen spoke about. I

am concerned I may have been so caught up in religion, just like they were, that I might have missed Jesus, too.

Give thanks we were born when we were and we have the continued witness, not only of the Old Testament, but also the gospels and the remainder of the New Testament writings. He has made His full counsel known to us.

### **Day 3– Read Acts 7:51-60**

**1. OBSERVATION:** Like Jesus in Luke 11: 47-51, of what does Stephen accuse his listeners that causes them to become enraged?

**2.** Who or what does Stephen see and how do his accusers respond?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** According to verse 55, Stephen saw Jesus “standing at the right hand of God” instead of the usual references of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Why do you think Stephen sees Him standing?

**4.** Why does the passage say that Stephen “fell asleep” ESV?

**5. APPLICATION:** How do we respond when confronted with our sin? Do we become defensive and lash out at the messenger? Or do we respond in worship to Christ who paid the penalty and bore our shame?

#### **Day 4– Read Acts 8:1-8**

In case you have not noticed, we are seeing a rapid pace of gospel expansion in this passage. In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave the geographical mandate. They were in Jerusalem and they were to start presenting the gospel right there they were. Then, they were to go to Judea and Samaria. This week, we see the gospel make a leap beyond Jerusalem to Samaria.

Chapter 7 closed with two very significant young men. One was Stephen, who was put to death. It was his death which brought persecution that catapulted the gospel out of Jerusalem. The other young man, of whom we only saw a glimpse in Chapter 7, was Saul. All that is written about him in Chapter 7 is that the people who were stoning Stephen had placed their coats at his feet. What do you suppose Stephen saw as he looked up into heaven and cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit, and do not charge them with this sin.” Acts 7:59 Then he died. This must have had an impact on Saul. Chapter 8 opens with Saul giving approval to Stephen’s death. He was more than a coat rack.

Afterward, Saul took a much more active role in the persecution of Christians, going into their homes to arrest them and send them to prison. This resulted in believers fleeing the area for safety. As they fled, they took the gospel message with them. The gospel has



always spread and thrived under persecution. I don't think it is God's will for His people to be persecuted, but He did tell us it would happen. When it does happen, the gospel grows and spreads. This was no exception.

In the outward move from Jerusalem, we read that Phillip went down to Samaria and preached the gospel of Christ. The gospel spread, people were healed, and lives were transformed. Where Christ was preached there was great joy.

Just as Jesus said, they became witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and very soon the gospel would be taken to the whole world. Are you bearing witness to what Jesus has done in your life? Spread the word—the gospel!

### **Day 5– Read Isaiah 24:10-16**

In the translation you are reading, Isaiah 24:16, may be written, “Glory to the righteous!” This is translated, “Glory to the righteous one” in the NIV. The actual context makes the righteous one more preferable. In Isaiah 24:10-16, two different groups of people are pictured. There are those who are willfully, sinfully rejecting the things of the Lord. They fill themselves with too much wine and waste their lives on things contrary to the Lord. The other group of people gives praise and worship to the One mentioned in Verse 16 as the righteous (one). This group is often referred to in Scripture as the remnant. The remnant is a people who remain faithful to God and worship Him, even in a world which totally rejects God and despises Him. This remnant sings a song of glory and worship to the righteous one.

In our passage this week, Stephen called Jesus the Just One (Acts 7:52). This could also be translated the Righteous One. Stephen connected Jesus to the passage in Isaiah by calling Him the Righteous One. Stephen was saying the Righteous One in Isaiah who was to be worshipped was Jesus. Jesus would be worshipped, but the Sanhedrin and their forefathers had rejected Him. Stephen connected the dots for the Sanhedrin, but they were not willing to accept the truth. It was at this point they became enraged and had Stephen stoned to death.

Stephen represents for us the manner and disposition of the remnant. He was one who stood on the truth of who Jesus was. He connected the dots for himself and sought to help others do the same. We, too, are part of the believing remnant. Although we are not Jewish, we stand firm proclaiming Jesus to all people so they may also know the truth.

Stand firm, no matter what is happening, and make Jesus known.





# **WEEK 24 SAUL IS KNOCKED TO THE GROUND**

By Chris Watson

Praise the Lord God can change anyone. No one is too far gone for Him to save. If He can change a man who killed Christians into one of the greatest missionaries of all time, He can change anyone. God is into doing the impossible. As you read these devotions, what are you believing God for that only He can do? Who are you praying for? If you think God could never save them, remember our account this week.

## **Day 1– Read Acts 8:26-40**

The Gospel will be proclaimed. Prior to today's passage and toward the beginning of Chapter 8, Saul was persecuting Christians and throwing them in jail. Christians dispersed all over proclaiming Jesus' name as they went on their way. In Bible times and up until today, the persecution of God's Church and His people has not hindered the gospel, but rather has helped in its spread.

In our passage today, Philip was visited by an angel of the Lord and told to go toward the desert. He didn't ask questions, he just went. He didn't request further instructions, and he didn't ask why or for how long, he just went. Can't we all learn from this? When the Holy Spirit asks us to do something, we should not play 20 questions, but take the step as He has instructed us. Philip obeyed at once.

The Spirit of the Lord continued speaking to Philip and he listened all the way until he met the eunuch and began to explain to him

what he was reading from Isaiah 53. The eunuch clearly said he didn't understand what he was reading. He asked, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Philip began to share with him what he was reading, sharing the gospel, and the eunuch responded to Jesus and was baptized. The eunuch declared, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:37 The eunuch knew of God and knew something of his place before God. By saying he believed and understood the relationship between Jesus and God, he was essentially calling on Jesus' name for salvation. Back then, the respect for God was incredible, but one of the things many struggled with was whether Jesus was really God's Son, the Messiah. When God showed the eunuch this, he knew he needed Jesus and trusted Him and was baptized.

Philip was a willing vessel and he was used by God at each step of obedience and, in the end, God used him to proclaim His name. This is incredible, because of Philip's obedience and God's plan, the eunuch followed Christ. God simply desires us to be obedient where we are and follow Him, speaking the truth and the gospel wherever we are. How are you sharing the truth where God has you now?

## **Day 2– Read Acts 9:1-9**

Saul was not just some average guy. His father and mother were both native Jews and he called himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He was of the tribe of Benjamin which adhered to Judah. He was very educated in the things of God.

Warren Wiersbe writes “When you look at Saul on the road you see a very zealous man who actually thought that he was doing God a service by persecuting the church. Had you stopped him and asked for his reasons, he might have said something like this: ‘Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified no- body is the promised Messiah? According to our law, anybody who is hung on a tree is cursed (Deut. 21:23). Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. But their power comes from Satan, not God. This is a dangerous sect, and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our Jewish faith.’”

Saul was spiritually blind and did not understand all the Old Testament taught about the Messiah. He stumbled over the cross and depended on his own good works. When Saul met God that day, the Lord revealed to him what others had tried to show him. He learned Jesus was the Messiah. In light of this, Saul realized his sin was against God and God totally changed him.

Saul had just encountered the holy and righteous God. Can you imagine what the Damascus road experience must have been like for him? What would the next three days have been like for him, to be blind and totally dependent on others? I am sure he and the Lord had some serious conversations during that time. The Lord had ample time to speak to him, as he could not see and did not eat or drink.

There is so much which can be taken away from this account. No one is too far gone from the Lord's grasp. Have you been praying for a lost spouse, child, friend, co-worker, or other family member?

Don't stop. Remember, Saul was coordinating the jailing and killing of Christians before his conversion, so God can save anyone. Not only can God save anyone, but He can also use anyone He so chooses. No matter your past, it doesn't define you. While there are consequences for our choices, God can still use us, as He did with Saul/Paul.

As you wrap up today's devotions, pray for those which are lost and those you may feel are too far gone. Pray for them to have a Saul-like experience and for God to wake them up. Pray that God would also wake up believers and send revival in our lives and in our church.

### **Day 3– Read Acts 9:10-22**

**1. OBSERVATION:** What does God tell Ananias to do?

**2.** How does Ananias respond to God's request?

**3. INTERPRETATION:** How is Saul changed by his encounter with Jesus?



4. How is Ananias changed by his encounter with Saul?

**5. APPLICATION:** How has Jesus changed your life? Take time today to reflect on how your life looked before Jesus and how He has changed you and thank Him for His sanctifying work.

6. How may God be calling you now to step out in faith in ministering to someone that you have seen as an adversary?

#### **Day 4– Read Acts 9:23-31**

Much of the American Church today teaches to trust Jesus, give Him your life, and your life will go well: as though life for a Christian is a bed of roses. In fact, it's often the total opposite. Teaching like this, which is contrary to reality, is the reason some people walk away from the faith. They are not disciplined or taught that being a Christ follower doesn't mean you will escape trouble or difficulties, it means you actually will have them (John 16:33). However, as you go through them, you have the strength of Jesus, Who has overcome the world. Knowing Him and having His peace

and the life after this one beats any struggle or difficulty we will face in this life.

Not long after Saul's conversion, he was running for his life because many of the religious leaders didn't want to believe the truth. Notice what Luke writes in Verse 31 of today's passage. He tells us Paul was running for his life, people were questioning the disciples, and yet the gospel was.....SPREADING! Bible history, church history, closed-country history, and our own history tell us the gospel often spreads fastest in the midst of adversity. Not only does the gospel spread, but often the sheep and goats are separated during such times. I believe we see this happening today. It is no longer culturally popular or really acceptable to be a believer, so some believers are taking a back seat, dropping out, or turning their eyes from Jesus. It could be they were never a believer in the first place. When adversity and difficulty comes, true believers turn to God and then to God's Church. Those who turn away often never truly believed what they professed to believe.

Have you faced troubles lately? Remember James' words from James 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

As believers we will face tough times. Our faith will be tested. While it is not the case yet, we may one day have to run for our lives as followers of Jesus. Even so, nothing beats knowing Jesus. Praise God for Paul's (Saul's) words, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any

other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 Thank God today that He is in control. Though you may be facing difficulties and struggles, He is still sovereign and Lord over all.

### **Day 5– Read Psalm 130**

“A watchman patrolling the wall of a city at night would be glad to see morning come, for dawn meant that his work was finished and he could go home and rest. Without a clock to tell the time, a watchman looked in the sky for the morning star rising on the horizon. The morning star signaled that night was almost over, so the watchman looked eagerly to see it. The psalmist compared a watchman waiting for the morning with how he eagerly waited for God to forgive his sin. As a sinner, he realized that his only hope—that Israel’s hope was for God to forgive them and redeem their sins.” Marty Machowski

We know God answered the psalmist’s prayer by sending Jesus. We know from Revelation 22:16 that Jesus is our bright morning star. He is also our rest and we will no longer battle with sin one day. Peter said in 2 Peter 1:19, “And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

Praise the Lord, Jesus has redeemed us. He has bought us back with His precious blood. Therefore, I have nothing or no one to fear, because He is in control. God is our rest; we can rest in Him. Isn’t this a great reminder? What are you facing? What are you

dealing with? What worries you today? Let God be your rest; place it on His shoulders and let Him carry the burden because He can handle it.

## **Additional Weeks of Study**

### **JESUS CLEARS THE TEMPLE**

By Dennis Watson

In John 2, we read about the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry when He first cleansed the temple. In this chapter, we understand why John wrote in **Verse 17**, "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house has eaten me up.'" Jesus wants us to love the place of worship which is a house of prayer. This week's scriptures will detail the second cleansing of the temple by Jesus.

#### **Day 1-- Read Psalm 122**

Psalm 122 is one of three Pilgrim Psalms attributed to David which focuses on Jerusalem and the house of God. Another is Psalm 124 which describes God's protection of Israel from enemies. The last is Psalm 131 which is about David's submission to the Lord.

At the time this passage was written, there were many faithful Jews who made lengthy pilgrimages several times a year to Jerusalem to worship at the Tabernacle. At that time, the Tabernacle was just the tent of worship as the temple had not yet been built. Building the temple would happen later and would be Solomon's project. David lived in Jerusalem which meant he did not have a long pilgrimage. Nevertheless, David did go frequently to the Tabernacle to worship. In Verse 1 David expresses delight at coming to the house of the Lord. The words, "Let us go" would better be translated, "We will go." It was a declaration not an invitation.

David had a heart for God as he loved to go to the place of worship. If we truly love God, we will love the place of worship, the person of worship, and the people who worship Him. Today, more than ever, it is a treat to gather with other believers (the people of worship) at the place of worship (the church) to worship the person of worship—Almighty God.

Not only did David have a heart for God, he had a heart for praise. Twenty-six times in Psalms, the phrase “I will praise” is found. The Lord had told His people that one day there would be a central place where they would worship and that place was Jerusalem. David was told by the Lord that Mount Moriah, where he built the altar, would be the site of the temple. Jerusalem became known as the Holy City and the City of David. Those who are God’s people will have a heart for God and a heart of praise.

In Verses 6-9, all people are called upon to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. God’s people are to have a heart for prayer. Prayer originates in the heart of God. Jesus taught us to pray in agreement with God, “Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” **Matthew 6:10** The peace of Jerusalem and peace on earth will not be a reality until the Prince of Peace reigns of David’s throne. The heart for prayer is rooted in praying for the day when God, through Jesus, reigns supreme. Those who love God have a heart for Him, a heart for praise and a heart for prayer.

I hope you love to gather with God's people to worship God.

**Day 2-- Read Matthew 21:1-11**

We often neglect context when we read or study the Bible. This week, we are looking at the second biblical account of Jesus driving out those who were abusing the temple. The first is recorded at the beginning of His ministry in John 2:13-17. The other gospel accounts only record the second cleansing of the temple which took place the last week of His life and ministry on earth.

Jesus knew He had just made a prophesied ride into Jerusalem to carry out the ultimate purpose of His Father.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." **Zechariah 9:9**

The second account of the cleansing of the temple took place immediately after Jesus made the prophesied triumphal entry into Jerusalem the week of His arrest and crucifixion. Jesus knew what was coming. He knew He had come to seek and to save the lost. He knew He had come to bring unconditional love to all people. He loved the things His Father loved.

I do not want to read too much of my own humanity into Jesus, but with what had been prophesied, the ride He had just made, and knowing what He was about to face, I can see some hostility coming on. John wrote "Then the disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house has eaten me up.'" **John 2:17**. They saw the reason and context of what He had done. He loved His Father, He loved the Temple and He loved His mission. What was

happening in the temple, He no doubt hated. He did not hate the people, He hated what they were doing. He had come to bring cleansing.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. In light of what Jesus knew and what was going on, His actions, though they seem out of character, are very understandable. Today, we live in a time when much of what Jesus' followers hold dear is being mocked and even torn down by our laws and culture. Zeal for the truth should eat us up, and we should be firm and more outspoken than ever. We should bring cleansing and refreshing to our world.

### **Day 3-- Read Matthew 21:12-14**

Our passages today are a historical narrative indicated by the use of the word *then*. Historical narrative indicates a flow of activity that is being written about. After Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling prophecy, He entered the temple and took authority over what was going on in the temple.

What was going on in the temple? Jewish males were to make three pilgrimages a year at festival time to the temple in Jerusalem. The three festivals were Pesach (Passover, The Feast of Unleavened Bread), Shavuot (The Feast of Weeks), and Sukkot (The Feast of Booths). This occasion was Passover. All of Jerusalem was filled with people who had come to worship and celebrate. The worship included making sacrifices. Most of the pilgrims were making long journeys and were not able to bring their sacrifices with them. This made it necessary to purchase animals for their sacrifices which would require exchanging their



money. Jesus saw what was going on and drove the sellers and the money-changers from the temple.

Jesus had begun His public ministry with a similar act described in John 2:13-25. Three years later, the temple was being defiled again by the business dealings of the religious leaders. They were more concerned with their own business than the business of the Lord. They had turned the court of the Gentiles into a place where foreign Jews could exchange money and purchase sacrifices. What had begun as a service and convenience for visitors from other lands soon turned into a lucrative business.

The purpose of the court of the Gentiles in the temple was to give non-Jews an opportunity to enter the temple and learn from Israel about the true God. The presence of the commercial activity turned many sensitive Gentiles away from the witness of Israel. The commercialism became a distraction. The court of the Gentiles was used for commercial business, not missionary business.

Jesus rebuked the sellers and money-changers, charging them with turning His house into a den of thieves. He was quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." **Isaiah 56:7**

"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD." **Jeremiah 7:11**

Jesus was calling Himself God by calling the temple “My house,” and He was giving its major purpose—prayer.

Many things go on in the house of God, but it is mainly to be a place to cry out to the Lord, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done.” **Matthew 6:10**

#### **Day 4-- Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-24**

Have you ever noticed that the really important events and ceremonies, over time, can lose their significance? It is due to human contempt. I have watched more than my share of Perry Mason and other lawyer shows. Often the terminology, Contempt of Court is used when someone is not showing proper respect for the court and/or the judge. It is usually due to a sloppy procedure or downright disrespect. Believers have a tendency to get to a point of being sloppy about the things of God and at times are disrespectful. It is easy to get to the point where we just go through the motions of things which are good and of the Lord.

I am not sure what caused the contempt the people held toward the temple activities, but Jesus was driving the people out due to their contempt for the things of God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-24, Paul is warning the believers in Corinth not to treat holy things with contempt. He was speaking of the Lord’s Supper and the events surrounding its observance. One of the activities of the church at Corinth was the gathering of church members in homes to share meals. In some places in scripture, they

were referred to as love feasts. Paul rebuked the people for how they were going about these activities, even observing the Lord's supper without seeing or recognizing the Body of Jesus. The body of Jesus is seen in the Lord's Supper—in remembrance, and in seeing His body which is His church.

Here is how one writer describes what may have caused the contempt and brought on Paul's rebuke:

“Paul's rebuke of the love feasts of Corinth concerns the gluttony, drunkenness, and selfishness exhibited by some in the church: "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Corinthians 11:21–22)

These were love feasts without love, and Paul says their holding of the feasts were "not for the better but for the worse" (verse 17). Some in the Corinthian church were not sharing their food but enjoying their own private feasts while others had nothing to eat; some were even getting drunk. This bad behavior led Paul to say, "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat" (Verse 20)—it was their own supper, and their gorging was dishonoring the Lord.”  
(<https://www.compellingtruth.org/love-feasts.html>)

Their participation in the Lord's Supper and other associated activities had become contemptible. Their focus was lost and they were not allowing the Lord's Supper to enable them to remember the body of Jesus crucified for them, and to see the body of Jesus in the church.

When worship gatherings become anything other than about the Lord, His body and the gospel, it is out of line and in need of cleansing, just as Jesus cleansed the temple. He drove out the sellers and the money-changers to restore what the temple was to be about. Ask the Lord to enable all of us to keep our focus on Him.

### **Day 5-- Read Hebrews 10:19-25**

In the last few months we have emerged from the shut-down of the pandemic of 2020. During this time, certain workers and places of business were allowed to reopen if they were considered essential. It was interesting to see that some places were considered essential like Wal-Mart, Lowes and Home Depot. Early on liquor stores were allowed to remain open. However, in some states churches were not allowed to meet at all. Harp's Crossing opened up quickly, following all of the CDC guidelines, such as cleaning, social distancing and the wearing of masks. We were one of the first churches in our area to open up. The reason? I believe the gathering of believers on a regular basis is essential. It is essential for the welfare of the people of God.

One of the tactics of the enemy is to divide and conquer. When followers of Christ become separated from the body, they are much more readily exposed to spiritual failure. Just like God gave us family and community, He gave the church to believers. In order for the church to carry out its mission, purpose and vision, each of the members need the strength which comes from the Word of God. They need the Spirit of God, and they need other believers in the church of God.

Church attendance and involvement can become old hat. It should be part of our nature, but it should never become routine. Gathering together must be an integral part of your spiritual journey. It should be like breathing. We breathe in and we breathe out. We take in and we put out. We receive and give encouragement, blessings, and the power of God's testimony which is always working and transforming us. I do not see church involvement as an option for any Jesus follower. We must practice gathering for strength so the church can be the effective light for which it was placed here to be. The writer adds another phrase, "And even more so as we see the day approaching." **Verse 25b** The day, meaning the last days which could bring with it great difficulty. We are living in hostile times for the believer and the church. So, more than ever, you need the church body. Do not stay away unless it is absolutely necessary. You need the body and the body needs you!



# **BARABBAS**

By Chris Watson

A big topic in our country right now is injustice. However, the account of Barabbas and Jesus was an injustice for the ages. Jesus was arrested for doing nothing wrong and Barabbas was arrested for insurrection and murder. In the end, Barabbas was released and Jesus was crucified. Yet, Jesus knew this was God's plan and He followed it. Can you imagine being arrested for doing nothing wrong and they let the murderer next to you go free? Thank the Lord, Jesus was silent and said nothing for us.

## **Day 1-- Read Matthew 27:15-20**

Look at a few of the facts listed in our scriptures today:

Verse 16 Barabbas is called a notorious prisoner. This means he wasn't just in for stealing candy, he was a hardcore criminal. Other passages tell us he was a murderer.

Verse 18 tells us Jesus was handed over because of envy. Remember it was mainly the religious leaders who handed Jesus over to the authorities.

Verse 19 tells us that Pilate's wife warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus because of dreams she had concerning Jesus.

Lastly, Verse 20 tells us the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to go against Jesus.

There will be several important themes in our passages this week, 2 in particular we will look at closely:

- 1) We make our own choices.
- 2) God is in control.

The religious leaders made the choice to have Jesus arrested although He had done NOTHING wrong. We know Jesus was arrested at the people's will, and we know He soon died for the sins of all. God used their evil choices ultimately for His glory. Are we to take away from this, "live ungodly and God will use it?" Of course not. Though we may make foolish choices and decisions, if we are a child of God, there is nothing that can separate us from His love. If we are His child, we will be convicted of our sin and turn back to Him. As we learn, we will see those foolish choices aren't from God because God gives us free will. Remember Jesus' last words as they were crucifying Him, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." **Luke 23:34** Even as they killed Him, He saw what was going on. We are reminded by Paul in Romans that as believers, we have died to sin and we should not want to live in sin any longer.

Be reminded today that God can use everything for His glory. In everything that happens, He is faithful. I've heard it said, "If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, rest in this, you, my friend, are not that powerful" (unknown).

Know that God loves you; God wants to walk with you because He is faithful.

**Day 2-- Read Matthew 27:21**



"The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" **Matthew 27:21**

What emotion does this stir up in you? No matter how many times I read this verse, my thoughts are, Jesus had done nothing wrong and yet Barabbas was a notorious criminal! **Luke 23:19** tells us "... he had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder." Jesus was a healer, forgiver, teacher, etc. Barabbas was rightly arrested, Jesus, wrongly. Barabbas was in jail as criminals should be, Jesus was falsely accused.

Here is a link for a youtube video that will put a very clear face on the injustice we are reading about. You can type in the link or google "Barabbas Judah Smith."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGOcLFqWtIE>

### **Day 3-- Read Matthew 27:22-23**

We live in a day and time where the mob rules. Whoever screams the loudest, makes the biggest scene, or can get the media behind them, they are heard and heard loudly. Pilate was ready to release Jesus as he realized Jesus had been wrongly arrested and He had done nothing wrong. The mob cried out loudly for the release of Barabbas, a man who had actually committed murder and deserved to be condemned to death, while it is demanded by the mob that Jesus, the One who had done nothing, be crucified.

Crucifixion was used for the worst of criminals because it was a drawn out and very painful process. It was now being demanded by the mob that a punishment meant for criminals be used on Jesus. I wrote on Day 1, that God would use this for His glory and Jesus would die for our sins. But what a turn of events! The murderer would be set free and the innocent would die. Notice I didn't say Jesus was murdered. Jesus' life was not taken from Him, it was given freely. If it had been taken from Him, He would not be sovereign. Christ willingly went to the cross for our sins. The religious people thought they were winning, they were getting rid of Jesus, but this was just the beginning.

Can you imagine what must have been going on in the minds of those who had been walking with Him for years? His mother, the disciples, what about Lazarus? They had heard His teachings, but a lot of it was still a mystery to them. I imagine they were confused and perplexed. They were trying to remember all of His works and what He had taught them. Did they wonder how Jesus could still be in charge once He was arrested? To the crowd following Jesus, they must have been confused and trying to put the pieces together.

So many times things happen in our lives which we don't understand. Things don't make sense and we question in our confusion. Over time, when we let things play out, God allows us to see He was faithful and in control the whole time. Remember, nothing is finished unless God says it is finished. Let Him finish. I came across this post the other day and it goes right along with today's devotion in letting God finish: "I would have pulled Joseph out. Out of that pit. Out of that prison. Out of that pain. I would have cheated nations out of the one God would use to deliver them

from famine. I would have pulled David out. Out of Saul's spear-throwing presence. Out of the caves he hid away in. Out of the pain of rejection. I would have cheated Israel out of a God-hearted king.

I would have pulled Esther out. Out of being snatched from her only family. Out of being placed in a position she never asked for. Out of the path of a vicious, power-hungry foe. I would have cheated people out of the woman God would use to save their very lives.

I would have pulled Jesus off. Off of the cross. Off of the road that led to suffering and pain. Off of the path that would mean nakedness and beatings, nails and thorns. I would have cheated the entire world out of a Savior. Out of salvation. Out of an eternity filled with no more suffering and no more pain.

And oh friend. I want to pull you out. I want to change your path. I want to stop your pain. But right now I know I would be wrong. I would be out of line. I would be cheating you and cheating the world out of so much good. Because God knows. He knows the good this pain will produce. He knows the beauty of this hardship will grow. He's watching over you and keeping you even in the midst of this. He's promising you that you can trust Him. Even when it all feels like more than you can bear.

So instead of trying to pull you out, I'm lifting you up. I'm kneeling before the Father and I'm asking Him to give you strength. To give you hope. I'm asking Him to protect you and to move you when the time is right. I'm asking Him to help you stay

prayerful and discerning. I'm asking Him how I can best love you, and be a help to you. I believe He's going to use your life in powerful and beautiful ways. Ways that will leave your heart grateful and humbly thankful for this road you've been on.”  
Kimberly Henderson Proverbs 31 Ministries

## **Day 4-- Read Matthew 27:24-26**

Read our passage again below:

<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.” <sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.” <sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Matthew 27:16-26

Pilate declared himself innocent of the blood of Jesus, and just a verse later he is handing him over to be scourged and crucified. It’s important to be reminded that God was using these events as part of His plan for the crucifixion of Jesus. So many times today we hear the mob and they are loud. We know the right thing to do or to stand up for, but the more we do it, the louder the mob gets. Sometimes the louder they get, the tendency we have is to give in. However, we are to stand on the Truth, the Word of God.

I mentioned one Sunday that people who actually believe and follow the Bible these days are few and far between. Many say they are Christians, but when it comes to believing the Bible, it’s a different story. In today’s time, we must stand and follow God’s Word. When others are yelling loudly, making a scene, and calling us crazy, we must stand taller. Today, recommit yourself to standing on the Word and following the Truth of God.

## **Day 5-- Read Isaiah 53**

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

<sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:3-6

He was despised

He was smitten by God He was wounded

He was bruised

These are just a few of the words we read in the above verses. Ultimately, Jesus endured all these things for God's glory. All of the heartache He went through was to bring us to God. Jesus is the mediator between God and mankind. Without Jesus, we would have no hope, no peace, no joy, and no salvation.

Knowing that Isaiah was written some 700 years before Jesus was born, is another reminder of the mighty God we serve. Thank Him today for your salvation.



## **PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED**

By Chris Watson

I remember my parents telling me when I was growing up that if I told a lie, (and I was found out) I would be in more trouble than if I had just told the truth to begin with. In our account this week, Peter and John told the truth and soon found themselves in trouble. They were in trouble with the religious leaders. No matter what, we should always speak the truth.

### **Day 1– Read Acts 4:1-12**

In the precious chapter of Acts 3, God uses Peter to heal a lame man. The same lame man who sat just inside the gate whom everyone knew had been lame since birth so there was no ignoring the fact that a miracle had indeed taken place. In Chapter 4, we read that the religious leaders (priests, captain of the temple and the Sadducees) were disturbed by the miracle performed as well as the resurrection of Christ being preached. Between the time of the healing of the lame man and up until our chapter today, we learn that many believed Peter’s words. The leaders were very distraught, so they arrested Peter and John.

The leaders of Israel had already rejected the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus, here was another chance for them to believe “Peter respectfully began with an explanation of how the miracle occurred. Certainly the members of the Sanhedrin had seen the crippled beggar many times, and perhaps they had even given alms to him and piously prayed for him. How was this well-known man healed? “By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!” Those



words must have pierced the hearts of the members of the council! They thought they had finished with the Prophet from Nazareth, and now His followers were telling everybody that Jesus was alive! Since the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, Peter's statement was almost a declaration of war!

But the Spirit was telling Peter what to say (see Luke 21:12–15), and the apostle quoted Psalm 118:22, definitely a messianic reference (see Matt. 21:42; 1 Peter 2:4–8). He made it clear that the members of the council were “the builders” and that they had rejected God's Stone, Jesus, the Son of God.

The image of “the stone” was not new to these men who were experts in the Old Testament Scriptures. They knew that the “rock” was a symbol of God (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 31; 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 18:2; Isa. 28:16), and that the Prophet Daniel had used the rock to picture Messiah and the coming of His kingdom on earth (Dan. 2:31–45). The Jews stumbled over the Rock (Rom. 9:32; 1 Cor. 1:23) and re-jected Him, just as Psalm 118:22 had predicted. However, to those who have trusted Him, Jesus Christ is the precious Cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4–8) and the chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

Peter went on to explain that Jesus is not only the Stone, but He is also the Saviour (Acts 4:12). Peter saw in the healing of the beggar a picture of the spiritual healing that comes in salvation. “Made whole” in Acts 4:9 is a translation of the same Greek word that is translated “saved” in Acts 4:12, for salvation means wholeness and spiritual health. Jesus Christ is the Great Physician who alone can heal mankind's greatest malady, the sickness of sin (Mark 2:14–

17). Of course, Peter also had “all the people of Israel” in mind as he spoke (see Acts 4:10) because the message was still going out exclusively to the Jews. Even Psalm 118, from which Peter quoted, speaks of a future national salvation for Israel.”<sup>18</sup>

The leaders had Peter and John arrested because they didn’t like them healing a crippled man in the name of Jesus. They didn’t know what to do about it. Everyone in this account had seen or heard what Jesus had done and they had to choose to believe in Him or not. The same is true for us and our society today. We either believe and follow Jesus or we choose to turn our backs on Him. There is no middle ground. Today may we trust and obey.

## **Day 2– Read Acts 4:13-22**

In Verse 13, Peter and John are accused of four things: being uneducated, being untrained, having boldness, and having been with Jesus. Verse 14 goes on to tell us the leaders could say nothing as no one could argue that the man was healed. The men realized Peter and John really had no formal education, and yet they were bold and according to the religious leaders, they had been with Jesus. God is not looking for the most educated or even the most qualified, but rather one who is obedient and who has been with Jesus. I have often heard that the world has yet to see what God can do with one man or woman who is completely sold out to the Lord.

Peter and John were pretty sold out by this time. They were accused of having been with Jesus and they had been. Can the

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<sup>18</sup> The Bible Exposition Commentary, Warren Wiersbe

same thing be said about you and me? Can others see we have been with Jesus? Will they notice it by our attitudes, love, grace, truth and boldness? Wouldn't we all love to be accused of being bold and having been with Jesus?

After they were accused of being bold and it being realized they did nothing wrong, the members of the council let them go, but not before commanding them "...not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." (Verse 18) Their response was, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Verse 19) They were being held for something they had been a part of and upon being let go, they still decided they would not stop speaking of what they have seen and heard. They knew above all else, they worshipped the Lord and obeying God rather than men is what mattered.

It is becoming clearer and clearer in our culture that we will have to choose to listen to man or listen to the Lord and His Word. I don't think it's unrealistic to say that in my lifetime many may be imprisoned for speaking their faith or parts of their faith even here in America. Will you and I follow the Lord or follow man?

### **Day 3– Read Acts 4:23-31**

After being let go, the believers celebrated what the chief priests and elders had said to Peter and John. They didn't grumble and fuss about the fact they had been arrested, but they worshipped the Lord and were thankful they had been given the chance to lift up His name.

Let's read Verse 29 again, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word." Peter and John were arrested, accused and then let go. Notice their prayer was not, "God, get the bad guys." Their prayer wasn't, "Lord, take this trial or difficulty from us." Their prayer wasn't, "God, why is this happening to us?" Rather their prayer was, "... grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word." Verse 29

I am not sure about you but I find this very convincing. As Americans, we often want the difficulty, struggle, or problem to go away. Peter and John didn't pray for this, rather they prayed for boldness in the face of opposition. They saw this as an opportunity, an opportunity for God to work, for God to be glorified, and for others to be drawn to Him. I am convinced so many times we may be praying for God to take the thing away in our life or situation that He is using to conform us and to get His name out. "May our light so shine before men that they see His good works and glorify our Father in Heaven." Matthew 5:16

#### **Day 4— Read Acts 4:32-37**

I really enjoy studying the book of Acts for many reasons, especially since it is the history of the New Testament Church. In Acts 2, we see the church eating, sharing and communing with each other. Today, we read of the church meeting the needs of each other. The church people were selling their property so they could take care of the needs of others (Verse 35).

This is one of the biggest reasons to be connected to God and His Church. God often uses others to meet needs that are in the church. We often think of physical or financial needs, but it's also spiritual, emotional and mental needs. We have heard it said, "No man is an island", and yet sometimes people set themselves up for just that. God has called us to not only be the church to the world who so desperately needs Him, but also to be the church to each other. I am 41 years old and for 41 years of my life + 9 months, I have been in church. As I reflect over my life, I can't begin to imagine how my life would be if I had not been connected to God and His church. Outside of Lisa's and my family, our church is also our family. These people are who we spend the most time with, we encourage each other, we struggle with each other, we cry with each other, and we laugh together. How would you answer this question, "Where would I be without God's church?" Crazy to think of, isn't it?

Take some time today to thank God for His church and for what He has done in and through it to minister to you and ask how you can continue to minister to others?

### **Day 5– Read Joshua 24:14-18**

From our passage this week, Peter and John drew a line in the sand to indicate they served one God and one God only and that was the one True God, the maker of heaven and earth. It did not matter to them that they might be arrested or persecuted, they were following and serving God.

Our Old Testament passage holds the same truth today. For thousands of years followers of the Lord have drawn lines in the

sand saying you serve who you will serve but we are serving the Lord. This is nothing new, and today we have to make that choice daily. Will we serve political correctness or the Lord, will we serve appeasement or the Lord, will we serve what others say is right or will we serve the Lord, and will we serve our own agenda or will we serve the Lord?

Today, we must choose who we will follow. Man tells us to follow our heart and the Bible warns us that our hearts are evil. The world says do what makes you happy, the Bible says do what makes you holy.

### Notes

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all people. This week, we will be introduced to the beginning of the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

### **Day 1– Read Acts 7:57-8:3**

At the end of Acts 7 and the opening of Acts 8, we see a pretty intense event. I have really come to appreciate the word in Luke 10:31 translated *chance*. It is only used one time in the New Testament. It was used regarding the priest who *by chance* came up on the nearly dead man who was finally rescued by the good Samaritan. The word means the concurrence of events, not chance or coincidence. The day Stephen was stoned to death there was a man taking care of the coats of the people doing the stoning. That man's name was Saul who later became Paul. So we have the convergence of persecution, the martyrdom of Stephen, the one who was doing the persecuting, and the first to go and take the gospel to the Samaritans.

It feels like this is the starting line of the church spreading the gospel to the world and while it may seem insignificant, it is such a huge event with major players drawing a line in the sand and moving on. We have Stephen's death, we have Saul seeking to stop the message carriers by persecution, (The one doing the persecuting would soon become the great missionary and author of a large part of the New Testament, Paul.) and we have Philip going to Samaria to lead people to Jesus. Others would branch out with the message and all of history would be changed forever.

There are no coincidences and no coincidental people. We all are in on the work of God to participate in the activity of seeking and



saving those which are lost. All people participate in one way or another. Some are obediently delivering the message. Others are hindering the message through disobedience. Many are opposing the message. Then there are those who are receiving or waiting to receive the message. So, which are you? In that moment in history, many were opposing the message by stoning Stephen. Saul was in on the stoning and continued to actively persecute Christians. Many just went back to their homes in Jerusalem and did nothing. Philip and a few others moved on and in so doing made the message known and the gospel spread. So, one more time, which are you?

## **Day 2– Read Acts 8:4-8**

There were those who left Jerusalem and in doing so they “... went everywhere preaching the word.” (Verse 4) My friend and evangelist, Keith Fordham, likes to make a distinction between two words. One is the word *kurusso* which means to preach or proclaim. The other word is *euangeledzo* which is the word evangelize. Here, the people went everywhere evangelizing, not preaching. They went with the purpose and plan to lead people to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Philip was the first to go out evangelizing. Who was this man named Philip? He was not the Philip who was one of the twelve apostles listed in Matthew 10. He was one of the first seven deacons selected in Acts 6 and he was present with the followers of Jesus who gathered for prayer in Acts 1 after Jesus ascended into heaven. He was with the group waiting for the sending of the Holy Spirit. He was most likely present on the Day of Pentecost when

God sent the Holy Spirit to empower the church. We know that he had four daughters who prophesied. We also know that about twenty years after the events recorded in Acts 8, Paul (Saul) was a house guest of Philip in his home in Caesarea. I am sure this made for an interesting visit after Saul's (Paul's) involvement in Stephen's death and the persecution led by Saul (Paul) in those early days.

Philip had forgiven and moved on and the gospel was being spread. The book of Acts ends with the words without hindrance. Philip obviously did not let Paul's (Saul's) earlier days of persecuting Christians hinder his evangelizing. Anything hindering you?

### **Day 3– Read Acts 8:9-13**

The pure gospel was proclaimed. Philip was faithful to set forth the gospel. A person is saved only through the finished work of Jesus when He died on the cross for sin and was raised again to give victorious life through the Holy Spirit to those who receive Him. Unfortunately, when that happens, there are usually distractions which hamper the acceptance of the truth.

At the beginning of Verse 9 there is a conjunction in the opening sentence. " But there was a certain man called Simon..." Verse 9

It is the conjunction "but." Simon had professed belief in the gospel and had, along with many others, been baptized. His previous employment was that of a magician or sorcerer. All was going well until Simon, who had originally been the main show in

town, had been top-billed by the gospel which was proclaimed by Philip and others. Anytime someone is saved, it is a reason to celebrate and rejoice, but often there are hindrances.

Let's focus on the message of the gospel of Jesus. There are three aspects of biblical faith which are clearly presented when the gospel is shared. First of all, salvation is through Christ alone. Peter, when speaking of Jesus and salvation says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12 It is Jesus plus nothing. Secondly, salvation is through Christ alone by grace alone. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 2:8a, "For by grace you have been saved." Grace is God's kindness and love given without any performance on the part of the one who receives His grace. It is all because of His grace and goodness. And lastly, it is through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

"Through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:8b It is received by faith. Faith is belief in what God has done through Jesus Christ. The last part is in the last of Verse 8 and Verse 9, "...and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast" Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV). It is all the work of God. We only receive it by faith.

Have you received His greatest gift? If not, acknowledge your sin and receive the work of God through Jesus Christ on your behalf. He died for you to bring forgiveness and He was raised up to give you His life. Rejoice in His great salvation.

Day 4— Read Acts 8:14-27

When word reached Jerusalem that many Samaritans had been saved and had been baptized, Peter and John were sent to check on things. This was the first case of non-Jews becoming believers in Jesus Christ. They discovered the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit. They prayed for the newly baptized believers and they received the Holy Spirit. Here is how Warren Wiersbe explains it:

“Jesus had given Peter the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:13–20), which meant that Peter had the privilege of “opening the door of faith” to others. He opened the door to the Jews at Pentecost, and now he opened the door to the Samaritans. Later, he would open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Remember too that the first ten chapters of Acts record a period of transition, from the Jew to the Samaritan to the Gentile. God’s pattern for today is given in Acts 10: the sinner hears the Gospel, believes, receives the gift of the Spirit, and then is baptized. It is dangerous to base any doctrine or practice only on what is recorded in Acts 1–10, for you might be building on that which was temporary and transitional.”<sup>19</sup>

Simon had a bit of a problem, one which we all have, and that problem is pride. He had all the attention and the people were amazed at his performances. He wanted to buy the power to do what had just taken place—to give people the Holy Spirit. He was immediately rebuked by Peter and he was told to repent and he would be forgiven. Simon did what we often do-- he resorted to his

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<sup>19</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 436). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

old ways. He asked Peter to pray for him so he would not be destroyed.

Was Simon really saved? I do not know for sure, but here is what Tony Evans has to say: “It is clear that Simon was a believer (see 8:13)—though one in extreme error. Years of practicing magic and claiming to have divine power (see 8:9–11) had resulted in bitterness and wickedness in his heart (8:23). Repentance and prayer were needed (8:22) to root out the evil ways and desires that had so long been a part of his life. God is not a slot machine to be used to fulfill our carnal desires.”<sup>20</sup>

The Lord saves and nothing can separate us from His love.

### **Day 5– Read Acts 8:26-40**

After the events and successful gospel presentation in Samaria, the Holy Spirit instructed Philip to move on from there and go to a specific place on a specific road. It was there Philip encountered an Ethiopian who was in charge of the Queen of Ethiopia’s treasury. This man was referred to as a eunuch although this does not necessarily mean he had been castrated. In those days, this was the case of many who were given authority over a harem or a particular treasury. This man believed in the God of the Jews and was returning home from worshipping in Jerusalem. He was a religious man and he was in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip was instructed by the Spirit to catch up with the

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<sup>20</sup> Evans, T. (2019). *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Ac 8:21–24). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

chariot. He approached the chariot and heard the man reading this passage from Isaiah: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; 32 And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." Acts 8:32-33

Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading, but the man told him he needed someone to explain it. Peter preached (evangelized) to the man explaining the passage was about Jesus Christ. The man was so convicted and moved by the Word of God and the Spirit of God the man asked Philip to baptize him when they came to a body of water.

After baptizing the man, Philip was taken away and the man continued home rejoicing.

You probably know religious people who attend church, read the Bible, and do all the right things, but there may be a need to ask them if they are truly saved, truly born again. I believe there are going to be a lot of good church people who will miss the boat because they have never really come to Jesus Christ. Be bold. Ask the question, are you saved?



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