

Table of Contents

<input type="checkbox"/> Introduction		2
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 1	<i>The Genealogy of Jesus</i>	9
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 2	<i>The Birth of Jesus</i>	17
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 3	<i>Jesus Presented in the Temple</i>	25
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 4	<i>The Ministry of John the Baptist</i>	34
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 5	<i>The Baptism of Jesus</i>	42
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 6	<i>The Temptation of Jesus</i>	50
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 7	<i>The Wedding Feast</i>	59
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 8	<i>Jesus Cleanses the Temple</i>	67
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 9	<i>Nicodemus Comes to Jesus</i>	77
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 10	<i>Good News</i>	84
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 11	<i>The Miraculous Catch</i>	91
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 12	<i>Jesus Heals the Paralyzed Man</i>	99
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 13	<i>The Beatitudes</i>	107
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 14	<i>Love your Enemies</i>	116
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 15	<i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	125
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 16	<i>Treasures in Heaven</i>	134
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 17	<i>The Wise and Foolish Builders</i>	142
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 18	<i>The Four Soils</i>	151
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 19	<i>The Hidden Treasure</i>	158
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 20	<i>Jesus Calms the Storm</i>	166

Additional Weeks of Study

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 sections:
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 BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

By Dennis Watson

Luke was a gentile doctor writing a summary of eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. Luke was writing this account for a man by the name of Theophilus who was, apparently, a gentile official. His name means lover of God. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man, which is a Messianic title focusing on His humanity. In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, he traces the line back to Adam. This week, we will look at two announcements made by the Angel Gabriel, one to Zacharias telling of the birth of John the Baptist and the other to Mary telling of the birth of Jesus. As we journeyed through the Old Testament, we have been anticipating this time - here we are, studying about The Dots Connected.

Day 1- Read Luke 1:1-38

The Angel Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias the priest, when he was serving his time in the Holy Place at the temple. Gabriel told him Elizabeth, his wife, who had been unable to have a child, would have a son in answer to his prayers. His son would be great and would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Zacharias was also told the son's name would be John. We read that John would drink no wine or strong drink which indicated he was to be a Nazarite. Luke recorded that John would bring joy and gladness. In Luke 15, when lost things were found, there was joy and rejoicing, which speaks of salvation. John would be the forerunner of the Messiah. This was spoken of in Malachi 3:1, prophesied more than 400 years before the event took place.

Then, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary who was probably in her teens. Luke described her as a virgin. Mary responded to Gabriel by saying she had not yet known a man. This was a way of saying she had not yet become sexually active. Gabriel told her she would have a son, but her son would be called *Son of the*

Highest and would reign on the throne of His father David.

The response of Zacharias and Mary was markedly different. Both were granted the grace of God to participate in His plan to bring salvation to the world. However, Zacharias questioned Gabriel and said he and Elizabeth were too old to have children. Gabriel told Zacharias since he questioned him, he would be unable to speak until the child was born. Mary responded by asking how this could happen to her since she was a virgin and Gabriel explained that she would become pregnant by a miracle of the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The Lord knew her heart. At this explanation, Mary surrendered to the Lord's will and plan. Nothing is impossible with the Lord.

Both Zacharias and Mary were used by the Lord to accomplish His purpose. What about you? Are you questioning the Lord with the intent of avoiding His plan? Or, are you, like Mary, ready and willing to surrender to His plan and will? Thank the Lord that He uses common, ordinary people to bring Jesus the Savior to the world. Surrender to His plan to use you through His grace.

Day 2- Read Luke 1:39-45

What an amazing biblical, historical account. Elizabeth knew what had taken place with Mary before they spoke. When Mary and Elizabeth saw each other, the unborn baby, John the Baptist, immediately *leaped* in Elizabeth's womb and was filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the power of the presence of Jesus, perhaps just days after conception! There was an instant connection between the two unborn babies. Neither of these unborn babies were to be merely normal baby's—they were both prepared by the Lord to carry out His plan and will. I believe that the recognition of Jesus as the Savior of the world is what caused John to leap in his mother's womb.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with great joy. She called Mary *blessed* among women. Note that she did not call her blessed above women. Mary was an ordinary young lady, but the Lord had shone His favor or grace on her. Mary should not be considered as someone extraordinary, but one who was obediently surrendered to the Lord. Elizabeth recognized that it was God's activity on Mary's behalf which made her *blessed among women*.

I am safe in saying that every conception is of the Lord. David expressed this in Psalm 139. Jeremiah was told by the Lord that He knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother's womb. Samuel's birth was obviously a miraculous plan of the Lord. It is important, as with Jeremiah, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus, that we acknowledge the Lord has proposed to us. This is why we are here. We need to acknowledge and seek to live out His plans, purposes, and His will.

Give thanks to the Lord for forming you and giving you life.
Surrender your life to Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 1:46-56

Would you guess that the top three most popular Christmas songs of all time are Jingle Bells, We Wish You A Merry Christmas, and Deck the Halls! A Christmas song that is usually overlooked is Mary's song (The Magnificat) in Luke 1:46-56. Within this soul-stirred canticle, we find Mary exulting over the glory of God, as well as the reality of her participation in the glory of His salvation. Three attributes of God are heralded in this Christmas song. Can you find them? First, she describes His power. V. 49: He who is mighty has done great things for me. Also, v. 51: he has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones. Second, she highlights God's holiness. She describes that his very character is Holy when she proclaims, v.

49: holy is His name. Thirdly, she proclaims the mercy of God when she sings in v. 50: His mercy is for those who fear his name from generation to generation. Elsewhere in v. 54: He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy. All three attributes, Mary praises and exults.

As you consider those three attributes, can you see how vital all three of those are to God's character? Because God is holy, He must do something. Because God is merciful, He wants to do something. Because God is sovereign, he can do something. Beautifully the very attributes that Mary sings of to highlight God in the coming salvation are the very attributes evidenced in the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. And all three are present in our salvation. If God were holy and merciful, but not powerful, we'd be doomed to fear because he wouldn't be able to accomplish the very thing we need. If God were mighty and holy, but not merciful, we have only to fear because His wrath would be upon us. If God were mighty and merciful, but not holy, then we have only to fear because if He isn't distinct from others, then He too will turn on us as soon as we fail. But He's not two of the three. The hope of our salvation, that should lead us to sing like Mary, is that His holiness, His power, and His mercy come together in perfect harmony in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. Take a moment a consider how all three attributes are evidenced in all three of those events associated with our salvation

Day 4- Read Luke 1:57-80

1. **Observation:** What is the big idea of this passage?
2. What parallels could be drawn between Zechariah's "song" and Mary's "song" in 1:47-55? Where does Zechariah focus the bulk of his attention? As a proud father in the birth of his newborn son, or as patient priest longing for the consolation of Israel?

3. **Interpretation:** What attributes of God do you see highlighted in Zechariah's "song?" How do you see those same attributes fulfilled in Jesus Christ? In what area of your life might you need to rest in those very attributes of God?

4. **Application:** Spend some time in silence quietly reflecting on the passage. Take away an application from Luke 1:67-80. What promises within this passage do you need to hold fast to?

5. **Prayer:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 4:2-3

As we read yesterday, Zacharias' song was very much a high point of dot connecting. He spoke of the One to come from the line of David. He spoke about prophecy delivered by the Old Testament prophets, while at the same time he spoke of the One who would come to bring salvation and light. When we read the Bible, we are often simultaneously reading about prophecy that has been fulfilled and prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. We live in amazing times!

In that day (Verse 2) refers to the Day of the Lord. This phrase occurs many times in Isaiah (as in all the prophets), and it is also used in the New Testament. The prophet Joel, in particular, has something to say about it. We need to realize that each Hebrew day begins at sundown. The day begins with darkness and moves

to the dawn. In this case, *the day of the Lord* begins with the Great Tribulation and goes on into the millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah spoke of a *branch*, which was like a code word used by the prophets to describe the future Messiah who would bring salvation. Both Zechariah and Jeremiah also called the future Messiah, the *branch*. There are eighteen Hebrew words translated into one English word, branch. All of these words refer to Jesus. In this verse, the word branch means sprout. We are told that He is a branch out of dry ground. He is something green that has sprung up in the desert.

Jesus came to save and to establish an eternal reign of righteousness and justice. A simple expression of this is when He has completed His work and established His eternal reign, all of the people who remain will be called holy.

Jesus is the branch which was prophesied and now has come. He would die on the cross for sinners, be resurrected from the dead defeating Satan, sin, death and the grave. He will ultimately return to establish a reign that will be characterized by peace, perfect peace. Give thanks to the Lord God's amazing plan!

Notes

WEEK 2 THE BIRTH OF JESUS

By: Chris Watson

Much of our Old Testament study pointed forward to this week's devotion, the Birth of Jesus. Jesus was not an afterthought, but was in God's mind the whole time to redeem mankind. Every book in the Old Testament, in one way or another, pointed forward to Jesus. We first saw this in Genesis 3:15, the very first book of the Bible where God was already pointing forward to Jesus. In Isaiah, Chapter 53, we saw the suffering servant which was about Jesus and what He would endure during His life and His death on the cross. This week, we will see God's plan unfold as His Son is brought into the world, ultimately for our salvation.

Day 1- Read Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 2:1-6

After our studies of the Old Testament, the birth of Jesus shouldn't be a surprise. As we have already seen, the accounts and prophecies in the Old Testament clearly lay the groundwork for Jesus' entrance into the earthly world. **Micah 5:2** says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." God, through the prophet Micah, had told His people that Jesus would come into the world. Not only would Jesus come into the world, but He would be born in Bethlehem even though it was the smallest of the clans of Judah. God picked Bethlehem, a place lowly and humble, as the location of His Son's birth. It shouldn't surprise us when we read in Luke that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that everyone should be registered in their home town, though the prophecy Micah issued was given 600 years before Caesar Augustus was born. We know that Joseph was in the line of David and he had to return to Bethlehem for the census. After arriving in Bethlehem to register, Mary gave birth to her Son. Our Savior, Jesus, was born in the exact place which had been

prophesied in the scriptures. We find in Matthew 2:4 that even the chief priests knew where He would be born because they knew of Micah's prophecy. What an incredible plan!

Galatians 4:4 confirms that in the *fullness of time* Jesus was born. The fullness of time means just the right time, not too early and not too late. In God's time, Jesus would be born. At this time, this place, and for this reason, our Savior would come.

Take time today to thank God for His plan of sending Jesus and that it was not done haphazardly, but done as part of His plan, in His timing. Thank Him for using sinful people in His plan to carry out His purposes. Ask God how He might want to use you as part of His plan.

Day 2- Read Luke 2:8-21

We often think of this passage around Christmas and we don't really discuss it much throughout the year, although we should. This is the announcement of our Savior's birth. Verse 9 indicates that the shepherds were afraid and **Verse 10** reads, "Then the angel said to them, 'do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings (news) of great joy which will be to all people.'"

While we could focus on many things stated in Verse 10, we are going to focus on two. We will focus first on the words *good tidings* or *good news*. Why would the birth of Jesus be good news? Why wouldn't His birth be just like that of any other baby? It would only be good news to the shepherds and others if they understood the bad news. Mankind is sinful and separated from God. Jesus, who had just been born, would fix this problem. This is why the news was good and worthy of great joy. The shepherds understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. The good news was great to them because they knew the predicament that all mankind was in.

The second focus is on the words at the end of **Verse 10**, "...which will be to all people." In other words, this birth and the good news that Jesus' birth brought, were to be for all people. It wasn't just for the Jews or any other particular group of people, but for the people of all nations. Jesus' birth was for you and me; it was for people on the other side of the world, in China, France and even in Iraq. His birth was for people that look like me and for people that look completely different. God's gift of Jesus is for all who will receive Him. Have you received God's gift of Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus to take away your sins? If not, why not today? If you have, are you sharing it? Today's passage tells us "The shepherds made widely known what had been revealed to them concerning the Child." (**Verse 17**) Are you making Jesus known to all people? God has left us on this earth to know Him and to make Him known! How can you make Jesus known today?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 2:10-11

Want to know if you are a true southerner? Have you ever compared the speed of something to Christmas? "That driver is as slow as Christmas." For most adults Christmas is a rushed season filled with too many commitments, so it may seem odd to compare something slow to Christmas. For most children, however, Christmas feels as if it will never come. It feels as if the longing for Christmas morning will be never be satisfied, and their waiting will last forever.

For much of Israel, the Messiah's coming was "as slow as Christmas." The days of the monarchy under David where lives flourished, territory was expanded, and the land experienced a certain measure of peace seemed like a distant memory. Indeed, David's reign was a full millennium past for the shepherds experiencing the events of Luke 2. For the past approximately 600 years, they had no king at all, as they lived under the constant

subjection to foreign governments, first Babylon, then Persia, Greece, and now Rome. Can you imagine? Children longing for Christmas morning pales in comparison to the type of waiting Israel endured.

And yet now, the angels appear on the scene and announce that Israel's run without a reigning King is about to come to an end. In the very city where King David would have been born, a new heir would ascend to the throne. It would be the best good news of great joy for all the people. The Christ, the Messiah, for whom all Israel was longing and looking, was taking his rightful place to rule over all the people. He would usher in the Kingdom of God such that all of the curses of the fall would begin to be reversed. He, the Savior of the world, would restore men in their relationship with God through the sacrifice of His very life. He would offer forgiveness of sins and unite men to one another. He would even begin to seek the restoration of a broken physical creation. The wait was over. As you consider your life, what longing still permeates your heart? How does the Messiah's coming help relieve that longing?

Day 4- Read Matthew 2:7-21

1. **Observation:** In addition to Jesus, who seems to be a focus of attention throughout the passage?

2. Ask questions of Matthew 2:7-21. What echoes of the Old Testament do you hear in this passage? What impact do those echoes have on the overall story? What motivated the wise men to worship Christ?

3. **Interpretation:** What differing motives could have driven Herod to act to destroy the Christ child? How do some of those same motives drive your actions and behaviors? Which of those things are you convicted to confess and repent of?

4. **Application:** Take away an application from Matthew 2:7-21. How would your actions this week look different if motivated as the wise men, rather than the motives of Herod?

5. **Prayer:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Hosea 11:1-2

Today's passage has two meanings. The first meaning refers to God's love for Israel. The other, and our focus for today, is the last part of **Verse 1** which says, "And out of Egypt I called My son." We read this scripture yesterday in Matthew 2:15. These were the words of Hosea, the prophet, and were written many years before Jesus would physically come into the world. The verse we read in Hosea and later in Matthew tells us that Jesus would come out of Egypt. When we read the account in Matthew, we learn God protected Jesus and brought Him out of Egypt, saving Him, so that one day He could save the world from their sins.

From our Old Testament study and from your knowledge of the Bible, take some time to write down some of the prophecies seen

in the Old Testament which were fulfilled in the New Testament or have been fulfilled through today. This may be something you think about and come back to from time to time.

Take some time to thank God for fulfilling these prophecies and that His Word is true and can be trusted.

Sermon Notes

WEEK 3 JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

By Dennis Watson

Luke 2 concludes with these words, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (**Verse 52**) Jesus grew in several different ways. Even at the very beginning of His life, the law of the Lord was very significant as it was throughout His life. James 2:10 says that if we break just one of the laws of the Lord, we are guilty of breaking the whole law. Jesus fulfilled the whole law. Just think, He did not break one law of the Lord! Throughout His life, He observed the whole law, even from infancy. This week is about anticipation and realization. Anna and Simeon had been anticipating the coming of the Messiah and how that anticipation had become a realized experience.

Day 1- Read Luke 2:21-24

Some people get a perfect SAT score. What an accomplishment! Imagine that same person taking it every day for the rest of their life and getting a perfect score despite changes made in the test. This would be beyond exceptional, but can you imagine that same person being perfect in every way? Pitch a perfect game in baseball every time! Hit a homerun every time! Always perfect! Well, our idea of perfect isn't like that. For instance, a professional baseball player can hit 30% of the time and is considered exceptional. However, God's scale of perfection is 100% perfect in everything. Jesus was always perfect, He had to be in order to die for our sins. He had to do the right thing all the time!

From birth Jesus was sinless. He had to be perfect to fulfill His purpose. His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, were very conscientious Jews who sought to follow the Law of Moses. Through the Law of Moses, God said every baby boy was to be

circumcised when he was eight days old. In keeping with the law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus when He was eight days old to be circumcised. Because the first born son belonged to the Lord, when the time of purification after having a baby was over, the parents were to take the first born son to offer a sacrifice and present him to the Lord. The parents were to redeem the son by offering a lamb as a sacrifice. If they could not afford a lamb, they could offer a turtle dove or young pigeon. So, once again Mary and Joseph submitted to the Law of Moses which the Lord God had given.

The start of Jesus' life was lived according to the Law of Moses as given by the Lord God. Throughout His life Jesus submitted to the law because the law came from His Father, the Lord God. He kept the whole law. I am so thankful for this because I am a transgressor of the law. Just think about the Ten Commandments. How many have you broken? I'm pretty sure I have broken them all since Jesus expanded on the ten laws, speaking not just of the act, but the thought behind the act. Jesus said that if we have broken the law in our heart, we are guilty. That's me and it's you, too. There is nothing you and I can do to remedy that. We are all guilty, but Jesus kept the law completely. He alone would die to cover our sin.

Thank the Lord God for His grace and mercy and how He does not expect perfection from us. Jesus was perfect for us and then He died for our imperfections.

Day 2- Read Luke 2:36-40

I clearly remember the days that Denise, Chris and Josh were born. It was a time of celebration! Their arrivals had long been anticipated and looked forward to. Special people were there, family members and friends. It was such a special time. The birth of Jesus was no different. One of the people present the

day Jesus was presented at the temple at about six weeks old was a woman named Anna. The name Anna means *grace*. Anna was a prophetess, a woman who spoke forth the Word of the Lord God. Anna was part of what is called the remnant. People who make up the remnant are those who believe the Lord God to continue what He started and are expecting Him to finish fully. Anna was anticipating the coming of the Messiah. The passage here says that Anna lived at the temple. She fasted and prayed day and night. From what Luke says about her, she may have been over 100 years old. The Lord God had shown her, through His word, that the Messiah would come and she would see Him. Upon seeing Jesus, she spoke to all who were like her, expecting His coming, telling them this was the One they had been looking for.

What a day this must have been for Anna. Each day, probably all day, she was watching for the Messiah to come. What joy she must have felt when she declared that the Redeemer who brought redemption had come.

Many people in the days of Anna had pretty much forgotten about the coming of the Messiah. Either they had forgotten or they no longer believed. They were not looking forward to or anticipating His coming. Who is the remnant today? Our faith is not just backward looking. We look back and see what God has been faithful to do, but we also take what He has said and look forward to what He says He is going to do. If you believe and trust Him for what He has said and done and are anticipating He will do all He promised, you are part of the remnant. We are once again anticipating Jesus' return when He will deliver His church from the wrath to come and He will ultimately rule and reign in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Not only are we anticipating, but we need to be letting others know He is coming again to finally, once and for all, deal with sin, death, and Satan.

So keep looking and anticipating! Jesus is coming again. Are you

ready? What about your friends and family?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 2:25-35

The truly devout Jews would have been living with knowledge of the prophecies given by the Old Testament prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah. They would have been living with an anticipating and watchful eye. Like Anna, there was another significant person at the dedication of Jesus at the temple. Simeon came to the temple the day Jesus was dedicated to the Lord. The Holy Spirit had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Yesterday, we read that Anna was part of the remnant, a group of people who believed God for His promises about the coming of Jesus, and, today, we will look at Simeon.

When Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms, he began to prophesy that God's salvation had come to His people. This salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all people. Simeon then blessed Mary and Joseph telling them that their Son would bring division and the rise and fall of many. He also predicted Mary's own soul would be pierced, probably a reference to Mary's heartbreak as she would see her Son rejected and then crucified.

Of course, as agonizing as Jesus' death was, it was the means by which the salvation Simeon spoke of came to the Jews and to the whole world. He was proclaiming the truth which had been made known to him which, in Jesus, had become a reality. Now, we know the outcome. Jesus grew up and there have been many to rise and many to fall based on their response to Him. We also know that Mary's soul was pierced as her Son was pierced on the cross. All biblical prophecy and teachings point to the salvation which was brought into the world by Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. Anna and Simeon pointed to this truth and so should we.

Day 4- Read Luke 2:41-52

1. **Observation:** What things jump out at you from the passage?

2. Ask questions of Luke 2:41-42. What significance is there that the writer of Luke would have included these 2 verses in the account? What custom is being alluded to? Why did Jesus' parents consistently go up for the feast of the Passover? How does Jesus' early life experiencing the Passover influence how you view his last supper?

3. **Interpretation:** What aspects of God may have nurtured Mary and Joseph's faithfulness to observe the Passover? Why do believers today so often struggle to maintain faithfulness? What about Christ's work encourages you despite your unfaithfulness?

4. **Application:** Where might the Lord be calling you to greater faithfulness personally or in guiding your family?

5. **Prayer:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Psalm 9:7-14

Earlier this week, we talked about Simeon and how he rejoiced when he held the baby Jesus and said, “My eyes have seen your salvation.” (**Verse 29**) Salvation in the Bible refers to two things. First, it refers to God’s protection of His people from their enemies. David rejoiced in how the Lord God had protected him in the past from his enemies. It also has a forward look to the saving of people from sin. David anticipated this in the Psalms. David anticipated and experienced the righteous judgment of the Lord God. When you read the words of **Verses 13-14**, it sounds much like the celebration of Simeon—“Have mercy on me, O Lord...I will rejoice in your salvation.” David anticipated the coming salvation of the Lord God, but it was Simeon who experienced and proclaimed it.

Once again we are in a very privileged position. We read about David experiencing the Lord God’s deliverance from his earthly enemies. We also read that David anticipated an even greater deliverance and salvation. The salvation he anticipated would come through the Messiah and it would be salvation from sin.

You and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, also experience and anticipate God’s salvation. We have experienced His deliverance from the power of sin in our daily lives. However, we also anticipate the time when the conflict will be over, when our salvation is complete and the flesh is totally done away with. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will ultimately be saved.

Thank the Lord our salvation is complete and that one day we will fully experience it without the influence of flesh. I once heard a preacher say regarding a believer who has passed away, “He breathed out his last breath in the flesh and the next breath in was breathing in the Spirit life of eternity.”

Notes

Sermon Notes

WEEK 4 THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

By Chris Watson

Approximately 30 years passed between the events we read about in Matthew 2, where the wise men visited Jesus, and Matthew 3, when we read about John the Baptist. John was born into the priesthood and his father was Zacharias (Luke 1:5). We know that John and Jesus were cousins because of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). This week we will see that God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus.

Day 1- Read Matthew 3:1-3

Long before John the Baptist was born, Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophesying about him. Verse 3 of today's passage refers to Isaiah's words prophesying that John would prepare the way for the Messiah. This was all part of God's plan to get the people ready for Jesus.

Try to imagine John's job. John the Baptist didn't exactly have an easy or desirable job. He could have been jailed immediately, but God was working through him to prepare the way for Jesus. John the Baptist was faithful to prepare the way. In fact, Jesus said in **Matthew 11:11**, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."

Notice the message John was preaching. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (**Verse 2**) Repent simply means to turn around, do a complete 180. You must realize you are going the wrong way, stop, and then turn and go the right way. The people were headed away from God and were involved in ungodly acts. John was telling them to stop, acknowledge they were wrong, and turn to God!

We all need to do this, both believers and unbelievers. Do you

know Jesus? If not, repent and turn to Him. Recognize you are going the wrong direction, put your faith in Jesus, call on Him to save you, and then turn and follow Him. Those who know Him are also in need of repentance. Are you headed in the wrong direction? Maybe you are involved in an ungodly relationship or maybe harboring bitterness. Are you acting deceitful or hateful? Are you just empty? We can look back to Jonah and remember that the people of Nineveh were very wicked people and God sent Jonah to tell them to repent and turn to the Lord. The people, including the king, called on God and turned from their sin and because of this, God heard their cry and chose not to destroy them. So, be reminded that when we repent of our sin, it can bring about a right relationship with God and save us from many undesired consequences down the road. Repent and turn to the Lord. He is our only hope. Call out to Him and follow Him with all you have!

Day 2- Read Matthew 3:4-11

Many heard John the Baptist's call regarding repentance and returning to God. We read in Verse 5 that many repented and were baptized!

However, there were two groups of people that showed up to the baptisms just to check things out. They were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These were two groups of people which had many things in common, but also disagreed about many things. The Pharisees were legalists and traditionalists, and were consumed with keeping the law perfectly. The Sadducees were more powerful and their ranks included the chief priests and high priests. However, they were more concerned with politics than with the things of God. Later, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus and had problems with the authority of the Old Testament. In fact, they denied the inspiration of the Word of God. Both groups were supposed to be religious and they may

have been, but they were not godly and they were not following the things of God. They were in it for themselves, what they wanted, and what made them look good.

It's not surprising that John calls them a brood of vipers. This refers to Genesis 3:15 and is actually calling them sons of Satan. Wow! That was pretty harsh. It appears to be true as they were religious, but had no thoughts of the things of God. They seemed to look great on the outside, but on the inside, they were just like everyone else. They needed to repent of their sins and be baptized.

There are a lot of religious people today. People may look like they have it all together. They may have all the right answers, know a lot about the Bible, and they may even lead others in their ways. However, for some of these people, it's not about Jesus or a relationship. It's about rituals, legalism, or looking good, while they are really just putting up a front. I pray this isn't the case with any of us. If it is, we must cry out to the Lord in desperation, repent from our selfish ways, and put our hope and trust in Jesus. We all need Jesus, DAILY!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 3:1-9

We see a similar account of John the Baptist in Luke's gospel with a little more detail. In fact, in the four gospels, we read many similar accounts from different angles. It would be as if four of us were eyewitnesses to an event. We all saw the same event, but we would explain it in a different way and focus on different aspects of the event.

John says in Verse 6 that "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." This should have been an obvious picture to the Jews that salvation was not just for them, but for all people. The Jews, God's chosen people, believed salvation was just for them.

However, Jesus begins to correct this view in John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” In this proclamation he informs Nicodemus, the “teacher of Israel,” that the salvation that is being offered is not only for the Jew, but indeed for the whole world so that all flesh might see salvation.

Marty Machowski wrote, “Jesus’ death on the cross was the way God kept his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring, for Jesus was born into Abraham’s family, and salvation is now offered to all people.” We are reminded Jesus is for all people, whether black or white, rich or poor, whatever our differences. Jesus is for all, and has blessed and grafted a diverse people, including us, into Abraham’s family.

Day 4- Read Luke 3:10-18

1. **Observation:** What is the context of this passage? What has John been proclaiming?

2. Ask questions of Luke 3:10-18. What about John’s message so moved the people to repentance? What did John mean that the one coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire?

3. **Interpretation:** How does John’s description of Jesus lead you to adoration? What type of person might the people then expect to be introduced to? How does this description differ from other descriptions of Jesus? How does it serve to highlight the majesty of who Jesus is?

4. **Application:** Many of the crowds asked John, “what then shall we do” in response to the coming of the Messiah. If you were to ask that of John, given your vocation, what would his response be to you?

5. **Prayer:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 40:1-5

Isaiah lived hundreds of years before John the Baptist and yet he wrote about him. This was one of God’s many ways of pointing to Jesus before Jesus was physically on this earth. Today, we can look back and read the prophets like Isaiah, and see God’s plan was in full swing before John the Baptist was born. God’s plan and sovereign will was played out then and continues to be played out today.

In Old Testament times, God often used prophets to share the Truth and proclaim what was coming. Today, we have something people in the Old and New Testaments didn’t have; we have the fully inspired and infallible Word of God. We can see from

Genesis to Revelation the whole account of God's plan. As Paul Harvey would say, "We have the rest of the story." We know that God still uses people to convey His Truth through His Word, but as individuals, we can read God's Word daily. We can study it and learn from it. Just a few days ago, I saw a cartoon of someone looking up to God in heaven and saying, "God please speak to me." In response, God handed that person a Bible indicating, "I already have and you have those very Words in your hand, on your heart, and they can be with you everywhere you go."

I am sure you are aware that there are still many people-groups across the world that do not have the Bible written in their language. Some groups have a few books of the Bible, while there are others which don't have any part of the Bible. We have the very words of God at our fingertips every day, yet we often leave it lying on our tables. Then, we either can't find them, or we don't pick them back up again until the following Sunday. Will you thank God for His Word? Will you continue to read and study it? Are you thankful you have "The rest of the story," the account that tells us one day we will spend eternity with Him? We will walk and talk with Him. Until then, may we know Him better as we connect through His Word. Will you cherish the Word of God?

WEEK 5 THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

By Dennis Watson

As we have seen, John the Baptist's baptisms were for repentance. Jesus never sinned, yet, Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize Him. Jesus came to this earth for sinners. To be specific, Paul writes that Jesus came to become *sin for us* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus completely identified with us in our humanity though He was both fully God and fully man. He was born as a helpless infant just like we were and He grew up into an adult. He lived a sinless life and in His death He identified with our sinfulness. He became sin for us. His baptism was identification with our sin. He didn't need to repent, but He was to take on our sin and His baptism was an example for us. This week we will look at the baptism of Jesus.

Day 1- Read Matthew 3:13-15

We don't know how John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, but it was probably the Holy Spirit who let him know. It seems odd he didn't know his cousin was the Messiah, but John did know he was not worthy to baptize Jesus. Jesus was without sin! Why did Jesus ask John to baptize Him? John had been calling people from all over the region to come to him for repentance of sin. Jesus said He needed to be baptized to fulfill righteousness. John's message was a message of repentance and those experiencing it were looking forward to the coming Messiah who would be righteous and who would bring in righteousness. If the Messiah were to provide righteousness for sinners, He must be identified with sinners. It was therefore in the will of God for Him to be baptized by John in order to be identified (the real meaning of the word "baptized") with sinners.¹

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Jesus took the initiative to identify with us. He was born as an infant, a helpless infant. Can you imagine the God who created all things became an infant in need of the care and concern of a mother and father? By becoming human, He identified with our humanity. In baptism, He identified with our sin though He was sinless. In His death on the cross He identified with our guilt. He became human sin, and guilt for us. Now, we get to identify with Him. In baptism, we identify with the death He died for us. In that death, He took away our sin. Also in baptism, we are symbolically identifying with His resurrection. The old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all." He paid it all. He did the difficult; identifying with us so we could receive the benefit of His resurrection.

Paul expressed it this way:

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."

Romans 6:5 (NKJV)

The sinless Son of God put Himself in harm's way so we would receive the benefits. Thank the Lord God for becoming flesh and sin for us so we can receive the benefits of His resurrection.

Day 2- Read Matthew 3:16-17

As Jesus came up out of the water following His baptism by John, Heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. "And suddenly a voice came from Heaven saying, 'This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (**Verse 17**) Here at the baptism of Jesus all three of the persons of the Trinity of God were present. The Son Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and rested on Jesus, and God spoke from Heaven. The Trinity, humanly speaking, is impossible to explain. There have been many attempted explanations, but none truly

explain the Trinity. The Trinity describes or defines God as three in one. God is three but one. This is beyond human grasp, though we know it is true. The Lord God is indescribable. We can only attempt to speak of the One True God in human terms but He is larger and greater than our words will ever express.

When the Spirit of God descended and God spoke, John truly understood that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). It also fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that the Spirit would rest on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2). The descent of the Holy Spirit empowered the Son, the Messiah, for His ministry among people.²

The Lord God affirmed and authenticated Jesus in the virgin birth, the appearance of the Trinity at His baptism, at the transfiguration, and in His resurrection from the dead.

Give thanks to the Lord God for His many confirmations for us that Jesus Christ is the One God sent to be our Messiah.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read John 1:29-34

John proclaimed Jesus was, " ... the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (Verse 29) In the biblical, historical account of the Passover in Exodus, the people were instructed to take a lamb, kill it, and spread the blood of the lamb on the door frame of their homes. When the angel of death came along, he passed over homes which had the blood of the lamb on the doorframe. The lamb's blood saved those households from experiencing the death of the firstborn. Jesus is the Lamb of God. His blood provides salvation from sin, death, and the grave, for people who have placed their faith in Him and His shed blood.

²The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

John also said Jesus was before me. Although John was a few months older than Jesus, he knew and proclaimed that Jesus was before him. John spoke of the preexistence of Jesus. Jesus was present with God the Father in the beginning and all things were made by Him and for Him.

John acknowledged Jesus was the Lamb of God and He existed before him. John saw the Spirit come down and remain on Jesus when He was baptized and John was certainly familiar with Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 11:2) proclaiming the Spirit would come and rest on Him. For John the Baptist, this was God's confirmation that Jesus was His Son and the promised Messiah. Because of all of this, John testified Jesus was the Son of God. John made the connection between Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Passover lamb whose blood spared families from experiencing the death of the firstborn. He also connected Jesus to His role as Creator. Give thanks that Jesus is all over and throughout the Word of God!

Day 4- Read Mark 6:17-29

1. **Observation:** How does Mark 6:17-29 fit within the verses surrounding it? What emotions do you find throughout the text?
2. Ask questions of Mark 6:17-29. Why do you think Herod would desire to listen to John when ultimately he was denouncing Herod's marriage? Using an online interlinear Bible, define the emotions that are used throughout the text.

3. **Interpretation:** In v. 20, Herod's perplexment is often translated doubt. What about John's message might have appealed to Herod? What about John's message would have led him to doubt? Confess the ways that doubt manifests in your life. What aspect of Christ's work comforts believers in their struggles with doubt?

4. **Application:** Take away an application from Mark 6:17-29. Which character, Herod or John, might the Lord be calling you to focus on? Being in Christ, how might God desire to have your doubts relieved? Being in Christ, how might God desire you to have the boldness of John.

5. **Prayer:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 11:1-5

It is interesting that today's passage was written about 700 years before Jesus came to live on earth. In this passage, Isaiah linked Jesus not to David, but to David's father, Jesse. Though this still links Jesus to the Davidic Covenant that the Messiah would rule on David's throne, Isaiah linked Jesus to the poor farmer from Bethlehem. Like Jesus, He was born to peasants. The geographical link was not to the City of David, which was

Jerusalem, but to the little town of Bethlehem.

We have already looked at the passage in John 1:32 about the Spirit coming to rest on Jesus at His baptism. This was prophesied in today's passage. Look at what J. Vernon McGee says about this:

This is the sevenfold spirit which rested upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The plentitude of power is the sevenfold spirit: (1) of the LORD; (2) of wisdom; (3) of understanding; (4) of counsel; (5) of might; (6) of knowledge; and (7) of the fear of the LORD. The number seven in Scripture does not necessarily mean perfection. The primary thought is fullness, completeness. John 3:34 tells us, “...for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” In Ephesians 5:18 we are admonished, “...*be filled with the Spirit.*” Some of us just have a few drops at the bottom, others are one fourth filled, and some are half filled. Very few Christians you meet are really filled with the Spirit. A little girl once prayed, “Lord, fill me with the Spirit. I can't hold very much, but I can run over a whole lot.” Very few Christians are just brimming full, running over on all sides. The Lord Jesus Christ was the exception to that.³

There is a critical need today for God's people to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. Are you spilling over with His Spirit? If not, ask the Lord to fill you in a mighty way.

³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Notes

WEEK 6 THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Chris Watson

We all are tempted daily. We live in a sin-filled world where all manners of sin and the things of this world are at our fingertips. Jesus was tempted, just like you and me, but He never sinned. This should remind us that we can't do it on our own; if we desire victory over the enemy and temptation, then we need to put our hope and trust in Jesus. This week, we will see Jesus being tempted and overcoming that temptation, knowing ultimately He is in charge.

Day 1- READ Luke 4:1-4

Jesus had just been baptized and His Father had just told Him how much He took delight in Him. We might think that following His baptism, God through Jesus would do some great miracle or something incredible would occur. Yet, right after His baptism, He went into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil. This often happens in our lives, too. Right after God does a great work, or we have a wonderful victory, the enemy tries to get us off track.

In this account, Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit (God) to fast and seek God while at the same time He was being tempted. Even this was a part of God's plan. Jesus would be tempted just like we are, and yet, He would not give into the temptations. Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus was tempted just like you and I, but He remained sinless.

It's interesting to note that Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden by the enemy as well, but they failed and gave in to the temptation. Jesus (the last Adam, 1 Corinthians 15:45) was tempted in the wilderness and succeeded in resisting temptation. Though Jesus was hungry, He overcame the temptation.

Notice **Verse 3** reads, "If you are the son of God..." In the Greek, which is what the New Testament was written in, there are conditional clauses when it comes to the "if" statements. It could mean "if and it's not so," "if, maybe it's so and maybe it's not," and "if and it's so, thus..." In other words, this *if you are the Son of God* statement by the devil wasn't a question or a wondering, but it was an, *if you are the Son of God, and you are, then tell the stones to become bread*. For if He wasn't the Son of God, it would have been meaningless. Satan knew He was the Son of God and he was seeking to tempt Him and hoping He would give in.

However, Jesus didn't; He fought the temptation with God's words from Deuteronomy 8:3. He told the devil that God's Word is greater than any physical food and God's Word is the true source of our strength.

We need the Word of God and we can know it by reading, studying, and memorizing. Then, when you and I are tempted, God, through His Word, will be victorious in us. What are you tempted with right now? Whatever it may be, it is not greater than our Jesus. He has the words of life and nothing will satisfy other than Him. Call on Him to help you resist temptations and tell the devil you have the very words of God.

Day 2- Read Luke 4:5-8

This passage is very significant. At first glance, especially for someone who is not familiar with it, it may seem like the devil is in control. If the devil can give Jesus anything and everything, doesn't that mean he is in control or that God is not all powerful? The answer is no.

God is sovereign, meaning He is in control. We can trust God and His plans. Jesus told us "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." (**John 12:31**) Three key

words are *this world* and *ruler*. Satan is *ruler* of this world only when it comes to evil and darkness. In other words, the devil has no power or rule over believers; we are under God's love and grace. In fact, **Ephesians 2:1-2** speaks of those who used to have the mindset of the enemy in this world when it says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." In other words, we used to walk in the way of this world before God saved us, but now we walk in the peace and grace of God.

God is ultimately in charge. **Colossians 1:15-18** says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." The enemy was trying to tempt Jesus with the whole world and fast track what was ultimately His anyway. Jesus knew that one day the evil of this world would be destroyed. If Jesus had fallen for the devil's plot, He would have received the darkness and evil of this world, which wasn't a deal at all, as God is light. So while Satan was seeking to tempt Jesus with a shortcut to have this world, Jesus ultimately knew God's plan and knew Who was really in charge. Satan made a valid offer, but the terms were not acceptable. The Father had promised to give the Son all the kingdoms of the world (Psalms 2:7-8), but Jesus first had to suffer and die. Satan was trying to offer a shortcut and there are no shortcuts in God's plan.

Jesus' answer told the whole story when He responded, "... you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." (**Verse 8**)

Jesus knew the only one who deserved worship and praise was the One True God. No person, sport, material thing, possession, position or any other thing deserves to be worshipped. Only God deserves our worship. If He works through a circumstance or a person, they don't deserve the worship, God does because it is God working through them.

Take time to thank God that He is all knowing, worthy and totally in control. The glory belongs to no one else. Commit to worship and serve only Him. Most of all, thank Him, that as a believer, you are no longer under the authority of the devil of this world, but under the grace and mercy of God through Jesus.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Hebrews 4:14-16

Today we found out my daughter passed her nursing board exam. She is officially a Registered Nurse. This accomplishment has caused me to reflect on our journey to this destination. I say our journey because her dad and I feel like we felt every joy, pain, fear, and triumph over the last two and a half years. We have sweated through the tough tests, watched the demonstrations, celebrated each class she passed, and prayed through the next difficult assignment. WE are very excited to reach the end of this particular journey.

In our passage today, we are reminded that Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness. We can be tempted to think Jesus floated through life with His feet not touching the rough, uneven ground we have to travel. These verses remind us we have a Savior who knows us and has sympathy for us *in our weakness*. He did not stay in His perfect heaven. He came down and experienced all the brokenness of this world firsthand. And He does not distance Himself from us when we are not at our best, instead he draws near to us there.

In his book *Gentle and Lowly*, Dane Ortlund helps us understand what it means that Christ sympathizes with us. “*Sympathize* here is not cold and detached pity. It is a depth of felt solidarity such as is echoed in our own lives most closely only as parents to children. Indeed, it is deeper even than that. In our pain, Jesus is pained; in our suffering, he feels the suffering as his own even though it isn’t-not that his invincible divinity is threatened, but in the sense that his heart is feelingly drawn into our distress. His human nature engages our troubles comprehensively. His is a love that cannot be held back when he sees his people in pain.”

I know how my husband and I have felt every bump and bruise of our children, especially in the last few years of nursing school. How comforting it is to know Jesus even more deeply feels our pain and more completely pursues and loves us in our weakness.

Day 4- Read Luke 4:9-13

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What’s not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. In this passage, Satan begins quoting Scripture to tempt Jesus. What does that tell you about Satan and his tactics?

5. **APPLICATION:** James 4 says if we resist the devil he will flee from us. How can you resist the devil in Christ's resurrection power today?

6. **PRAYER:** Thank Jesus today for being tempted in every way we are yet without sin. Praise Him for His beautiful perfection especially in the areas you find yourself to be tempted today.

Day 5 Luke 4:9-13

During this biblical, historical event, Satan knew scripture, but he didn't use it in context. The verses he quoted were Psalm 91:11-12 which speaks of abiding in the presence of God as He gives His angels charge over you. Satan was tempting Jesus, but he was not properly using scripture. Sometimes the enemy tries to get us to take, read, or use scripture out of context to make it say what we want it to say. It's important when we read scripture, we see it in light of the whole Bible, looking at what comes just before it and just after it. Obviously, Satan was using scripture for his own purposes. He was trying to further his plans, but it didn't work.

Satan was seeking to command or demand of Jesus what he

wanted. However, Satan can't do that. Yes, he can ask or try commanding God to do this or that, but God is in control, not Satan. This should come as a great reminder and a refuge for us. No matter what you and I face, God is in control. In the darkest of days or when things are going great, we can trust Him because He is in control. Our responsibility is to remain in Him (John 15) and walk with Him. We walk with Him because we know Him, we have seen His faithfulness. Satan knew who Jesus was, he knew Jesus was in control, though he didn't like it and he tried to do things his own way. Those of us who trust Jesus know that He is King. We know He loves us and He is in control even though there are times we have to be reminded. Those who have walked with God have seen His faithfulness. Chuck Missler says, "Trust never employs tricks to find out whether the one trusted is trustworthy." We don't have to use tricks to test God's trustworthiness; we know we can trust Him.

Do you trust God? Is your hope in Him? Are you walking with Him? If so, be encouraged; even in our worst days we can have peace. Let this sink in, "When a child of God is in the will of God, he can claim the Father's protection and provision; but if he willingly gets into trouble and expects God to rescue him, then he is tempting God" (Chuck Missler).

Paul wrote that whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Today, let us walk willingly in the ways of God, trusting Him, not tempting Him. In other words, don't willfully walk into sin, for it is not from God. Thank God for delivering you from sin and giving you victory over temptation.

Notes

Sermon Notes

Week 7 The Wedding Feast

By Dennis Watson

Day 1- Read John 2:1-5

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother, Mary, was there along with Jesus and His first six disciples, Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip and Nathaniel (Bartholomew). It is very interesting to note that Jesus began His ministry at a wedding and the beginning of eternity will be the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven as a bride adorned for her groom-- a wedding! Marriage is extremely important to the Lord God. One of the first things He did, in the beginning, was to make man and woman fit together. He often used marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Himself and His followers.

Jesus' first miracle took place at this wedding. A wedding in those days, and in that culture, was a seven day affair. With Jesus and His disciples, there were probably more guests expected, but for whatever reason, they ran out of wine. Jesus' mother, Mary, went to Him for His help. His initial response sounded rude and disrespectful. However, He was telling her it was not time for people to know who He really was. Mary's insistence He do something may have risen from a need for justification on her part. People were probably still talking about her becoming pregnant before marrying Joseph. A miracle would prove that He was no ordinary man.

His response of *my time has not yet come* or similar words occur five times in John (2:4; 7:6, 7:8, 7:30; 8:20). Later He would use similar terminology saying that His time had come (12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus was telling her that the time of revealing who He was had not yet come. She then told the servants to do what He said--she trusted Him and left it up to Him to do what He deemed best.

Mary believed she could take her problems to Jesus, her Son. Two passages tell us to cast our cares on Him--Psalm 55:22 and 1 Peter 5:7. Mary was bold and unapologetic in approaching Jesus with the problem at hand. We should do the same. Cast your cares on Him.

We can learn from Mary. She did not make the need known and then tell Him what to do; she simply pointed out the need and left it in His hands. This is true submission.

What about the needs you submit to Jesus? Can you leave them with Him? This is true trust.

Day 2- Read John 2:6-10

Jesus went ahead and turned the water into wine, although His time had not come. I don't believe He felt pressured to do it. He was telling His mother a truth she would need to continue to understand. His time would come for miracles, for suffering, and for death. Ultimately, the time of His resurrection and glorification would also come. In that event, she would truly be confirmed.

This miracle was known only by Mary, Jesus' disciples, and the servants. There were six pots which were used for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus told a group of servants to fill those water pots with water. They were ordinary, empty clay pots. They filled them with water and when a cup was dipped into one of the pots, the cup was filled with top quality wine. Where there was no wine before, there were now at least 120 gallons. Neither the guests nor the host knew the source of the wine. We were once empty, useless pots and Jesus filled us to overflowing with His Spirit. I cannot help but think of this when I read this account.

Turning water into wine was no real challenge for the Son of God. He did not need months or years for time to ferment. He did

not need the elaborate natural process. He was God in the flesh. "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." **Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)**

How difficult would it be for Jesus to perform such a miracle? No problem at all. There was suddenly enough wine for 2500 wine glasses to be filled. I can guarantee you they would not run out of wine again at that wedding feast!

Empty pots; probably old and chipped pots filled with fine wine. Sounds familiar--We have this treasure in jars of clay. Consider Paul's words: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." **2 Corinthians 4:7 (NKJV)**

Jesus is still in the business of filling worthless clay pots for His name's sake! Rejoice; again, I say rejoice.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read John 12:23-32

Jesus told His mother His time had not yet come. It was not time for Him to show the world who He was by working miracles. However, He did perform His first miracle by turning water into wine at the wedding feast. Several other times in the gospels He said, My time has come. In today's passage, we see one of those times. He said, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." (**Verse 25**) The time had come. Jesus made it clear why He had come. By referring to Himself as, The Son of Man, He connected Himself to the prophecy of the Messiah (Daniel 7:13). Jesus is identifying Himself as the Messiah and predicts His death. He even said the method of His death would be crucifixion.

Although He was troubled, Jesus surrendered Himself to His Father's will. Jesus, The Son of God, was agitated and stirred because of the prospect of being made sin in His death (2 Cor. 5:21) Yet, His greatest desire, even more than preserving His own life, was doing His Father's will.

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.”

John 12:27 (NKJV) Jesus' prayer reflects His deep agony but also His strong resolve to do what the Father sent Him to do.

Jesus came to save us from our sin. His whole life had been a journey to the cross and now that journey reached its final stretch. His hour had come. The Father's name would be glorified. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and millions throughout history would be drawn to His death and resurrection for salvation.

It is deeply moving to see the humanity and the deity of Christ so vividly on display in the Garden when His hour had drawn near. Take comfort today that you have a Savior who can truly sympathize with the deep emotions you feel when faced with the darkness in this life. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Day 4- Read John 2:11-12

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?

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

4. How is Jesus' glory manifested in His miracles? Why would these miracles cause the disciples to believe in Him?

5. **APPLICATION:** What caused you to believe in Jesus? How does reflecting on His miracles cause you to renew your faith in Him?

6. **PRAYER:** What areas of unbelief is the Holy Spirit convicting you of today? Confess those to the Lord and mediate on His glory in those areas today.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 62:11-12

After the water to wine miracle at the wedding, the first six disciples were probably feeling pretty good about following Jesus. Jesus had saved the wedding hosts the embarrassment of running out of wine, but He came for far more than to save us from embarrassment. The disciples were starting to connect the dots. They probably knew of Isaiah's prophecy and the prophecies of many other Old Testament prophets. They might have wanted to go out shouting what Isaiah wrote in today's passage, "Surely your salvation is coming." These verses were written as though the Lord was on His way so the people should be expecting Him. It is incredi-

ble there were not more people expecting His coming since there were so many specific prophecies about His coming.

Isaiah's prophecy is not just for the Jewish people. Galatians 3:29 says if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed. That means this promise in Isaiah 62 is for you:

YOU "shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

Spend some time meditating on these truths that you are holy, redeemed, sought out and not forsaken.

Notes

Sermon Notes

WEEK 8 JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

By Chris Watson

Jesus is loving and patient, yet He spoke truth when it needed to be spoken. When things were not going in line with scripture, He acted accordingly, especially when it came to His Father's house. As believers, we should do the same. We should be patient and loving, but when we see things that are against God's plan, we should pray and wait for direction from the Lord. If so directed, we should speak up. We should do so with God's authority, but always with love and kindness.

Day 1- Read John 2:13-17

We often think of Jesus as someone who is meek and mild who never ruffles any feathers. However, as we have and will see in the Gospels, He spoke tough words to many people including the Pharisees and the Sadducees, He made sure people understood what it meant to truly trust and follow God. In today's account, we don't see Jesus being meek and mild. In fact, He took a whip throughout the temple, poured out the money changer's coins, and overturned the tables.

At first glance, some may look at these verses and try to use this as an example that Jesus sinned. However, scripture tells us in our anger to *sin not* (Ephesians 4:26). It is possible to become angry and not sin, however, we often allow our anger to turn into sin. Thankfully, Jesus did not.

In this passage and also in Matthew 21:13, we see that the money changers were cheating the people. These things should not have been happening in the temple. Worship and sacrifice should have been taking place in the outer court of the temple, but selling and cheating were taking place. No wonder Jesus took the action He

did! Did you realize the Passover was at hand? What was considered one of the holiest and greatest remembrances of God's deliverance of His people was being celebrated, yet people were oblivious and doing the exact opposite of what they should have been doing in the temple.

Jesus was zealous (Verse 17) for the things of God. He couldn't stand by and watch ungodly things going on in His Father's house. He wanted only proper worship and sacrifice at the temple. We, too, should desire to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. Whether we are at home or at church, we should worship God with all of our hearts. Many times, we may be at church and while we may not be selling or cheating people, our hearts are not fully there; we are not zealous for God and the things of God. Are you zealous and in love with God? Do you want the things He wants? Are you content with the status quo? Ask God to help you love what He loves and hate what He hates. Ask Him to change your heart to be like His and see things the way He sees them. Then, maybe the trivial things won't matter to us; and the things which matter to God, will matter to us. Let us be in tune with God and His heart.

Day 2- Read John 2:18-22

It's easy to second guess the Jews in the New Testament, knowing what we know now. Truth be told, had we been in their place, we might have done the same thing. The Jews wanted a sign that Jesus cleansing the temple was right and He had the authority to do so. However, we see in **Matthew 12: 38-42** what Jesus said about those who ask for a sign, "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" Again they questioned Jesus. He was

telling and showing them He was Jesus, the Son of God, and no sign demanded by humans would be given aside from what had already been seen and would continue to be shown as a part of His ministry.

When Jesus told the Jews that the temple would be destroyed and in three days He would raise it, it was almost impossible for them to grasp. From His response, they thought He was talking about the physical temple. In reality, He was talking about Himself; He is the temple. They could only see what was right in front of them. However, the disciples remembered these words when He was crucified and rose from the grave.

When Jesus died, the veil to the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. From that moment, we began to have direct access to God through Jesus. We don't have to go to a temple, church, or any other special place to meet with Jesus. Though Jesus instructs us to be a part of His Church, we can talk and meet with Him anywhere. Jesus is the temple and if Jesus is in us, He is with us wherever we go.

Isn't that incredible? Even after knowing this most of my life and experiencing it for myself, it's incredible to think the God of the universe lives in me. He is near me. He walks beside me, He comforts and guides me. This amazes me! Jesus is the temple.

Not only are we to take care of our earthly bodies (as the temple) as Jesus is in us, but we are to be good stewards of Jesus and His message. We often think of stewardship in terms of money, but how are we being good stewards of Jesus and His message? In other words, what are you doing through Christ living in you? Are you leaning on Him? Are you sharing Him? Are you living for Him? Are you going through the difficult parts of life with Him? Jesus is in us; we have His power. All praise and glory to Him! Thank Him for being Christ in us.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Matthew 27:39-43

I don't think one day goes by where I don't worry about what other people think of me. Often, my love of another person's approval can make me do foolish and illogical things. The first thing that pops in my mind is middle school fashion choices-who thought it was a good idea to wear two polo shirts and acid wash jeans!?!

We can laugh about some of our tendencies towards pleasing people but in reality we have all experienced the bondage of fear and anxiety we feel when we think we have displeased someone whose opinion matters to us. We might be tempted to think this is an area where Jesus can't relate to us, but Hebrews says He was tempted in every way we are. I believe this means that Jesus did care what others thought of Him, and He longed for approval and belonging just like we do.

When we think of Jesus in His humanity, it makes it all the more amazing that He would endure not only daily rejection without sin but also the public humiliation He faced on the cross. In our verses for today, we see Jesus not only in excruciating physical and psychological pain but also enduring the ridicule of all who passed by. Passersby were mocking His claims of deity and His relationship to God the Father. And yet, He did not retaliate and did not come down from the cross. He faced rejection from all those who were closest to Him and from the crowds in order that we would never have to face the rejection of God the Father. He was willing to be cast out from all sense of belonging so we could belong to Him forever.

Re-read these few verses and think about Jesus the man and all He endured to secure your place with Him forever.

Day 4- Read John 2:23-25

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. When you compare verses 22 and 23, do you think the belief in Jesus was different? Does your understanding of the crowd's belief in Jesus change when you read John 6:66?
5. What did Jesus understand about mankind that would make Him not entrust Himself to us?
6. **APPLICATION:** How does my trust in Jesus falter when I am not receiving from Him what I want?

7. **PRAYER:** Confess to God your tendency to trust Him when He is doing the things you want or understand and your unbelief when He doesn't do those things.

Day 5- Read Psalm 69:7-13

The beginning of **Verse 9** reads, "Because zeal for your house has eaten me up." In other words, David had zeal for God's house (temple) and the things of God. The word zeal means, fervor for a person, cause, or object; eager desire or endeavor; enthusiastic diligence; ardor. ⁴ David, Jesus, and others we know from scripture had a zeal for God's House and the things of God. During Old Testament times, it would have been a zeal for the temple. Today, it could mean a zeal for God's church as a building, but this is not necessarily what it means. Rather, it means to have a zeal for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

When you think about your relationship with Jesus, does the word zeal come to mind? Do you have fervor and a love for Jesus and the things of Jesus? Do you desire to follow Jesus and the things Jesus follows? Do you desire to go to the places where He would go? Do you desire to love the things He loves and hate the things which He hates?

If we are truthful, sometimes our zeal may not be for Jesus or the things of Jesus. At times, we may think we are zealous for the things of Jesus, but may not show it in the right way. For instance, we should hate sin and all of its effects, but God desires us to love others. We don't have to hate the person who sins, but we can hate the sin. If we love a person, we will speak the truth to them with kindness and the love of Jesus about their sin. If we truly have zeal for Jesus, we would not be showing His love if we

⁴ Dictionary.com, Zeal

didn't speak truth to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Again, our motives should not be selfish, derogatory, hateful, or spiteful, but should flow from our zeal and love for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

Are there things in your life, maybe actions, words, thoughts, and desires that speak the opposite of having a zeal for the things of Jesus? Do you need to lay those things down? Would you take some time today to do just that? Lay them down, those things which go against Jesus and against having a zeal for Him. Let us speak truth for Jesus and let our zeal be a godly, loving zeal, not hateful or mean-spirited.

WEEK 9 NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS

By Dennis Watson

Day 1- Read John 3:1-8

Nicodemus was a religious man, but he was clearly sensitive to spiritual truth. Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of night so his Pharisee companions would not see him. He was drawn to Jesus and His teaching.

"Three things are said about Nicodemus here. The first thing is that he was a man of the Pharisees. That means that he belonged to the best group in Israel. They believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament, they believed in the coming of the Messiah, they believed in miracles, and they believed in the Resurrection. He was a man of the Pharisees, and his name was Nicodemus -- we are given his name. And he was a ruler of the Jews. This tells us of the three masks that this man wore."⁵

"Nicodemus was of a religious group who believed that you needed to be a good Israelite and avoid sin to be accepted by God. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that coming to God was not something that you can accomplish on your own. What a shock it must have been when Jesus announced to him, "...Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God...."

Verse 3:3 After all what kind of religious activity can cause a person to be born again? Very early in Jesus' ministry He makes it clear that getting right with God is not something a person can do by merit. The command to be "born again" is something no one can do on their own. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born of water and the Spirit. No one had anything to do with their first birth. The new birth is a work of God!

⁵ ThruThe Bible with J. Vernon McGee

“Water” would remind Nicodemus of John the Baptist’s emphasis. Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to enter the kingdom, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There are two distinct realms: one is of fallen man (the flesh) and the other is of God (the Spirit). A fallen person cannot regenerate himself; he needs a divine operation. Only God's Holy Spirit can regenerate a human spirit. People should not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus' words. They must be born from above. The necessity is absolute and is universally binding.”⁶

If you are saved, you add nothing to it and you take nothing away. It is a gift not achieved, but received. Give thanks to the Lord for His great accomplishment in you on your behalf.

Day 2- Read John 3:9-15

The writers and prophets of the Old Testament spoke of a time to come when there would be a new age with the working of God’s Spirit. Nicodemus and the other religious leaders failed to connect the dots. Here is one example of prophecy regarding the work of the Spirit: " Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." **Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NKJV)**

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying so he asked, "How can these things be?" (**Verse 9**) Jesus then questioned how he could be a teacher and not understand these things.

⁶ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty

Nicodemus did not see himself as a sinner in need of being saved. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to a biblical, historical event in which the Israelites sinned and were suffering and dying and Moses put the bronze serpent on the pole instructing the people to look at to be healed. Jesus told Nicodemus that Jesus, the Son of Man, would also be lifted up and all who believe in Him would receive eternal life.

What a huge departure from the heavy-handed religion Nicodemus and the Israelites were accustomed to. God had provided the solution to the problem of sin. He alone could deal with sin and make people acceptable. Religion is man's attempt to get to God. Christianity is God's plan to come to man. I often speak with people who are questioning their salvation. They wonder, Did I do it right, or Did I pray the right prayer? Salvation is a gift. It was accomplished by God sending Jesus to die for our sins, and then for Him to be raised up victorious. He did it. You receive it. It is a gift received, not an award achieved. Give thanks to the Lord that He has provided what we need in order to know Him. Jesus paid it all!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read John 3:16-18

Heaven and hell are real places. In Hebrews it is written, "As it is appointed for men to die once, but after that the judgment."

Hebrews 9:27 (NKJV) It is very clear in biblical teaching that death is the result of sin. It is also clear that after death, people will either spend eternity in Heaven with the Lord God, or in hell separated from God, with Satan and his demons. Jesus summarizes the gospel when He tells Nicodemus those all too familiar words, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." **John 3:16 (NKJV)**

God is a good God! Because He is good, sin must be punished.

The punishment for sin is death and hell. Jesus tells Nicodemus that God loved the people of the world so much He sent Jesus, His only Son, into the world to die and that all those who believe in Him will receive not death and hell, but eternal life with Him in Heaven. Just like the historical account in the Old Testament we discussed yesterday, Jesus would be lifted up to take away the penalty of our sin.

It is clear for those who believe in God's work through Jesus for salvation that they will spend eternity with the Lord God in Heaven. However, those who do not believe will receive the full impact of sin—death and hell. Is that mean or cruel on God's part? Is it unfair? Think about it. If God were fair, we would all go to hell. He has chosen to give us grace and mercy.

A long time ago, long before Moses and the serpent and before God created everything, He had already planned to save us, both you and me, from our sins. God was motivated by His love to send His Son to deal with our sin. Give thanks to the Lord God for His amazing grace and love. All of scripture points to Jesus, God's only Son.

Day 4- Read John 3:19-21

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?

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

4. How are the metaphors of darkness and light fitting for loving evil versus good?

5. **APPLICATION:** When you think of your life before you trusted Jesus for your salvation, what characteristics do you see of loving darkness? Are there residual ways you continue to love darkness rather than light?

6. **PRAYER:** Ask the Lord to give you one person to pray for by name today who still loves darkness. Pray that he/she will turn to the light.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 60:1-5

In John 3, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the light coming into the world. Many years before Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that God would send His light into the world. The light would shine all over the world and people would be set free in the light. In January 2014, we had an ice storm that left us without power for a week. It was miserable! We had no TV, no radio, no lights, and no heat. When our neighbor loaned us a portable generator, we experienced some relief, but each evening

I looked forward to morning when the sun would come up. The light just seemed to lift my spirit. This is what Isaiah was speaking about. He announced God's light would come, the nations would come to the light, and people would be filled with joy.

Once when I was on a mission trip to a very remote part of the world, our plane was making its final approach into a very small airport. I am accustomed to looking out the window of the plane and seeing the lights of the city around the airport, but not this time. There were very few lights and they were dim; the airport was almost totally dark. Within fifteen minutes of arrival, they closed the airport and turned out those few lights. Oh, how I longed to see lights.

People of the world are longing for light. Not just the light that shines and gives physical light, but the light which comes from the One True God. His light gives hope and security. It exposes danger and trouble. His light shows us the way. God's light, Jesus, is the way the truth and the life.

There was a time when the Lord's light was shining in the tabernacle, but departed because of Israel's sin. His glory was in the temple, but departed when the nation turned to idols. Later, true light came into the world, and that light was Jesus Christ. He said He was the Light of the world; however, even the Light of the world was nailed to a cross. Today, God's glory is in His church and in His people, individually. The day will come when His light will dawn in the New Heaven and the New Earth and the darkness will be totally cast out.

Rejoice in the Light of the world, which is Jesus.

Notes

Week 10 Good News

By Chris Watson

Think of the best news you have ever received. Maybe it was the doctor saying, “the cancer is gone.” Maybe it was an announcement from your son or daughter that there was going to be a wedding, or you were going to be a grandparent. Did you receive the acceptance letter in the mail from the one college you really wanted to attend? We receive all kinds of news, every day. Because we live in a fallen world, we often see and hear bad news more than good news. We can simply listen to the radio or watch the 6 o’clock news to hear bad news. However, the best news we could ever receive is what Jesus did for us on the cross. This week, we see Jesus proclaiming He is the good news.

Day 1- Read Luke 4:14-21

A few weeks ago, we looked at Isaiah 61:1-2 which includes today’s passage (Verses 18-19) as prophecy. What Isaiah had spoken hundreds of years before was unfolding. Luke 4:18 says Jesus was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. He would preach, in fact, to anyone who would hear Him.

The word gospel in Verse 18 simply means good news. Jesus was anointed to preach the good news. Have you ever heard the deliverer of news ask, “Do you want the good news or the bad news first?” The good news being preached was that people could truly be saved from their sin. However, this wouldn’t make sense if they didn’t know what sin was and why they needed to be saved. Jesus was preaching the good news and the good news was only good if the bad news was understood. The Israelites, God’s chosen people, knew only God could save them. God, through Jesus, was doing just that. He was preparing them for His death, burial and resurrection.

When we share the gospel (good news), we must lay the groundwork by explaining the bad news. Without Jesus, we are bound to hell and eternity apart from God because without Jesus, we can't know God. The good news suddenly becomes great as we share what Jesus has done for us by saving us from our sin.

Have you received the good news? If you have, are you sharing it? Are you speaking it?

2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” In other words, we are Christ’s mouth, words, and love to others. God often uses us to share the hope of His Son. Who do you need to share this hope with today? Who do you need to show God’s love with today? Do you need to spend some time with God and experience His love today? God’s love is real and everlasting.

Day 2- Read Luke 4:22-30

After they heard Jesus preach, the people in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth were surprised and amazed at His words. Jesus didn’t want them to be amazed, He wanted them to put their faith in Him. In Verse 24, He went on to say that a prophet is never accepted in his own town, alluding to Himself. He then gave examples of the work God had done in the lives of Naaman, the Syrian, and the widow from Zarephath. What was important about these two people? Neither were Israelites, God’s chosen; both were Gentiles. When Elijah tried to speak to Israel to warn them, they ignored him, so God sent him to a widow and He worked in her life. When Elisha was rejected by Israel, God sent him to Naaman, a Syrian. Instead of being encouraged to heed his words, they became so angry they wanted to throw him off the cliff. After throwing him off the cliff, they would pelt him with rocks until he was dead. The Israelites often rejected Jesus. Today, many Jews are still

looking for the Messiah. We need to pray their eyes will be open to the truth and they will know and experience Jesus as Messiah. Jesus is the God of the Jews just as He is God of all who will trust and follow Him. God is not prejudiced; He desires for ALL people to come to Him. Have you come to Him? If you have, are you sharing the gospel even when it's tough to share? Jesus knew the responses He would receive, yet He persevered in telling the good news.

Don't reject Jesus as Savior or ruler of your life. As a believer, give God all of your life and let Him direct you in everything you do.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 4:31-37

In our reading today, we see Jesus healing a man by casting out an unclean spirit. This story captures my heart in two ways. First, we cannot deny the power and authority Jesus has when we see Him commanding evil spirits as He wills. But there is one more thing that amazes me about Jesus. He repeatedly moves towards those who society moves away from. Jesus engages with the unclean spirit not only to show His power and authority but also to show us that nothing can separate us from Him when He sets His love on us.

I don't know what things in your past or even your present make you believe Jesus would not want to draw near to you. Maybe it's the shame of addiction, abuse, the rejection of others, or your repeated failure in some aspect of holiness. Read this story one more time and put yourself in the place of the man who has been cast out from society and inhabited by evil spirits. Feel the wonder of God-made-flesh drawing close to you and driving away what has destroyed you for years. Then allow yourself to realize Jesus does the same thing for you. He is a kind and merciful Savior who truly heals all our diseases and redeems our lives from the pit.

Day 4- Read Luke 4:38-44

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Why do you think Jesus says he was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom when in the passage He did more healing than teaching?
5. **APPLICATION:** How might God be calling you to preach the Good News of the kingdom today without using words?
6. **PRAYER:** Pray for someone today who is afflicted with sin or with suffering and has given up hope of healing. Pray they will be comforted by the Good News that Jesus is Lord of all.

Day 5- Read Ezekiel 37:24-28

The very first verse we read today speaks of David being the king forever. We know that David had been dead for some time, so we know Ezekiel was not really speaking of David, but Jesus, who would come from the line of David. This is yet another prophetic account of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Verse 26 speaks of a covenant of peace and God's sanctuary among them. This refers to the peace that Jesus brought on the cross to any and all that would call on His name as Savior and Lord. Would His people, even to this day, pick up a sanctuary and move it with them from place to place? No. Jesus is with us as our Savior everywhere we go. He is our tabernacle, our sanctuary, the place of worship and rest that we run to.

These verses remind us just how personal our God is. We don't serve a God that is unknowable or who doesn't care for and about us. A few weeks back we looked at how other religions in the world serve gods who are unknowable, dead, or both. Our God is neither. Just think about that for a minute. This should be an encouragement for us to share the truth about the One True God. He is very alive and He is very knowledgeable through Jesus.

Sermon Notes

WEEK 11 THE MIRACULOUS CATCH

By Dennis Watson

As we look at the New Testament, we see those who came to know and experience the Lord God's grace were to pass the message along. In fact, it is clearly expressed in the Old Testament, as well, that the people of God, Israel, were to be a light to the nations, the gentiles. This week, we begin to see the focus of God's plan to get the message out through the people Jesus called to follow Him. Those called by and brought to Jesus were to tell others and bring them to Him also.

Day 1- Read John 1:40-51

Think about what it must have been like when Jesus first called people to "...Follow Me." (**John 1:43**) All these people had an initial encounter with Jesus. John the Baptist announced to some "...Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (**John 1:29**) When Andrew heard the announcement, he followed Jesus, but first went and told his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah." (**John 1:41**) Jesus also called Philip to follow Him and he did. Philip then went and found Nathanael, who also came to Jesus.

Do you see a trend? It is pretty obvious. When these men came to Jesus, they went out and brought others. Andrew appears only three times in John's gospel and on all three occasions, He was bringing people to Jesus. In John 12:20, Philip and Andrew were involved in bringing some Greek men who wanted to see Jesus and, in today's passage, he brought his brother, Peter. How indebted we are to Andrew for bringing Peter to Jesus. In John 6:4-9, we see that Peter brought a little boy who had five loaves of bread and two small fish to Jesus and He used the boy's lunch to feed 5,000 people and when the church was birthed, God used Peter to bring thousands to faith in Jesus.

These passages indicate there is a two-step process. First, someone comes to Jesus and follows Him. Then, those who come and follow Him bring others to follow Him. This is the process the Lord God intended. This is His plan to take the good news to the whole world. It was never intended to be mass communication, one telling hundreds or thousands at a time. That method is well and good, but the original plan was for each person to tell their family, friends, and others. This is the process of multiplication. One tells one, then they each tell one until the globe is eventually covered.

Be sensitive to the people around you and look for the opportunity to bring them to Jesus.

Day 2- Read Luke 5:1-9

Peter had already met Jesus, but was unaware He was more than just an ordinary man. Jesus was about to reveal Himself to Peter and the others in a life changing and history impacting event. A moment when God reveals Himself in such a way that we can see His power and grace and surrender to Him. Peter and the others did not miss this grace moment.

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people from Peter's boat. Peter and the others had been fishing all night. When Jesus told them to launch the boat out into deep water and throw in their fishing nets, Peter balked, saying, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing." (**Verse 5a**) If he had stopped there, he would have missed a miracle. Instead of making excuses and disobeying, Peter said, "...Nevertheless at your word I will let down my net." (**Verse 5b**) The result was such a huge catch that his nets began to break and he had to call his partners in another boat to come and help him. They filled both boats with so many fish that their boats began to sink. This confirmed to Peter that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. Although his brother Andrew had already told him,

“We have found the Messiah,” **(Luke 1:41)** now he was convicted and convinced. He fell on his knees confessing his sin and asked Jesus to go away from him because he was a sinner.

Notice a few things. First of all, Peter was made aware that Jesus was the Messiah. He was not just any man. When this became a reality to Peter, he was convicted of his sin and fell down before Jesus, confessing his unworthiness to have Jesus in his presence.

The Lord only saves the undeserving. Peter brought nothing to Jesus except his sin. The same is true of you and I. Second, notice there is often a thin line between obedience and disobedience. Obedience opens the way to experience God’s power. Peter complained, but obeyed. Too often people complain and stop there. They miss out on seeing what only the Lord God can do. Sometimes, complaining becomes a way of life. Live in the presence of Jesus. Regularly confess your sin and carry on trusting Him to show Himself great for His name’s sake.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 5:10

On Wednesday each week, we see how the week’s accounts connect to the gospel. Simply stated, the gospel is the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to accomplish our salvation. It is God’s story of the redemption of sinners and the restoration of all of creation.

Jesus set Peter up to experience the Lord’s grace. Peter obeyed the words of Jesus, went back out to cast his nets, and was blessed with an amazing catch of fish. Peter was so overwhelmed with the miracle and the presence of Jesus that he fell down and confessed his sin. Instead of judging and condemning Peter, Jesus told him, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men.” (Luke 5:10) Jesus comforted Peter telling him he did not need to fear. Jesus knew He had come to be Peter’s forgiveness so he had no

need to fear. Jesus also told him he would now be catching men. In a similar situation recorded in Matthew and Mark, Jesus told Peter, James and John that they would be fishers of men. Peter was no longer a sinner deserving judgment but a fisher of men, pointing others to Jesus and His saving grace.

This was the turning point in Peter's life. He would now be catching men. This was to be a huge catch. Indeed, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached and three thousand people were saved! Peter was no longer known for his sin, but for winning people to Jesus.

We are unworthy of all He has done, but Christ has drawn us up in his net of love. He has called us out of the darkness into his marvelous light. See yourself truly in this light. Allow Jesus to reassure you so you no longer live as a person characterized by sin, but as one who is called by Christ. Make the connection! It's a miraculous catch indeed!

Thank God for the way He reaches out to sinners like you and me, just as he did to Peter two thousand years ago. God calls us and gives us the grace to believe. He forgives us of our sins. Then, He makes us all fishers of men, as we tell others about Jesus.

Day 4- Read Luke 5:11

1. **OBSERVATION:** There is only one verse to study today. Let's look at it more in depth. Look at the passage in an interlinear Bible. - <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/luke/5.htm> Then do a word study on the word "follow" (in the Greek aorist ἠκολούθησαν in this verse):
<https://biblehub.com/greek/190.htm> or
<https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/190.html>
Where else is this word used? How does this help us to

understand what following Christ means?

2. Ask questions of the passage. What does it mean for these people to leave everything and follow Jesus? What are they giving up? What are they getting in return?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** What does it mean for you to leave everything and follow Christ? Is there commonality to the way you have been called to the way the disciples have been called?

4. **APPLICATION:** Take away an application from the passage. What promises are there for following Christ? What does following Christ mean for our comfort? As a starting point, consider Christ's words in Matt 8:20 "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

5. **PRAYER:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Share where you struggle with seeking comfort over seeking the promises of God with a close friend and pray together for the calling of Christ to be fulfilled completely in your life.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 43:8-13

In our Connecting the Dots journey, it has been amazing to see the foundation of Jesus and the gospel presented in the Old Testament. Today's passage speaks of witnesses. Verse 10 begins "You are my witnesses..." A dot connecting moment—in Acts 1:8, Jesus promised the believers that were gathered on the Day of Pentecost they would be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The result of that filling, "You shall be My witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (**Acts 1:8**) In the early days of Jesus' ministry, we are seeing the call of people to come to Him, follow Him and give witness to Him. This is the Lord's plan, to establish for Himself a people who will witness to the world about His message of salvation. The goal, as Isaiah expressed, is that people would know and believe.

What is a witness? A witness is someone who tells what they experienced. It may include what they saw and what they heard. Others may disagree with what the witness saw and heard. They may doubt the testimony, but the job of a witness is to tell, in their own words, what they personally experienced. When the witness is honest and sincere the response of others is secondary. The witnesses must be faithful to their testimony. As people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, we must bear witness to what has happened to us. Others may not believe and may question and doubt us, but we must be faithful to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, as we have come to know Him, Jesus.

There is no other way to be saved except through Jesus Christ. We do not have to be hostile about it. It is a matter of fact. Tell someone your testimony today.

WEEK 12 JESUS HEALS THE PARALYZED MAN

By Chris Watson

Jesus is God; therefore He has the power to heal. We will see this in our devotions this week. However, in New Testament times, just as today, Jesus' healing is not limited to the physical. When He heals, whether it is physical, mental or spiritual, it is not only for the person being healed, but so others will see His glory and be drawn to Him. As we see the biblical, historical events unfold this week, be reminded that everything Jesus does is to show Himself mighty and to draw people to Himself.

Day 1- Read Luke 5:17-20

Pharisees, religious leaders, and the scribes had come to watch Jesus and to see what might happen. We read in Verse 17 they came from every town and this would be the day they had been waiting for; Jesus would show Himself mightily.

This account always touches me. The friends of a paralyzed man heard Jesus was in town. They took their friend to where Jesus was so he could be healed. When they arrived where Jesus was, the crowd was so large there was no way they could get their friend close to Jesus. They did not become upset or discouraged, they did not go home, but they were persistent. They went up on the roof of the house and cut a hole in the roof, lowering their friend down right in front of Jesus. Can you imagine how hard that would have been for them? That was a lot of work! The paralyzed man could do nothing for himself. He was dependent on his friends, and they found a way to help.

When Jesus saw their faith He said, "... Man, your sins are forgiven you." (**Luke 5:20**) Jesus saw their faith, the faith of the man's friends and the faith of the paralyzed man. It is important to have godly friends who lead you to the Lord and not away from

Him. When we are in trouble and cannot do for ourselves, godly friends will not leave us, but will help lead us to Jesus. We should all want friends like this, friends that will help us with our real needs.

Notice in Verse 20, Jesus doesn't say to get up or be healed (yet). Rather He said, "... Man, your sins are forgiven you." We will see tomorrow, He did this because He knew the religious leaders were listening and watching, but also because sin was the root of the problem. This man's sins may or may not have been the reason he was crippled; it may have been sin in general that had brought hardship into the world. Just think! If there was no sin today, there would be no paralysis, sickness, car wrecks, or cancer. There would be no need for law enforcement, lawyers or many other jobs. Sin is the result of our disobedience, both individually and as a whole. This man was coming, by way of His friends, to be healed physically, but Jesus healed him spiritually as well.

Thank the Lord today for your spiritual healing and then ask Him who He might have you bring to Him for spiritual healing.

Day 2- Read Luke 5:21-23

The religious leaders were really up in arms. They believed Jesus had committed blasphemy. Chuck Missler says, "The religious leaders correctly saw these terms as terms only to be used by God (Luke 7:49) Only God can forgive sin. Such an assault on the name of God was punishable by death (cf. Lev 24:10-11, 14-16, 23). Jesus pointed out that the religious leaders were absolutely right. His subsequent healing of the man was incontrovertible proof that He did have the authority to forgive sins and therefore should be accepted as God."

Jesus was the Son of God and He was trying to help the religious leaders see this. Not only in this instance, but in Verse 22 we see

that Jesus knew the leaders' thoughts even before they spoke, so He asked them "...why are you reasoning in your hearts?" This should have been more proof He really was who He said He was. Jesus can forgive sins and He can heal. He knows what is in the hearts and minds of all people.

The religious leaders were trying to grasp this and were amazed, but they were also mad at what they were seeing and hearing. They couldn't and didn't want to grasp this truth and reality. Although they had the truth and evidence they needed in front of them, they chose not to see it and not to follow Jesus for who He was.

As Americans, we have the same proof available for drawing our own conclusions on what we believe about God and Jesus. The evidence is out there for and against belief in Jesus, but the evidence against Jesus as God, quickly falters and gives way to truth under scrutiny. Like the Jews, many don't want Jesus to be true; they don't want to believe Jesus for who He is. We can either be like the religious leaders and question or we can jump all in knowing He is who He says He is. The paralyzed man and his friends believed and their lives were changed forever. May God continue to work and change our lives.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Luke 5:24-26

In Verse 24, Jesus told the paralyzed man to take his bed and go to his house. The religious leaders couldn't verify Jesus had the power to forgive sins, so He demonstrated His healing power by telling the man to take his bed and go home. Immediately, the man got up and went home, glorifying God!

Verse 26 says others were amazed and glorified God saying they had seen strange things that day. The religious leaders might have praised God as well, thinking this man was just a prophet. Most likely, they were probably mad trying to figure out who this man

was. If He was just a prophet, He couldn't forgive sins.

We know Jesus can forgive sins. These three verses point to what only Jesus can do. Isn't it interesting that the religious leaders were the ones that knew so much about God and keeping the law? They knew how to pray and how to perform all the right rituals, but we read they were the ones most often the furthest from God. As Jesus began to preach grace rather than law, they couldn't grasp it and many didn't want to. They wanted to keep the law, though they couldn't, because keeping the law showed only what they were doing. They wanted to say elaborate prayers because it was an outward presentation of what they thought they were supposed to be doing. They wanted to look powerful and close to God by emphasizing what they were doing. However, they knew they couldn't forgive sins as only God could do that! They missed God, in Jesus, right in front of them because they were selfish and focused on their ways and their traditions.

The leaders now had to decide what to do with Jesus who could heal a man and maybe even forgive sins. They had seen Jesus do this with their own eyes. Either this was God, through Jesus, or this man was crazy, maybe even a blasphemer. Either could have the same result, death. Unfortunately, they concluded He was a blasphemer. Maybe that was fortunate for us, because their decision to not trust Jesus for who He was, played right into God's plan for our salvation. We know Jesus' love for us is what ultimately led Him to the cross, but thank God He chose to use the religious leaders of the day to accomplish His purpose.

Day 4- Read Matthew 9:1-8

1. **OBSERVATION:** This is a parallel passage to yesterday's passage in Luke 5:21-23 Compare and contrast this passage with the passage in Luke.

2. Ask questions of the passage. What does it mean that Jesus knows all of our thoughts and actions, good and bad and yet He still chose to die for our sins? Why would Jesus want to know us and be in a relationship with us? What are the desires and thoughts of the people in this story- the people who brought the paralytic, the paralytic himself, the crowd, the disciples, the Pharisees, Jesus?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** Jesus knows our every thought, even the ones we are thinking right now. Do your thoughts glorify God? Are your thoughts what God desires? Are your desires/ thoughts ungodly and of this world?

4. **APPLICATION:** Take away an application from the passage. The people in this story have different desires. What are the desires/thoughts of your heart? How can you tell if this is a godly or ungodly desire?

5. **PRAYER:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Share the desire that you have written down with someone close and ask them if this is a godly desire, and if so pray for God to fulfill it. If it is not a godly desire, ask God to give you His desire for your life.

Day 5- Read Psalm 119:97-104

Yesterday, we were reminded we need to have the thoughts of God and that God knows our thoughts. Today, we see how we can accomplish this. Each verse speaks of knowing God's law, His

commandments, being restrained from evil, keeping His Word, and enjoying the sweetness of His Word. What is one of the ways we know God? We know Him through the Bible; His Word. I recently saw a picture of someone praying to God asking for God to speak to them and God reached down from Heaven and handed him a Bible! We have the very words of God, the very heart of God, and the whole account of God's love story to us, though we often disregard it. We put it on a shelf or don't look for it until Sunday morning. We can't neglect God's Word on a regular basis and expect to be in tune and in a right relationship with Him.

While we have a lot to learn about God's Word, it contains many truths and so much guidance in plain sight for us. In a sermon, Tom Eliff once said "Why do we want a word from God, we already have more here (Bible) than we are doing now." In other words, if we want to know God's plan, will, and ways, we must walk in His Word daily by reading, memorizing, and even praying it. When we do this on a regular basis, we will know His plans and heart; if we fail to open, read, and study it, we will continue to be hungry for a Word from God when it is right there at our fingertips.

Don't neglect God's Word. If you have, confess it. If you are already studying God's Word, begin to memorize scriptures, one at a time. Write a verse on a note card and carry it in your pocket, look at it and read it over and over throughout the day. God's Word is important. Scripture tells us it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, and we can hide His Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against God.

The more I read and study God's Word, the more I learn. The more I learn, the more I grow and the more I grow the more I want. Thank God for His Word and that it doesn't return void or empty.

Notes

WEEK 13 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—THE BEATITUDES

By Dennis Watson

Jesus often taught His followers in very informal settings. He taught in open fields, from a boat, and on this occasion, from the side of a mountain. This is known as the Sermon on the Mount. We will break it down into two sections; the first week will be “The Beatitudes” and the second week will be “Love Your Enemies.” The Beatitudes deal with issues of the heart. In Jesus’ day, most people thought of religion as being works and activity. Jesus tells His listeners that He is more concerned with the heart.

Day 1- Read Matthew 5:1-12

At the beginning of each of the beatitudes is the word *blessed*. The Latin word is *beatus*, which is where *beatitude* comes from. To the people listening to Jesus, it meant divine joy and perfect happiness. Blessed implied an inner satisfaction and sufficiency which did not depend on outward circumstances for happiness. This is what Jesus was offering those who came to Him.

Each of the beatitudes has two parts. One part describes living here in the temporal world and the other part describes life in the eternal Kingdom Jesus will establish. Jesus described life in the Kingdom of Heaven for His listeners. In Heaven, His children will enjoy comfort, inherit the earth, be fully satisfied, receive mercy, and see God. The first and the last beatitude both speak of receiving the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus speaks much about the Kingdom.

The beginning of each beatitude contains high ethical standards and practices which are not contrary to Christian living; in fact, it expresses the mind of Christ which should be the mind of the Christian also. The great principles set down here are profitable for

the Christian to study and learn, but he can never attain them in his own strength; he must go elsewhere to look for the power. What you have in the Sermon on the Mount is a marvelous electric light bulb, but you do not have the generator that produces the power that will make the light. And it is the light, not the bulb that is all important.⁷

Contrary to the religious leaders of Jesus' day. He was not suggesting that we can accomplish our entrance to God's eternal kingdom. It is only by trusting Jesus and His work at the cross that we can get there.

Give thanks for the guidance He gives for living and the sacrifice He made, because we will never achieve the ethical standards He laid down for us.

Day 2- Read Matthew 5:13-16

I was at a youth camp years ago when some youth were complaining about something that I have heard for many years. I probably used it myself as a youth. The complaint was "I don't fit in." The speaker rebuffed the complaint with a better saying. He said, "You are not supposed to fit in, you are to stand out." I really liked that! Jesus did not call us to fit in. He called us to stand out. He even told us how.

In today's passage, He told us that we are salt. Salt is a seasoning which brings the flavor out in food. Can you imagine eating potato chips which have no salt? Salt is also a preservative. Believers are to be a preserving factor. I know people often behave better when I am around, just because I am there. It could be they know their behavior is not what it ought to be. Could that be conviction? Salt also makes people thirsty. Believers should live in such a way that

⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

people seek the One we seek. As salt, we should cause people to thirst for the Lord and His Word.

Jesus also said believers are the light of the world. Once again, the light is obvious, just like salt. Light shines and shows the evil and sin in a person's life. Light shows the way. The light is not our light, but the light which comes from the light's source, Jesus. He is the true light that has come into the world.

The bottom line is, we are supposed to be different. Not different for the sake of being different, but different as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ. Showing kindness, mercy, grace, and love to others will shine the light of Jesus on them. The result is that they will see our good works, not so they will boast in us, but so they will give glory to God. They will see your life and works and fall for your Jesus!

Be salty, shine, and give glory to Jesus!

Day 3 CONNECT TO THE GOSPEL- Read Matthew 5:17-20

Matthew 5:17-20 is the main proposition statement for the entire Sermon on the Mount. It is critical for you to read this dense section of scripture and appreciate that Jesus addresses one of the greatest and most contentious questions of Christianity- What is the relationship of Christianity to Israel and Judaism, or the new covenant to the old covenant? This is still a hotly debated topic today with contemporary Christians differing on their answers, so too in Christ's day. In fact, the Jewish leaders will charge Jesus on his lax interpretations of the Mosaic law and his claims to be an arbiter of the law forcing him to the cross of execution. His disciples would be persecuted and killed for their claims as well.

Did Jesus overturn and replace Mosaic covenant law with something else? (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-42; 6:8-8:1)

Matthew 5:17-20 does not provide a complete answer to this question.

When Jesus talks about “the Law and the prophets” he is talking about the whole story of God’s grace given to the people of Israel. What is the relationship of the person and work of Jesus to the whole covenant that God made with Israel?

The word “fulfill” is critical to understand. Jesus is not abolishing, overthrowing or proclaiming a freedom from all moral and ethical constraints. “Shall we sin that grace should abound [Rom 6:1]” Or can you keep the whole law and be judged righteous?

How good are you? How good do you have to be to be accepted by God and get to Heaven? Some people believe all you have to do is make sure your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. That is similar to the way the religious leaders in Jesus’ day believed. They believed behavior and keeping all parts of the law would make you a good person and make you righteous. The religious leaders of the day were Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus told them in the Sermon on the Mount that you have to have a righteousness which is greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The law reveals our sin. Paul said the law was a tutor to bring us to Christ so that instead of being justified by the law, we would be justified by faith and that faith is in Christ. Jesus said He came to fulfill the law. He lived a perfect life, keeping all of the Mosaic Law. Then He died as our sacrificial lamb to satisfy the law for us. Not the least part of the law will pass away until all of the law is fulfilled. That is what Jesus said He came to do, fulfill the whole law. The law is still good and we are responsible to keep it. However, it has no power to make us righteous. It can only show us our unrighteousness. The law exposes our sinfulness, and our inability to keep it.

Jesus makes it clear that there is continuity with the law and the prophets- that he is superior to what they pointed too. The Law and the prophets were signs pointing to him. And what is he- he is the fulfillment- the fulfillment of God's revelation to men and the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes to save a people for himself. The wholeness of personhood according with God's nature, will and coming kingdom are realized in the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus is our righteousness! There is no righteousness by accomplishment. Jesus has come to give you His righteousness, a righteousness which is received not achieved.

Thank the Lord God for salvation that is a gift, rather than an accomplishment. Pray that you would be made whole and complete in the righteousness of Christ.

Day 4- Read Matthew 5:21-28

1. **OBSERVATION:** What is the big idea of this passage? Yesterday we saw that Matt 5:17-20 set the main proposition for Jesus' sermon. Today, we see the practical working out of what Jesus has just said. Jesus doesn't just offer general proverbial statements- he shows real-life examples of what his wisdom teaching looks like in practice.

2. Ask questions of the passage. There are six illustrations broken into two sets of three [5:21-32 (this week) and 5:33-48 (next week)] How do these illustrations demonstrate that Jesus fulfills and does not abolish the Law and the Prophets? What does Jesus illustrate? Does Jesus prove his thesis? For example, Jesus shows a deeper sense and consummated reality (a fulfillment) of the commandment, do not murder. Murder is awful with devastating consequences, but the real issue underneath the murder is the heart or disposition of the moral agent committing the act. It's not just

the terrible physical act which is worthy of judgment. To have a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, disciples must face the issue of the inner person.

3. **INTERPRETATION:** Is Jesus only calling people to repentance and renewal? In what area of your life might you need to repent and be renewed in Christ?

4. **APPLICATION:** Take away an application from the passage. Is Jesus not also making a bolder claim- that he is the arbiter of the truth of God? At the heart level, how can you have internal righteousness?

5. **PRAYER:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Considering the fuller commandment that Christ gives to the Law, is there anyone that you need to seek forgiveness from? Contact them, asking for forgiveness.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 55:1-13

Connecting the prophets and the Psalms to both Jesus and the gospel is a very enlightening part of our dot-connecting. When Jesus cast out demons in Luke 4:34, the demons called Jesus *the Holy One of God*. In today's passage, Isaiah referred to the *Holy One of God* in Verse 5. Isaiah also gave an invitation for the thirsty

and hungry to come drink and eat without having to spend money. Jesus spoke in the beatitudes, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst.” (**Matthew 5:7**) Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” (**John 6:35**)

The promise of the fruitfulness of the Word is also found in this passage. The Word will go out and accomplish its purposes like the rain that falls on the earth and produces fruit. All over the world the Word of God is being proclaimed and people continue to come to Jesus for salvation. His Word does not return empty.

The invitation continues in this passage to seek the Lord and to call on Him. Now is the time. He can be found today and He is near, so call on Him. We should not take for granted that there will be another chance. There is an urgency to seek Him and call on Him now. This, of course, is for the lost but it applies to everyone, including believers. Seek Him and call on Him daily.

The outcome is joy, peace, singing, and clapping. Ultimately in the Millennium, there will be an incredible time of blessing and enjoyment in the presence of the Lord which will carry over into eternity. This is so exciting! However, I believe there is such an experience for all who practice the Lord’s presence and enjoy Him now. The result is what Paul says in **Philippians 4:4**, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.”

Are you enjoying the blessings of the Lord? Don’t get locked up in the doldrums. He has come so we would be blessed and enjoy all the benefits of His great salvation.

Sermon Notes

WEEK 14 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

By Chris Watson

A few days before this devotion was written, most of our nation mourned a ruling by the Supreme Court on gay marriage, while a few celebrated it. Since then, this news has been all over social media and discussed in many various media outlets. Opinions on this ruling have not been lacking. Based on scripture, marriage is between one man and one woman. There are, of course, many other truths based on scripture; this is just one. What are we to do when we are on the opposite side of an issue with a family member, friend or, even more so, an enemy? Scripture tells us we are to love them. We are not to celebrate sin, be excited that God's Word is being trampled on, or even pretend that we are in agreement. Rather, we are to be loving in our disagreement. Love can take many forms. This week, we will look at God's love.

Day 1- Read Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus showed us how God's law extends further than the surface meaning. We saw this in last week's devotions and will see it again this week. Many of the Jews probably said, "I haven't murdered or committed adultery," and believed they were keeping the law. However, they would have been surprised when Jesus told them sin begins with a thought or a word and by even thinking about such things, they had already broken the law.

We need to be reminded Jesus was speaking to the multitudes, which would have included many Jews. You can imagine the more Jesus told them, (Verses 39-42) the more disturbed the Jews became, especially when He said "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." (**Verse 41**)

Bill Bright says, "If a Roman soldier saw a Jewish man or boy, he

could command them to carry his backpack or burden for a mile. The Jewish boy or man was required by law to carry the soldier's burden for a mile. However, most Jews would not carry this burden one inch or one foot further than the law required. This law caused terrible resentment among the Jews toward the Roman government. Can you imagine how the Jews felt when Jesus said, 'Go the second mile?' No doubt, the audience said, 'He must be jesting.' 'Does He really expect us to do more than the law requires us to do?'" In essence, Jesus was saying that His disciples need to do more than the legalists who do no more than what is required of them. What is the principle of the second mile? It is to do more than is required or expected of us. Jesus is saying that any pagan or unsaved person can go one mile (5:46, 47). The first mile is to love those who love us. The second mile is to love those who do not love us. We must always remember that life is lived on three levels. The hellish level is to return evil for good. The human level is to return good for good and evil for evil. The heavenly level is to return good for evil. The second mile is to return good for evil."

I am not sure about you, but this goes against my nature. I can't do this and you probably can't either, but God can do it through us. While we should not be taken advantage of or become a punching bag, we are to love and even serve those who might and do mistreat us. While being arrested Jesus didn't strike back, throw out slurs, or try to make His point. Rather He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (**Luke 23:34**).

Who do you need to show God's love to? How can you show them God's love? Let's not have knee jerk reactions or responses with anyone, but respond to them with God's love.

Day 2- Read Matthew 5:43-48

In today's passage, Jesus told the multitudes, particularly the Jews, to love not only those who love you, but your enemies as well. I

don't know about you, but that does not come natural for me. It is not natural to love those who are unkind, unloving, or simply impolite to me. I can't do it; God must do it through me.

Not only are we to love our enemies, but we are to bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. Jesus commands it. Jesus could have stopped here and the Jews He was speaking to may have gotten what He was trying to say, but just to be sure He gave them a good word picture. Jesus said that even tax collectors love those that love them (Verse 46-47). The Jews would have understood this reference because the tax collectors were not liked by anyone. They cheated people out of money and yet Jesus was telling them that even the cheaters (tax collectors) are able to love those that love them. I imagine this was not what they wanted to hear but they understood what Jesus was talking about.

It's easy to love those that love us or those who share the same interests. However, it's hard to love those that stab us in the back, hate us, gossip about us, and curse us. He tells us to do the exact opposite of what comes natural to us. As I said earlier, I can't do this, but I know God can do it through me. Verse 48 tells us that if we do this, we are being like our Heavenly Father.

More than likely, you have enemies. This may be people you consider enemies or people that may consider you their enemy. We may not use that exact word, but we understand what it means. Take time today to pray for your enemies. Pray God's love over them. Pray about how you might serve them. God did. He modeled it and we can do it, too. We were once enemies of God, but God loved us so much, He died for us. God can do it in and through us.

Day 3- Read Romans 5:8-10

Today, we connect our study straight to the Gospel, the Good News. Romans 5 speaks of Christ taking our place on the cross.

We know Jesus didn't sin, but He became sin for us and He took our punishment. Verse 8 tells us "God demonstrated His love for us, for while we were sinners Christ died for us."

The word justification in Verse 9 is so important. We have been made right with God. Through Jesus and His death on the cross, our sins have been washed away. When we stand before the Judge (God) as believers, we don't stand as guilty, but not guilty. Jesus took care of our sins on the cross and if you have placed your faith in Jesus you are no longer guilty. Jesus has stated your case to the Father God and you have been set free from sin, set free from Hell, set free from Satan's grip, and set free unto Jesus.

If you think of this for more than a moment, it can be mind-boggling. We have been reconciled (our relationship with God has been made possible and right) through Jesus' death on the cross and by placing our faith in Jesus, His death has covered our sins. Yes, we are the guilty ones, not Jesus. Therefore, when God looks at me, He doesn't see sin, He sees the blood of His Son. Since sin cannot enter Heaven, I know I have been made clean and whole by Jesus' blood.

Take some time today to thank God for giving us what we don't deserve in Jesus. Thank Him for His provisions and His grace. Remember, you have been justified (made right) before God, through Jesus.

Day 4- Read Matthew 5:48

1. **OBSERVATION:** Look at Matthew 5:48 reviewing Matthew 5:17-48. Matthew 5:48 is the conclusion of Matthew 5:17-48 where Jesus lays out the instruction of his Sermon on the mount illustrating the righteousness required to enter his Kingdom with six heart-level exegeses of the Torah. The passage itself invites the reader to learn by imitation.

2. Ask questions of the passage. There are several wrong or unhelpful observations that one might make on verse 48 that would distract us from its most beneficial exposition. Consider these three and identify why they are not helpful:

1) Matthew 5:48 is simply the conclusion to 5:43-47 based upon the word “Therefore.”

2) The word “teleios” translated as “perfect” in the ESV should be understood with our modern day sense of the word “perfect.” What are the implications of this verse when translating the word “teleios” as whole or virtuous vice perfect?

3) The verse is showing us the impossible demand of being like God and therefore is meant only to show us our need for grace.

3. **INTERPRETATION:** The call to “teleios-ity” is the same call found in the OT (see Lev 19:2 and 20:26) and the rest of the NT. It is not having moral perfection, but having wholehearted orientation toward God- The inside and the outside are whole, are virtuous, are made singular through Christ. Obedience to rules does not necessarily produce the spirit that Jesus requires of those who would follow him. It is all too easy to refrain from adultery but still lust or refrain from murder but still hate. What does Jesus’ call for “wholeness” or Godward virtue mean for living the Christian life?

4. **APPLICATION:** Take away an application from the passage. We are not dealing with mere hypotheticals in verse 48. There is a

clear call to consistency, wholeness and true virtue that Jesus is inviting us to wrestle with. The command here doesn't merely show us our need for grace, but calls us to flourish as God flourishes. God demonstrates the "teleios", the wholeness in each illustration. God does not murder, but he is forgiving; God is faithful to his marriage covenant; God is honest and keeps his covenant oath; God forgives even those who dishonor him; God loves his enemies. The life of imitation of God comes only in and through grace.

5. **PRAYER:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Seek out an opportunity to share those insights with them.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 50:5-6

We take Day 5 to look back to the Old Testament to see Jesus prophesied. Our passage today speaks of our Lord who was obedient to God and who didn't fight back when they pained Him and made a mockery of Him. He could have resisted, but He was not rebellious (verse 5) He did the will of His Father. As believers, Jesus' Father is our Father. How awesome is that? Therefore, if Jesus did the will of His Father, we should also want to do our Father's will.

What is our Father's will? We see it clearly stated, the greatest commandment is to love God with all we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission, we are instructed to go and make disciples. In doing this we can and should expect to be persecuted and laughed at just

like Jesus. If we are followers of Jesus, this reaction should not be a surprise. We should respond with grace and dignity, all while speaking the truth. Jesus spoke truth to all around Him, yet He did so peacefully and with a right and holy heart. We know what God wants and desires for us to do as we spend time with Him and grow in Him. Buck Parsons recently said, “So many are looking for special revelation from God while it sits on their shelves gathering dust.” Ouch, but so true! How are we to respond when ridiculed or laughed at like Jesus? First, because we know how Jesus would respond, we spend time with Him and His Word, then we know how to love and respond as He wants us to.

How will you respond today? How will you respond to those that love you or those that hate you? How will you respond to those who are kind and those who are unkind? How will you respond to godliness and to ungodliness? May we learn from Jesus’ example and grow in our understanding, so we can and will respond with the same grace and love He has given us.

WEEK 15 THE LORD'S PRAYER

By Dennis Watson

Jesus taught His disciples and us how to pray. That might seem odd, because when the time comes, it seems that most people already know how to pray. However, prayer is more than a grocery list of needs. We can ask anything, but true prayer is God recruiting people to join Him in what He is up to. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gives us a model to follow for prayer. This week we will learn some things about prayer, and perhaps, be reminded of some things we already know.

DAY 1- Read Matthew 6:1-6

In **Matthew 5:16** Jesus tells His disciples to, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." In today's passage, He gives a warning which makes it sound as though we are not to let other people see what we do for Him. Jesus is speaking about motivation. Hypocrites are people who pretend to be something they are not. They pretend to have one motivation when the one they really have is something completely different.

There are two kinds of prayer: personal, private prayer and corporate prayer. In a personal, private prayer, you are interceding for others and seeking the Lord's will on that person's behalf. Personal, private prayer is motivated by seeking God's best and God's will for the people and circumstances around you. In corporate prayer, you are voicing a prayer on behalf of others and leading others in that prayer. In both situations, the person praying is motivated by the Lord's will. Jesus' warning was to avoid praying and doing any spiritual activity for your own purposes. The difference is motivation. The right motivation is to seek God's will and glory. The wrong motivation is to seek self-glory.

Prayer is not for show. It is not for public consumption. In fact, prayer is not seeking our will at all. We can tell the Lord what we want, but our prayer, in the end, should be as it was with Jesus. When it was time for Him to go to the cross, He struggled. He begged His Father that if there was any other way to "...take this cup from me; nevertheless not my will but Yours, be done" (**Luke 22:42**). Jesus' number one motivation was for His Father's will to be done. He prayed His desires, but surrendered to His Father's will. If it was true for Him, it must be true for us. That is why Jesus warned us against making prayer about us, but to keep it about His Father.

When you pray, seek God's will and God's best, always. It is a blessing to ask anything of Him, but it is most liberating to pray that above all else, "...Your kingdom come Your will be done. (**Matthew 6:10**)

Day 2- Read Matthew 6:7-13

Why pray if the Lord God already knows what we need? Jesus told His disciples, "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." (**Verse 8**) Again, why pray? There are several reasons. First of all, He wants us to know the One who supplies all of our needs. Second, He wants us to depend on Him. Third, someone has said prayer is the Lord God's way of getting us in on what He is up to. In these verses, Jesus gave us what is known as The Lord's Prayer. However, it is probably best described as The Model Prayer. Here, Jesus gives us the things we need to pray about.

The first part describes the relationship the Lord makes possible through Jesus. Jesus says to pray this way, "Our Father..." (**Verse 9**) He teaches us to begin this way, acknowledging that by His work in and through Jesus at the cross He has made us His children. He is the One who gives us the power to call Him our

Father.

Then, He tells us to pray, “Hallowed be your name;” (**Verse 9**) which means let your name be made holy. Our lives, actions, words and attitudes should be such that people know we revere God as holy. At this point in the prayer, we are enlisting ourselves to make God’s name holy.

“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (**Verse 10**) is the next part. Here, we are aligning ourselves with God to see His will done as opposed to our own. It is so important for us to seek His will be done and His kingdom come. This should be our heart’s desire and passion. What more could you ask for than for God’s will and kingdom?

He tells us to pray for our daily provisions. Note this is not a prayer for twenty years of provisions, but for what is needed this day. How often are we content for today, but anxious about tomorrow? Is this really contentment? God gives us the provision for this day. He wants us to look to and depend on Him for our daily needs. “Give us THIS DAY our daily bread.” (**Verse 11**)

The next part does not refer to our salvation when we read, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” (**Verse 12**) “He is speaking here to those who are already saved, those who already have the nature of God. He does not wait for you to give before He forgives. This is not His method of settling the sin question. He gave His Son to die, and it is on this basis that God forgives.”⁸ Our desire should be to give others what we have already received—forgiveness.

“ And Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” (**Verse 13**) These are two sides of the same coin. We will be

⁸Through The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

tempted, but the prayer is “Don’t leave us there, deliver us.” Don’t abide in temptation. Join God in seeking to flee the enemy.

Close the prayer with the acknowledgment that the kingdom, power, and glory all belong to Him.

Use the model Jesus gave. He wants to guide you and teach you to pray.

Day 3- Read Matthew 6:14-15

In Luke 7, we read the account of a woman of bad reputation who came to Jesus, wet His feet with her tears, and then wiped them with her hair. She then kissed His feet and anointed them with fragrant oil. The Pharisee who was the host of the gathering said to some guests that if Jesus was a true prophet, He would have known what kind of woman she was. Jesus then told a parable about two men who owed money to a creditor. One owed ten times as much as the other. The creditor forgave both men of their debts. Jesus asked the Pharisee which one would love and appreciate the creditor more. The answer? The one who had been forgiven more, of course! Jesus then told them this woman knew she had been forgiven much and therefore, she loved Jesus more than any of the religious people. He also rebuked the Pharisee because he had not performed even the common custom of welcoming Jesus into his home, yet this woman had wept, washed, kissed and anointed His feet. Jesus said of the woman, “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” Luke 7:47 (NKJV)

The point of the words in Matthew 6:14-15 is that the basis of believers forgiving others is the extent to which they are aware of how much their own forgiveness cost Jesus. He was not saying that if you forgive you will be forgiven. He was saying that since you have been forgiven, you should live from that reference point and

forgive others. How much have you been forgiven? It is immeasurable! Therefore, forgive others as you have been forgiven. Paul said it this way, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

Find someone to forgive. Don't talk about the bad they have done to you. Don't even mention they have not asked for forgiveness. Forgive them on the basis of how much you have been forgiven.

Day 4- Read Matthew 6:16-18

1. **OBSERVATION:** What is the big idea of this passage? What jumps out at you or conflicts with the messages of the world?

2. Ask questions of the passage. Why does Jesus command fasting in private? Why does it matter that Jesus can see us in private? Who are we tempted to seek to please even in our distress according to this passage? God, show me what it means to receive a reward from you.

3. **INTERPRETATION:** What does the promises of reward mean? How does a reward in heaven motivate you in the Christian life on Earth? Why do people fast? What would convince you of your need to fast?

4. **APPLICATION:** What promise does God make of reward to you in his word? Pray for guidance on the need to fast in your life.

5. **PRAYER:** Pray about who might benefit from the insights you gained from your Bible study and meditation. Typically, this element of the study asks you to share your insights with another person, but I am going to ask you to perform this step in a slightly different way. As you actually fast this week, can you apply the principle commanded by Christ to maintain quiet? To not show your fasting to anyone, to not tell anyone you are fasting, but take all of your concerns directly to God. Share the insights of your fasting, but not the fact that you are fasting.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 53:8

Written about 500 years before Jesus walked on the earth, Isaiah 52-53 is about the suffering servant, Jesus. Isaiah 53 says that He has "...borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." (**Isaiah 53:4**) In **Verse 5** we read, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...by His stripes we are healed." **Verse 6** says the Lord God, "Laid on Him the iniquity of us all." What a glorious picture written about 500 years before Jesus came to the world to die for us. Isaiah describes how He came to deal with our sins. These are wonderful words for all who call Jesus Lord and Savior.

The words of Verse 8 speak of His arrest and His judgment, which was a complete mockery. All this was done because of our sins so that He, being taken away from life, accomplished the taking away of our sins. This whole section of prophecy about my Savior is so

vivid. The last part of Verse 8 paints the picture in a very personal way. He was stricken, which means He was punished. This was done for our transgressions, our sins. Jesus went through all of this suffering for my sins! His arrest, the mock trial, beating, rejection, and ultimately the crucifixion, was in my place. Do you get the picture? There is an old gospel song titled, “When He Was On The Cross, I Was On His Mind.” While this is true, this passage, and many others, tell me that I was on His mind long before He was on the cross. From before the beginning of history, I was already on His mind. It was with the unfolding of His-story that it became a reality.

Give thanks to the Lord for His amazing grace, His love, and His plan which was there from before the beginning but played out on history’s stage!

“He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”

Isaiah 53:8 (NKJV)

Notes

Sermon Notes

WEEK 16 TREASURES IN HEAVEN

By Chris Watson

How we spend our time says a lot about us. Where we go, what we do, what we say, and how we say it, also says a lot. From our passage this week and from other passages in the Bible, we learn that things and money, in and of themselves, are not bad, but if they become our focus, it is wrong. No matter what it is, if it is anything other than God we set as our treasure, then we are missing His best and are getting off track. May our treasure be found solely in Him.

Day 1- Read Matthew 6:19-24

The major focus of this short passage is who or what is our treasure. What do we really value? What do we really want? What does our life say is most important? Take a few minutes and think about the past seven days. How did you spend your time, money and thoughts? For me, this shows what I really value. After all, where we spend our time and money really shows what's important to us.

Jesus told the crowd they couldn't serve God and money. That means we can't serve God and _____, either. How would you fill this blank? Whatever it is, it won't work. Our greatest treasure and focus must be God. Money, things, relationships, and jobs, just to name a few, are not inherently evil. However, when those things take our entire focus and we put all of our heart into them (basically ignoring God or putting Him way down on our priority list), we clearly show what we value. What is more important than God and your relationship with Him? Would you lay down what you value for Him? Would you ask Him for your relationship with Him to grow?

Jesus reminded us that treasures on this earth will one day rot away

or be gone, but our relationship with God and the things we do out of love and obedience for God, will not. (Verses 19-21) In fact, He told us to lay up treasure in Heaven where they are not destroyed. (Verse 20) Later in the New Testament, it speaks of rewards in Heaven based on a pure love and service for God. In other words, know and follow God, obey Him, and let your heart and mind be pure in the process. If we are so focused on treasures on this earth which will one day be gone, we will not be storing up treasures in Heaven. Let us serve God today through the way we love our family, do our job, spend our money, and spend our time. After all, we can't serve two masters; God wants all of our hearts and our minds. Who do you serve? Take some time to ask God to refocus your priorities and even shift what you may spend your time and money on so it will be focused on God.

Day 2- Read Matthew 6:25-32

Three short words that are easily said and yet so hard to practice, "Do not worry!" It sounds simple enough. It's pretty straightforward and we don't have to study Greek to see what Jesus was trying to say. Just, do not worry. After Jesus told the crowd not to worry, He gave them a vivid example of the birds to demonstrate how they don't store up or worry, but the Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't we more valuable than they?

"Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" (Verse 27) If we think about this one verse enough, we might actually realize that worrying could do just the opposite. The stress, and often heartache, that worry causes might actually make our life shorter, not longer! I once heard it said that worrying means we believe God either got it wrong or we are afraid He won't get it right. Worrying in my own life shows me how much I need to grow and learn to trust Him. It also indicates that I know better than God does. I don't like to think of it this way, but for me and many others, this is sometimes true.

As you begin or end your day, what are you worrying about? What have you been carrying around that has consumed your thoughts, only to realize that worrying has changed nothing? Will you continue to worry or will you let go and trust God? Will you try to do it on your own and figure out all the pieces, or will you leave it in His hands? Those three short words, “do not worry,” are so easy to say, but so hard to practice day to day. In fact, it is a moment by moment decision to trust. So, the next time you find yourself worrying, stop and think, God has told me not to worry and if He is in charge of the birds and the grass of the field, surely He can be trusted with my life. Let go and trust God. Spend some time praying and lay what you are worrying about at God’s feet.

Day 3- Read Matthew 6:33

Yesterday, we were reminded that we are not to worry. Today, we are instructed about what we are to do instead. Simply put, we are to seek God with everything we have. Seeking God is the complete opposite of worrying. How do we seek God? First, by doing what we are doing right now, spending time in His word and in prayer. I mentioned a quote from Buck Parsons a few weeks back, “Everyone is looking for divine revelation from God while it sits on their shelf collecting dust.” That’s it! Seeking God starts with His Word and communication (prayer) with Him. If we want to hear from the Lord, we need to consistently be in the Word.

As we seek God, our heart, thoughts, will, and minds will change. We learn to focus on the things of God. Jesus told us that as we seek Him and His righteousness, “...all these things shall be added to you.” (**Matthew 6:33**) All these things include knowing Him and trusting Him to provide for us. We trust Him to provide our spiritual, emotional, and physical needs, not so much because we deserve it, but because God loves us as His children. This doesn’t mean God will give us everything we want, but it does mean that

God will provide for us as He sees fit.

Yesterday, we read that worrying causes us to be so fixated on a situation or problem that we can think of nothing else, all the while knowing that worrying won't really help. Compare that with trusting and seeking God, knowing He is ultimately in control. Though we struggle to die to our sin and fully trust God with all that is going on, we are commanded to lay everything down to Him and know He is in control.

Ask God to help you seek Him today with all you have, giving your mind no time to worry. In the end, we can know that God will provide all that we need.

Day 4- Read Matthew 6:34

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. In this verse, Jesus actually acknowledges that "tomorrow will be anxious for itself." He doesn't merely say you are wrong for being

anxious. He acknowledges that the concerns of each day affect us, but to seek *first* His Kingdom and to see that He knows your concerns. What comfort is it that Jesus actually acknowledges your anxiety today?

5. **APPLICATION:** Verse 34 is vitally linked to v. 33 and the rest of the passage. What is Jesus actually telling you to do with your anxiety? How can you seek first Christ's kingdom this week? How can you take your eyes off of what is making you anxious by actively seeking Christ's kingdom.

6. **PRAYER:** Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to seek Christ's Kingdom first, to be kingdom-minded!

Day 5- Read 2 Samuel 22:1-4

In this passage, David is praising God for the victories provided for him. He was thankful God had saved him from Saul and his other enemies. Reread Verses 2-4. Notice the names David contributes to God. He calls God his rock, fortress, deliverer, strength, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold, refuge and savior. What an incredible list!

When we face trouble, we can trust God that He will protect us and be our guide. It may not be exactly the way we think it should be, but it will be as He sees fit. Many of the words David uses seem to

have similar meanings, like rock, fortress, refuge and stronghold. David recognized that God was his anchor. God kept him in a safe place. Although he spent time running from his enemies, he still knew God was protecting Him. While I am sure David was scared at times, he knew that God would hold him in place.

What troubles are you facing today? What is the enemy trying to get you to worry about? Did it keep you up last night? Rest assured that God is your anchor, just as He was David's. He will hold us together in the storm. No matter what trouble I face today, my strength is in God. I have never had to run for my life like David, but maybe you have. Even in his troubles, David knew and thanked God for being his refuge, stronghold, rock and shield.

Be thankful He is all these things for us. All the names David gave to God, God has been for us. Thank Him for His faithfulness. No matter what trouble you face today, thank God that He is your anchor.

WEEK 17 THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

By Dennis Watson

It is important to consider what guides the choices and decisions of your life. Jesus spoke about the significance of the foundation upon which a person builds his/her life, as we'll see in this week's passages. There are always people who come across as well-meaning, seeking to help you make choices and decisions. Jesus gives a very stern warning to watch out for those who are "...false prophets in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (**Matthew 7:15**)

Day 1- Read Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus gave His followers a warning about people who would come to them claiming to be prophets or teachers, who, in reality, were not trying to help at all, but sought to lead them off course. It is easy to get off track if you are not careful.

Who do you trust in matters of truth and spiritual guidance? Jesus gave us guidance in this passage. He said we will be able to recognize the wolves by the fruit of their lives. Then, He gave a few illustrations: You don't get grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. Good trees do not produce bad fruit and bad trees do not produce good fruit. He said we will know them by their fruit. Jesus told us to watch people who want to be leaders and teachers to see if their lives are consistent. These tree illustrations show true faith in Christ changes life and produces fruit for God's glory.

False teachers who teach false doctrine can produce only a false righteousness. Their fruit is fake and cannot last. The teachers themselves are false; the closer we get to them, the more we should see the falsity of their lives and doctrines. They magnify themselves, not Jesus Christ, and their purpose is to exploit people, not to edify them. The person who believes false doctrine or who

follows false teachers will never experience a changed life. Unfortunately, some people do not realize this until it is too late.

Remember, this is a warning from Jesus. Paul also warned us against false teachers coming in among believers: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” **Acts 20:28 (NKJV)**

Be careful who you follow. Watch their lives, know their fruit, and make sure it is consistent with the Truth.

Day 2- Read Matthew 7:21-23

Talk is cheap. This old saying means a person can say anything, but the doing? Well, that is a different story. Words by themselves are cheap, but words backed up with action are extremely valuable. Jesus said it was not the people who merely made a confession that would enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who did the will of God. Anyone can verbalize something, but it takes Jesus living in a person for the living of the Christ life.

There are too many people today who do wonderful things, even godly things, yet their heart is empty or, at best, incorrectly motivated. You can do the right things with the wrong motivation and miss the mark. The life of the believer is the result of Jesus living within them because of spiritual regeneration. All else is empty religion.

Often the question asked is, “Do you know Jesus?” The question could mean do you know about Him, or do you know about salvation? Some even equate the question with church attendance or religious activity. Perhaps a better question is the focus of this passage of Scripture-- “Does Jesus know you” The people described were apparently busy about religious activity. They were

doing wonderful things. Jesus said the day would come when He would say to them, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” **Matthew 7:23** I have often said that I do not want people to doubt their salvation unless they can. I must say that I have tried, but I know Jesus has done a work in me and lives in me. There is no other explanation of the transformation that has happened and continues to happen.

When I was in college, I had an Old Testament professor who would regularly say, “Consistency, thou art a jewel.” Does your activity consistently match with your claim to know Jesus? Does He know you? What is impacted here is one’s eternal outcome! This is huge. “Even the demons believe and tremble.” (**James 2:19**) James is addressing the same thing, true faith will express itself in faith activity.

Words don’t cost you anything, but following Jesus to the point of denying self and taking up your cross? That is truly costly.

Ask the Lord to enable you to live a life so your profession matches your confession.

Day 3- Read Matthew 7:24-27

In Matthew 7:13-14, we have a picture of two ways. Then in Verses 17-18 we see two trees. Jesus then closes this section with a vivid picture of two builders and their houses. The two ways illustrate the start of the life of faith; the two trees illustrate the growth and results of the life of faith here and now; and the two houses illustrate the end of this life of faith, when God shall call everything to judgment. There are false prophets at the gate that leads to the broad way, making it easy for people to enter. But at the end of the way, there is destruction. The final test is not what we think of ourselves, or what others may think. The final test is:

What will God say?⁹

In this passage, the word therefore is used to comment this parable of two builders to the previous passages about true faith. There will be people who build their lives on faulty foundations and others who build their lives on the true foundation which is Jesus Christ. There are many people with many ideas about how you should live your life, but to come to the end of this life and discover you were wrong would be devastating. Jesus encouraged His listeners to pay close attention and make a responsible and wise choice. Our choices have outcomes. I intentionally used the word outcomes instead of consequences because the word consequence has a negative connotation. If you follow Jesus, you are building your life-house on the solid, reliable, and faithful foundation. That being the case, there will be positive outcomes. The ultimate is a life that is delivered. The day-to-day outcomes are the blessing and benefits of living your life based on truth. On the other hand, if you ignore His words, you are building your life on sand and when the difficulties of life come, devastation will be the outcome, both temporally and eternally. What are you building on, sand, or on the firm foundation which is Jesus Christ?

Day 4- Read Matthew 7:28-29

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

2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?

⁹TheBible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-New Testament Volume 1

3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. What is so astonishing about Jesus's teaching? How did it so clearly stand out to the people from the teaching of the scribes?

5. **APPLICATION:** Are you amazed at the teaching of Christ? Do you marvel at the upside-down nature of much of Jesus's teaching? It seems that he continually teaches in such a way to leave the reader thinking, "Wow, I didn't see that coming." How can you grow in marveling at Jesus's teaching and ministry this week?

6. **PRAYER:** Pray for a passion to follow Christ's word, for a love and delight in His teaching, to marvel as the crowds did.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 51:5-8

In their past, Israel had been delivered from their enemies on several occasions. The first was from Egypt in the event known as the Exodus. The Lord had saved them from foreign enemies and delivered them from captivity, but each time they disobeyed again. These verses look to Israel's future. The Lord tells them about a

righteousness and salvation to come that will be eternal. Isaiah recorded that the earth will wear out like a garment and the heavens will disappear like smoke. He also said people will die. “For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool; But my righteousness will be forever, and my righteousness will not be abolished.” **(Verse 8)**

There is another way to look at this. As a believer I have been saved, am being saved, and ultimately will be saved. As I follow Jesus day-to-day, He saves me from sin and from myself, but I know that He will ultimately save me to Himself forever! This is not a temporary salvation for today only, but a permanent salvation which is eternal and will never end.

Notes

Sermon Notes

WEEK 18 THE FOUR SOILS

By Chris Watson

If you have ever tried to plant anything, you know it's necessary to have good soil. Farmers will often turn the soil over and fertilize their ground throughout the year before they ever plant anything in the ground. Having the right soil is important to the life of whatever is being grown. This week, we find the same is true when it comes to God's Word and Truth.

Day 1- Read Matthew 13:1-9

You are probably familiar with all types of soil if you have ever planted anything like grass seed or a garden. Of course, in Georgia, we have the wonderful Georgia red clay. We know that some types of soil do wonderfully and others not so well. It has to do with many factors, including working the soil, fertilizing and watering, to name a few.

With this in mind, Jesus clearly knew many in His audience would easily understand the Parable of the sower because so many worked the ground. He conveyed this account in their terms, and while they might struggle to grasp the deeper meaning, the types of soils would have been abundantly clear. Jesus was helping them make the connection between a physical concept and a spiritual one.

“Jesus’ explanation of the Parable of the Sower highlights four different responses to the gospel. The seed is ‘the word of the kingdom.’ The hard ground represents someone who is hardened by sin; he hears but does not understand the Word, and Satan plucks the message away, keeping the heart dull and preventing the Word from making an impression. The stony ground pictures a man who professes delight with the Word; however, his heart is not changed, and when trouble arises, his so-called faith quickly

disappears. The thorny ground depicts one who seems to receive the Word, but whose heart is full of riches, pleasures, and lusts; the things of this world take his time and attention away from the Word, and he ends up having no time for it. The good ground portrays the one who hears, understands, and receives the Word—and then allows the Word to accomplish its result in his life. The man represented by the ‘good ground’ is the only one of the four who is truly saved, because salvation’s proof is fruit (Matthew 3:7-8; 7:15-20).”¹⁰

It’s possible we have experienced all types of soil in our own lives, from the time we were unbelievers until now. Hopefully, the good soil is what describes each of us now. As a believer, have you become consumed by the pleasure and lust of this world? Have the troubles of this world caused you to fall away from the truth or walk more closely in tune with the Lord? Do some reflecting and ask God to get your focus back on the path if you have strayed off of it. Sometimes the soil needs to be worked and God is the one who works on the soil of our very hearts.

Day 2- Read Matthew 13:10-16

If you are a believer, God has opened your eyes to the truth. The most vivid expression of this is Paul’s conversion experience. One day he is killing Christians and the next day, he was evangelizing after God opened his eyes to the truth. The reason many are still blind is because they have followed their sinful hearts and minds to ungodly things and God has not yet opened their eyes to the truth. How is one’s mind opened to the truth and to the gospel? Through Jesus. One comes to know Jesus through His Word, prayer and the gospel being shared with them. God does the work that opens our eyes to the truth.

¹⁰ <http://www.gotquestions.org/parable-sower.html>

If you have trusted the gospel, and put your faith in Jesus, your eyes have been opened to the truth. Jesus said in **Verse 15** that “For the hearts of this people had become dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes have closed.” What are we to do for people whose eyes are closed, who are hard of hearing towards God’s truth, and who do not know God? First, we pray for God to be made known to unbelievers and we pray specifically for people’s eyes to be opened and their ears to hear. When we pray this, we are praying in agreement with God. We also share the truth with those who are lost, whether it is our spouse, kids, co-workers, or our friends. As we pray, we share the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to do the work. Our part is to be obedient and God is the One who draws people to Himself. **John 6:44** says, “No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws Him...” In other words, we share, pray, and tell God’s truth in love, and God speaks to each person’s heart and draws them to Himself.

At one point, God opened our eyes to the truth of the gospel. When that happened, we were made new and right with God. He has called us to share our testimony and to share His story of the gospel from now until we pass or until His return. God draws people to Himself, but He has put us in the position to point others to Him, because we love Him. Are you praying, telling, and sharing? Start today. Who will you share with? Pray for all eyes to be opened to the gospel.

Day 3- Read Matthew 13:17

Sometimes we may wish we could have experienced what Noah experienced, or been alive during Abraham’s time, or maybe even walked through the Red Sea when it was parted by God. Our passage today tells us many prophets and righteous men desired to see Jesus in person and experience the Messiah for themselves, but were not able as they grew old and passed away. Many godly men, women, and prophets knew of the Messiah (Jesus), but didn’t

physically see Him. They were never able to read of His account in the Gospels like we do. While the prophets and those who went before us had God's words through the Torah and the prophetic writings, we have been blessed to have the whole account from Genesis to Revelation.

I think it would be incredible to have lived during Jesus' time. How exciting it would have been to have lived in Old Testament times, but our passage today says Old Testament figures desired to see the future (Jesus). We have the rest of the story. We have the beginning (before Jesus), Jesus' ministry, and after Jesus was taken into Heaven. We have the privilege of putting it all together. I have learned so much in scripture, but I know there is still so much to learn. We have the one true account of the only God and Lord of the universe. While it would be interesting to go back to a certain period of time, I have everything I need right now, including God's Word to help me grow and learn.

Be thankful for God's Word. Be thankful for what it teaches us and how it guides us. Be thankful it keeps us in tune with God and allows us to see the whole story. Read it, study it, and allow it to guide your life. After all, it is the very Word of God. Take some time today to thank God for His Word.

Day 4- Read Matthew 13:18-23

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?

3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? Look at the whole chapter. How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. List out the different soils and how Jesus explains each. Write out some ways you've seen each soil before, the different reactions to God's word.

5. **APPLICATION:** List out some names of people to pray that you want their hearts to receive the seed of God's word like the good soil. Who will you share the Gospel message with this week? Prioritize sowing the seed of God's word in another's heart this week.

6. **PRAYER:** Pray specifically for God to prepare hearts as you share God's word. Pray for hearts of those you invite to church this week as they hear God's word.

Day 5- Read Psalm 14:1-7

If you turn to Romans 3:10-12, you will read some of the same verses which are found in our passages today. In the first five verses of our text today, we read the author's words regarding the

foolishness of those who are ungodly, particularly those who say there is no God.

For people who say there is no God, anything goes. There is no basis for right and wrong, for God is the One who writes His law on our heart. It's a case of whatever may be right for me may be wrong for someone else and that's ok; everyone should just live the way he or she sees fit.

This is where our country is currently and continues to go. People can say what they want, but if one really researches and studies they will find that this country was founded on God and His principles. We have been walking away from that foundation for a while now. Today, as a country, we aren't afraid to offend even God, Himself.

We must pray for people's eyes to be opened to the truth while we continue to speak the truth to them. Meanwhile, we should walk and talk with God, seek Him on our knees, and ask Him to work what only He can work. We are to trust that Jesus is in control. Verse 7 of our passage tells us that salvation would come and it has. We pray that all eyes will be opened to the gospel. Who are you praying and believing God for? Whose eyes are you praying will be opened to the Truth? Spend time in prayer today asking for those eyes to be opened.

WEEK 19 THE HIDDEN TREASURE

By Dennis Watson

A parable is a story that presents a truth. Jesus used parables to teach truth about several subjects. This week, we will look at a few parables Jesus used to teach about the Kingdom of Heaven. A kingdom has territory, a king, and subjects. In the case of the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God), God is the king, believers in Jesus are the subjects, and the rule and reign of Christ in a person's life is the territory. Jesus teaches about the advance of the kingdom in these parables.

Day 1- Read Matthew 13:31-33

Both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven are about things which start out very small, but grow quickly into something much larger. The mustard seed was the smallest seed known in that region of the world and would grow to great heights in just one season. It provided protection for the birds in its vast branches.

Often in scripture, leaven or yeast represents evil. However, in the parable of the leaven, Jesus is talking about a lasting impact which is impossible to stop. Once the leaven was placed in the meal, its impact could not be stopped. He is not talking about evil having a lasting, unstoppable influence, but the impact of the gospel would spread and could not be stopped.

Jesus brought the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. He was born an insignificant little baby, but by the time He left the earth, He had over one hundred followers. When He sent His Holy Spirit, the word of the kingdom, the gospel, began to spread. Today it is estimated that the number of Jesus followers in the world is 2.2 billion! The growth was rapid and it continues. In areas of the world where people have tried to stop it, the gospel has spread

even more rapidly.

Be encouraged that the gospel has spread and will continue to spread. If the seed has been planted in you, share it with others, and be a part of the spread of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Day 2- Read Matthew 13:34-35

In today's passage, Matthew is quoting from Psalm 78 which speaks about mysteries or secrets that will be revealed. Jesus told His disciples that He taught them in parables, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." (Matthew 13:11). The term mystery in the New Testament referred to truths not revealed in the Old Testament that were now being made known to those instructed by Jesus. Jesus spoke to His followers in parables to reveal to them things which had only been partially revealed in the Old Testament. Matthew noted Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy given by the Psalmist.

The Psalmist knew he was writing about one to come, but he did not know who it was or who it would be. He knew God would send the Messiah to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to men and to earth. This is another one of those places we see the dots connected. Who was the person that would teach in parables? Of course, the answer is revealed here - Jesus Christ.

Jesus made a very general statement. God gives believers the understanding of spiritual things, the mysteries of the kingdom, but the mysteries of the kingdom are not given to unbelievers.

Common sense tells us that God will reveal things to a person who really believes in Him and draws near Him—things that He cannot reveal to a person who ignores, neglects, and couldn't care less about God. Therefore, Christ puts it very simply: "It is given

unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [unbelievers] it is not given." God does not reward unbelief; He rewards belief and trust.¹¹

Are you open to the truth revealed in scripture? If so, keep searching the Word.

Day 3- Read Matthew 13:44

This parable has always one stand out to me. It seems bizarre to think about buying a whole field just to get a buried treasure in it. But it stands out that the man knew the value of what he had found. He knew that he had stumbled across something worth more than everything else had previously mattered to him. He was willing to sell all his possessions. In a sense he was willing to cut ties with all else and go all in for this treasure.

The point of the parable isn't to say that we could actually purchase the kingdom of God. We know that's not possible. We know that it is an undeserved gift. But it's a gift that the Father delights to give. (Luke 12:32) God doesn't hold back His good gifts but rather He delights to give us the Kingdom in His Son Jesus Christ. God isn't hiding his kingdom. But when our eyes have been opened to God's grace in Christ, it's the joy of finding a hidden treasure of immense value. The parable notes that the man went to sell all his possessions "in joy." When our eyes have been awakened to the beauty of life offered in Jesus Christ, it is a joy to give our lives for it. It's a joy to die to ourselves that we may be alive to Christ. Have you experienced the hidden treasure of knowing Christ? Is Christ Himself worth more than all you have in this life?

Take time today to meditate on the reality that you have been born

¹¹ Preachers Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary Matthew 1

again, that you've been given the gift of God's kingdom, to be welcomed as a treasured son or daughter of the King! Marvel at the gift of your salvation in Christ!

Day 4- Read Matthew 13:45-46

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. How does this parable relate with the last one? How is it alike and how is it different? What seems to be emphasized by this parable?
5. **APPLICATION:** How can you seek out the value of God's kingdom more this week? What does it look like to more actively treasure your relationship with Christ, to enjoy him this week?

6. **PRAYER:** Thank Jesus today for opening your eyes to see the value of a relationship with Him that you are now a child of God.

Day 5- Read Amos 9:5-15

In today's passage there are two parts. Verses 5-10 speak of the Lord God's history with Israel in which He describes His greatness and power. He talked about the Lord God delivering Israel from Egypt. He spoke of the Lord God's mercy and His covenant with Israel and, in particular, the believing remnant. The remnant is those who continue to seek and worship the One true God. He promised that though He will destroy many nations He would not destroy the House of Jacob which is Israel. He would, however, destroy the Israelite house of false worship.

The second part is found in Verses 11-15. Here we see that the Lord God was going to raise up the tabernacle of David. This assured the people that God would give His people, the Israelites, a bright future. The dynasty of David was about to collapse.

Here is how Warren Wieserbe describes it:

“But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one king. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord.”¹²

This was a message of encouragement to God's people. This was a

¹² Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Prophets

promise of Jesus the Messiah. Through Him Israel would be planted, protected, and never again pulled up from her land “says the Lord your God.” “Your God!” What a great encouragement for the Jews to know, that in spite of their unbelief, their God would be faithful to keep His covenant promises. Be reminded that God is always faithful to His promises. Although His people are not!

Notes

Sermon Notes

WEEK 20 JESUS CALMS THE STORM

By Chris Watson

We have all faced storms in our life. While we have all seen some pretty nasty rain storms, most of us have also experienced troubles and difficulties in our lives. We can be confident as we face these storms, Jesus is right there with us. He is not surprised by the storms we face nor is He uncertain as to what He should do. This week, we will look at an actual, physical storm and how God was even in control of that.

Day 1- Read Luke 8:22-25

Sometimes I think I have great faith, while at other times I feel as though my faith is very small and weak. I think we all can relate to Jesus' disciples. His disciples had been with Him for some time now. They had seen Jesus heal people, forgive sins, and they were even present at His incredible Sermon on the Mount. By now, the disciples should have known that He was no ordinary Man.

As they headed out to sea, a great storm arose while Jesus was sleeping. This is an interesting fact because it reminds us that while Jesus was fully God, He was fully human, too, and He needed rest just like His disciples. As He rested, a great storm came up and the disciples panicked. I can imagine they were at a loss and they thought they were going to die. They even told Jesus they were perishing when they woke Him up. They obviously believed He could do something, so they called to Jesus. I have to admit I would have done the same thing; it makes total sense to me.

Jesus rebuked the storm, the waters calmed, and the wind ceased. Then Jesus looked at His disciples and asked, "...where is your faith?" Luke 8:25 As if to ask, did you not think I had this? Do you doubt me? Don't you know I am in control? Haven't you been with

me long enough to see what God has done through me? Have you forgotten already?

I would probably have been much like His disciples. In a moment of panic and disbelief, I might have forgotten, too. The good news is they went straight to Jesus. The bad news may be they temporarily forgot that God was in total control. What do you do when storms come up? What do you do when life seems out of control? Do we forget what God has done in our past? Do we forget He has been in control up till now and He will continue to be? Today, we should trust God even in the storms. He is in control and He can be trusted. He may calm the storm or He may be our calm in the storm. Ask God to help you trust Him no matter what the case may be.

Day 2- Read Luke 8:26-33

The enemy is well aware of Jesus. In fact, he knows that his time is limited. One day, he will be done away with and he will no longer roam the earth seeking to steal, kill, and destroy. The enemy doesn't have power over Jesus, in fact it is the other way around. As we face our days, we can be assured that God wins because He already has. God told us we would face trials and tribulations in the world, but to take heart because He has overcome the world. In the end we will reign with Him and there will be no more sin.

Notice that they (demons) begged Jesus not to command them to go out into the abyss. (Verse 31) This is proof for us that the enemy and his demons knew Jesus' power and appealed to Him about where He would send them. As believers, this should be a reminder we are not under the enemy's thumb. We face struggles and difficulties because we live in a sinful and evil world, but we are not under Satan's control, we are under God's control.

Whose control are you under? Are you under the evil one or under

God? If you are under God, then you can trust He is in control. If you are under the enemy as a non-believer, recognize you need Jesus and call on His name to save you and forgive you of your sins. If you are following the enemy and his ways, repent. We know the enemy seeks to destroy, but God wants to give us life.

Our God is in control and this is reassuring and peaceful to me. Even the enemy and the demons submit to Him. As you face your day, be reminded who is really in control and trust Him. Ask God to give you peace, no matter what is going on.

Day 3- Read Luke 8:34-39

A monk is someone who withdraws from society to focus totally on God. They usually are not a part of the normal world and seek to spend time only with God. This would be great, if only it were biblical.

Understandably so, after the man was healed of his demon possession he wanted to stay with Jesus. In fact, he begged Jesus to let him stay with Him. (Verse 38) While it was noble he wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus told him to return to his house and tell everyone what God had done for him. The man did just that. He began to tell anyone he could find what Jesus had done for him.

This is exactly what God has told us to do. He has told us to be His witnesses everywhere. Whether we are at home, work, school, on vacation, or around the world, we are to tell God's story. I admit that sometimes I do this and sometimes I don't. I want to regularly tell what God has and continues to do for me because it has changed my life. We should not hide behind a closed door to read the Bible and talk to Jesus. We should not cut ourselves off from society. We are to share what Jesus has done for us. While we may not be accepted and may be laughed at, ridiculed, or even persecuted, in light of what God has done for us,

does it really matter what others think or do to us?

Thank God for what He has done for you. Pray for the strength and courage to tell everyone in your household and city and that you won't stop until all have heard.

Day 4- Read Luke 8:40-56

1. **OBSERVATION:** What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. **INTERPRETATION:** How does the context impact your understanding of these verses? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What is the woman's response when she is found out for touching His robe? How does Jesus deal with the woman who touches his robe?
5. **APPLICATION:** Jesus sees the woman. He could have let it go and she could have walked away amazed that she was finally

healed. But the narrative seems to emphasize that she was no longer hidden and Jesus sees her in her distress. Then he affirms her calling her Daughter and then saying she is healed on account of her faith. He validates her faith. Write out ways you feel seen by God today. How has he validated you, tenderly cared for you, cared for you today Write out as much as comes to mind.

6. **PRAYER:** Thank God for his tender mercies towards you today. Pray even that you would be able to extend the same tender mercy and love towards those around you as Christ has to you.

Day 5- Read Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably one of the most well known chapters in the entire Bible. It is right up there with the Verse John 3:16. Most people seem to know or be familiar with it because it is often read specifically during times of struggle and mourning.

This psalm is very refreshing. In the Psalms that David wrote, he was very open and transparent. He often wrote after a difficult battle or when he was running for his life. We certainly know his life had its share of ups and downs. Therefore, when we read Psalm 23, we can understand its truth for David.

David said the Lord was his Shepherd and David knew shepherding well. Many of the things David did for his sheep, God does for us. He allows us to rest, He quiets our hearts and souls,

and He leads us down the correct path, not letting us go to the left or the right.

If you know anything about sheep, you know they are not the smartest of animals. They have to have a shepherd. I will say it, I am not the smartest, nor am I the sharpest tool in the tool shed. In fact, I am much like a sheep needing a shepherd, and not just any old shepherd; I need the Lord to direct my every step!

Does the Lord direct your steps? Are you leading your steps or is He? We all need the right shepherd. Thank God for His leading, and for the shepherding He does with our hearts and our lives.

Notes

Sermon Notes

Additional Weeks of Study

THE PREHISTORY OF JESUS

By: Dennis Watson

It has been said that the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. As you read and study each testament, you will come to a greater understanding of both. Jesus is all in the Old Testament, but it is not recognized until you begin to grasp the New Testament. Although Jesus of Nazareth was born into history, He is eternal, but He entered into history at a specified, prophesied and fulfilled time. He has no beginning and no end. This week, as we move into the New Testament, we will be looking at the prehistory of Jesus.

Day 1- Read John 1:1-18

The gospel of John is unique. The other gospels, known as the Synoptic Gospels, are Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are called synoptic because they describe similar events. They see together with a common view and they tell us what Jesus did and said. The gospel of John, on the other hand, tells us who Jesus is and he focuses more on the identity of Jesus. John could safely be called the spiritual gospel while the synoptic gospels are the historical gospels.

In the passage today, the opening verses of John, we are connected to the opening words of **Genesis 1:1**, "In the beginning." Here in this gospel, the "Word" is the instrument by which all things are created. The Word then is identified with God. **Genesis 1:1** says, "In the beginning God created." The Word and God are one and the same and the Word and God, which are one, did the creating. In **Genesis 1:2b**, the writer completes the teaching regarding the Triune God. We read, "And the Spirit of

God was hovering." In this link we see all of the Godhead; the fullness of God is seen. As we read on in John, we discover who this Word is which was created in the beginning. **John 1:14** says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This Word is, Jesus of Nazareth, who was born into history. He was God in the flesh in history, so man could know Him and He could become the cure for our overarching human problem—sin.

The historical Jesus was not an after-thought of God. He was with God from the very beginning, creating and revealing Himself and His perfect plan. The historical Jesus was God in the flesh. Take a moment to give praise and thanks for God coming to us and making us His children.

Day 2- Read 1 Peter 1:17-2

In Colossians 1, we read about the incredible nature of Jesus Christ. In **Colossians 1:26-27**, Paul writes referring to the ministry entrusted to him,"²⁶ The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. ²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul often speaks of the mystery or the mysteries pertaining to the gospel. The word mystery has to do with a plan or work of God that has been or was unrevealed, but is now being made known. It does not carry the idea of a secret being withheld, but of one to be revealed. It was held as a mystery until the predetermined time set by God.

In today's passage the word mystery is not used but it is implied. In Verse 20 we read about this once mystery that Christ was

foreordained. He was known by God before the foundation of the world. This means He was existing before and was participating in the counsels of God from before the beginning of time. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are eternal. They are outside of time, space and matter. Jesus was in that group, pre-incarnate. He was existing and participating with the Godhead before creating time, space and matter. Now, in these *last times*, the one who was hidden, the mystery, is made known for you; that which was hidden until the right time is now revealed. He is not just revealed; He is revealed for you. The *for you* is for all who will believe and receive that He is the One sent to save.

It is an amazing mystery revealed that God so loved and He chose to demonstrate His love for us.

All that planning, all that history. . . .so He could deliver the mystery goods to you! Not a small thing for sure. Thank Him for His amazing plan that is no longer a mystery, but a blessing.

Day 3- Read Exodus 3

Did Moses meet the pre-incarnate Jesus?

In the Old Testament, there are theophanies. A theophany is a manifestation of God in the Bible that is tangible to the human senses (gotquestions.org). There are also Christophanies. A Christophany is what some commentators believe to be appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. These are usually recognized as an appearance of the Angel of the Lord. Although this is not always the case.

We read the Old Testament from the perspective of the New Testament. We have been thoroughly introduced to the historical Jesus in the New Testament. When we read the Old Testament, it becomes easy to see glimpses of the historical Jesus appearing to

people in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3, Moses is confronted with a burning bush. The Angel of the Lord speaks to him from the burning bush. Later in the passage, when Moses asks who he was to say had sent him to the people in bondage in Egypt, he was to say, "I AM has sent me to you." **Exodus 3:14** Immediately, we recognize Jesus because the historical Jesus made such statements as:

“I am the bread of life” **John 6:48**

“I am the way the truth and the life” **John 14:16**

“I am the light of the world.” **John 8:12**

In Judges 6:11:21, we see the Angel of the Lord appearing to Gideon. In Verses 23-24, the Angel of the Lord used familiar phrases we recognize from the New Testament such as *Peace be with you* and when Gideon built an altar, he called it *the Lord is Peace*. We can hear the Jesus of history in **Mark 4:39** speaking to the storm on the Sea of Galilee, “...peace be still.”

There are many other instances where we see Jesus appearing in His pre-incarnate state in the Old Testament. We recognize Him because we now know Him as the historical or the incarnate God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Not only that, but if you are a believer, discovering Him in the pages of the Old Testament becomes a very special experience of what this devotional guide is all about—connecting the dots.

Give thanks for the mystery revealed.

Day 4- Read Hebrews 13:8

Some things never change. This sentence is often heard and you have often, perhaps, said it, but it is just not true. People change. We are born with the smooth soft skin of a baby. Babies grow and become active and vibrant. Then the youthful vibrancy fades. Wrinkles take the place of the smooth skin and then comes more fading until taken by death.

The people we were often so close to in our childhood, high school and college days are often replaced by family and new friends as our lives change and we mature and begin to live as adults. Responsibilities of family and career cause us to move on. Our friendships change.

Technology changes rapidly and brings with it even more change to our lives. The cell phone, which is really a handheld computer, has made worldwide communication instantaneous. We are always available to family, friends, and work, as well as people and organizations we have no real connection with. We have instant access to news and information right in our hands. It can be a good thing and it can be a bad thing.

There is always one sure constant; One who does not change. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Here are two instances of the nature of God in the Old Testament linked to the nature of Jesus, God in the flesh in the New Testament:

"But You are the same, And Your years will have no end." Psalm 102:27 (NKJV)

"Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." Hebrews 1:12 (NKJV)

"Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last." **Isaiah 48:12 (NKJV)**

"And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last." **Revelation 1:17 (NKJV)**

The unchanging nature of Jesus is connected with the unchanging nature of God because Jesus was, in history, God in the flesh. He is the up-close, knowable, experiential version of God. He came so that we could know God personally. He came so we could experience God. And He is like God—He does not change. He has promised to be with us all the time. Jesus is fully reliable.

With the constant presence of change, take a moment to give thanks for the eternal, unchanging nature of Jesus!

Day 5- Read Revelation 1:1-3; 4:1

The book of Revelation is eschatological. It is about end time events. Christian eschatology is the study focused on the ultimate destiny of the individual soul and of the entire created order. Jesus, as we have seen this week, had a pre-incarnate existence. He was with God before creation; before He made the beginning of history. We encounter Him in various places in the Old Testament appearing and speaking to different people. In the New Testament, we meet Jesus as He enters history in the incarnation. He came and dwelt among us.

Today, we will take a moment to reflect on Jesus in His post-incarnate state. After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven at the right-hand of God. The book of Revelation is titled by the opening words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." **Revelation 1:1 (NKJV)** Jesus is showing John what is going to take place regarding His second coming and what

must shortly take place. In Revelation 4, a transition is made which appears to be a time after the rapture of the church. Jesus will show and tell John what must take place after this.

Before Jesus' encounter with John regarding the end times, He wrapped up His ministry within history. Jesus told His disciples He would be leaving them and He even told them it was best for Him to leave:

"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." **John 16:5-7 (NKJV)**

He tells them there would be post-incarnation existence as there was pre-incarnation existence with incarnate existence in between.

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." **Mark 16:19 (NKJV)**

After His bodily resurrection, He ascended into heaven and then sent the Helper. The Helper is the Holy Spirit. The KJV calls Him the Comforter which is translated from the Greek word 'paraklete.' On the Day of Pentecost the church was birthed and was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was seated and is still seated at the right hand of God.

Another post-incarnation activity is described in John: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know." **John 14:3-4 (NKJV)**

Jesus is at the right hand of God and He is preparing a place for His own. In addition to preparing a place for us He is interceding for us, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." **Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV)**

Jesus is interceding (praying) for His own. Not for salvation, but for those who are already saved. He is praying for us to be delivered from and through trials. When you are struggling, Jesus is interceding for you to His Father. He continues to be the One who rescues us.

Also, He is living inside His own, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)**

There are other post-incarnation activities of Jesus, but these give you a good idea not only of Jesus's prehistory, but His eternal nature.

Jesus was at work in the Old Testament secretly or not fully revealed. In the New Testament, He is incarnate, God fully revealed in the flesh. In the incarnation, He entered history. In His post-incarnation work, we enter eternity. Give thanks to the Lord that He entered our fallen history so we could enter His glorified eternity.

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

By: Chris Wason

This week brings us to the celebration of the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary. Their pregnancies were similar and, yet, so different. Both women loved God and were devoted to Him. They would both give birth to sons who would change the world and one who would ultimately save it, Jesus Christ. What must it have been like to be Elizabeth and Mary as they navigated all of the news that had come upon them?

Day 1- Read Luke 1:35-40

Mary had just found out she was to give birth to the Savior of the world. Imagine the thoughts and emotions she was dealing with. Right after finding this out, she finds out here her cousin, Elizabeth, was also with child and was 6 months along. Verses 39 and 40 tell us Mary went with haste to see Elizabeth.

Mary wanted to celebrate with Elizabeth. We, as believers, have so much to celebrate. Scripture reminds us that any good and perfect gift comes from the Father. God has been so gracious to give us good gifts. I'm reminded of the words in the hymn, "Count your blessings." "Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings see what God hath done. Count your blessings; name them one by one. Count your many blessings, see what God hath done." Whether it is a child or a church, a friend or a marriage, a vehicle or a relationship, we have so much to rejoice about but the greatest is God Himself.

I am sure it was quite the celebration for Mary and Elizabeth. Today think of the things you have to celebrate, be it big or small, and thank God for them.

Day 2- Read Luke 1:41-42

Celebrating joyous occasions is a great thing. Mary and Elizabeth were pre-Jesus, but they trusted and followed God. There are several interesting focuses/truths found in these two verses in Luke. The first is that life, all life is valuable. Verse 41 says when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb. I remember watching all of our kids move around in Lisa's belly as they grew. Like many of you with your own babies, I would talk to them and even sing to them. Research has shown that babies respond in the womb to things like music and familiar voices. This is another reminder that every child that grows inside of a woman is a precious child. I don't know what situation you find yourself in while reading this. You may have children that are grown and have already moved out or your children may still be living in your home. Maybe you just got married and hope to have children one day or maybe you are married and desire children but God hasn't yet answered that prayer. I want to encourage you to put your hope in Him and look solely to Him. Maybe you find yourself realizing life is valuable, but you made a choice as a woman (or supported a choice as a man) to abort a child. God loves you and can forgive you. In fact, if you are a Christian, He already has, as scripture tells us, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Life is precious and it is given from the Lord. I'm so thankful He gives not only physical life but spiritual life as well.

Elizabeth was herself with child and the Holy Spirit was with her. This is how she knew even before Mary told her that Mary was with child. As believers, we have been filled with the Holy Spirit which means no matter where we go or what we say, the Holy Spirit is always with us. God doesn't leave us, He said He never would. It is a mindset. This means instead of being Chris Watson driven I should be Holy Spirit driven. Instead of being Chris Watson led, I should be Holy Spirit led and instead of being Chris

Watson focused, I should be Holy Spirit focused. Are you self-driven, self-led and self-focused, or are you Holy Spirit focused? As you start your day, ask God that you would be Holy Spirit driven, lead, and focused. As we will discuss in a few days, the Holy Spirit does what we could NEVER do. Thank God.

Day 3- Read Luke 1:42-45

Have you ever thought about this account and what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph? Mary would bring forth into the world, the Savior of the world. We see in Verse 45 that Elizabeth tells Mary there would be a fulfillment of those things that she was told from the Lord. We will look further at the birth of Jesus foretold in Week 4, but here is a portion of it below:

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

²⁹But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.”

³⁸ Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Mary would literally carry the son of God for nine months and bring Him into the world. He would live His life, die for our sins and He would be raised from the dead. He not only lived then but He lives now. Take some time to thank God for Jesus!

Day 4- Read Luke 1:46

Such a short verse, yet, with so much meaning. When Mary says in this verse, "... my soul magnifies the Lord," it's conveying that all of who she is celebrates and worships the Lord. Having just been informed she was with child along with her cousin Elizabeth, I am sure she was overwhelmed, but in a good way. It was like getting the best news, and it was a lot to take in. What was her response when she finds out she is with child? In **Luke 1:38** Mary said to the angel "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

I believe Mary was overwhelmed with the goodness of God in this wonderful news and she worshipped; her soul magnified the Lord. What do we do when we are overwhelmed with good news or bad? The best response, no matter the situation, is to worship the Lord for He is in control. As I write this devotion, I am preparing to preach Sunday on Lamentation 3. Right in the middle of this passage of turmoil, struggle and Judah's captivity,

Jeremiah looks to the Lord, much like Mary did, but he was in a bad situation. No matter what situation we find ourselves in, may we always look to the Lord and magnify His name for He is worthy.

Day 5- Read Psalm 34

In most Bibles translations, Psalm 34 is broken into sections, each with a beginning verse/phrase if you will. Take some time to dwell on each verse/phrase in bold. If you feel led, write down how that verse directs you to obey or trust in God.

**¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.

³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

**⁴ I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.**

⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷ The [a]ngel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him,
And delivers them.

**⁸ Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!**

⁹ Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!
There is no [b]want to those who fear Him.

¹⁰ The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

**¹¹ Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.**

¹² Who is the man who desires life,
And loves many days, that he may see good?

¹³ Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.

**¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears
are open to their cry.**

¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, To [c]cut
off the remembrance of them from the earth.

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them
out of all their troubles.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves
such as [d]have a contrite spirit.

**¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD
delivers him out of them all.** ²⁰ He guards all his bones;
Not one of them is broken.

²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous shall be [e]condemned. ²² The
LORD redeems the soul of His servants, And none of those who
trust in Him shall be condemned.

Thank God for who He is.

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

By: Dennis Watson

In the New Testament, there is only one genealogy recorded which is the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth. It is in the New Testament twice and each one is unique. One is found in Matthew 1:1-17 and the other is in Luke 3:23-28. The genealogies of Jesus are important because they demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies spoken of Him. Jesus could only be the Messiah as the son and heir of David. The two genealogies are different and there is a reason, which we will discuss this week. There is no contradiction in the lineage, only confirmation.

Day 1- Read Matthew 1:1-17

Today we will look at the overall genealogy in Matthew and tomorrow we will look at the genealogy found in Luke. It is not a case of error, but to meet the provisions regarding the prophecies about Jesus.

Though Jewish genealogical records would be destroyed in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, Jesus's genealogy was supernaturally preserved in the Gospels. (Tony Evans)

Matthew and Luke's genealogies are the same from Abraham to David but Matthew then branches off and follows the line of David's son, Solomon. Both genealogies link the line of the Messiah to the line of Abraham which places Him in the nation of Israel. However, Matthew's genealogy does not connect Jesus to Joseph because Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and Matthew's recorded genealogy is actually traced from Abraham to Joseph. The line of Joseph gave Jesus the legal title to the throne. It is safe to say Jesus is actually the step-son of Joseph. A step-son had legal status as a son. Since Joseph was a blood descendant of David and of David's throne, Jesus had legal right to inherit the

throne of David. This was necessary for Jesus' Messianic claim.

It is tempting to say, God thought of everything. He did not have to think, plot or figure it out. He made it all happen before the foundation of the world. We get to figure it out and be amazed and give Him glory for His incredible revealing of His sovereignty.

Day 2- Read Luke 3:23-28

In **Verse 23**, we find some very important words which are key to understanding the two genealogies we are looking at. The key phrase is regarding Jesus, "... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli. "The qualifying phrase is "...as was supposed the son of Joseph." Jesus was not the son of Joseph, but it was supposed by the people that Joseph was His father. We know that Jesus was virgin born; no man had a part in it. In reality, Luke is saying that Jesus was the Son of Heli by way of being Heli's grandson. It was not unusual for a person to be called the son of someone, meaning a descendent, not necessarily the son. So Heli was Joseph's father-in-law because he was Mary's father and Jesus' grandfather.

Matthew traced the paternal line of Jesus' earthly, adoptive father, Joseph. This linked Jesus legally to the throne. Luke traced the maternal line of Jesus through Mary's line. It is through the line of Mary that Jesus got the bloodline of David. He could not have been born of man. It was necessary He be born of a virgin. For this reason, He was born of the seed of the woman which was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. Jesus, born of the woman's seed, was the One who would crush the serpent's head. Both lines were of the tribe of Judah and the line of David.

This is no small or insignificant truth. I like the way J. Vernon McGee puts it:

The second genealogy is in Luke 3:23-38. This is the genealogy of Mary, and it does not come through Solomon but comes through another son of David, Nathan. There is no curse and no judgment on that line. The Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born, and He came through Mary's line. That is where He got the blood title to the throne of David. I find this to be one of the most remarkable things that has occurred in this world!¹³

God has always been working to bring His gospel message into the world. It is way beyond man to fully comprehend what He has done. Give thanks to His amazing delivery system.

Day 3- Read Revelation 12

We are looking at the genealogies of Jesus this week but significant in this discussion is the sovereignty of God. Revelation 12 is about a woman who represents Israel. The fiery dragon represents Satan. Satan is waiting for the woman (Israel) to give birth (to the Messiah) so that he can devour Him. This has been the focus of Satan ever since he was booted out of heaven. The two genealogies we have been looking at are not just names of random people. The names are of significant people God protected and sovereignly preserved so the Messiah would come miraculously into the world, born of a virgin, a specific virgin, Mary.

The battle is seen in the attempts of Satan to obstruct God's plan to rescue mankind from the effects of sin and rebellion. His attack is continuously on the lineage of the Messiah. Think of it this way, Satan is messing with the delivery system of the gospel. The battle is first mentioned in **Genesis 3:15** "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her

¹³ J. Vernon McGee, Thru The Bible

Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

We first see this played out when Cain, prompted by the deceiver Satan, murders his brother Abel. His attempts begin in trying to stop the line of the Messiah. However, the sovereign God thwarted Satan's plan through the continuation of the Messianic line through the birth of Seth. You see Seth in the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's account.

We also see his attempt to thwart the Messiah's coming when Satan attempts to contaminate the pre-flood gene-pool. God raised up Noah and his family and sent the flood. You see Noah in Luke's genealogy.

The plot is seen again by enslaving the people of God in Egypt and seeking to kill the deliverer Moses when he is just a baby. God miraculously intervenes and delivers the deliverer. Moses, is also in Luke's genealogical account.

I could make a list which would go on for a long time. One more example is in the book of Esther. We read how a wicked man by the name of Haman put together a plot to exterminate the Jews. Once again, Satan attempts to thwart God's plan by wiping out the Jews. The plot was discovered by Mordecai and Esther found herself in the place God put her to rescue her people from the plot.

The extreme to which Satan took his plot was the killing of baby boys two years and younger by King Herod soon after the birth of Jesus. The plot was thwarted when Joseph took his Son and Mary and fled to Egypt. Then, another attempt to destroy the deliverer was in the crucifixion of Jesus. God stopped the enemy's attempt and raised the deliverer from the grave on the third day.

Satan continues his attempt to thwart the gospel delivery system. by trying to stop you. But be reminded, God will provide a way of

escape from the attempts of the enemy to stop you as part of God's gospel delivery system. You are a vital part of God's gospel delivery system.

Day 4- Read Acts 10:24-34

When Peter went to the home of Cornelius after having a vision about clean and unclean foods, he came to understand that "God is not a respecter of persons." (**Verse 34 KJV**) He is saying that God does not show favoritism.

You may want to read Matthew 1:2-16 again. It is possible to do a quick casual reading of the genealogies of Jesus and miss two major lessons. We will look at one today and the other tomorrow. Today, I want to look at the character of a few of those listed. The list reminds us of human sin and imperfection. God uses sinful people. In fact, it is safe to say God uses only sinful people. The only exception is His son, Jesus.

A close look at the names reveal some really shady people. Jacob, was a deceiver. We know that he manipulated and deceived the people in his family. David was an adulterer and murder. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah, sent to the front lines of battle to be killed. Solomon was a womanizer having seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Manasseh was a wicked King. Tamar dressed up as a prostitute to lure her former father-in-law, Judah, into a sexual relationship and then gave birth to two sons, both of whom appear in the genealogy. Rahab was a prostitute.

God's grace is always in play. His grace is His tool to bless people and make them to be a blessing. He can only use broken people because that is what we all are. Give thanks to God today for His amazing and transforming grace. If He could use those imperfect people, He can use us.

Day 5- Read Romans 3:27-31

Once again, "...God is no respecter of persons." (**Acts 10:34 KJV**) He does not make a distinction on skin color or nation of origin. Now, back to the genealogies. Tamar, Bathsheba, Rahab and Ruth each descended from Ham. Ham was believed to have been black. We see in the genealogy of Jesus, both Jewa and Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. God used women as well as men. God is in the people business. He does not make distinctions based on gender, skin color, and nation of origin. He is concerned that all people come to faith in Jesus.

What color was Jesus?

Pastor E.V. Hill used to tell of a time he received a death threat from the Black Panthers because they didn't like his preaching about that "white Jesus." This was his reply: "I don't know anything about a white Christ – I know about Christ a Savior named Jesus. I don't know what color He is. He was born in brown Asia, He fled to black Africa, and He was in heaven before the gospel got to white Europe, so I don't know what color He is. I do know one thing: if you bow at the alter with color on your mind, and get up with color on your mind, go back again – and keep going back until you no longer look at His color, but at His greatness and His power – His power to save!" Very well said!

JESUS IN JERUSALEM AT TWELVE

By Chris Watson

Jesus was no ordinary child. He was born from Mary, but not in the line of Adam. He was literally the Son of God. This week we will see that being the child of God meant something very different for this child. After all this *child* changed the world.

Day 1- Read Luke 2:39-41

Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover.

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is a Jewish festival celebrating the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' freedom from slavery to the Egyptians. The Feast of Passover, along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was the first of the festivals to be commanded by God for Israel to observe (see Exodus 12). Commemorations today involve a special meal called the Seder, featuring unleavened bread and other food items symbolic of various aspects of the exodus.

Passover is one of the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays. Along with Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) and Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles), Passover is one of the three *pilgrimage* festivals in Scripture, during which the Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem and observe the feasts together. Passover takes place in the spring, during the Hebrew month of Nisan. In Western countries, Passover is celebrated in early to mid-April and is always close to Easter.

The book of Exodus tells of the origin of Passover. God promised to redeem His people from the bondage of Pharaoh (Exodus 6:6). God sent Moses to the Egyptian king with the command that Pharaoh "...let my people go..." (Exodus 8:1). When Pharaoh

refused, God brought ten plagues on the land of Egypt. The tenth and worst of the plagues was the death of all the firstborn in Egypt.

The night of the first Passover was the night of the tenth plague. On that fateful night, God told the Israelites to sacrifice a spotless lamb and mark their doorposts and lintels with its blood (Exodus 12:21–22). Then, when the Lord passed through the nation, He would “pass over” the households that showed the blood (verse 23). In a very real way, the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from death, as it kept the destroyer from entering their homes. The Israelites were saved from the plague, and their firstborn children stayed alive. From then on, every firstborn son of the Israelites belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed with a sacrifice (Exodus 13:1–2, 12; cf. Luke 2:22–24).

The children of Israel in Egypt followed God’s command and kept the first Passover. However, none of the Egyptians did so. All through Egypt, behind the unmarked, bloodless doorways of the Egyptians, the firstborn children died at midnight (Exodus 12:21–29). “There was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead” (verse 30). This dire judgment finally changed the Egyptian king’s heart, and he released the Israelite slaves (verses 31–32).

Along with the instruction to apply the Passover lamb’s blood to their doorposts and lintels, God instituted a commemorative meal: fire-roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8). The Lord told the Israelites to “observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever” (Exodus 12:24, ESV), even when in a foreign land.

To this day, Jews all over the world celebrate the Passover in obedience to this command. Passover and the story of the exodus have great significance for Christians also, as Jesus Christ

fulfilled the Law, including the symbolism of the Passover (Matthew 5:17). Jesus is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:12). He was killed at Passover time, and the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Luke 22:7–8). By (spiritually) applying His blood to our lives by faith, we trust Christ to save us from death. The Israelites who, in faith, applied the blood of the Paschal lamb to their homes become a model for us. It was not the Israelites' ancestry or good standing or amiable nature that saved them; it was only the blood of the lamb that made them exempt from death (see John 1:29 and Revelation 5:9–10).¹⁴

Can you imagine what Jesus as a child must have thought about Passover? He was a child, but He was also the Son of God. Take some time today if you are a Christian to thank God that you have been passed over; that death (the enemy) has no victory over you because the blood of Jesus has covered you.

Day 2- Read Luke 2:42-45

Have you ever lost your child for a whole day? You didn't just lose them, you thought your child was with people you knew or with the rest of your traveling group in this case, only to find out that they weren't? We understand that upon realizing that Jesus wasn't with them, Jesus' parents began looking for him among relatives and acquaintances in the group, but couldn't find him. They returned to Jerusalem 3 days later and found him teaching in the temple. Can you imagine, you are the mother of Jesus and, literally, you have lost Him. You have lost the Savior of the world; the One that would save mankind couldn't be found. Joseph and Mary were parents just like you and me. They parented the Savior of the world, but they still had to feed Jesus when He was a baby, they still had to care for Him and He was still their responsibility. I am sure, like with any child, this was a great responsibility and

¹⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-Passover.html>

sometimes they got it wrong.

I am the father of three children, an 11, 7 and 4-year-old and I know I often get it wrong. Sometimes, I become impatient. Sometimes, I become visually frustrated or aggravated about a situation. Truth is, even the Lord's parents didn't always get it right. As parents, grandparents, or siblings, we will sometimes get it wrong. We might lose it and have to apologize. We will, at times, feel like we are losing the battle and at other times we will see glimmers of hope that let us see we might just be winning the war. This is not an excuse to be hands off or let our children do what they want, but in those tough times, remember even Jesus' parents didn't know where He was for 3 days!

Take some time today to ask Him how to guide your children and/or grandchildren. When you get it wrong, confess it to the Lord and to your children. When you are seeking God and leading your family one step at a time, be assured you can be in God's will. Know in those tough times, God is still the God of grace and love.

Day 3- Read Luke 2:48-50

In today's passage, Jesus could not be found. His parents had lost Him and had to retrace their steps to look for Him. When they found Him, He basically said, why in the world are you looking for me? Almost like a rhetorical question of why did you bother? You should have known where I would be and what I would be doing. He tells His parents that He was being about His Father's (God's) business, but they did not understand. Although Mary was the mother of Jesus and Joseph was the earthly father of Jesus, and knowing that Jesus was the Son of God, they still didn't understand He was all about what the Father wanted. They didn't fully understand that anything He did was in accordance with God's plan and will. In fact, Jesus didn't act apart from the

direction of the Lord.

Are we about our Father's business? As I type this, I am preparing to preach Sunday on Daniel. Daniel 1:8 tells us Daniel lived with a purposed heart. His heart was set on the purpose of God, not his own. Jesus' purpose was set on the purpose of His Father, God. He didn't act on His own, but at the will of His Father. Even while on the cross, He prayed not His will be done but His Father's. Sometimes, if we are honest, we get off track and can get distracted or caught up in things that don't matter as much as Jesus. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on Him. God has us in our marriage, school, job, church, etc. as a part of His plan. May we be about His business and not look back.

Day 4- Read Luke 2:46-47

If we look back at Verse 42, it tells us that Jesus was 12 when He was left in Jerusalem alone. When Jesus' parents found Him, He was in the temple with teachers, both listening and asking them questions. They were amazed with His understanding and His answers. Although He had been left for 3 days, obviously He wasn't concerned as He was about God's business.

When we speak the truth or evangelize to others, God gives us the words. In fact, many won't share because they are afraid they won't know what to say or they will look like they don't know what they are talking about. This is a pride issue. If you don't know the answers, simply say, "I don't know, but I will try to find out." You don't have to have all the answers. You might be surprised if you speak the truth and speak up for Jesus, God will often give you the answers. In fact, I have found that if I don't speak up, I won't have the right answers, but if I do, I will. Don't be afraid to speak the truth. The world needs the truth now more than ever, whether it's at home, in the church, at the ballfield, at school, or in the workplace.

Day 5- Read Isaiah 53

Remember our 12-year-old little boy preaching in the temple last week? Isaiah 53 is also about this little boy. Isaiah 53 was written about 700 years before Jesus' time, as prophecy. That little boy would grow up, begin His public ministry at the age of 30, call 12 disciples, be arrested, be beaten, be put to death and would rise to live again. Scripture tells us He sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf.

Jesus, as a child or adult, had nothing (Verse 2) in regards to looks or wealth to draw people to Him. Rather, as a child, He grew in wisdom and in stature, in favor with God and man. Can you imagine what it must have been like for Mary to care for Jesus? To change His diapers, watch Him play with His friends, watch Him teach in the temple, grow up, begin His ministry, call His disciples and then go to the cross? Mary watched Him literally die for your sins and for hers. What an emotional and heart wrenching experience that must have been. Now imagine what it must have been like to find out that Jesus had risen from the dead, and all that He said was indeed true.

I'm reminded of the hymn, "I serve a Risen Savior, He's in the world today, I know that He is living whatever men may say." This Jesus which was prophesied in Isaiah 700 years before His birth, is the same Savior that died for our sins and lives today. He doesn't just live, but as believers, He lives in us. He walks and talks with us as we go. Thank God for His goodness and for choosing to walk with us.

Notes

The Samaritan Woman at the Well

By Chris Watson

Every culture has had, and some still have, what is socially expected of certain people groups. It was no different in Jesus' day. For example, Jews were not to associate with Samaritans and men were not to interact with women as Jesus interacted with the Samaritan Woman that we read about today. In our study this week, Jesus changes several cultural and social beliefs.

Day 1- Read John 4:1-11

As we read the Gospels, we know Jesus blew a lot of their standards of His day out of the water and the Pharisees were always trying to catch Him. Our account today tells us that the disciples had gone into town to buy food and Jesus was alone. Warren Wiersbe writes "In that day, it was not considered proper for any man, especially a rabbi, to speak in a public place to a strange woman (John 4:27), but our Lord set social customs aside because a soul's eternal salvation was at stake." Adrian Rogers notes, "The Jews don't have any dealing with the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mongrel race; they were a kind of half-breeds. The 10 tribes had been carried away into captivity, and some were left. The weak, the feeble, and the crippled were left when the tribes of the north were carried away. These intermarried with the Canaanites, and so they were half-Jews and half-Canaanites-they were intermarried. And the Jews wouldn't have anything to do with them. Why, a Jew would not even use the same utensil that a Samaritan had used! He wouldn't ordinarily drink from a vessel that a Samaritan would handle. And yet Jesus said, 'give me a drink of water.' And this woman said, 'you're a Jew. I'm a Samaritan.'" (Adrian Rogers)

When Jesus meets someone who needs His touch, He often uses their situation to bring out the Gospel. Jesus knew this woman was

a slave to her sin and He was meeting her where she was. He didn't allow her sin, status, or anything else to get in the way of telling her the truth. Most Christians associate with people who act, vote, talk, and have the same interests as they do. We often avoid those not like us.

Are there people in your life or sphere of influence you know who need Jesus or simply need a kind word or gesture, but they are not like you? Have those differences kept you from reaching out? Ask God to help you show grace and love to all people at all times regardless if they are of a different race, socioeconomic background, or political party because they all need Jesus.

Day 2- Read John 4:12-15

Nothing satisfies and nourishes the body like water, especially during the summer after working outside all day. The Samaritan woman was curious, possibly even confused by what Jesus said to her. She was trying to imagine how this man could give her continuous water and she wouldn't have to go back to the well again. She took Jesus literally, but He had so much more to offer her than actual water, He had living water. He tells her if she drinks from this water, she will never thirst again.

The Samaritan woman was not just physically thirsty, she was spiritually thirsty, too. Only Jesus could fill that thirst. We will read over the next several days how she sought to fill her thirst with many things, including relationships. Jesus is the satisfying water and spring water, meaning it is a water (well) that keeps on coming, it has no end.

James Proctor said, "I've tried in vain a thousand ways, my fears to quell, my hopes to raise; but what I need, the Bible says, is ever, only Jesus." The Samaritan woman knew about Jesus, but was so consumed in her sin, she didn't understand what Jesus was saying

to her. She wanted from Jesus what no one else could give her.

Do we believe Jesus knows best? Do we believe He has what only He can give and no one else? May we not miss that which only Jesus can give, which is eternal life and satisfying water!

Day 3- Read John 4:16-24

Today, we read where Jesus is sitting with a Samaritan woman at the well and as they continue in their conversation, Jesus tells her to go and bring her husband back with her. The Samaritan woman tells Jesus she does not have a husband. He surprised her by telling her she has had 5 husbands and the one she is with now is not her husband. God knows EVERYTHING about you and me. He knows our actions, our thoughts, and even our motives.

Have you ever tried to hide your sin from God? I know that sounds like a crazy question, but we have probably all done it directly or indirectly at some point. Nothing can be hidden from God. He is all knowing and all present. Can you imagine, physically sitting with Jesus, and He begins telling you all about your life? I imagine the Samaritan woman felt the same way we might and was very confused. I would be. It was probably at this point she began to understand something very different is going on. She would soon understand that that man at the well was not just any man or prophet, but He was the Messiah, the one on whom many had waited. Jesus came to give her what no one could give her which was eternal life.

God knows all we have ever done and our every thought and yet He loves us just the same. It's been said many times, "God loves us just the way we are but He loves us too much to leave us that way." Thank God for salvation and thank Him for knowing, forgiving, and loving you. Thank Him that He eats and talks with sinners. Thank God for the hope only He gives.

Day 4- Read John 1:25-42

Verse 39 tells us that many Samaritans believed because of the words of the woman. She told everyone what Christ had told her and done for her. Now, look at Verse 42. Others believed, not just because of what the Samaritan woman had said, but because they had experienced Him themselves and trusted He was who He said He was.

The Samaritan woman became a witness by meeting Jesus and because of meeting Jesus, she went and told others what happened to her. Isn't this what we should be doing? Through His Word, He tells us who He is and who we are, and then, we tell others. They may believe us or they may not, but when they meet Jesus for themselves, they know the Truth.

This is how God desires for His love to get out, through you and me. We are the mechanism or the conduit which God's love flows through. We must speak and share the truth with others. They need to know their sin separates them from God and He has sent Jesus to save them. Scripture reminds us "And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?" **Romans 10:14** It is not just the pastor's job to share the Good News, it is your job and mine.

Who in your life needs to hear the Good News? Who in your life are you praying to be saved? Who in your life needs to be reminded of the truth? Pray today that God would make you a living example of His truth.

Day 5- Read Acts 8:26-40 and Isaiah 53:7-8

Today we look both at the Old and New Testament. Our account

this week has taken us to Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman. Jesus wasn't concerned about His being a Jew and she a Samaritan, or that He was a man and she was a woman. He was more concerned with what was in her heart.

In today's account, we read about Phillip being led by the Holy Spirit to go and speak to the Ethiopian. He was told not only to go to a certain place, but to overtake the chariot. When we are in tune with God, truly listening to Him and walking with Him, He may speak to us and tell us to do things others wouldn't do or think about. I'm sure it took boldness for Phillip to go and speak to the Ethiopian, but he was more concerned with listening to the Holy Spirit and following God's plan. It's safe to say he was out to please God, not man. The same was true for Jesus, He was all about pleasing and bringing glory to the Lord.

As you read God's Word today, ask yourself who you are trying to please. Phillip and Jesus both wanted to please the Lord and they were not afraid of what it looked like to others as they both knew they were following what God had for them.

A HOUSE DIVIDED CANNOT STAND

By Dennis Watson

Jesus had been healing and casting out demons. People's lives were being transformed by Him. To be misunderstood is one thing but to be intentionally attacked is quite another. Jesus was blatantly attacked. It was not so much He was attacked because of being misunderstood but because what He represented was striking at a belief system that was incomplete. Jesus was the goal or the fulfillment of the belief system represented by the Jewish religious leaders. This week we will be looking at the attacks on Jesus and His message. He will explain that a divided house will not stand. He will point out that with Him there was no place for neutrality.

Day 1- Read Mark 3:20-26

As was often the case, Jesus always drew a large crowd of people. On this particular day, there was a crowd and so much was happening that Jesus and His followers could not even eat. The crowd was made up of His followers, some of His own family members, and several Jewish religious leaders who were there to heckle.

This occasion began with His own family members and closest friends coming out to take Him home. They were under the impression He was out of His mind. The Message paraphrase says, "They suspected He was getting carried away with Himself."

Mark 3:21 I find it very interesting that when followers of Jesus and the gospel are truly faithful and loyal to following Him, some of our closest family and friends figure we have gone off the deep end. They did not want to understand Him, they just wanted to shut Him up.

Then came the Jewish religious leaders. Their attack was suggesting He was full of Beelzebub. Beelzebub was a particularly

contemptible denial and his name was used by the Jews as an epithet for Satan. In other words, the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of being in cahoots with Satan. The charge was that Jesus was doing His miracles by the power of Satan. They accused Him of casting out demons by the power of demons. The religious leaders were making the same mistake that many people make today. Then, Jesus tells a parable which shows the foolishness of their statement. Jesus is showing that they were using self-refuting statement. It is what happens when someone says, "There is no truth." Well, if there is no truth then their statement is false because they are making a truth claim that is self-refuting. Jesus turned their statement back on them, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" A house divided will not stand.

The religious leaders and Jesus' own family were attempting to neutralize Him, seeking to make Jesus of no account. But Jesus came to defeat the enemy, there was no way He could be working with Him.

Day 2- Read Luke 11:17-22

The account of the house divided is told in Luke 11, Mark 3 and Matthew 12. The accounts are similar with some variation. As we saw yesterday, the religious leaders were foolish because they thought it was Satan working with Jesus to drive out demons which made no sense because a house divided will not last. Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom are in opposition.

Today, we see the religious leaders had another problem. The charges they brought against Jesus were self-incriminating. The religious leaders were accusing Jesus, but, by what power were they casting out demons? How did their works of casting out demons differ from that of Jesus? The miracles of Jesus revealed the presence of the kingdom of God. Jesus' miracles of deliverance were evidence of God's kingdom over Satan's kingdom. His work

was done to reveal the power of the kingdom of God over the kingdom of darkness.

The last revelation we see today is their accusations was really an admission of power. How could Jesus defeat Satan unless He was stronger than Satan? Jesus gives a picture of Satan being like a strong man in armor, guarding his palace and his goods. All is seemingly well, but Jesus, the One stronger than Satan, comes to Satan's territory and defeats Satan with power which is infinitely stronger. John speaks of the power Jesus had over Satan in **1 John 4:4**, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Jesus removes Satan's power rendering him with none. Satan has limited authority and he is a defeated enemy.

Give thanks today for the victory Jesus has won over the enemy. Satan has no power over God's children. We need to live in the victory Jesus has won.

Day 3- Read Luke 11:23-26

This passage is very similar to the others we have already read this week. Jesus was telling a parable about neutrality. He says, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters." (**Luke 11:23**) Just like in Jesus' day, people today want to come across as being neutral. He explains being neutral does not work. Religious people all seem to have the same problem which is trying to be neutral on the issues which really matter. Neutrality is a spiritual black hole. According to astronomy, a black hole is a region of space having a gravitational field so intense that no particle matter or electromagnetic radiation can escape. If we are making a spiritual application a black hole is a place people get sucked in by spiritual neutrality; their impact for spiritual advancement disappears without a trace. It is not possible in this spiritual war to be neutral because neutrality means standing

against Jesus. We are either for Jesus or against Him. We are either gathering or scattering. I have said for many years that there is coming a day of separation within the church. For those who are truly with Him, it will be evident, but those who are just hanging out, their true colors will be revealed.

Jesus told a parable to illustrate the danger of neutrality. There was a man who was possessed by a demon. For some reason, the demon left the man and the condition of the man improved. The man's body was the demon's house; however the man did not invite God to rule in his life because he decided to remain neutral. Then, the demon returned to the man and brought seven other demons with him and the man was worse than before.

It is sad to see people who do not choose to submit fully to the grace and authority of God's reign. He has come to make us His own and for His glory. It is all about Him and His grace, mercy and healing. You cannot be neutral. You are either with Him or against Him. You are either gathering people or scattering.

Warren Wiersbe explains it this way:

“There are two spiritual forces at work in the world, and we must choose between them. Satan is scattering and destroying, but Jesus Christ is gathering and building. We must make a choice, and if we choose to make no choice, we are really choosing against Him.”¹⁵

Day 4- Read Matthew 12:31-32

“God could never forgive me.” How often does this statement come up? People will stay away from God, His church, and other believers because they feel and believe they have committed the

¹⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - New Testament, Volume 1.

unpardonable sin. The only place in scripture where a sin is said to be unforgivable, is in Matthew 12:31. What is the sin God will not forgive? Is there an unpardonable sin? Do you think you have committed it? Jesus was speaking of blasphemy **against the Holy Spirit**. Blasphemy is defiant irreverence. Here, He referred to attributing to Satan the works of Jesus. Such sins as cursing God or willfully degrading things considered holy would be blasphemous.

A host of preachers, biblical scholars, and theologians believe what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12 and Mark 5 was a circumstance, which cannot be duplicated because Jesus is not physically walking on the face of the earth today. While this particular sin may have been possible only when Christ was physically present on earth, in a broader sense there is no hope left for anyone who persistently rejects the convicting work of the Spirit. The only thing that is unforgivable is to remain in a state of unbelief. The only unpardonable sin is to die in such a state.

The Pharisees had seen proof, time and time again, that Jesus was the Christ He claimed to be. They knew He was supernatural in nature, but refused to believe He was from God. They attributed His works to Satan. Jesus said they were committing the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Consider a few passages:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” **1 John 1:9**

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:13

“There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” **Romans 8:1**

- Moses was forgiven of murder and was used of God

- David was forgiven of deceit, adultery and murder and was used of God
- The prodigal son was forgiven and restored to fellowship
- Peter denied knowing Jesus three times with profanity and was forgiven and restored

It is not possible for a believer to commit the unpardonable sin. Having already believed, He is already a child of God:

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” **John 1:12**

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Romans 8:38-39**

I am so thankful God is not like me. My love, mercy and grace are limited. There seems to be an end to my patience and tolerance of the failures and foolishness of other people and even of my own. God is HOLY, His mercy and kindness are never ending. He has chosen, motivated by His love and through the instrument of His grace, to forgive our sin and sinfulness. He has given us the free gift of salvation—to become a new person. It is not through our ability or performance, but through His. We appropriate this gift by faith.

Please pray with me, God, I believe that because of Your love for me and through Your grace in sending Jesus to die on the cross in my place and having raised Him from the dead, You have totally and completely forgiven every sin I have ever committed and ever will commit. Because of what You have done, I am no longer guilty.

Day 5- Read Philippians 1:27-2:4

A great truth is expressed for all of us to take in. Jesus said that a house divided will not stand. He was, of course, instructing the Jewish religious leaders about their accusation that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus was illustrating the fact that success relies on harmony. We see this daily in life. Sports teams, businesses, and political parties will not be successful if there is division in the ranks. Even James 1:8 tells us that a man who is double minded is unstable. This is a true statement and it applies, most significantly to the church.

Paul encouraged the people of the churches to be unified. He says in 1 Corinthians there is to be no division among believers in a church. The people of the church are to be united. In our passage today, we are told the people of the church are to “...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” (**Philippians 1:27**) The wording is clear when he writes, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind.” (**Philippians 2:2**) The great source of the unity is the appeal in Philippians 2:5-11. We, as the body of Christ are to have the same mind in us which was in Jesus. We are to empty ourselves and seek the unity of the faith.

It is of supreme importance that God’s people be united in Christ and in the purpose of His church. If not, the church out of sync with Jesus will not stand. The true church is in sync with Jesus and will thrive. There are plenty of issues that are divisive today. God’s people need to focus on that which makes us one.

Please pray for and seek the unity of the faith.

Notes
