

COUNTDOWN

TO THE CROSS

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PREFACE

Jesus Christ is the most influential man of all time. More than that, He is God. All of human history revolves around Him. He is the center. The Old Testament writers pointed forward to Him. The Gospel writers described His life and death. Those who wrote the Epistles based everything on pointing back to Him.

It is not just that God came to Earth, it is why. Jesus came to offer salvation. He is the Savior. The only way this could happen was for Him to die on a cross for our sins. He did!

Countdown to the Cross will examine the days surrounding the crucifixion covering several key events:

- The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
- The Cleansing of the Temple
- Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet
- The Lord's Supper – The Last Supper
- Jesus Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane
- Jesus Betrayed, Arrested, Forsaken
- Easter – the Resurrection!

Countdown to the Cross consists of seven study guides for personal or group discussion and forty-two devotions to help you better appreciate, love, and worship the One who lived and died for us. It will also set the tone for celebration as we acknowledge the resurrection of our Savior.

LESSON ONE

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

As we approach Easter Sunday, there is an event that can often be overlooked and forgotten in the excitement of the resurrection. That event was Christ's Triumphal Entry into the city. In Matthew chapter 21, Matthew gives an account of what happened the week before the crucifixion. Starting in Matthew 21:1-6, we read, ***"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once.' This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them."***

1. How many animals do the disciples bring to Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

2. What would a king normally ride into a city when he was celebrating?

_____
_____
_____

It is interesting to note, farmers have been known to use donkeys in order to protect their sheep. Now, we never want to put anything into Scripture that is not there. However, what a great image of Christ's desire for us - to protect us, His sheep!

3. Do you know or have any fun facts about donkeys? Are there any other passages of Scripture where donkeys are used?

_____
_____
_____

4. What is the passage of Scripture where this prophecy is given?

_____
_____
_____

Jesus gave the disciples what seemed to be an odd task. Yet, regardless of the task at hand, the disciples were obedient, and they had the opportunity to see the Scriptures unfold before their very eyes. The story does not end there, what happens next is incredible. In Matthew 21:7-11 we read, ***"They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?' And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.'"***

5. What were the people laying on the ground? What were they shouting?

_____
_____
_____

6. What does “Hosanna” mean?

_____
_____
_____

7. Who do they think Jesus is? What do they think He has come to do?

_____
_____
_____

The crowd did several different things during Christ’s entry into Jerusalem. First, they laid their cloaks on the ground. We have seen this done before back in 2 Kings 9:13, as it was an act of respect and reverence to the king. Secondly, they began shouting “Hosanna,” which means “save now.” Again, we see a reference back to the Scriptures in the people’s shouting as seen in Psalm 118:25-26. Thirdly, they call Jesus the “Son of David,” which is one of the titles used specifically for the Messiah that was prophesied to come. However, in verse ten when some asked who this was, they replied that He was a prophet. Sadly, just as those who had the opportunity to see this event unfold before their very eyes were still blinded to who Christ was, too many people today are also blinded. They personally saw the King of Kings triumphantly enter into the city, yet they did not truly “see” Him.

8. Why is it important to distinguish the fact that Jesus was not just a prophet?

_____
_____
_____

This “Triumphal Entry” was truly that, triumphant. Jesus did not ride in on a warhorse ready for battle, as many believed and expected of Him. He did not come in a full suit of armor with chariots and an army of 100,000 strong. Instead, He fulfilled the Scriptures and rode peacefully in on a donkey. Christ rode into the city knowing His mission, knowing what was to come, and fully prepared to conquer death and the grave. However, some of those very people who were shouting, laying their cloaks, and seeing this amazing entrance still did not truly see Christ - the Savior.

I want to challenge you as you continue this week and as you go back and read this passage of the Triumphal Entry, to take a step back. Can you remember a time where you too missed Jesus? Can you remember a time where you thought that maybe He was just a prophet? Now, think back to the time where you got it. Remember the time when it all clicked, and you did not miss that amazing opportunity to call Jesus your Messiah and King. There are many in the crowds around us who get lost in the shouting and the noise. Look for that opportunity to share the love and the hope you have been given, so that those in the crowds around us do not miss our amazing King!

9. Who is that person in your life that you can not only be praying for, but also invite to church this Easter season?

_____

_____

_____

TO WHICH KING DO YOU BOW?

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 1

John Stone

The crowds are in a frenzy! The promised Messiah has arrived to take His throne! He is hailed as the “Son of David” and “King of Israel.” This is the Man who heals sicknesses and raises people from the dead. Not only that, He can multiply food to feed thousands. Finally, the Promised One is here to drive out the hated oppressor and free the people from their slavery. When Jesus walked the earth, many people’s focus was selfishly on what the Messiah could do for them, and sadly, the trend continues today.

Jesus Christ is King and Messiah (Philippians 2:9-10), but sadly, people have been trying to place Him on the wrong throne since the day He created a feast from the boy’s five loaves and two fish (John 6:9-15).

Please do not misunderstand. Jesus did and still does all of those amazing things. He had true compassion and love for the suffering people He met just like He still does today. Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and that mission continues. He promises to bless those who trust in Him, not with wealth and long, trouble-free life but by empowering them by the Spirit in unexplainable, counterintuitive ways (Matthew 5:2-12) and ultimately raising them in eternity to be like Himself (Romans 8:29). He came to free us from our slavery to sin and conquer death (Romans 6:16-23). Christians are given new hearts that desire Christ-focused, God-honoring things (Ezekiel 36:26-31). However, being a Christian is not all about us and what we want. It is all about a real relationship with Him. Although He is King and Lord of all creation, Jesus did not come to

earth to establish a kingdom of worldly, material things. He is the "bread of life" (John 6:32-35), not a genie that gives us whatever our appetite demands. He is not interested in a large territory, an invincible army, or peace and prosperity. His kingdom is established in the hearts, souls, and minds of His people (Matthew 22:37). God desires that we be completely satisfied in Him and in nothing else. When we, who identify by His name, treat the Lord of the universe as some sort of divine vending machine, we place ourselves on the throne of our life and trample His grace, love, and mercy.

One day, according to Philippians chapter 2, every knee will bow to Jesus Christ. Those who did not submit to Him as king of their lives but used the name of Jesus for personal gain will bow in trembling fear before the throne of Heaven as He hands down their final judgment (Matthew 7:21-23). Those who humbly submitted to Him in heart, soul, and mind will be welcomed into eternal glory (Matthew 25:34).

To which king will you bow? Is it the king of self with all its desires that lead to disappointment, despair, and eternal destruction or will you bow to the only wise King of kings and Lord of lords Jesus Christ? (Romans 10:9) He will graciously lead you in the way of eternal satisfaction if you will humbly submit yourself to His Word and trust only in Him (Proverbs 3:5-6). Do so, not because He gives you your desires, but because He alone is worthy.

"He who is the blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,
who alone possesses immortality
and dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has seen or can see.
To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen."
1 Timothy 6:15-16 (NASB)

500 YEARS EARLIER

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

It has been said that everyone loves a parade. It is a time of celebration. There are often music, balloons, decorations, streamers, security, cameras, banners, confetti, food, and a very elaborate vehicle for the superstar. The central figure is easy to find because he or she is escorted in the fanciest float, truck, or car available. When someone "important" is being honored, we bring out the best. One can only imagine what extremes people would go to in order to honor a king. Would you guess a donkey?

Mark 11:7-10 paints the picture of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, ***"And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!'"*** It is seen from other passages that the ***"colt"*** is a young donkey.

The greatest individual of all time had a parade and He rode a donkey. The King of kings was welcomed by the crowd as He rode a donkey. Jesus was plainly clothed riding a donkey as opposed to the typical ruler who would be surrounded by an entourage of soldiers as he rode a mighty warhorse. The Messiah came in humility, gentleness, and peace.

Warren Wiersbe has stated that since it was the Passover, there could have been about two million people in and around Jerusalem.

This is noteworthy as it was the only time in Jesus' ministry that He actually planned and promoted a public demonstration.

There are always reasons why Jesus did what He did. The main reason is found in Zechariah 9:9, ***"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*** Zechariah wrote about 500 years earlier that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey. I imagine Zechariah must have noticed the arrogance of many of those in power. The contrast between their pride and the humility of the Messianic King being prophesied about could not be starker.

John succinctly describes the event in John 12:14-15, ***"And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!'"*** It has been said that this passage is "one of the most Messianically significant passages of all the Bible."

This prophecy is so powerful that all attempts to disprove the Messianic importance of this passage have been unavailing. Even critics who do not want to accept the concept allow that it is abounding with Messianic ideas. It cannot be applied to any other hero of Jewish story or event of Jewish history. There is no other "King" of Israel to whom it can refer. It has been noted that no king had ever before this time come to Jerusalem in such a manner. This circumstance was predicted of the Messiah alone, and Christ alone fulfilled it to the letter, showing what nature His kingdom was. Jesus was not only proclaiming His Messiahship and His fulfillment of Scripture but showing the kind of peace-loving approach He was now making to the city.

It might be too obvious to say, but this was not the normal manner in which kings arrived. Kings usually came as conquerors riding on horses. A colt or donkey was a symbol of peace. It showed that He will establish a government of peace. The donkey was the animal chosen as the symbol of peace in contrast with the horse because on account of its smaller strength, agility, and speed, it is less adapted for riding in the midst of fighting and slaughter than a horse.

Jesus riding in on a donkey was also a token of poverty and lowliness. It also displayed that the Messiah was a King who would rise through lowliness and suffering, to might and glory, and would conquer the world not by arms but by suffering and dying.

It is interesting that Jesus' earthly life started with that lowly beast (Mary riding a donkey to Bethlehem while pregnant with Jesus) and was coming to an end with Him peacefully and humbly showing He was indeed the Messiah by riding that honored creature.

A DONKEY, LAID OUT CLOTHES, AND PALM BRANCHES

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 3

John Rigg

Every year as Easter approaches, I try to learn something new about our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. This year I read and re-read all scriptures that speak of His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. This is what I learned.

1. A Donkey – The Lord's Sovereignty

Matthew 21:1–3 (NKJV) says, ***"Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.'"***

The donkey and her colt speak of the omniscience of our Lord and His sovereignty over all things. He was in total control of all the events leading to the cross. Everything was going just as the Lord had spoken, through the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9).

2. Laid out Clothes – The Lord's Subjects

Matthew 21:6–7 (NKJV) says, ***"So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them."***

True subjects obey just as the King commands. The fetching of the donkey as well as the immediate releasing of the donkey revealed some of the Lord's true subjects. The laying down of their clothing was a familiar practice in Jewish history, as they would lay down their garments when acknowledging the authority of an earthly king (2 Kings 9:13). On this day, His true subjects were acknowledging their heavenly King.

3. Palm Branches – The Lord's Victory

Matthew 21:8–9 (NKJV) adds, ***"And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'"***

Palm branches were a symbol of deliverance and victory to the Jewish people. These branches were used also in the Feast of the Tabernacles as a reminder of God delivering His people out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:40–43).

Every seven years Israel would celebrate God's deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh with this feast which lasted for seven days.

Leviticus 23:39 (NKJV) says, ***"Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest."***

On the eighth day of the Tabernacle Feast, God provided rest for His people. In the same way, on the eighth day of Jesus' Triumphal

Entry, God would raise Jesus from the grave and secure eternal rest for all His subjects who see Him as King!

This year, a donkey taught me that God is sovereign. Spread out clothing helped me see the King's true subjects. The palm branches reminded me of His victory over death, Hell, and the grave. It is a victory that offers deliverance from the evil one and securing eternal rest for all those who believe.

ARE YOU PACKED?

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 4

Holly Boston

My husband and I prepare for trips very differently. I am a planner and begin writing lists a week before we leave. Greg is more of a "fly by the seat of your pants" kind of packer. He will be up at midnight the night before "just throwing a few things in a suitcase." Two weeks ago, I got a taste of the consequences of last-minute packing. We had a family emergency and I had about two hours to be packed and ready to leave my home and family for a week. There was no time to write lists, let alone plan my attire. I learned two things: poor planning results in leaving something essential behind (blood pressure medication) and it results in packing all the wrong stuff (clothes for 60-degree weather instead of 80-degree weather). By now, you are wondering what my point is. Stick with me.

As I write this, we have just celebrated Resurrection Week. Every Easter I reminisce about the days when I was part of our passion play. My favorite scene was Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. As part of the crowd, my part was to wave a palm branch and eagerly anticipate Jesus' arrival. This marks the beginning of His road to the cross; where He willingly laid down His life for each of us. He is more than worthy of all our praise and worship. In the wake of 2020, I spend more and more time thinking about His second triumphant entry, when He will return to take His people home (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What an incredible day that will be if we are packed and ready to go. Are you?

Leaving something crucial behind can have real consequences. Without my medication, my blood pressure climbed each day and I progressively felt worse over the course of the trip. Every

performance of the play, I feared forgetting the one prop I needed: my palm branch. Without it, I would have stuck out like a sore thumb and been unable to greet Jesus properly. When Jesus returns and we embark on our final trip into eternity, we will all ***"appear before the judgment seat of Christ"*** (2 Corinthians 5:10). Will you have packed the critical item?

John 14:6 says, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** Nothing but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will get you to your final destination: Heaven. Without Him, you face eternal separation from God, ***"They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might"*** (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Neither good character, good works, nor your giving statement will suffice. He alone is the cost of admission.

Unlike my emergency trip, we know this final trip is coming. I knew I had two hours to pack so I had to use my time well. Our departure into eternity could begin in two seconds, two minutes, two weeks, or two years. Only our Heavenly Father knows the hour (Matthew 24:36). Are you packing well for the trip? Are you packing the essentials or a bunch of unnecessary stuff? Matthew 6:19-21 refers to treasures on earth and treasures in Heaven. Are you packing temporal things that are here today and gone tomorrow (James 4:14) like your career, 401K, a bucket list of things to do, and places to go? Or are you packing eternal things like pursuing Christ, sharing Christ, and forgiving and loving your enemies to name a few? Who knew "You can't take it with you" was biblical.

One final thought. If I had forgotten my palm branch in the play, I would have had nothing to lay at Jesus' feet when He arrived. Believer, will you be empty-handed when you meet your Savior or will you be carrying crowns that reflect a life lived for Him

(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)? Will you be alone or surrounded by others whom you helped in their walk with Christ?

Matthew 6:19-20 reminds us, ***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."***

Pack wisely and remember: "You will never see a U-Haul behind a hearse."

WE GET TO HELP

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 5

Philip Piasecki

A lesson that I have learned over my few years of having kids, is they just want to be a part of what you are doing. I do not have all the time in the world to play with them and their toys, but I have learned that if I just invite them to "help" me with what I am doing, those are some of our sweetest times together. They love running errands with me, knocking things off my to-do list at the church building, helping me fix things around the house, and the list could go on and on. Are these things I could do by myself? Of course. However, because I love my kids, I want them to be a part of what I am doing, and them being a part of what I am doing brings them joy.

Luke 19:30-31 says, ***"Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'"***

Whenever I have studied the accounts of the Triumphal Entry, this part of the passage has always been so interesting to me. Jesus essentially tells the disciples, "Hey go find a colt, take it, and if anyone questions you just tell them I need it." As you continue reading the account, the plan works, the disciples get the colt and bring it to Jesus, then Jesus rides into Jerusalem on it all to fulfill prophecy from the Old Testament.

So how does this apply to my illustration from the beginning of the devotion? I do not think Jesus actually needed His disciples to do this for Him. He could have made the colt appear right in front of them to ride it, but He wanted to use them. He let those disciples

be a part of fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah. How amazing must that have been for them?

The same is true for us in our work as believers here on this earth. Jesus designed His church in a way where we get to be a part of what He is doing. He is the Creator of the universe, He could accomplish everything He wants to with the snap of a finger, but instead He decided to use us to accomplish His plan. What an amazing honor and privilege that is. As we are beginning the countdown to the cross, let this passage remind us that God has chosen to use us to accomplish His mission. Then get out there and start accomplishing it! The Lord wants us to help in doing what He wants to do, we just have to be ready and willing. We have to trust that through the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us that God has equipped us for every good work. We want people to know who the Lord is. Prepare the way for Him by being bold to share who He is with the world. I am so grateful that the Lord loves me enough to let me play my small part in growing His church here on this earth.

THE PEACEFUL AND HUMBLE ENTRY

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY, DEVOTION 6

James Mann

The Triumphal Entry is such an exciting scene for many reasons, but one of the most significant points that stands out to me is the humility that is being shown during this entry. You might read through this passage and miss this concept since it is a celebration for the Son of God, and everyone is praising Him. The thing that we often overlook is His method of transportation. I often think back to the former presidents of the United States. These men would drive around in their top-of-the-line Lincolns and Cadillacs. Being that these men are some of the most powerful men in America, it makes complete and total sense to see them driving around in some of the most luxurious vehicles of this time. Now let us take a moment and read how Jesus decides to go through the town during a parade celebrating Him,
"Go into the village in front of you, where on entering, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here" (Luke 19:30).

Often when we watch movies during the earlier time periods, we see royalty entering into a city on a large horse. It is always a powerful scene. So, the question becomes, why did Jesus ride in on a donkey or a colt? During this time, someone entering into a city on a large horse was to symbolize war. If a person in power entered into a city on a colt, a donkey, or a mule, it was a sign of peace. We can see another time this is shown in 1 Kings 1:33. We need to remember that Jesus' entry into the city was not something that the government was excited about. The government was out to ruin Jesus because they believed He was a false prophet and was challenging the lifestyle that they were trying to encourage. Jesus could have easily gone into the city angry and looking for a fight, knowing that these men

were out to get Him. Instead, He chose peace. Instead of riding in the front gates on a mighty steed, Jesus chose the peaceful approach of a colt.

The beauty behind this is the humility that it shows. When I read through passages like this, it makes me take a step back and evaluate my life and how I portray myself when entering the world. Am I trying to puff up my own ego and make myself look good or am I humbling myself and focusing on the wellbeing of others? Am I going after those who are wronging me with anger and waging war, or am I showing peace and love even in the face of torment? These are points we should be thinking about when we go into our daily lives.

LESSON TWO

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

PASTOR RYAN STORY

Abnormalities stick out to me. Whenever something is off, whenever something does not seem to be the way it ought to be, or whenever someone responds in a manner that is uncharacteristically abnormal for that person to respond instantly gets my attention. Whenever a person starts acting in a manner that is abnormal it makes me question the reasoning for whatever response that is seen. When a selfless person begins to act selfish, when a selfish person begins to be overly selfless, when a lazy person begins to be a workhorse, and when an optimistic person begins to let cynicism rule their life are all examples of times when abnormalities in a person behavior make us sit back and question, "What is going on?" This phenomenon plays true in a well-known moment in Jesus' life.

1. Using one word, how would you describe the personality of Jesus?

_____

_____

_____

Dollars to donuts, I would bet that words like "love," "Lord," "merciful," "caring," "teacher," and "perfect" were used, and those answers are absolutely correct. Jesus is sinless, Jesus is holy, Jesus is loving, patient, kind, self-controlled, joyful, and peaceful. During His time on Earth, Jesus was selfless and obedient to God to the point of death. Jesus is fully God and fully man. Jesus is perfect.

However, during the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, there is an "abnormal" moment in the way we envision Jesus, and all four Gospel writers record this moment.

Matthew 21:12 says, ***"And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons."***

Mark 11:15-16 records, ***"And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple."***

Luke 19:45 adds, ***"And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold."***

John 2:13-15 says, ***"The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."***

** Fun textual issue would be the timing of this moment recorded by John. John writes this moment at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. While all of the writers agree that Jesus cleansed the temple at the time of Passover, some scholars believe Jesus went to Jerusalem twice, while others think this moment is synonymous with the other Gospel writers' account. Either way, if Jesus cleansed the temple one time or two, it still shows the heart of Jesus.

2. Does Jesus lose His "spotless" sinlessness during this moment? How was it possible for Jesus to respond in this way and yet still be holy, sinless, perfect, and loving?

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If we can come to the conclusion that while Jesus' response is seemingly abnormal for Him to us, Jesus' response was merited and without sin. Since this is such a unique way for our Jesus to respond, we have to dive deep into why Jesus would respond like this. I am not in a place to claim, "This is why God did this." Isaiah 55:8 says, ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."*** Here are a few reasons why I feel Jesus responded the way He did.

First, the temple was no longer operating with purpose.

3. Why were people in Jerusalem during the Passover? Why would they be at the Temple?

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Think of Passover in the same light as Easter. For the Jewish nation, Passover is "the" celebration. It brought the less devout and the devout in to celebrate. The church sees this same thing every Easter season. Many people will come to the Easter Gathering who do not regularly attend church.

Matthew 21:13 says, ***"He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers.'"***

It can be helpful to paint a picture. Inside the courtyards of the Temple (most likely in the Court of the Gentiles) many more people were coming to the Temple than normal. The courtyard would have been full of people, tables of money changers filled the crowded courtyard. On top of that hustle and bustle, animals to be sacrificed would have been housed in stalls, would have taken up more space, created

noise, and produced a smell that only a large collection of animals could produce.

4. What was the reason people went to the temple at the time of Passover? How did the temple lose its purpose with all that was going on?

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Second, leadership was cutting corners.

Jesus only really showed the flipping tables, driving-people-out-with-whips side of His personality to one group, the religious leaders. While Jesus had a few "stern talks" with the disciples, we do not read in too many accounts where He comes as hard as He does when He encounters the Pharisees. In this temple cleansing moment, while the money collectors are the ones who take the brunt of Jesus' scorn, we have to remember who allowed the temple to become like that. It was the leaders.

5. Why would Jesus be so hard on the religious leaders?

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Now before you "phew" and whip your forehead thinking, "Thank God I am not a leader," I believe that any person who obstructs a person from getting closer to Christ is on the same page as the religious leaders in Jesus' day. While we may not have temples and the need for pigeons and goats, Jesus' Church is still called to ensure that people can properly grow in their relationship with Jesus.

6. How can the church (people, not programs) "cut corners" when it

comes to ensuring the environment we set up during a Gathering or a Growth Community maximizes the focus on Christ?

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Third, Jesus knew the temple is meant to be more than what people realized.

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, we read, ***"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"***

7. What does the Word of God say is the temple? How did this become possible?

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While Jesus was cleansing the temple in His day, there is a truth I believe every Christ-follower can apply to their lives. The temple of God was always meant to focalize the worship of God. The temple was never meant for personal gain, the temple of God was never meant to cut corners and allow bad practices. The temple was always a place where a person could go to worship God and praise God for His promises, His faithfulness, and His love for His people.

It should be an abnormality for a Christ-follower to live in a way that would distract anyone from seeing the realness of God in their lives. Jesus cleansed the temple because it was distracting people from worshiping God. Sadly, self-professing Christians live in a manner that distracts themselves and others from worshiping the one true God.

8. What are some bad habits a Christian should ask Christ to cleanse from their lives?

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9. Why does it seem sanctification is an abnormality in a Christian's life?

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10. Why do you think Jesus was so passionate about ensuring people did not tarnish the purpose of the temple?

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SPRING CLEANING

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 1

Roger Allen

Spring cleaning will be soon upon us. With the change of the song birds' voice to daylight savings, spring cleaning is as natural as the change of the seasons. With the buildup of winter's baggage, we find ourselves compelled to rid our homes of unwanted grime. With a checklist in hand, we go from room to room vacuuming, dusting, washing, and disinfecting as we go. This annual rite of spring for most adults is brought with expectation and enthusiasm for what the finished product will be. There is nothing like a house that has been cleaned and awaiting the greening of the lawns and budding of the trees. I appreciate the wonderful smell of spring as it flows through the recently cleaned screens and takes the place of the stale air of winter. You begin to smile when the smell of Honeysuckle, Lilac, and Autumn Olive begins to take full effect. If given a chance to reflect, you wonder how it became so dirty in the first place and vow for it to never happen again.

Two thousand years ago in Jerusalem, we see another house that needed a spring cleaning. As the Temple was being prepared for Passover, merchants were selling animals for sacrifice, money-changers, and others were bartering and selling their wares as if it were a market. The problem was not that the practice was unethical for providing unblemished sacrifices or currency exchange, but for using the Temple as a place of business and not worship. Angered, Jesus cleared those in the Father's house by fashioning a whip out of cord and driving both seller and buyer out of the Temple. His zeal for keeping the Temple pure was an all-consuming desire which prompted Him to act swiftly. He was determined to keep the Temple clean.

Psalm 69:9 prophesied of this event, ***"For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me."***

We find in all four Gospels that Jesus chased out those who would disrespect God. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Synoptic Gospels), we read that Jesus teaches those that are listening that their actions are as robbers. Instead of selling their wares, they should be in prayer and worship to God. Those disrespecting who God is, have made the Son act decisively and with authority. He is determined to clean house.

In all three Synoptic Gospels, we find Jesus reiterating that the Temple is a house of prayer. Throughout the New Testament, we find Jesus in prayer. At His baptism (Luke 3:21), choosing the twelve (Luke 6:12), in the garden (Matthew 26:42), and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42) are just a few examples of Jesus in prayer. How important must prayer be then if He not only teaches it but is obedient to it? As the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, ***"Pray without ceasing."*** We can assume that every time an important decision was made, He was in prayer to the Father. How could He have cleaned house without first praying? Knowing the will of the One who sent you should be the first and most important aspect of "cleaning house."

In our own lives, the term "cleaning house" can have different meanings. From the literal to the figurative, the act of cleaning house looks different for each one of us. In a spiritual sense, when we clean house, we are attempting to rid ourselves of those things that have become a deterrent to a close relationship with God. From the very desire of idols in our life to those sins that continue to fester up over time, we should want to be closer to Him through our obedience. Through His Word and prayer, we have a greater chance

of understanding His hope of change within us. As the Holy Spirit leads and guides us, we should start to see improvements as we live our lives according to His will. Remember, sanctification is not a passive process, but one in which we take an active role. Through His own actions, Jesus shows us that prayer is where you begin if you want to know God's will. If the struggle to renew and refresh seems impossible, remember He has shown us the way by humbly asking in prayer (Matthew 6:9-13).

Are you ready to clean up your house? Are you ready to show Him how much you love Him and are willing to let go of the sins in your life? It is a question those of us that call Jesus Lord, must ask ourselves. Are we willing to call out and allow God to "sweep the house," cleaning us from the inside out, or are we content to let the dirt remain? That is the real question.

"Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word."
Psalm 119:170

PRAYING NOT PREYING

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Jesus cleansed the Temple twice - once at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13–22), and again at the end of His ministry. He started and ended with a focus on prayer and worship. Luke 19:45-48 records, ***"And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers." And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words."*** Typical of Jesus' actions, there were corresponding verses from the Old Testament that foretold what the Messiah would do or expressed the heart of the issue from God's perspective. In this situation, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 as He was driving out the people who were selling in the Temple.

Warren Wiersbe made a clever but sad observation, "Instead of praying for the people, the priests were preying on the people!" Their words fells to the ground unclaimed as they bartered over prices, while Jesus' words floated through the air as ***"all the people were hanging on his words."*** His words were lifting them up and they wanted more. We know that God's Word will not return void.

What is meant by a ***"house of prayer?"*** Prayer is a word that is used about 316 times in the Bible. In its purest form, it is a conversation with God. A conversation implies or entails speaking and listening.

When you come for a Sunday gathering do you place yourself in the mindset of being in a ***"house of prayer?"***

As you are singing, are you thinking through the words, speaking the words confidently, while yet listening to that still small voice inside of you?

During the message, do you process the sermon with its interpretation and application? Do you strive to understand what God is saying through the Pastor? Are you listening to the Holy Spirit and dialoguing with Him on what you need to do?

During prayer, do you think through what you say and do you allow for time to listen to what He might say?

In giving, do we follow God's lead through conversation with Him? Do we care what He thinks?

During communion, do we actively listen to the story and again affirm our faith? If we do not handle these questions correctly, then maybe we just come to church to get something. It is a sort of preying on God instead of praying to God.

"Watch and pray
that you may not enter into temptation.
The spirit indeed is willing,
but the flesh is weak."
Matthew 26:41

PRAYER OR PROFIT?

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 3

Keaton Washburn

We meet Jesus as He makes His way into the Temple, sees what is happening, overturns tables, drives out the money-changers and vendors, and concludes by reminding His listeners of a passage in Isaiah 56:7. The passage says, ***"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the peoples?"*** Jesus adds to this by saying, ***"But you have made it a den of robbers."***

Until I studied this passage to write this, I always thought of this as a story about Jesus' anger towards the money-changers and vendors for ripping people off. As we see through Jesus' quotation though, the point He was making was that the Temple is supposed to be a place for prayer and worship. Furthermore, the court where this took place is the only place in the Temple that Gentiles (non-Jewish) people were allowed to enter to worship. Jesus is angry because Gentiles do not have a place in the Temple where they can worship since their area had been turned into a market. As Grant Osborne says in his commentary on Mark, "The temple was intended for prayer, not profit."

The application of this passage for Christians today is not that we must keep our church buildings really clean and not sell t-shirts in the lobbies. Rather, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, ***"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?... For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."*** If you are a follower of Christ, you are the Temple where God's Spirit dwells! Are you a place where people of all nations know they can commune with God? Are you known for being someone who prays?

When you say you are going to pray for someone, is that your only prayer for them? Or do you actually take time to intercede for them later on when it is just you and God talking?

Christians no longer have to go to the Temple to be in God's presence. If you are a follower of Christ, God's Spirit goes with you because He is in you. That is a sobering thought for me. Today, take time to consider what that means and if you have been putting it off, pray for those who you have said you are going to pray for!

TIDYING UP

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 4

Pat Bedell

During Passover, many people came to the Temple to celebrate God and offer livestock as burnt offerings as a way to ask for forgiveness of sins. Some of the Temple officials saw this as a business opportunity and began selling animals among other things to make a profit. Essentially, the Temple became more like a flea market instead of a house of God.

Jesus also celebrated the Passover and when He and His disciples came to the Temple and saw that it had turned into a marketplace instead of a house of worship, He became very angry. He decided to put an end to it. Matthew 21:12 says, ***"And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons."*** He came into the Temple and began releasing animals, flipping tables, and kicking over benches. The money-changers (currency exchangers) and merchants were furious and asked Jesus who gave Him the right to do this? Jesus told them to get out and not to turn His Father's house into a den of thieves. Matthew 21:13 says, ***"He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers.'"*** He knew that these merchants and money-changers had weak hearts and did not serve God. As God cleaned the Temple, many of the sick and lame came to Jesus and He healed them in the sight of the priests and scribes. The priests and scribes were both jealous and mad because He did not fear them. God continued to do His work.

Sometimes in our lives, we do not even mean to find ourselves wrapped up in a situation that is not pleasing to God. We get so caught up in what we think we are doing is right but when we take a step back and prayerfully ask what God's will is, we are taken back a step to realize it is not what God desires. This could be self-righteous planning, unethical business practices, or subtle idolatry. I like to think of our soul as our "Temple." Our soul displays everything that we are and what we represent. If we continually yearn for what God wants for our soul, then we can most certainly depend on God to keep our souls clean and always advocate for Him in our everyday lives. On the contrary, if we keep our souls unchecked, we risk damage to not only ourselves and our eternity, but also to all of the souls we come into contact with.

Please challenge yourself to search your soul for your true self, and then ask God if that is what He wants for you. We all struggle with something at any given moment and our soul reflects that in some way or another whether it is fear, anxiety, greed, or something else. Allow God to work and cleanse your soul like He cleansed the Temple and make it nothing but a house of worship for God.

ONLY THE BEST

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 5

Ferdinand Sanders

"And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of robbers.' And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching." Mark 11:15-18

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all account the events of Jesus' life during His earthly ministry. We get a front-row seat to certain events, conversations, and teachings. Sometimes, we get it from four unique perspectives. One of the events recorded leading up to the crucifixion (and resurrection) was the "Cleansing of the Temple." This was not "yo mama's" cleansing." We are not talking about Lysol wipes or hand sanitizer here! As a kid, it was fascinating to know that "flipping over tables" was in Jesus' arsenal. It definitely added a layer of relatability to the Holy Son of God for me!

At Passover, first-century Jews would travel from around the world to the Temple to offer a sacrifice to the Lord (Exodus 12:1–28; Leviticus 23:4–8). It did not take long for even a spiritual act to ultimately become perverted by man. Knowing that many would be traveling from far distances, an "opportunity" to make a few dollars had presented itself by making sacrificial animals available

for purchase. Throughout the books of Jewish Law (the first five books of our Bible), we find instructions on these sacrificial offerings, ***"Out of all the gifts to you, you shall present every contribution due to the Lord; from each its best part is to be dedicated"*** (Numbers 18:29).

We are called to offer our best sacrifice! How much more convenient would it be to offer our worst sacrifice, or better yet to simply purchase one from someone else on the way into the Temple! I do not even think that it is even considered a sacrifice at that point. Just as water will find the path of least resistance, I would argue human nature tends to do the same. This act completely negated the significance of the sacrifice. I would also imagine that the hustle and bustle of vendors within the Temple distracted and even detracted from the experience of everyone at the Temple.

Though only a handful of verses, I think this event holds a great deal of significance for our lives today. If the Holy Spirit has not led you there already, I think we need to look inwards into our own lives. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, ***"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"*** Are there things in your spiritual life that maybe you are holding back? Are you offering your "best sacrifice?" Though we do not have Jesus in the flesh to come in and flip over the tables of things in our life, we have been given the Holy Spirit. As a Christian, and as the Church, I pray we never stop self-examining our hearts in what we practice and preach.

BE ANGRY AND SIN NOT!

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE, DEVOTION 6

Debbie Kerr

Have you ever been angry with someone or something, but you did not sin? It is easier said than done considering the wickedness of our flesh. I am pretty sure I fail at this 100% of the time. God never gives us a command that we cannot obey, but we will only succeed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Matthew, Mark, and Luke share eyewitness accounts of Jesus cleansing the Temple for the Passover celebration. At first glance, it can be confusing to learn that Jesus became angry and overthrew the table of the money-changers. As we look closer, we realize that Jesus became righteously angry because the people who were exchanging the currency were literally making a profit by overcharging the faithful foreigners. Interestingly, this is not the first time Jesus encountered this type of situation. The first time is found in John 2:13-17 at the beginning of His earthly ministry. It took place right after the wedding at Cana and before His encounter with the Samaritan Woman. It is interesting to note that Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this account for the second time, but this was at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. It was also the beginning of the week He would be crucified and risen from the dead. Matthew 21:12-13 (KJV) says, ***"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."***

The issue was not about a building. It was about people spending time with God. It was more about their attitudes than their actions.

The Old Testament Temple was a very important and sacred part of the Jewish culture. It is still very sacred and held to the letter of Jewish Law in Orthodox Judaism. Today on this side of the cross, as believers in Jesus we are no longer held to the Law but are now under grace. Unfortunately, many churchgoers treat the church building as a sacred place much like the Israelites. The difference being the Jewish people were given strict instructions from God Himself. Today, we operate by our preferences. Many churchgoers believe the church building is the place God resides and must be treated a certain way. I agree to a point, but there have been church splits over issues God never deemed important. People get angry over pews or chairs? Steeple or no steeple? Hymns or worship music? Okay, you get the point. What matters to God should matter to you!

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we read, ***"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body."***

LESSON THREE

HIS TOWEL

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

We have heard over and over in the church that we need to serve people, but many of the ways that we serve people are done through the programming of the church.

1. Can you name some of the programs that our church uses to serve people?

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We attend programs and serve people through those programs, but when called upon to meet their needs in their everyday lives on a personal level, it is different.

2. Do you see the difference? How so?

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3. How have you served in church programming?

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4. How have you served people without the use of church programming?

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We are often taught to follow Christ's example and be "people of the towel." A servant's heart is one of love, just like the love which paid the price for our sins. Please remember that Christ's love was

demonstrated at a great cost. Therefore, we have the example that our love for others will have a cost.

5. Do you believe that loving others will have a cost? Why or why not?

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John 13:1-11 reads, ***"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'"***

Jesus is serving a very real need of the other disciples. The disciples' feet were dirty because they were walking in a desert, and the culture

used animals to help transport materials around the countryside and cities. So we know that they were walking in a technically dirty situation with only sandals to protect their feet and keep them clean. Some commentators look at this section of Scripture and see another picture of the Son of God coming into existence to serve mankind.

6. Is it important for the church to serve the very real needs of people? Why?

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Philippians 2:5-9 reads, ***"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name."***

7. Do you agree with this picture?

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Matthew 20:28 reads, ***"Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

We can see from Scripture that Peter knew that Jesus was the Son of God, and knew that He came to serve, but this is not what Peter saw in this situation.

8. Why was Peter upset or concerned about what Jesus was doing?

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John 13:13-17 reads, ***"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."***

Jesus' actions here are an "example" that we must help our brothers and sisters in taking away the day-to-day dirt of the world by serving one another. It is dirty work if you are going to be involved in serving others, but let us challenge our body of believers to serve others for Him.

9. List areas that God is moving you to serve others?

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10. What is holding you back from serving others?

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SLOW DOWN

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

Time is an amazing concept. Albert Einstein once said, “Put your hand in a hot stove for a minute and it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour and it seems like a minute.” It seems that in moments where there is a high amount of stress, time virtually stands still. While I write this, I am reminded Covid-19 changed the world one year ago. While we will be reading this two years since those faithful months, this reminder will feel like an eternity ago, while living through each day felt like time passed slowly.

There was a lot happening in the Upper Room on the night Jesus was arrested. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, instructs them about communion, looks Judas in the eyes and says he will betray the Lord, and talks Peter off the ledge. I am spiritually exhausted with each of these topics and I only have the opportunity to relive them through God’s Word. I read the Bible in a bit of a non-traditional way, that is in fact the most traditional means of reading God’s Word. I overlook chapters, headings, and verse numbers when I read. This helps me see Scripture as the original author intended. Doing this allowed me to spot something amazing.

Jesus just went through a grueling amount of time dealing with the disciples. Before you say, “Well, Jesus was God,” - He was also a man. Jesus felt. Jesus got tired. Jesus got hungry. While Jesus is the King of kings, He still had an element that we can relate to. To top it all off, while Jesus just went through the emotional and spiritual ten rounds with those closest to Him, He still knew He had the cross waiting for Him. So what did our Lord go and do after all that happened in the upper room?

Mark 14:32 says, ***"And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.'"*** When the stress of life is becoming too overwhelming, when there is friction within your personal circle, and when you feel stretched in a thousand directions and still have to focus on the important things in your life, what should you do? Pray. When our hands seem to be on a hot stove and life slows down, and we begin to feel overwhelmed, give your time to the One who has time in His hands. I have a hard time believing Jesus went to Gethsemane for the show. Jesus went to Gethsemane to spend time with His Father during a very stressful time. I think Jesus was onto something.

AFIKOMEN

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

The Last Supper of Jesus was the Seder meal that celebrated something that God had accomplished some 1,500 years earlier. It involved the Passover meal which was soon followed by the crossing through the Red Sea. The more we study these traditions, the more we will be blessed with the highly symbolic elements that are nuggets of truth.

Unleavened bread was used as yeast and can symbolize sin and how it spreads. On the table was a “matzah tosh.” It is a special pouch with three compartments in which a piece of matzah was placed in each section.

The second (middle) piece of unleavened bread (the afikomen) was taken from the matzah tosh during the Seder. The matzah is removed, broken, wrapped in cloth, and is “buried” or hidden from view. This happened early in the meal (which can be a two to three hour time of fellowship, eating, reading, and singing). Later on in the evening, the children would search for the afikomen. Whoever found it would raise it up and take it to the host where they would be given a prize.

The Jews did not know what to do with the word “afikomen.” They assumed it meant “dessert” as it was something that was coming later in the meal. However, the Greek word actually means the “coming one.”

For those of us who know Jesus, it is clear that our Messiah’s sinless body was broken (death), wrapped in a cloth, hidden in burial, and

then raised up by the power of God. The one who finds Him will be rewarded with the free gift of eternal life.

I think it is intriguing that people kept these traditions without knowing their fulfillment until they met Jesus the Messiah. There is no other clear explanation for this afikomen.

Please take a fresh look at how Jesus instituted the church's observance of the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26:26-29 says, ***"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'"***

I envision Jesus reaching into matzah tosh (with its three compartments representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), taking out the centerpiece of unleavened bread (afikomen), and showing it to the disciples as their eyes are glued to Him. He then ***"broke it."*** This was not surprising as that was the natural step. He then ***"gave it to the disciples."*** That may have confused them as they knew the process. However, he then turns on the lights when He said, ***"Take, eat; this is my body."*** When I first heard this, my jaw dropped in amazement. I imagine the disciples experienced it then and even more so the next year when they celebrated Passover.

Afikomen means the "coming one." I want to remind you, He is coming again!

LOVING TO THE END

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 3

John Rigg

"And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." John 13:2–5 (NKJV)

The scriptures above are John's account of the event that began what we have come to know as the Last Supper. This upper room meal, unknown to the disciples, would be their last with the Savior. Nevertheless, Jesus knew this would be the final meal before His brutal crucifixion (verse 3). He even was aware of who it was who would betray Him. Yet, Jesus begins this Passover meal by washing the feet of the disciples.

Foot washing was a form of hospitality in the ancient Near East performed upon guests entering a person's house. Because only sandals were worn, and feet were easily soiled, this humble task was most commonly performed by a master's servant.

Yet, this is where we find Jesus, at the feet of His disciples, humbly washing the feet of those He loved. This included washing the feet of Judas, His betrayer.

As you and I walk through this broken world, eventually every one of us will encounter a betrayer. Each of us at one point will have someone who is close to us be disloyal, or maybe even do something that is harmful to us. So how do we respond?

If you are Jesus, you humbly wash the feet of your betrayer. Obviously, you and I are not Jesus; however, we should be taking steps to look like Him.

In our culture today, we may not have the opportunity to wash the feet of our betrayer. Nevertheless, in principle, we can.

Maybe we start by picking up the phone and calling or texting them?
Maybe we do not avoid conversation with our betrayer but when we see them humbly initiate a conversation with them?
Maybe it is a card or letter?
Maybe it is meeting a need they may have?
Maybe we just take the example of Jesus and become their servant?

Why? Most likely, before they became your betrayer, they were someone you loved. John 13:1 (NKJV) says, ***"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."***

Being like Jesus is rarely easy and loving our betrayer will be difficult. But may we put forth the effort and love our betrayer, all the way to the end.

Who knows what God may do?

THE SAVIOR'S HUMBLE SPIRIT

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 4

Patrick Bicknell

On the night that our Savior knew that His hour had to come to do the work of the Father that He was sent to do, Jesus displayed an amazing act of service and humility. John chapter 13 begins by saying how Jesus knew that His hour had come, that Judas was going to betray Him, and that He was going to die one of the most gruesome deaths imaginable. The first thing that Jesus does is get up from the table and begin to wash the feet of His disciples. Here is Jesus knowing all that is about to happen to Him, He gets up and begins to serve those around Him. He not only is doing this the night of His betrayal, but He is also washing the feet of people who walked around everywhere. This means that He is not washing the feet of some people who sat at a desk all day, drove in a car to and from work, and maybe had a little bit of foot odor at the end of the day. He was washing the feet of people who had been sweating from walking around everywhere in the heat and dirt while wearing only sandals. It is safe to assume that these were some nasty feet that Jesus was washing. Not only was He washing some disgusting feet, but what is so significant about this act of service is that he was doing a job that the lowest servant in the household at the time would do. He was truly living out what John wrote a couple of verses earlier at the end of verse one saying, ***"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"*** (John 13:1). Jesus gives us two amazing examples here, one of how we are to love and serve others, and the other is that Jesus cleanses us and makes us clean through His sacrifice.

Jesus goes on to explain what He was doing in the act of washing their feet by saying, ***"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have***

washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done for you" (John 13:14-15). Now I do not think Jesus was specifically telling us to always be washing one another's feet, although that can be done and some people do it, but I think Jesus was giving a deeper example. I believe Jesus was telling us to humbly serve one another, to consider ourselves less than everyone, and meet the needs of others that we see regardless of how "low" the service may seem. I think it is fair to say if the Son of God, Creator of everything, humbled Himself to the position of a servant, we should follow His example and serve others at every chance we get. Secondly, Jesus was showing the disciples what He was going to do for them later that night. He knew that He was the only one who could wash away the sins of the world. In His response to Peter who did not want Jesus to wash His feet, He says, ***"If I do not wash you, you have no share with me"*** (John 13:8). Jesus is telling them that apart from the finished work of Christ on Calvary, the stain of sin remains on all. If we surrender our lives to Him, He cleanses us of all unrighteousness, declaring us justified and forgiven. We must follow the example that Christ laid out for us.

WASH MY FEET LORD

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 5

Debbie Gabbara

As a child, I remember running around outside all summer with no shoes. There were days that my feet were so dirty that they were black on the bottom. We were never allowed to go to bed without having a bath first or at the very least washing our feet.

In John chapter 13, we read that the disciples also had dirty feet. Their feet got dirty from walking on dusty roads in their sandals. John 13:1 (NLT) says, ***"Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end."*** Verses 4-5 continue, ***"So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him."*** The disciples must have been stunned at the humility of Jesus when He began to do the work of a lowly servant and wash their feet.

The church where I grew up taught that washing the feet of the saints was a command to be observed by believers. I was a teenager the first time I participated in this practice. It sounds kind of weird to think about washing someone's feet at church, but I remember it being a very special time. The chairs were lined up in rows and we sat facing each other. It was very humbling to have one of the older ladies kneel down on the floor to wash my feet and then wipe them dry, and then for me to wash her feet in return. It helped me to see the humility that Jesus wanted His disciples to understand. When we have a servant's heart, the Lord promised, we will be greatly blessed (John 13:17).

We have to read both Luke and John to see more of the actions of the disciples on the night of the Last Supper when Jesus washed their feet. In Luke chapter 22, the disciples were discussing which of them is the greatest. Then we jump over to John chapter 13 to find the account of Jesus, God's own Son, their Teacher and Lord, washing the feet of His disciples. They did not understand why Jesus would be doing the job of a servant. Peter first said that Jesus would never wash his feet. He quickly agreed when Jesus told him, ***"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"*** (John 13:8 NIV), and then he asked the Lord to wash not just his feet, but his hands and head as well.

Biblical commentator, Matthew Henry said, "Those who truly desire to be sanctified, desire to be sanctified throughout, to have the whole man, with all its parts and powers, made pure. The true believer is thus washed when he receives Christ for his salvation. See then what ought to be the daily care of those who through grace are in a justified state, and that is, to wash their feet; to cleanse themselves from daily guilt, and to watch against everything defiling. This should make us more cautious. From yesterday's pardon, we should be strengthened against this day's temptation."

Jesus showed us here how important it is to humble ourselves and serve one another. When He washed the disciples' feet, He reminds us that living in this world also makes our spiritual feet dirty.

Through prayer, we ask the Lord to cleanse us of our daily sins. In Luke 11:2-4 (NLT), we read, ***"Jesus said, 'This is how you should pray: 'Father, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. Give us each day the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation.'"***

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A FINAL MEAL

HIS TOWEL, DEVOTION 6

Justin Dean

One of the questions students seem to ask me a lot is, “If you had to pick your last meal, what would it be?” I do not know if the reason they ask me this is because I look like I enjoy food too much or if they think I am going to end up on death row, but it seems to be a common icebreaker question. Honestly, for me, it is fairly standard, “Steak and lobster.”

What would be your last meal?

I think we talk about our last meal because it is interesting to think about what we would eat if we knew we would never eat anything else. Most people are fascinated by what people eat, think, say, and do with the knowledge they will not be around much longer. As we take a look into the upper room, we get a picture of what Jesus made a priority during His final meal with His disciples. We can see what Jesus felt the disciples had to know as He broke bread with them one last time.

Read Luke 22:15-20.

Jesus wants them to remember what is about to happen. Though the disciples are clueless to the events that are about to unfold, Jesus knows the purpose of His death. He wants to make sure that the disciples know and do not ever forget, who His death was for and why He did it. He wanted to establish a tradition, not for tradition’s sake, but so that His followers would take time to remember that He died to save them. His body was broken and He shed His blood so that believers could be free from condemnation.

Why do you think Jesus wanted to establish a practice of remembering through communion?

Why is it so important that we take time to remember what Jesus did for us?

Communion for many people has become an impersonal and uninteresting ritual in the church. They have forgotten the significance, and fail to take the time and intentionality to reflect on what it truly means. It becomes the “grape juice and cracker time” and not the piece of a gathering where we truly look back to what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus’ death on the cross is the ultimate sacrifice. It cleared us of our conviction. He took the punishment that we rightfully deserve. His body was broken and His blood poured out for us. The thought of this should spur us to love. It should remind us of our freedom from sin. Reflecting on this has to become part of our regular lives. You do not need to wait for Sunday morning to reflect on what Jesus did on the cross. Set aside time to remember what Christ did for you on the cross. This week, take time to consider what Christ did for you on the cross and let it spur you to love and remind you of your freedom from sin.

LESSON FOUR

HIS SUPPER

PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND

One time when I was leading a group in taking the Lord's Supper together, I was given two cups, and the bread was in the bottom cup, but they had spilled juice on the top of the cup. Well, when the juice dried, it acted like a glue between the two cups, and I had to try to separate the cups while instructing the church body. As I tried to separate the cups, they shattered and made a loud cracking noise, and I was left without the bread or the juice to lead the group. It was quite embarrassing!

1. Have you ever had anything funny happen to you when you were getting ready to take the Lord's Supper?

_____

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_____

Luke 22:14-20 reads, ***"And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"***

Jesus is always teaching, and He uses the Passover dinner, which had great significance to the Jewish people, as a springboard to understanding His gift and sacrifice for mankind.

2. What does the fruit of the vine symbolize?

_____
_____
_____

3. What does the bread represent?

_____
_____
_____

4. What do you know about the Passover?

_____
_____
_____

5. Do you have foods, items, or celebrations that have great significance for you, your family, or your community? Tell us about them.

_____
_____
_____

Jesus changes two elements of the traditional Passover (Seder) meal. He explains a new meaning for the bread and the wine. We are taught that unleavened bread was the bread of affliction to remind the Jews of the persecution in Egypt when the Jewish people were enslaved. Deuteronomy 16:3 reads, ***"You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction - for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste - that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt."*** Now, Jesus is changing this bread to represent His body which was given as a sacrifice for our sins. Paul reaffirms this in 1 Corinthians 15:3, ***"For I delivered to***

you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."

6. According to Deuteronomy 16:3 what are the Jews to remember with the unleavened bread?

_____
_____
_____

7. What is Jesus asking His children to remember when we take the Lord's Supper?

_____
_____
_____

8. What does Paul say is of the first importance?

_____
_____
_____

9. Do you have any keepsakes or traditions that have been passed down in your family that remind you of something? Please share with the group? Do you see how the Jewish people used keepsakes and traditions?

_____
_____
_____

After they had eaten the bread, Jesus taught them about the cup or wine. He called it a symbol of the new covenant contrasting "His shed blood" to the animal blood that was used when the Jewish people sacrifice animals to atone for their sins.

Exodus 24:5-8 reads, ***"And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"***

Jesus teaches that there is a payment for sin and emphasizes the seriousness of sin. He is explaining a great truth that He is the payment for all sin. So Jesus reinterpreted the Passover meal and combined words and symbols. As some commentators have said, "The Passover meal focused on the lamb, but the Lord's Supper focuses on Jesus."

10. Have you ever trusted in the body that was broken and the blood that was shed for us? If you have, please share your salvation experience.

_____

_____

_____

THE DIVINE WORKOUT

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I own an exercise bike, elliptical runner, rowing machine, dumbbells, and a chin-up stand. However, the toughest part of my workout is the stairs. All my equipment is in the basement. I just need to go downstairs and then I have what I need for a good workout. I just need the motivation to go down the stairs.

I know there are all kinds of workouts. Maybe you have tried Billy Blanks' Tae Bo videos, Jane Fonda's Original Workout, a Boot Camp format, Richard Simmons' Sweatin' to the Oldies, P90X, Insanity, Zumba, or just going for a brisk walk. I would like to suggest another plan.

The plan I am suggesting is found in Luke 22:39-46, ***"And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.' And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'"***

Did you catch the workout? It was in verse 44 when Jesus was praying so earnestly that ***"his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."*** Jesus was praying so intently that He was sweating. His brow did not just feel warm. Sweat was dripping on the ground. It was a workout that would have our tank top drenched. We would fist pump friends while saying with a little pride, "Sorry. Don't hug me, I'm really sweaty."

Are we so purposeful, focused, and passionate about prayer that it literally drains us emotionally and physically? I believe when Jesus said "rise and pray," it was not intended for us to just do a quick, convenient prayer while our mind races all over the place.

Jesus taught and modeled prayer. We are called to times of extended, intensive prayer. Start today – start right now.

"Watch and pray
that you may not enter into temptation.
The spirit indeed is willing,
but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:41

NO

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 2

Donna Fox

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." Matthew 26:39

What does your prayer time look like? Is it a once-in-a-great-while thing when something bad happens and you think to yourself, "God I really need your help right now?" Or is it more like a wish list? "God, I want this, and I want that." Or is it somewhere in between?

Are you mad at God when you do not get what you asked for?

Jesus prayed to His Father, and He did not get the desire of His heart. The answer was, "No." Yet He was not angry or upset. He knew the Father's plans were best. The scene is the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had just had the "Last Supper" with the disciples and revealed He was about to be betrayed. He went off to the garden with Peter, James, and John for a quiet place to pray. He knew His time was near. Jesus told the three disciples to stay awake and be alert, yet when Jesus left to pray, they fell asleep. Three times Jesus returned from prayer to find the three asleep.

What did Jesus pray, you ask? Matthew 26:39 says, ***"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."***

The "cup" Jesus is referring to is His destiny, the plan, His death on the cross. This was the Father's plan all along, yet we find Jesus asking for it to be changed "if possible." He was, after all, 100% human. He was voicing His human desire not to suffer. However,

Jesus was also 100% God. He and the Father (and the Holy Spirit) are One. He voiced His wishes and yet obeyed His Father's plan.

Jesus obeyed the will of the Father, even if the answer to His prayer was, "No." Jesus showed His human emotion, and He showed His obedience and faithfulness to His Father.

When you pray and ask for something, are you ok with the answer, "No?" Are you willing to submit to and obey God, knowing that His ways are the best? He has a better plan for you!

Next time you pray for something and the answer is "no" or "not now," remember Jesus had that same experience. He did obey His Father and in the end, the Father's plan was best!

TRUE FEELINGS

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 3

Josh Thayer

Before we jump in, go ahead and read Luke 22:39-46.

Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane was recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Here in this part of the Bible Jesus is very aware of what is about to happen to Him. He knows He is going to die on the cross for all of mankind. So He retreated to this historic place to pray and ask God for His help. At this point in the story, the disciples have no idea what is about to happen. You can see this fact in that as Jesus is praying all night, afraid for what is going to happen, His disciples just casually fall asleep in the garden with no sense of urgency.

I want to focus on one verse here in Luke, and note that this verse is only recorded in Luke. ***"And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him"*** (Luke 22:43).

An angel appeared to Jesus to help Him. This angel is not mentioned in the other gospels, and I will chalk this up to Luke being a doctor to notice details that others may have missed. One thing to quickly understand about angels is that they are spiritual beings created by God who help carry out His work on earth. So here in Luke chapter 22, Jesus is terribly afraid, stressed out, and is asking for God's help. This is further confirmed by the verse to follow, ***"And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"*** (Luke 22:44).

God saw Jesus in need and He was there strengthening Him. I cannot imagine the thoughts that were going through Jesus' head at

this moment in His life. Obviously, it was causing Him great pain to compare His sweat to blood. Also, Luke is the only one to mention Jesus' sweat was like blood. Maybe you are reading this today and you can somewhat relate to how Jesus is feeling with insane amounts of stress, pain, and fear in your life. I am not sure what it is but you need to know that Jesus knows exactly what you are going through. Jesus can physically relate and He wants to be there for you. Just like His Father was there for Him.

It is never wrong to express our true feelings to God. Jesus exposed His fear of dying on the cross. Knowing this we can come to God and express our true feelings and not be afraid to ask for help with whatever we have going on and Jesus will be right there with us. Jesus wants to be there with you through the hard times and through the good times. Jesus recognized He was scared, anxious, and in agony, so He stopped and turned all His feelings into prayer. Whenever you start having any of these feelings, stop, pray, and realign your focus on God.

"Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:6-7

NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 4

Mitchell Holmes

The story of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is told in three of the gospels and referenced in the fourth. Of all these, the way it is written in the book of Luke is my personal favorite. Luke's telling of the situation is shorter and simpler than the other two books but the wording is beautiful and emphasizes the relationship between Jesus and the Father while focusing less on the conversations between Jesus and His disciples.

The story of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is a very unique window into Jesus' character. Nowhere else in the Bible do we see such intense fear come from Jesus. Jesus faced trials and tribulation endlessly during His years of ministry but never does He falter or give a hint of fear or intimidation, even when tempted by Satan. Jesus dreads death so intensely here that His soul is overcome with sorrow so intense that it nearly killed Him (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34). He is so afraid that He asks God for an alternative option or a delay. Jesus was master of death and was wholly God, so why did He fear death specifically in this scenario?

Part of His fear was a testament to Jesus' humanity. While He is wholly God, He is also wholly human. As a man, He desired to obey the will of God while also not wanting to suffer the shame of the cross and all that came with it. Jesus did not fear the physical pain of death. He feared everything that came with it.

The death of Jesus was unlike the death of any other man, woman, or child. Jesus knew that when He died, He would be paying the

full wages of sin for all of humanity. He understood that this meant bearing the judgment of God. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, it says, ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*** Jesus became sin knowing full well this meant separation from God. Isaiah 59:2 tells us as much, ***"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."***

Jesus desperately and sincerely pleaded with God for another path. In my opinion, one of the most beautiful passages of the Bible is Luke 22:42 says: ***"Saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'"*** What an incredible thing to say and what a beautiful glimpse into the heart of Jesus. Jesus is pleading, saying if there is any other way, please do it. He is desperate to not incur the wrath of God. He understands the pain and torment He will receive. He understands the isolation He will experience. Yet he chose to follow God's will.

"Nevertheless" - what a beautiful word. Jesus asks for a way out but He says if there is no other way, He will choose to follow God's will despite everything that comes with it. What a beautiful mindset to have. Make your request known to God, yet be willing to submit to His will even if the answer is no. This is a tough mindset to have nowadays. If you are at all like me, it can feel like God is ignoring or unloving when my prayers are not answered the way I wanted.

Jesus ends His prayer by saying, ***"Not my will, but yours, be done."*** Jesus, who was equally God, ends His prayer in submission to God. He trusted the Father with everything. How many of us live in submission to God and are willing to end our prayers, ***"Not my will, but yours, be done?"*** How many of us hesitate to relinquish that control and submit that authority to God? Are you willing to trust

in God's will and have faith in Him enough to end your prayers, ***"Not my will, but yours, be done?"***

JESUS KNEW

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 5

Mark O'Connor

What would you do if you had a few days left to live? I asked this question of our students the other day. I got a lot of the answers that you would expect:

- Spend time with friends and family.
- Doing exciting things.
- Traveling to a place they have always wanted to go.
- Only one said they would commit a crime, so that was good.

Then I asked them what they would do if a loved one was sick and they could trade their own life so their loved one could live. There were not as many quick answers. I would like to answer that question very quickly but I am not sure that I would react as I hope. Would your friends or family be willing to lay their life down for you? I am not sure.

As Jesus returned to Jerusalem that week, He knew what awaited Him. He had told His disciples already what was to happen to Him. As He rode that donkey and people cheered, He knew that in just a few days many of those same people would be calling for His blood. As He washed His disciples' feet and ate the Passover meal, He knew that Judas was going to sell Him out in a short time. He explained to His followers again what was going to happen but they still could not grasp it. They argued about who was the best among them. As Jesus watched and taught, He knew in just a few hours that the events that would lead to His death would be set in motion. Still, He loved and taught. He did not run; He did not leave. He could have.

Feeling the weight of coming events, Jesus did what Jesus so often does. He seeks the Father. He goes to pray in the Garden. There, He asked those He loves to watch. They did not. They fell asleep. As Jesus prays with longing to not endure what is to come, He submits as He calls us to do. He could have done His will. He has the power and ability at that moment to not go on that cross. Luke describes the agony that Jesus felt as though He was sweating drops of blood. He could have chosen differently. Knowing that His death was the only way to bridge the gap between us and the Father, He willingly laid down His life for you and me.

Just as the disciples did not understand what was going to happen, it is hard for us to comprehend the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Just as His disciples fell asleep as Jesus prayed in that garden, we sometimes fall asleep in our walk with Him. Despite that, knowing how miserably we would fail Him, He went to that garden and prayed. He went to that cross for us. Though sometimes we may lose sight, let us never forget what He did for us that day.

SEE THE LOVE

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE, DEVOTION 6

Pastor Ben Kirkman

The details of the week leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus amaze me every time I read them. Most recently, in reading through them, I really tried to focus on the display of unquestionable love Jesus showed in His actions and reactions. It is an understatement to say He was a great example of what love looks like. Today, we will look at Jesus praying to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 22:41-44 says, ***"And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.' And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."***

Can you picture this playing out in real life? Jesus is within hours of being crucified. He is the perfect, innocent, spotless lamb of God and is about to pay the necessary price for our sins. What an incredibly emotional, physical, and spiritual burden He must have been bearing. With all of that going on, Luke gives us some insight into this intense time of prayer Jesus has with His Father as He prepares for the events about to unfold. We see Jesus "in agony," "kneeling down," "falling on His face" (Matthew 26:39), "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33), and "earnestly" praying while "His sweat became like great drops of blood." That is an intense time of prayer. Being fully man and also fully God, He understood what was about to happen. He was aware of the physical pain He was about to face. He fully grasped the necessity of the redemptive work He was

about to accomplish. He knew He was the only one that could pay the required price that would make it a possibility for sinners to be declared righteous before a Holy God.

Christ's obedience to the Father and love for the world is on display as He proceeds with the plan to go to the cross and pay for sins. As you consider this intense scene, I hope you see a glimpse of how much God loves you. We do not have a God that simply claims to love us but we have a God that clearly puts His love on display for all to see.

In 1 John 4:9-10, we read, ***"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His Only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."***

How have you responded to God's unquestionable display of love?

LESSON FIVE

PRAYING AT GETHSEMANE

PASTOR JOSH YATES

“Nangry?”

Have you ever been there? Do you wonder what this is? I think it is much like being “hangry” (so hungry that you are angry) except this is about getting a nap. When you do not get an expected nap, do you ever get “nangry?”

I try to take a nap on Sunday afternoons. Sunday mornings are a blessing, but they can take it out of me. By the time I get home, I am ready for a nap! When that does not happen, “nangry” can happen. I mean, we all want to be like Jesus, right? He took naps, so should we!

1. Do you ever get “nangry?” Do you like naps? Do you hate naps? When do you usually try to sneak a nap into your schedule?

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In all seriousness, naps can be a part of taking care of yourself. Many studies have shown that the right length of a nap can be so helpful to your health. Too short or too long and it can ruin your day. We have to be taking care of ourselves. All of us are so very busy and springtime is no exception. So many of us are running from place to place, sport to sport, school, preparing for summer vacations, and for the Yates, we have a graduating senior! (I have no idea how it happened this fast.) Life is hectic.

Most of us are running ever so close to empty.

2. How close to empty are you running today? In what areas of your life are you exhausted?

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The disciples had been doing so much in the service of Jesus. They were traveling with Him and learning about the Kingdom of God. In the middle of all of this, they had learned what Jesus had come to do, though they may not have fully understood it.

Please read John 2:19-22.

3. What was Jesus describing here? Does it seem like the people present understood what Jesus was saying?

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The disciples missed the meaning in the middle of the mess. Jesus would teach lesson after lesson, take them on experience after experience, and the disciples would see Jesus do so much. They had to be exhausted so much of the time. In the middle of their exhaustion, they would miss something so important.

Read Mark 14:32-42. (The account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane can be found in Matthew 26:36-46 and Luke 22:39-46. You may want to take some time to read all of the accounts, but we will focus on Mark's account.)

The Garden of Gethsemane is a beautiful place. It is a small, walled orchard on the Mount of Olives directly across the Kidron Valley and the Temple Mount. It is quiet and serene even today. There is a reverence that you feel when you walk into the garden.

4. When you think of reverence, what setting and feelings come to mind? What would you be doing if you are “reverent?”

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There is a lot going on here. Jesus is troubled to the point of death. He had taken Peter, James, and John with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane and He is described as “greatly distressed and troubled.” He even tells Peter, James, and John that He is sorrowful to the point of death. What a revelation, even Jesus struggled as He faced difficult circumstances.

5. What are some of the toughest circumstances you have faced where you have been “greatly distressed and troubled” or “sorrowful to the point of death?”

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6. What helped you through those circumstances and the feelings surrounding those circumstances?

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Jesus goes away to pray and asks His Father if there was any other way to accomplish what He had come to do. He was scared of what was to come. He had faith in the Father and in what He had been sent to do. Yet, He submitted to the will of the Father even though He was looking toward the cross.

He then came back and found His friends sleeping. He woke them and asked them to watch with Him and to pray with Him. He was calling them to pray so that they would not fall into temptation. Unfortunately, Jesus does this three times and each time He found His friends asleep. They were simply too tired.

I do not believe that it is a coincidence that Jesus asked His friends to pray three times and Peter would end up denying that He knew Jesus three times. Jesus was always teaching those He loved. He took every situation and used it to the fullest. This would be a situation that His friends would never forget.

I wonder what would have happened if they had stayed awake and prayed. Would they have handled Jesus' arrest, trial, and death differently? Would Peter have still denied Jesus? (I believe he would have as Jesus had already told him he would.) Maybe Peter would have handled his failure better than he did if he had stayed awake. I am not sure.

I do know this, they missed an opportunity to be with Jesus in His time of dark need.

7. Do you ever miss opportunities to minister to and love those around you because you are too busy? Can you think of a time when that happened?

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Every single person ends up going through a "Gethsemane" moment at some point in life. It is a moment where you are stretched way beyond yourself and you do not know where to turn or what to do. In fact, you find yourself in a circumstance that is out of your control.

This is where we must learn to lean on God and how to trust Him. So often we are so busy, so tired, and too distracted to follow God in the "normal" times that we miss the messages in the middle of our mess. We are running on empty in our spiritual lives and we do not realize it. We take for granted the relationship we can have with God, we miss opportunities to learn more about God's Word and even what prayer is about, and, in effect, we fall asleep.

8. What are some of the things that distract you from focusing on God and learning from Him?

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9. How can you take more opportunities to learn more about God's Word and how to follow Him closer than you currently do?

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Jesus told His friends to pray that they would be able to overcome temptation, but they fell asleep and they faced a situation they were not prepared for. Then they all ran (except for Peter, though he would deny Jesus).

This can so easily happen to us if we remain asleep. The circumstances of life come upon us (cancer, relational stress, career trouble, financial struggle, children, and heartbreak) and we are jolted awake. Unfortunately, we are not ready.

10. Can you think of a time where the circumstances of life came upon you and you just were not ready or prepared (it might be something you already discussed tonight)?

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Jesus' prayer is a call to prayer and a relationship with Him. Jesus went to His Father when He was "sorrowful to the point of death" because His relationship with the Father was solid. He had followed Him closely and when the time came for Him to fulfill the Father's will, He was able to put Himself in His Father's hands.

You can have that same confidence. This is born through making your relationship with your Heavenly Father of utmost importance. As you spend time in God's Word, you get to know your Father's heart for you. As you bring your requests to your Father in prayer, you learn that He is trustworthy and holds you.

We can all get "nangry" when we get tired. A nap can fix that issue. We can also get "nangry" spiritually if we stray too far from our Father. We must learn to rest in Him in the "normal" things of life so that when we are blown around and tossed in circumstances that we cannot handle and we are scared, we can find that same rest.

We can have the confidence that Jesus had that no matter what, our Father holds us and never leaves us. You can trust the heart of God.

Philippians 2:12-13 says, ***"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."***

11. Where in your life do you need God to work today? Where do you need rest? How do you need to depend on God?

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My prayer for you is that you find rest in your Father, that He holds you, and that you can trust His heart for you no matter what.

I AM

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I have heard people say, "Jesus never said that He was God." Unfortunately, when this is said, most people do not make them prove it or know how to challenge the statement. There are numerous verses to look at, but I want to start with just a few.

In John chapter 8, the Jews were debating with Jesus whether He was from the devil or God. In the discussion, Abraham was referenced. Jesus said to them, ***"'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.' So the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am'"*** (John 8:56-58). Jesus was boldly saying that He existed before His birth. He had existed two thousand years earlier during the time of Abraham and that He had always existed. He was God. By saying, ***"I am,"*** He was referencing God's conversation with Moses at the Burning Bush. Moses was nervous about going to the people on God's behalf, so he asked God who he should reference when the Jews questioned him. In Exodus 3:14, we read, ***"God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"*** In case you do not see the connection, I want to go back to John chapter 8 and show the response of the Jews to Jesus saying, ***"I am."*** Verse 59 reads, ***"So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."*** The Jews knew Jesus was saying He is God. They were so convinced of what He was saying that they tried to kill Him for saying it.

This statement is also referenced hours before the crucifixion. In John 18:2-6, we read the story, ***"Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground."*** This army of men came looking for Jesus. Jesus acknowledged who He was by saying, ***"I am he."*** In Greek, the word ***"he"*** is not used. The literal Greek translation is "I am." Not only did Jesus say He was God, He decided to give them a taste of His power. I would have loved to see the dominoes fall. I wonder how confident they were in arresting Him after that happened.

Jesus was God, is God, and forever will be God. He is infinite and eternal. He knew it and proclaimed it. He also knew His mission. He had the power to stop the process at any time but chose to go to the cross for us.

GRACE GREATER THAN OUR SIN

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 2

John Rigg

Have you ever found yourself making determinations on who should receive God's grace and who should not? (Stop reading and answer the question). Yeah, me too. Maybe it is not an all-or-nothing call for you. Perhaps you have devised a way of evaluating how much grace a person should receive? Possibly you have a grace chart or a grace scale? These items help you evaluate and weigh out the portions of God's grace that should be distributed. Maybe you find yourself looking at your own life and can see the need for God's grace, but immediately realize there are people you know that need it more than you.

Have you ever asked yourself what necessitates God's grace? The answer may seem obvious, but all a person has to do to qualify to be a recipient of the grace of God is to sin. Do you qualify? If you are unsure, you can find the chart in Romans 3:23.

Read Luke's account of Jesus's betrayal and arrest and see if you can spot anyone in need of the grace of God. Luke 22:47–51 (NKJV) says, ***"And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, 'Permit even this.' And He touched his ear and healed him."***

So, what did you determine? Did the multitude who came against Jesus need God's grace? Judas? How about the servant of the high priest? Did you consider Peter, the one who struck the servant of the high priest? Were you thinking a particular group or person was in greater need of the grace of God? Perhaps, in your mind, no one was deserving?

Consider this.

- The multitude received the grace of God when they were knocked back but not destroyed (John 18:6).
- Judas was given grace when he was reminded Who it was he was about to betray.
- The servant of the high priest experienced the grace of God when Jesus healed his severed ear.
- Even Peter was handed grace for trying to interrupt the plan of God.

Luke records that Jesus was just hours away from the cross at the time of these events. His substitutionary death was the greatest display of grace mankind would ever be given. He was betrayed, arrested, forsaken, and crucified all in the name of grace.

No matter how you and I may determine who needs the grace of God, one thing is certain, God's grace is greater than any of our sin. This is something that I am reminded of when I hear the classic hymn, *"Grace Greater Than Our Sin."* I leave you with the refrain of that hymn.

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin!

PUT THE SWORD AWAY

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 3

Philip Piasecki

We all have that person in our life that is fiercely loyal to us. It is so encouraging knowing that there is someone who will always go to bat for you. For me, that person is my wife. I know that if I need someone in my corner she will be there. Having that person is such a blessing, but I know we have all had times where we have had to pull them back too. That is the situation we find Jesus in with His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas shows up with soldiers and the Pharisees to arrest Jesus, and fiercely loyal Peter decides that it is up to him to fight on behalf of Jesus. He strikes the high priest's servant and cuts his ear off. Quickly Jesus diffuses the situation, heals the servant's ear, and then rebukes Peter.

John 18:10-11 records, ***"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?'"***

Peter was ready to fight to protect Jesus, but the Lord had different plans. As we have been studying the countdown to the cross, we see moment after moment where Jesus willfully pushes forward towards what He knows is going to be His crucifixion. Jesus did not need Peter to fight His battle for Him. He knew what He was doing, what was going to happen, and He had it under control. How often do we also find ourselves in this situation where we are trying to fight a battle that the Lord has clearly told us to let Him handle? We can start simply with salvation, so many of us are trying to achieve our

salvation through our own efforts when Jesus is looking down on us saying, “I already fought that battle for you, just accept this free gift!”

I think of David declaring to the Israelites about the victory the Lord was going to have in His fight against Goliath. In 1 Samuel 17:47, it says, ***“And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hand.”***

This concept not only applies to our salvation but also the battles that we are fighting in our life. The battle is the Lord’s! When we are struggling, fighting through the battles of our life, our natural inclination is to stand up and try and fight back in our own strength. Instead, we should lean into the Lord knowing that it is only by His power and His strength that we can have any victory in the battles of life. The story of the cross shows the power and the strength of the Lord, He has already won! Next time you feel the urge to draw your sword like Peter remember that it is the Lord, not us, that delivers the victory.

WHAT TO DO WITH A JUDAS

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 4

Sierra Combs

Have you ever been hurt by a friend? I will go ahead and answer for you - of course you have. We all have been hurt by friends and family, both intentionally and unintentionally, more times than we can count. However, have you ever been really, truly hurt and betrayed by someone who you would consider one of your closest friends? I have been there, and there is something that still cuts me to my core when I look back and think about the friend who I loved and trusted, one I spent countless hours with. We were the closest of friends until one day, she just decided she did not want to be part of my life anymore. Without even a conversation, she bailed. It quickly became clear how much of a problem she had with me by conversations she had with others, ones she refused to have with me. It gutted me. I cried about it for months. At that time, I could not focus on much else. I was so absorbed in the hurt and betrayal from this person. How could she do this? After the sadness faded, it quickly turned to anger. No longer was she my friend, but now a bitter enemy in my heart. I viewed her as the worst person I had ever known. I can look back on this now and realize I may have been a little dramatic. Clearly, I did not handle things in my heart and in my mind in a Christ-like way. I let bitterness grow where it should not have been, and I excused it away because the hurt was so tremendous. You may have a similar experience.

One thing that is so wonderful about our Savior is that He gave up the glory, honor, and wonders of Heaven to come and live life as a lowly servant here on Earth. God became flesh because of His great love for us. This was just all a part of God's great plan, and while it was the best thing that could ever happen for us, it was usually not

what we would call great for Jesus. When we look at His life, it was filled with hardships and hurt. Any time I start to fall into self-pity ("woe is me" type of moment), I quickly get a heart check as soon as I look at Jesus. My sufferings and trials pale in comparison, and yet I know that He sees every tear and understands the hurt. When it comes to the hurt and betrayal of a friend, He knows it better than anyone. All four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) give an account of one of the biggest betrayals in history. Jesus was in the garden, praying to the Father while deeply overwhelmed with sorrow for what was about to happen. It was finally time for Him to lay His life down on a cross for the sins of the world. Not only was the most intense kind of physical pain about to come upon Him but worst of all, the separation from the Father was quickly approaching. A few of His disciples were with Him in the garden as well, though they did not offer much in terms of support as they lay sleeping. Matthew 26:45-47 records what happened next, ***"Then [Jesus] came to the disciples and said to them, 'Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.' While He was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people."*** For those of you who may not know, Judas was also one of Jesus' disciples. He, along with the other eleven men, spent practically every waking hour with Jesus over the prior three years. They traveled together, ate together, listened and learned from Jesus, witnessed countless miracles, and even were given power and authority to do some miracles themselves. They gave up everything they had to follow Jesus. They were the inner circle to God in the flesh. They knew Jesus and Jesus knew them. Yet one of these men, Judas, would throw it all away in betrayal. Matthew 26:48-50 continues, ***"Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize Him.' And he came up to Jesus at once and***

said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' And he kissed Him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you came to do.' Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him." This was no minor betrayal. Judas literally handed Jesus over to be taken and killed. He did all this for 30 pieces of silver. I can only imagine how sad it must have been for Jesus to see this whole thing unfold, even though He knew how it would happen from the very beginning. He knew what Judas would do before he even existed, and yet He still chose him as a member of His inner circle. He knew Judas would betray Him and yet Jesus still placed him at the most prominent spot at the dinner table just hours before. Where most of us would look at this man with the utmost contempt and fury, Jesus loved Him and still called him a friend.

Just like Judas, I am guilty of betraying and sinning against the Lord every day. However, Jesus went to that cross to die for sinners just like me. He forgave me, wiped my dirty slate clean, and calls me a friend. Wow! Every time I think about His amazing love and forgiveness, I realize just how un-Christlike I can be. If He could forgive me, I should certainly be able to forgive those who have hurt me for much less. Whatever kind of hurt you may find yourself in right now, remember that Christ sees and knows your pain. Only through Him can we look upon those who hurt us with love and compassion, choosing to forgive them and maybe even still call them friends. I say this as much to myself as I do to you today. We have a choice to make. We need to go be like Jesus!

BETRAYED, ARRESTED, AND FORSAKEN

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 5

Pastor Noble Baird

I am not sure about you, but when I read the words "betrayed, arrested, and forsaken," it is hard to believe that they can be used in the same sentence with Jesus. Yet, as we open God's Word and grow closer to Him, we know that without those three words we could never be called righteous.

In Luke 22:47-53, Luke gives the account of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane the night that Jesus was betrayed, ***"While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?' And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'"***

Although it is truly difficult to read this passage, it never ceases to amaze me. In a true hour of darkness, Jesus knows the task at hand. This is the penultimate chapter in His mission before the cross. Yet, as He is betrayed by a friend and one whom He had literally done

life with, Jesus stops an event from what could have been utter chaos. He not only willingly goes with the Pharisees and guards, but He stops and heals the man whose ear was just cut by one of His disciples.

Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and forsaken. Yes, this statement is sadly true. However, because of the truth of this statement, we are justified by the blood of Christ, freed from the chains of Hell, and loved eternally by our Heavenly Father. My hope is that I will never take Jesus' sacrifice for granted and I hope that you too will rejoice and hold onto this truth.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

JESUS BETRAYED, DEVOTION 6

Keaton Washburn

As we spend this week focusing on the betrayal and arrest of Christ, I want to begin by reading Scripture. Please read John 18:2-12.

There is so much packed into this short section. In verse 4, we see the knowledge that Christ had of what was to come and He still chose to endure it. He was not surprised by any of it but saw beginning to end and chose to allow it to continue. In verses 5 and 6, as Jesus answers, ***"I am he,"*** Judas and the soldiers fall to the ground. By Jesus' words, they fell to the ground. Where I want to focus today is verses 8 and 9, ***"Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.' This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: 'Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.'"***

When I think of Jesus fulfilling prophecies, I think of the Old Testament. Throughout His life, He fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies (that is by conservative counts, there are arguably many more than that). Not a single prophecy did Christ contradict. He fulfilled all of them! However, here in John 18:8-9, the words Jesus is fulfilling are His own.

The words Jesus is fulfilling are from John 17:12, where He says, speaking of His 12 disciples, ***"While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."*** Jesus spoke these words only hours before this and fulfilled them at this moment. Charles Spurgeon makes a beautiful observation here in saying, "It is not the

age of God's Word but the truth of it that constitutes its power. What Christ had said that night in prayer was as true and as much the Word of the King as what God had spoken by his Spirit through holy men ages before." This is the beauty of God's Word. Because it is from God, all of it is true. The red letter verses (the words spoken by Jesus) are no more Scripture than every word of the Old Testament.

Reflecting on the words of Christ, like a good shepherd, none of His sheep were lost, only the one that chose to betray Him. Even when His disciples could have been arrested with Him, He defended them, as a good shepherd does. If you are a follower of Christ, He is your shepherd and your defender. When the evil one attacks, Christ will not lose you to Him because He is the one holding your salvation. Stand strong against the attacks of the evil knowing you have a Good Shepherd who watches over you.

LESSON SIX

JESUS BETRAYED

DR. RANDY T. JOHNSON

"While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.' And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you came to do.' Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him." Matthew 26:47-50

Judas betrayed Jesus. This passage is so familiar for us that it has become part of the vernacular of our culture. If you are referred to as a "Judas," they are accusing you of being unfaithful, a double-crosser, a backstabber, a turncoat, or a betrayer. You might be called a snake in the grass. This would put you in the company of men like Brutus and Benedict Arnold.

This event is also described in Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53, and John 18:2-12. There are at least three parts of this betrayal that should be examined.

- Judas kissed Jesus while betraying Him.

"Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.'" Matthew 26:48

1. Why do you think Judas kissed Jesus?

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_____
_____

We know Judas kissed Jesus because it was his way of pointing out who Jesus was? However, I wonder if he was mocking Jesus or already regretting his decision and actions.

During the first century, the kiss was typically a sign of affection, even among men. This can still be seen in some cultures today. Paul encouraged the greeting.

- ***"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you."*** Romans 16:16

- ***"All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss."*** 1 Corinthians 16:20

- ***"Greet one another with a holy kiss."***
  2 Corinthians 13:12

- ***"Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss."***
  1 Thessalonians 5:26

2. What are some forms of the ***"holy kiss"*** today?

_____
_____
_____

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "He used the kiss as a weapon, not as a sign of affection. In that day, it was customary for disciples to kiss their teacher. But in this case, it was not a mark of submission or respect. The Greek verbs indicate that Judas kissed Jesus repeatedly."

3. Why do you think Judas kissed Jesus repeatedly?

_____
_____
_____

This reminds me of Proverbs 27:6, ***"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."*** It can be helpful to see how others translate or paraphrase this verse.

- ***"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."*** King James Version

- ***"Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy."*** New Living Translation

- ***"Friends mean well, even when they hurt you. But when an enemy puts his arm around your shoulder—watch out!"*** Good News Translation

4. Today, what are ***"the kisses of an enemy?"***

_____
_____
_____

5. How can ***"wounds of a friend"*** be a blessing?

_____
_____
_____

This verse reminds me of two phrases. First, I have heard the advice, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Second, I often quote Proverbs 27:17, ***"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."***

6. What does either of those phrases mean to you?

_____
_____
_____

• Judas called Jesus ***"Rabbi"*** while he was betraying Him.

"And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' And he kissed him." Matthew 26:49

7. Why do you think Judas called Jesus ***"rabbi?"***

_____
_____
_____

8. What term should Judas have called Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

Judas betrayed Jesus. He sold Him out for a little bit of silver. He continued the charade by referencing Jesus through an informal title of teacher. With that, he kissed Jesus and departed stage left as he concluded his show.

In his commentary, Craig Blomberg mentioned that Judas did not address Jesus as "Lord" but as "Rabbi." He was still betraying his distance from Jesus.

• While being betrayed, Jesus called Judas "friend."

"Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you came to do.' Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him." Matthew 26:50

9. Why do you think Jesus called Judas ***"friend?"***

_____

_____

_____

I examine Jesus' every word and action in light of the Old Testament. Could He have used the title "friend" in light of messianic prophecy?

- ***"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."*** Psalm 41:9

- ***"And if one asks him, 'What are these wounds on your back?' he will say, 'The wounds I received in the house of my friends.' 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.'"*** Zechariah 13:6-7

10. Do you think Jesus was referencing that a "friend" would betray the Messiah?

_____

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_____

Jesus could have used the title "friend" as an opportunity for forgiveness. Just because someone does not like us, does not mean we cannot like, love, or respect them. We do not need someone to ask for forgiveness or change their actions before we forgive them.

Matthew 5:39 says, ***"But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."***

11. What does this verse mean?

_____
_____
_____

12. How can this verse be applied today?

_____
_____
_____

13. Who has betrayed you?

_____
_____
_____

14. How have you forgiven them? If not, why?

_____
_____
_____

"If God can forgive Judas,
then he can forgive any of us.
No matter the level of your failures,
God can restore you.
That is the good news."
Sean McDowell

15. How is forgiveness part of the good news?

_____
_____
_____

DO YOU BELIEVE?

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 1

Roger Allen

When I was young, one of the things I remember most about a trip to the doctor was the children's magazines. Growing up in the '60s, I fondly remember those stories of David and Goliath, Samson, Noah, and Jonah. For a child who did not attend church, these stories were quite a curiosity to me. I am sure I had heard the names before, but could not retell the stories of these famous Bible characters. I know it sounds silly, but it was some time before I figured out that the Claymation characters of Davey and Goliath were not the same as the Biblical characters of David and Goliath. Today, I can only believe that many children may not even know these names. No longer do you see the magazines that littered the pediatrician's office. Instead, we see faces buried deep into iPhones, iPads, and other devices. Unless taught, they too will miss out on the "greatest story ever told."

Fast forward forty years, my life is coming full circle. I have found a new curiosity in the biblical narrative. Sitting on the balcony in church after receiving Christ as my Savior, I heard the Pastor begin to tell a story I had never heard before (John 11:1-44). Unpacking the verses, he opened my eyes to the parallel meaning of what just happened to me and this man's story. It was about a man called Lazarus, loved greatly by his sisters Mary and Martha. A man who was also loved by Jesus had fallen sick and needed His help. As we follow the narrative, we see that Jesus has stayed back a few more days, only to be told that Lazarus had died. Arriving four days later, Jesus comforted the sisters. With only Martha there to greet Him, their conversation quickly became one of faith. In one short sentence, Jesus told her that her brother ***"will rise again"*** (John 11:23).

John 11:25-26 continues, ***"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"*** In the next verse, Martha replied, ***"She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'"***

In raising Lazarus from the dead, those that were there witnessed the power of the Son of God. Setting the stage for His own death, Jesus was stirring up those that would not believe. It would be only a few short weeks before Jesus Himself would be crucified and raised from the dead. Making believers throughout the land, Jesus continued in His ministry. He was showing His power and compassion to all.

I believe that my own story is one of resurrection and life. Those who had known me previous to my conversion would say, "It is a miracle!" The change was profound and an eye-opener to all those that witnessed the new me. Many would question the permanence of this change until years later, only to find I have grown deeper in my faith. Now they too can say a miracle took place that day. Jesus has used my broken life to lift the faith of those who have struggled in their own lives. His miracles are to show all that "will" believe, the strength to say "I do" believe. Even today, miracles are taking place as we see the striking change that takes place in the lives of those that have received Christ. After witnessing this change in a person, how does your faith not grow stronger, or have you become so hardened that you choose not to believe? During His earthly ministry, Jesus raised a total of four people which included Himself. Yet, there were those who chose not to believe that He was the Messiah. He told them that He would raise Himself up on the third day, yet their unbelief sealed their own fate. It comes down to the eternal question, do you believe that Jesus died and was raised again on the third day so that you too would have everlasting life, or do you not?

"He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay."
Matthew 28:6

DO NOT CLING

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I like idioms. I often wonder about the exact meaning or history involved. Here are some common examples.

- The elephant in the room
- Barking dogs seldom bite
- Break the ice
- Crack the whip
- Heads will roll
- Set the bar
- Cross the line
- To the nines
- Without further ado
- Rabbit hole
- Fight tooth and nail
- Topsy-turvy
- Sticky fingers
- Wear their shoes

The last one is common. It means that before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes. It mandates empathy. It appears that it comes from a poem by Mary T. Lathrap which was published in 1895. The original title of the poem was *"Judge Softly,"* later titled *"Walk a Mile in His Moccasins" (Grammarist.com).* Often we forget to think from the other person's perspective. Their past culture, upbringing, experiences, perspective, and what they have to gain or lose might help us better understand their actions.

I enjoy trying to put myself in someone else's "scandals" when I read Scripture. When Jesus met with Mary Magdalene after the

resurrection, the scene must have been packed with emotions. Jesus had changed Mary's life forever and now was gone. Not only had He died, but now she was at an empty tomb. John 20:11-13 describes the scene, ***"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'"*** I do not know if we can fully comprehend the depth of uncertainty. The disciples had seemed to lose all purpose and perspective and were hiding. Mary and a few ladies went to make sure all the burial details were in order.

John 20:14-16 describes an amazing encounter, ***"Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned and said to him in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher)."*** She knew His voice. I think she knew His dialect and tone but also heard His compassion. He always cared and cares.

Jesus makes an interesting statement in verse 17, ***"Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*** Jesus did not say, ***"Do not cling to me"*** because He was of the "spirit world" and could not be touched. Nor did it have anything to do with fulfilling the symbolism of the Day of Atonement and presenting the blood to the Father. He had presented that on the cross when He was made

sin for us. I think it is much more basic. Jesus knew Mary felt she had lost Jesus once before (at His crucifixion) and it was natural for her to have that same fear again. She was not going anywhere. She wanted to be near Him, but He knew He was not leaving yet. He had already chosen to stay on earth for another forty days. His practical advice was for her to go and tell others.

In verse 18, we read about Mary's obedience, ***"Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord' - and that he had said these things to her."***

I think believers focus too much on "clinging" to Jesus. We only focus on prayer and reading the Word. It might sound good to say that it is just about us and Jesus, but this is not scriptural. James 1:22 says, ***"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*** We need to go and tell others. We need to be active. Sometimes we are praying about things that Jesus has already told us to act upon. It is time to get up and take action. We have heard the calling and now it is time to heed it. When we do this, we will be blessed (James 1:25). "You can bet your bottom dollar on that" (in no way is the author condoning gambling in the use of this idiom).

WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD?

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 3

Patrick Bicknell

Everything about the Christian faith rests on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything about our hope, the way we live our lives, and the faith we put in God are totally dependent on Jesus rising from the grave three days after His crucifixion. One chapter earlier in Luke, we see our humble Savior take our place on the cross, suffer agonizing pain, and bury our sin in the dirt when He died. Now, that is amazing for a person to claim, to die for his brothers, for those that he loves. However, if Jesus did not rise again from the grave then everything that He has said is all a lie. All the faith and time that His disciples spent with Him were all in vain if there was no resurrection. Jesus would have just been another guy who said a lot of big words, performed some miracles, and then died a martyr's death. However, that is not what happened.

On that blessed morning, a couple of women who were followers of Jesus decided to head to the tomb with the spices and ointments they had prepared to put on Jesus' body. They were probably still mourning and missing their friend Jesus who had just been with them, alive, just a few days ago. As they approached, however, they saw that the stone was rolled away and Jesus' body was nowhere to be found. I cannot imagine what was going through their mind at that moment. Then we get to verse 5 where some of the most amazing words are spoken by an angel of the Lord saying, ***"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen"*** (Luke 24:5-6). That morning, everything had changed forever. Jesus truly was who He said He was. He truly was the one that came to

this world, clothed Himself in flesh, lived a perfect life, died a terrible, humiliating death as the Son of God, and rose again three days later to offer sinners of the world the free gift of grace. There is now a way for redemption from sins, justification before the Father, and hope that will never be put to shame.

This is the amazing truth about Christianity and the biggest thing that sets it apart from all other religions and faiths. Paul addresses the necessity of the resurrection in his letter to the church in Corinth when he said, ***"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain"*** (1 Corinthians 15:14). If Christ has not risen from the grave then none of this matters. The preaching of the pastors at this church is in vain. Those that spend their time serving and loving others are in vain. The outreach that we do at this church to save lost souls is in vain. Everything about the Christian faith is reduced to nothing if Jesus Christ stayed dead 2,000 years ago.

Paul even goes on further to say, ***"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied"*** (1 Corinthians 15:19). If we put our hope in Christ only to get through the struggles of this life, and He has not risen, then we are to be the most pitied people on this planet. However, our God did not stay dead. He rose again, and now we have a hope that we are to share with everyone, that there is a Savior who died for the sins of the world, that whoever would believe in His name shall not perish but have everlasting life.

AS HE SAID

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 4

Ferdinand Sanders

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be amongst the crowd during the crucifixion of Jesus or being one of the ones to see that the stone was rolled away? Whenever I read these passages, I often find myself wondering what would I feel or see - what would the setting be? I would imagine feeling entirely heartbroken seeing Jesus on the cross, unable to even look. I would sense the dark clouds, empty streets - feeling lost and defeated. I have often imagined the morning of the third day. Something is different. The streets are still empty and the weight was still very present, but there is work to be done as life presses on. I imagine it is a quiet morning, the warm sun is peeking over the trees, and dew is still on the ground. This is the setting that I often picture when I think of Mary Magdalene approaching the tomb that morning. Across the four Gospels (although we get some variance on details) we get one glorious message - the tomb is empty! However, as I read through these verses, two things stand out to me.

In each of the four Gospels, we see doubt and disbelief from the very closest followers of Jesus that this really happened. Luke captures this perfectly when he writes, ***"These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them"*** (Luke 24:11). They were even in the same place as Jesus, in person, and still doubted! In Matthew's Gospel, he accounts a conversation between the group of women who went to the tomb and an angel, in which the angel says, ***"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said"*** (Matthew 28:5-6). Those three words at the end really stand out to me - ***"As He said."*** The resurrection of Jesus was prophesied all throughout

the Old Testament. It was not a secret! Between you and me, I am always a little encouraged and comforted when I see the disciples miss things or struggle as they were His closest followers and were with Him in person (John 20:29). On a serious note, it made me wonder, "How often do we read the promises of God in Scripture but do not believe it is actually for us?" To take it one step further, "How many times do we doubt or disbelieve the living work of God in our lives?"

The second thing that stood out to me was an interesting interaction that John records of Mary Magdalene at the tomb. In John chapter 20, we read, ***"They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus"*** (John 20:13-14). She did not even recognize Jesus. She thought He was a gardener! Now, I have no doubt that this was a very confusing interaction, not to mention after over 48 hours of weeping and grieving, but as I read that Jesus was standing right in front of Mary having a conversation with her, but Mary failed to recognize Him - it caused me to pause and examine myself. If Jesus was standing right in front of me, would I recognize Him? How often do we let the circumstances of our situation cause us to miss what God is doing, or how He is moving in our lives? A lot of times we can focus so much on what is in front of us, that we may miss "who" is in front of us.

With all this in mind, it is a reminder for us all to be in the living, breathing Word of God. That is how He reveals Himself to us. When we know what His Word says, we will better see when He is "right in front of us" through His promises and His work in our lives.

JUST AS HE TOLD YOU

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 5

Jill Osmon

The resurrection of Jesus is profoundly significant to our Christian faith. We worship and serve a LIVING Savior. I have always found the story of Mary and the disciples discovering that Jesus had risen from the grave fascinating. He had told them multiple times that He would not stay dead, that He would be resurrected, yet I think they did not quite believe it, even though they had seen Him bring others back from death.

Mary Magdalene and the disciples were in deep mourning, so much so they seemed to have forgotten all that Jesus taught them. He had told them, I will rise on the third day, yet on that third day, the disciples were still in hiding and Mary was making her way to His grave to treat His body. It is such a clear picture of what we do sometimes. God tells us, “I am faithful, good, and loving” but we move about in our lives as if we cannot be sure that it is true.

Can you picture it? Mary was heading to the tomb to treat a body that she had been told would not be there, and when she got there, the shock of the truth was realized. Look at Mark 16:7, ***“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, JUST AS HE TOLD YOU”*** (Emphasis mine). Also, look at Luke 24:6, ***“He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee?”*** Mary and His disciples were moving about as if what Jesus had told them might not be true, they had a contingency plan. Mary walked to His grave to treat His body just in case he had not risen. His disciples were hiding just in case He had not risen from the grave like He said He would.

Yet, here we are, so much like them, living our lives with a contingency, "Well if God does not show up I should be prepared to handle it myself." How would our lives look different if we simply live a life without a spiritual contingency? Would we live more boldly? Would we live a life that is more faithful to God?

What contingency do you have in your life? What is the one that you hold onto just in case God does not show up as He promises? Maybe, just maybe, if you released those and fully embraced the promises of God, you could see what He has for you.

I love the verse in Isaiah, ***"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand"*** (Isaiah 41:10 CSB). Can we live without a contingency and rest in His promises that He is holding us in His righteous hand?

WHERE IS OUR HOPE?

THE RESURRECTION, DEVOTION 6

James Mann

One of the things that people begin to learn as they study the Bible more and more is that words that we commonly use today do not have the same meaning as they once had, or more specifically, still have in the biblical context. One of those words is the concept of "hope." Today we use this term in reference to an outcome we desire to happen or not happen. We can think of situations like "I hope it does not rain today" or "I hope the Lions do not embarrass our state too much this season." These are things that may or may not happen. Hope in the biblical context is a term in reference to the expectation of an outcome happening because God said it will. To a believer, this "hope" does not have a chance of failing, and there is something amazing about that.

There is something that is quite troublesome that occurs following the death of Jesus. It is as if all of His followers lose this hope and begin to just go on with life, as usual, mourning the loss of a loved one. This hope of His resurrection seems to be almost forgotten about. His followers watched Him die and then there was a period, the story was over, and they were ready to move on. We see this hope lost in Peter as he denies Jesus. Something that stands out to me the most is that the denial and doubting of Jesus follow Peter even after Jesus' death. Upon hearing that Jesus has risen from the dead, Peter does not believe the words he is hearing and has to see them for himself.

Luke 24:11-12 records, ***"But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen***

cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened."

Why was it so difficult for Peter to just believe the words of these women? We often read this and think Peter is terrible for what he has done. He lost hope in Jesus at the first sign of failure. I like to think, "What would I have done in this situation?" I want to say I would stand stronger, but the reality is I probably would not. We have to remember that Peter did not know how the story ends yet. He does not have the same luxury that we do. We are lucky that we have seen the writings of His resurrection to know that this whole concept of Christianity was not lost at His death on the cross; but instead, it truly began. His death gave us the ability to have hope in Him in the past, the present, and the future. We must read His Word and have hope that what He says is going to come true will and not lose that hope at the first sign of struggle.

LESSON SEVEN

THE RESURRECTION

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

"He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."
Matthew 28:6-7 (NKJV)

On October 1, 1932, during the third game of the World Series at Chicago's Wrigley Field, the "Great Bambino" (Babe Ruth) stepped up to the plate and famously lifted his arm and pointed into the stands. He was "calling his shot." In what may be the most famous moment in baseball history, the "Babe" pointed and then delivered hitting a towering home run into the stands on the next swing of the bat. Everyone was stunned as the "Babe" solidified himself as the greatest hitter in history.

1. Did you play sports as a child? Did you have any special "heroic" moments?

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_____

Jesus Christ did the same. He called His "shot" if you will. He regularly told His disciples that He would suffer and die, but that it would not end there. He would then "point up" and "call His shot" telling them that afterward, He would rise from the dead. He was extremely specific. It would be three days. Three days later, He would be alive and they would see Him again.

2. What are some of the passages where He spoke of His death or resurrection?

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Imagine what it was like for His disciples on the night He was taken into custody. Imagine the questions they must have asked, both inwardly and outwardly. “How could this happen?” “Was He not supposed to overthrow the ones who have taken Him?” “Why is He allowing this?” They may even have thought (what John the Baptist seems to have wavered in), “Maybe we were wrong about Him. Maybe He is not who we thought He was.” Remember that when Jesus was taken, His disciples all fled.

3. What other kinds of thoughts could have gone through their minds?

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Now consider what it must have been like for them to hear about His trial that next morning, a “guilty” verdict, the sentence of death. Were His disciples there to see and hear Pilate’s presentation of Him and Barabbas to the crowd? How it must have seemed like things were slipping away and out of control as they heard the crowd begin to shout, ***“Crucify Him!”*** Then He was taken. No one intervened. No plan was enacted. Nothing was stopping this.

The next time they would have seen Him would have been on the Via Dela Rosa street as their “hope,” the Lord Jesus, now freshly “opened” by the leather strands of the flagellum passed by them carrying His cross. I wonder at that point if there could have been any hope left in their hearts? If so, it was surely dashed as they watched nails driven into His wrists and feet and the cross carrying the One they loved raised into its place. All hope was lost. Every Jew knew it well. No one escaped Roman crucifixion alive.

4. What all did Jesus go through physically for us?

_____
_____
_____

The sky darkened, lightning flashed, and earthquakes shook the ground in what appeared to be the Earth revolting against what was happening, and yet, He hung there without relief and without rescue. In horror they watched as He took His final breath, shouting, ***"It is finished."*** He slumped into lifelessness. He had died. It was over. That was it.

5. What was meant by Jesus saying, ***"It is finished?"***

_____
_____
_____

6. Do you think the disciples understood the significance of that phrase at the time?

_____
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What was it like to walk home that day? What sense did life make now? Did anything matter at all in those following days? Knowing the way we as people deal with tragedy and loss, I wonder if depression or despair claimed some of them. Were they able to get out of bed? Were they able to sleep or eat or even smile? Imagine what it was for them who leaned completely on Him as their hope. They had gone "all in" on Jesus. They had given up their lives to follow Him and help bring about His kingdom. "How do I go back to what it was before Him? Yet, how do I go forward without Him?" If you have ever lost someone you loved deeply, you know what they were feeling. You

have been there. You have felt it. Mark's Gospel tells us that three days later, they are still mourning and weeping.

7. Who have you lost that affected you the most?

_____
_____
_____

8. How are you still affected by the loss?

_____
_____
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Imagine what it was to hear a hysterical woman (Mary Magdalene) blasting through the door shouting through tears that Jesus was "alive." What went through their heads as she told them of the empty tomb, the stone that had been rolled away, that His body was not there, and that an angel had appeared telling her that He was alive and would meet them in Galilee?

9. Do you have any thoughts on what this would have been like?

_____
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We know what happened next. They ran to the tomb to see for themselves but left confused. The internal war must have been fierce. They were fighting against the hope of what could be and the reality of what they had seen. Soon they began to hear that some had seen Him. Reports spread that He appeared to this person and that one. However, I imagine that it was not until He "appeared" to them all in the room that they finally allowed themselves to hope again. There He was. He was the same before and yet different. There were those

eyes so full of love and joy. There was that smile that filled you with hope and happiness. There was the One who had loved them, freed them, led them, cared for them, fed them, and bound up their broken hearts. He was risen, ***"Just as He said."***

10. What would have been your reaction to seeing Him?

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_____
_____

11. What will be your reaction to seeing Him?

_____
_____
_____

He "called His shot." In so doing, our Lord established Himself as the Great One, as the only true God who has total power over life and death and is forever glorified as such! May His name be forever exalted!

CATCH UP

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 1

Pastor Ryan Story

I hate Waldo. It is rather a blunt sentiment to start a devotion with, but I have never truly enjoyed the *Where's Waldo* books. The main reason for this loathing for the red and white striped man is it never seems like my eyes move fast enough to spot him. I know who I am looking for, I know all the tricks to the book by faking you out with the random candy cane thrown in there, and that there are only two pages to scan through, and yet my eyes fail me. The same happens to the two men who were on the road to Emmaus.

I find humor in random places in the Bible and this event makes me chuckle any time I get to read it. Two men, walking down the road, and the resurrected Savior of the world just starts strolling with them. The cherry on top has always been the amazing truth that is on display by the once crucified Jesus who is now walking around. Hard to claim a man undergoing torment three days prior was up strolling around without any sort of miraculous feat happening, but I digress. These two men are chatting about the man who they cannot seem to recognize. Jesus seems to be enjoying the scuttlebutt that is circulating Jerusalem and probes the men for more details.

While the men are causally chatting to Jesus, about Jesus because they do not recognize Him as Jesus, our Lord rebukes the men saying, "And he said to them, ***'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself"*** (Luke 24:25-27). Just in case you missed it, Jesus explains every piece of Scripture that pertained to Him!

Eventually, the men's eyes seem to properly work and they recognized who this random traveler truly was. Luke 24:32 says, ***"They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'"*** Sadly for them, their eyes were just not fast enough to recognize Jesus. Jesus even rebukes them by saying they were ***"slow of heart."***

An amazing truth can be taken away from this moment. There are times in our walk with Christ, that our eyes are too slow to catch Jesus standing right next to us. While we can blame our optical capabilities, the truth is our eyes are slow because our heart is slow. Our hearts are slow to see God move because we are not truly tuned in to seeing Him. Do not miss Jesus like we miss Waldo. Keep your heart and eyes open.

WHAT IF GOD SHOWED UP?

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 2

John Stone

Throughout all of history, the world has been eagerly waiting for God to reveal Himself. I try to imagine what it was like in Eden when God would come and walk with Adam in the evenings (Genesis 3:8-9). Eden, in its pre-fall state, certainly would have been breathtaking but could not possibly compare with a person-to-person relationship with Yahweh, the Creator God. In Exodus 33:18-19, Moses begged God to show him His glory. Like a truly loving Father, knowing that Moses needed the confirmation and encouragement, God covered him with His hand while allowing a brief glimpse as He walked past. Elijah called on God to reveal His power to the nation of Israel when the worshipers of Baal were persecuting him and seemed to have the upper hand. God responded in dramatic fashion with a consuming fire from Heaven and the people repented (1 Kings 18:20-39).

Generation after generation, faithful believers had looked forward in hope to the revealing of the Messiah (Hebrews 11:13-14, 38-39). He would be their Savior and free them from their slavery to the Law. Jesus Christ, the long-awaited One, came and fulfilled the perfect requirements of the Law by dying the sacrificial death to pay for sin (Hebrews 10:10-18). He was raised back to life, making a way for all who would believe (Romans 8:2-4). Even Jesus' eleven disciples, after spending three years with Him, asked Jesus to show them the Father in order to prove Himself to them (John 14).

In the aftermath of His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared several times to different disciples and followers. In these situations, they badly needed encouragement that their belief was not in vain. God (Jesus), only days prior, had been walking with them and now

Eden had been ripped away again. Persecution was just beginning and the forces of evil seemed to be gaining the upper hand. Jesus, knowing what they were about to face, came to them to provide confirmation of their faith and in-person proof of the Gospel message (John 1:1-4).

There are times in our Christian walk that, from our finite perspective, God is missing or is far away. One day we are skipping across mountaintops with Jesus and the next we are languishing in a dry desert, yearning for God (Psalm 63:1). These experiences can cause confusion, doubt, and a desperate need for confirmation. Just like the generations before us, we can get bogged down or dissolute waiting for God to show up and prove Himself.

However, God has not gone anywhere. Like on the road to Emmaus, He has been walking beside you and me the entire time, whether or not we recognize Him. In John 16:7-15, Jesus tells His disciples that it is better for them that He leaves. How can it possibly be to their advantage for Jesus to leave and ascend to Heaven? It is because as He explained, He would send His Spirit throughout the world to encourage and help all believers. We have been given the Spirit of Christ to live inside of us! His mission is to reveal the truth about God's Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13) and give confirmation of our adoption into our Heavenly Father's family (Romans 8:16). The very same Creator God who walked in Eden and walked the road to Emmaus walks with us!

We, as believers, need to recognize our Companion (The Holy Spirit) for who He is and step out confidently in His strength (Galatians 5:16). Instead of passively staring up into the sky (Acts 1:11) waiting for Jesus to return, we need to obey what He commanded: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching***

them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20 NASB).

May we be among the blessed; those who our Savior praises in John 20:29 for believing with unseeing faith. May we boldly live for His glory alone, trusting that, although we do not see Him now, we can feel His presence and power in our lives and one day go and see Him face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12) and walk with Him for eternity.

COMMUNION

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 3

Josh Thayer

Here in Luke 24:13-35, we see two disciples returning to Emmaus. As they are walking, Jesus appears and starts walking with them. They have no clue that this man is Jesus, so they continue along and shoot the breeze as they travel. They eventually get to their location and invite Jesus in to stay the night with them. It is then that they realize who He is. There are two moments here that I want to point out. Jesus uses these moments to share with us how we can encounter Jesus every day.

Luke 24:27 says, ***"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."***

These two disciples had just explained their sadness and confusion with Jesus dying on the cross and then the news of the tomb being empty. Obviously, these men knew the biblical prophecies but they missed one giant point - Jesus' suffering was His path to glory. It was His path to save you and me. So Jesus took them to Scripture here in verse 27 and explained to them what was said in Scripture concerning Himself. (Sidebar, this must have been the most immersive, crazy cool Bible study ever from Jesus Himself. You cannot beat that!) Jesus led them to encounter Himself through the scriptures.

Luke 24:30-31 adds, ***"When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight."***

After their long walk, they finally arrived and they invited this man, aka Jesus, in to stay with them since the day was over. So, naturally, they had to eat dinner. Jesus did what He does best and broke bread and blessed it and began to give it to them. It was at that moment that they realized who this man was. Imagine the embarrassment they must have felt. (They even mentioned some of that in verse 32.) They were walking with Jesus the whole time - not recognizing who He was. All it took was a little communion to remember who Jesus was. Just like today, when we take communion, we use it as a way to remember everything Jesus did for you and for me.

Reading and studying the Bible and taking communion are two of the ways we can encounter Jesus today. Jesus will continue to reveal Himself to us as we study the Word and as we break bread together. I love how sometimes I will read a part of the Bible 100 times, and on the 101st time, I will see something different. That is Jesus revealing Himself to me through the Holy Spirit and the reading of the Word. If you want to experience Jesus, make sure you are doing these things on a regular basis.

WDYSTIA

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 4

Kenny Hovis

In the 1990s, WWJD bracelets became a very popular accessory for many people claiming to be Christians. It was a contemporary grassroots movement that was brought to life by a youth leader at Calvary Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. Janie Tinklenberg was challenging teenagers faced with decisions (moral or spiritual) in their lives to ask themselves the question, "What Would Jesus Do?" Although there is not anything wrong with asking that question, I believe there is a question that Jesus asked that is way more important to have an answer to, "Who Do You Say That I Am?"

In Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks His disciples, ***"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*** They respond in verse 14, ***"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*** Jesus desires to hear the disciples' opinion of who He is. In their answer, they do not say who they think He is, just what others say. So He presents the question to them again but makes it more personal. In verse 15, ***"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'"*** Peter blurts out quickly in verse 16, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."***

Luke chapter 24 recounts a similar occurrence after Jesus' resurrection. In verses 13-17, the Bible says, ***"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. And He said to them, 'What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.'"***

Without actually asking the same question He had asked Peter previously, He was still looking for them to tell Him Who they were referring to. Although they were kept from recognizing Him earlier, Jesus reveals His true identity to them in verse 31, ***"And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him."***

Everyone will be asked this question that is a moral imperative, "Who is Jesus Christ?" The answers vary from a good man, prophet, teacher, and magician to the Son of God. Do you believe He is everything He claimed? Jesus is quoted in John 14:6, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me!"*** In Revelation 22:13, He says, ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*** In John 11:25, He says, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."*** This list could go on and on.

In Romans 10:9, the Bible says, ***"Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*** In other words, if we confess with our mouths exactly who Jesus is to us, and believe that God did literally raise Him from the dead, we receive life with Him for eternity.

So is it a bad thing to ask ourselves "What Would Jesus Do" when faced with important life choices? My answer is a conditional, "No." It is good as long as you first ask yourself the question, "Who Do You Say That I Am?" Then, you will have a better chance of knowing what Jesus would actually do. This is because you will know Him personally and He will not hide Himself or the truth from you. Luke 8:17 adds, ***"For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light."***

So, what is the correct response when asking ourselves the question, “What would Jesus do?” I believe Jesus Himself answers it in John 8:31-32 where it says, ***“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”***

BESIDE YOURSELF

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 5

Pat Bedell

When I was in college, I took both psychology and sociology courses which opened a new perspective on viewing interactions of those around me. I learned about body language, physical nuances when people get nervous, mental stress when others are watching you perform tasks, and other interesting reactions to certain situations. All of these, with many other variables, are what make everyone unique in perspective and responsiveness in everyday life.

When we are walking down the road of life as an unbeliever, we find ourselves living a carefree and sin-filled way. I never cared to get an accountability partner to help with any of my struggles. Also, being a “macho” early twenties male, I thought I did not need any help from anyone and I could find my own way. We, as broken and sinful people, cannot do it alone. We need to invite God into our lives like Cleopas invited Jesus into their home in Luke chapter 24. Only He can give us comfort and peace and deliver us from sin.

Once you have invited Jesus into your life, repentance and transformation need to begin. All of the expectations that you had for your life need to be surrendered to Him and He will make the way for your life. Your vision in the days, months, and years ahead is nothing compared to the knowledge and provision of God. He has your greatest story already written and He will lead the way for your life if you let Him.

One of the most difficult, yet most important, parts of letting God into your life is seeking His perspective on your life. Referencing my psychology and sociology bit at the beginning of this devotional, this could be one of the most daunting and frightening tasks. Putting

your pride aside, find yourself an accountability partner to help you overcome addictions and struggles. While you are living your life, always seek God's counsel and be meaningful in your prayers. He is always watching your thoughts and actions. Knowing that helps keep your focus on God and not on the flesh.

The hardest lesson that I have learned in my walk with God is trusting His timing. In today's society, instant gratification is the norm and with every other aspect of my life, if I want it, I just go get it. I have learned that with patience and persistence, God provides something so much better. Submit to God's will and timing in your life and He will be faithful to His Word.

When you are living your life and have a moment of temptation or need provision on whatever it is you may be struggling with, look beside you. God is always there and yearns for your reliance on Him. He yearns for your heart and soul to be with Him for eternity. He yearns to walk beside you for the rest of the days of your life both here on Earth and in Heaven.

EXPECTATIONS

ROAD TO EMMAUS, DEVOTION 6

Shawna Johnson

Have you ever gone somewhere or experienced an event and it was nothing like you expected? I am going to guess that you have and that you are thinking of that moment right now. What type of response did you have? Was it way better than you anticipated or was it a total bummer?

I hate to admit this, but oftentimes I get these ideas in my head or have high expectations, just to find myself working through disappointment shortly after, needing to remind myself of all the beauty that still surrounds me.

This reminds me of the disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. Please read Luke 24:13-35.

A couple of disciples are walking along discussing all of the events that just surrounded the crucifixion of Jesus. Scripture says their faces are downcast. They have been told about His goodness and have placed their hope in Him, but at this moment, things are not going quite as they have expected though they have been told the truth.

I have had to learn over the last several years that my feelings and emotions do not equal truth. I must tell myself this statement over and over. My expectations almost never match God's plan! However, His ideas are always way better than mine! Oh, how quickly I forget as I walk along my "road to Emmaus."

Romans 12:2 says, ***"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you***

may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Our mind (God's truth) needs to take charge of our emotions and not vice versa. All too often our expectations are based on things around us (what the world approves) as opposed to God's promises.

Let these disciples be a reminder to us to stand on God's truth and put our hope in Him no matter what.

OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."***

REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, "We don't go to church, we are the Church." We believe that as God's people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

GATHER

Weekend Gatherings at The River Church are all about Jesus, through singing, giving, serving, baptizing, taking the Lord's Supper, and participating in messages that are all about Jesus and bringing glory to Him. We know that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it's not only a refresher it's bringing life-change.

GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***"all things in common."*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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