

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

# Being with Jesus

VOL 1, JANUARY–APRIL 2021

# PLUS

NAME:

Being with  
**PASSION**

Going with  
**PURPOSE**

Doing with  
**POWER**

## SSMC's VISION

Transforming Lives, Expanding His Kingdom

Dear SSMC Church Family,

We first started *Being With Jesus* (BWJ) in 2017 taking the cue from Mark 3:14-15. Since those days of humble beginnings and with tentative baby steps, over the past four years as a Church we have read through the entire Bible – both Old and New Testaments as well as reading the Bible Topically or Doctrinally. It has been an adventure and walk of faith for many, if not all of us.

According to the BWJ Feedback survey I did Oct 2020, 92.6% of the 242 responses used at least one copy of the BWJ, growing slowly over the years with 87.5% rating it 7 or higher, which is very encouraging. 46% used it at least 4 times/week moving up to 73.7% at least 2 times/week. What I was especially delighted with were the 52.2% who responded that because of BWJ, they have read through both the Old and New Testaments for the FIRST time – all Glory to the Lord.

Personally, as your Pastor, it has been a very challenging and yet enlightening journey of faith over the past four years. Looking back at my Pastoral ministry since the year 2000, if there is just ONE THING I wish I had done when I first started, *Being With Jesus* would be my pick. I think we are the only Church that I know of that has a Church-wide Devotional Reading Program that is linked with our Pulpit ministry as well as our Discipleship Group Word Discussion – truly if it had not been with the Lord's help, we would not have come so far.

Come 2021, the Church Leadership has unanimously decided to continue with the *Being With Jesus* Devotional Readings with some changes, taking into account the comments many of you made through the feedback survey.

### *What to expect in BWJ 2021*

1. Reading through the entire **New Testament** again but in a **Chronological** order. This will be especially evident in the Gospels since many of the accounts overlap. When you read the same Gospel accounts together, you will better appreciate the different Gospel writers, their particular emphasis and their intended audience. Any apparent "differences" in the various Gospel accounts will also be easily noticeable; where necessary, short explanatory notes will be included.
2. **Devotional Reading** for the Day. We have included a short Devotional Reading for each day that is related to the Bible Passage for that day. The Devotional Readings on the whole will be more Asian focused and Asian in context. This hopefully will make it easier for the reader to understand, relate and apply.

NB: The Devotional Readings are taken from published material and the source references will be listed at the bottom of the page.

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3. There will be **Reflective statements and questions** at the end of each Devotional reading as an aid to that day's reading. These can also service as Guides for DG Word discussion and sharing.
4. Our BWJ mnemonic **P.R.A.Y.** – Pray – Read & Reflect – Apply – Yield has been expanded to refer to: **PRAY & PRAISE – READ & REFLECT – ASK & APPLY – YIELD & 'YAKHAL'**. 'YAKHAL' is one of two Hebrew words for HOPE and ultimately it is our HOPE in Jesus that will make all that difference in all our lives. All of us must live our everyday lives with that Precious, Living, Blessed Hope ever present, as an unshakeable anchor to our Faith. So at the end of the day not only must we YIELD to God's Word and promptings but also have the assurance of 'YAKHAL' / HOPE that at the end, it will turn out well in the Lord.
5. BWJ 2021 will come in 4-monthly editions and will include **Extra Explanatory Notes** on key Calendar and especially Church Calendar Events e.g. Ash Wednesday or Maundy Thursday. Hopefully, this will give everyone a better understanding and appreciation of Historical / Traditional Church Practices.
6. For each day's Bible Reading portion, I have generally tried to keep to within 20 to 40 verses except for certain exceptions. For those who want more in-depth reading and study, I am putting together a **BWJ Plus edition** which will have an additional page of more in-depth material. This will be available only in softcopy, downloadable from our Church website.

Lastly, some may ask: "Why are we reading through the New Testament again? We have already done it in 2017." I would like to say that the Bible is timeless and inexhaustible. Many greater minds and intellects than yours or mine have spent entire lifetimes to study the Bible or even just parts of the Bible. Even then, there is always something new and fresh to glean and discover from God's Word. The Rhema Word of God is always living and active, and every time we read the Word, there are sure to be hidden nuggets waiting to be discovered.

Come 2021, let us together as the SSMC Church Family embark once again on this exciting adventure with God in and through His Word. Let's **P.R.A.Y.: PRAY & PRAISE – READ & REFLECT – ASK & APPLY – YIELD & 'YAKHAL'**.

*Blessed BWJing 2021*

*Ps Swee Ming*

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### Why Are There Four Gospels?

By Don Stewart, *Blue Letter Bible*

Is there something special about the number four?  
Why not more or less gospels?

### Each Gospel Was Written For A Distinct Purpose

It is important that we understand these sources and what they are trying to accomplish. The Gospels are neither biographies of the life of Christ nor are they a disinterested record of certain events in His life. Each writer wants the reader to know the truth about Jesus and become a disciple. To accomplish this purpose, each Gospel is aimed at a certain audience and each writer is selective of the events he includes.

### Matthew

The Gospel according to Matthew is aimed primarily at the Jew, the person familiar with the Old Testament. Jesus is portrayed as Israel's Messiah, the King of the Jews. Matthew records how the promises God made in the Old Testament, with regard to the Messiah, are fulfilled in Jesus. Matthew begins his book by stating the family tree of Jesus: *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham"* (Matthew 1:1).

This genealogy demonstrates that Jesus is the rightful heir to the kingdom that was promised to David and his descendants and sets the tone for the book. The remainder of the book emphasizes that Jesus has the credentials to be Israel's Messiah.

### Mark

Mark, on the other hand, is not writing to the Jew or to those who are familiar with the Old Testament. His audience is basically those people in the Roman Empire who are unfamiliar with the religion of the Jews. Consequently, Mark's Gospel does not start with the birth of Jesus or any family tree that demonstrates Jesus as a fulfillment of prophecy. It starts, rather, with the beginning of Jesus' ministry: *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"* (Mark 1:1).

Mark's is a Gospel of action. Jesus is portrayed as the servant of the Lord doing that job that God has sent Him to do. Thus, the emphasis is on doing, and Mark shows that Jesus got the job done. Consequently, Mark's gospel records more miracles of Jesus than Matthew, Luke, or John.

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### Luke

Luke was written to those more intellectually minded. He states his purpose in the book's prologue: *Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account* (Luke 1:1-3).

Luke is not writing as an eyewitness but as one who is recording eyewitness testimonies. His portrayal of Jesus is as the perfect man. Hence, he focuses on those events in Jesus' life that stress His humanity. The Greeks in their art and literature were always looking for the perfect man. The Gospel of Luke reveals that man.

### John

John, the writer of the fourth gospel, was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. The things he recorded were for the purpose of establishing the fact that Jesus was the eternal God who became a man. John wanted his readers to exercise faith toward Jesus.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30,31).

When John states his purpose he also states that he is selective in what he has recorded.

### Summing Up The Testimony Of The Four Gospels

We can sum up the testimony of the four gospels in the following manner.

- In Matthew, Jesus is the Son of David (Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 1:1)
- In Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man (Zechariah 3:8; Mark 8:36)
- In Luke, He is the Son of Adam (Zechariah 6:12; Luke 3:38)
- In John, Jesus is the Son of God (Isaiah 4:2; 7:14; John 3:16)

### Summary

The four gospels were written to cover four aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus. Each gospel writer wrote from a different perspective to a different audience. They each looked at the character of Jesus from different angles. Thus the number of four arises from the four different perspectives we have given about Christ's life and ministry.

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Each author is presenting a different aspect of Jesus' character. In Matthew, Jesus is the king; in Mark, He is the servant; in Luke, He is the perfect man; in John, He is God. This is because each writer addressed a different type of audience.

The Gospels are not intended to be a history or biography of the life of Christ in the modern sense of the term. Each author is selective in what he portrays. Jesus did many more things than the Gospels record as John testified.

When the Gospels are compared with each other we get an overall portrait of Jesus. He was God from all eternity who came down to earth as the perfect man. He was the Messiah of Israel, the King of the Jews, the one who did the job that God sent Him to do. This is the testimony of the four Gospels.

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_188.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_188.cfm)

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## GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

For your devotion, please try to use a easily understandable Bible version eg. NIV, ESV or NLT.

**PRAY** as you begin your devotion followed by a time of **PRAISE** – a simple chorus, scripture set to song or even a familiar hymn, whatever the Holy Spirit may impress upon your spirit. Some people find soft soothing background worship music helpful for their devotion.

**READ** the Bible Passage(s) for the day aloud if you can and then proceed to read the short devotional for the day. This will help to give a better understanding of the particular passage under consideration.

Take time to **REFLECT** on the words, the short devotional and also the 'guiding thoughts/ questions' at the end.

Try to see the connection between the Scripture Passage(s) and the Daily Key Topic and Key Verse.

**ASK** the famous "W's" questions : *Who! Where! When! Why! What!* Please take special note of REPETITIONS, SIMILARITIES and CONTRAST as well as sentences beginning with - BUT, THEREFORE, BECAUSE, IF and THEN.

**APPLY** – ask *How!* – How does it apply to me today? How is it relevant to my life, family, work, church or nation ? How, How, How!

Sometimes it's also helpful to ask :

- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a promise to claim and keep?
- What encouragement or comfort may I gain?
- What new perspective is God showing me?

Lastly is there any area of my life that I need to **YIELD** to the Word – my behaviour, speech, action, thoughts, priorities etc. Reaffirm the '**YAKHAL**' or HOPE that we all have in Jesus Christ through His Precious Word - the Bible, written, preserved and kept throughout the ages.

## GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Any thoughts, comments, impressions or even questions that come into your heart and/ or your mind – please record it in the blank space provided.

Your BWJ book is PRIVATE and only you will read it. You can be totally honest and transparent with God especially if you have doubts, fears, even confusion and outright anger – write it down and lay it before God.

Rest assured that Almighty God is much much bigger than whatever doubts, fears or anger that you may have or feel.

Close by being still in the Lord's Presence, asking Him to reveal to you what is that ONE THING you need to learn and apply from today's reading to bring about life transformation?

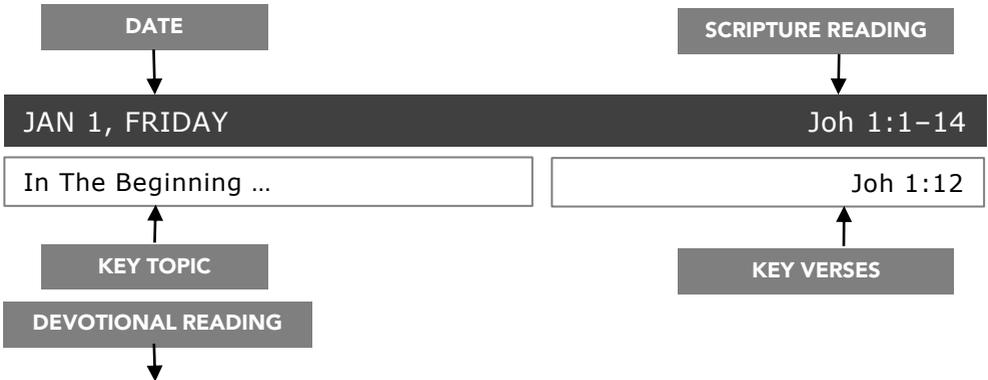
"To the degree & to the extent that I yield and submit to the Holy Spirit in my life, God's Kingdom will come more and more into my life, my family, my Discipleship Group, my work, my Church & my community."

### Closing Thanksgiving Prayer

- *Pray for obedience and strength to faithfully work out the ONE THING that you have been reminded by His Holy Spirit.*
- *Bring to the Lord any prayer request that you may have for yourself, family, church, work, friends in the area of health, guidance, relationships, protection, provision etc.*
- *Good to write down key prayer items as a reminder of what and when you brought them before the Lord.*

# GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

The daily readings for BWJ 2021 has been formatted as such:



After the Apollo XV mission, Colonel James Irwin related some of the high points of his experience. He told of weightless bodies floating free in the space capsule, the rising crescent of the earth as seen from the moon, and the triumphal splashdown before a watching world.

Irwin also spoke of the impact the experience had on his spiritual life. He said that from the lunar surface he sensed both the glory of God and the plight of earthbound man. As he came back to earth, he realized he couldn't content himself with being merely a celebrity. He would have to be a servant, telling his fellowman of a better way to live. Irwin concluded by saying that if we think it a great event to go to the moon, how much greater is the wonder that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ!

Because man walked on the moon, science and technology have made tremendous advances. But because God walked on earth, we know both our origin and our destiny. We can know our Creator personally (Joh 1:1,14,18), and we can live in His light (v.9). Through Jesus' sinless life and sacrificial death we have the joy of sins forgiven and an abundant life—all because God walked on earth.

By **Mart DeHaan**

**Down from His glory, ever-living story,  
My God and Savior came, and Jesus was His name.  
Born in a manger, to His own a stranger,  
A Man of sorrows, tears, and agony. - Booth-Clibborn  
God made His home with us that we might make our home with God.**

**REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS & QUESTION(S)**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

**JOURNAL YOUR REFLECTIONS, IMPRESSIONS, THOUGHTS, LESSONS HERE.**

**ALSO PRAYER NEEDS FOR YOURSELF & OTHERS**

**SOURCE REFERENCE**

In The Beginning ...

Joh 1:12

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*God made His home with us that we might make our home with God.*

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 1, FRIDAY

JN 1:1-14

In The Beginning...

Jn 1:12

Why does John the Evangelist begin his gospel with a description of the Word of God? The “word of God” was a common expression among the Jews. God’s word in the Old Testament is an active, creative, and dynamic word. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” (Psalm 33:6). “He sends forth his commands to the earth; his word runs swiftly” (Psalm 147:15). “Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces” (Jeremiah 23:29)? God’s word is also equated with his wisdom. “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Proverbs 3:19).

John describes Jesus as God’s creative, life-giving and light-giving word that has come to earth in human form. Jesus is the wisdom and power of God which created the world and sustains it who assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. Jesus became truly man while remaining truly God. “What he was, he remained, and what he was not he assumed” (from an early church antiphon for morning prayer). Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother. From the time of the Apostles the Christian faith has insisted on the incarnation of God’s Son “who has come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2)

Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great early church fathers (330-395 AD) wrote: *Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?*

Christians never cease proclaiming anew the wonder of the Incarnation. *The Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. The Son of God ...worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin (Gaudium et Spes).*

If we are going to behold the glory of God we will do it through Jesus Christ. Jesus became the partaker of our humanity so we could be partakers of his divinity (2 Peter 1:4). God’s purpose for us, even from the beginning of his creation, is that we would be fully united with Him. When Jesus comes God is made known as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By our being united in Jesus, God becomes our Father and we become his sons and daughters. Do you thank the Father for sending his only begotten Son to redeem you and to share with you his glory?

“Almighty God and Father of light, your eternal Word leaped down from heaven in the silent watches of the night. Open our hearts to receive his life and increase our vision with the rising of dawn, that our lives may be filled with his glory and his peace.”

*Assurance of salvation is not in what you know but who you know*

JAN 2, SATURDAY

Luk 1:1-38

Truth versus Fiction

Luk 1:38

We live in a world where the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is constantly under attack. Whether it takes the form of a film like 'The Last Temptation of Christ', or the book 'The DaVinci Code' or the documentary 'The Lost Tomb of Jesus', we are nevertheless faced with an unrepentant pagan world that seeks to impose its questionable facts on the serious seeker of truth.

It is important to persuade people that Christianity is true. How does Luke do this? He undertakes a very heavy task. He writes a book to Theophilus so that Theophilus may know the certainty of the things he has heard. Luke refers to three important facts. First, he says that his narrative is based on thorough and careful research (v.3). Second, he stresses his sources of information, (v.1) and there were many. Finally, these narratives conform to what the eyewitnesses have reported. But even better, he has had direct access to the eyewitnesses. Mary and the apostles.

Have we had doubts or questioned our beliefs when in conversation with our friends? Or have doubts arisen due to what we read and hear? If we are to take the Gospel to an unbelieving world, our story must be based on a thorough understanding of God's word and its application in our lives. We need to be like the Bereans who 'examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true' (Acts 17:11). Then having done our part, let us allow the Holy Spirit to do His work, for as Lydia listened to Paul's compelling sermon by the river, 'the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message' (Acts 16:14). The Holy Spirit works in the heart of hearers and convicts them of the truth.

**Pray that God will use you as an effective instrument to share His Gospel with your non-Christian family members and friends.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 2, SATURDAY

Lk 1:1-38

Births Foretold

Lk 1:38

Do you listen for God's voice? Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Zechariah was a godly man who was tuned to God's voice. He was born into a priestly family and it was his privilege to be chosen to enter the inner court of the temple to offer sacrifice to God. Luke records that the people wondered at Zechariah's delay and were amazed that he was speechless when he withdrew from the inner sanctuary. They rightly perceived that he had a special encounter with God. God's angelic messenger greeted Zechariah with a blessing beyond his expectations. "Your prayer is heard! You will have a son! And his mission will be great for all of Israel." Now that seemed like a lot for Zechariah to take in all at once. Could God really do a miracle for his barren wife, Elizabeth? The angel somewhat wisely put Zechariah in his place before God's mighty action. He became speechless until the day the infant was dedicated to the Lord and given the name, John. When God draws us into his presence, he wants us to be still and quiet before him so we can listen to his voice as he speaks to our hearts and reveals his mind to us. Do you listen attentively to the Lord and do you ponder his word in your heart with trust and confidence? In the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, the angel explains to Zechariah the role his son is to play in preparing the way for the Messiah. John will be great in the sight of God. He will live as a Nazarite (see Numbers 6) -- a person set apart for the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even within his mother's womb. And he shall be sent to the people of God, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers and children to God and one another, by turning the "disobedient to the wisdom of the just." The name John means "the Lord is gracious". When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith "alive" to his promises. Do you pray that "the hearts of parents and children may be turned to God and one another"?

*"Lord Jesus, you bring hope and restoration to your people. Restore and strengthen Christian family life today. Help me to love and serve my family. May your love rule in all my relationships and remove any barriers to peace and harmony."*

Do you know the favor of the Lord? God lavishes his grace upon all who believe in him. He shows his favor to the lowly, to those who are humble and receptive to his word. We see the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God. As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21). This child to be conceived in her womb is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He will be "great" and "Son of the Most High" and "King" (Luke 1:32-33), and his name shall be called "Jesus", which means "the Lord saves". "He will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The promise of an everlasting kingdom to the house of David (Isaiah 9:6-7) is fulfilled in the King to be born in Mary's womb.

How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? She knows she is hearing something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that God has done previously. Her question, "how shall this be, since I have no husband" is not prompted by doubt or skepticism, but by wonderment! She is a true hearer of the Word and she immediately responds with faith and trust. Mary's prompt response of "yes" to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly.

Mary is the "mother of God" because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. When we pray the Nicene Creed we state our confession of faith in this great mystery: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man". God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heart-felt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the help, strength, and means to respond. We can either yield to his grace or resist and go our own way. Do you believe in God's promises and do you yield to his grace?

"Heavenly Father, you offer us abundant grace, mercy, and forgiveness through your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to live a grace-filled life as Mary did by believing in your promises and by giving you my unqualified "yes" to your will and plan for my life."

<http://dailyscripture.servantsoftheword.org/readings/luke15.htm>  
<http://dailyscripture.servantsoftheword.org/readings/luke126.htm>

JAN 3, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JAN 4, MONDAY Luk 1:39-56

**Break Into Song!**

**Luk 1:46**

*'The most revolutionary document in the world' - that's how missionary and preacher. E. Stanley Jones described this song.*

Mary, the unmarried, impoverished, village girl, a nobody by the world's standards, could have allowed thoughts of rejection, ostracism, or stoning for adultery to fill her mind. Instead, she burst into a song of praise. She sang of a God who reached down and touched the pain of His people, who lifted the victims of economic poverty and political oppression and drew them into His arms, who demoted the proud, deposed the powerful and corrupt rulers and removed the greedy and the rich. Nothing had changed in Palestine. The Romans still oppressed the people, and poverty was rampant. How could her soul be bursting with joy when there was so much reason to tremble and fear? Foolish as it may seem, Mary had implicit trust in God.

It is the same God who is with us today. He never changes. When God is in control of our lives. He revolutionizes the way we think, the way we act and the way we live. We will no longer look at our situation, our surroundings and the world from our perspective but from His perspective. You may be in a situation of economic and financial oppression and life seems bleak and hopeless. There is so much you want from life but it eludes you. There are forces at work that are beyond your control. What can you do? Do what Mary did. Take your eyes off your present situation and look at the God who remembers, feeds, and exalts the poor. Worship Him. In His time He will open the windows of heaven and give you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

**Let us ask God for help to tread the road ahead, knowing that whatever pain He allows in our lives has a purpose. Sing a song of joy and faith in the Lord.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 4, MONDAY

Lk 1:39-56

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Lk 1:46

Do you recognize the indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus in your life?

Blessed are you if you see and recognize the Lord with the "eyes of faith". The word "blessed" [*makarios* in Greek] literally means "happiness" or "beatitude". It describes a kind of joy which is serene and untouchable, self-contained, and independent from chance and changing circumstances of life. There is a certain paradox for those "blessed" by the Lord. Mary was given the "blessedness" of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross.

Anselm, a great teacher and Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109), spoke these words in a homily: "Without God's Son nothing could exist; without Mary's son, nothing could be redeemed." To be chosen by God is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Mary received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. Her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life given over to God in faith and trust?

What is the significance of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus? When Elizabeth greeted Mary and recognized the Messiah in Mary's womb they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promise to give a Savior. What a marvelous wonder for God to fill not only Elizabeth's heart with his Holy Spirit but the child in her womb as well. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the King to be born.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Do you live in the joy and knowledge of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit and give me joy in seeking you more closely. Increase my faith in all your promises, my hope in the joys of heaven, and my love for You as my All."*

JAN 5, TUESDAY Luk 1:57-80

The Gift of Praise

Luk 1:80a

Zechariah is asked to name his eight-day-old son. He writes 'John' and is instantly released in his speech and hearing. He immediately praises God and prophesies of the coming Messiah. Having been deaf and dumb for nine months, one would have thought that his first words would be of thanks for the safe birth of his son and the restoration of his speech. Instead, filled with the Holy Spirit, he sings of the attributes of a great and wonderful God who has come to deliver His people.

What was Zechariah doing the nine months he was not able to talk? He would probably have spent a good portion of his time studying and meditating on the Old Testament, recollecting the life of Abraham and God’s promises to him and the delivery of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. God’s provision in the desert for forty years, their arrival into the Promised Land and God’s continued protection over the nation of Israel would have passed through his mind. Above all, he would have read again and again the Messianic promises given by the prophets. It is no wonder that when he was released in his speech, his first words were of praise of this awesome, faithful God who had kept His promise to His people.

While we often praise and thank God for the things He has done for us, it is more important to praise God for who He is. Praise means focusing our thoughts on God’s attributes as Creator. Sustainer and Redeemer. It means recognizing, appreciating and expressing His greatness. May we be a people whose lives are filled with praise for the Lord. May we stand under God’s word and allow it to flow through us and over us. May we be transformed by the His word and His Spirit. As we do this, sooner or later, we will come face to face with the living God.

**Meditate on Psalm 103:1-2. Praise and thank God for all that He has done for you,  
your family, your community and your nation.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 5, TUESDAY

Lk 1:57-80

Birth Of John

Lk 1:80a

Are you surprised to see the relatives of Zechariah and Elizabeth quibble over what to name their newborn child? Don't we do the same thing? This child, however has been named from above! And Elizabeth is firm in her faith and determined to see that God be glorified through this child.

The name John means "the Lord is gracious". In the birth of John and in the birth of Jesus the Messiah we see the grace of God breaking forth into a world broken by sin and death and without hope. John's miraculous birth shows the mercy and favor of God in preparing his people for the coming of its Lord and Savior, the Christ. When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith "alive" to his promises.

Do you make your life an offering to God, along with your family, and all that you possess? God wants to fill us with his glory all the days of our lives, from birth through death. Renew the offering of your life to God and give him thanks for his mercy and favor towards you?

*"Lord, you are gracious and forgiving towards us. May I ever seek to bring you glory in all that I do and say."*

Does the proclamation of the gospel fill you with joy and hope? When the Lord comes to redeem us he fills us with his Holy Spirit, the source of our joy and hope in the promises of God. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, blessed the Lord and prophesied the work of redemption that was to be accomplished by the Messiah.

In sending the Messiah God has made a gracious visit to his people to redeem them. This was the mission for which Jesus Christ was sent into the world — to redeem those sold for sin and sold under sin. In the feast of the Incarnation, we celebrate the gracious gift of God in sending his only begotten Son to redeem us.

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may inspire us and fill us with joy and boldness to proclaim the message of the Lord's visitation and redemption.

*"Lord, you have been gracious and merciful towards your people. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may bear witness to the joy of the gospel to those around me."*

JAN 6, WEDNESDAY

Mat 1:1–17; Luk 3:23–38

Genealogy of Jesus

Mat 1:6b

It's easy to miss the significance in a name if you don't know the story behind it. In Luk 3, we find a fascinating detail about a name in the ancestry of Joseph.

The genealogy traces Joseph's line backward all the way to Adam and even to God (v.38). In verse 31 we read: "the son of Nathan, the son of David." Nathan? That's interesting. In 1 Chr 3:5 we learn that Nathan was born to Bathsheba.

Is it coincidence that David named Bathsheba's child Nathan? Recall the backstory. Bathsheba was never supposed to be David's wife. Another Nathan—the prophet—bravely confronted the king for abusing his authority to exploit Bathsheba and murder her husband (see 2 Sam 12).

David accepted the prophet's point-blank rebuke and repented of his horrific offenses. With the healing passage of time, he would name his son Nathan. How appropriate that this was Bathsheba's son, and that he would be one of the ancestors of Joseph, Jesus' earthly dad (Luk 3:23).

In the Bible, we keep finding God's grace woven into everything—even into an obscure name in a seldom-read genealogy. God's grace is everywhere.

By **Tim Gustafson**

**What unlikely places have you seen God's grace showing up in your life? How can focusing on God's big story help you find the grace in your part of that story?**

*Dear God, help us to find Your grace everywhere we look.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

Jan 6, WEDNESDAY

Mat 1:1-17; Luk 3:23-38

## Genealogy of Jesus

Mat 1:6b

How well do you know your spiritual heritage? Genealogies are very important. They give us our roots and help us to understand our heritage. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus traces his lineage from Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, through the line of David, King of Israel.

Jesus the Messiah is the direct descent of Abraham and David, and the rightful heir to David's throne. God in his mercy fulfilled his promises to Abraham and to David that he would send a Savior and a King to rule over the house of Israel and to deliver them from their enemies. When Jacob blessed his sons he foretold that Judah would receive the promise of royalty which we see fulfilled in David (Gen. 49:10). We can also see in this blessing a foreshadowing of God's fulfillment in raising up his anointed King,

Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the hope not only for the people of the Old Covenant but for all nations as well. He is the Savior of the world. In him we receive adoption into a royal priesthood and holy nation as sons and daughters of the living God (see 1 Peter 1:9). Do you recognize your spiritual genealogy, and do you accept God as your Father and Jesus as the sovereign King and Lord of your life?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Messiah and Savior of the world, the hope of Israel and the hope of the nations. Be the ruler of my heart and the king of my home. May there be nothing in my life that is not under your kingship."*

Luke traces Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam, father of the human race. Luke stresses the real humanity of Jesus. Jesus came not just to save the chosen people but all humankind as well. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is the hope not only for the people of the Old Covenant but for all nations as well. He is the Savior of the world. In him we receive adaption as sons and daughters of the living God. Do you recognize your spiritual genealogy, and do you accept God as your Father and Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Luke states that Jesus was thirty years old when he began his public ministry. Why did Jesus spend thirty years in obscurity in the village of Nazareth when his purpose for coming to earth was to save us the world from destruction?

This is significant for at least a couple of reasons. First, it shows that Jesus was responsible and faithful in the mundane duties of family life. Before he embraced public duties, he showed his fidelity and concern for domestic duties. Tradition has it that Joseph died when Jesus was young. Jesus assumed the responsibility for caring for his mother. Jesus taught his disciples the precept that "he who is faithful in little, will be faithful in much" by his personal example. He we want to be fit to carry on the Lord's mission today, we must learn faithfulness in great matters by first being faithful in little matters of home and workday life.

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you're the Savior of the World and the King of all ages. Be the Lord and ruler of my heart and home. May there be nothing in my life that is not under your kingship."*

JAN 7, THURSDAY

Mat 1:18-25; Luk 2:1-20

Birth of Jesus

Isa 7:14

*"Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left . . ."* These hymn lyrics, written by the fifth-century Celtic Christian St. Patrick, echo in my mind when I read Matthew's account of Jesus's birth. They feel like a warm embrace, reminding me that I'm never alone.

Matthew's account tells us that God dwelling with His people is at the heart of Christmas. Quoting Isaiah's prophecy of a child who would be called Immanuel, meaning *"God with us"* (Isa 7:14), Matthew points to the ultimate fulfillment of that prophecy—Jesus, the One born by the power of the Holy Spirit to be God with us.

This truth is so central that Matthew begins and ends his gospel with it, concluding with Jesus's words to His disciples: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Mat 28:20).

St. Patrick's lyrics remind me that Christ is with believers always through His Spirit living within. When I'm nervous or afraid, I can hold fast to His promises that He will never leave me. When I can't fall asleep, I can ask Him to give me His peace. When I'm celebrating and filled with joy, I can thank Him for His gracious work in my life.

Jesus, Immanuel—God with us.

By **Amy Boucher Pye**

**Father God, thank You for sending Your Son to be God with us.  
May we experience Your presence this day.**

*God's love became Incarnate at Bethlehem.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

Jan 7, THURSDAY

Mat 1:18-25; Luk 2:1-20

Birth of Jesus

Isa 7:14

Do you believe that God will fulfill every promise he has made? The prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah spoke words of hope in a hopeless situation for Israel. The Davidic dynasty was corrupt and unfit for a Messianic King. Apostates like King Ahaz (2 Kings 16) and weaklings like Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38) occupied the throne of David. How could God be faithful to his promise to raise up a righteous King who would rule forever over the house of David? The prophets trusted that God could somehow “raise up a righteous shoot” from the stump of Jesse (Isaiah 2:11). Like the prophets we are called “in hope to believe against hope” (Romans 4:18) that God can and will fulfill all his promises.

Mary had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph, the man she chose to marry. She was asked to assume a burden of tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Second, Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was not tolerated in those days. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises.

Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish his espoused wife, Mary when he discovered that she was pregnant. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Like Mary, Joseph is a model of faith for us. He is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God has not left us alone, but has brought us his only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us celebrate Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, with joyful hearts and let us renew our faith and hope in God and in his redeeming work.

*"Lord Jesus, you came to save us from sin and the power of death. May I always rejoice in your salvation and trust in your plan for my life".*

JAN 8, FRIDAY Mat 2:1-18; Luk 2:21-38

Faithful To The End

Psa 95:6

Simeon and Anna were two elderly, righteous, God-fearing people, both well advanced in years. Both looked for the redemption of Israel and when the Child was brought to the temple, both recognized Him as the long awaited Messiah. Unlike the shepherds who had the angels, and the wise men who had the star, they received no outward guidance. What they had was inward revelation from the Holy Spirit as to where and when to go and see the Child.

What can we learn from Simeon and Anna to help us develop a deeper understanding of our relationship with God?

The first lesson we can learn is that Simeon, *'just and devout'* and Anna who *'served God with fasting and prayer'* were sensitive to the voice of God. They had spent years in the presence of God, worshipping and praying and when God called, they heard and made themselves available. We are not likely to hear God's voice unless we live in God's will, in righteousness and devotion.

Secondly, at no point in their lives did they lose their hope that they would see the Messiah. They had waited 50 to 60 long years and God honored them. Sometimes we give up too easily. We may have been praying for years but when things don't go our way, we give up and lose the blessing that God has for us.

The final lesson we can learn is that the Holy Spirit can speak to us and show us things that others cannot know or understand. With earthly eyes both saw a Baby that was no different from other babies but with spiritual eyes they saw the Son of God. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual insight into the ordinary things around us, and of the truths in God's word. The only way we can do this is to experience Him in all His fullness.

***'Teach me, my God and King. In all things Thee to see  
And what I do in anything, to do it as for Thee.'***

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 8, FRIDAY

Mat 2:1-18; Luk 2:21-38

Jesus: Presentation, Visit &amp; Escape

Psa 95:6

Who can explain suffering, especially the suffering of innocent children? Herod's massacre of children who gave their lives for a person and a truth they did not know seemed so useless and unjust. What a scandal and stumbling block for those who can't recognize God's redeeming love. Why couldn't God prevent this slaughter? Suffering is indeed a mystery. No explanation seems to satisfy our human craving to understand. What does Paul the Apostle mean when he says: *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called to his purpose* (Romans 8:28)?

These innocent children and their parents suffered for Christ. Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom are the lot of all who chose to follow Jesus Christ. There is no crown without the cross. It was through Jesus' suffering, humiliation, and death on a cross, that our salvation was won. His death won life — eternal life for us. And his blood which was shed for our sake obtained pardon and reconciliation with our heavenly Father. Suffering takes many forms: illness, disease, handicap, physical pain and emotional trauma, slander and abuse, poverty, and injustice. Jesus exclaimed that those who weep, who are reviled and persecuted for righteousness sake are blessed (Matthew 5:10-12). The word *blessed* [*makarios* in the Greek] literally means *happiness* or *beatitude*. It describes a kind of joy which is serene and untouchable, self-contained and independent from chance and changing circumstances of life.

There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that *"no one will take your joy from you"* (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life fully surrendered to God with faith and trust?

*"Lord, you gave your life for my sake, to redeem me from slavery to sin and death. Help me to carry my cross with joy that I may willingly do your will and not shrink back out of fear or cowardice when trouble besets me."*

JAN 9, SATURDAY

Mat 2:19-23; Luk 2:41-52

The Perfect Child

Luk 2:52

*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. Luk 2:52*

A God-fearing Christian mother had problems with her teenage son. He was lazy, bad-tempered, a cheat, liar and a thief. He became a well-known lawyer but ambition, money and women dominated his life. The mother continued to pray for her son. One day, she saw the light of Christ in him. She waited. At the age of thirty-two, he gave his life to Jesus. St. Augustine went on to become one of the greatest theologians of the church.

In many Asian Christian homes, the catchword is 'academic excellence'. Parents perceive this as the 'open sesame' to go up the corporate ladder and future financial success. Obsessed with grades, they spend a huge amount of time and energy ferrying their children to tuition classes. God is given the back seat. It is not surprising that children grow up in one direction and lag in another. The children may become academic achievers but remain social misfits, physical giants but continue to be spiritual pygmies.

In the home in Nazareth, all the necessities of life were provided for. Lovingly nurtured by Mary and Joseph. Jesus developed physically (stature), intellectually (wisdom) socially (favor with men) and spiritually (favor with God). He showed perfect, balanced growth, a testament to excellent parenting.

In the temple in Jerusalem, the 12-year-old Jesus showed a highly intelligent grasp of what was being said (v.46), yet He did not attempt to instruct the teachers of the law. He showed the correct attitude of a well-brought up young person. At the age of twelve. He knew He had to be in His Father's house, yet although Mary and Joseph did not understand what He meant, the wise and obedient child went back with them and was subject to them. His sense of obligation to put God first did not mean disobedience to His earthly parents.

If we are to have better-balanced young people, we need stable homes with God-fearing, upright parents. Their love for God and His word and their proper response to affluence will be reflected in their children.

**Food for thought:**

**If Jesus came today, would He choose to live in your home. If no, why not?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 9, SATURDAY

Mat 2:19-23; Luk 2:41-52

Return to Nazareth / Early Childhood

Luk 2:52

Like all godly parents, Joseph and Mary raised the child Jesus in the fear and wisdom of the Lord. Joseph was given a unique task as the guardian and protector of Mary and of Jesus. What can we learn from the example and witness of Joseph? Joseph is a man of God, a man of unquestioning obedience and willing service. He is a man of prayer and a man of God's word. Through faith he recognized the hand of God in the mystery of the Incarnation—the Son of God taking flesh as the son of Mary. Joseph is a man of action, diligent in the care of his family and ready to do the Lord's bidding. Joseph fearlessly set aside his own plans when God called him to "take to the road" and to leave his familiar surroundings—his home, friends and relatives, and the security of his livelihood in order to pursue a hidden mission God entrusted to him as the guardian of the newborn King. God has a plan for each of us. With the plan God gives grace and the assurance of his guiding hand and care. Do you trust Him for his plan for your life? Are you willing to sacrifice your own plans for God's plan? Are you willing to give God unquestioning service and to pursue whatever mission he gives you?

*"Lord, make me a faithful servant and guardian of your truth and your word.  
Help me to obey you willingly, like Joseph, with unquestioning trust and with joyful hope."*

Do you recognize your Father in heaven? Jesus went up to the temple for his first Passover at the dawn of his manhood (usually the age of twelve for Jewish males). It was at this key turning point in his earthly life that Jesus took the name "father" from Joseph and addressed it to God his Father in heaven. Just as the prophet Samuel heard the call of the Lord at a very young age, Jesus in his youth recognized that he has been given a call by his heavenly Father. His answer to his mother's anxious inquiry reveals his trusting faith and confident determination to pursue his heavenly Father's will. *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* While Jesus recognized his unique call, he, nonetheless, submitted himself with love and obedience to Joseph and Mary and waited for the time when his call would be fulfilled. Our Heavenly Father calls each of us to a unique task and mission in this life. We may not discover or understand it fully, but if we cooperate with God he will use us for his purpose and plan. With the call God gives grace -- grace to say "yes" to his will and grace to persevere through obstacles and trials. Do you recognize God's call on your life and do you trust in his grace?

*"Lord, in love you have called me to live for your praise and glory.  
May I always find joy in your presence and trust in your grace and in your wisdom  
and plan for my life."*

JAN 10, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JAN 11, MONDAY      Mat 3:1-12; Mar 1:1-8; Luk 3:1-20; Joh 1:15-28

No Compromise

Mar 1:3

As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet "A voice of one calling in the desert. 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'". Luk 3:4

John the Baptist had no regard for the organized society of his day. The message that He declared was blunt and uncompromising.

He was a lone voice crying in the wilderness and the messenger of God's choice. A beacon of courage and fearlessness, he refused to buckle under the political and religious pressures of his day. In the wilderness where he had been schooled, God had been his only companion and teacher, and when he came out. he was fully committed to God. God had his full allegiance.

Compromise is something we do so easily because it is the easiest way out of difficult situations. It begins in small ways in everyday common situations and continues into the more complex areas where justice, truth telling etc. are compromised.

How often have we, in the presence of non-Christian friends, compromised on simple issues? We may give full allegiance to other people and man-made institutions because we are afraid to be different. Our great concern is to be accepted socially. We go by the principle that 'everybody is doing it so it must be okay for us to do it'. But Paul says to the Roman Christians, 'Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Rom 12:2) and again to the Philippian Christians. 'our citizenship is in heaven' (Phi 3:20). The Christian owes his ultimate allegiance to God and if something a person or institution says conflicts with God's will, then it becomes imperative for the Christian to take a stand. It is loyalty to the kingdom of God even unto death. It is true that when we make our stand we may lose a few friends and make a lot of enemies. But the true Christian will not worry too much about that.

**In what areas of your life have you compromised and disobeyed God's word?  
Ask the Lord for forgiveness and the strength to stand for His truth and righteousness.**

<p><b>P.R.A.Y</b></p>	<p>PRAY &amp; PRAISE   READ &amp; REFLECT   ASK &amp; APPLY   YIELD &amp; YAKHAL</p>
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Jan 11, MONDAY    Mat 3:1-12; Mk 1:1-8; Lk 3:1-20; Jn 1:15-28

John the Baptist

Mk 1:3

When the Lord comes "he baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Do you want to be on fire for God and for the return of the Lord Jesus when he comes in his glory? Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness (Deut. 4:24), righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16). It is also used of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11 and Acts 2:3). God's fire both purifies and cleanses, and it inspires a reverent fear of God and of his word in us. John the Baptist's life was fueled by one burning passion -- to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of his kingdom.

Who is John the Baptist and what is the significance of his message for our lives? Scripture tells us that John was *filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb* (Luke 1:15, 41) by Christ himself, whom Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth John leapt in her womb as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). The fire of the Spirit dwelt in John and made him the forerunner of the coming Messiah. John was led by the Spirit into the wilderness prior to his ministry where he was tested and grew in the word of God. John's clothing was reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (see Kings 1:8). John broke the prophetic silence of the previous centuries when he began to speak the word of God to the people of Israel. His message was similar to the message of the Old Testament prophets who chided the people of God for their unfaithfulness and who tried to awaken true repentance in them. Among a people unconcerned with the things of God, it was his work to awaken their interest, unsettle them from their complacency, and arouse in them enough good will to recognize and receive Christ when he came. Are you eager to hear God's word and to be changed by it through the power of the Holy Spirit?

John the Baptist was *more than a prophet* (Luke 7:26). John was the *voice* of the Consoler who is coming (John 1:23; Isaiah 40:1-3). He completed the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah (Matt. 11:13-14). What the prophets had carefully searched for and angels longed to see, now came to completion as John made the way ready for the coming of the Messiah, God's Anointed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to the human race of the "divine likeness", prefiguring what would be achieved with and in the Lord Jesus. John's baptism was for repentance -- turning away from sin and taking on a new way of life according to God's word. Our baptism in Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit results in a new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5).

Jesus is ready to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the joy and truth of the gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. His word has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Christ. Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ. Do you point others to Christ in the way you live, work, and speak?

*"Lord, let your light burn brightly in my heart that I may know the joy and freedom of your kingdom. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to witness the truth of your gospel and to point others to Jesus Christ."*

JAN 12, TUESDAY      Mat 3:13-17; Mar 1:9-11; Luk 3:21-22; Joh 1:29-34

Preparation – Three Important Voices

Mat 3:15

*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*  
 Mat 3:17

Most families prepare months ahead for the great event - a wedding! Sometimes it is necessary to book a hotel for the dinner at least a year in advance.

In this chapter we read of the preparations that were made for the greatest event in history - the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Firstly, we hear the voice of John the Baptist, who was fulfilling the prophecy of Isa 40:3. He was calling on the people to prepare the way of the Lord by repenting of their sins. Repentance is not merely being sorry but it involves a change of heart and a turning away from sin. In Mar 1:4 we are told that *'John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.'* Many confessed their sins and were baptized by John in the river Jordan.

Jesus came to John and requested baptism. John tried to deter Him but Jesus replied, *'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness'* (v.15). Although sinless, Jesus was identifying Himself with those who were going to repent and be baptized.

The Holy Spirit was in Jesus Christ from the moment of His conception. Now the heavens open and the Spirit of God alights on Him. Having heard the voice of John the Baptist and Jesus, we now hear the voice of God the Father saying, *'This is My Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'* What an encouragement to us, to know that Jesus, whom we love, is truly the Son of God!

**Each day brings with it events both big and small -but all are equally important.  
 Let us, throughout the day, seek to be prepared for what God has in store for us.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 12, TUESDAY

Mat 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34

Baptism of Jesus

Mat 3:15

Why did Jesus, the Sinless One, submit himself to John's baptism? John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). In this humble submission we see a foreshadowing of the "baptism" of his bloody death upon the cross. Jesus' baptism is the acceptance and the beginning of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He allowed himself to be numbered among sinners. Jesus submitted himself entirely to his Father's will. Out of love he consented to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. Do you know the joy of trust and submission to God?

The Father proclaimed his entire delight in his Son and spoke audibly for all to hear. The Holy Spirit, too, was present as he anointed Jesus for his ministry which began that day as he rose from the waters of the Jordan river. Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all who come to believe in him. At his baptism the heavens were opened and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, signifying the beginning of a new creation.

How can we enter into the mystery of Jesus' humble self-abasement and baptism? Gregory of Nazianzus, a seventh century Church father tells us: "Let us be buried with Christ by Baptism to rise with him; let us go down with him to be raised with him; and let us rise with him to be glorified with him."

Do you want to see changes in your life? And do you want to become a more effective instrument of the gospel? Examine Jesus' humility and ask the Holy Spirit to forge this same attitude in your heart. As you do, heaven will open for you as well. The Lord is ever ready to renew us in his Spirit and to anoint us for mission. We are called to be "light" and "salt" to those around us. The Lord wants his love and truth to shine through us that others may see the goodness and truth of God's message of salvation. Ask the Lord to fill you with his Holy Spirit that you may radiate the joy of the gospel to those around you.

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit and inflame my heart with the joy of the gospel.  
May I find joy in seeking to please you just as you found joy in seeking to please your Father".*

John calls Jesus the *Lamb of God* and thus signifies Jesus' mission as the One who redeems us from our sins. The blood of the *Passover Lamb* (Exodus 12) delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death. The blood of Jesus, the true *Passover Lamb* (1 Cor. 5:7), delivers us from everlasting death and destruction. It is significant that John was the son of a priest, Zachariah, who participated in the daily sacrifice of a lamb in the temple for the sins of the people (Exodus 29).

In Jesus he saw the true and only sacrifice which can deliver us from sin. When John says he did not know Jesus he was referring to the hidden reality of Jesus divinity. But the Holy Spirit in that hour revealed to John Jesus' true nature, such that John bore witness that *this is the Son of God*. We can only know who Jesus truly is through the Holy Spirit who reveals him to us. Do you seek to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit and let me grow in the knowledge of your love and truth. Let your Spirit be aflame in my heart that I may know and love you more fervently and strive to do your will in all things."*

JAN 13, WEDNESDAY Mat 4:1-11; Mar 1:12-13; Luk 4:1-13

No Short Cuts

Mat 4:4, 7 & 10

*"It is written . it is written ... it says ..."* Luk 4:4, 8, 12

The temptation(s) of Jesus in the wilderness was as much a triumph of identifying temptation as it was of overcoming it.

Jesus was hungry after fasting forty days in a dry land. Food was a legitimate need. But He rebuked Satan for saying He should take (or make) some bread. Jesus knew the time for bodily discipline and chastening had not yet ended.

Jesus was about to face great suffering to inaugurate a worldwide kingdom. There were less painful ways to have one's own kingdom, authority and splendor. Satan's way was tempting: "You get the world and all the power to change it - I just want you to give me the same reverence I already get from everyone else" But Jesus decided He would only do what His Father had laid down before Him.

Satan offered Scriptural proof of God's ever-present shielding from harm, even as he challenged Jesus to force God's safeguarding hand. Jesus replied, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

The temptations to shortcut the discipline of body, mind and spirit, to compromise with less painful alternatives, to insist that God must intervene at our commands - Jesus overcame these by obeying God and His word.

**Have we undergone adequate disciplining of the body, mind and spirit, or have we been lazy? Have we heard the voice of God directing us towards a difficult path and closed our eyes, preferring less painful alternatives? Do we walk in faith, or have we been demanding improper substantiation of God's presence?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 13, WEDNESDAY

Mat 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13

## Temptation of Jesus

Mat 4:4, 7 &amp; 10

Do you ever feel compelled or driven to do something radical for God? Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to spend forty days and nights in prayer and fasting in a lonely place. Why was he compelled to seek solitude for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his ministry? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word tempt in English usually means to entice to sin. The scriptural word here also means test in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if they are ready for the task at hand. We test pilots to see that they are fit to fly.

Likewise God tests his servants to see if they are fit to be used by him. God tested Abraham to prove his faith. The Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt before God delivered them from their enemies. Jesus was no exception to this testing. Satan will surely tempt us and will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us. Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame not by his own human strength but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1).

When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try fight his adversary on his own human strength. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him. Jesus came to overthrow the evil one who held us captive to sin and fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). His obedience to his Father's will and his willingness to embrace the cross reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. His victory over sin and death won for us not only pardon for our sins but adoption as sons and daughters of God.

How can we overcome sin and oppression in our personal lives? The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit to be our strength, guide and consoler in temptation and testing. The Lord Jesus is ever ready to pour out his Spirit upon us that we may have the strength and courage to resist sin and to reject the lies and deceits of our enemy Satan. God wants us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12) with the power and strength which comes from the Holy Spirit. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

*"Lord, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it."*

*“Can you tell me where I can find the lightbulbs?”  
 “Sure. Come with me, and I’ll take you to them.”*

In many large stores, employees are instructed to take customers to find what they are looking for rather than simply giving them verbal directions. This common act of courtesy and walking alongside an inquiring person may help us expand our concept of what it means to lead others to Christ.

In Joh 1, the phrase *“come and see”* occurs twice. When two curious disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus where He was staying, the Lord said, *“Come and see”* (v.39). After spending the day with Him, Andrew found his brother, Simon Peter, and brought him to Jesus (v.40-41). Later, Philip told Nathanael he had found the Messiah. To Nathanael’s skeptical reply, Philip said, *“Come and see”* (v.46).

Witnessing for Christ can be a one-time event when we speak the good news about Him to others. But it may also involve walking alongside people who are seeking help and wholeness. Our genuine interest in their spiritual welfare, our prayers, and our involvement with them say without words, *“Come and see. Let’s walk together, and I’ll take you to Him.”*

By **David C. McCasland**

**The gospel has to be proclaimed, Its truth we need to share;  
 But sometimes seekers also need, To see how much we care. —Sper**

*Kindness and compassion have led more people to Christ than proclamation alone.*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 14, THURSDAY

Jn 1:35-51

## John's Disciples Following Jesus

Jn 1:39

"How can we know for ourselves and help others to know with certainty that Jesus is truly the Son of God and Savior of the world? Philip, a new disciple of Jesus, at first failed to convince his friend Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah. Nathaniel was very skeptical. He didn't like Nazareth and didn't want to have anything to do with people who came from such an out of the way place. How could the Messiah come from such a seemingly low-down town?

Perhaps we are like Nathaniel. We reject others (or at least keep them distant from us) because they come from some place or position we don't like or find fault with. Rather than argue with his friend, Philip took the wiser strategy of inviting Nathaniel to "come and see" for himself who this Jesus claimed to be. Clever arguments rarely win people to the gospel, but an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ can transform one's life forever. Nathaniel found in Jesus more than he could have hoped and dreamed. Jesus spoke a word to Nathaniel and it set his heart ablaze with wonder! Jesus, who knows our hearts better than we do, revealed to Nathaniel the innermost thoughts and desire of his heart. Nathaniel was hungry for knowledge of God. He really wanted to know God personally. God places in every heart a longing and desire to know the One who created us in love for love. That is why Augustine of Hippo, who found God only after many years of wandering in disbelief and darkness, exclaimed: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

What is the significance of Jesus' revelation of seeing Nathaniel under the fig tree? The fig tree was a symbol of God's blessing and peace. It provided shade from the midday sun and a cool place to retreat and pray. It is very likely that Nathaniel had meditated "under the fig tree" on the Messianic prophecies and prayed for their fulfillment in his time. Perhaps he dozed off for a midday nap and dreamed of God's kingdom like Jacob did when he saw a vision of the ladder which united earth with heaven. Nathaniel accepted Jesus as Messiah and Lord because he spoke to the need of his innermost being -- the desire to know God personally and to be united with him in his glory.

Jesus' response to Nathaniel's new faith is the promise that he himself will be the "ladder which unites earth with heaven" (see Genesis 28:12-17). God had opened a door for Jacob that brought him and his people into a new relationship with the living God. In Jacob's dream God revealed his angelic host and showed him the throne of heaven and promised Jacob that he and descendants would dwell with the living God. Jesus proclaims to Nathaniel that he himself is the fulfillment of this promise to the Patriarch Jacob. Jesus is the true ladder or stairway to heaven. In Jesus' incarnation, the divine Son of God taking on human flesh for our sake, we see the union of heaven and earth -- God making his dwelling with us and bringing us into the heavenly reality of his kingdom. Jesus' death on the Cross and his Resurrection opens the way for each of us to come into a new relationship with God as his sons and daughters. The Lord Jesus opens the way for each of us to "ascend to heaven" and to bring "heaven to earth" in the daily circumstances of our lives. God's kingdom is present in those who seek him and who do his will. Do you pray as Jesus taught, *May your kingdom come and your will be done in earth as it is in heaven?*

*"Heavenly Father, through your Son Jesus Christ, you have opened the way to heaven for us.  
As you revealed yourself to your beloved Patriarchs and Apostles,  
so reveal yourself to me that I may glorify you in my daily life.  
May I always find joy in your presence and never lose sight of the kingdom of heaven."*

JAN 15, FRIDAY Joh 2:1-25

Do Whatever He Tells You

Joh 2:9b

*His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Joh 2:5*

Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding in Cana. He saved the host from embarrassment by turning water into wine. But let us pay heed to the words of Mary and the obedience of the servants.

Mary knew that Jesus was not merely her son, but the Son of God. That was why she immediately approached Jesus when the wine ran out. What she said to the servants has very strong implications. 'Do whatever He tells you,' means that whatever Jesus says, whether it seems logical or not should be obeyed. Those servants could have scoffed at Mary's ridiculous suggestion. But because they did not, they had the privilege of witnessing a miracle.

As we encounter life's problems, do we believe the words of Scripture wholeheartedly? Do we truly believe the promise in Pro 3:5, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding'? The older we are, the richer we get, the smarter we become, the harder it is for us to respond like the servants in Cana to what God says to us. At times we become skeptical and lack the faith to follow God's ways. Or we may rationalize and use 'our own understanding' to find solutions in our own way.

When God speaks to you. do whatever He tells you.

**Show us Your ways. Lord, that we may walk with You.  
Help us to walk by faith, not by sight.**

**P.R.A.Y**    PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 15, FRIDAY

Jn 2:1-25

Miracle @ Cana / Cleansing of the Temple

Jn 2:9b

God reveals his glory in the unlikeliest of places — in a stable at Bethlehem, at a wedding party in Cana, in a muddy Jordan river, and on a bloody cross on Golgotha. Jesus' first public miracle (his first sign) was performed at the insistence of his mother. Jesus blessed a young couple and brought joy to their wedding party. First by his presence, and second by saving them from embarrassment when the wine ran out. Changing water into wine was a remarkable act of kindness; but giving the best to last was unnecessary and unheard of. In the Old Testament wine was often seen as a gift and symbol of God's blessing (Deut. 7:13; Prov. 3:10, Psalm 105:). That Jesus would miraculously produce 120 gallons of the best wine (many times more than needed) shows the superabundance of the blessings which he came to offer.

This miracle signifies the new rich wine of the Gospel and it points to the "wine of the new covenant" and the "bread of life" which Jesus provides for his disciples in the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. It also points to the Messianic banquet which Jesus will provide at the end of time. The miracles of Jesus demonstrate the power of God's love and mercy for his people. God's kindness knows no limits. And the ultimate expression of his love is revealed in the person of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He became flesh for our sake, and he died for our redemption, and he rose for our glorification.

Do you thirst for God and for the life of holiness he offers?

*"Father, you have revealed your glory in our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may bring you glory in all that I do and say."*

What can keep us from the presence of God? Jesus' dramatic cleansing of the temple was seen by his disciples as a prophetic sign of God's action. The temple was understood as the dwelling place of God among his people. When God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, he brought them through the sea, and finally to Mount Sinai where he made a covenant with them and gave them a new way of life embodied in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). God gave Moses instruction for worship and for making the Tabernacle, or tent of meeting, which was later replaced by the temple. The New Testament tells us that these "serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" – God's Temple in heaven (Hebrews 8:5). Jesus' cleansing of the temple is also a prophetic sign of what he wants to do with each of us. He ever seeks to cleanse us of sin and make us living temples of his Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Do you thirst for holiness?

Jesus referred to the temple as his Father's house which was being made into "house of trade" (John 2:16) or "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). That is why he used physical force to expel the money-changers. The prophecy of Malachi foretold the coming of the Lord unexpectedly to his Temple to "purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord" (Malachi 3:1-4). Jesus' disciples recalled the words of Psalm 69: "Zeal for your house will consume me." This was understood as a Messianic prophecy. Here the disciples saw more clearly Jesus as the Messiah who burned with zeal for God's house.

The Jewish authorities, however, wanted proof that Jesus had divine authority to act as he did. They demanded a sign from God to prove Jesus right, otherwise, they would treat him as an imposter and a usurper of their authority. Jesus replied that the sign God would give would be his resurrection: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". The Jews did not understand that the temple Jesus referred to was his own body. The "tent of his body" had to be destroyed to open the way to the presence of God for us. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus not only reconciles us with God, but he fills us with his Holy Spirit and make us temples of the living God (1 Cor. 6:19-20). God's word enlightens our minds and purifies our hearts that we may offer God fitting worship and enjoy his presence both now and forever.

Do you burn with zeal for the Lord's house?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you open wide the door of your Father's house and you bid us to enter confidently that we may worship in spirit and truth. Help me to draw near to your throne of mercy with gratitude and joy".*

JAN 16, SATURDAY

Joh 3:1-21

Nicodemus

Joh 3:3

A few years ago a publisher made a big mistake. A book had been on the market for several years, so it was time for a makeover. The author rewrote the book to bring it up to date. But when the revision was published, there was a problem. The publisher gave the book a nice new cover but printed the old book inside. The exterior was fresh and new, but the interior was old and out of date. This “reprint” was not really new at all.

Sometimes that kind of thing happens with people. They realize a change needs to be made in life. Things are heading in the wrong direction. So they may put on a new exterior without making a vital change in their heart. They may change a behavior on the outside but may not realize that it is only God who can change us on the inside.

In Joh 3, Nicodemus sensed that because Jesus came “from God” (v.2) He offered something very different. What Jesus told Nicodemus made him realize that He offered nothing short of a rebirth (v. 4): He needed to be “born again,” to be made totally new (v.7). That change comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s when “the old has gone, the new is here” (2 Co 5:17). Do you need a change? Put your faith in Jesus. He’s the one who changes your heart and makes all things new.

By **Dave Branon**

**Lord, I now know that changes on the outside—behavior, looks, attitude—don’t change me inside. I put my faith in Jesus, who died on the cross and rose again to forgive my sins.  
Make me new on the inside—in my soul.  
How has your life been changed by Jesus? Share it with your DG.**

*Only God can make us new.*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 16, SATURDAY

Jn 3:1-21

Nicodemus

Jn 3:3

Do you nourish your faith with prayerful reflection of the word of God? When Nicodemus heard about Jesus' miracles and extraordinary teaching, he decided to meet with him privately, away from the crowds and the public spotlight. Nicodemus was no ordinary Jew. He was a religious ruler and member of the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme court of the Jews, and a teacher of Israel (John 3:10). He was a devout Pharisee who sought to perfectly follow the law of Moses, as prescribed in the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Numbers) and further elaborated in the numerous scribal laws, recorded in the Mishnah and the Talmud.

Nicodemus decided to meet with Jesus at night, possibly for two reasons. He may have been cautious and not ready to publicly associate himself with Jesus since many Pharisees opposed Jesus' teaching and called him a Sabbath breaker. It is also likely that Nicodemus chose the night as the best time for seeking a private and undisturbed conversation with Jesus. The rabbis declared that the best time to study the law was at night after the day's work was completed and the household was at rest. When Nicodemus saw Jesus, he addressed him as *rabbi* (a teacher of God's word and law) and acknowledge that Jesus' teaching came from God.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus went to the very heart of the Mosaic law - how can one get right with God and enter God's kingdom? Jesus' answer was brief and startling: "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see God." The new birth which Jesus spoke about was not a physical birth but the beginning of a spiritual birth which is something completely new and radical, and from above, namely from God himself. Jesus said that this rebirth was necessary if one was to enter God's kingdom. Nicodemus thought that to be born again, even spiritually, was impossible. He probably knew too well from experience that anyone who wants to be changed, can't change himself. Jesus explained that this change could only come about through the work and action of the Holy Spirit. This rebirth in the Spirit is very real and experiential, like the wind which can be felt and heard while it is visibly unseen to the naked eye.

What does it mean *to be reborn* in the Spirit? The new birth Jesus speaks of is a spiritual birth to a new life and experiential relationship with God as his sons and daughters. This new birth is made possible when one is baptized into Christ and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. God wants to renew all his people in the gift of new life in his Holy Spirit. This new life brings us into God's kingdom and heavenly way of life. What is God's kingdom? God's kingdom is that society of men and women who acknowledge God as their Lord and who live according to his will *on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). *To be reborn* is to enter that society in which God is honored and obeyed, to live as citizens of heaven and members of God's family - his sons and daughters, and to enter into possession of that life which comes from God himself, a never-ending life of love, peace, joy, and freedom from sin and the fear of death. Do you know the joy and freedom of new life in Jesus Christ?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you offer us a new birth in the Holy Spirit. Renew in me the gift of faith and new life in your Holy Spirit. Help me to draw near to you and to believe in your life-giving word. May your kingdom come and may your will be done in my life today, tomorrow, and always."*

JAN 17, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JAN 18, MONDAY      Mat 4:12; Mar 1:14; Luk 3:19-20; Joh 3:22-36

He Must Become Greater

Joh 3:30

*"He must become greater; / must become less. "Joh 3:30*

When John the Baptist's disciples came to him to report that many had gone to see Jesus to be baptized, his reply was not what they expected. Remarkably, John wasn't concerned about the smaller crowds that came to hear him when Jesus was preaching in the same district. Earlier, he had declared. "Look, the Lamb of God. who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him. but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel" (1:29-31).

Instead of envy, John was full of joy. His great joy was that Jesus was the greater, and he himself less. John's attitude protected him from the Christian's greatest temptation: pride. Many have fallen because of pride when they compare themselves with others. Some become envious when they see others doing better than themselves. Some become boastful when they know they are greater than others.

The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 13. 'Love does not envy; it is not boastful'. To the Romans he writes. 'For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you' (Rom 12:3). From these two passages we see two antidotes to keep our pride in check.

Firstly, let God's love rule in our hearts, reminding us that we are who we are today because of His great love and amazing grace. Secondly, we need to always have a careful assessment of ourselves. John was careful not to allow his popularity to make him proud. His reply to his disciples was, 'A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said. 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' He must become greater; I must become less' (v.27- 28,30).

**○ Lord, come take your place as President, not a resident, in our lives.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 18, MONDAY

Mat 4:12; Mk 1:14; Lk 3:19-20; Jn 3:22-36

John the Baptist's Testimony

Jn 3:30

When the associates of John the Baptist complain that all are now going to Jesus, John in his characteristic humility exclaimed that he was not the Messiah but only the messenger sent to prepare his way. John describes the Messiah as the Bridegroom and himself as the friend of the Bridegroom.

The image of marriage and the wedding feast is used throughout the scriptures to describe God's joy in his people, who are regarded as his bride. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:5). John acted as the best man in arranging the marriage and in making preparations for the marriage feast. John and his disciples rejoice that the Bridegroom has come to make his bride, the church, ready for the marriage feast. We see this fulfilled in the New Jerusalem in the marriage feast of the Lamb and his Bride (see Revelations 21-22).

Do you look with joyful anticipation to the consummation of God's plan for his people at the end of the ages?

*"Lord, help me to fix my eyes on your kingdom and to pray with eager longing and with joyful hope for the day when your people will be fully united with you in the heavenly marriage feast. May there be no nothing in my life which might hinder me from giving you my all, you who are my joy and life".*

The Jews understood that God gave a certain portion of his Spirit to his prophets. When Elijah was about to depart for heaven, his servant Elisha asked for a *double portion* of the Spirit (2 Kings 2:9). Jesus tells his disciples that they can believe the words he speaks because God the Father has poured his Spirit on him in full measure, without keeping anything back. The function of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God's truth to us. When we receive the Holy Spirit he enables us to recognize and understand God's truth. Jesus is the Word of God and he gives us his Holy Spirit so that we can recognize his truth and live according to it. God's truth has consequences, and he gives us the freedom to choose how we will respond. The choice he gives us has eternal consequences -- everlasting life or everlasting death.

God challenged his people in the Old Covenant: *See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. ...I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore, choose life, that you may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him" (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).* And he issues the same challenge to the people of the New Covenant today. Do you weigh the consequences of your choices? Do they lead you towards life or towards death? If you choose to obey God's voice and to do his will, then you will know and experience that life which comes from God himself. If you choose to follow your own way apart from God and his will, then you choose for death -- a spiritual death which poisons and then kills the soul until there is nothing left but an empty person devoid of love, truth, goodness, purity, peace, and joy.

Do your choices lead you towards God or away from God?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, let your Holy Spirit fill me and transform my heart and mind that I may choose life -- abundant life in you and with you. And give me the courage and strength to always discern good from evil and to reject everything that is false and contrary to your holy will."*

JAN 19, TUESDAY Joh 4:1-42

Out Of The Saltshaker

Joh 4:34

*Now he had to go through Samaria. John 4:4*

The Jews and the Samaritans were hostile towards each other. The Jews would avoid passing through Samaria which was located between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. They would cross River Jordan to the east and travel along Decapolis although this was a longer route.

But our Lord Jesus, with the mission to win these Samaritans, deliberately went through Samaria so that He could meet the Samaritans. First, He met the woman at the well and then, the other villagers of Sychar.

Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in USA creatively introduced this equation for evangelism:  $MI = HP + CP + CC$ , taken from Matthew 5 where Jesus calls us to be salt of the earth and light of the world. MI means 'maximum impact'. Christ wants His followers to have maximum impact or influence on unbelievers. HP stands for 'high potency', CP stands for 'close proximity' and CC stands for 'clear communication'. In a nutshell, someone with high potency (HP) has to be willing to get into close proximity (CP) with someone else and clearly communicate (CC) the message of Jesus if maximum influence (MI) is to be exerted.

Our model evangelist, Jesus knew that He could never reach the Samaritans unless He deliberately drew Himself close to them. In spite of the hostility, Jesus went to the territory of the Samaritans.

Many of us have been ineffective in witnessing because we do not have close proximity with unbelievers. Although we have sound theological understanding and are great communicators of the Gospel, we have become too comfortable in our Christian environment. We fail to recognize that Jesus called us to 'go' and preach to the lost.

Many of us have become salt kept in the saltshaker and light kept under a bowl. As salt, we need to be out of the saltshaker to prevent decay and to add flavor to the lives of others. As light, we need to let our light shine before men so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven.

**O Lord, give us a burning desire to burn brightly in the darkest of places.  
Make us Your beacons of hope amongst people who do not yet know You.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 19, TUESDAY

Jn 4:1-42

Samaritan Woman

Jn 4:34

Do you allow any barriers to distance yourself from the Lord and his will for your life? Jesus overcame the barriers of prejudice, sin, and misunderstanding with the truth of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Jews and Samaritans had been divided for centuries. They had no dealings with one another, avoiding all social contact, even trade, and inter-marriage. If their paths crossed it would not be unusual for hostility to break out. When Jesus passed through Samaria, he did the unthinkable. He conversed with a Samaritan, thus risking ritual impurity and scorn from his fellow Jews. He also did something no strict Rabbi would dare to do in public without loss to his reputation. He greeted a woman and spoke openly with her. Not only was she a woman, but a notorious adulteress. No decent Jew would even think of being seen with such a woman, let alone exchanging a word with her!

Why did Jesus meet alone with this Samaritan woman? Women normally gathered at the town well in the early hours of the morning while it was still cool. This would be a customary time for social contact and exchange of news. The fact that this notorious woman chose the midday hour to go out in public when the heat is greatest, shows her estrangement from her own community. Jesus broke through the barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom. He showed the universality of the gospel. No one is barred from the love of God and the good news of salvation. There is only one thing that can keep us from God and his redeeming love — our stubborn pride and willful rebellion.

What is the point of Jesus' exchange with the woman about water? Water in the arid land was scarce. Jacob's well was located in a strategic fork of the road between Samaria and Galilee. One can live without food for several days, but not without water. Water is a source of life and growth for all living things. When rain came to the desert, the water transformed the wasteland into a fertile field. The kind of water which Jesus spoke about was living, running water. Fresh water from a cool running stream was always preferred to the still water one might find in a pond or well. *Living water* was also a symbol for the Jew of thirst of the soul for God.

The water which Jesus spoke of symbolized the Holy Spirit and his work of recreating us in God's image and sustaining in us the new life which comes from God. The life which the Holy Spirit produces in us makes us a new creation in Jesus Christ.

Do you thirst for God and for the life of the Holy Spirit within you?

*“Lord, my soul thirsts for you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may always find joy in your presence and take delight in doing your will.”*

JAN 20, WEDNESDAY    Mat 4:12-17; Mar 1:14-15; Luk 4:14-30; Joh 4:43-45

Targeting the Least

Luk 4:18-19

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me... to preach good news to the poor ... freedom for the prisoners .. recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Luk 4:18-19

I once listened to a blind beggar outside a McDonald's along the glitzy streets of Bangsar. He shared, through tears, about the neglect of blind people in Kuala Lumpur, about how his savings can be taken away any minute, about how his paltry welfare cheques can barely get him past a week. Thus, he has to beg as a supplement, lest he starve.

As Asians we are familiar with the taboos held by our society that alienate those who are deemed 'not whole' or less than the rest. The Jews have their 'unclean, and thus 'outside-the-covenant', groups. As a typical Malaysian yuppie, I also naturally recoil at the sight of poverty, disease, social degradation and retardation.

Yet today's reading reminds me that such people-groups are the primary target of Jesus' ministry. Jesus proclaimed the 'Year of the Lord's favor' (v.19) which was a parallel of the great Jewish Jubilee celebration (Lev 25:8-17) in which debtors were forgiven what they owed and slaves were set free. The poor, the blind, the prisoners - liberation for them was what characterized the great Messianic promise first sounded in Isaiah and now echoing through Jesus' ministry.

God's new dawn, the coming reign of His kingdom, brings with it a display of His sheer sovereign grace in cancelling out the burdens of the least privileged in society. This is no abstract redemption, but real life given abundantly.

The ones least loved by 'normal folk' were the ones God has most compassion for. Are our hearts pierced thus too?

**Who are the key beneficiaries of your ministry or that of your church or Christian group?  
 How do you view the least fortunate in your community?  
 Do the oppressed, the poor, the blind, etc. feature in any 'mission statement'  
 of any church you know of?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 20, WEDNESDAY

Mat 4:12-17; Mk 1:14-15; Lk 4:14-30; Jn 4:43-45

Jesus Returns to Galilee

Lk 4:18-19

In Jesus we see the grace of God in action. His gracious words brought hope, joy, and favor to those who were ready to receive him. Where did Jesus begin his public ministry? In his own land of Galilee where he was raised. His proclamation of the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah brought wonder to his kin and townsfolk.

Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and evil (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus awakened their hope in the promises of God. They, in turn, received his words favorably and wondered what would become of "Joseph's son". Their hearts were hungry for the word of life and they looked to Jesus with anticipation and wonder. Do you look to Jesus with confidence and hope in the fulfillment of all God's promises?

What did Jesus come to do for us? He came to set us free from the worst tyranny possible -- slavery to sin and the fear of death, and the eternal destruction of both body and soul. God's power alone can save us from emptiness and poverty of spirit, from confusion and error, and from hopelessness and the fear of annihilation. The gospel of salvation is "good news" for us today. Do you know the joy and freedom of the gospel?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams. Through the gift of your Holy Spirit you bring us grace, truth, life, and freedom. Fill me with the joy of the gospel and inflame my heart with love and zeal for you and your will".*

How would you react if Jesus spoke this message from the pulpit on Sunday? It was customary for Jesus to go weekly to the synagogue to worship and on occasion to read the scriptures and comment on them to the people. His hometown folks listened with rapt attention on this occasion because they had heard about the miracles he had performed in other towns. What sign would he do in his hometown?

Jesus startled them with a seeming rebuke that no prophet or servant of God can receive honor among his own people. He then angered them when he complimented the gentiles who seemed to have shown more faith in God than the "chosen ones" of Israel. They regarded gentiles as "fuel for the fires of hell". Jesus' praise for "outsiders" caused them offense because they were blind-sighted to God's mercy and plan of redemption for all nations.

The word "gospel" literally means "good news". Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and evil (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus came to set people free from the worst tyranny possible -- the tyranny of slavery to sin and the fear of death, and the destruction of both body and soul. God's power alone can save us from emptiness and poverty of spirit, from confusion and error, and from the fear of death and hopelessness. The gospel of salvation is "good news" for us today. Do you know the joy and freedom of the gospel?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the fulfillment of all our hopes and desires.  
Your Spirit brings us grace, truth, life, and freedom.*

*Fill me with the joy of the gospel and inflame my heart with love and zeal for you and for your will".*

JAN 21, THURSDAY      Mat 4:18-22; Mar 1:16-20; Luk 5:1-11

El-Shaddai's Engineers

Mar 1:17

*"From now on you will catch men." Luk 5:10b*

One of the first things a mother asks her daughter about her new boyfriend is, "What does he do?" Implicitly, "How much is he making a month?"

Financial adequacy is a non-negotiable in Asian culture. Only rarely will we see, say, a Chinese or Indian family endorsing hippie-like kinds of lifestyles where life is lived for the moment and long-term objectives eschewed.

Jesus' calling of His first disciples is marked by a challenge and a call in the midst of their vocation. It's remarkable to note that had Jesus called His first disciples within a Malaysian setting, the disciples would have caused an uproar and an upheaval within their families. I doubt my Christian parents would approve of me quitting school or my job and following a self-proclaimed messenger of God.

In Jesus' time, the disciples couldn't follow Him without abandoning their daily jobs. And whilst some of us may be called out of our secular vocation, most of us are called to follow Christ within and as part of our careers.

God meets us in the midst of our work, our careers, and asks us to redefine our vocation around His transformative aim: 'I shall make you fishers of men.' Or "Programmers of Peace? 'Engineers for El-Shaddai'? 'Consultants for Compassion'? Wouldn't it be nice to have a spiritual call-card with the title, 'Architects of God's Altruism'?"

Whatever the title, our job description will be **'catching men' for Christ** (v.10).

**Think about the industry you plan to be in (both now and later).**

**What aspects encourage authentic humanity? Which elements urgently need redemption?**

**What can you do to make your profession be of God?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 21, THURSDAY

Mat 4:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11

Calling of His First Disciples

Mk 1:17

What is God's call on your life?

When Jesus chose his first disciples, he called ordinary people. Peter and Andrew were brothers and fishermen by trade. Like the other apostles they were non-professionals who had no wealth or position. In choosing ordinary people Jesus made extraordinary claims -- to leave all -- family, kin, and occupation--for the kingdom of God. When the Lord calls each of us to follow him, he makes the same claim -- let nothing stand between you and Jesus. He chose these men, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power.

When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not shrug back because we think that we have little or nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you make your life an offering to the Lord and allow him to use you as he sees fit?

*"Lord, fill me with gratitude and generosity for all you have done for me.  
Take my life and all that I have as an offering of love for you, who are my All."*

When Jesus preached the gospel message he called others to follow as his disciples and he gave them a mission -- "to catch people for the kingdom of God". What kind of disciples did he choose? Smelly fishermen! In the choice of the first apostles we see a characteristic feature of Jesus' work: he chose very ordinary people. They were non-professionals, had no wealth or position. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these individuals, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power.

When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not think we have nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you believe that God wants to work through and in you for his glory?

Jesus speaks the same message to us today: we will "catch people" for the kingdom of God if we allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through us. God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live, speak, and witness the joy of the gospel. Paul the Apostles says, *But thanks be to God, who in Christ Jesus always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing* (2 Corinthians 2:15). Do you witness to those around you the joy of the gospel and do you pray for your neighbors, co-workers, and relatives that they may come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in the knowledge of his love?

*"Lord Jesus, you have called me personally by name, just as you called your first disciples, Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Help me to believe your word and follow you faithfully.  
Fill me with the joy of the gospel that your light may shine through me to many others."*

JAN 22, FRIDAY

Mar 1:21-28; Luk 4:31-37; Joh 4:46-54

Healing - Nobleman's son &amp; Demoniac

Mar 1:17

God sometimes answers our prayers in marvelous ways, but He does not want us to become preoccupied with the miraculous. That's why Jesus gently rebuked the nobleman who begged Him to come and heal his son (Joh 4:48). But in response to the father's repeated appeal He said, "Go your way, your son lives" (v.50). The father came to "believe" on the basis of Jesus' word alone. The reality of his faith is seen in the fact that he obeyed Christ's simple command and "he went his way."

Upon returning home, the nobleman discovered that his son had been healed "at the seventh hour" on the previous day. From his servants he learned exactly what had taken place and when. His son was made well at the same instant that Jesus said, "Your son lives" (v.50-53).

At times we are amazed by God's perfect timing and miraculous intervention when He answers our prayers. We must be careful, though, not to become so preoccupied with the miracle that we forget the One who performed it. **We need to remain focused on Christ, whether a miracle takes place or not.**

Sooner or later we will be called upon to trust God as we endure sickness, grief, or disappointment. That's when "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7).

By **Herbert Vander Lugt**

**Sometimes we see a miracle, And faith in God revives;  
Yet eyes of faith can see God's hand At work throughout our lives. —Hess**

*Believing is seeing what our eyes cannot see.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

Jan 22, FRIDAY

Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:31-37; Jn 4:46-54

Healing - Nobleman's son &amp; Demoniac

Mk 1:17

How do you respond to the word of God? Do you hear it with selective submission or with the full assent of faith and obedience? When Jesus taught he spoke with authority. He spoke the word of God as no one had spoken it before. When the Rabbis taught they supported their statements with quotes from other authorities. The prophets spoke with delegated authority -- *Thus says the Lord*.

When Jesus spoke he needed no authorities to back his statements. He was authority incarnate -- the Word of God made flesh. When he spoke, God spoke. When he commanded even the demons obeyed. If demons, the fallen angels, have faith in the Son of God, how much more should we believe the gospel with the full assent of our minds and hearts and entrust our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ? If we approach God's word submissively, with an eagerness to do everything the Lord desires, we are in a much better position to learn what God wants to teach us through his word. Are you eager to be taught by the Lord and to conform your life according to his word?

*"Lord, your word is power and life. May I never doubt your saving love and mercy, and the power of your word to bring healing, restoration, and freedom from sin and affliction."*

Do you approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith for healing, pardon, and transformation in Christ-like holiness? Jesus' miracles are signs that manifest the presence and power of God's kingdom. When a high ranking official, who was very likely from King Herod's court, heard the reports of Jesus' preaching and miracles, he decided to seek Jesus out for an extraordinary favor. If this story happened today the media headlines would probably say: "High ranking official leaves capital in search of miracle cure from a small town carpenter."

It took raw courage for a high ranking court official to travel twenty miles in search of Jesus, the Galilean carpenter. He had to swallow his pride and put up with some ridicule from his cronies. And when he found the healer carpenter, Jesus seemed to put him off with the blunt statement that people would not believe unless they saw some kind of miracle or sign from heaven. Jesus likely said this to test the man to see if his faith was in earnest. If he turned away discouraged or irritated, he would prove to be insincere. Jesus, perceiving his faith, sent him home with the assurance that his prayer had been heard. It was probably not easy for this man to leave Jesus and go back home only with the assuring word that his son would be healed. Couldn't Jesus have come to this man's home and touched his dying child? The court official believed in Jesus and took him at his word without doubt or hesitation. He was ready to return home and face ridicule and laughter because he trusted in Jesus' word. God's mercy shows his generous love – a love that bends down in response to our misery and wretchedness.

Is there any area in your life where you need healing, pardon, change, and restoration? If you seek the Lord with trust and expectant faith, he will not disappoint you. He will meet you more than half way and give you what you need. The Lord Jesus never refused anyone who put their trust in him. Surrender your doubts and fears, your pride and guilt at his feet, and trust in his saving word and healing love.

*"Lord Jesus, your love never fails and your mercy is unceasing. Give me the courage to surrender my stubborn pride, fear and doubts to your surpassing love, wisdom and knowledge. Make me strong in faith, persevering in hope, and constant in love."*

JAN 23, SATURDAY Mat 4:23-25, 8:14-17; Mar 1:29-39; Luk 4:38-44

Putting the 'kitchen god' in his Place

Mar 1:35

*At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah. Luk 4:40-41*

One of the few things which makes Asian culture stand out from Western society (apart from our food) is our preoccupation with the supernatural world. Kitchen gods, leaping Taoist funeral monks, kavadi-bearers and feng shui - we have them all.

Perhaps, therefore, in Asia there is a greater need for teaching concerning the supernatural and the life-giving reality of Christ. Our passage today links exorcism with teaching (v. 36) and healing (v. 40). It shows Jesus launching His war on the powers that would enslave souls in the worst possible way, spiritually.

The kingdom of God is about taking the fight back to the forces of evil, closing them down, planting the divine flag of liberation in what was formerly demonic territory. It is clear that such action formed an integral part of the kingdom of God, as Jesus understood it (v.43).

Realistically speaking, not many of us may be called to cast out demons. But all of us are called to challenge demonically initiated structures, value-systems and institutions and by doing so to restore lives and redeem communities. We can all learn and live (and thereby communicate) the teachings of Jesus to all we come across. We can speak words of healing and do acts of love (which heal in unimaginable ways).

Thus shall we unloose the chains of feng shui and put the kitchen god in his place - under the feet of the true God.

**What is the one uniquely Asian festival or practice which disturbs you the most spiritually?  
Talk to a pastor or other Christian friends about it.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

JAN 23, SATURDAY Mat 4:23-25, 8:14-17; Mar 1:29-39; Luk 4:38-44

Putting the 'kitchen god' in his Place

Mar 1:35

Who do you take your troubles to? Jesus' disciples freely brought their troubles to him because they found him ready and able to deal with any difficulty, affliction, or sickness which they encountered. When Simon brought Jesus to his home, his mother-in-law was instantly healed because Jesus heard Simon's prayer. Do you allow Jesus to be the Lord and Healer in your life, family, and community? Approach him with expectant faith. God's healing power restores us not only to health but to active service and care of others. There is no trouble he does not want to help us with and there is no bondage he can't set us free from. Do you take your troubles to him with expectant faith that he will help you?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you have all power to heal and to deliver. There is no trouble nor bondage you cannot overcome. Set me free to serve you joyfully and to love and serve others generously. May nothing hinder me from giving myself wholly to you and to your service."*

When Dr. Rishi Manchanda asks his patients, "Where do you live?" he's looking for more than an address. He has seen a pattern. Those who come to him for help often live in conditions of environmental stress. Molds, pests, and toxins are making them sick. So Dr. Manchanda has become an advocate of what he calls Upstream Doctors. These are health care workers who, while providing urgent medical care, are working with patients and communities to get to the source of better health.

As Jesus healed those who came to Him (Matthew 4:23–24), He lifted their eyes beyond the need for urgent physical and material care. With His Sermon on the Mount He offered more than a medical miracle (5:1–12). Seven times Jesus described attitudes of mind and heart that reflect a well-being that begins with a new vision and promise of spiritual well-being (vv. 3–9). Two more times he called blessed those who experience relentless persecution and find their hope and home in Him (vv. 10–12).

Jesus's words leave me wondering. Where am I living? How aware am I of my need for a well-being that is greater than my urgent need for physical and material relief? As I long for a miracle, do I embrace as enviable the poor, broken, hungry, merciful, peacemaking heart that Jesus calls blessed?

By: **Mart DeHaan**

*Father in heaven, it's so hard to see beyond our pain.*

*Please let us sense Your mercy in this moment.*

*Lift our eyes beyond ourselves.*

*Let us find a new vision and source of health in the care of Christ, who heals.*

*When God is our home, our hope is in Him.*

JAN 24, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JAN 25, MONDAY      Mat 8:1-4, 23-27; Mar 1:40-45, 4:35-41; Luk 5:12-16, 8:22-25

Facing the Storms of Life

Mar 4:39

*The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. Luk 8:24*

Jesus fell asleep. A long day and the gentle rocking motion of the boat would make anybody fall asleep. A sudden squall blew up. This was nothing unusual on the Sea of Galilee and nothing fishermen (5:1-3) could not handle. But this was no ordinary storm. This was big. The disciples panicked. They turned to Jesus. Surely the master will save them.

And Jesus did. He stilled the storm. In the ensuing calm came a gentle rebuke. Where is your faith?' (v.25). Did not the disciples have faith? Of course they had otherwise they would not have woken Jesus up. But they did not have the faith in God that Jesus had. The future church will need that faith. The disciples went through this storm and they learnt that this man who needs sleep like us is also so unlike us. He is more than man.

The storms of life can come upon us suddenly. In 1978 a truck ploughed into a minibus in central Thailand. Five missionaries, seven missionary children and three unborn babies were killed outright. The survivors were rushed to Manorom Christian Hospital. Bryan Parry, a missionary surgeon, prepared to operate. He had just learned that his own wife and daughters were among the dead. And operate he did. Where did he find the strength to operate as his own personal tragedy hung heavy over him? He found it in his Lord Jesus Christ. When you go through your storm with Jesus in your boat, you will have your own extraordinary story to tell. For Jesus is not just man; He is also the Son of God. He is sufficient for your storms.

**We naturally want to avoid the storms of life. But God is in the storm with us.  
We can therefore go through it and come out the stronger.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 25, MONDAY

Mat 8:1-4, 18-27; Mk 1:40-45, 4:36-41; Lk 5:1-12, 8:22-25

Healing &amp; Stilling

Mk 4:39

Jesus did the unthinkable. He touched the untouchable. Lepers were outcasts of society. Their physical condition was terrible as they slowly lost their limbs and withered away. They were not only shunned but regarded as “already dead” even by their relatives. The Jewish law forbade anyone from touching or approaching a leper, lest ritual defilement occur. The leper did something quite remarkable. He approached Jesus confidently and humbly, expecting that Jesus could and would heal him. Normally a leper would be stoned or at least warded off if he tried to come near a rabbi. Jesus not only grants the man his request, but he demonstrates the personal love, compassion, and tenderness of God in his physical touch. The medical knowledge of his day would have regarded such contact as grave risk for incurring infection. Jesus met the man’s misery with compassion and tender kindness. He communicated the love and mercy of God in a sign that spoke more eloquently than words. He touched the man and made him clean -- not only physically but spiritually as well.

Some eleven centuries later, another man, named Francis, met a leper on the road as he journeyed towards Assisi. “Though the leper caused him no small disgust and horror, he nonetheless, got off the horse and prepared to kiss the leper. But when the leper put out his hand as though to receive something, he received money along with a kiss” (from the *Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano). Francis did what seemed humanly impossible because he was filled with the love and compassion of Christ. The Holy Spirit inflames our hearts with the love of Christ that we may reach out to others with compassionate care, especially to those who have been rejected and mistreated.

Do you allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the love and compassion of Christ for others?

*“May the power of your love, Lord Christ, fiery and sweet as honey, so absorb our hearts as to withdraw them from all that is under heaven. Grant that we may be ready to die for love of your love, as you died for love of our love. (Prayer of Francis of Assisi, 13th century)*

How can we fight fear with faith? Jesus’ sleeping presence on the storm-tossed sea reveals the sleeping faith of his disciples. They feared for their lives even though their Lord and Master was with them in the boat. They were asleep to Christ while he was present to them in their hour of need. The Lord is ever present to us. And in our time of testing he asks the same question: *Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?* Do you recognize the Lord’s presence with you, especially when you meet the storms of adversity, sorrow, and temptation? Whenever we encounter trouble, the Lord is there with the same reassuring message: *“It is I, do not be afraid.”*

What are the characteristics of faith and how can we grow in it? Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to us. Believing is only possible by grace and the help of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and who opens the eyes of the mind to understand and accept the truth which God has revealed to us. Faith enables us to relate to God rightly and confidently, with trust and reliance, by believing and adhering to his word, because he is utterly reliable and trustworthy. If we want to live, grow, and persevere in faith, then it must be nourished with the word of God. Fear does not need to cripple us from taking right action or rob us of our trust and reliance on God. Courage working with faith enables us to embrace God’s word of truth and love with confidence and to act on it with firm hope in God’s promises.

The love of God strengthens us in our faith and trust in him and enables us to act with justice and kindness towards our neighbor even in the face of opposition or harm. Do you allow the love of Christ to rule in your heart and mind, and to move your will to choose what is good in accordance with his will?

*“Lord, increase my faith in your redeeming love and power that I may always recognize your abiding presence with me. And give me courage to do your will in all circumstances.”*

JAN 26, TUESDAY      Mat 8:28-34; Mar 5:1-20; Luk 8:26-39

The Demons Submit to Jesus

Luk 8:39

*And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. Luk 8:31*

The storm stilled, the journey continues. They land on the other side of the Lake in the region of the Gadarenes. They are met by a demoniac. Now the disciples will see that the One who commands the storm can also command the demons (v.29). Who is this? He is the Son of God; even the demons recognize Him (v.28). The legion of demons is dispatched into the pigs. They commit suicide. The man exorcised and cleansed becomes normal again. This is very newsworthy- demons, mad man healed, suicidal pigs and great economic loss (v.34).

These happenings affect people in various ways. The disciples have a new angle to their question, 'Who is this?' (v.25b). The pig herders are shocked. The healed man is grateful. The people of the region are scared - they want Jesus to leave.

So Jesus leaves but He has not given up on them. How do we know? Because Jesus did not allow the healed man to follow Him. Instead, He tells him to return home and tell his people what God has done for him. The man does more than that. He tells the whole town (v.39b).

We all have our encounters with the living God. It may not necessarily be demon exorcism. You may have a different experience with God. An answered prayer. A healing. Protection from harm and evil. Clear guidance. If you live among people who reject Jesus, know for a fact that Jesus has not rejected them. He wants you to go and tell them your story and about what God has done for you.

**Pray for the people you know who are hostile to or are fearful of Jesus Christ.  
Pray that they will know Christ is not to be feared or hated.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

**Question: "Why are there two demon-possessed men in the Gerasene tombs in Matthew, but only one in Mark and Luke?"**

The three passages that describe the incident with the demoniacs in the country of the Gerasene, also called Gadarenes, are Mat 8:28-34, Mar 5:1-20, and Luk 8:26-39. The Matthew account mentions two demon-possessed men, while Mark and Luke only mention one. Is there a discrepancy in these accounts, and do the Gospel writers contradict one another?

The first thing to determine is whether the three writers are describing the same event. The timing of the event in all three accounts—immediately following the calming of the storm on the sea of Galilee—as well as other similarities (living in the tombs, the ferocity of the demoniac, the conversation with the demons, the driving of them into the pigs, the drowning of the herd, and the response of those who witnessed the scene) all give credence to Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describing the same event. The question remains, then, whether there was one demoniac or two.

Matthew tells us there were two demoniacs, while Mark and Luke only mention one of the two. It is unclear why they chose to mention only one, but that does not negate the possibility of a second demoniac being present. Mark and Luke do not say there was "only one" demon-possessed man. They simply state that one of the two met Jesus and spoke to Him. For whatever reason, Matthew simply gives us more information than Mark and Luke.

In any case, no contradiction exists. A contradiction occurs only if one statement makes the other impossible and there is absolutely no way for them to be reconciled.

For example, let's say we put two apples on a table.

Statement 1: There are two apples on the table.

Statement 2: There is only one apple on the table.

These two statements contradict each other.

Now read these two statements:

Statement 1: There are two apples on the table.

Statement 2: There is an apple on the table.

These two statements do not contradict each other.

In the same way, the biblical accounts do not represent a contradiction.

- All three accounts describe demon possession and the power that Jesus has over the spirit world.
- All three tell us that He made a point to cross the sea to save someone from the demons.
- All three affirm that there was at least one man who was plagued by demons.

The fact that the three accounts differ in some minor details only proves that they were written by three different authors, each of whom chose to focus on a different aspect of the account.

Jan 26, TUESDAY

Mat 8:28-34 ; Mk 5:1-20 ; Lk 8:26-39

Gadarene Demoniac

Lk 8:39

Do you ever feel driven by forces beyond your strength?

A man who was possessed and driven mad by the force of many evil spirits found refuge in the one person who could set him free. Both Luke and Mark in their Gospel accounts of this incident describe this demonic force as a legion (Luke 8:30 and Mark 5:9). A legion is no small force – but an army 6,000 strong! For the people of Palestine who were often hemmed in by occupied forces, a legion – whether human or supernatural – struck terror! Legions at their wildest committed unmentionable atrocities. Our age has also witnessed untold crimes and mass destruction at the hands of possessed rulers and their armies.

What is more remarkable – the destructive force of this driven and possessed man, or the bended knee at Jesus' feet imploring mercy and release (Luke 8:28 and Mark 5:18-19)? God's word reminds us that no destructive force can keep anyone from the peace and safety which God offers to those who seek his help. *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. ..Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation* (Psalm 91:7,9).

Jesus took pity on the man who was overtaken by a legion of evil spirits. The destructive force of these demons is evident for all who can see as they flee and destroy a herd of swine. After Jesus freed the demoniac the whole city came out to meet him. No one had demonstrated such power and authority against the forces of Satan as Jesus did. They feared Jesus as a result and begged him to leave them. Why would they not want Jesus to stay? Perhaps the price for such liberation from the power of evil and sin was more than they wanted to pay.

The Lord Jesus is ready and willing to free us from anything that binds us and that keeps us from the love of God. Are you willing to part with anything that might keep you from his love and saving grace?

*"Lord Jesus, unbind me that I may love you wholly and walk in the freedom of your way of life and holiness. May there be nothing which keeps me from the joy of living in your presence."*

JAN 27, WEDNESDAY      Mat 9:18-26; Mar 5:21-43; Luk 8:40-56

Your Faith has Healed You

Luk 8:50

*Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."*  
Luk 8:50

Who gained most from this episode? At twelve years, it is too young to die. Jairus is desperate but there is hope. Jesus is in town. The crowds parted for this important man. 'Jesus, please come and heal my daughter.' 'Yes.' His hopes raised, Jairus pushes through the crowd. Jesus follows. Little does Jairus know they will arrive to find his daughter dead. They push through the mass of humanity. Suddenly, a delay. Jairus worries. Jesus has felt power go out from Him.

Who touched me? (v.45). Peter thinks it is a ridiculous question (v. 45b). But Jesus wants to know the person. He does not deal with anonymous persons. Fearfully, a woman owns up. Twelve years is too long to remain ill. The crowds had not parted for this 'nobody'. But this woman has extraordinary faith. Pushing through arms, legs and bodies, she had managed to touch Jesus' cloak. She was healed. 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace' (v.48). Relationship established.

Jairus witnessed everything. And his worst fears were realized for at that moment bad news came (v.49). Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher any more' (v.49b). For a lot of us, death is so final. The delay has done its work. But with the Son of God, death is not the end. 'Don't be afraid, just believe... may not be very reassuring to many people but to one who had seen the woman healed just a few minutes ago, it was reassuring. He had help to have faith. The one who gained the most was Jairus.

Perhaps you are facing a desperate situation now. Be assured that Jesus cares for us (1 Pe 5:7). Remember the blessings and care you received in the past. They are aids to faith. What Jesus did for the woman and for Jairus, He can do for you too. And His healing comes in different forms.

**Faith is not just for healing. Faith is trusting in a good God who wants our highest good.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 27, WEDNESDAY

Mat 9:18-26 ; Mk 5:21-43 ; Lk 8:40-56

Jairus' daughter &amp; Woman with an issue of blood

Lk 8:50

Do you approach the Lord with expectant faith?

People in desperate or helpless circumstances were not disappointed when they sought Jesus out. What drew them to Jesus? Was it hope for a miracle or a word of comfort in their affliction? What did the elderly woman who had suffered greatly for twelve years expect Jesus to do for her? And what did a grieving father expect Jesus to do about his lost beloved daughter?

Jesus gave hope where there seemed to be no human cause for it because his hope was directed to God. He spoke words of hope to the woman (*Take heart, daughter!*) to ignite the spark of faith in her (*your faith has made you well!*).

A 4th century church father, Ephrem the Syrian, comments on this miracle: “Glory to you, hidden Son of God, because your healing power is proclaimed through the hidden suffering of the afflicted woman. Through this woman whom they could see, the witnesses were enabled to behold the divinity that cannot be seen. Through the Son’s own healing power his divinity became known. Through the afflicted woman’s being healed her faith was made manifest. She caused him to be proclaimed, and indeed was honored with him. For truth was being proclaimed together with his heralds. If she was a witness to his divinity, he in turn was a witness to her faith. ..He saw through to her hidden faith, and gave her a visible healing.”

Jesus also gave divine hope to a father who had just lost a beloved child. It took considerable courage and risk for the ruler of a synagogue to openly go to Jesus and to invite the scorn of his neighbors and kin. Even the hired mourners laughed at him in scorn. Their grief was devoid of any hope. Nonetheless, Jesus took the girl by the hand and delivered her from the grasp of death.

Peter Chrysologus, a 5th century church father comments on this miracle: “This man was a ruler of the synagogue, and versed in the law. He had surely read that while God created all other things by his word, man had been created by the hand of God. He trusted therefore in God that his daughter would be recreated, and restored to life by that same hand which, he knew, had created her. ..He who laid hands on her to form her from nothing, once more lays hands upon her to reform her from what had perished.”

In both instances we see Jesus' personal concern for the needs of others and his readiness to heal and restore life. In Jesus we see the infinite love of God extending to each and every individual as he gives freely and wholly of himself to each person he meets. Do you approach the Lord with confident expectation that he will hear your request and act?

*“Lord, you love each of us individually with a unique and personal love.  
Touch my life with your saving power, heal and restore me to fullness of life.  
Help me to give wholly of myself in loving service to others.”*

JAN 28, THURSDAY      Mat 9:1-13, 27-34; Mar 2:1-17 ; Luk 5:1-32

**Who are the Healthy? Who are the Sick?**

**Luk 5:31-32**

*"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luk 5:32*

Today's reading features the Pharisees questioning Jesus, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" The key subjects are tax collectors and sinners i.e. the outcasts of ancient Jewish society. Not entirely unlike gays and lesbians, the outcasts of modern Christian communities.

The passage today reminds us of a key principle in the way Jesus lived and ministered: He cared for and welcomed those who had been despised by society's gate-keepers.

It appears, therefore, that the more we are tempted to condemn and brand as unclean various groups of people, the more we make them objects of Jesus' ministry. The 'sicker' we feel people are, the more we should be sending the love of Christ their way. Our judgments make them targets for the grace of God.

But there's a note of irony in Jesus' comment about having come only for the sick and not the righteous. Think about it: Who among us can be said to be absolutely righteous? Who amongst us is not in need of some form of spiritual healing?

Is it not possible, therefore, that Jesus' comment (in verse 32) is meant to expose the faulty categories employed by the Pharisees themselves - as if they were "healthy" and everyone else 'sick'?

And are we making the same mistakes today?

**Which group of people would you feel outrage, disgust or shock at seeing Jesus fellowshiping with? Why? Then re-read the passage above. And think again.**

**P.R.A.Y**      PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 28, THURSDAY

Mat 9:1-13, 27-34 ; Mk 2:1-17 ; Lk 5:17-32

Healing: Blind man, Demoniac & Paralytic;  
Calling of Levi

Lk 5:31-32

Do you know the healing power of forgiveness?

Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day. When a cripple was brought to Jesus because of the faith of his friends, Jesus did the unthinkable. He first forgave the man his sins. The scribes regarded this as blasphemy because they understood that only God had authority to forgive sins and to unbind a man from his burden of guilt. Jesus claimed an authority which only God could rightfully give. Jesus not only proved that his authority came from God, he showed the great power of God's redeeming love and mercy by healing the cripple of his physical ailment. This man had been crippled not only physically, but spiritually as well. Jesus freed him from his burden of guilt and restored his body as well.

The Lord is every ready to bring us healing of soul, body, and mind. Do you allow anything to keep you from Jesus?

*"Lord Jesus, through your merciful love and forgiveness you bring healing and restoration to body, soul, and mind. May your healing power and love touch every area of my life -- my innermost thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and memories. Pardon my offences and transform me in the power of your Holy Spirit that I may walk confidently in your truth and righteousness."*

Do you know God's mercy and do you treat your neighbor with mercy? People in Palestine were divided into roughly two groups: the orthodox Jews who rigidly kept the law and all its petty regulations, and the rest who didn't keep all the minute regulations. The orthodox treated the latter like second class citizens. They scrupulously avoided their company, refused to do business with them, refused to give or receive anything from them, refused to intermarry, and avoided any form of entertainment with them, including table fellowship.

Jesus' association with the latter, especially with tax collectors and sinners, shocked the sensibilities of these orthodox Jews. In calling Matthew to be one of his disciples, Jesus picked one of the unlikeliest of men -- a tax collector who by profession was despised by the Jewish people. When the Pharisees challenged his unorthodox behavior in eating with public sinners, Jesus' defense was quite simple. A doctor doesn't need to visit healthy people; instead he goes to those who are sick. Jesus likewise sought out those in the greatest need. A true physician seeks healing of the whole person -- body, mind, and spirit. Jesus came as the divine physician and good shepherd to care for his people and to restore them to wholeness of life. The orthodox were so preoccupied with their own practice of religion that they neglected to help the very people who needed spiritual care. Their religion was selfish because they didn't want to have anything to do with people not like themselves.

Jesus stated his mission in unequivocal terms: *I came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners.* Ironically the orthodox were as needy as those they despised. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom. 3:23). Do you thank the Lord for the great mercy he has shown to you? And do you seek the good of all your neighbors and show them mercy and kindness?

*"Lord Jesus, our Savior, let us now come to you: Our hearts are cold; Lord, warm them with your selfless love. Our hearts are sinful; cleanse them with your precious blood. Our hearts are weak; strengthen them with your joyous Spirit. Our hearts are empty; fill them with your divine presence.*

*Lord Jesus, our hearts are yours; possess them always and only for yourself."*  
(Prayer of Augustine, 4th century)

JAN 29, FRIDAY Mat 9:14-17; Mar 2:18-22; Luk 5:33-39; Joh 5:1-15

Eyes To See

Joh 5:6b

*At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. Joh 5:9*

The pool of Bethesda was a gathering place for the disabled who believed in the healing power of the water. In this account, the focus is on the paralyzed man. He had been hopeless and helpless for 38 years.

When Jesus came, He offered the man both hope and help. When Jesus asked, 'Do you want to get well?' and then instructed him. 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk', all the man needed was faith in Jesus' words. He obeyed and was healed (v.6-9).

A miracle had just happened. A paralyzed man was healed. But the Jews, especially the religious leaders, were upset and furious with the man for picking up his mat on a Sabbath day. They deemed that to be equivalent to 'work'.

They were blind to the power of God that was demonstrated right before their eyes. Their preoccupation with the requirements of the law caused them not to see God's power and love at work in the life of the paralyzed man.

What about us? Are we also so preoccupied with 'rules' and 'traditions' that we fail to see the power of God at work in the events and lives around us? We need to recognize that the same Son of God who performed a miracle at the pool of Bethesda some two thousand years ago can still do the same today.

**Lord, help us to see You working in and around us even in our times.  
Open our eyes to Your never ending power, Father.  
Give us seeing eyes and a believing heart.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 29, FRIDAY    Mat 9:14-17 ; Mk 2:18-22 ; Lk 5:133-39; Jn 5:1-15

Letter Vs Spirit of the Law

Jn 5:6b

Which comes first, fasting or feasting?

The disciples of John the Baptist were upset with Jesus' disciples because they did not fast. Fasting was one of the three most important religious duties, along with prayer and almsgiving. Jesus gave a simple explanation. There's a time for fasting and a time for feasting (or celebrating). To walk as a disciple with Jesus is to experience a whole new joy of relationship akin to the joy of the wedding party in celebrating with the groom and bride their wedding bliss. But there also comes a time when the Lord's disciples must bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord's presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility and fasting and for mourning over sin. Do you take joy in the Lord's presence with you and do you express sorrow and contrition for your sins?

Jesus goes on to warn his disciples about the problem of the "closed mind" that refuses to learn new things. Jesus used an image familiar to his audience — new and old wineskins. In Jesus' times, wine was stored in wineskins, not bottles. New wine poured into skins was still fermenting. The gases exerted gave pressure. New wine skins were elastic enough to take the pressure, but old wine skins easily burst because they were hard. What did Jesus mean by this comparison? Are we to reject the old in place of the new? Just as there is a right place and a right time for fasting and for feasting, so there is a right place for the old as well as the new. Jesus says *the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old* (Matthew 13:52).

How impoverished we would be if we only had the Old Testament or the New Testament, rather than both. The Lord gives us wisdom so we can make the best use of both the old and the new. He doesn't want us to hold rigidly to the past and to be resistant to the new work of his Holy Spirit in our lives. He wants our minds and hearts to be like new wine skins — open and ready to receive the new wine of the Holy Spirit.

Are you eager to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God's word and plan for your life?

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit, that I may grow in the knowledge of your great love and truth. Help me to seek you earnestly in prayer and fasting that I may turn away from sin and willfulness and conform my life more fully to your will.  
May I always find joy in knowing, loving, and serving you."*

JAN 30, SATURDAY

Mat 12:1-8; Mar 2:23-28; Luk 6:1-5; Joh 5:16-47

God's Kind of Life

Joh 5:19

*'I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.'* Joh 5:24

I came across an acronym for the word 'Gospel' - God Offers Sinful People Eternal Life. Jesus the Son of God said, 'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life' (v.24).The 'eternal life' that Jesus promises has both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Many understand eternal life to be life forever - a quantitative aspect. In other words, believers in Christ will continue living for eternity. Jesus said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die' (Joh 11:25). He implies that those who believe in Him will be resurrected. Death cannot put an end to our lives. The apostle Paul echoes this in I Corinthians 15:55, 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'

The qualitative aspect of our eternal life is even more glorious. When we believe in Christ, He gives us a totally different quality of life. Eternal life is God's kind of life. We who believe can live out such a life because it is God living in us and through us. He lives in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is God Himself. He will convict us of our sins, guide us into all truth and empower us to live the abundant life - the eternal life. Read 2 Pet 1:3-4.

With the Holy Spirit in our lives, God has made it possible for us to live a kind of life that by ourselves would have been impossible to live.

**Lord, help us rejoice in Your infinite wisdom and plans for our lives.  
Help us grow to know You more day by day.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Jan 30, SATURDAY

Mat 12:1-8; Mk 2:23-28; Lk 6:1-5; Jn 5:16-47

Jesus, the Jews &amp; Plucking Corns on the Sabbath

Jn 5:19

What does the commandment "keep holy the Sabbath" require of us? Or better yet, what is the primary intention behind this command? The religious leaders confronted Jesus on this issue. The "Sabbath rest" was meant to be a time to remember and celebrate God's goodness and the goodness of his work, both in creation and redemption. It was a day set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on our behalf. It was intended to bring everyday work to a halt and to provide needed rest and refreshment.

Jesus' disciples are scolded by the scribes and Pharisees, not for plucking and eating corn from the fields, but for doing so on the Sabbath. In defending his disciples, Jesus argues from the scriptures that human need has precedence over ritual custom: In their hunger, David and his men ate of the holy bread offered in the Temple. Jesus also quoted of the Sabbath work involved in worship in the Temple. This kind of work was usually double the work of worship on weekdays. Jesus then quotes from the prophet Hosea (6:6): *I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*. While the claims of ritual sacrifice are important to God, mercy and kindness in response to human need are even more important.

Do you honor the Lord in the way you treat your neighbor and celebrate the Lord's Day?

*"Lord, make us to walk in your way: 'Where there is love and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance; where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor annoyance; where there is poverty and joy, there is neither greed nor avarice; where there is peace and contemplation, there is neither care nor restlessness; where there is the fear of God to guard the dwelling, there no enemy can enter; where there is mercy and prudence, there is neither excess nor harshness'; this we know through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226)*

God's actions reveal his mercy and his justice. Do you recognize his action in your life, his saving grace and love, and the purifying fire of his Spirit who convicts us of sin and transforms us in his holiness? The religious authorities refused to accept Jesus' authority to heal and to speak in the name of his heavenly Father. They charged Jesus as a "Sabbath-breaker" and as a "blasphemer". They wanted to kill Jesus because he claimed the same authority and power as God. He claimed equality with God—something no mortal could say without blaspheming. Jesus answered their charge of breaking the Sabbath law by demonstrating God's purpose for creation and redemption—to save and restore life. God's love and mercy never ceases, even on the Sabbath. Jesus continues to show the Father's mercy, even on the Sabbath day of rest. When they charged that Jesus was making himself equal with God, he replied that he was not acting independently of God because his relationship is that of a Father and Son relationship.

If we wish to see how God reacts to sin and how he responds to our sinful condition, then we must look to Jesus. The mind of Jesus is the mind of God, and the words of Jesus are the words of God. Jesus also states that his identity to the Father is based on complete obedience. Jesus always did what his Father wanted him to do. His obedience was not based on submission or power, but on love. The unity between Jesus and the Father is a unity of love. We are called to submit our lives to God with the same love and obedience which Jesus demonstrated for his Father. Jesus states that to accept him is life and to reject him is death.

Are you ready to follow the Lord and to leave behind whatever is false and contrary to his will?

*"Lord, increase my love for you and unite my heart and will with yours, that I may only seek what is pleasing to you".*

JAN 31, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

FEB 1, MONDAY

Mat 12:9-21; Mar 3:1-12; Luk 6:6-11

Outlawing Laws which Kill

Mar 3:4

*"I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Luk 6:9*

In the Chinese community, life and death shouldn't mix. If, for example, you're about to get married and your mother-in-law to be were to pass away, you should avoid the funeral. Don't even go near. Why? Because such occasions bring 'bad-luck'. Life and death must remain separate.

Look at it from the groom-to-be's perspective: Your mother has died, but your bride-to-be can neither mourn with you nor be at the funeral. She cannot be with you at your time of need because to do so would invite misfortune.

In all cultures, man-made pseudo-spiritual laws and practices have been a source of oppression and dehumanization. To the Pharisees, narrow interpretations of 'not working on the Sabbath' were more important than relieving hunger (v.1-5) and giving new life to dead limbs (v.6-11). Furthermore, that someone should defy these humanity-burdening laws was a source of anger, scheming and premeditated murder (v.11).

Such is the state of fallen humanity: Not only do we create ruinous rules which 'do evil and destroy life' (v.9), we also plot the ruin of those who point out their foolish and victimizing nature. Even granted that the Sabbath had roots in God's historical actions (e.g. creation) and laws, Jesus had no qualms subordinating legalistic issues to meeting basic human needs.

The Son of Man, who is also Lord of the Sabbath, calls us to reject soul-killing laws and redeem the world by, not least, reminding people of what their priorities should be. There is a higher moral law of love which supersedes ceremonial niceties.

**Think about the cultural practices you are most familiar with.  
Reflect too on practices in the office, on the road, in politics, in the marketplace, etc.  
Which encourage community and relationships and which create fear?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 1, MONDAY

Mat 12:9-21; Mar 3:1-12; Luk 6:6-11

Outlawing Laws which Kill

Mar 3:4

What is God's intention for the commandment, *keep holy the Sabbath* (Exodus 20:8; Deut. 5:12)? The scribes and Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus in the act of breaking the Sabbath ritual so they might accuse him of breaking God's law. They were filled with fury and contempt for Jesus because they put their own thoughts of right and wrong above God. They were ensnared in their own legalism because they did not understand or see the purpose of God. Jesus shows their fallacy by pointing to God's intention for the Sabbath: *to do good and to save life rather than to do evil or to destroy life*. Christians celebrate Sunday as the Lord's Day, to commemorate God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ and the new work of creation he accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection. Taking "our sabbath rest" is a way of expressing honor to God for all that he has done for us. Such "rest" however does not exempt us from our love for our neighbor. If we truly love the Lord above all else, then the love of God will overflow to love of neighbor as well. Do you honor the Lord in the way you celebrate Sunday, the *Lord's Day* and in the way you treat you neighbor?

*"Lord, in your victory over sin and death on the cross and in your resurrection,  
you give us the assurance of sharing in the eternal rest of heaven.*

*Transform my heart with your love that I may freely serve my neighbor for his good and find joy  
and refreshment in the celebration of Sunday as the Lord's Day."*

In everyone's life there are key moments or turning points on which the whole of one's life hinges. The mounting confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus was such a decisive event and crisis. The religious leaders became intolerant because of their prejudice. Nothing that Jesus would do or say from this point on would be right in their eyes. They conspired, not simply to oppose Jesus but to eliminate him. Jesus met this defiance with courage and determination. He used the crisis to teach his disciples an important lesson for the kingdom way to success and victory. The only way to glory in God's kingdom is through the cross. Jesus quoted from the "Suffering Servant" prophecies of Isaiah to explain how he would accomplish his mission, not through crushing power but through sacrificial service. In place of a throne he would mount the cross and wear a crown of thorns. There is no greater proof of God's love for us. Jesus died not only for Jew but Gentile as well. Isaiah had prophesied centuries before, that the Messiah would bring justice to the Gentiles. To the Greek mind, justice involved giving to God and to men that which is their due. Jesus taught his disciples how to behave towards God and towards others. Jesus brings justice tempered with divine love. He does not bruise the weak or treat them with contempt, but rather shows understanding. He does not discourage the fainthearted but gives encouragement and hope. No matter how hopeless or weak one may be, the Lord Jesus is ever ready to bring his healing love, hope, and encouragement. Do you hope in God and trust in his mercy and justice?

*"Lord, strengthen me in your love and hope.*

*Make me an instrument of your hope that I may encourage those who have no hope."*

FEB 2, TUESDAY Mat 10:1-4; Mar 3:13-19; Luk 6:12-16

Loved of God

**Mar 3:13-14 (BWJ Anchor Verse)**

*He chose Simon... the Zealot...and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Luk 6:15-16*

Thank God, Jesus isn't like Donald Trump. Or like most managers in our country, especially Human Resource managers. Because if He was, Simon (not Peter) and Judas wouldn't have been a part of His team.

Both had serious black marks about them. One was a zealot (not exactly God's model of compassionate love to enemies), the other a traitor. Include the highly temperamental Peter (who decided to dispossess the high priest's servant of his ear at Gethsemane) and a full 25% of Jesus' apostles wouldn't have achieved a Very Satisfactory rating in today's annual appraisals.

There's something about the delinquent, the maladjusted, the erratic and the impulsive which Jesus loves. Maybe, it's their passionate belief in and search for something better in the world. Maybe, it's their sorrow over the status quo. Maybe, it's their trigger-happy eagerness to see God doing something powerful.

Whatever we say about a zealot, a traitor or an emotional impulsive person, we cannot say they do not care about the outcomes. Perhaps, that's it: Jesus yearns for people who long for something new and something greater. They long for it so much that, unfortunately, they may take undesirable or unhealthy steps to achieve it. Jesus saw the fire in their hearts and sought to make it burn brightly and purposefully after His own heart.

Still, let's not be too 'harsh' on them, especially Judas. For though most of us believe we are God's elect and chosen people, have we not also been 'traitors' of His kingdom in a real sense? God has chosen us, but we have nevertheless, on many occasions, chosen against Him. Yet, we believe He continues to love us (don't we?).

**Make a list of people you know who are of low or questionable repute. Think hard about them. Have a (or more) conversation(s) with them. Is there an eagerness about them we may have missed? What can we learn from their lives, their questions, their work?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 2, TUESDAY

Mat 10:1-4; Mar 3:13-19; Luk 6:12-16

Loved of God

**Mar 3:13-14 (BWJ Anchor Verse)**

What is God's call on your life? When Jesus embarked on his mission, he chose twelve men for the task of preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick in the power of that kingdom. In the choice of the twelve, we see a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people.

They were non-professionals, who had no wealth or position. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these men, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not shrug back because we think that we have little or nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom.

Do you make your life an offering to the Lord and allow him to use you as he sees fit?

*"Lord, fill me with gratitude and generosity for all you have done for me.  
Take my life and all that I have as an offering of love for you, who are my All."*

Do you know and experience in your life the power of the gospel? The core of the gospel message is quite simple: *the kingdom (or reign) of God is imminent!* What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who submit to God and who honor him as their King and Lord. In the Lord's prayer we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: *May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Jesus' preaching of God's kingdom was accompanied by signs and wonders. People were healed not only spiritually, but physically as well. Jesus' words are just as relevant today, *the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* We cannot buy heaven; but those who know the love and mercy of Jesus already possess heaven in their hearts! Do you believe in the power of God's kingdom? Jesus commissioned his disciples to carry on the works which he did -- to speak God's word and to bring his healing power to the weary and oppressed. In the choice of the twelve apostles we see a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people.

Do you believe that God wants to work through and in you for his glory?

*"Lord, you have chosen me to be your disciple.  
Take and use what I can offer, however meager it may seem, for the greater glory of your name."*

FEB 3, WEDNESDAY Mat 5:1-12; Lk 6:17-26

The Gospel for Society's Least

Mat 5:12

*"Blessed are you who are poor ... you who hunger now...you who weep now ..."*  
 Luk 6:20-21

For the larger part of my Christian life, I thought that Christianity's primary concerns were about the afterlife, about one's 'personal relationship with God', about striving for holiness and avoiding sin. For over two decades, the issue of playing a pertinent role in transforming the society and ministering to the least and the outcasts in my community was at best a secondary footnote.

Jesus says that blessed are those who are experiencing poverty, hunger, sorrow, persecution (verbal or otherwise), rejection - for it shall all be undone one day. The kingdom He came to inaugurate is, among other things, about reversing the hell and hardships in society. Our Lord is doing what the church sadly doesn't do very often or very well: give hope to the least in society. And who are the agents of this hopeful reversal? Read the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:17-49) and ask: Did Jesus not expect the impact of personal renewal from following His commandments to 'flow out' into the wider community outside the church? More specifically, would Jesus be satisfied if the church was praising God and having a 'fellowship luncheon' in a particular building whilst outside hundreds are starving?

For too long, societal transformation has been languishing at the bottom of the church's agenda when in fact it should be among her highest priorities. The people of salvation are called to undo Satan's soul-crushing work.

**The children of God must be bringers of hope and joyous laughter (v 21).**

Consider the following items:

- 1) Post-Death Bliss
- 2) Service
- 3) Character Improvement
- 4) Sin Management/Avoidance
- 5) Social Transformation.

Which would you think Christians have traditionally emphasized, from most to least?  
 What would you think is the Christian's priorities, from highest to lowest? Why?

<b>P.R.A.Y</b> PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 3, WEDNESDAY

Mat 5:1-12; Lk 6:17-26

The Gospel for Society's Least

Mat 5:12

What is the good life, and the ultimate end or purpose of life? Is it *happiness*, which is none other than the complete good, the sum of all goods, leaving nothing more to be desired? Jesus addresses this question in his sermon on the mount. The word *beatitude* literally means "happiness" or "blessedness". What is the significance of Jesus' beatitudes, and why are they so central to his teaching? The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in every heart. They teach us the final end to which God calls us, namely the coming of God's kingdom (Matt. 4:17), the vision of God (Matt. 5:8; 1 John 2:1), entering into the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21-23) and into his rest (Hebrews 4:7-11). Jesus' beatitudes also confront us with decisive choices concerning the life we pursue here on earth and the use we make of the goods he puts at our disposal. God alone satisfies. Do you seek the *highest good*, the total good, which is above all else? The beatitudes which Jesus offers us are a sign of contradiction to the world's understanding of happiness and joy. How can one possibly find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? Poverty of spirit finds ample room and joy in possessing God as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God's word and Spirit. Sorrow and mourning over wasted life and sin leads to joyful freedom from the burden of guilt and spiritual oppression. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Thomas Aquinas said: *No one can live without joy*. That is why a person deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures. Do you know the happiness of hungering and thirsting for God alone?

*"Lord, increase my hunger for you and show me the way that leads to everlasting peace and happiness. May I desire you above all else and find perfect joy in doing your will."*

What is the true source of joy and happiness that so many find elusive? Jesus begins his teaching on the way of the kingdom of heaven by addressing the issue of where true happiness is found. The word *beatitude* literally means *happiness* or *blessedness*. Jesus' way of happiness, however, demands a transformation from within -- a conversion of heart and mind which can only come about through the gift of the Holy Spirit. How can one possibly find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? If we want to be filled with the joy and happiness of heaven, then we must empty ourselves of all that would shut God out of our hearts. Poverty of spirit finds ample room and joy in possessing God alone as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God's word and Spirit. Sorrow and mourning over wasted life and sin leads to joyful freedom from the burden of guilt and oppression. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Thomas Aquinas said: *No person can live without joy*. That is why someone deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures. Do you know the joy and happiness of hungering and thirsting for God alone?

*"Lord, increase my hunger for you and show me the way that leads to everlasting happiness and peace. May I desire you above all else and find perfect joy in doing your will."*

FEB 4, THURSDAY Mat 5:21-48; Luk 6:27-36

The Kingdom Way

Mat 5:48

*"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." Luke 6:27*

What if a third of all the members in every church were to practice this commandment twice a week? What if, two times a week, we were to actively show our kindness to the wicked and the ungrateful (v.35)? What if, a few times a month, we gave generously to those who hate us and would like to see us destroyed, and gave without expecting to get anything back (v.35)?

Wouldn't such actions cause a ripple so powerful in our society and social order? Wouldn't people sense and know there was something special happening in their midst?

To the godless, such acts are foolish. To the money-minded, to do so would invite dents in their profits. To the selfish, to work for peace at one's expense is a counter-productive approach to life. To the powers that be, this commandment goes counter to everything they stand for.

To the follower of Christ, though, there is something greater at stake than mere reprisal. There is concern for the offender.

Only a people nurtured in kingdom ways can behave this way. And in behaving this way, the reality that God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son to die for it, shines through.

**Does the name of an 'enemy' come to mind?  
Ask the Lord's enabling to do a loving deed for him/her this week.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 4, THURSDAY

Mat 5:21-48; Luk 6:27-36

The Kingdom Way

Mat 5:48

What does Jesus mean when he says “*pluck out your eye*” or “*cut off your hand and throw it away*” if it leads you to sin? Is he exaggerating here? Jesus used forceful language to urge his disciples to choose for life — a life of joy and happiness with God -- rather than for death -- an unending life of horrible misery and separation from the loving presence of an all-good God. Jesus set before his disciples the one goal in life that is worth any sacrifice and that goal is the conformity of our will with God and what he desires for our well-being and happiness with him. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which inevitably leads to spiritual death. Jesus warns us of the terrible responsibility that we must set no stumbling block in the way of another, that is, not give offense or bad example that might lead another to sin. The young in faith are especially vulnerable to the bad example of those who should be passing on the faith. Jesus teaches that righteousness involves responding to every situation in life in a way that fulfills God’s law, not just externally but internally as well. Jesus says that evil desires spring from the heart. That is why the sin of adultery must first be dealt with in the heart, the place not only of the emotions, but the mind, will, thought, and intentions as well. God’s intention and ideal from the beginning was for man and woman to be indissolubly united in marriage as “one flesh” (see Genesis 2:23-24 ). That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Moses permitted divorce as a concession in view of a lost ideal (see Mark 10:2-9). Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands. Jesus gives grace and power to those who seek to follow his way of holiness in their state of life -- whether married or single. If we want to live righteously we must understand the intention of God’s commands and decide in our heart to obey the Lord. The Lord writes his law on our hearts and gives us his power to live his way of righteousness and holiness. Do you trust in God’s love and allow his Holy Spirit to fill you with a thirst for righteousness and holiness?

*"Lord, begin a new work of love within me. Instill in me a greater love for your commandments.  
Give me a burning desire to live a life of righteousness and holiness.  
Purify and transform me that I may be fully conformed into the likeness of Christ."*

What makes Christians different and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is *grace* — treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated — with loving-kindness and mercy. God is good to the unjust as well as the just. His love embraces saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return. Our prayer for those who do us ill both breaks the power of revenge and releases the power of love to do good in the face of evil. How can we possibly love those who cause us harm and ill-will? With God all things are possible. He gives power and grace to those who believe and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. His love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and griefs. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. Do you know the power of Christ’s redeeming love and mercy?

*"Lord, your love brings freedom and pardon. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and set my heart free that nothing may make me lose my temper, ruffle my peace, take away my joy,  
nor make me bitter towards anyone"*

FEB 5, FRIDAY Mat 6:1-18; Luk 11:1-4

Prayer is both Caught and Taught

Mat 6:9-13

*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Luk 11:1*

We all know that we ought to pray and many of us struggle with our prayer life. To 'improve' our prayer life, some of us might choose to attend seminars or read books that teach us about what others have discovered about prayer. Some of us reject that approach and prefer to devote more time on simply 'just seeking the Lord' with open and sincere hearts. We may believe that prayer is all about our personal relationship with God and that in time our prayer lives will come alive.

Today's passage reminds us that prayer is both caught and taught. The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray because they have caught the importance of prayer in His life (v.1). Jesus is pleased at their request and proceeds to teach them 'the Lord's Prayer' (v.2-4). And as Jesus elaborates on prayer, He affirms that it is not just about 'prayer methods' but also about our relationship with God (v.2, 13).

How do we 'catch' and learn about prayer? For a start, we need good models (v.1). A good model can inspire us more than a good book. We can only find inspiring examples if we prioritize coming to pray as a community (v.2-4). We also need to persevere in our prayers (v.5-8). As with all things we hold important, we need to give prayer priority and energy. Last but not least, we need to believe that the God we pray to is our Heavenly Father who loves us and delights in our prayers (v.2, 11-13).

**Lord, grant us the humility to learn how to pray. Teach us through Your Holy Scriptures and through the lives of 'pray-ers' in our Christian community.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 5, FRIDAY

Mat 6:1-18; Luk 11:1-4

Prayer is both Caught and Taught

Mat 6:9-13

Why did Jesus single out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples? The Jews considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory -- the preoccupation with looking good and seeking praise from others. True piety is something more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience. It is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit that enables us to devote our lives to God with a holy desire to please him in all things (Isaiah 11:1-2).

Do you pray with joy and confidence? The Jews were noted for their devotion to prayer. Formal prayer was prescribed for three set times a day. And the rabbis had a prayer for every occasion. Jesus warns his disciples against formalism, making prayer something mechanical and devoid of meaning, with little thought for God.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he gave them the disciple's prayer, what we call the *Our Father* or *Lord's Prayer*. This prayer dares to call God "*our Father*" and boldly asks for the things we need to live as his sons and daughters. It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we can know God personally and call him "*Abba, Father*" (Rom. 8:15).

We can approach God our Father with confidence and boldness because Jesus Christ has opened the way to heaven for us through his death and resurrection. When we ask God for help, he fortunately does not give us what we deserve. Instead, he responds with grace and mercy. He is kind and forgiving towards us and he expects us to treat our neighbor the same. Do you treat others as they deserve, or do you treat them as the Lord would with grace and mercy? Jesus' prayer includes an injunction that we must ask God to forgive us in proportion as we forgive those who have wronged us. Ask the Lord to fill you with the fire of his love and mercy.

What is the sure reward which Jesus points out to his disciples? It is communion with God our Father. In him alone we find the fulness of life and happiness, and truth and love. Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote the following prayer in his Confessions: *When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrows or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete.*

The Lord rewards those who seek him earnestly with humble and repentant hearts. He renews us each day and he gives us new hearts of love and compassion that we may serve him and our neighbor with glad and generous hearts. Do you want to grow in your love for God and for your neighbor? Seek him expectantly in prayer, with fasting, and in generous giving to those in need.

*"Lord, give me a lively faith, a firm hope, a fervent charity, and a great love for you.  
Take from me all lukewarmness in the meditation of your word, and dullness in prayer.  
Give me fervor and delight in thinking of you and your grace, and fill me with compassion for others, especially those in need, that I may respond with generosity"*

**FEB 6, SATURDAY** **Mat 6:19-7:6; Luk 6:37-45, 12:22-34**

**Judge Rightly**

**Mat 6:24**

*"Then you will see clearly, to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Luke 6:42*

Saying you disagree is difficult. Saying you disapprove is even tougher. Not because you don't possess a point of view, but because it's unfashionable to sound judgmental.

Jesus was forthright and even harsh in His judgments if He needed to be (Matthew 23 has got to be the most politically impolite speech in the Bible!). Throughout Scripture, divine and prophetic pronouncements of sin and condemnations abound. God clearly does not favor an 'anything-goes' mentality, not when it comes to transforming His people into a community characterized by shalom, wholeness and reconciliation.

Such a purpose, however, is no license for us to fire away at the failings and wrongs of others.

Not because there is anything to apologies about the truth, but because there is usually nothing but anger, self-righteousness and lashing out in the hearts of God's imperfect fallen truth-bearers. We are, by nature, hypocrites (v 42). And hypocrites, in order to be a blessing, must first deal with the 5' by 2' plank in their irises, that proverbial board or plank which blocks clear-sightedness and hardens hearts.

We must take away that beam in order to be able to remove the speck lodged in the other party's eye. We must confront what is to be confronted. Yet, this must happen only after we have applied our spiritual Eye-Mo.

**Who do you usually get upset with most of the time? What are his/ her failures?**

**Reflect on your own- usually hidden- sins and ask yourself if you have been fair with this brother or sister.**

**Can we commit ourselves to first working on our own failures before reprimanding those whose behavior and beliefs we find unacceptable?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	<b>PRAY &amp; PRAISE   READ &amp; REFLECT   ASK &amp; APPLY   YIELD &amp; YAKHAL</b>

FEB 6, SATURDAY

Mat 6:19–7:6; Luk 6:37–45, 12:22–34

Judge Rightly

Mat 6:24

What does “serving two masters” and “anxiety” have in common? They both have the same root problem -- being divided within oneself. The root word for “anxiety” literally means “being of two minds”. An anxious person is often “tossed to and fro” and paralyzed by indecision. Fear of some bad outcome usually cripples those afflicted with anxiety. It’s also the case with someone who wants to submit to God but also live according to the world’s standards of success and fulfillment. Who is the master in charge of your life? Our “master” is that which governs our thought-life, shapes our ideals, controls the desires of the heart and the values we choose to live by. We can be ruled by many different things -- the love of money or possessions, the power of position, the glamor of wealth and prestige, the driving force of unruly passions and addictions. Ultimately the choice boils down to two: God and “mammon”. What is mammon? “Mammon” stands for “material wealth or possessions” or whatever tends to “control our appetites and desires”. There is one Master alone who has the power to set us free from the slavery of sin and fear. That Master is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus uses an illustration from nature — the birds and the flowers — to show how God provides for them in the natural order of his creation. How much more can we, as his children, rely upon God’s providential care? God is utterly reliable. In the Lord’s Prayer we are reminded that God is our provider when we pray: *Give us this day our daily bread.* What is bread, but the very staple of life and symbol of all that we need to live and grow. Anxiety is neither helpful nor necessary. It robs us of faith and confidence in God’s help and it saps our energy for doing good. Jesus admonishes his followers to put away anxiety and preoccupation with material things and instead to seek first the things of God — his kingdom and righteousness. Anxiety robs the heart of trust in the mercy and goodness of God and in his loving care for us. God knows our needs even before we ask and he gives generously to those who trust in him. Who is your master -- God or mammon?

*“Lord, free me from needless worries and help me to put my trust in you.*

*Make my first concern your kingdom and your righteousness.*

*Help me to live each day with trust and gratitude for your providential care for me”.*

Everybody is a critic, but nobody wants to be judged or condemned. Then why is judgementalism so rampant, even among Christians? “Thinking the best of other people” is necessary if we wish to grow in love. And kindness in judgment is nothing less than a sacred duty. The Rabbis warned people: “He who judges his neighbor favorably will be judged favorably by God.” How easy it is to misjudge and how difficult it is to be impartial in judgment. Our judgment of others is usually “off the mark” because we can’t see inside the person, or we don’t have access to all the facts, or we are swayed by instinct and unreasoning reactions to people. It is easier to find fault in others than in oneself. Jesus states a heavenly principle we can stake our lives on: *what you give to others (and how you treat others) will return to you.* The Lord knows our faults and he sees all, even the imperfections and sins of the heart which we cannot recognize in ourselves. Like a gentle father and a skillful doctor he patiently draws us to his *seat of mercy* and removes the cancer of sin which inhabits our hearts. Do you trust in God’s mercy and grace? Ask the Lord to flood your heart with his loving-kindness and mercy that you may only have room for charity and forbearance towards your neighbor.

*“O Father, give us the humility which realizes its ignorance, admits its mistakes, recognizes its need, welcomes advice, accepts rebuke. Help us always to praise rather than to criticize, to sympathize rather than to discourage, to build rather than to destroy, and to think of people at their best rather than at their worst. This we ask for thy name’s sake. (Prayer of William Barclay, 20th century)*

FEB 7, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

FEB 8, MONDAY Mat 7:7-23; Luk 11:5-13, 13:22-30

Will You Be Saved?

Mat 7:7

*"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, "Sir, open the door for us." "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Luk 13:24-25*

There's a story of two university professors of ethics who over lunch had a deep theological and philosophical discussion over some finer points of an ethical issue. Upon finishing their meal, one professor saw his colleague slipping the cutlery into his coat pocket. Noticing his shocked expression, his colleague merely shrugged his shoulders and said, 'I teach ethics. It doesn't necessarily mean I believe what I teach. And besides, I need the silverware.'

In today's parable the Jews who have rejected Jesus are being contrasted with the Gentiles who have come from afar and are saved because they embraced Jesus (v.29-30). It has an important lesson for us too. In response to Jesus' teaching, someone in the crowd wanted to discuss the important theological issue of salvation (v.22-23). He wanted to discuss an abstract theological matter but Jesus responded by reframing his question to elicit a personal response (v 24).

To illustrate the importance of a personal response, Jesus tells us a parable (v.25-30). In this parable, many were found unable to enter God's house simply because they were too late (v.25). What is striking is that those who came and knocked on the door only to be rejected are shown as genuinely surprised (v.26). But to Jesus, they should not have been surprised because it is by their lack of action that they have 'thrown themselves out' of God's kingdom. They were sadly late and rejected for a reason that could have easily been resolved. They knew who the Master (Jesus) was. They were familiar with His teachings (v.26). They knew about salvation but made no effort, and no personal commitment, to receive and accept the invitation of salvation for themselves.

**What many of us lack today is not knowledge of Jesus. What we lack is sufficient effort and commitment to act on what we know. Salvation is offered to us. Let's not talk about it but receive it for ourselves.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 8, MONDAY

Mat 7:7-23; Luk 11:5-13, 13:22-30

Will You Be Saved?

Mat 7:7

Do you expect God to hear your prayers? Jesus wanted to raise the expectations of his disciples when he taught them how to pray. Jesus' parable of the father feeding his son illustrates the unthinkable! How could a loving father refuse to give his son what is good; or worse, to give him what is harmful?

In conclusion Jesus makes a startling claim: How much more will the heavenly Father give to those who ask! Our heavenly Father graciously gives beyond our expectations. Jesus taught his disciples to pray with confidence because the Heavenly Father in his goodness always answers prayers. That is why we can boldly pray: Give us this day our daily bread.

Prayer flows from the love of God; and the personal love we show to our neighbor is fueled by the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Jesus concludes his discourse on prayer with the reminder that we must treat our neighbor in the same way we wish to be treated by God and by others. We must not just avoid doing harm to our neighbor, we must actively seek his or her welfare. In doing so, we fulfill the law and the prophets, namely what God requires of us – loving God with all that we have and are and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The Holy Spirit is every ready to transform our lives in Jesus' way of love. Do you thirst for holiness and for the fire of God's love?

Jesus summed up the teaching of the Old Testament law and prophets with the expression, *So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them* (Matthew 7:12) – and in the same breath he raised the moral law to a new level of fulfillment and perfection. God's law of love requires more than simply avoiding injury or harm to one's neighbor. Perfect love – a love which is unconditional and which reaches out to all – always seeks the good of others for their sake and gives the best we can offer for their welfare. When we love our neighbors and treat them in the same way we wish to be treated by God, then we fulfill the law and the prophets, namely what God requires of us – loving God with all that we have and are and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

How can we love our neighbor selflessly, with kindness, and genuine concern for their welfare? If we empty our hearts of all that is unkind, unloving, and unforgiving, then there will only be room for kindness, goodness, mercy, and charity. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). It is the love of God that fuels our unconditional love for others. Are you ready to let the Holy Spirit transform your life with the purifying fire of God's love?

Jesus used an illustration of a narrow gate which opens the way that leads to a life of security and happiness (Matthew 7:13-14) to reinforce his lesson about choosing the one true way which leads to peace with God rather than separation and destruction. The Book of Psalms begins with an image of a person who has chosen to follow the way of those who are wise and obedient to God's word and who refuse to follow the way of those who think and act contrary to God's law: Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1-2). When a path diverges, such as a fork in the road, each way leads to a different destination. This is especially true when we encounter life's crossroads where we must make a choice that will affect how we will live our lives. Do the choices you make help you move towards the goal of loving God and obeying his will?

The Lord Jesus gives us freedom to choose which way we will go. Ask him for the wisdom to know which way will lead to life rather than to harm and destruction. See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. ...Therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live (Deuteronomy 3:15-20). Choose this day whom you will serve (Joshua 24:15). Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death (Jeremiah 21:8). If we allow God's love and wisdom to rule our hearts, then we can trust in his guidance and help to follow his path of love, truth, and holiness.

FEB 9, TUESDAY Mat 7:24-29; 8:5-13; Luk 6:46-7:17

Learning From The Pagan Boss

Mat 7:24

*"Say the word, and my servant will be healed." Luk 7:7*

Faith isn't the domain of any particular class, race or creed. The story of the centurion's remarkable faith was, among other things, a lesson in spiritual humility for Jesus' disciples and (mainly Jewish) audience.

Note that the centurion wasn't only a Gentile - he was a Gentile leader whose duty it was to govern over Jewish territory. He was a pagan boss. But he can teach us a lot about faith:

1. He had never met Jesus (only heard of our Lord, v.3), yet he was sure Jesus could heal i.e. he saw the often-missed connection between, Jesus can heal and 'Jesus can heal me and my people!' (He didn't need confirmation of Jesus' power before trusting Him.)
2. He was a caring master, willing to take desperate measures for those way below him in the social strata, in this case a mere servant. (He had compassion for all.)
3. He was obviously a respected (pagan) leader who developed friendships with Jewish elders and even built their places of worship and publicly demonstrated his love and respect for Jewish territory (v.5); it was the elders who became the centurion's first messengers to Jesus (v.3). (He connected well with the "outsiders" whom he governed.)
4. He accurately 'mapped' Jesus' authority to heal with general principles of power and subordination, applying the incredible insight that the healing can be performed 'from a distance' (v.8). (He intelligently related the spiritual world to the natural political order in his application of faith.)

This is the kind of great faith that Jesus commended and declared non-existent in 'all of Israel' (v.9).

**Of the four points above, which do you feel most lacking in?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 9, TUESDAY

Mat 7:24-29; 8:5-13; Luk 6:46-7:17

Learning From The Pagan Boss

Mat 7:24

If the threat of disaster were to come your way, would you be ready to meet it and overcome it? When Jesus told the story of the builders he likely had the following proverb in mind: When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm for ever (Proverbs 10:25). What's the significance of the story for us? The kind of foundation we build our lives upon will determine whether we can survive the storms that are sure to come. Builders usually lay their foundations when the weather and soil conditions are at their best. It takes foresight to know how a foundation will stand up against adverse conditions. Building a house on a flood plain, such as a dry river-bed, is a sure bet for disaster! Jesus prefaced his story with a warning: We may fool humans with our speech, but God cannot be deceived. He sees the heart as it truly is — with its motives, intentions, desires, and choices (Psalm 139:2). There is only one way in which a person's sincerity can be proved, and that is by one's practice. Fine words can never replace good deeds.

Our character is revealed in the choices we make, especially when we must choose between what is true or false, and good or evil. Do you cheat on an exam or on your income taxes, especially when it will cost you? Do you lie, or cover-up, when disclosing the truth will cause you pain or embarrassment? A true person is honest and reliable before God, neighbor, and oneself. Such a person's word can be taken as trustworthy. What can keep us from falsehood and disaster? If we make the Lord and his word the rock and foundation of our lives, then nothing can shake us or keep us from God's presence and help. Is the Lord and his word the sure foundation of your life?

*"Lord, you are the only foundation that can hold us up when trials and disaster threaten us. Give me the wisdom, foresight, and strength of character I need to do what is right and good and to reject whatever is false and contrary to your will. May I be a doer of your word and not a hearer only."*

In Jesus' time the Jews hated the Romans because they represented everything they stood against -- including foreign domination and pagan beliefs and practices. Why did Jesus not only warmly receive a Roman centurion but praise him as a model of faith and confidence in God? In the Roman world the position of centurion was very important. He was an officer in charge of a hundred soldiers. In a certain sense, he was the backbone of the Roman army, the cement which held the army together. Polybius, an ancient writer, describes what a centurion should be: *"They must not be so much venturesome seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground, and die at their posts."*

The centurion who approached Jesus was not only courageous, but faith-filled as well. He risked the ridicule of his cronies by seeking help from an itinerant preacher from Galilee, and well as mockery from the Jews. Nonetheless, he approached Jesus with confidence and humility. He was an extraordinary man because he loved his slave. In the Roman world slaves were treated like animals rather than people. The centurion was also an extraordinary man of faith. He wanted Jesus to heal his beloved slave. Jesus commends him for his faith and immediately grants him his request. Are you willing to suffer ridicule in the practice of your faith? And when you need help, do you approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith?

*"Heavenly Father, you sent us your Son that we might be freed from the tyranny of sin and death. Increase my faith in the power of your saving word and give me freedom to love and serve others with generosity and mercy as you have loved me."*

FEB 10, WEDNESDAY Mat 11:1-30; Luk 7:18-35

Status Anxiety

Mat 11:12

*"Among those born of women there is no-one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" Luk 7:28*

Although the desire for status can drive people to become obsessed with self, not all status-oriented practices are negative. For instance, respect for one's elders could be seen as a God-given communal code to foster harmony in families and humility and learning among the young.

Jesus has another point of view: 'No one in history surpasses John the Baptizer, but in the kingdom he prepared you for, the lowliest person is ahead of him. The ordinary and disreputable people who heard John, by being baptized by him into the kingdom, are the clearest evidence; the Pharisees and religious officials would have nothing to do with such a baptism, wouldn't think of giving up their place in line to their inferiors.' (Lk 7:28-30, The Message)

As the people of God, we are called to demonstrate compassion and kindness in His community. It's about pointing the way to truth and God's way, about challenging the powers that be which dehumanize people, about exposing demonic forces wherever we find them. It's about the new work of Christ in our lives.

John came before this new era of God's fresh work in the world. That alone makes anyone aligned to Jesus 'greater than' even he who heralded the coming of the Son of God. In the new order, the 'least' has more status than even the greatest under the old. Status anxiety has no place in the kingdom of God.

**Would you consider yourself among the higher or lower 'classes' in your community? What factors might increase/lower your standing in the eyes of others? And how has your understanding of the kingdom of God changed how you approach this issue?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 10, WEDNESDAY

Mat 11:1-30; Luk 7:18-35

Status Anxiety

Mat 11:12

Jesus gave his disciples a two-fold commission: to speak in his name and to act with his power. The core of the gospel message is quite simple: the kingdom (or reign) of God is imminent! What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who submit to God and who honor him as their King and Lord. In the Lord's prayer we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus also commissioned his disciples to carry on the works which he did -- bringing the healing power of God to the weary and oppressed.

Jesus said to his disciples: Freely you have received, freely give. What they had received from Jesus they must pass on to others without expecting remuneration. They must show by their attitude that their first interest is God, not material gain. They must serve without guile, full of charity and peace, and simplicity. They must give their full attention to the proclamation of God's kingdom and not be diverted by other lesser things. They must travel light -- only take what was essential and leave behind whatever would distract them -- in order to concentrate on the task of speaking the word of the God. They must do their work, not for what they can get out of it, but for what they can give freely to others, without expecting special privileges or reward. "Poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves.

Secondly, Jesus said: the worker deserves his sustenance. Here we see a double-truth: the worker of God must not be overly-concerned with material things, but the people of God must never fail in their duty to give the worker of God what he needs to sustain himself. Do you pray for the work of the gospel and support it with your material resources? Jesus ends his instructions with a warning: If people reject God's invitation and refuse his word, then they bring condemnation on themselves. When God gives us his word there comes with it the great responsibility to respond. Indifference will not do. We are either for or against God in how we respond to his word. God gives us his word that we may have life in him. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. God shares his word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly and simply to others. Do you witness the truth and joy of the gospel by word and example to those around you?

*"Lord, may the joy and truth of the gospel transform my life that I may witness it to those around me. Grant that I may spread your truth and your light wherever I go."*

What does fear have to do with the kingdom of God? Fear is a powerful force. It can lead us to panic and flight or it can spur us to faith and action. The fear of God is the antidote to the fear of losing one's life. I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. O fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no want! Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalm 34:4,9,11) What is godly fear? It is reverence for the One who made us in love and who sustains us in mercy and kindness. The greatest injury or loss which we can experience is not physical but spiritual -- the loss of one's soul to the power of hell. A healthy fear of God leads to spiritual maturity, wisdom and right judgment and it frees us from the tyranny of sinful pride, cowardice -- especially in the face of evil, and spiritual deception. Do you trust in God's grace and mercy and submit to his word?

When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God he met opposition and hostility. He tells his disciples that they must expect the same treatment if they are to live and to proclaim the reign of God. There is both a warning and a privilege in his statement. Just as Jesus had to carry his cross, so the disciples must carry their cross and not try to evade it. To suffer for the faith is to share in the work of Christ. As one hymn states: Lift high the Cross of Christ! Tread where his feet have trod. The Holy Spirit gives us power and grace to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you trust in God's grace to carry your cross for Jesus' sake? *"Lord, it is my joy and privilege to your disciple. Give me strength and courage to bear any hardship and suffering which may come my way in your service. May I witness to others the joy of the gospel."*

FEB 11, THURSDAY                      Mat 13:1-23; Mar 4:1-20; Luk 8:1-15

Being Fruitful

Luk 8:15

*Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown. When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*  
Luk 8:8

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna were among a group of women who supported Jesus and the disciples from their own means (v.1-3). What a wonderful testimony of love and transformation that the Gospel brings to those who have believed. Has your own life been similarly changed?

Jesus Christ told a parable which was not meant to be understood by the large crowds that came to hear Him (v.10). Even the disciples did not understand so they asked Him what it meant. In His explanation, He tells us that there are various responses to the word of God.

If you thought that this parable applies only to evangelizing the lost you are only half right for the seed is the word of God, not just the Gospel. Christians hear the word of God preached. How do you respond to God's word? Does the devil snatch it away? Do you receive it but do not obey it? Does it fall on deaf ears because you are listening to the world's voices? Or is your heart a good and noble heart that receives God's word and through obedience you become fruitful like Mary, Joanna and Susanna? The fruit in your life can be the fruit of evangelism (Joh 15:16) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

***"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-he will be blessed in what he does."***  
(Jam 1:22-25)

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 11, THURSDAY

Mat 13:1–23; Mar 4:1–20; Luk 8:1–15

Being Fruitful

Luk 8:15

Are you hungry for God's word? Matthew tells us that Jesus taught many things to those who came to listen and learn. Jesus' teaching method was a very simple one. He used parables – short stories and images taken from everyday life to convey hidden truths about the kingdom of God. Like a skillful artist, Jesus painted evocative pictures with short and simple words. A good image can speak more loudly and clearly than many words. Jesus used the ordinary everyday to point to another order of reality – hidden, yet visible to those who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear". Jesus communicated with pictures and stories, vivid illustrations which captured the imaginations of his audience more powerfully than an abstract presentation could. His parables are like buried treasure waiting to be discovered (Matt. 13:44).

What does the parable about seeds and roots say to us about the kingdom of God? Any farmer will attest to the importance of good soil for supplying nutrients for growth. And how does a plant get the necessary food and water it needs except by its roots? The scriptures frequently use the image of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the principle of spiritual life and death. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jeremiah 17:7-8; see also Psalm 1:3).

Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly.

- There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear.
- Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else.
- Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is for ever too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. He or she may work so hard that they are too tired to even think of anything else but their work.
- Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand.

God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

How good are you at listening especially for the word of God? God is ever ready to speak to each of us and to give us understanding of his word. This parable of Jesus is a warning to those who hear and who preach the word of God. What makes us ineffective and unresponsive to God's word? Preoccupation with other things can distract us from what is truly important and worthwhile. And letting our hearts and minds be consumed with material things can easily weigh us down and draw us away from the treasure that lasts for eternity. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart which is docile and ready to hear what God has to say. One lesson is clear: the harvest is sure. While some seed will fall by the wayside and some fall on shallow ground and never come to maturity, and some be choked to death by the thorns; nonetheless a harvest will come. The seed that falls on good soil, on the heart that is receptive, will reap abundant fruit. Are you teachable and eager to learn God's truth? And do you allow anything to keep you from submitting to God's word with joy and trusting obedience?

*"Lord, help me to guard the word you have planted in my heart that no doubt or temptation may keep me from believing and obeying you. May I be fruitful in your service and may I never fear to speak of you to others and to share with them the good news of the gospel."*

FEB 12, FRIDAY                      Mat 13:24-43; Mar 4:30-34; Luk 13:18-21

In It's Proper Time

Matt 13:30

*"Let both grow together until the harvest" Matthew 13:30a*

Have you despaired over the evil and wickedness that seems to abound in the world? Bad news appears to overwhelm good news in the news media. Brutal robberies and rape, people losing their life savings to scams, corruption at all levels of society - and that is only on the local front.

On the international level, it is rare for a day to pass without another report of a natural disaster, a political upheaval within a nation or another escalation of tension between nations. Is God doing anything at all? Are things out of control?

Jesus' teaching addresses these questions. The parable of the wheat and the weeds reminds us that God knows exactly what is happening in the world today. While it may seem that the good suffer and the bad prosper and sometimes it is even difficult to tell who or what is good or bad, God knows all and in His time the good will be victorious and the bad destroyed.

Is God doing anything? Jesus assures us that He is. A mustard seed is so small that it is usually insignificant and unnoticed; yeast is also 'hidden' in a lump of dough. But under proper conditions and at their proper time, both will reveal their presence in a magnitude that cannot be ignored.

So it will be in God's time. While it may seem to us that God is not doing anything about the evil in the world, we can be assured that He is. His ways may be 'hidden' to us today, but all will be revealed at the right time.

**Read Psalm 75. Note that our perplexities today were shared by others in Israel's history. Trepidation turns to trust (v 16) when the psalmist sees things from God's perspective. Pray that God will help us see as He sees. Let us respond to Him in worship and trust.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 12, FRIDAY

Mat 13:24–43; Mar 4:30–34; Luk 13:18–21

In It's Proper Time

Matt 13:30

What can malicious weed-sowing tell us about the kingdom of God? The image Jesus uses here is a common everyday example of planting, harvesting, and sorting the good fruit from the bad. Weeds can spoil and even kill a good harvest if they are not separated and destroyed at the proper time. Uprooting them too early, though, can destroy the good plants in the process.

Just as nature teaches us patience, so God's patience also teaches us to guard the word he has planted in our hearts and to beware of the destructive force of sin and evil which can destroy it. God's word brings life, but Satan seeks to destroy the good seed which has been planted in the hearts of those who have heard God's word. God's judgment is not hasty, but it does come. And in the end, God will reward each according to what they have sown and reaped in this life. In that day God will separate the evil from the good. Do you allow God's word to take deep root in your heart?

*"Lord, may your word take deep root in my heart and that I may bear good fruit for your glory. May I hunger for your righteousness now that I may look forward to the day of judgment with joy rather than with dismay."*

What can mustard seeds teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within.

Just as a seed has no power to change itself until it is planted in the ground, so we cannot change our lives to be like God until God gives us the power of his Holy Spirit. The Lord of the Universe is ever ready to transform us by the power of his Spirit. Are you ready to let God change you by his grace and power? The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield to Jesus Christ, our lives are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says, *"we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us"* (2 Cor. 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit and transform me into the Christ-like holiness you desire. Increase my zeal for your kingdom and instill in me a holy desire to live for your greater glory."*

FEB 13, SATURDAY Mat 13:44–52; Mar 4:21–29; Luk 8:16–18

Candle, Seed & Hidden Treasure

Mar 4:24b

John and Mary were walking their dog on their property when they stumbled on a rusty can partially unearthed by recent rains. They took the can home and opened it, discovering a cache of gold coins over a century old! The couple returned to the spot and located seven more cans containing 1,427 coins in all. Then they protected their treasure by reburying it elsewhere.

The cache of coins (valued at \$10 million) is called the Saddle Ridge Hoard, the largest find of its kind in US history. The story is strikingly reminiscent of a parable Jesus told: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Mat 13:44).

Tales of buried treasure have captured imaginations for centuries, though such discoveries rarely happen. But Jesus tells of a treasure accessible to all who confess their sins and receive and follow Him (Joh 1:12).

We’ll never come to an end of that treasure. As we leave our old lives and pursue God and His purposes, we encounter His worth. Through “the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7), God offers us treasure beyond imagination—new life as His sons and daughters, new purpose on earth, and the incomprehensible joy of eternity with Him.

By **James Banks**

**How are you treasuring your relationship with God?  
How can you share that treasure with others?**

*You are my greatest treasure, Jesus. I praise You for giving Your life for me on the cross, so that I could find forgiveness and new life in You.*

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 13, SATURDAY

Mat 13:44–52; Mar 4:21–29; Luk 8:16–18

Candle, Seed &amp; Hidden Treasure

Mar 4:24b

What do you most treasure? In a peasant community the best safe was often the earth. The man in the parable "went in his joy" to sell everything. Why? Because he found a treasure worth possessing above all else he had. He did not, however, have enough to buy the treasure. Fortunately, he only needed enough to buy the field. In a similar fashion, God offers his kingdom as incomparable treasure at a price we can afford! We can't pay the full price for the life which God gives us; but when we exchange our life for the life which God offers, we receive a treasure beyond compare. The pearl of great price also tells us a similar lesson. Pearls in the ancient world came to represent the supremely valuable. Jesus remarked that one should not cast pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). Why would a merchant sell everything for a peerless pearl? No doubt because he was attracted to what he thought was the greatest treasure he could possess.

Discovering God's kingdom is like stumbling across hidden treasure or finding the one pearl of great price. When we discover the kingdom of God we receive the greatest possible treasure -- the Lord himself. Selling all that we have to obtain this incomparable treasure could mean many things -- our friends, job, our "style of life", what we do with our free time. Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. In this parable what does the treasure of the kingdom refer to? It certainly refers to the kingdom of God in all its aspects. But in a special way, the Lord himself is the treasure we seek for. If the Almighty is your gold and your precious silver, then you will delight yourself in the Almighty (Job 22:22-23). Is the Lord the treasure and delight of your heart?

*"Lord Jesus, reveal to me the true riches of your kingdom. Help me to set my heart on you alone as the treasure beyond compare with any other. Free my heart of any inordinate desires or attachment to other things that I may freely give to you all that I have in joy and gratitude for all that you have given to me. May I always find joy and delight in your presence."*

What does the image of light and a lamp tell us about God's kingdom? Lamps in the ancient world served a vital function, much like they do today. They enable people to see and work in the dark and to avoid stumbling. The Jews also understood "light" as an expression of the inner beauty, truth, and goodness of God. *In his light we see light* (Psalm 36:9). *His word is a lamp that guides our steps* (Psalm 119:105). God's grace not only illumines the darkness in our lives, but it also fills us with spiritual light, joy, and peace. Jesus used the image of a lamp to describe how his disciples are to live in the light of his truth and love.

Just as natural light illumines the darkness and enables one to see visually, so the *light of Christ* shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God's kingdom. In fact, our mission is to be *light-bearers* of Christ so that others may see the truth of the gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception. Jesus remarks that nothing can remain hidden or secret. We can try to hide things from others, from ourselves, and from God. How tempting to shut our eyes from the consequences of our sinful ways and bad habits, even when we know what those consequences are. And how tempting to hide them from others and even from God. But, nonetheless, everything is known to God who sees all. There is great freedom and joy for those who live in God's light and who seek this truth. Those who listen to God and heed his voice will receive more from him. Do you know the joy and freedom of living in God's light?

*"Lord, you guide me by the light of your saving truth. Fill my heart and mind with your light and truth and free me from the blindness of sin and deception that I may see your ways clearly and understand your will for my life. May I radiate your light and truth to others in word and deed."*

## What is the origin of Valentine's Day 14<sup>th</sup> February, and should Christians celebrate it?

The first Valentine was posted around 1806. Almost one billion Valentine's Day cards are sent each year on or near February 14 with females purchasing 85% of the cards. This is second only to the number of Christmas cards sent. The history is somewhat murky as to how Valentine's Day has come to be what we now know and celebrate. Saint Valentine served in third-century Rome. Emperor Claudius decided that single men made better soldiers. Therefore, Claudius banned soldiers from being married. One version of the story is that Valentine continued to perform the weddings of young soldiers who were in love, and Claudius had Valentine imprisoned. While imprisoned, Valentine reportedly fell in love with the jailer's daughter. Valentine sent her a card and signed it, "Love, your Valentine."

Another version is that Valentine defied Claudius by helping Christians escape the torture of the Romans.

Valentine died in approximately A.D. 270. Others claim the church may have decided to celebrate in mid February to "Christianize" the pagan Roman celebration Lupercalia.

The first Valentine sent in the United States was in the 1840's by Esther Howgald. Most of us enjoy "spoiling" a loved one on Valentine's Day. Sending gifts and cards conveys love, affection, and friendship.

There is no biblical reason why Christians should not celebrate Valentine's Day by giving their loved ones flowers, candy and/or cards. As with celebrating any holiday, the decision should be between the individual and God. Some people feel very strongly that observing any secular holiday is wrong, while others see it as harmless. The important thing to remember is that celebrating or not celebrating holidays should not be a cause for pride or division among Christians.

FEB 14, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

FEB 15, MONDAY Mat 12:46–50, 13:53–58; Mar 3:31–35, 6:1-6; Luk 8:19–21

Christ's Family Members

Joh 4:34

*He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Luk 8:21*

In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls Himself the light of the world (Joh 8:12) and He says all who 'put your trust in the light ... become sons of light' (Joh 12:36). Light dispels darkness so that all things hidden in darkness may be seen. The metaphor of Jesus Christ as light is apt for He came into a world darkened by sin.

If we are children of light we must consider how we listen. Jesus Christ did not say consider what we are to hear. People hear many things and so do we. Some people hear and then forget. That is alright most of the time as many things in this information age are better forgotten.

When Jesus tells us to consider how we listen, He is referring to the manner of our hearing. Some people hear something and ignore it, some forget, some hear and retain it.

Some people hear and obey and this is what Jesus Christ would have us do: to hear and then obey. If we obey. we become His 'mother and his brothers' (v.21). If we hear and do not obey, we are like those who light a lamp and hide it in a jar or put it under a bed (v.16).

What about you and me? Are you a son (or daughter) of light? Are you a brother (or mother) of Jesus Christ? It does not matter whether we are called mothers or brothers of Jesus or sons of light. What is important is that we are related to Jesus Christ because we believe in Him and we put into practice what we hear. Consider how you listen.

**Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.'**  
**- John H Sammis, 1887 -**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 15, MONDAY Mat 12:46–50, 13:53–58; Mar 3:31–35, 6:1–6; Luk 8:19–21

## Christ's Family Members

Joh 4:34

Who do you love and cherish the most? God did not intend for us to be alone, but to be with others. He gives us many opportunities for developing relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Why did Jesus, on this occasion, seem to ignore his own relatives when they pressed to see him? His love and respect for his mother and his relatives was unquestionable. Jesus never lost an opportunity to teach his disciples a spiritual lesson and truth about the kingdom of God. On this occasion when many gathered to hear Jesus he pointed to another higher reality of relationships, namely our relationship with God and with those who belong to God.

What is the essence of being a Christian? It is certainly more than doctrine, precepts, and commandments. It is first and foremost a relationship – a relationship of trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, mercy, helpfulness, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind people together in mutual love and unity. God offers us the greatest of relationships – union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (1 John 4:8,16). God's love never fails, never forgets, never compromises, never lies, never lets us down nor disappoints us. His love is consistent, unwavering, unconditional, and unstoppable. We may choose to separate ourselves from him, but nothing will make him ignore us, leave us, or treat us unkindly. He will pursue us, love us, and call us to return to him no matter what might stand in the way. It is his nature to love. That is why he created us – to be united with him and to share in his love and unity of persons (1 John 3:1). God is a trinity of persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and a community of love. That is why Jesus challenged his followers and even his own earthly relatives to recognize that God is the true source of all relationships. God wants all of our relationships to be rooted in his love.

Jesus is God's love incarnate – God's love made visible in human flesh (1 John 4:9-10). That is why Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and the shepherd who seeks out the sheep who have strayed and lost their way. God is like the father who yearns for his prodigal son to return home and then throws a great party for his son when he has a change of heart and comes back (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus offered up his life on the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and restored to unity and friendship with God. It is through Jesus that we become the adopted children of God – his own sons and daughters. That is why Jesus told his disciples that they would have many new friends and family relationships in his kingdom. Whoever does the will of God is a friend of God and a member of his family – his sons and daughters who have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.

An early Christian martyr once said that "a Christian's only relatives are the saints" – namely those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and adopted as sons and daughters of God. Those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ and who live as his disciples enter into a new family, a family of "saints" here on earth and in heaven. Jesus changes the order of relationships and shows that true kinship is not just a matter of flesh and blood. Our adoption as sons and daughters of God transforms all of our relationships and requires a new order of loyalty to God first and to his kingdom of righteousness and peace. Do you want to grow in love and friendship? Allow God's Holy Spirit to transform your heart, mind, and will to enable you to love freely and generously as he loves.

*"Heavenly Father, you are the source of all true friendship and love.  
In all my relationships, may your love be my constant guide for choosing what is good  
and for rejecting what is contrary to your will."*

FEB 16, TUESDAY      Mat 10:5-11:1; Mar 6:7-13, 30-32; Luk 9:1-6

Continuing the Work of Christ

Mar 6:31b

*If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them." Luk 9:5*

Something was astir. A band of twelve men was healing and preaching the kingdom of God. 'Who is this...?' (v.9). Herod wanted to know the main person. The disciples had asked the same question (8:25b). And Luke's answer was that this is One who drives out demons, heals the sick, raises the dead and commands the winds and the waves. And the demons fear Him (8:1-5b).

It was this same man who sent this band out with power and authority and provision to do the same and to proclaim the kingdom of God (v.1-3). Indeed the kingdom of God has come for one stronger than the demons is here (11:20-22).

Jesus calls and sends us out today with the same power and authority and provision (Mat 28:18, Act 1:8) to do the same work. Hudson Taylor was sent to China. The China Inland Mission (CIM) was started in 1860 through the passionate work of Taylor. The CIM story is a testimony of faith and courage and the provision of the God who sends us out. Consider this. "As to finances and personal support, the CIM missionaries were offered no set salary but rather were to depend entirely on God for their needs. To avoid even the appearance of relying on human resources, offerings and other forms of direct appeals for money were strictly taboo.'

You don't have to go to China. And you don't have to cause a stir. Right where you are - in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in your school, even in your home, you can go about quietly doing the work of the kingdom of God.

**The church has work to do before she reaches heaven.  
It is to continue the work of Jesus Christ.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 16, TUESDAY

Mat 10:5-11:1; Mar 6:7-13, 30-32; Luk 9:1-6

Continuing the Work of Christ

Mar 6:31b

Jesus gave his disciples a two-fold commission: to speak in his name and to act with his power. The core of the gospel message is quite simple: *the kingdom (or reign) of God is imminent!* What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who submit to God and who honor him as their King and Lord.

In the Lord's prayer we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: *May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Jesus also commissioned his disciples to carry on the works which he did -- bringing the healing power of God to the weary and oppressed.

Jesus said to his disciples: *Freely you have received, freely give.* What they had received from Jesus they must pass on to others without expecting remuneration. They must show by their attitude that their first interest is God, not material gain. They must serve without guile, full of charity and peace, and simplicity. They must give their full attention to the proclamation of God's kingdom and not be diverted by other lesser things. They must travel light -- only take what was essential and leave behind whatever would distract them -- in order to concentrate on the task of speaking the word of the God. They must do their work, not for what they can get out of it, but for what they can give freely to others, without expecting special privileges or reward. "Poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves.

Secondly, Jesus said: *the worker deserves his sustenance.* Here we see a double-truth: the worker of God must not be overly-concerned with material things, but the people of God must never fail in their duty to give the worker of God what he needs to sustain himself. Do you pray for the work of the gospel and support it with your material resources? Jesus ends his instructions with a warning: If people reject God's invitation and refuse his word, then they bring condemnation on themselves.

When God gives us his word there comes with it the great responsibility to respond. Indifference will not do. We are either for or against God in how we respond to his word. God gives us his word that we may have life in him. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. God shares the word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly and simply to others. Do you witness the truth and joy of the gospel by word and example to those around you?

*"Lord, may the joy and truth of the gospel transform my life that I may witness it to those around me. Grant that I may spread your truth and your light wherever I go."*

## What is the meaning of LENT?

Lent is a period of fasting, moderation, and self-denial traditionally observed by Catholics and some Protestant denominations. It begins with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter Sunday. The length of the Lenten fast was established in the 4th century as 46 days (40 days, not counting Sundays). During Lent, participants eat sparingly or give up a particular food or habit. It's not uncommon for people to give up smoking during Lent, or to swear off watching television or eating candy or telling lies. It's six weeks of self-discipline.

Lent began as a way for Christians to remind themselves of the value of repentance. The austerity of the Lenten season was seen as similar to how people in the Old Testament fasted and repented in sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1-3; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3).

However, over the centuries Lenten observances have developed a much more "sacramental" value. Some Christians believe that giving something up for Lent is a way to attain God's blessing. But the Bible teaches that grace cannot be earned; grace is "the gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17). Also, Jesus taught that fasting should be done discreetly: "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen" (Mat 6:16-18). Jesus' command to "wash your face" seems to conflict with the practice of rubbing ashes on one's face on Ash Wednesday.

Fasting can be a good thing, and God is pleased when we repent of sinful habits. There's absolutely nothing wrong with setting aside some time to focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. However, repenting of sin is something we should be doing every day of the year, not just for the 46 days of Lent.

If a Christian wishes to observe Lent, he is free to do so. The key is to focus on repenting of sin and consecrating oneself to God. Lent should not be a time of boasting of one's sacrifice or trying to earn God's favor or increasing His love. God's love for us could not be any greater than it already is.

**FEB 17, ASH WEDNESDAY Mat 14:1-12; Mar 6:14-29; Luk 9:7-9**

**We Bear His Name**

**Mar 6:20a**

*Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias. Mat 14:3*

What comes to mind when you think of an ideal ruler or king? Well, I think of one who is noble in thought, morally beyond reproach in his ways and dignified in behavior. I envision one who is decisive, wise and just in decision-making and above all, one who has the good of his subjects at heart. Sadly, almost none of the above characteristics were seen in Herod the Tetrarch.

When Herod the Great died, the rule of the kingdom was divided among his four sons. Each of these four rulers was known as a 'tetrarch', from the Greek word for 'four'. While proud and happy to carry the title 'tetrarch or ruler', Herod the Tetrarch failed to live up to the demands of his title. He was at the mercy of his wife, his subjects and his own moral weaknesses. He was ruled by fears - fear of the wrath of his wife, fear of loss of face before his guests and fear of losing the favor of his subjects. Sadly, though, not one decision was made out of the 'fear of the Lord'.

Lest we be too swift to heap judgment on Herod, let us check ourselves. We too carry a 'title' of great honor - we are 'Christians', literally 'little Christs'. We have been assigned a privileged name. We are to reveal Jesus to the world through the way we live. Our speech is to be pure, our behavior loving at all times, our moral judgments always reflecting God's goodness and holiness.

**May our manner of life be like that of Peter's and the other apostles' when they were brought before the Jewish rulers for preaching the Gospel. May we always be able to proclaim as they did to the Sanhedrin, 'We must obey God rather than men!' (Acts 5:29). Let us live up to the Name we bear.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 17, ASH WEDNESDAY Mat 14:1-12; Mar 6:14-29; Luk 9:7-9

We Bear His Name

Mar 6:20a

What fueled the courage and zeal of the martyrs? They loved God and his truth more than their own lives. Standing for the truth, especially for the gospel can be very costly. Take the prophets. They all suffered abuse and most were martyred. Herod, a somewhat reluctant persecutor, was nonetheless a man with a guilty conscience. When Herod heard the *fame of Jesus* he supposed that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had returned from the dead. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin. Herod was a weak man. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice.

Are you ready to stand for Jesus and for his truth and righteousness?

*"Lord, give me a strong conscience that I may recognize evil for what it is and repent for all the ways in which I may offend you. Help me to choose what is good and to reject what is contrary to your will. And help me to strive for holiness that I may please you in all things (Hebrews 12:14)."*

Do you court favor with the rich and the famous? Scripture warns us of such danger (see Proverbs 23:1-2). King Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John, however did not fear to chastise Herod for his adulterous relationship. Herod, out of impulse and a desire to please his family and friends, had John beheaded. Now his conscience is pricked when he hears that some think that the Baptist has risen. When Herod heard the *fame of Jesus* he supposed that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had returned from the dead. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin. Herod was a weak man. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice.

God's grace enables us to overcome fear and weakness in the face of temptation.

Do you allow his grace to fortify you with faith and courage when you face adversity?

*"Heavenly Father, form in me the likeness of your Son and deepen his life within me that I may be like him in word and deed. Help me to live the gospel faithfully and give me strength and courage to not shrink back in the face of adversity and temptation."*

## FEB 17, ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Its official name is “Day of Ashes,” so called because of the practice of rubbing ashes on one’s forehead in the sign of a cross.

Since it is exactly 40 days (excluding Sundays) before Easter Sunday, it will always fall on a Wednesday—there cannot be an “Ash Thursday” or “Ash Monday.” The Bible never mentions Ash Wednesday—for that matter, it never mentions Lent.

Lent is intended to be a time of self-denial, moderation, fasting, and the forsaking of sinful activities and habits. Ash Wednesday commences this period of spiritual discipline. Ash Wednesday and Lent are observed by most Catholics and some Protestant denominations. The Eastern Orthodox Church does not observe Ash Wednesday; instead, they start Lent on “Clean Monday.”

While the Bible does not mention Ash Wednesday, it does record accounts of people in the Old Testament using dust and ashes as symbols of repentance and/or mourning (2 Sam 13:19; Est 4:1; Job 2:8; Dan 9:3). The modern tradition of rubbing a cross on a person’s forehead supposedly identifies that person with Jesus Christ.

Should a Christian observe Ash Wednesday? Since the Bible nowhere explicitly commands or condemns such a practice, Christians are at liberty to prayerfully decide whether or not to observe Ash Wednesday.

If a Christian decides to observe Ash Wednesday and/or Lent, it is important to have a biblical perspective. Jesus warned us against making a show of our fasting: “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen” (Mat 6:16-18). We must not allow spiritual discipline to become spiritual pride.

It is a good thing to repent of sinful activities, but that’s something Christians should do every day, not just during Lent. It’s a good thing to clearly identify oneself as a Christian, but, again, this should be an everyday identification. And it is good to remember that no ritual can make one’s heart right with God.

FEB 18, THURSDAY Mat 14:13-21; Mar 6:33-44; Luk 9:10-17; Joh 6:1-15

Seeing Is Not Always Believing

Mat 14:18a

*Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"* Matthew 14:31 (Tomorrow's Reading)

'If I had been there when Jesus fed the five thousand people, I would have no problem believing that He can help me with all my problems. I will never doubt Him.' I overheard these remarks while walking behind two school boys after a Christian Fellowship meeting where they had heard me speak about this miracle.

That got me thinking! I too have wondered - would I not be a man of much greater faith if I had personally witnessed the parting of the Red Sea (Exo 14:21), or seen the axe head float because of Elisha's prayer (2 Ki 6:6) or ... yes, Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes with twelve baskets of broken pieces of bread left over to take home?

But consider Peter ... he was there and he had seen the multiplication of the food. Yet his faith was not 'doubt-proof' - he started walking on the water only to falter and fall into the arms of Jesus.

No, 'seeing is not always believing' and, believing does not always depend on seeing. As Jesus said to Thomas (who proclaimed his belief in the resurrected Jesus only after he had seen Jesus personally), '... blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed' (Joh 20:29). Our faith is a result of the indwelling Spirit within each one of us. He is the One who leads us into all truth, reveals Jesus to us and empowers us to be His witnesses (Joh 14:16-17, Acts 1:8).

**Paul prayed for the Ephesians, 'that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Eph 1:17). Lord, we desire to know You better.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 18, THURSDAY Mat 14:13-21; Mar 6:33-44; Luk 9:10-17; Joh 6:1-15

Seeing Is Not Always Believing

Mat 14:18a

What can truly satisfy our deepest hunger and longing? Wherever Jesus went multitudes of people gathered to meet him - people from every part of society - rich and poor, professionals and laborers, even social outcasts and pagans. What drew them to Jesus? Were they simply curious or looking for a healing? Many were drawn to Jesus because they were hungry for God. Jesus' message of God's kingdom and the signs and wonders he performed stirred fresh hope and expectation that God was acting in a new and powerful way to set people free from sin and oppression and to bring them the blessings of his kingdom.

***God never rests in caring for our needs***

Jesus never disappointed those who earnestly sought him out. We see a marvelous example of this when Jesus and his twelve disciples got into the boat to seek out a lonely place for some rest along the lake of Galilee, only to discover a crowd of a few thousand people had already gathered in anticipation of their arrival! Did Jesus' disciples resent this intrusion on their plan to rest awhile? Jesus certainly didn't - he welcomed them with open-arms. His compassion showed the depths of God's love and care for his people. Jesus spoke the word of God to strengthen them in faith and he healed many who were sick.

***God multiplies the little we have to bring great blessing to others***

As evening approached the disciples wanted Jesus to send the people away. Jesus, instead, commanded his disciples to feed the whole crowd. Why did Jesus expect his disciples to do what seemed impossible - to feed such a large and hungry crowd when there was no adequate provision in sight? Jesus very likely wanted to test their faith and to give them a sign of God's divine intervention and favor for his people. Jesus took the little they had - five loaves and two fish - and giving thanks to his heavenly Father, distributed to all until were satisfied of their hunger. Twelves baskets full of fish and loaves that were leftover show the overflowing generosity of God's gifts to us - gifts that bring blessing, healing, strength, and refreshment.

***Bread from heaven to sustain us on our journey***

Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospel accounts (Luke 9:10-17, Mark 6:34-44, John 6:51-58, Matt 14:13-21). What is the significance of this miracle? The miraculous feeding of such a great multitude recalled the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness under Moses' leadership and intercession for his people (Exodus 16). The daily provision of food for the people of Israel during their forty years of journeying in the barren wilderness foreshadowed the true heavenly bread which Jesus would pass on to his disciples at his last supper meal on the eve of his sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus makes a claim which only God can make: He is the *true bread of heaven* that can satisfy the deepest hunger we experience (John 6:32-35). The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, when Jesus said the blessing, broke and distributed the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, is a sign that prefigures the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper which sustains us on our journey to the kingdom of heaven.

***God multiplies the little we have so we can bring His blessing to others***

The feeding of the five thousand shows the remarkable generosity of God and his great kindness towards us. When God gives, he gives abundantly. He gives more than we need for ourselves that we may have something to share with others, especially those who lack what they need. God takes the little we have and multiplies it for the good of others. Do you trust in God's provision for you and do you share freely with others, especially those who lack?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts and you feed us with the finest of wheat (Psalm 81:16). Fill me with gratitude for your blessings and give me a generous heart that I may freely share with others what you have given to me."*

FEB 19, FRIDAY Mat 14:22-36; Mar 6:45-56; Joh 6:16-21

Jesus Calms Storms

Joh 6:20b

*Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. Joh 6:21*

The Sea of Galilee is Israel's largest freshwater lake. It is approximately 53 km in circumference, about 21 km long, and 13 km wide; it has a total area of 166 square km, and a maximum depth of approximately 43 m. At 209 m below sea level, it is the lowest freshwater lake on Earth and the second-lowest lake in the world after the Dead Sea. a saltwater lake. (It is not a sea by any normal definition; it is called a sea by tradition.)

Storms and turbulences are common occurrences in the Sea of Galilee. In today's reading, the disciples were laboring hard against the strong wind and waves. They made little progress although four of them were experienced fishermen.

When they saw Jesus walking on water, they did not immediately recognize Him. Thus they were terrified. Later, when they realized that it was Jesus, they invited Him into the boat. As soon as Jesus got into the boat, the wind died down (Mar 6:51) and immediately the boat reached the shore.

We may face 'strong winds' heading our way in our life's journey. When we try to labor hard, we too discover that we are making very little progress. In spite of our experience and knowledge, we often find ourselves wanting. We are simply incapable of handling these 'strong winds'.

Let us remember to invite Jesus to be involved in our struggles. By His grace we will reach the 'shore' and find peace and rest.

**Father, be our anchor in our boat when stormy weather hits our lives. Help us to see how Your power is made perfect in our weaknesses, how Your grace is sufficient for us.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 19, FRIDAY

Mat 14:22–36; Mar 6:45–56; Joh 6:16–21

Jesus Calms Storms

Joh 6:20b

Does the Lord seem distant when trials or adversity come your way? It was at Jesus' initiative that the disciples sailed across the lake, only to find themselves in a life-threatening storm (see Mark 6:53-56). Although they were experienced fishermen, they feared for their lives. While Jesus was not with them in the boat, he, nonetheless watched for them in prayer. When he perceived their trouble he came to them on the sea and startled them with his sudden appearance. Do you look for the Lord's presence when you encounter difficulty or challenges?

This dramatic incident on the sea of Galilee revealed Peter's character more fully than others. Here we see Peter's impulsivity — his tendency to act without thinking of what he was doing. He often failed and came to grief as a result of his impulsiveness. In contrast, Jesus always bade his disciples to see how difficult it was to follow him before they set out on the way he taught them. A great deal of failure in the Christian life is due to acting on impulse and emotional fervor without counting the cost. Peter, fortunately in the moment of his failure clutched at Jesus and held him firmly. Every time Peter fell, he rose again. His failures only made him love the Lord more deeply and trust him more intently. The Lord keeps watch over us at all times, and especially in our moments of temptation and difficulty. Do you rely on the Lord for his strength and help? Jesus assures us that we have no need of fear if we trust in Him and in his great love for us. When calamities or trials threaten to overwhelm you, how do you respond? With faith and hope in God's love, care and presence with you?

*"Lord, help me to trust you always and to never doubt your presence and your power to help me. In my moments of doubt and weakness, may I cling to you as Peter did. Strengthen my faith that I may walk straight in the path you set before me, neither veering to the left nor to the right".*

What grips your heart and mind when adversity strikes? Is it fear or panic? While panic may seem like the most natural reaction, Jesus expected more from his disciples. *"Perfect love casts out fear"* (1 John 4:18). It was at Jesus' initiative that the disciples sailed across the lake, only to find themselves in a life-threatening storm. Although they were experienced fishermen, they feared for their lives. Although Jesus was not with them in the boat, he, nonetheless watched for them in prayer. When he perceived their trouble he came to them on the sea and startled them with his sudden appearance.

Does the Lord seem distant when trials or adversity come your way? The Lord keeps watch over us at all times, and especially in our moments of temptation and difficulty. Do you rely on the Lord for his strength and help? Jesus assures us that we have no need of fear if we trust in Him and in his great love for us. When calamities or trials threaten to overwhelm you, how do you respond? With faith and hope in God's love, care and presence with you?

*"Lord, may I never doubt your saving help and your ever watchful presence, especially in times of adversity. Fortify my faith with courage and my hope with perseverance that I may never waver in my trust in you".*

FEB 20, SATURDAY

Joh 6:25-71

To Whom Shall We Go

Joh 6:35

*'Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Joh 6:68-69*

Many of the people deserted Jesus, the Son of God because they could not accept His hard teaching about Himself as the Bread of Life. The Twelve stayed and continued to believe in Him.

They could not fully understand His teaching either, but they believed in what He said. Simon Peter's answer to the Lord's question, 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' has significant lessons for us as His disciples.

Firstly, though there are many things we may not understand about God. it does not mean that we stop believing in Him. In our readings, we see Jesus as the Son of God who gives eternal life to those who believe. His words and the miraculous signs point us to Him as the only One whom we can turn to - the Savior of the world.

Like the Twelve, we can never know everything about Jesus. But the little that we have come to know about Him is sufficient to bring us to the place where we can say, 'For the things I understand, I thank You, Lord. For the things I do not understand, I trust You, Lord.'

Secondly, it is important to take note that Peter said. 'We believe and know' (v 69). Faith begets understanding! Many try to reverse it. They want to understand first and then only believe. As a result they become disappointed and disillusioned. The Lord seeks faith first in us before He reveals His truth to us. We will never know that the Lord is good until we 'taste Him and see that the Lord is good' (Psa 34:8).

**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.  
We believe and know that You are the Holy One of God.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 20, SATURDAY

Joh 6:25-71

To Whom Shall We Go

Joh 6:35

Do you hunger for the bread of life? The Jews had always regarded the manna in the wilderness as the bread of God (Psalm 78:24, Exodus 16:15). There was a strong Rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he would give manna from heaven. This was the supreme work of Moses. Now the Jewish leaders were demanding that Jesus produce manna from heaven as proof to his claim to be the Messiah. Jesus responds by telling them that it was not Moses who gave the manna, but God. And the manna given to Moses and the people was not the real bread from heaven, but only a symbol of the bread to come.

Jesus then makes the claim which only God can make: **I am the bread of life**. The bread which Jesus offers is none else than the very life of God. This is the true bread which can truly satisfy the hunger in our hearts. The manna from heaven prefigured the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist or Lord's Supper which Jesus gave to his disciples on the eve of his sacrifice. The manna in the wilderness sustained the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. It could not produce eternal life for the Israelites. The bread which Jesus offers his disciples sustains us not only on our journey to the heavenly paradise, it gives us the abundant supernatural life of God which sustains us both now and for all eternity. When we receive from the Lord's table we unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, who makes us sharers in his body and blood and partakers of his divine life. Ignatius of Antioch (35-107 A.D.) calls it the "one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ" (Ad Eph. 20,2). This supernatural food is healing for both body and soul and strength for our journey heavenward.

Do you hunger for God and for the food which produces everlasting life?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you are the bread of life. You alone can satisfy the hunger in my heart. May I always find in you, the true bread from heaven, the source of life and nourishment I need to sustain me on my journey to the promised land of heaven."*

God offers his people abundant life, but we can miss it. What is the *bread of life* which Jesus offers? It is first of all the life of God himself -- life which sustains us not only now in this age but also in the age to come. The Rabbis said that *the generation in the wilderness have no part in the life to come*. In the Book of Numbers it is recorded that the people who refused to brave the dangers of the promised land were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. The Rabbis believed that the father who missed the promised land also missed the life to come. When Jesus offers us real life he brings us into a new relationship with God, a relationship of trust, love, and obedience. And he offers us real life which last forever, a life of love, fellowship, communion, and union with the One who made us in love to be him forever. To refuse Jesus is to refuse eternal life, unending life with the Heavenly Father. To accept Jesus as the *bread of heaven* is not only life and spiritual nourishment for this world but glory in the world to come.

Do you accept Jesus as the *bread of life*?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the living bread which sustains me in this life. May I always hunger for the bread which comes from heaven and find in it the nourishment and strength I need to love and serve you wholeheartedly. May I always live in the joy, peace, and unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both now and in the age to come"*.

FEB 21, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

What is your Motive ?

Mat 15:11

*He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Mar 7:6*

Terrorism is hitting us hard these days. Many live in fear of harm simply because of their beliefs. What is even more frightening is the use of violence as a means of justifying one's religious beliefs.

Religious extremism is not a new thing. In today's reading we see another form of religious extremism - judging people because they did not follow traditions. For the Pharisees, Jesus' disciples were unclean simply because they did not follow the practices of Judaism (v.5). The problem with this assumption was that the Pharisees were selective in their practices - they only followed the practices that suited them (vs 9-13).

We too can be found guilty of being selectively judgmental of others. We tend to sometimes pronounce harsh judgments on people simply because they do not do things the way we choose. Sadly, many of us hide behind religion to justify our judgments. Surely killing people to justify one's religion cannot be right!

Jesus tells the Pharisees clearly that it is not one's actions but motives that determine one's righteousness. And this has to do with one's heart (v 20). We can do so many things hoping that by doing so we can be considered righteous but if our motives are wrong, all our good deeds will come to naught. Only God knows our heart. Therefore only God can judge others and we should refrain from doing so.

**1 Sam 16:7b: *The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.***  
**Pray that Christians will examine their motives in the things that they do so that they will glorify God and not themselves.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 22, MONDAY

Mat 15:1-20; Mar 7:1-23

What is your Motive ?

Mat 15:11

What makes a person unclean or unfit to offer God acceptable worship? The Jews went to great pains to ensure that their worship would conform to the instructions which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. God's call to his people was a call to holiness: "be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2). In their zeal for holiness many elders developed elaborate traditions which became a burden for the people to carry out in their everyday lives. The Scribes and Pharisees were upset with Jesus because he allowed his disciples to break with their ritual traditions by eating with unclean hands. They sent a delegation all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to bring their accusation in a face-to-face confrontation with Jesus. Jesus dealt with their accusation by going to the heart of the matter -- by looking at God's intention and purpose for the commandments. Jesus gave an example of how their use of ritual tradition excused them from fulfilling the commandment to honor one's father and mother. If someone wanted to avoid the duty of financially providing for their parents in old age or sickness they could say that their money or goods were an offering "given over to God" and thus exempt from any claim of charity or duty to help others. They broke God's law to fulfill a law of their own making. Jesus explained that they void God's command because they allowed their hearts and minds to be clouded by their own notions of religion.

Jesus accused them specifically of two things. First of hypocrisy. Like actors, who put on a show, they appear to obey God's word in their external practices while they inwardly harbor evil desires and intentions. Secondly, he accused them of abandoning God's word by substituting their own arguments and ingenious interpretations for what God requires. They listened to clever arguments rather than to God's word. Jesus refers them to the prophecy of Isaiah (29:31) where the prophet accuses the people of his day for honoring God with their lips while their hearts went astray because of disobedience to God's laws.

Jesus shocked the religious sensibilities of the Jews by declaring that nothing which "goes into the mouth defiles a person" (Matt. 15:10). This statement meant that all the ritual food laws of the Old Testament were now canceled. God gave these laws to teach his people of the old covenant the importance of offering right sacrifice and worship to God with a clean conscience. Ritual purification was intended to show people the necessity of being not just outwardly clean, but inwardly clean and holy in thought as well as indeed. Jesus points his listeners to the source of true defilement -- evil desires which come from inside a person's innermost being. Sin does not just happen. It first springs from the innermost recesses of our thoughts and intentions, from the secret desires which only the individual soul can conceive. This is precisely why Jesus came to free sinful men and women deceived by the glamor of sin and enslaved by its seductive powers.

God in his mercy freely offers us pardon, healing, and grace for overcoming sin and evil in our lives. But to receive God's mercy and help, we must admit our faults and ask for God's pardon. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). Only God can change our hearts and make them clean and whole through the power of the Holy Spirit. Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God through his Word and Spirit first brings our sinful intentions and deeds into the light of our conscience that we may recognize them for what they are and call upon his mercy and grace for pardon and healing. Ask the Lord to cleanse you with the purifying fire of his Holy Spirit.

*"Lord, let the fire of your Holy Spirit cleanse my mind and my heart that I may love you purely and serve you worthily."*

FEB 23, TUESDAY

Mat 15:21-39; Mar 7:24-8:10

Syrophoenician, Healing & Feeding of the 4,000

Mar 7:30

In 1953, a fledgling business called Rocket Chemical Company and its staff of three set out to create a line of rust-prevention solvents and degreasers for use in the aerospace industry. It took them 40 attempts to perfect their formula. The original secret formula for WD-40—which stands for Water Displacement, 40th attempt—is still in use today. What a story of persistence!

The gospel of Matthew records another story of bold persistence. A Canaanite woman had a daughter who was possessed by a demon. She had no hope for her daughter—until she heard that Jesus was in the region.

This desperate woman came to Jesus with her need because she believed He could help her. She cried out to Him even though everything and everybody seemed to be against her—race, religious background, gender, the disciples, Satan, and seemingly even Jesus (Mat 15:22-27). Despite all of these obstacles, she did not give up. With bold persistence, she pushed her way through the dark corridors of difficulty, desperate need, and rejection. The result? Jesus commended her for her faith and healed her daughter (v.28).

We too are invited to approach Jesus with bold persistence. As we keep asking, seeking, and knocking, we will find grace and mercy in our time of need.

By **Marvin Williams**

**Something happens when we pray, Take our place and therein stay,  
Wrestle on till break of day; Ever let us pray. —Anon.**

*Persistence in prayer pleases God.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 23, TUESDAY

Mat 15:21–39; Mar 7:24–8:10

Syrophenician, Healing &amp; Feeding of the 4,000

Mar 7:30

Do you ever feel "put-off" or ignored by the Lord? This passage describes the only occasion in which Jesus ministered outside of Jewish territory. (Tyre and Sidon were fifty miles north of Israel and still exist today in modern Lebanon.) A Gentile woman, a foreigner who was not a member of the Jewish people, puts Jesus on the spot by pleading for his help. She addressed Jesus as Lord and Son of David. She recognized that Jesus was God's anointed one who would bring healing and salvation, not only to the people of Israel, but to the Gentiles as well. She asks Jesus to show mercy and compassion to her tormented daughter. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her, and this made his disciples feel embarrassed. Jesus does this to test the woman to awaken faith in her.

When she persisted in asking Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus answered by saying one shouldn't take food prepared for their children and throw it to the dogs. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The Jews often spoke of the Gentiles as "unclean dogs" since they worshipped idols, offered sacrifices to demons, and rejected the true God. For the Greeks the "dog" was a symbol of dishonor and was used to describe a shameless and audacious woman. Matthew 7:6 records the expression: do not give dogs what is holy. Jesus was sent from the Father in heaven to first feed the children of Israel with the true bread of life that would bring healing, reconciliation, and lasting union with God. This humble Canaanite woman was not put-off by Jesus' refusal to give her what she asked for. In desperation and hope for her tormented child, she pleads with Jesus to give some of the "crumbs that fall from the table" to the "little dogs".

John Chrysostom (349-407 AD), in his sermon on this passage, remarks how this woman approached Jesus with great humility, wisdom, and faith:

"See her humility as well as her faith! For he had called the Jews 'children,' but she was not satisfied with this. She even called them 'masters,' so far was she from grieving at the praises of others. She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Behold the woman's wisdom! She did not venture so much as to say a word against anyone else. She was not stung to see others praised, nor was she indignant to be reproached. Behold her constancy. When he answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs,' she said, 'Yes, Lord.' He called them 'children,' but she called them 'masters.' He used the name of a dog, but she described the action of a dog. Do you see the woman's humility? ...Do you see how this woman, too, contributed not a little to the healing of her daughter? For note that Christ did not say, 'Let your little daughter be made whole,' but 'Great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire.' These words were not uttered at random, nor were they flattering words, but great was the power of her faith, and for our learning. He left the certain test and demonstration, however, to the issue of events. Her daughter accordingly was immediately healed."

Jesus praised this woman for her faith and for her love because she made the misery of her child her own. She was willing to suffer rejection in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had indomitable persistence. Her faith grew in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with faith – whether Jew or Gentile – was refused his help. Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith?

*"Lord Jesus, your love and mercy knows no bounds.*

*May I trust you always and pursue you with indomitable persistence as this woman did.*

*Increase my faith in your saving power and deliver me for all evil and harm. "*

FEB 24, WEDNESDAY

Mat 16:1-12; Mar 8:11-26

He is True to His Word

Mar 8:17

*“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:6*

The Pharisees and the Sadducees did not agree among themselves. They were often at odds with each other over doctrinal beliefs. The former believed in angels, bodily resurrection after death and a set of teachings called the ‘Oral Law’ while the Sadducees did not. Yet they were united over a common enemy - Jesus.

Jesus often criticized them for their hypocritical religious practices. Ritual over genuine repentance; strict observance of the Law over selfless loving care for those in need; a craving for public acclaim over personal piety; knowledge over kindness ... such was the state of their religiosity.

As Jesus came close to the end of His public ministry, He spoke out more and more against blind observance of institutionalized religion. He called for a personal response to God. What was Jesus specifically referring to when He warned His disciples against the ‘yeast’ of the Pharisees and the Sadducees? In this context, it is likely referring to the persistent choice they made to reject Jesus as the Messiah despite His teaching and Messianic acts of healing.

Lest we be quick to judge them, do we not, even today, occasionally ask for a ‘sign’ from God so that we may know that He is in control over all the affairs of our lives? We have even less excuse than the Pharisees and the Sadducees because today, the sign of Jonah has been given (12:40). Our faith should rest squarely on the fact of the resurrected Lord. We must choose to believe truth over falsehood.

**Doubt - this has been the ploy of the devil from the time he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden. The next time he tries to incite you to question God’s love for you and His ability to help you, choose to reject doubt. Choose faith - believe. Jesus has risen from the grave and He lives!**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 24, WEDNESDAY

Mat 16:1-12; Mar 8:11-26

He is True to His Word

Mar 8:17

How good are you at reading warning signs? Jesus expects his disciples to accurately read the signs of the times! Farmers and seafarers know the importance of spotting weather conditions for safe travel and planting. A lot of effort is made today, with the help of science and technology, to discern potential natural dangers, such as tropical storms, hurricanes, floods, tornados, earthquakes, and erupting volcanoes, so that people can be warned to take shelter before disaster hits. Our need for accurately discerning spiritual danger is even more necessary if we want to avoid moral and spiritual crisis and disaster.

Why did the religious leaders ask Jesus for a sign? It was characteristic of the Jews that they demanded "signs" from God's messengers to authenticate their claims. Jesus calls them an "evil and adulterous generation." The kind of adultery Jesus had in mind here was very like "spiritual" adultery. The image of adultery was often used in the scriptures for describing apostasy or infidelity towards God. When the religious leaders pressed Jesus to give proof for his claims, he says in so many words that he is God's sign and that they need no further evidence from heaven than his own person. The Ninevites recognized God's warning when Jonah spoke to them, and they repented. And the Queen of Sheba recognized God's wisdom in Solomon. Jonah was God's sign, and his message was the message of God for the people of Nineveh. Unfortunately, the religious leaders in the time of Jesus were not content to accept the signs right before their eyes. They had rejected the message of John the Baptist and now they reject Jesus as God's Anointed One (Messiah) and they fail to heed his message. Simeon had prophesied at Jesus' birth that he was "destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that inner thoughts of many will be revealed" (Luke 2:34- 35).

Jesus confirmed his message with many miracles in preparation for the greatest sign of all – his resurrection on the third day. The Lord Jesus through the gift of his Holy Spirit offers us freedom from sin and deception, and he gives us wisdom for our lives, if we are willing to listen. Do you thirst for God's wisdom? James says that "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity" (James 3:17). A double-minded person cannot receive this kind of wisdom. The single of heart and mind desire one thing alone – God who is the source of all goodness, truth, beauty, wisdom and holiness. Ask the Lord to renew your mind and to increase your thirst for his truth and wisdom.

*"Lord Jesus, may I wholly desire your truth and wisdom for my life.*

*Help me to discern truth from error and to recognize your good will and plan for my life."*

Do you allow anxiety or fear to keep you from trusting in God's provision for your life? Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Ask God to flood your heart with his love and to increase your faith in his provident care for you. The apostles worried because they forgot to bring bread for their trip. And that was right after Jesus miraculously fed four thousand people! How easy it is to forget what God has already done for us and to doubt what he promises to do as well. Jesus cautioned the disciples to beware of bread that corrupts, such as the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. To the Jew leaven was a sign of evil. It was a piece of dough from left-over bread which fermented. Fermentation was associated with putrefaction. Jesus warned his disciples to avoid the way of the Pharisees and of Herod who sought their own counsels rather than the will of God. As the apostles continued to worry about their lack of bread, Jesus reminded them of his miraculous provision of bread in the feeding of the four thousand. He then upbraided them for their lack of trust in God. Do you not yet understand? It's easy to get preoccupied with the problems and needs of the present moment and to forget the most important reality of all -- God's abiding presence with us and his abundant provision for our lives as well. Do you pray with joyful confidence, Father, give us this day our daily bread?

*"Lord, you alone can sustain me with your life-giving Word and Spirit.*

*Give me joy and strength to serve you always and help me to turn away from the leaven of sin and worldliness which brings corruption and death."*

FEB 25, THURSDAY      Mat 16:13-28; Mar 8:27-9:1; Luk 9:18-27

Which Jesus are You Following?

Mat 16:16

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luk 9:23*

Everybody loves a winner, Everybody loves a winner, But when you lose, you lose alone. - Linda Ronstadt -

Which Jesus are you following? The One who exorcised demons, healed the sick, calmed the waves, raised the dead and fed 5000? Peter saw all that Jesus did and he went out and did the same. When Jesus Christ asked him who Peter thought He was, the answer came confidently: 'The Christ of God' (v.20). I am sure you agree with Peter's answer.

But you will not get full marks for that answer, not yet anyway. Because Jesus Christ told Peter: 'Don't tell anyone. Why? Because everybody loves a winner. Everybody wants to believe in Jesus Christ the winner, the healer, the ghost buster. the super bread man, the conqueror of the winds. And Jesus did not want that. He wasn't going to be the average man's idea of a winner. He was going to suffer and be rejected. He was going to die.

Only after He died and was risen was when Peter was to tell people that Jesus is the Christ. Because the Jesus that we are to follow is the One who was also unpopular. Christ suffered, died undeservedly, and finally rose from the dead (v.22). if this is the Jesus that we are to follow then we are not to be surprised at these words: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (v.23). Jesus gave up His rights. we are to give up ours. Jesus humbled Himself. We are to humble ourselves. Jesus suffered unjustly. We must be prepared to suffer unjustly. And we must do it everyday (v.23). We may have to do it alone. But always remember, Jesus is with you. Which Jesus are you following?

**Give me grace that I might die to selfishness daily and accept whatever suffering You send my way. Help me do it even if I have to do it alone.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 25, THURSDAY

Mat 16:13–28; Mar 8:27–9:1; Luk 9:18–27

Which Jesus are You Following?

Mat 16:16

Who is Jesus for you? At an opportune time Jesus tests his disciples with a crucial question: Who do men say that I am and who do you say that I am? He was widely recognized in Israel as a mighty man of God, even being compared with the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah.

Peter, always quick to respond, professes that Jesus is truly the Christ. No mortal being could have revealed this to Peter; but only God. Through faith Peter grasped who Jesus truly was. He was the first apostle to recognize Jesus as the Anointed One (Messiah and Christ). Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah, which means Anointed One. Peter's faith, however, was sorely tested when Jesus explained that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die in order that God's work of redemption may be accomplished. How startled the disciples were when they heard these words! How different are God's thoughts and ways from our thoughts and ways! Through humiliation, suffering, and death on the cross Jesus broke the powers of sin and death and won for us our salvation.

The Lord Jesus tests each of us personally with the same question: Who do you say that I am?

*"Lord Jesus, I profess and believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are my Lord and my Savior. Make my faith strong and help me to live in the victory of the cross by rejecting sin and by accepting your will."*

What is the most important investment you can make with your life? Jesus poses some probing questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile. In every decision of life, we are making ourselves a certain kind of person. The kind of person we are, our character, determines to a large extent the kind of future we will face and live. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all. Of what value are material things if they don't help you gain what truly lasts in eternity. Neither money nor possessions can buy heaven, mend a broken heart, or cheer a lonely person.

Jesus asks the question: What will a person give in exchange for his life? Everything we have is an out-right gift from God. We owe him everything, including our very lives. It's possible to give God our money, but not ourselves, or to give him lip-service, but not our hearts. A true disciple gladly gives up all that he has in exchange for an unending life of joy and happiness with God. God gives without measure. The joy he offers no sadness or loss can diminish. The cross of Christ leads to victory and freedom from sin and death.

What is the cross which Jesus Christ commands me to take up each day?

When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done. Are you ready to lose all for Jesus Christ in order to gain all with Jesus Christ?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, I want to follow you as your disciple. I gladly offer all that I have to you. Take and use my life as a pleasing sacrifice of praise to your glory."*

FEB 26, FRIDAY

Mat 17:1-13; Mar 9:2-13; Luk 9:28-36

The Father's Voice

Mat 17:5b

*A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." Luk 9:35*

Jesus is set to go to Jerusalem. It is a road of suffering and rejection and finally death and on the third day, resurrection (v.22). This was the lot of the Master we follow; we can expect no less.

Everybody wants to follow a triumphalist leader. But the true followers of Jesus are the ones who follow Him even unto suffering and death (vs 23-24). Is this really the way that has been set for Him by God, His Father? Or shouldn't we just be proclaiming the triumphant Jesus Christ who heals, drives out demons, calms storms, raises the dead and feeds 5000 with five loaves and two fish (v.21)?

The disciples need some confirmation of this call by Jesus Christ to a difficult discipleship. And they get it eight days later (v.28). Jesus takes three of them into the mountains. There they see the Christ transformed, bathed in glory. They see Moses and Elijah bathed in glory too. But are they not dead? No. God is the God of the living (Mat 22:32). (They will remember this when Christ rises from the dead.) Then a voice from the clouds spoke: *'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'* (v.35).

There is no greater confirmation of a hard and narrow path. The confirmation of the Father is all that is needed. The path of suffering and self denial is not the path of a deluded man, but the path set for Him by God our Father.

This is the Christ we follow today. There will be suffering and even death. But whoever loses his life for Jesus will save it (v.24). Rest assured and believe the words of the Voice from the clouds.

**Give grace and mercy, O Lord, that we who follow You may follow You to the end.  
Even if the end should be death.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 26, FRIDAY

Mat 17:1–13; Mar 9:2–13; Luk 9:28–36

The Father's Voice

Mat 17:5b

Are you prepared to see God's glory? God is eager to share his glory with us! We get a glimpse of this when the disciples see Jesus transfigured in glory on the mountain. Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain is celebrated in the Eastern and Western churches on August 6. Mark's account tells us that Jesus' garments became glistening, intensely white. When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God (see Exodus 34:29). Paul says that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness (2 Cor. 3:7). In this incident Jesus appeared in glory with Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, and with Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, in the presence of three of his beloved apostles.

What is the significance of this mysterious appearance? Jesus went to the mountain knowing full well what awaited him in Jerusalem — his betrayal, rejection and crucifixion. Jesus very likely discussed this momentous decision to go to the cross with Moses and Elijah. God the Father also spoke with Jesus and gave his approval: This is my beloved Son; listen to him. The cloud which overshadowed Jesus and his apostles fulfilled the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would fill the temple again (see Exodus 16:10, 19:9, 33:9; 1 Kings 8:10).

Peter, James, and John were privileged witnesses of the glory of Christ. We, too, as disciples of Christ are called to be witnesses of his glory. We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

The Lord wants to reveal his glory to us, his beloved disciples.  
Do you seek his presence with faith and reverence?

*"Lord, draw me near to you and let me see your glory.  
May I never doubt your love and saving help."*

God gives signs to show what he is about to do. John the Baptist is one such sign, who pointed to Jesus and prepared the way for his coming. John fulfilled the essential task of all the prophets: to be fingers pointing to Christ. John is the last and greatest prophet of the old kingdom, the old covenant. The Jews expected that when the Messiah would come, Elijah would appear to announce his presence. John fills the role of Elijah and prepares the way for the coming of Christ by preaching a baptism of repentance and renewal.

As watchful servants, we, too must prepare for the Lord's coming again by turning away from sin and from everything that would keep us from pursuing his will.

Are you eager to do God's will and are you prepared to meet the Lord Jesus when he returns in glory?

*"Lord, stir my zeal for your righteousness and for your kingdom. Free me from complacency and from compromising with the ways of sin and worldliness that I may be wholeheartedly devoted to you and to your kingdom."*

FEB 27, SATURDAY Mat 17:14-27; Mar 9:14-32; Luk 9:37-45

Bring your Son Here

Mar 9:23-24

*And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. Luk 9:43*

Mountain top experiences are very special and rare. Real day to day life is lived in the lowlands. The reality of the Christian life today is that we live in an age when Christ is no longer here bodily. It is His Spirit Who is with us. We live by faith.

The twelve disciples had had success in their mission (v.6). But they had no success with this demon-possessed boy (v.40). When the father saw Jesus he saw hope. But the cry for help earns a rebuke from Jesus.

In this Gospel we are not sure whom Jesus rebuked, but in the parallel narration in Matthew it is directed at the disciples (Mat 17:14-21). Their failure was due to a lack of faith. This rebuke doubtless is made with Jerusalem in mind (v.22).

After the successful healing of the boy, Jesus speaks to the disciples. Again, Jesus' words show that Jerusalem is in mind (v.44).

The disciples did not understand (v.45). We, however, understand for we are people who already know the ending of the story. If we know Christ we depend on God. It is faith in God. It is exercising the power and authority given us by Christ (v.1).

It is the man of faith who moves mountains. When he does, it will be a mountain top experience in the lowlands.

**Reminder: I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to there' and it will move.  
Nothing will be impossible for you.'**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

FEB 27, SATURDAY

Mat 17:14-27; Mar 9:14-32; Luk 9:37-45

Bring your Son Here

Mar 9:23-24

What kind of faith does the Lord expect of us, especially when we meet set-backs and trials? Inevitably there are times when each of us disappoint others or disappoint ourselves when we suffer some kind of set-back or failure.

In this gospel incident the disciples of Jesus fail to heal an epileptic boy. Jesus' response seems stern; but it is really tempered with love and compassion. We see at once Jesus' dismay with the disciples' lack of faith and his concern to meet the need of this troubled boy and his father. With one word of command Jesus rebukes the evil spirit that has caused this boy's affliction and tells the spirit to "never enter him again". God's works reveal his majesty and power. When we ascribe majesty to someone, we acknowledge greatness in that person, and voice our respect for it. The miracles of Jesus revealed the majesty of God and displayed his grace and favor, especially towards the lowly.

When you encounter trials and disappointments do you turn to the Lord with confidence and trust in his mercy?

*"Lord Jesus, help my unbelief! Increase my faith and trust in your saving power.  
Give me confidence and perseverance, especially in prayer.  
And help me to bring your healing love and truth to those I meet".*

Do you know the majesty of God? When we ascribe majesty to someone, we acknowledge greatness in that person, and voice our respect for it. The miracles of Jesus revealed the majesty of God and displayed his grace and favor, especially towards the lowly. But with the miracles Jesus also gave a prophetic warning: *There can be no share in God's glory without the cross.* Jesus prophesied his own betrayal and crucifixion. But it did not make any sense to the disciples because it did not fit their understanding of the Messiah. And they were afraid to ask further questions. Like a person who might receive a bad verdict from the doctor and then refuse to ask further questions, they, too, didn't want to know any more.

How often do we reject what we do not wish to see? We have heard God's word and we know the consequences of accepting it or rejecting it. But do we give it our full allegiance and mold our lives according to it?

Ask the Lord to show you his majesty that you may grow in reverence of him and in godly fear of his word.

*"Lord, by your cross you have redeemed the world and revealed your glory and triumph over sin and death. May I never fail to see your glory and victory in the cross.  
Help me to conform my life to your will and to follow in your way of holiness."*

FEB 28, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAR 1, MONDAY Mat 18:1-9; Mar 9:33-50; Luk 9:46-50

The Least is the Greatest

Mat 18:3-4

*For he who is least among you all- he is the greatest.' Luk 9:48b*

Jesus' second announcement of what lay ahead in Jerusalem is not understood (v.44). They have heard of the sort of discipleship demanded by Jesus Christ earlier after the first announcement of His passion (v.23). But the outworking's of that sort of discipleship has not been understood. Their lack of understanding is evident as they argue about greatness (v.46).

The disciples still think of greatness and their band in worldly terms. For them greatness depends on achievement and position and they see their band as privileged and exclusive. But Jesus overturns their idea. Children are nobodies in Jewish societal hierarchy. By associating God with a child, He very pointedly says the least among them is the greatest.

John, realizing that he may have made a mistake by stopping some outsider from ministry, asks Jesus if he had done the right thing. The answer is telling. Ministry is not exclusive to the band. It is the prerogative of God to use whomever He wants.

How often have we thought that greatness belongs to leaders like Peter or beloved ones like John or to the privileged three who were at the mountain top experience? In the kingdom of God however, greatness is not measured by achievement but is a gift given by God. So we do not have to fret when other people are put on a pedestal. We just need to be a servant like Jesus (Phi 2:3-11) and He will exalt us.

The servant attitude takes care of 'the exclusive club mentality.' Serving God does not make us exclusive and special: He called us and He can call others. It is not our business to exclude other servants of God.

**O God, teach us to be humble so that we might be truly servants with a servant's heart.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 1, MONDAY

Mat 18:1–9; Mar 9:33–50; Luk 9:46–50

The Least is the Greatest

Mat 18:3–4

Do you rejoice in the good that others do? Jesus reprimands his disciples for their jealousy and suspicion. They were upset that someone who was not of their company was performing a spiritual work in the name of Jesus. They even "forbade" the man "because he was not following us". Jesus' reply is filled with wisdom: "No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me." Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good deeds of others who seem to shine more than us? Paul says that "love is not jealous... but rejoices in the right" (1 Cor. 13:4,6). Envy and jealousy, its counterpart, are sinful because they lead us to sorrow over what should make us rejoice -- namely, our neighbor's good.

The reason we may grieve over our another's good is that somehow we see that good as lessening our own value or excellence. Envy forms when we believe that the other person's advantage or possession diminishes or brings disgrace on us. Envy is contrary to love. Both the object of love and the object of envy is our neighbor's good, but by contrary movements, since love rejoices in our neighbor's good, while envy grieves over it. How can we overcome envy? With the love that God puts into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). This love seeks the highest good of our neighbor. Ask the Lord to fill you with the fire of his purifying love that you may always rejoice in the good of others, even in those you find disagreeable.

The love of Christ not only frees us from envy and jealousy, but it compels us to give generously, especially to those in need. Everyone in need has a claim on us because they are dear to Christ and bear the image and likeness of God. God created us in love for love. The charity we show to our neighbor in his or her need expresses the gratitude we have for the abundant goodness and kindness of God towards us. Jesus declared that any kindness shown and any help given to the people of Christ will not lose its reward. Jesus never refused to give to anyone in need who asked for his help. As his disciples we are called to be kind and generous as he is. Are you grateful for God's mercy and kindness towards you and are you ready to show that same kindness and generosity towards your neighbor?

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may radiate the joy of the gospel to others. May your light and truth shine through me that others may find new life and freedom from sin and the corruption of evil."*

Was Jesus' exaggerating when he urged his followers to use drastic measures to avoid evil and its harmful consequences? Jesus set before his disciples the one supreme goal in life that is worth any sacrifice, and that goal is God himself and his will for our lives which leads to everlasting peace and happiness. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which leads to spiritual death. Jesus warns his disciples of the terrible responsibility that they must set no stumbling block in the way of another, that is, not give offense or bad example that might lead another to sin. The Greek word for temptation (*scandalon*) is exactly the same as the English word scandal. The original meaning of scandal is a trap or a stumbling block which causes one to trip and fall. The Jews held that it was an unforgivable sin to teach another to sin. If we teach another to sin, he in turn may teach still another, until a train of sin is set in motion with no foreseeable end. The young in faith are especially vulnerable to the bad example of those who should be passing on the faith.

Do you set a good example for others to follow, especially the young?

What does Jesus mean when he says "have salt in yourselves"? Salt served a very useful purpose in hot climates before the invention of electricity and refrigeration. Salt not only gave food flavor, it also preserved meat from spoiling. Salt was used as a symbol of fellowship and the common meal. The near-Eastern expression to *betray the salt* meant to betray one's Master or some person who was owed loyalty and devotion. Leonardo da Vinci in his painting of the Last Supper depicts Judas in the act of tipping over the salt shaker, thus symbolically identifying himself as the betrayer of his Master. Jesus used the image of salt to describe how his disciples are to live in the world. As salt purifies, preserves, and penetrates, so the disciple must be as salt in the world of human society to purify, preserve, and penetrate that society for the kingdom of God and of his righteousness and peace. What did Jesus mean by the expression "salted with fire" and "salt becoming saltless"? Salt was often put in ovens to intensify the heat. When the salt was burned off and no longer useful it was thrown out on the road or on the roof top where it would easily get *trodde*n upon. Perhaps Jesus wanted to contrast useful salt used for giving flavor and for preserving food with salt which was burned and no longer of much benefit, to encourage his disciples to be faithful witnesses and to not neglect the opportunity to influence others for the kingdom of God through the witness of their lives and their testimony to the power of the kingdom of God.

*"Lord, fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may radiate the joy of the gospel to others. May your light and truth shine through me that others may find new life and freedom from sin and the corruption of evil."*

MAR 2, TUESDAY

Mat 18:10-14; Luk 15:1-32

God's Persistence To Save

Luk 15:7

*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luk 15:7*

We may think that we are good followers of Christ but sometimes, things happen that force us to rethink some of our assumptions. The Pharisees and teachers of the law have a major issue with Jesus (v.1-2). Jesus does not just have 'sinners' gathering round Him but He has table-fellowship with them. They are considered outcasts and to the Pharisees, to have meals with them is beyond the realms of propriety.

Jesus uses two parables (verses 4-6 and verses 8-9) to illustrate His points. In both parables, something is lost and the owners spend a lot of time and effort to look for what is lost. When found, they have great joy and celebrate with their friends and neighbors. Jesus goes on to equate that to the joy in heaven when someone repents (v.7,10).

This passage says much about the heart of God; He cares enough for sinners to go looking for them, even when they have stayed away consciously. Jesus' implicit rebuke of the approach of the Pharisees is a challenge to us that we too need to examine our attitudes. It is easy to dismiss as insignificant the variety of people whom our culture has cast aside or views with contempt. This could be people who suffer from debilitating diseases like AIDS or those who have made wrong choices in life. We are called to action, because we appreciate just how much heaven wants us to search for those who are lost.

**Are we too busy for others?  
What can we do with our lives so that we have opportunities  
to have fellowship with the 'outcasts' or 'sinners' in our society?**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 2, TUESDAY

Mat 18:10-14; Luk 15:1-32

God's Persistence To Save

Luk 15:7

Do you take offense when someone else gets a reward or favor they don't deserve? The scribes and Pharisees took great offense at Jesus because he associated with sinners and treated them graciously. The Pharisees had strict regulations about how they were to keep away from sinners, lest they incur defilement. They were not to entrust money to them or have any business dealings with them, nor trust them with a secret, nor entrust orphans to their care, nor accompany them on a journey, nor give their daughter in marriage to any of their sons, nor invite them as guests or be their guests. They were shocked with the way in which Jesus freely received sinners and ate with them. Sinners, nonetheless, were *drawn to Jesus to hear him* speak about the mercy of God. Jesus characteristically answered the Pharisees' charge with a parable or lesson drawn from everyday life.

What does Jesus' story about a lost sheep and a lost coin tell us about God and his kingdom? Shepherds normally counted their sheep at the end of the day to make sure all were accounted for. Since sheep by their very nature are very social, an isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered and even neurotic. The shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. The housewife who lost a coin faced something of an economic disaster, since the value of the coin would be equivalent to her husband's daily wage. What would she say to her husband when he returned home from work? They were poor and would suffer greatly because of the loss. Her grief and anxiety turn to joy when she finds the coin. Both the shepherd and the housewife "search until what they have lost is found". Their persistence pays off. They both instinctively share their joy with the whole community. The poor are particularly good at sharing in one another's sorrows and joys. What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out and not merely mourned for. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God. Seekers of the lost are much needed today.

Do you persistently pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

*"Lord, let your light dispel the darkness that what is lost may be found and restored.  
Let your light shine through me that others may see your truth and love and find hope and peace in you.  
May I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me.  
Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful."*

The parable of the father and his two sons is the longest one in the gospels. What is the main point of the story? Is it the contrast between an obedient and a disobedient son or is it between the reception given to a spendthrift son by the father and the reception given by the eldest son? Jesus contrasts the father's merciful love with the eldest son's somewhat harsh reaction to his errant brother and to the lavish party his joyful father throws for his repentant son. While the errant son had wasted his father's money, his father, nonetheless, maintained unbroken love for his son. The son, while he was away, learned a lot about himself. And he realized that his father had given him love which he had not returned. He had yet to learn about the depth of his father's love for him. His deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed on the husks of pigs and his reflection on all he had lost, led to his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father. While he hoped for reconciliation with his father, he could not have imagined a full restoration of relationship. The father did not need to speak words of forgiveness to his son; his actions spoke more loudly and clearly! The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet symbolize the new life -- pure, worthy, and joyful -- of anyone who returns to God. The prodigal could not return to the garden of innocence, but he was welcomed and reinstated as a son. The errant son's dramatic change from grief and guilt to forgiveness and restoration express in picture-language the resurrection from the dead, a rebirth to new life from spiritual death.

The parable also contrasts mercy and its opposite -- unforgiveness. The father who had been wronged, was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. His unforgiveness turns into contempt and pride. And his resentment leads to his isolation and estrangement from the community of forgiven sinners. In this parable Jesus gives a vivid picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than us. He does not lose hope or give up when we stray. He rejoices in finding the lost and in leading them home. Do you know the joy of repentance and restoration of sonship with your heavenly Father?

*"Lord, may I never doubt your love nor take for granted the mercy you have shown to me.  
Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful."*

MAR 3, WEDNESDAY Mat 18:15-35

**Seventy-Seven Times and more!**

**Mat 18:35**

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Mat 18:21-22*

What we find most difficult to do - to forgive others - is what God requires the most from us. Peter wanted to know how many times we need to forgive others and Jesus answered 'seventy-seven times'. This really means an infinite number of times. But why is it so important to forgive? Because our grievances are trivial when compared to what God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus.

The parable of the unmerciful servant drives home the point that God's mercy towards us must be matched by our forgiveness of others (v.27, 35). However, this does not mean we do not address those who sin against us. Jesus tells us that we ought to talk things over with the person who has grieved us (v.15). The purpose is to work towards repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. If the person fails to listen we are to pray for him or her, preferably with others. When our hearts are united for the purpose of reconciliation, God will surely hear us and answer our prayers (v.19-20).

We are not to think that we are doing God or anybody else a favor when we forgive. Rather, we do ourselves a whole lot of good when we do so for unforgiveness not only fills us with bitterness, it can cause us a whole host of health problems. These include sleepless nights, headaches, depression, ulcers and exhaustion. It is much easier to forgive those who have grieved us than live with the consequences of unforgiveness!

**Lord, help me to be sincere when I pray daily,  
'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 3, WEDNESDAY

Mat 18:15-35

Seventy-Seven Times and more!

Mat 18:35

What's the best way to repair a damaged relationship? Jesus offers his disciples spiritual freedom and power for restoring broken or injured relationships. Jesus makes clear that his followers should not tolerate a breach in relationships among themselves. Sin must be confronted, and help must be offered to restore a damaged relationship. When relationships between brothers and sisters in the Lord are damaged, then we must spare no effort to help the brother or sister at fault to see their error and to get things right again.

What can we learn from this passage about how to mend a damaged relationship? If you feel you have been wronged by someone, Jesus says the first step is to speak directly but privately to the individual who has done the harm. One of the worst things we can do is brood over our grievance. This can poison the mind and heart and make it more difficult to go directly to the person who caused the damage. If we truly want to settle a difference between someone, we need to do it face to face. If this fails in its purpose, then the second step is to bring another person or persons, someone who is wise and gracious rather than someone who is hot-tempered or judgmental. The goal is not so much to put the offender on trial, but to persuade the offender to see the wrong and to be reconciled. And if this fails, then we must still not give up, but seek the help of the Christian community. Note the emphasis here is on restoring a broken relationship by seeking the help of other Christians who hopefully will pray and seek a solution for reconciliation based on Christian love and wisdom, rather than relying on coercive force or threat of legal action, such as a lawsuit.

Lastly, if even the Christian community fails to bring about reconciliation, what must we do? Jesus seems to say that we have the right to abandon stubborn and obdurate offenders and treat them like social outcasts. The tax-collectors and Gentiles were regarded as "unclean" by the religious-minded Jews. However we know from the gospel accounts that Jesus often had fellowship with tax-collectors, ate with them, and even praised them at times! Jesus refuses no one who is ready to receive pardon, healing, and restoration. The call to accountability is inevitable and we can't escape it, both in this life and at the day of judgment when the Lord Jesus will return. But while we have the opportunity, we must not give up on stubborn offenders, but, instead make every effort to win them with the grace and power of God's healing love and wisdom. Do you tolerate broken relationships, or do you seek to repair them as God gives you the opportunity to mend and restore what is broken?

*"Lord, make me an instrument of your healing love and peace. Give me wisdom and courage to bring your healing love and saving truth to those in need of healing and restoration."*

How does mercy and justice go together? The prophet Amos speaks of God forgiving transgression three times, but warns that God may not revoke punishment for the fourth (see Amos 1:3-13; 2:1-6). When Peter posed the question of forgiveness, he characteristically offered an answer he thought Jesus would be pleased with. Why not forgive seven times! How unthinkable for Jesus to counter with the proposition that one must forgive seventy times that. Jesus made it clear that there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness. And he drove the lesson home with a parable about two very different kinds of debts. The first man owed an enormous sum of money -- millions in our currency. In Jesus' time this amount was greater than the total revenue of a province -- more than it would cost to ransom a king! The man who was forgiven such an incredible debt could not, however bring himself to forgive his neighbor a very small debt which was about one-hundred-thousandth of his own debt. The contrast could not have been greater! No offence our neighbor can do to us can compare with our debt to God! We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying; to ransom our debt of sin God gave up his only begotten Son. If God has forgiven each of us our debt, which was very great, we, too must forgive others the debt they owe us. Jesus teaches that one must forgive in order to be forgiven. If we do not forgive our fellow man we cannot expect God to forgive us. James says that *judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy* (James 2:13). Mercy is truly a gift and it is offered in such a way that justice is not negated. Mercy "seasons" justice as "salt" seasons meat and gives it flavor. Mercy follows justice and perfects it. To pardon the unrepentant is not mercy but license. C.S. Lewis, a contemporary Christian author wrote: *"Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice: transplanted to the marshlands of mere Humanitarianism, it becomes a man-eating weed, all the more dangerous because it is still called by the same name as the mountain variety."* If we want mercy shown to us we must be ready to forgive others as God has forgiven us. Do you hold any grudge or resentment towards anyone?

*"Lord, you have been kind and forgiving towards me. May I be merciful as you are merciful. Free me from all bitterness and resentment that I may truly forgive from the heart those who have caused me injury or grief."*

MAR 4, THURSDAY

Mat 8:18-22; Luk 9:51-62; Joh 7:1-13

Disciples Need Focus

Luk 9:62

*"No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Luk 9:62*

Unless we keep our focus firmly on Christ we will get easily distracted no matter what environment we live in. In today's passage we meet some distracted and wannabe disciples of Jesus. They wanted to follow Jesus but lacked focus. Jesus' response to them reveals the kind of focus they each needed but lacked.

First, some Samaritans showed disrespect for Jesus and the disciples wanted to vent their feelings (v 54). But discipleship is about compassion and humility, not about a show of power as retribution for 'loss of face.' Sometimes, the Asian tendency to value 'face' may cause us to lose focus.

Then there is the wannabe disciple who thinks following Christ is easy (v 57). But he is not accepted because his focus is on his earthly security and not wholly on Jesus. Sometimes, genuine concerns for earthly security can become distractions.

Next we find two wannabe disciples who are willing to follow but add in later clauses (vs 59,61). But this too is not acceptable to Jesus. Too often, our 'reasonable' arguments, even that of filial piety, are nothing but nice sounding cover-ups to distract others from our lack of commitment.

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God' (Heb 12:2).

**What kind of disciples are we?**

**Are we wishy-washy and easily distracted with all kinds of 'reasonable and valid' excuses  
or are we focused followers who have our hands to the plough,  
and with God's help, will never look back?**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 4, THURSDAY

Mat 8:18–22; Luk 9:51–62; Joh 7:1–13

Disciples Need Focus

Luk 9:62

Are you ready to follow the Lord wherever he may lead you? In love the Lord calls each personally to follow as his disciple. What an awesome privilege and an awesome responsibility! What does it cost to be a disciple? Our whole lives, for sure! Christ in turn gives us all that we need and more besides! Before we “sign-on” for something, is quite natural to ask what it will cost us. Jesus made sure that any “would-be” followers knew what they were getting themselves into.

One prospective follower, a scribe, paid Jesus the highest compliment he knew. He called Jesus “teacher”. Scribes considered themselves the “teachers” and “experts” in the law of God. Jesus warned this would-be follower: Before you follow me, think what you are doing and count the cost. A disciple must be willing to make sacrifices, even the sacrifice of his own life to follow Jesus as his Master and Lord.

Another would-be disciple responded by saying that he must first bury his father, that is go back home and take care of his father until he died. Jesus appealed to the man’s heart and told him to detach himself from whatever might keep him from following as his disciple. Love sacrifices all for the beloved. It was love that compelled the Lord Jesus to lay down his life for us. Does the love of Christ compel you to give your all for the Lord? Let the Holy Spirit flood your heart with the love of God.

What can keep us from giving our all to God? Fear, self-concern, pre-occupation and attachment to other things. Even spiritual things can get in the way of having God alone as our Treasure if we put them first. Detachment is a necessary step if we want to make the Lord our Treasure and Joy. It frees us to give ourselves without reserve to the Lord and to his service. There is nothing greater we can do with our lives than to place them at the service of the Lord and Master of the universe. We cannot outgive God in generosity. Jesus promises that those who are willing to part with what is most dear to them for his sake “will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).

Is there anything holding you back from giving your all to the Lord?

*“Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will.*

*All that I am and all that I possess you have given me.*

*I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to your will.*

*Give me only your love and your grace —*

*with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more.”*

*(Prayer of Ignatius Loyola, 1491-1556)*

MAR 5, FRIDAY Joh 7:14-53

**What Do We Thirst For?**

**Joh 7:37b-38**

*On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." Joh 7:37*

For the Jews, 'thirst' and 'water' are used symbolically to refer to their relationship with God. The psalmist's 'soul thirsts for God' (Psa 42:2). God is referred to as 'the spring of living water' (Jer 2:13) and so is the Holy Spirit (v.39). At the highest point of the Feast. Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice. 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink'. He was clearly claiming to be God. Those who were thirsting for God believed Him (v.40-41). They recognized that with all the miracles He had performed, He had to be the Christ, their Messiah (v.31). Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was one of them (v.50). Even the temple guards who were sent to arrest Him and who returned empty-handed conveyed a positive report about Him to those who sent them (v.46).

Others questioned Jesus' claim to Messiahship by debating His origins (v.27, 41b-42). Would it have made a difference if they had known the facts about Jesus' birth and that He was from Bethlehem and not Galilee? There is a big difference between knowing certain facts about a person and believing in him for who he is.

Unlike the psalmist who thirsted for God and longed to meet Him (Psa 42:1-2), people who reject Jesus have no such thirst for God. They replace thirst for God with something other than God. Thus the chief priests and Pharisees were out to kill Jesus (v.47-49). They neither knew God nor their own Scriptures for they were mistaken when they said that 'a prophet does not come out of Galilee' (v.52). Jonah son of Amittai was a prophet from Gath Hopher which was about 3 miles northeast of Nazareth in Galilee. See 2 Ki 14:25.

**What we thirst for determines how we live our lives.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 5, FRIDAY

Joh 7:14-53

What Do We Thirst For?

Joh 7:37b-38

What was the aim of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? He willingly suffered and went to the cross for our sake, to redeem us from sin and to restore our relationship with God the Father. Jesus met opposition and hostility with grace and determination to accomplish his Father's will. Can anyone treat Jesus with indifference? We either accept or reject his claims, and his promises and his threats with faith or with disbelief and contempt. The consequences are enormous, both in this life and in eternity. The religious authorities sought to arrest Jesus because they could not accept his claim to be the Son of God.

Jesus made two startling statements: that he was the Messiah, God's Anointed One, and that the Jews did not know God but that Jesus alone knew him. He claimed to be in a unique relationship with God and to know him as no one else did. To the Jews this was utter blasphemy.

This same choice is still before us. Either, what Jesus said about himself is false, or what he said about himself is true, in which case he is what he claimed to be the Son of God. Do you know the joy and freedom of surrender to Jesus, the Word of God and Redeemer of humankind?

*"Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)*

Are you willing to give yourself totally to the Lord Jesus? No one could be indifferent for long when confronted with Jesus' message. It caused division for many who heard it. Some believe he was a prophet, some the Messiah, and some believed he was neither. The reaction of the officers was bewildered amazement. They went to arrest him and returned empty-handed because they never heard anyone speak as he did. The reaction of the chief priests and Pharisees was contempt. The reaction of Nicodemus was one of timidity. His heart told him to defend Jesus, but his head told him not to take the risk.

There often will come a time when we have to take a stand for Christ and for the gospel. To stand for Jesus may provoke mockery or unpopularity. It may even entail hardship, sacrifice, or suffering. Are you ready to stand for Jesus and to defend the cause of the gospel?

*"Lord, your gospel brings joy and freedom.  
May I be loyal to you always, even though it produce a cross on earth,  
that I may share in your crown in eternity".*

MAR 6, SATURDAY Joh 8:1-30

Sin has No Favorites

Joh 8:7b

*When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Joh 8:7*

When we read in the newspapers that a lorry-driver has been arrested for wife beating we think nothing of it. But if the person responsible happens to be a respected professor from a reputable university, we are shocked. We should not be. Sin shows no favoritism. Today, we see Jesus teaching this lesson to the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law.

They acted as if they were horrified by the sin of adultery. If that were so, they ought also to have brought the man to Jesus for the law of Moses applied equally to the woman and man (Deu 22:22). It was obvious that they were trying to test Jesus (v.6). In so doing they were behaving like their sinful forefathers who put God to the test in the wilderness (Exo 17:2, Num 20:13). They knew Roman law did not allow stoning. Would Jesus as a Jew and a teacher from God follow the demand of the law of Moses and put her to death? What was Jesus to do? His response was to bend down and write on the ground with His finger (v.6b).

There is much speculation about what Jesus wrote but most Bible scholars believe He could have been acting out Jer 17:13b: *'Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water'*. To have your name written in the dust is the opposite of having your name written in the Book of Life. If the teachers of the law and the Pharisees didn't get the message that they were no less sinful than the woman they condemned, they did when Jesus said. *'If any one of you is without sin. let him be the first to throw a stone at her'*.

There was someone qualified to stone the woman. Yes. Jesus the sinless One. He showed her mercy instead but He also did not condone the sin. There was to be no repetition of past sins. She could look forward to a new life in Christ (v.11).

**We are all tainted by sin. We need to keep this in mind when we seek to help people who have been condemned by society. Separating the sin from the sinner will help us to better understand them.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 6, SATURDAY

Joh 8:1-30

Sin has No Favorites

Joh 8:7b

Do you know the healing power of the cross of Christ? When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). The bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven, is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God.

God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of Christ's Cross. Are you ready to witness the truth and joy of the gospel to those around you?

While many believed in Jesus and his message, many others, including the religious leaders, opposed him. Some openly mocked him when he warned them about their sin of unbelief. Some of his listeners mocked him when he warned them about their sin of unbelief. It's impossible to be indifferent to Jesus' word and his judgments. We are either for him or against him. There is no middle ground or neutral parties.

When Jesus spoke about going away he was speaking about his return to his Father and to his glory. His opponents could not follow him because by their continuous disobedience to the word of God and their refusal to accept him, they had shut themselves off from God. Jesus warned them that if they continued to refuse him they would die in their sins. Jesus' words echoed the prophetic warning given to Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 3:18 and 18:18) where God warns his people to heed his word before the time is too late. God gives us time to turn to him and to receive his grace, but that time is right now.

To sin literally means to miss the mark or to be off target. The essence of sin is that it diverts us from God and from our true purpose in life -- to know the source of all truth and beauty which is God himself and to be united with God in everlasting joy. When Adam first sinned, he hid himself from God (Genesis 3:8-10). That is what sin does; it separates us from the One who is all loving, all-wise, and all-just. Jesus went on to explain that if people could not recognize him in his word then they would recognize him in the Cross -- when the Son of man is lifted up. The cross is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). To fail to recognize Jesus and where he came from is to remain in spiritual darkness; to believe Jesus and his words is to walk in the joy and light of God's truth.

There are certain opportunities in life that come and do not return. Each of us is given the opportunity to know and to accept Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior. But that opportunity can be rejected and lost. Life here is limited and short, but how we live it has everlasting consequences.

Do you take advantage of the present time to make room for God so that your life will count for eternity?

*"Lord Jesus, grant this day, to direct and sanctify, to rule and govern our hearts and bodies, so that all our thoughts, words and deeds may be according to your Father's law and thus may we be saved and protected through your mighty help."*

MAR 7, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAR 8, MONDAY Joh 8:31-59

The Jews Learn Some Home Truths

Joh 8:31

*Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin". Joh 8:34*

The Jews considered themselves unique as they were the only nation that had a covenant relationship with God. Israel was God’s son (Exo 4:22) and God was their Father (v.41b). However, there were conditions to the covenant - Israel had to obey God ‘fully’ (Exo 19:5). The Jews who said they had never been slaves to anyone (v.33) had forgotten that every time they broke faith with God, He had sent foreign forces to rule over them. Even as they spoke they were being occupied by the forces of Rome.

When Jesus addressed those who believed in Him, He knew that their belief was not based on who He was. They believed in a Messiah who would free them from the enemies of their nation. He had come to set them free from their sins (v.32). It is not the freedom to do as we please but the freedom to please God. Since God is the source of all good, this is the freedom that is good for us. Only the Son of God who is free from all sin can offer us this freedom (v.34-36).

The Jews believed that since Abraham was their father, they were already under God’s favor and were not under any bondage. Jesus told them some home truths about their relationship to Abraham. Yes, they shared the same DNA but their deeds showed that their father was not Abraham but the devil himself (v.44). These are strong words. When we do not choose God, we choose the devil (v.47).

As we read Jesus’ description of the devil’s nature (v.44), we see that it is the opposite of His own. Jesus gives life, the devil is a murderer; Jesus is the truth and speaks the truth, the devil is a liar and speaks only lies; Jesus always speaks ‘just what the Father has taught’ Him (v.28) while the devil ‘speaks his native language’ - exactly what he wants to say. The devil is not a good choice. Only those who do not know God will choose him (v. 45-47).

**Just because parents are active in church or are well known Christian leaders does not mean that their children will choose God. However, children will gladly choose Him if their parents reflect the truth and beauty of the Lord to them.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 8, MONDAY

Joh 8:31-59

The Jews Learn Some Home Truths

Joh 8:31

Do you know the joy and freedom of submission to God and his word? Freedom today usually means "freedom to do as I please". This notion of freedom, however, is a mask for servitude to one's passions and unruly desires and to the power of sin. Jesus offers his disciples true freedom -- freedom from the slavery of fear, the slavery of selfishness, freedom from the fear of what others might think or say about us, and freedom from hurtful desires and the power of sin.

The good news of the gospel is that Christ has set us free from the power of sin. How is this possible? Through the power of his Holy Spirit we can choose to walk in his way of love and holiness. A disciple is a follower and a listener. If we listen to the words of Jesus, with a humble and teachable spirit, he will give us the grace and the power to follow in his way of holiness. Ask the Lord to open your ears to his word that you may be attentive to his voice.

Jesus came to do the will of his Father. He was not spared the cross which he willingly embraced for our sake. His obedience reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. The Father crowned him with victory over sin, death, and Satan. Jesus shows us the way to true freedom and victory--freely submitting our heart, mind, and will to an all-merciful, all-loving, and all-wise God. What the Father offers us is a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom.14:17). The happiest, freest people are those who delight in God. Their joy is the pleasure of doing the Father's will. Do you know the joy of obedience?

*"Lord, write your words of love and truth upon my heart and make me a diligent student and a worthy disciple of your word."*

Do you thirst to know God -- to know him personally and the power and depth of his love for us? God made us to know him and he gives us the gift of faith and understanding to grow in our knowledge of him. Jesus challenged the people of Israel to accept his word as the revelation of God. His claims challenged the very foundation of their belief and understanding of God. Jesus made a series of claims which are the very foundation of his life and mission.

What are these claims? First, Jesus claims unique knowledge of God. Jesus claims that the only way to full knowledge of the mind and heart of God is through himself. Jesus also claims unique obedience to God the Father. He thinks, lives and acts in the knowledge of his Father's word. To look at his life is to "see how God wishes me to live." In Jesus alone we see what God wants us to know and what he wants us to be.

When the Jews asked Jesus who do you claim to be? he answered, before Abraham was, I am. Jesus claims to be timeless and there is only one in the universe who is timeless, namely God. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus was not just a man who came, lived, died, and then rose again. He is the immortal timeless One, who always was and always will be. In Jesus we see the eternal God in visible flesh. His death and rising make it possible for us to share in his eternal life. Do you live in the hope and joy of the resurrection?

*"Lord, let your word be on my lips and in my heart that I may walk in the freedom of your truth and love."*

MAR 9, TUESDAY

Joh 9:1-41

Knowing and Accepting Truth

Joh 9:25b

*"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Joh 9:25b*

Imagine that you were the man born blind. One day you were sitting in your dark world and begging and the next you had crystal-clear vision and were debating with your religious leaders. The Person behind this amazing transformation? Jesus!

But the Pharisees did not want to attribute such powers to Jesus for that would mean acknowledging Jesus for who He is. Though not physically blind, they refused to see the reality of the truth that was before them. Again and again, they questioned the once-blind man (v.13-15, 17, 26) hoping that he would change his story. They even called in his parents for questioning hoping that they would say that their son had never been blind (v.18-19).

There are people, like the Pharisees, who do not want to know the truth or accept it as that would require them to make changes in their life that might affect their pride, position and power. They are insecure. They do not realize that only in Christ can they find true security and acceptance.

The parents of the blind man knew the truth but did not want to accept it. For years they had been burdened with a son born blind and the guilt of causing it. However, when Jesus restored their son's sight and wiped away their guilt they chose not to acknowledge Him and celebrate. They forfeited the blessings of a life lived in truth because they feared being 'put out of the synagogue' (v.20-23).

Their son, however, had no such fears (v.34b). He may have had some respect for the Pharisees to start with but it began to disappear as he debated with them. They had tried to make Jesus out to be a sinner because He healed on the Sabbath (v.16, 24) and they, themselves to be righteous because they were disciples of Moses and kept the Sabbath (v.28-29). But the healed man focused on the facts - his sight had been restored, God hears only those who do His will and not sinners so the One who had healed him does God's will and never before has anyone 'opened' the eyes of a man born blind (v.30-32). The Pharisees did not want to accept the truth and became defensive, accusing him of being 'steeped in sin at birth' and 'threw him out' (v.34).

**It is better to be thrown out for the sake of truth than be a part of a group that does not accept the truth.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 9, TUESDAY

Joh 9:1-41

Knowing and Accepting Truth

Joh 9:25b

What's worse: physical blindness or moral and spiritual darkness? Sin clouds the mind in darkness and closes the heart to God's love and truth. Only in the light of God's truth can we see sin for what it really is, a rejection of God and opposition to his will. The Pharisees equated physical blindness and sickness with sin. While the scriptures indicate that sin can make the body and mind sick as well as the soul, not all sickness, however, is the result of sin. Sickness befalls us for a variety of reasons. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Romans 8:28)

One of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus is the healing of the man who was blind from birth. Even the blind man, once cured, marveled and proclaimed that "never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind" (John 9:32). This miracle remarkably reveals the power and glory of God.

Why did Jesus use his own spittle in healing this man? Jesus wanted to identify with this man's misery and to draw faith and confidence in him as well. He covers his eyes with clay and bids him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. This pool was one of the landmarks of Jerusalem. Hezekiah had a secret tunnel bored through 583 yards of solid rock in the hillside in order to bring water from the Gihon Spring, which was outside the city walls, into the city proper (2Chr.32:2-8,30; Isa.22:9-11; 2Kgs.20:20).

At the Feast of Sukkoth (also known as the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths) water from this pool was brought by one of the priests to the temple with great trumpet blasts while the people recited the words of Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." It was poured together with wine beside the altar and ultimately flowed into the Kidron Valley. This was both a thanksgiving offering for the summer harvest and a petition that God would continue to provide water and growth for the newly planted seeds for the next harvest. It was during the Feast of Sukkoth that Jesus identified himself as the source of this life-giving water (John 7:37). Jesus gave not only physical sight to the blind man, but spiritual vision as well. That is why Jesus proclaimed himself the "light of the world" (John 9:4). This miracle at the Pool of Siloam points to the source of the miraculous life-giving water which Jesus offers through the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38). Do you thirst for this life-giving water?

The Pharisees were upset with Jesus on two counts. First, he healed the blind man on the Sabbath, which they considered a violation of the Sabbath rest. Second, how could a sinner and a sabbath-breaker do such a marvelous work of God! The cured man must not have really been blind at all! This blind man was well known to many people and his parents testified under oath that he had indeed been blind since birth. Their prejudice made them blind to God's intention for the Sabbath and to Jesus' claim to be the One sent from the Father in heaven to bring freedom and light to his people. They tried to intimidate both this cured man and his parents by threatening them with excommunication from the synagogue. This man was ostracized by the religious authorities because he gave witness to the Lord Jesus in his life. If our witness of Jesus and his redeeming power in our lives separates us from our fellow neighbors, it nonetheless draws us nearer to Jesus himself. Paul the Apostles warns us to avoid the darkness of sin that we might walk more clearly in the light of Christ (Ephes. 5:8-12). Do you allow any blind spots to blur your vision of what God is offering you and requiring of you?

Jesus is ever ready to heal us and to free us from the darkness of sin and deception. There is no sickness, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual that the Lord Jesus does not identify with. Isaiah prophesied that the "Suffering Servant" would be bruised for our iniquities and by his stripes we would be healed (Isaiah 53:5). The Lord offers us freedom from spiritual blindness due to sin and he restores us to wholeness of body, mind, soul, and heart.

*"Jesus, in your name the blind see, the lame walk, and the dead are raised to life.*

*Come into our lives and heal the wounds of our broken hearts.*

*Give us eyes of faith to see your glory and hearts of courage to bring you glory in all we say and do."*

MAR 10, WEDNESDAY

Joh 10:1-21

The Good Shepherd

Joh 10:10

An intriguing element of English football is the team anthem sung by the fans at the start of each match. These songs range from the fun (“Glad All Over”) to the whimsical (“I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles”) to the surprising. “Psalm 23,” for instance, is the anthem of the club from West Bromwich Albion. The words of that psalm appear on the façade inside the team’s stadium, declaring to everyone who comes to watch the “West Brom Baggies” the care of the good, great, and chief Shepherd.

In Psalm 23, David made his timeless statement, “The Lord is my shepherd” (v.1). Later, the gospel writer Matthew would tell us, “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). And in John 10, Jesus declared His love and concern for the human “sheep” of His generation. “I am the good shepherd,” He said. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v.11). Jesus’s compassion drove His interactions with the crowds, His responses to their needs, and, ultimately, His sacrifice on their (and our) behalf.

“The Lord is my shepherd” is far more than an ancient lyric or a clever slogan. It’s the confident statement of what it means to be known and loved by our great God—and what it means to be rescued by His Son.

By **Bill Crowder**

**In what ways have you seen God’s care for you?  
Who can you tell about Him today?**

*What a gift our Shepherd is to us, Father!  
Help us to respond to His voice—and draw nearer to You.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

MAR 10, WEDNESDAY

Joh 10:1-21

The Good Shepherd

Joh 10:10

Do you know the peace and security of the Good Shepherd who watches over his own? The Old Testament often speaks of God as shepherd of his people, Israel. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want* (Psalm 23:1). *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!* (Psalm 80:1) *We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture* (Psalm 100:3). The Messiah is also pictured as the shepherd of God's people: *He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms* (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus says he is the *Good Shepherd* who will risk his life to seek out and save the stray sheep (Matthew 18:12, Luke 15:4). He is the *Shepherd and Guardian of our souls* (1 Peter 2:25).

Jesus made three promises to his followers. He promised them everlasting life. If they accept him and follow him, they will have the life of God in them. Jesus also promised them a life that would know no end. Death would not be the end but the beginning; they would know the glory of indestructible life. Jesus promised a life that was secure. Jesus said that nothing would snatch them out of his hand, not even sorrow and death, since he is everlasting life itself. Our lives are safe in his hands.

The words which Jesus spoke upset many of the Jewish leaders. How could he speak with the same authority which God spoke and claim to be equal with God? He must either be insane or divine. Unfortunately, some thought he was mad even though he cured a man who was blind from birth. We are faced with the same choice. Either Jesus is who he claims to be -- the Son of God and Savior of the world -- or the world's greatest deluder! We cannot be indifferent to his claim. For those who accept him as Lord and Savior he offers the peace and security of unending life and joy with God. Do you know the peace and security of a life fully submitted to Christ?

Cyril of Alexander, a 5th century church father comments on Jesus as our Good Shepherd: "He shows in what manner a shepherd may be proved good; and He teaches that he must be prepared to give up his life fighting in defense of his sheep, which was fulfilled in Christ. For man has departed from the love of God, and fallen into sin, and because of this was, I say, excluded from the divine abode of paradise, and when he was weakened by that disaster, he yielded to the devil tempting him to sin, and death following that sin he became the prey of fierce and ravenous wolves. But after Christ was announced as the True Shepherd of all men, *He laid down his life for us* (1 John 3:16), fighting for us against that pack of inhuman beasts. He bore the Cross for us, that by His own death he might destroy death. He was condemned for us, that He might deliver all of us from the sentence of punishment: the tyranny of sin being overthrown by our faith: fastening to the Cross the decree that stood against us, as it is written (Col. 2:14). He died for us as truly Good, and truly our Shepherd, so that the dark shadow of death driven away He might join us to the company of the blessed in heaven; and in exchange for abodes that lie far in the depths of the pit, and in the hidden places of the sea, grant us mansions in His Father's House above. Because of this he says to us in another place: *Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you a kingdom* (Luke 12:32).

Do you listen attentively to the voice of the Good Shepherd and obey his word?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd who keeps watch over our lives.  
May I be ever attentive to your voice and submit fully to your wise rule for my life.  
Draw me near to you that I may always find peace and joy in your presence."*

MAR 11, THURSDAY

Joh 10:22-42

Unbelief of the Jews

Joh 10:27-28

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."

The people of Jesus' day were confronted with this choice. Although the Teacher's words and actions set Him apart, *"the people were ... divided in their opinions about him. Some said, 'He's demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?' Others said, 'This doesn't sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'"* (Joh 10:19-21).

At the height of the controversy, *"the people surrounded him and asked, 'how long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly'"* (Joh 10:24). *"I have already told you, and you don't believe me," Jesus replied. "The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. ... The Father and I are one"* (Joh 10:25,30). Ironically, even when Jesus spoke plainly to them, the crowd struggled with His response. No sooner had He made this declaration than *"once again the people picked up stones to kill him"* (Joh 10:31).

The struggle to accept Christ's claims continues today. If you harbor a lingering doubt about who He is, prayerfully consider what He revealed about Himself (Joh 10:24-30). The One who died and rose again that we might have eternal life—revealing His power over sin and death—is the Messiah, our Shepherd, and the Giver of life (Joh 10:24-28). Jesus is the Son of God! (Joh 10:30).

*Taken from "Our Daily Journey"*

**P.R.A.Y**

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MAR 11, THURSDAY

Joh 10:22-42

Unbelief of the Jews

Joh 10:27-28

How secure is your faith and trust in God? Scripture describes God's word as a "lamp for our feet and a light for our steps" (Psalm 119:105). The Jewish Feast of the Dedication is also called the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah. This feast was held in late December, near the time we celebrate Christmas. This is the time of year when the day is shortest and the night longest.

Jesus used this occasion to declare that he is the true light of the world (John 8:12). In his light we can see who God truly is and we can find the true path to heaven. Jesus also speaks of the tremendous trust he has in God his Father and the tremendous trust we ought to have in him, our Good Shepherd. The security Jesus offers is an abiding relationship with the living God, and membership with his flock, the people of God. Jesus also promises the security of peace and protection from evil and the greatest harm that could befall us -- eternal destruction.

The Lord does not spare us from all trouble. In this life we will experience pain, suffering, sickness, and death. But through these the Lord will lead us to ultimate victory and safety in his everlasting home. Even in the midst of our sufferings we can find a peace and security which no one can give except God alone. We can confidently follow the Lord wherever he leads, trusting that nothing can keep us from God if we trust in him. Have you placed your life securely in God where it belongs?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd. In you I place all my hope and I entrust myself to you completely. Increase my confidence in your saving grace and in your abiding presence."*

Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God and he made himself equal with God. The law of Moses laid down the death penalty for such a crime: "He who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him" (Lev. 24:16). As they were picking up stones to hurl at Jesus, he met their attack with three arguments. The many good works that he did, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, and feeding the hungry -- demonstrated that they obviously came from God.

Jesus defended his right to call himself the Son of God with a quote from Psalm 82:6 ("I say, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you"). If scripture can speak like that of humans, why should Jesus not speak of himself like that? Jesus then made two claims: He was *consecrated* by the Father to a special task and he was *sent into the world* to carry out his Father's mission. The scriptural understanding of consecration is to *make holy for God* -- to be given over as a free-will offering and sacrifice for God. Jesus made himself a sin-offering for us, to ransom us from condemnation and slavery to sin. He spoke of his Father consecrating him for this mission of salvation (John 10:36). Jesus challenged his opponents to *accept his works* if they could not *accept his words*. One can argue with words, but deeds are beyond argument.

Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says but on what he does. The word of God is life and power to those who believe. Jesus shows us the way to walk the path of truth and holiness. And he anoints us with his power to live the gospel with joy and to be his witnesses in the world. Are you a doer of God's word, or a forgetful hearer only?

*"Write upon my heart, O Lord, the lessons of your holy word, and grant that I may be a doer of your word, and not a forgetful hearer only."*

MAR 12, FRIDAY

Luk 10:1-24

Short-term Mission Trips

Luk 10:20

*The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. Luk 10:1*

Most churches have sent out teams on 'short-term mission trips.' The benefits of these trips are still being debated. So if you have not gone before, should you go?

In today's passage we see Jesus sending 72 'ordinary' disciples on their first ever short-term mission trip. What can we learn from this 'mission trip'? Among the facts gleaned from this passage, we can see that its context was the great missionary need but a lack of workers (v.2). So Jesus sends out a group of committed 'non-full time' disciples to partner with Him by preparing the way for the Gospel message to be preached (v.1).

The 'mission trip' was a success (v.17-20) because the mission team members were well prepared and obedient to Jesus' instructions (vs 3-11). This was no mission tour. They were aware of the serious responsibility and difficulties associated with such a mission. It was a wonderful opportunity for them to serve and experience practical Christian ministry. They learned things like 'living by faith' (v.4-7), partnering with locals and learning to humbly receive hospitality (v.5-7), understanding the reality of 'rejection' (v.10-11) and 'spiritual warfare' (v.9, 17, 19). In addition, it opened their eyes to real needs and the realization of life's priorities and the privilege of being a Christian (v.16, 20).

As someone who has personally led various 'short-term mission teams' for a number of years, I have found, along with others, that a combination of right selection, right attitude and realistic preparation can result in great blessings to all concerned.

**Before we go on a mission trip, let us ask: Is this to be a mission trip or a mission tour?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 12, FRIDAY

Luk 10:1-24

Short-term Mission Trips

Luk 10:20

*NB:* Luk 10 is the only place where we find the account of Jesus sending a specific 70 (or 72) disciples to prepare the way before Him. The discrepancies in the number (70 or 72) come from differences found in approximately half of the ancient scrolls used in translation. The texts are nearly evenly divided between the numbers, and scholars do not agree on whether the number should be 70 or 72, although such a minor issue is no cause for debate. Since the number 70 is repeated other places in Scripture (Exo 24:1; Num 11:16; Jer 29:10), it may be more likely that the actual number of disciples was 70, with the 2 being a copyist's error. Whether there were 70 or 72 disciples sent out by Jesus is irrelevant. What is important are the instructions Jesus gave them and the power that came upon them to perform miracles and cast out demons (Luk 10:17).

What is your vision of the Lord's harvest for today? When Jesus commissioned seventy of his disciples to go on mission, he gave them a vision of a great harvest for the kingdom of God. Jesus frequently used the image of a harvest to convey the coming of God's reign on earth. The harvest is the fruition of labor and growth -- beginning with the sowing of seeds, then growth, and finally fruit for the harvest. In like manner, the word of God is sown in the hearts of receptive men and women who submit to God and honor him as their Lord and King. The harvest Jesus had in mind was not only the people of Israel, but all the peoples (or nations) of the world. *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

What does Jesus mean when he says his disciples must be *lambs in the midst of wolves*? The prophet Isaiah foretold a time when wolves and lambs will dwell in peace (Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25). This certainly refers to the second coming of Christ when all will be united under the Lordship of Jesus after he has put down his enemies and established the reign of God over the heavens and the earth. In the meantime, the disciples must expect opposition and persecution from those who oppose the gospel. Jesus came as our sacrificial lamb to atone for the sin of the world. We, in turn, must be willing to sacrifice our lives in humble service of our Lord and Master.

What is the significance of Jesus appointing seventy disciples to the ministry of the word? Seventy was a significant number in biblical times. Moses chose seventy elders to help him in the task of leading the people through the wilderness. The Jewish Sanhedrin, the governing council for the nation of Israel, was composed of seventy members. In Jesus' times seventy was held to be the number of nations throughout the world. Jesus commissioned the seventy to a two-fold task: to speak in his name and to act with his power. Jesus gave them instructions in how they were to carry out their ministry. They must go and serve as men without guile, full of charity and peace, and simplicity. They must give their full attention to the proclamation of God's kingdom and not be diverted by other lesser things. They must travel light -- only take what was essential and leave behind whatever would distract them -- in order to concentrate on the task of speaking the word of the God. They must do their work, not for what they can get out of it, but for what they can give freely to others, without expecting special privileges or reward. "Poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves.

Jesus ends his instructions with a warning: If people reject God's invitation and refuse his word, then they bring condemnation on themselves. When God gives us his word there comes with it the great responsibility to respond. Indifference will not do. We are either for or against God in how we respond to his word. God gives us his word that we may have life in him. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. God shares his word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly and simply to others. Do you witness the truth and joy of the gospel by word and example to those around you?

*"Lord, may the joy and truth of the gospel transform my life that I may witness it to those around me. Grant that I may spread your truth and your light wherever I go."*

MAR 13, SATURDAY Luk 10:25-42

Just Obey and Do It

Luk 10:41-42

*"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." Luk 10:28*

We don't do what we know we ought to do. This, surely, is one of our biggest failures. We know we need to love others, but we pick and choose whom we love and exclude others we may not like or feel comfortable with. We know we need to spend quality time with Jesus but we substitute it for something else. Even the apostle Paul experienced this (read Rom 7:21-23).

In today's passage, we find that the expert in the law had a similar problem. He knew what was right but would not do it. In this well-known parable, Jesus tells us to go beyond head knowledge. Just obey and do it!

The Samaritan doesn't stop to consider that the man is a Jew and that Jews despise Samaritans. He sees the one thing he needs to do and compassion spurs him to action (v.33). He renders practical help (v.33) that must have been an inconvenience (v.34) and he goes even further - beyond the call of duty (v.35). He does not weigh the pros and cons and worry about what people might say.

Mary made a similar decision. What was needed was to sit at the feet of Jesus but Martha became distracted with service. Mary dropped everything for the one thing that was needed - She 'just did it.' She obeyed irrespective of what others might say.

**What is the one thing that God is telling you to do today?  
It's not enough that you can answer correctly.  
Will you trust and obey God and just do it?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 13, SATURDAY

Luk 10:25-42

Just Obey and Do It

Luk 10:41-42

What would you do if your neighbor get into big trouble through his or her own fault? For the Jewish believer the law of love was plain and simple: treat your neighbor as you would treat yourself. A Jewish expert in the law wanted to test Jesus and his disciples to see if they correctly understood this basic commandment. He understood "neighbor" to mean one's fellow Jew who belonged to the same covenant which God made with the people of Israel. Jesus agreed with the sincere expert but challenged him to see that God's view of neighbor went beyond his narrow definition.

Jesus told a parable to show how wide God's love and mercy is towards all. Jesus's story of a brutal highway robbery was all too familiar to his audience. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went through a narrow and steep valley surrounded by cliffs. Many wealthy Jews had winter homes in Jericho. This narrow highway was dangerous and notorious for its robbers who could easily ambush their victim and escape into the hills. No one in his right mind would think of traveling it alone.

Why did the religious leaders refuse to give any help when they saw a victim lying by the roadside? Didn't they know that this victim was their neighbor? And why did a Samaritan, an outsider who was despised by the Jews, treat this victim with special care at his own expense as he would care for his own family? Who showed true neighborly care, compassion and mercy?

Jesus makes the supposed villain, the despised Samaritan, the merciful one as an example for the status conscious Jews. Why didn't the priest and Levite stop to help? The priest probably didn't want to risk the possibility of ritual impurity. His piety got in the way of charity. The Levite approached close to the victim, but stopped short of actually helping him. Perhaps he feared that bandits were using a decoy to ambush him. The Levite put personal safety ahead of saving his neighbor.

What does Jesus' story tell us about true love for one's neighbor? First, we must be willing to help even if others brought trouble on themselves through their own fault. Second, our love and concern to help others in need must be practical. Good intentions and empathizing with others are not enough. And lastly, our love for others must be as wide as God's love. No one is excluded. God's love is unconditional. So we must be ready to do good to others for their sake, just as God is good to us.

*Are you ready to lay down your life for your neighbor?*

Does the peace of Christ reign in your home and in your personal life? Jesus loved to visit the home of Martha and Mary and enjoyed their warm hospitality. In this brief encounter we see two very different temperaments in Martha and Mary. Martha loved to serve, but in her anxious manner of waiting on Jesus, she caused unrest. Mary, in her simple and trusting manner, waited on Jesus by sitting attentively at his feet. She instinctively knew that what the Master most wanted at that moment was her attentive presence.

Anxiety and preoccupation keep us from listening and from giving the Lord our undivided attention. The Lord bids us to give him our concerns and anxieties because he is trustworthy and able to meet any need we have. His grace frees us from needless concerns and preoccupation. Do you seek the Lord attentively? And does the Lord find a welcomed and honored place in your home?

*"Lord, to be in your presence is life and joy for me. Free me from needless concerns and preoccupations that I may give you my undivided love and attention."*

MAR 14, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAR 15, MONDAY                      Mat 12:22–37; Mar 3:20–30; Luk 11:14–28

The Purpose of Miraculous Healings

Mat 12:33

*He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Luk 11:28*

It is easy to miss the point when miracles happen. We miss the point when we focus on questions such as the method, the circumstances and other unimportant details. To our shame we sometimes may also wonder how we could 'replicate' the miracle.

In today's passage, as in many other parts of the Bible, the questions related to miraculous healings have nothing to do with the kinds of questions we normally ask. Luke does not give us the details (v.14a) but the responses (v.14b–16) and the implications and consequences of the responses (vs 17-28). The miraculous healing was a sign that authenticated Jesus' message and ministry (see Luk 4:16–21)

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, understood this and he said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him' (Joh 3:2). But in today's passage, the response was one of jealousy, unbelief and plain slander (v.15–16).

Miraculous healings remind us that Jesus has won the victory over Satan (v.20–22) even if not all will be healed (see 1 Tim 5:23, 2 Tim 4:20, 2 Cor 12:7–9). It also reminds us that miraculous healing is a reminder that God is still in control. His kingdom has come on earth (v.20–21) and we have a responsibility to live for God (v.23–26).

God brings miraculous healing not to pander to our wants (v.16) or even to receive our praise (v.27 - though He surely deserves all the praise and glory) but that we may gratefully respond with allegiance and obedience to Jesus. Truly, this is the greater blessing (v.28).

**Miracles are not so much about us as they are about God.  
They remind us to be responsible citizens of His kingdom.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 15, MONDAY

Mat 12:22–37; Mar 3:20–30; Luk 11:14–28

## The Purpose of Miraculous Healings

Mat 12:33

What is the unforgivable sin which Jesus warns us to avoid? Jesus knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them what they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it's possible to spurn the grace of God and to fall into apostasy (giving up the faith) out of cowardice or disbelief. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It's contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin. Jesus spoke about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God. A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If someone repeatedly closes his eye to God and shuts his ears to his voice, he comes to a point where he can no longer recognize God when he can be seen, and when he sees evil as good and good as evil (Is. 5:20). To fear such a sin, however, signals that one is not dead to God and is conscious of the need for God's grace and mercy.

There are no limits to the mercy of God, but any who refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. God gives grace and help to all who humbly call upon him. Giving up on God and refusing to turn away from sin and disbelief results from pride and the loss of hope in God. What is the basis of our hope and confidence in God? Jesus' death on the cross won for us our salvation and adoption as the children of God. The love and mercy of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are freely given to those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Is your hope securely placed in Christ and his victory on the cross?

*"Lord Jesus, your mercies are new everyday. Help me to turn away from sin and cooperate with the purifying grace and work of the Holy Spirit in my life."*

How do you know for certain that a tree is healthy and life-producing? Outward appearances can be misleading or even deceptive. There may be rotteness or decay inside! But if a tree continues to bear good fruit year after year, then you know it is sound and healthy. Jesus uses this analogy as a mirror image of the true condition of one's heart and moral character. What's inside of us - the inner core of our being, the place of choice and will, desire and passion, attitude and disposition - will either produce good or bad fruit! And it will be obvious to everyone who knows us what kind of fruit we are bearing.

Our daily speech and actions reveal what is really inside the heart. That is why Jesus called the religious leaders of his day a "brood of vipers". When they saw Jesus casting out demons, they branded him an ally of the devil (Matt. 12:24). The tongue of a viper is double-forked making it doubly effective in striking its enemy! The scribes and Pharisees professed knowledge of God and his law, but they betrayed their evil intention and ill-judgment towards Jesus because he claimed to speak and act in God's name.

It is often when we are angry that we let our guard down and reveal what we actually think about others. We can say nice things in public when others are watching us. But when we speak without thinking, or when restraints are down, we reveal what is really inside of us, what we really are.

A person will produce good or bad fruit depending on what is sown in the heart. Charles Read said: "Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny." Character, like fruit, doesn't grow overnight. It takes a lifetime. Jesus connects soundness with good fruit. Something is sound when it is free from defect, decay, or disease and is healthy. Good fruit is the result of sound living — living according to moral truth and upright character. The prophet Isaiah warned against the dangers of falsehood: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20). The fruits of falsehood produce an easy religion which takes the iron out of religion, the cross out of Christianity, and any teaching which eliminates the hard sayings of Jesus, and which push the judgments of God into the background and makes us think lightly of sin.

How do we avoid falsehood and bad fruit? By being true — true to God, his word, and his grace. And that takes character! Those who are true to God know that their strength lies not in themselves but in God who supplies the grace we need to live as his disciples. The fruit of a disciple is marked by faith, hope and love, justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance. Do you cultivate good fruit in your life and reject whatever produces bad fruit?

Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on this passage writes: "When he says 'treasure,' Christ refers to the multitude of motives that lie in the soul. It is not by nature that people are good or bad but by their own choice. He makes this plain in his remark to the Pharisees: It is possible for one and the same person at one time to become good, at another time evil, for 'a good man speaks out of the abundance of his heart,' and likewise for the bad."

*"Lord Jesus, take my heart, mind and will, and all my thoughts, intentions and actions, and all my desires and affections, and make them wholly yours. Transform me that I may only think and say and do what is pleasing to you and in accord with your will."*

MAR 16, TUESDAY

Mat 12:38-45; Luk 11:29-36

Generosity and Responsibility

Luk 11:29

*Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. Luk 11:34*

The stewardship of money (giving, tithing etc) is not often taught in churches. The exception, of course, is when there is a church building programme. And yet in many church leadership meetings, matters related to money often take up the most time.

In today's passage, Jesus brings up the subject of money, specifically the need for us to be generous with our money. To have 'a good eye' is a Jewish idiom (common in Jesus' time) which simply means 'you are generous' and to have a "bad eye" simply means 'you are stingy.' Read the parallel passage in Mat 6:19-24.

Our passage begins with Jesus condemning His generation for their unbelief despite being given so much. Jesus Himself stood among them with all the overwhelming evidence of God's love and yet they were apathetic (v.30-32). So much knowledge and yet so little responsible action! And this is plainly 'wicked' (v.29).

Jesus then addresses those who believe and are not 'wicked'. He reminds us that we who are to be lights of the world need to let our light shine in a prominent place (v.33). How are we to do this? Jesus tells us that the way to let our light shine is to loosen our purse strings! If we truly want our light to shine then we have to be generous with what we have been given (v.35). How much more attractive would the Gospel be if we would increase in our generosity? Are we growing in generosity by responsibly sharing what we have been entrusted with?

**“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luk 12:48b)**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 16, TUESDAY

Mat 12:38–45; Luk 11:29–36

Generosity and Responsibility

Luk 11:29

What would Jesus say about our generation? Jesus gave a rather stern warning to his generation when they demanded a sign from him. It was characteristic of the Jews that they demanded "signs" from God's messengers to authenticate their claims. Jesus faulted them for one thing: spiritual adultery. The image of adultery was often used in the scriptures for describing apostasy or infidelity towards God. When the religious leaders pressed Jesus to give proof for his claims he says in so many words that he is God's sign and that they need no further evidence from heaven than his own person. The Ninevites recognized God's warning when Jonah spoke to them, and they repented. And the Queen of Sheba recognized God's wisdom in Solomon. Jonah was God's sign and his message was the message of God for the people of Nineveh. Unfortunately the religious leaders were not content to accept the signs right before their eyes. They had rejected the message of John the Baptist and now they reject Jesus as God's Anointed One (Messiah) and they fail to heed his message. Simeon had prophesied at Jesus' birth that he was "destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that inner thoughts of many will be revealed" (Luke 2:34- 35). Jesus confirmed his message with many miracles in preparation for the greatest sign of all – his resurrection on the third day.

The Lord Jesus through the gift of his Holy Spirit offers us freedom from sin and wisdom for our lives, if we listen to him. Do you thirst for Godly wisdom? James says that the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity (James 3:17). A double-minded person cannot receive this kind of wisdom. The single of mind desire one thing alone– that which is good and ordered according to God's wise plan.

Ask the Lord to renew your mind and to increase your thirst for his wisdom.

*"Lord, give me your wisdom and increase my love for your ways. Help me to resist temptation and all willfulness that I may wholly desire to do what is pleasing to you."*

What is the point of Jesus' grim story about a vacant house being occupied by some evil force? If you knew that someone had a life-threatening disease, would you let that person into your house without proper protection? Sin and evil are like deadly viruses. They are especially contagious when we get close to them and allow them to infect us. Jesus warned his followers about leaving their homes and lives unprotected from destructive and evil forces. It's not enough, however, to simply "clean house" by banishing evil thoughts and breaking with bad habits. Something has to take their place to fill the void that has been created.

God wants to fill the void in our lives with himself and with the good things he provides for our well-being. Augustine of Hippo said that our lives have a God-shaped void which only God can fill satisfactory. If we attempt to leave it vacant or to fill it with something else, we will be worse in the end. What do you fill the void in your life with? Jesus makes it clear that there are no neutral parties. We are either for Jesus or against him, for the kingdom of God or against it. There are two kingdoms in opposition to one another—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness under the rule of Satan. If we disobey God's word, we open to door to the power of sin and Satan. If we want to live in freedom from sin and Satan, then our house must be occupied by Jesus where he is enthroned as Lord and Savior.

Do you know the peace and security of a life submitted to God and his word?

*"Lord, be the ruler of my heart and the master of my home.  
May there be nothing in my life that is not under your lordship."*

MAR 17, WEDNESDAY Mat 23:1–36; Luk 11:37–54

Love or Legalism?

Mat 23:12

*"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone." Luk 11:42*

For the devout Jew, 'observance of the Sabbath,' means ceasing from work. The Torah (Law), however, lists only a few prohibitions explicitly. 'Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out (Exo 16:29) and "Whoever does any work on it must be put to death. Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day' (Exo 35:2–3). Yet from these two verses, the Rabbis were able to come up with seven basic categories of prohibited work further sub-divided into a total of 39 prohibitions. They then laid down further injunctions covering every conceivable area that would prevent any accidental breaking of the 39 prohibitions. These in time became 'laws'. The intention was sincere and noble but the results were disastrous.

It is no wonder that in today's passage, Jesus severely rebukes the Scribes and Pharisees for their interpretation and regulations that made God's law a heavy burden (v.46). Jesus is not against piety and those who adhere to strict religious observances and practices (v.42) for God has much room for diversity of religious observances (see Romans 14:1-6). The only criteria to note is that whatever our preferences, we do not lose sight of the main point of religious practices: justice and the love of God (v.42).

Jesus focused on how to love God and others (see also Mat 22:36–40). The Pharisees and Scribes focused on how 'not to sin'. Jesus' approach was positive and God-centered. The Pharisees and Scribes were negative and self-centered and this inevitably resulted in legalism and pride (v.39, 42, 43, 46). Worse, it hindered others from knowing the love of God because God's laws were wrongly made out to be oppressive (v.46, 52).

**What is our approach to our spiritual life?  
Do we focus on loving God and others or are we taken up with not sinning?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 17, WEDNESDAY

Mat 23:1–36; Luk 11:37–54

Love or Legalism?

Mat 23:12

Does your practice match your talk? Jesus chides the scribes and Pharisees for their showy practices. In a way they wanted to be good models of observant Jews. See how well we observe all the ritual rules and regulations of our religion! In their misguided zeal for religion, they sought respect and honor for themselves rather than for God and for his word. They made the practice of their faith a burden rather than a joy for the people they were supposed to serve. Respect for God and his ways inclines us to Godly humility and simplicity of heart. The word disciple means one who listens in order to learn. Jesus shows us the way to the Father -- the way of peace, joy, righteousness, holiness, and true happiness. He showed us the way by lowering himself as a servant for our sake. He humbled himself, even to death on a cross, that we might be raised up and exalted at the Father's right hand in heaven (Phil. 2:1-11). What is true Christ-like humility? Humility is true self-knowledge -- regarding oneself as God see each of us. The humble do not trust in themselves, but trust in God and in the power of his love and saving grace. True humility is a servant-like quality which enables one to place his or her life at the service of God and others. Do you know the joy of Christ-like humility and simplicity of heart?

*"Lord, teach me your way of servanthood and humility that I may walk in love as you have loved. Fill me with the joy of servanthood that I may inspire others to walk in your way of happiness and holiness."*

When God knocks on your door are you ready to let him in (Rev. 3:20)? God offers each of us an open door to his kingdom, but we can shut ourselves out if we reject his offer. What is the door to heaven? When Jacob fled from his brother Esau, who wanted to kill him for stealing his birthright (Genesis 27:41), he sought refuge in the wilderness. There God pursued him and gave him a vision that both changed his life and the life of his people. As Jacob slept on a star-lit hillside God showed him a great ladder or stairway that extended from earth to heaven. This stairway was filled with a multitude of angels ascending and descending before the throne of God. God opened heaven to Jacob so he could dwell more fully and intimately with this son of promise. God spoke to Jacob and renewed the promises which he had made to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, and now to Jacob and his posterity. God promised not only to bless and protect Jacob, but to make him and his descendants a blessing to all the nations as well. When Jacob awoke he exclaimed: "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). God opened a door for Jacob that brought him and his people into a new relationship with the living God. Jesus proclaimed to his disciples that he would fulfill the dream of Jacob in his very own person: "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). Jesus proclaimed that he is the door (John 10:8-9) and the way (John 14:6) that makes it possible for us to access heaven and God's very throne. But Jesus woefully warned the religious leaders and successors of Jacob that they were shutting the door of God's kingdom not only on themselves but on others as well. The word woe expresses sorrowful pity and concern as well as grief and extreme sadness.

Why did Jesus lament and issue such a stern rebuke? Jesus was angry with the religious leaders because they failed to listen to God's word and they misled the people they were supposed to teach and lead in the ways of God. Jesus gave a series of examples to show how misguided they were. In their zeal to win converts, they required unnecessary and burdensome rules which obscured the more important matters of religion, such as love of God and love of neighbor. They were leading people to Pharisaism rather than to God. Jesus also chastised them for their evasion of binding oaths and solemn promises. Oaths made to God were considered binding, but the Pharisees found clever ways to evade the obligation of their oaths when convenience got in the way. They forgot that God hears every word we utter and he sees the intention of the heart even before we speak or act. The scribes and Pharisees preferred their idea of religion to God's idea. They failed as religious leaders to teach others the way of God's kingdom because they failed to listen and to understand the intention of God's word. Through their own pride and prejudice they blindly shut the door of their own hearts and minds to God's understanding of his kingdom.

How can we shut the door of God's kingdom in our lives? By closing our ears to Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16), who speaks words of life and love, truth and freedom, hope and pardon. The Lord Jesus wants to dwell with us and to bring us his kingdom. He opens the way for each of us to "ascend to heaven" and to bring "heaven to earth" in the daily circumstances of our lives. God's kingdom is present in all who seek him and who do his will. Do you pray as Jesus taught, "May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)?

*"Lord, your word is life for me. May I never shut the kingdom of heaven through disbelief, indifference, or disobedience. Help me to listen to your voice and to conform my life more fully to your word."*

MAR 18, THURSDAY Luk 12:1-21

How Much Is Enough ?

Luk 12:15

*Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luk 12:15*

How much is enough? A very rich man was once asked this question, and his answer was very insightful. 'Just a little bit more!' In today's consumer culture, we can never seem to get enough of anything.

In today's passage two stories address the question of how much we overvalue our material possessions. In the first story, a man tries to get Jesus' help to get a share of a family inheritance. Interestingly, Jesus does not even bother to find out whether he had a valid case or not (v.13-14). Rather, He wars against our natural and sinful greed, and our human obsession with material possessions (v.15). To stress His point, He told the crowd a parable (v.16-21).

Jesus makes two simple points (v.15). The first is that it is sinful to want more than our fair share (this is the meaning of the word 'greed' or in some versions "covetousness"). And second, the way to judging whether we are greedy is to assess whether we have an excessive amount of possessions (which is the meaning of abundance of possessions').

The next parable Jesus told becomes clearer in meaning. Greed and self-centered pursuit for the bigger and better displeases God. Storing up excess possessions instead of using material things for God's glory displeases God. When we do so, we forget that our lives and all that we have belong to God (v.16-21).

**Do we have material possessions in excess? Do we see our possessions as belonging to God and gladly share them so that others may be blessed to the glory of God?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 18, THURSDAY

Luk 12:1-21

How Much Is Enough ?

Luk 12:15

What is the unforgivable sin which Jesus warns us to avoid? Jesus knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them what they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it's possible to spurn the grace of God and to fall into apostasy (giving up the faith) out of cowardice or disbelief. The scriptural expression to *deny someone* means to *disown* them.

Jesus also speaks against blaspheming the Holy Spirit. What is blasphemy and why is it reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It's contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the *unforgivable sin*. Jesus spoke about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God. A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If someone repeatedly closes his eye to God and shuts his ears to his voice, he comes to a point where he can no longer recognize God when he can be seen, and when he sees evil as good and good as evil (Isaiah 5:20). To fear such a sin, however, signals that one is not dead to God and is conscious of the need for God's grace and mercy. There are no limits to the mercy of God, but any who refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. God gives grace and help to all who humbly call upon him. Giving up on God and refusing to turn away from sin and disbelief results from pride and the loss of hope in God. What is the basis of our hope and confidence in God? Jesus' death on the cross won for us our salvation and adoption as the children of God. The love and mercy of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are freely given to those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Is your hope securely placed in Christ and his victory on the cross?

*"Lord Jesus, you are my hope and salvation.*

*May I trust you at all times and rely on your grace in temptation.*

*Let the fire of your Holy Spirit burn in my heart and fill me with a consuming love for you. "*

What causes disputes and what's the best means for settling them? In Jesus' time it was customary for people to take their disputes to the rabbis for settlement. Jesus refuses such a case and instead gives the disputant a parable to "mull over". How would you react if Jesus refused to settle your dispute, but gave you a parable instead? What is the point of Jesus' story about a wealthy landowner and why does he call him a fool? Jesus does not fault him for his industriousness, but for his egoism and selfishness. Like the rich man and Lazarus, he had lost the capacity to be concerned for others. His life was consumed with his possessions and his only interests were in himself. His death was the final loss of his soul!

In the parable of the rich fool Jesus gives a lesson on using material possessions. His lesson contains a warning to beware of all covetousness. To covet is to wish to get wrongfully what another possesses or to begrudge what God gave him. Jesus restates the commandment do not covet, but he also states that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. In this little parable Jesus probes the heart -- where is your treasure? Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus.

The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. What do you treasure most?

*"Lord, free me from all covetousness and from attachment to possessions. May I wholly desire you as my treasure and portion. Help me to make good use of the material blessings you give me that I may use them generously for your glory and for the good of others."*

MAR 19, FRIDAY Luk 12:35-59

It's Also For You

Luk 12:40

*Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" Luk 12:41*

It is not uncommon for us to leave church on Sunday thinking about how someone else needs to apply the message that was preached. Because the message was something basic that we already 'know', we mistakenly forget that the word of God was actually also for us.

Peter thought the same way and asked, 'Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?' (v.41). I suppose he asked because Jesus was teaching on something they already knew, namely the importance of faithfulness and responsibility (v.35-40).

What is interesting is that Jesus does not answer Peter's question. Instead, He goes on to elaborate on faithfulness and responsibility by relating it to proper stewardship of material possessions (v.42-44). Jesus warns that He will be coming back one day to demand an account (v.45-48). By doing so, Jesus was gently reminding Peter that the message, though familiar, was for him as well. Peter had much to learn and to apply in his life.

Today's reading reminds us that it is easy to lose focus when we forget that we are but stewards of the good things we possess. When we think we are masters, we will tend to treat others as our 'servants' when in reality we are also servants (v.45).

How do we treat waiters or our hired help? Do we give them their dues (v.42)? Just because we have the money and the power and we have paid for a service does not give us the license to act selfishly. Someday we will be called to give an account of our actions (v.45-48).

**Let us not forget that we are God's servants and that when God gives us more,  
it is for us to be able to bless others more (v.48).**

**P.R.A.Y**    PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 19, FRIDAY

Luk 12:35-59

It's Also For You

Luk 12:40

The Boy Scouts have as their motto, Be Prepared! Jesus' master-servant parables seem to extol the virtue of preparedness. But there is something deeper and even more important behind it. There is an element of surprise in the story of the master returning home after the marriage feast. Will he catch his servant sleeping rather than keeping watchful guard? And what about the reward promised for those who faithfully perform their duty, day in and day out, no matter what the circumstances? The image Jesus uses here is a great wedding feast in which the master honors his guests by seating them in the place of honor and personally waiting on them himself.

This parable contains a lesson in faithfulness and a warning against sloth. Why is faithfulness so important to God? For one, it's the foundation for any lasting and meaningful relationship. Faithfulness or fidelity allows us to persevere in living out an unswerving commitment. The Lord is committed to us in a bond of unbreakable love and fidelity. That is what covenant means -- keeping one's word, promise, and commitment no matter how tough or difficult it gets. Faithfulness is a key character trait of God and one that he expects of us. Fortunately, God gives the grace and strength to be faithful. He also rewards faithfulness.

Why is fidelity, commitment, and faithfulness so difficult today? Modern society extols freedom over fidelity and doesn't want to be bound to an unknown or uncertain future. It's also inconvenient and a burden to the pursuit of one's own interests. We badly need to recover this virtue, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of the next generation as well. If we want to pass on the faith then we need to first be faithful models for our youth.

Faithfulness demands consistency, a determination to stay the course, and hard work. The joy and privilege of being a son or daughter of God carries with it an awesome responsibility. The Lord expects us to make good use of the gifts and graces he gives to us. The more he gives, the more he requires. The temptation while the Master is away is to put off for tomorrow what we know the Master expects us to do today! Are you faithful to God and ready to give him an account of your stewardship?

*"Lord, you are faithful even when I fail.*

*Help me to remain ever faithful to you and to not shrink back when I encounter difficulties.*

*May always live in your presence and be ready to meet you when you call me on the day of judgment."*

How good are you at reading signs? Jesus expects his disciples to read the *signs of the times* accurately! While modern technology gives us greater accuracy for pinpointing troublesome tempests and quakes, our ability for discerning spiritual trouble and averting spiritual disaster seems to be in need of desperate repair or at least improvement. How good are you at reading signs? The people of Jesus' time expected that the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by extraordinary signs and wonders. False messiahs had made great claims to attract followers, such as cleaving the Jordan River in two or causing the walls of Jerusalem to fall. Jesus knew the hearts of those who came to test him. They were more interested in signs and supernatural phenomena than they were in the word of God. Simeon had prophesied at Jesus' birth that he was "*destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that inner thoughts of many will be revealed*" (Luke 2:34-35).

Jesus gave them no sign except himself and the ultimate proof of his divinity when he rose from the dead. The Lord reveals himself to us in many ways -- in his word and in the "breaking of the bread" in the Lord's supper or eucharist, in his Church -- the body of Christ, in his creation, and even in the everyday circumstances of our lives. If we seek the Lord, we can be confident that he will give us everything we need to do his will. Most of all the Lord assures us of his presence and the promise that he will never leave us.

Jesus used a vivid illustration to point out the urgency of getting right with God. If you were up against a bad cause and were likely to get severely penalized, would you not try to settle the case out-of-court to avoid a worse penalty? Each of us stands in constant need of God's love and mercy. His light reveals what is in our hearts and his grace frees us from the tyranny of sin. God's call is urgent and his grace is available for complete transformation in Christ. Are you ready for his grace and action in your life?

*"Lord, change my heart and my life that I may fully live for you. Help me to choose what is right and to turn away from every sin and from every attachment to worldliness which keeps me from loving and serving you wholeheartedly."*

MAR 20, SATURDAY Luk 13:1-17

**Watch Out!**

**Luk 13:8**

*"I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." Luk 13:3, 5*

When something bad befalls a 'bad person', we usually react by saying that the person is getting his just punishment. Or in more 'spirituals terms' we declare that he is reaping what he has sown. Case closed. However, when something bad happens to a 'good person', it's suddenly not so simple. Rather, it becomes confusing. To solve the confusion we might think to ourselves that the reason must be that this 'good person' has a dark secret. But if it involves someone dear to us whom we know is good, this reasoning just falls apart. Bad things happen to bad people but surely not to good people?

In today's Bible passage, Jesus challenges the validity of this belief. Yes, evil people will be punished and the good rewarded. However, the concept of who is good and who is evil needs to be clearly understood from God's perspective.

First, Jesus makes it clear that all of us are sinners (vs 1-5). We all need to repent (vs 3, 5). Second, when bad things happen to people we should not speculate as to why it has happened. Rather, we should take it as a reminder to repent of our own sins (vs 1-5). The parable in verses 6-9 tells us how.

We need to show the evidence (fruit) of our repentance (v 6). This is what God (the owner of the vineyard) seeks. Not having fruit means there has not been true repentance. If this is the case, judgment will come (v 7). Punishment has been withheld because of the intercession of Christ (the gardener). We have been given more time (v 8) to get matters right. But time is limited so we need to watch out before it is too late (v 9).

**But by the grace of God, we have forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. Do we really know Jesus as Lord and Savior? If we do, let us show it in the fruits of repentance.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 20, SATURDAY

Luk 13:1-17

Watch Out!

Luk 13:8

What can political calamity and natural disaster teach us about God's kingdom and the consequences of our actions and decisions? Jesus addressed two such incidences with his Jewish audience. Pilate, the Roman governor, perpetrated the unspeakable crime of butchering Jews in their temple, thus profaning their act of worship and incurring the wrath of God. In a similar fashion, King Henry II of England incited his knights to murder the archbishop Thomas a Becket in his cathedral on December 29, 1170. Who wouldn't be outraged at such acts of political barbarity and sacrilege?

The other incident was a natural disaster, not linked with any particular political or religious motive. The Jews associated such disasters with sin. Scripture warns that sin can result in calamity! Though the righteous fall seven times, and rise again; the wicked are overthrown by calamity (Prov. 24:16). But the Book of Job also tells us that misfortune can befall the righteous as well as the unrighteous.

Why does Jesus link a political-religious calamity with a natural disaster? Jesus intended these incidences to serve as signs helping us to avert worst disaster by preparing spiritually for the age to come. How does God's judgment relate to these signs? Just as natural signs point to what is happening today, so God gives us signs which indicate his action and intervention in our lives, our churches, and in the world.

Why does God judge? He judges to purify and cleanse us that we might grow in his holiness and righteousness, and to remove those who stubbornly rebel against him. He also judges his people to chastise and discipline us and to inspire a godly fear and reverence for him and his word. Are God's judgments unjust or unloving? When God's judgments are revealed in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9). To pronounce God's judgment on sin is much less harsh than what will happen if those who sin are not warned to repent.

What can barren fig trees tell us about the kingdom of God? Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the Jews. Bad figs or a decaying fig tree was linked with evil deeds and spiritual decay. The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's unresponsiveness to the word of God. The prophets depicted the languishing fig tree as signifying the desolation and calamity of Israel due to her unfaithfulness to God (see Joel 1:7,12; Habakkuk 3:17; and Jeremiah 8:13). Jeremiah said that evil people are like rotten figs (Jeremiah 24:2-8).

This parable of Jesus depicts the patience of God, but it also contains a warning that we should not presume upon it. God gives us time to get right with him, but that time is now. We must not assume that there is no hurry. A sudden and unexpected death leaves one no time to prepare to settle one's accounts when he or she must stand before the Lord on the day of judgment. Jesus warns us that we must be ready at all times. Tolerating sinful habits and excusing unrepentant sin will result in bad fruit and eventual destruction. The Lord in his mercy gives us both grace and time to turn away from sin and from worldliness, but that time is right now. If we delay, even for a day, we may discover that grace has passed us by and our time is up. Do you hunger for the Lord's righteousness and holiness?

*"Lord, increase my hunger for your righteousness and holiness. May I not squander the grace of the present moment to say "yes" to you, to your will, and to your way of holiness.*

MAR 21, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAR 22, MONDAY

Mat 23:37-39; Luk 13:31-14:14

The People were Not Willing

Luk 14:11

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" Luk 13:34*

Most of us are familiar with some form of rejection. Even if the pain may be gone, we remember quite vividly the episodes when we experienced the pain of rejection. How we respond to the rejection tells us a lot about who we are and where we are at in our life's journey.

In today's passage, we get an insight into how Jesus dealt with rejection. The Pharisees had rejected Him. They came to intimidate Him by telling Him that Herod had not only rejected Him but also wanted to kill him (v.31). Added to that rejection, the Jewish nation (represented by Jerusalem) had also rejected Him (v.34).

Jesus did not waste time worrying about being rejected by someone like Herod who was cunning, self-seeking and evil. Herod's rejection and threat were a reminder that Jesus was on the right track. He kept His focus on the task God had appointed for Him (v.32-33).

But His rejection by the Jewish nation brought a different response. Their rejection of Him was mostly due to stubborn blindness. Rather than respond with anger, Jesus responded with great sadness and compassion. Luk 19:28 tells us Jesus wept for Jerusalem. He had loved the people and had come to bring them salvation and deliverance.

**"Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man." (Luk 6:22)**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 22, MONDAY

Mat 23:37-39; Luk 13:31-14:14

The People were Not Willing

Luk 14:11

Do you have adequate security for averting disaster? When some of the Pharisees warned Jesus to flee from the wrath and destruction of king Herod, he, in turn, warned them about spiritual disaster and how to avert it! Like John the Baptist and all the prophets who preceded him, Jesus posed a threat to the ruling authorities of his day. Jesus went so far as to call Herod a "fox". What did he mean by such an expression? The fox was regarded as the slyest of all animals and the most destructive as well. The fox was also a symbol of a worthless and insignificant individual. It takes great courage to openly oppose a tyrant. Jesus knew that he would suffer the same fate as the prophets who came before him. He not only willingly exposed himself to danger, but he prayed for his persecutors and for those who rejected the prophets whom God had sent. Do you pray for your enemies and for those who oppose the gospel today?

Jesus contrasts his desire for Jerusalem -- the holy city and temple of God -- with Jerusalem's lack of desire for him as their long-expected Messiah. Jesus compares his longing for Jerusalem with a mother hen gathering her chicks under her protective wings. Psalm 91 speaks of God's protection in such terms: He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge (Ps. 91:4). Jesus willingly set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing that he would meet certain betrayal, rejection, and death on a cross. His death on the cross, however, brought about victory and salvation, not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but for all -- both Jew and gentile -- who would accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus' prophecy is a two-edged sword, pointing to his victory and redemption and foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the dire consequences for all who would reject him and his saving message. While the destruction of Jerusalem's temple was determined (it was razed by the Romans in 70 A.D.), there remained for its inhabitants a narrow open door leading to deliverance. Jesus says: I am the door; whoever enters by me will be saved (John 10:9). Is your desire for the heavenly city, Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2)? And is your life securely submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ?

*"Lord Jesus, in you I place all my trust and hope. May I wholly desire you and your will above all else and long for the heavenly city Jerusalem as my true home and refuge. Fill my heart with love and mercy for others that I may boldly witness to the truth and joy of the gospel through word and example, both to those who accept it and to those who oppose it."*

Who wants to be last? Isn't it only natural to desire respect and esteem from others? Jesus' parable of the guests invited to the marriage feast probes our motives for seeking honor and position. Self-promotion is most often achieved at the expense of others! Jesus' parable reinforces the teaching of Proverbs: Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of the prince (Prov. 25:6-7).

What is true humility and why should we make it a characteristic mark of our life and action? True humility is not feeling bad about yourself, or having a low opinion of yourself, or thinking of yourself as inferior to others. True humility frees us from preoccupation with ourselves, whereas a low self-opinion tends to focus our attention on ourselves. Humility is truth in self-understanding and truth in action. Viewing ourselves truthfully, with sober judgment, means seeing ourselves the way God sees us (Psalm 139:1-4). A humble person makes a realistic assessment of himself without illusion or pretense to be something he is not. He regards himself neither smaller nor larger than he truly is. True humility frees us to be ourselves and to avoid despair and pride. A humble person does not have to wear a mask or put on a facade in order to look good to others who do not know who he really is. He is not swayed by accidentals, such as fame, reputation, success, or failure.

Humility is the queen or foundation of all the other virtues because it enables us to see and judge correctly, the way God sees. Humility leads to knowledge, honesty, realism, strength, and dedication to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Humility frees us to love and serve others selflessly, for their sake, rather than our own. Paul the Apostles, gives us the greatest example and model of humility is the person of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, ...who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:7-8). The Lord gives grace to those who seek him humbly. Do you want to be a servant as Jesus served?

*"Lord Jesus, you became a servant for my sake to set me free from the tyranny of selfishness, fear, and conceit. Help me to be humble as you are humble and to love freely and graciously all whom you call me to serve."*

MAR 23, TUESDAY

Mat 22:1-14; Luk 14:15-35

Finishing The Journey

Luk 14:27

*And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luk 14:27*

Before we start something, it is prudent for us to know what we are deciding and how much it is going to cost us. Here, Jesus immediately puts a radical challenge (v.26-27) to the crowds following Him. It was meant for them to stop and think. It should be noted that 'to love this and to hate that' is a typical biblical way of expressing preference. Even so, there is the necessity to follow Jesus in His cross-bearing - it is a discipleship that is prepared even to die with Him.

Jesus uses two different circumstances (versus 28-30 and versus 31-32) to illustrate His basic point: discipleship requires a conscious advance commitment, made with a realistic estimate of the ultimate personal cost. Jesus goes on to make a radical demand (v.33). It is a demand to abandon the hold on things or the right to ownership.

The disciple of Jesus may be given the use of things in trust, as stewardship, but they are no longer his own. The willingness to part with our goods (which are not ultimately ours anyway) is necessary today.

The consistent quality of life that Jesus expects of His disciples is that they remain "salty" (v.34-35). To be salty is to have an effect on those around us. It may mean making decisions that are difficult, not condoning sin in our families or workplace. To follow Jesus and share His cross may mean that neighbors and friends do not always understand why we do what we do.

**Do I yield to the Lord in every area of my life - my possessions, my family, even my own life? Do I really trust Him to care for me? These are difficult questions.**

**We may say that we have given over all, when we have only given over what we are comfortable in handing over to Him.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 23, TUESDAY

Mat 22:1-14; Luk 14:15-35

Finishing The Journey

Luk 14:27

What can a royal wedding party tell us about God's kingdom? One of the most beautiful images of heaven in the scriptures is the banquet and wedding celebration given by the King for his son. We, in fact, have been invited to the most important banquet of all! The last book in the bible ends with an invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb and his Bride, the church: The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! (Rev. 22:17). Why does Jesus' parable seem to focus on an angry king who ends up punishing those who refused his invitation and who mistreated his servants?

Jesus' parable contains two stories. The first has to do with the original guests invited to the feast. The king had sent out invitations well in advance to his subjects, so they would have plenty of time to prepare for coming to the feast. How insulting for the invited guests to then refuse when the time for celebrating came! They made light of the King's request because they put their own interests above his. They not only insulted the King but the heir to the throne as well. The king's anger is justified because they openly refused to give the king the honor he was due. Jesus directed this warning to the Jews of his day, both to convey how much God wanted them to share in the joy of his kingdom, but also to give a warning about the consequences of refusing his Son, their Messiah and Savior.

The second part of the story focuses on those who had no claim on the king and who would never have considered getting such an invitation. The "good and the bad" along the highways certainly referred to the Gentiles and to sinners. This is certainly an invitation of grace -- undeserved, unmerited favor and kindness! But this invitation also contains a warning for those who refuse it or who approach the wedding feast unworthily.

Grace is a free gift, but it is also an awesome responsibility. Dieterich Bonhoeffer contrasts "cheap grace" and "costly grace". "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves ..the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance ..grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. ..Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

God invites each of us to his banquet that we may share in his joy.

Are you ready to feast at the Lord's banquet table?

*"Lord, may I always know the joy of living in your presence and grow in the hope of seeing you face to face in your everlasting kingdom."*

MAR 24, WEDNESDAY Luk 16:1-31

Seeking True and Eternal Riches

Luk 16:13

*"So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" Luk 16:11*

The parable begins with a rich man who has a manager in charge of administering his affairs. The rich man orders the manager to account for his stewardship (v.1-2). Facing a future on the streets, the fired manager contemplates his options (v.3-4). The manager develops a plan that will make his master's debtors thankful to him (v.5-7). Jesus commends the manager for his shrewdness.

Jesus' applications extend in various directions. He notes that the people of the world are shrewder than the people of the light. They are more able to make friends and think through their actions for both short and long terms (v.8-9). We should use resources generously 'so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings' (v.9).

To gain friends is to use money in such a way that others appreciate you for your exercise of stewardship, your kindness and generosity. Handling wealth is a preparatory lesson for other responsibilities before God (v.10-13).

This parable is not a commendation of dishonest stewardship, but of shrewd forethought and preparation for a future crisis. The point is simple: we should invest our money in God's kingdom, not in this temporary and insecure world. The use of money is a measure of faithfulness and of a person's fitness for the greater wealth of the kingdom. Wealth is to be used for God, not to become a substitute for God.

**To serve God is to give the resources He has given us to meet the needs of those around us. Some day, God will evaluate our use of resources, whether we have handled them in a way that anticipates His desires and values. This may be a good time to reflect on our stewardship of the resources given to us.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 24, WEDNESDAY

Luk 16:1-31

Seeking True and Eternal Riches

Luk 16:13

What does "tainted money" (or "unrighteous mammon") have to do with eternal life? Jesus exhorts his disciples to follow in the footsteps of the shrewd steward who used money generously to make friends for himself (see the parable of the dishonest steward in Luke 16:1-9). Generous giving is connected with almsgiving -- giving financial assistance to those in need (*sell your possessions and give alms -Luke 12:33*). Those who receive alms become your friends because you are merciful to them in their time of need, just as God is merciful to you in your need for his forgiveness and help.

What is the enemy of generosity? It's greed, the excessive desire for personal security. True generosity does not impoverish the giver, but enriches him a hundredfold! Generosity expands the soul; greed contracts it. God is generous and superabundant in lavishing his gifts upon us. We can never outgive God in what he has already given to us. Do you know the joy and freedom of generosity and liberality in giving to others what God has so richly given to you?

Jesus concludes his parable with a lesson on what controls or rules our lives. Who is the *master* (or ruler) in charge of your life? Our "master" is that which governs our thought-life, shapes our ideals, controls the desires of the heart and the values we choose to live by. We can be ruled by many different things -- the love of money or possessions, the power of position, the glamor of wealth and prestige, the driving force of unruly passions and addictions. Ultimately the choice boils down to two: God and "mammon".

What is mammon? "Mammon" stands for "material wealth or possessions" or whatever tends to "control our appetites and desires". There is one Master alone who has the power to set us free from the slavery of sin and addiction. That Master is the Lord Jesus Christ.

God loves generosity and he gives liberally to those who share his gifts with others. The Pharisees, however, had no room in their hearts for God. The gospel says they were *lovers of money*. Love of money and wealth crowd out love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus makes clear that our hearts must either be possessed by God's love or the heart will be possessed by the love of something else.

What does your heart most treasure?

*"Lord, may the fire of your love burn in my heart that I may be wholly devoted to you above all else. Free me from greed and attachment to material things that I may be generous in using the gifts and resources you give me for your glory and for the good of my neighbor."*

What most absorbs your time, your attention, and your heart? In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man Jesus paints a dramatic scene of contrasts -- riches and poverty, heaven and hell, compassion and indifference, inclusion and exclusion. We also see an abrupt and dramatic reversal of fortune. Lazarus was not only poor, but incapacitated. He was "laid" at the gates of the rich man's house. The dogs which licked his sores probably also stole the little bread he procured for himself. Dogs in the ancient world symbolized contempt. Enduring the torment of these savage dogs only added to the poor man's miseries and sufferings. The rich man treated the beggar with contempt and indifference, until he found his fortunes reversed!

The name *Lazarus* means *God is my help*. Despite a life of misfortune and suffering, Lazarus did not lose hope in God. His eyes were set on a treasure stored up for him in heaven. The rich man, however, could not see beyond his material treasure. He not only had every thing he needed, he indulged in his wealth to excess. He was too absorbed in what he had to notice the needs of those around him. He lost sight of God and the treasure of heaven because he was preoccupied with seeking happiness in material things. He served wealth rather than God. In the end the rich man became a beggar!

Do you know the joy and freedom of possessing God as your only treasure?

And is your hope securely anchored in heaven (see Hebrews 6:19)?

*"Lord, increase my hunger for you and for your way of happiness. Make me rich in the things of heaven and give me a generous heart that I may freely share with others the treasure you have given to me."*

MAR 25, THURSDAY

Luk 17:1-19

Discipleship is Servanthood

Luk 17:15

*So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." Luk 17:10*

Discipleship is doing what the Lord wants us to do. The first aspect of discipleship here is expressed in a warning not to be the cause of sin (v.1-3). Those who lead others into error are at risk before God. Jesus' stress here is that individuals must guard themselves in such matters. But the possibility of error needs to be balanced with forgiveness. So Jesus calls for not only rebuke of sin but also a quickness to forgive (v.3-4). The assumption behind such mutual accountability is the community's commitment to pursue righteousness (Gal 6:1).

Deep and honest relationships presuppose a grounding in relationship with God. Sensitive to this link, the disciples ask for an increase in their faith (v.5). Jesus is concerned not about faith's volume but about its presence (v.6). Jesus is arguing that a little faith can do surprising things. Do not fret about how great your faith is; only apply what you have and watch it work. The disciple's main responsibility is to trust God.

Out of such faith should come service. Jesus pictures a servant coming in after a long day of work, only to be asked to prepare the master's dinner (v.7-9). The servant will not get a meal until the master is served. He will not be thanked and he does it because it is his duty. There is no selective obedience here, no bargaining to do something for the master only if he does a favor in return. Faith understands forgiveness and leads to duty. Christianity is not a privatized experience of faith.

**The world's idea of success is to lord it over others. Jesus' way is the namely, servanthood - which is actually the way to true reverse greatness. Let us give thanks for the privilege to be His disciples and for the resources given to serve Him and others.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 25, THURSDAY

Luk 17:1-19

Discipleship is Servanthood

Luk 17:15

What can adversity teach us about the healing power of love and mercy? Proverbs states: *A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity* (Prov. 17:17). When adversity strikes you find out who truly is your brother, sister, and friend. The gospel records an unusual encounter between people who had been divided for centuries.

The Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with one another. And they were openly hostile whenever their paths crossed. In this gospel narrative we see one rare exception -- a Samaritan leper in company with nine Jewish lepers. Sometimes adversity forces us to drop our barriers or to forget our prejudices. When this band of lepers saw Jesus they made a bold request. They didn't ask for healing, but instead asked for mercy.

The word *mercy* literally means "*sorrowful at heart*". But mercy is something more than compassion, or heartfelt sorrow at another's misfortune. Compassion empathizes with the sufferer. But mercy goes further; it removes suffering. A merciful person shares in another's misfortune and suffering as if it were his own. And he will do everything in his power to dispel that misery. Mercy is also connected with justice. Thomas Aquinas said that mercy "*does not destroy justice, but is a certain kind of fulfillment of justice. ...Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution; (and) justice without mercy is cruelty.*" Pardon without repentance negates justice.

So what is the significance of these ten lepers asking for mercy? They know they are in need of healing, not just physical, but spiritual healing as well. They approach Jesus with contrition and faith because they believe that he can release the burden of guilt and suffering and make restoration of body and soul possible. Their request for mercy is both a plea for pardon and release from suffering. Jesus gives mercy to all who ask with faith and contrition.

Why did only one leper out of ten -- a Samaritan -- return to show gratitude? Gratefulness is related to *grace* — which means *the release of loveliness*. Gratitude is the homage of the heart which responds with graciousness in expressing an act of thanksgiving. The Samaritan approached Jesus reverently and gave praise to God. If we do not recognize and appreciate the mercy shown us we will be ungrateful. Ingratitude is forgetfulness or a poor return for kindness received. Ingratitude easily leads to lack of charity and intolerance towards others. It easily leads to lack of charity and intolerance towards others, as well as to other sins, such as discontent, dissatisfaction, complaining, grumbling, pride and presumption. How often have we been ungrateful to our parents, pastors, teachers, and neighbors?

Do you express gratitude to God for his mercy and do you show mercy to your neighbor?

*"Lord, may I never fail to recognize your love and mercy. Fill my heart with gratitude and thanksgiving and free me from pride, discontentment, and ingratitude. Help me to count my blessings with gratefulness and to give thanks in all circumstances."*

MAR 26, FRIDAY

Luk 17:20-37

Subjects of God's Kingdom

Luk 17:33

*"Nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." Luk 17:21*

As we wait for Christ to come again, we may be tempted to focus on the time rather than to be good disciples and good subjects of God's kingdom. To the Pharisees' question of 'when,' Jesus' answer is that the kingdom does not come with signs to be observed (v.20). In spite of claims of 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' when the Son of Man comes, it will be visible and obvious (v.23-24), like lightning flashing across the sky. One crucial event must precede all of this (v.25). The central event is the suffering of the Son of Man. Suffering precedes glory for Jesus.

Jesus compares the nature of the messianic judgment to the flood in the days of Noah (Gen 7) and to the days of Lot at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19). These were two great periods of judgment. Just as they did then, people will engage in the affairs of life (v.26-29) with little attention to God.

If the world is not careful, it will not be prepared for judgment when it comes. We tend to be too tied to the things of the earth (v.31) to hear the voice of God. Such misplaced allegiance is why Jesus says that the person who seeks to save his life will lose it, while those willing to lose their lives will save them (v.33). To the disciples' question of 'where' (v.37), Jesus deflects the question by pointing to the judgment. There will be total devastation for those who reject God.

**Jesus is saying that people are the subjects, not the timekeepers, of God's kingdom.  
Let us reflect on how we can live as loyal and obedient subjects of His kingdom.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 26, FRIDAY

Luk 17:20-37

Subjects of God's Kingdom

Luk 17:33

What can lightning tell us about the coming of the Lord and his kingdom? The Jews in Jesus' time were watching in great anticipation for some sign which would indicate when the Messiah would appear to establish the kingdom of God. The Pharisees' question on this matter was intended to test Jesus since they did not accept him as the Messiah. Jesus surprised them with the answer that the kingdom or reign of God was already here! Jesus spoke of the coming of God's kingdom as both a present event and an event which would be manifested at the end of time. The "Day of the Lord" was understood in the Old Testament as the time when God would manifest his glory and power and overthrow the enemies of his people, Israel. The prophet Amos declared that the "Day" also meant judgment for Israel as well as the nations (Amos 5:18-20). The prophet Joel proclaimed that at this "Day" those who truly repented would be saved, while those who remained enemies of the Lord, both Jew and Gentile, would be punished (see Joel 2).

Why did Jesus associate lightning with the "Day of the Lord"? When lightning appears in the darkened sky, its powerful surge of flashing energy and dazzling light and its piercing noise strike awe and terror. You don't need a special sign to announce its presence or to show where it is striking. It manifests itself quite clearly. In like manner, when "the son of Man comes" it will be as clear as the lightning in the heavens. No special sign will be needed to announce his imminent appearance. Jesus surprised the Jews of his time by announcing that God's kingdom was already present among them in his very person — the Son of God sent from the Father to redeem the world from sin and destruction. Jesus promises to bring the kingdom of God to all who recognize in him the power and glory of the Father in heaven.

How does the Lord Jesus make his presence and his kingdom known to us today? Like a seed planted in fertile soil, Jesus, the sower of the soul, plants God's kingdom first in our hearts. The kingdom begins from within and transforms our hearts to be like God's heart — a people who know the power of his love, mercy, and forgiveness. The Lord Jesus is present in his word, in the 'breaking of the bread' when we come to the table of the Lord in the eucharist, and in his church — the body of Christ. Jesus reveals himself in many countless ways to those who seek him with eyes of faith. When we read the word of God in the bible Jesus speaks to us and reveals to us the mind and heart of the Father. When we approach the table of the Lord, Jesus offers himself as spiritual food which produces the very life of God within us (*I am the bread of life*, John 6:35). He promises unbroken fellowship and freedom from the fear of being forsaken or cut off from everlasting life with God (John 6:37). And he offers us the hope of sharing in his resurrection. Is your hope and desire to see God face to face?

Jesus identified himself with the "Day of the Lord". "Son of man" was understood as a Messianic title for the one who would come not only to establish God's kingdom but who would come as Judge of the living as well as the dead. Jesus points to his second coming when he will return to complete the work of restoration and final judgment. While we do not know the time of his return, we will not mistake it when it happens. It will be apparent to all, both believers and non-believers as well.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus what sign would indicate the "Day of the Lord", Jesus replied that only one sign would point to that day and that sign was Jesus himself. In Jesus we see the power and the glory of God's kingdom. His power overthrew the powers of darkness and sin. Jesus knew that the only way to victory was through the cross. On that cross he defeated death and canceled the debt of sin for us. The victory of his cross opens the way for us to become citizens of God's kingdom. Do you seek the coming of God's kingdom with joyful hope?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, may your kingdom come and my will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Be the Ruler of my heart and the Master of my life that I may always live in the freedom of your love and truth."*

MAR 27, SATURDAY

Mat 19:1-12; Mar 10:1-12

God Hates Divorce

Mar 10:9

*But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. Mar 10:6-9*

Many marriages today end in divorce. If we have not experienced it personally, we personally know someone who has. It's happening everywhere from the west to the east. It seems that when things get rough, people want out. And they are getting out in increasing numbers, no doubt fueled by what is portrayed in the dramas on TV.

There were two schools of thought in Jesus' day concerning divorce, propagated by two popular rabbis, Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai. Rabbi Shammai, who held the stricter view, taught that divorce was only permissible on the grounds of some sexual impropriety. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, had a more liberal view and taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason. If she burned his breakfast, put too much salt in his food, showed disrespect to him, spoke disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence, spoke to a man on the street, or even let her hair down in public, he could divorce her.

Rabbi Hillel's view was popular in Jesus' day. It was for this reason the scribes tested Him. They wanted Jesus to become unpopular with the people for they knew He would not side with this more liberal view. Jesus' view is the Biblical view as stated in Mal 2:16, where the Lord says, 'I hate divorce ...' Jesus did not directly answer their question. In versus 6-9 Jesus points to God's original intention way back in creation: marriage is meant to last a lifetime. Pray that the Lord will preserve your marriage and will keep you from straying from that relationship.

**Value the marriage relationship that God has given you and preserve it.  
Guard the sanctity of marriage and flee from any thought of divorce or adultery.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 27, SATURDAY

Mat 19:1-12; Mar 10:1-12

God Hates Divorce

Mar 10:9

What is God's intention for our state in life, whether married or single? Jesus deals with the issue of divorce by taking his hearers back to the beginning of creation and to God's plan for the human race. In Genesis 2:23-24 we see God's intention and ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce as a *concession* in view of a lost ideal. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands. Jesus, likewise sets the high ideal for those who freely renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 19:12). Both marriage and celibacy are calls from God to live a consecrated life, that is to live as married couples or as singles who belong not to themselves but to God. Our lives are not our own, but they belong to God. He gives the grace and power to those who seek to follow his way of holiness in their state of life. Do you seek the Lord and his grace in your state of life?

What did Jesus have in mind when he said that a husband and wife are to be "one flesh"? He likely intended it to mean more than just a partnership for establishing a family or intimate companionship between two individuals. Marriage involves a partnership of not just two persons -- a husband and wife, but a third as well. It is God who joins with a husband and wife when they become "one flesh". That is why Paul the Apostle used marriage as an analogy for Christ and the church, his bride (Ephes. 5:31). God wants an unbreakable union between himself and his people. And this is only possible through the gift and working of his Holy Spirit who purifies us and makes us one in Christ.

Tertullian, an early second century Christian author, wrote the following to his wife: *"Where are we to find language adequately to express the happiness of that marriage which the church cements, the oblation confirms, the benediction signs and seals, the angels celebrate, and the Father holds as approved? For all around the earth young people do not rightly and lawfully wed without their parents' consent. What kind of yoke is that of two believers who share one hope, one desire, one discipline, one service? They enjoy kinship in spirit and in flesh. They are mutual servants with no discrepancy of interests. Truly they are 'two in one flesh.' Where the flesh is one, the spirit is one as well. Together they pray, together they bow down, together perform their fasts, mutually teaching, mutually entreating, mutually upholding. In the church of God they hold an equal place. They stand equal at the banquet of God, equally in crises, equally facing persecutions, and equally in refreshments. Neither hides anything from the other. Neither neglects the other. Neither is troublesome to the other."*

What can be more profound than the union of man and woman in marriage? Our union with God. We are called to be one with God, in a union so intimate and a bond so strong that nothing can separate it or destroy it, not even death itself (Rom. 8:35; Song of Solomon 8:6). Do you seek intimate fellowship and union with God?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, your call to holiness extends to all in every state of life. Sanctify our lives — as married couples and as singles — that we may live as men and women who are consecrated to you. Make us leaven in a society that disdains life-long marriage fidelity, chastity, and living single for the Lord".*

## MAR 28, PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday is the day we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, one week before His resurrection (Matthew 21:1–11). As Jesus entered the holy city, He neared the culmination of a long journey toward Golgotha. He had come to save the lost (Luke 19:10), and now was the time—this was the place—to secure that salvation. Palm Sunday marked the start of what is often called “Passion Week,” the final seven days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Palm Sunday was the “beginning of the end” of Jesus’ work on earth.

Palm Sunday began with Jesus and His disciples traveling over the Mount of Olives. The Lord sent two disciples ahead into the village of Bethpage to find an animal to ride. They found the unbroken colt of a donkey, just as Jesus had said they would (Luke 19:29–30). When they untied the colt, the owners began to question them. The disciples responded with the answer Jesus had provided: “The Lord needs it” (Luke 19:31–34). Amazingly, the owners were satisfied with that answer and let the disciples go. “They brought [the donkey] to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it” (Luke 19:35).

As Jesus ascended toward Jerusalem, a large multitude gathered around Him. This crowd understood that Jesus was the Messiah; what they did not understand was that it wasn’t time to set up the kingdom yet—although Jesus had tried to tell them so (Luke 19:11–12). The crowd’s actions along the road give rise to the name “Palm Sunday”: “A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road” (Matthew 21:8). In strewing their cloaks on the road, the people were giving Jesus the royal treatment—King Jehu was given similar honor at his coronation (2 Kings 9:13). John records the detail that the branches they cut were from palm trees (John 12:13).

On that first Palm Sunday, the people also honored Jesus verbally: “The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ / ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ / ‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’” (Matthew 21:9). In their praise of Jesus, the Jewish crowds were quoting Psalm 118:25–26, an acknowledged prophecy of the Christ. The allusion to a Messianic psalm drew resentment from the religious leaders present: “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’” (Luke 19:39). However, Jesus saw no need to rebuke those who told the truth. He replied, “I tell you . . . if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40).

Some 450 to 500 years prior to Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, the prophet Zechariah had prophesied the event we now call Palm Sunday: “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! / Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! / See, your king comes to you, / righteous and victorious, / lowly and riding on a donkey, / on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). The prophecy was fulfilled in every particular, and it was indeed a time of rejoicing, as Jerusalem welcomed their King. Unfortunately, the celebration was not to last. The crowds looked for a Messiah who would rescue them *politically* and free them *nationally*, but Jesus had come to save them *spiritually*. First things first, and mankind’s primary need is spiritual, not political, cultural, or national salvation.

Even as the coatless multitudes waved the palm branches and shouted for joy, they missed the true reason for Jesus’ presence. They could neither see nor understand the cross. That’s why, “as [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies . . . will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you’” (Luke 19:41–47). It is a tragic thing to see the Savior but not recognize Him for who He is. The crowds who were crying out “Hosanna!” on Palm Sunday were crying out “Crucify Him!” later that week (Matthew 27:22–23).

There is coming a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11). The worship will be real then. Also, John records a scene in heaven that features the eternal celebration of the risen Lord: “There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were *holding palm branches in their hands*” (Revelation 7:9, emphasis added). These palm-bearing saints will shout, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (verse 10), and who can measure sum of their joy?

MAR 28, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

## PASSION WEEK OR HOLY WEEK

Passion Week (also known as Holy Week) is the time from Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday (Resurrection Sunday). Also included within Passion Week are Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Spy Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Passion Week is so named because of the passion with which Jesus willingly went to the cross in order to pay for the sins of His people. Passion Week is described in Matthew chapters 21–27; Mark chapters 11–15; Luke chapters 19–23; and John chapters 12–19. Passion Week begins with the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday on the back of a colt as prophesied in Zechariah 9:9.

Passion Week contained several memorable events. Jesus cleansed the Temple for the second time (Luke 19:45–46), then disputed with the Pharisees regarding His authority. Then He gave His Olivet Discourse on the end times and taught many things, including the signs of His second coming. Jesus ate His Last Supper with His disciples in the upper room (Luke 22:7–38), then went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray as He waited for His hour to come. It was here that Jesus, having been betrayed by Judas, was arrested and taken to several sham trials before the chief priests, Pontius Pilate, and Herod (Luke 22:54–23:25).

Following the trials, Jesus was scourged at the hands of the Roman soldiers, then was forced to carry His own instrument of execution (the Cross) through the streets of Jerusalem along what is known as the Via Dolorosa (way of sorrows). Jesus was then crucified at Golgotha on the day before the Sabbath, was buried and remained in the tomb until Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, and then gloriously resurrected.

It is referred to as Passion Week because in that time, Jesus Christ truly revealed His passion for us in the suffering He willingly went through on our behalf. What should our attitude be during Passion Week? We should be passionate in our worship of Jesus and in our proclamation of His Gospel! As He suffered for us, so should we be willing to suffer for the cause of following Him and proclaiming the message of His death and resurrection.

MAR 29, MONDAY

Joh 12:1-11

Death And Doom Or Life-Giving Perfume

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

The order was out. Anyone who saw Jesus was required to report it immediately so that the Jewish authorities could arrest Him. Yet Jesus came out of seclusion and returned to Bethany—the "crime scene" of Lazarus' resurrection.

Here, a dinner was given in His honour. Martha served while Lazarus dined with Jesus. Then came Mary who, in a shocking display of pure devotion, let her hair down and poured her best at Jesus' feet. As the aroma of worship filled the house, Judas Iscariot raised the familiar objection: "Why waste all that money? It should have been given to the poor!"— an ironic complaint by the disciples' treasurer who neither cared for the poor nor had any qualms about using their money to his own indulgence.

Having a real relationship with Jesus is a beautiful yet costly affair. When we truly know Him, we cannot help but worship. And worship is sacrifice. While Mary faced painful opposition from within, Lazarus became public enemy number two by simply being a walking, talking testimony of who Jesus is. To those on the path to destruction, it is the stench of death and doom. But to others, it is a life-giving perfume.

**Which character do you identify with in today's Bible Reading?**

**God knows the depth of our hearts.**

**Allow Him to test your thoughts and lead you in the way everlasting.**

*Gracious Father, lead me in Your triumphant way. Draw me closer that I may know You better. Strengthen me and fill me with the joy that comes in worshipping You. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

MAR 29, MONDAY

Joh 12:1-11

Death And Doom Or Life-Giving Perfume

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

Do you know the love that knows no bounds? As Jesus dines with his beloved friends, Mary does something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. Her love was not calculated but extravagant. Mary's action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus and her gratitude for God's mercy. She did something, however, a Jewish woman would never do in public. She loosed her hair and anointed Jesus with her tears. It was customary for a woman on her wedding day to bound her hair. For a married woman to loosen her hair in public was a sign of grave immodesty. Mary was oblivious to all around her, except for Jesus. She took no thought for what others would think, but what would please her Lord. In humility she stooped to anoint Jesus' feet and to dry them with her hair. How do you anoint the Lord's feet and show him your love and gratitude?

The gospel records that *the whole house was filled with the perfume of the ointment*. What Mary had done brought *sweetness* not only in the physical sense, but the spiritual sense as well. Her lovely deed shows the extravagance of love -- a love that we cannot outmatch. The Lord Jesus showed us the extravagance of his love in giving the best he had by pouring out his own blood for us and by anointing us with his Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says that *nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:39). Does the love of God rule in your heart, mind, and actions?

Why was Judas critical of Mary's lovely deed? Judas viewed her act as extravagant wastefulness because of greed. A person views things according to what is inside the heart or soul. Judas was an embittered man and had a warped sense of what was precious and valuable, especially to God. Jesus had put Judas in charge of their common purse, no doubt because he was gifted in financial matters. The greatest temptation we can face will often come in the area of our greatest strength or gifting. Judas used money entrusted to him for wrong and hurtful purposes. He allowed greed and personal gain to corrupt his heart and to warp his view of things. He was critical towards Mary because he imputed unworthy motives.

Do you examine your heart correctly when you impute wrong or unworthy motives towards others?

*"Give us, Lord, a lively faith, a firm hope, a fervent charity, a love of you.*

*Take from us all lukewarmness in meditation, dullness in prayer.*

*Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you and your grace, your tender compassion towards me.*

*The things we pray for, good Lord, give us grace to labor for: through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

(Prayer of Sir Thomas More, 16th century)

MAR 30, TUESDAY

Joh 12:20–36

Seeking Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

The Son of Man! Whatever others thought of Him, Jesus had no qualms about who He was. He saw Himself as "the Son of Man"—a human being, and yet also the prophesied divine Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14) to whom authority, glory and sovereign power would be given, before whom all nations and peoples of every language will one day bow and worship, and a King whose Kingdom is everlasting and imperishable. Wow!

But to realize this, the Son of Man must first die. He who would be King of kings and Lord of lords would be betrayed and arrested, mocked and spat at, beaten and nailed to the cross, pierced in His side, and then buried in a borrowed tomb. What a paradox!

And now "the time has come". To be glorified, He had to be crucified. To bring many sons and daughters to glory, He had to suffer shame and death. To bring about a "good harvest"—a harvest of people lost in darkness and doomed to death but now bought over to light and life (meaningful, fulfilling and everlasting)—He had to 'fall into the earth and die'

**"We wish to see Jesus." But which Jesus were they looking for?**

- **The powerful miracle-worker?**
- **The charismatic preacher?**
- **The counter-culture teacher?**

*Dear God, help me to see Jesus as He really is. Take away all my false images of Jesus, and help me know Him as Your Son, my Savior and my Lord. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

MAR 30, TUESDAY

Joh 12:20–36

Seeking Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

How can we meet Jesus in our lives and introduce him to others who are searching for him? John tells us that some Greek travelers who came to Jerusalem for the Passover wanted to meet Jesus. They were not Jews, but were devout seekers of God. It was not unusual for Greeks to travel the then known world. Greeks loved to journey and discover new things. When these Greeks heard of Jesus, they wanted to meet him personally, but didn't know how to approach him. So they did something a Greek would feel comfortable doing. They found a sympathetic looking insider named Philip, a disciple of Jesus whose name happened to be a Greek name, and asked him how they could meet with Jesus. Philip surprisingly didn't know what to say. Andrew fortunately stepped in and personally introduced these foreigners to Jesus.

How can we help people discover the Lord Jesus today? One of the best ways to introduce people to the Lord is to invite them to "come and see" the Lord present among his people when they gather for prayer, bible study, and the "breaking of the bread" at the Lord's Table.

Jesus' response to giving an audience to these Greek visitors points to the reason why he came to Jerusalem at this Passover Feast. Jesus knew that this was his "hour" -- the time of fulfillment when he would be glorified through his suffering and death on the cross. John in his gospel account points out that it was not only the Jews who were seeking the Messiah, but foreigners as well. Jesus came to offer his life as an atoning sacrifice not only for the chosen people of Israel, but for all nations as well.

Jesus told his disciples a short parable about the nature of seeds to explain the spiritual significance of death and rebirth. His audience, including many who were rural folk in Palestine, could easily understand the principle of new life from nature. Seeds cannot produce new life by themselves. They must first be planted in the earth before they can grow and produce fruit. What is the spiritual analogy which Jesus alludes to here? Is this, perhaps, a veiled reference to his own impending death on the cross and resurrection? Or does he have another kind of "death and rebirth" in mind for his disciples? Jesus, no doubt, had both meanings in mind for his disciples. The image of the grain of wheat dying in the earth in order to grow and bear a harvest can be seen as a metaphor of Jesus' own death and burial in the tomb and his resurrection. Jesus knew that the only way to victory over the power of sin and death was through the cross. Jesus reversed the curse of our first parents' disobedience through his obedience to the Father's will -- his willingness to go to the cross to pay the just penalty for our sins and to defeat death once and for all. His obedience and death on the cross obtain for us freedom and new life in the Holy Spirit. His cross frees us from the tyranny of sin and death and shows us the way of perfect love.

If we want to experience the new life which Jesus offers, then the outer shell of our old, fallen nature, must be broken and put to death. In Baptism our "old nature" enslaved by sin is buried with Christ and we rise as a "new creation" in Christ. This process of death to the "old fallen self" is both a one-time event, such as baptism, and a daily, on-going cycle in which God buries us more deeply into Jesus' death to sin so we might rise anew and bear fruit for God. There is a great paradox here. Death leads to life. When we "die" to our selves, we "rise" to new life in Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to "die" to oneself? It certainly means that what is contrary to God's will must be "crucified" or "put to death". God gives us grace to say "yes" to his will and to reject whatever is contrary to his loving plan for our lives. Jesus also promises that we will bear much "fruit" for him, if we choose to deny ourselves for his sake. Jesus used forceful language to describe the kind of self-denial he had in mind for his disciples. What did he mean when he said that one must hate himself? The expression to hate something often meant to prefer less. Jesus says that nothing should get in the way of our preferring him and the will of our Father in heaven. Our hope is in Paul's reminder that "What is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible" (1 Cor. 15:42).

Do you hope in the Lord and follow joyfully the path he has chosen for you?

*"Lord, let me be wheat sown in the earth, to be harvested for you. I want to follow wherever you lead me. Give me fresh hope and joy in serving you all the days of my life."*

## "HOW IS THE DATE FOR EASTER DETERMINED?"

The four Gospels make it clear that Jesus was crucified in conjunction with the Jewish Passover (Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-15; John 18:28,39; 19:14). The four Gospels also make it clear that Jesus was raised from the dead three days later, on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19). Biblically speaking, then, Christ's resurrection should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the Jewish Passover meal.

However, this is not the case. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21 in 2008, the first day of spring). This method of determining the date of Easter often results in Easter being before Passover and/or displaced far from Passover. Easter can potentially be observed anywhere between March 22 and April 25.

In church history, there was a significant amount of debate that went into determining when Easter would be observed. As a background, please read our article on the origins of Easter. Dating Easter in conjunction with the vernal equinox and full moon had nothing to do with the biblical account of Christ's resurrection or the Passover. It was pagan practices, such as the spring fertility goddess rituals that the Catholic Church "absorbed" and attempted to Christianize, that resulted in Easter's being linked to the vernal equinox and the full moon. The only thing that is biblical regarding when Easter is now observed is the fact that Easter is always on a Sunday.

The Bible does not instruct Christians to set aside a day to celebrate Christ's resurrection. At the same time, the resurrection is most assuredly worth celebrating (1 Corinthians chapter 15). Celebration of Christ's resurrection, then, is a matter of Christian freedom. Christians are free to celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection and are free to refrain from celebrating.

Since it is a matter of Christian freedom and not a biblical command, it would seem that there is also freedom as to precisely when the celebration of Christ's resurrection is observed. Just as with Christmas, the exact date is not important. It is the fact that Christ was resurrected that is important.

Christians are free to follow the traditional dating system for Easter, thereby observing Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. At the same time, the lack of conjunction with Passover and the questionable (at best) motives for the method of scheduling Easter make it highly doubtful that Christ's resurrection is being celebrated according to the biblical calendar.

MAR 31, WEDNESDAY

Joh 13:21-32

Betraying Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

"One of you is going to betray me. "One of my trusted twelve, whom I called by name, personally. One of you who has followed me through my journeys and ministry, up-close and personal, these three years. One of you who has been my apprentice, tutored and mentored by me, your Master and Teacher.

"One of you is going to betray me. "Who me? The disciples looked at one another with uncertainty and suspicion, in disbelief and perhaps even in fear. Would it be Simon Peter, the fiercely loyal leader of the band? Or John, the disciple whom Jesus loved? Or Judas, the keeper of the money? Or one of the others?

"One of you is going to betray me." Betrayal is a stab in the back. A sell-out. Treachery. Disloyalty. Abandonment. Double-crossing. The Devil had tempted Judas, and he had already caved-in in his heart (Joh 13:2). The Garden of Gethsemane would bring it to fruition. We know not the real reason for Judas' betrayal of Jesus. But we do know its price—thirty pieces of silver to Judas' coffers (Mat 26: 1 5), but crucifixion-death for Jesus. What? Pittance for the Son of Man's life! But betrayal brings guilt, and the burden can be excruciating. Judas regretted what he did. He returned the blood money and then hanged himself on a tree (Mat 27:1-10).

### How are you like Judas?

### How have you betrayed Jesus, your Saviour and Master?

*Dear God, please forgive me for not being true to You. Forgive me for being ashamed of You before the watching world. Grant me courage to walk with You through thick and thin, even as You walk with me. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

MAR 31, WEDNESDAY

Joh 13:21-32

Betraying Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

How do you treat people who have caused you grief or disappointment, especially those who might be related to you in bonds of friendship or kinship? In his last supper discourse, Jesus addressed the issue of fidelity and disloyalty in relationships. Jesus knew beforehand that one of his own disciples would betray him. Such knowledge could have easily led Jesus to distance himself from such a man and to protect himself from harm's way. Instead, Jesus shows affection and loyalty to those who were his own, even to the one he knew would do violence to him through betrayal. Jesus used a quotation from Psalm 4:9 which describes an act of treachery by one's closest friend.

In the culture of Jesus' day, to *eat bread* with someone was a gesture of friendship and trust. Jesus extends such friendship to Judas right at the moment when Judas is conspiring to betray his master. The expression *lift his heel against me* reinforces the brute nature of this act of violence. Jesus loved his disciples to the end and proved his faithfulness to them even to death on the cross. Through his death and resurrection Jesus opened a new way of relationship and friendship with God. Jesus tells his disciples that if they accept him they also accept the Father who sent him. This principle extends to all who belong to Christ and who speak in his name. To accept the Lord's messenger is to accept Jesus himself. The great honor and the great responsibility a Christian has is to stand in the world for Jesus Christ. As his disciples we are called to speak for him and to act for him. Are you ready to stand for Jesus at the cross of opposition and hostility?

*"Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus our Lord."*

(Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Jesus' disciples were put to the test as Jesus prepared to make the final and ultimate sacrifice of his own life for their sake and for all the world. What was different between Peter and Judas? Judas deliberately betrayed his Master while Peter, in a moment of weakness, denied him with an oath and a curse. Judas' act was cold and calculated. Peter, however, never meant to do what he did. He acted impulsively, out of weakness and cowardice. Jesus knew both the strength of Peter's loyalty and the weakness of his resolution. He had a habit of speaking with his heart without thinking through the implications of what he was saying. The treachery of Judas, however, is seen at its worst when Jesus makes his appeal by showing special affection to him at his last supper. John says that Satan entered into Judas when he rejected Jesus and left to pursue his evil course. Satan can twist love and turn it into hate. He can turn holiness into pride, discipline into cruelty, affection into complacency. We must be on our guard lest Satan turn us from the love of God and the path which God has chosen for us. The Holy Spirit will give us grace and strength in our time of testing. If we submit to Jesus we will walk in the light of his truth and love. If we turn our backs on him we will stumble and fall in the ways of sin and darkness. Are you ready to follow Jesus in his way of the cross?

*"Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart which no unworthy thought can drag downwards; an unconquered heart which no tribulation can wear out; an upright heart which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow upon me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ, our Lord."*

(Prayer of Thomas Aquinas)

**APR 1, MAUNDY THURSDAY**

**Joh 13:1-17, 31b-35**

**Following Jesus**

**LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK**

Jesus knew His time on earth was up, and He was soon to return to God the Father. He knew He would be betrayed to His enemies, and by whom. Despite the ignominy of the cross looming ahead, Jesus knew His mission and He was resolute in staying on-course. Why? Jesus' death would be ultimate proof of God's amazing love for us—that we sinners mired in hopelessness could now be reconciled to God, to find renewed hope and eternal life.

So Jesus gathered His closest disciples in the Upper Room for one last meal. During the supper, He got up from the table, bent low and washed His disciples' feet. He re-dressed as a servant, and He did what was reserved for the lowest of servants. His disciples must have been shocked, and wondered what this was all about. And Jesus said, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." Selfless servanthood—no task too low or dirty! May this be our example. May this be our mission, what we do. And may this be our character, who we are!

**How can you be a servant like Jesus?  
To one another?**

**To the world out there – family, friends, neighbours, workmates, fellow Malaysians?**

*Dear God, tear me away from my "privileged" mindset and behaviour. Help me be like Jesus—giving up my privileges and serving others selflessly for their betterment and good. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 1, MAUNDY THURSDAY

Joh 13:1-17, 31b-35

Following Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

As Jesus' hour of humiliation draws near he reveals to his disciples the supreme humility which shaped the love he had for them. He stoops to perform a menial task reserved for servants -- the washing of smelly, dirty feet. In stooping to serve his disciples Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of them and that the rest would abandon him through disloyalty. Such knowledge could have easily led to bitterness or hatred. Jesus met the injury of betrayal and disloyalty with the greatest humility and supreme love. Jesus loved his disciples to the very end, even when they failed him and forsook him. The Lord loves each of us unconditionally. His love has power to set us free to serve others with Christ-like compassion and humility.

Does the love of Christ rule in your heart and thoughts and in your actions?

*"Lord Jesus, your love conquers all and never fails. Help me to love others freely, with heart-felt compassion, kindness and goodness. Where there is injury, may I sow peace rather than strife."*

How does God reveal his glory to us? In his Last Supper discourse Jesus speaks of his glory and the glory of his Father. What is this glory? It is the cross which Jesus speaks of here. The cross of Jesus shows us that the greatest glory in life is the glory of willingly sacrificing one's life for the sake of another. In the cross God reveals the breadth of his great love for sinners and the power of redemption which cancels the debt of sin and reverses the curse of our condemnation. Jesus gave his Father supreme honor and glory through his obedience and willingness to sacrifice his life on the cross. The greatest trust one can give to their leader is the willingness to obey in the line of duty, even to the point of putting oneself in harm's way. In warfare the greatest honor belongs not to those who survive but to those who give the supreme sacrifice of their lives.

Jesus also speaks of the Father bringing glory to the Son through the great mystery of the Incarnation and Cross of Christ. God the Father gave us his only begotten Son for our sake, to redeem us from slavery to sin and death. He freely offered his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the world. There is no greater proof of God's love for us than the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross we see a new way of love – a love that is selfless, sacrificial, forgiving and compassionate beyond comprehension.

Jesus commands us, his disciples, to love one another just as he has loved us. How can we love one another selflessly, sacrificially, and with compassion? Through the victory of the cross and resurrection, we have access to God's grace and mercy. God gives us new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit and he fills our hearts with faith, hope, and love. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). As we turn to God with trust and obedience, he transforms our hearts and frees us to love others with compassion and kindness.

Do you want to bring glory to God in the way you love others?

*"Lord Jesus, your love knows no bounds and your obedience to the Father reverses the curse of our disobedience. May I bring you glory in the sacrifice of my will to the will of the Father and in my love and compassion for others, both for those who treat me well and for those who cause me grief or harm."*

## MAUNDY THURSDAY OR HOLY THURSDAY

Maundy Thursday, also known as “Holy Thursday,” is the Thursday of Passion Week, one day before Good Friday (the Friday before Easter). Maundy Thursday is the name given to the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, known as the Last Supper.

Two important events are the focus of Maundy Thursday.

First, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and thereby instituted the Lord’s Supper, also called Communion (Luke 22:19-20). Some Christian churches observe a special Communion service on Maundy Thursday in memory of Jesus’ Last Supper with His disciples.

Second, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet as an act of humility and service, thereby setting an example that we should love and serve one another in humility (John 13:3-17). Some Christian churches observe a foot-washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday to commemorate Jesus’ washing the feet of the disciples.

The word *Maundy* is derived from the Latin word for “command.” The “Maundy” in “Maundy Thursday” refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper, that they should love and serve one another. Should we observe Maundy Thursday? The Bible neither commands nor forbids it. It is a good thing to remember the Last Supper and Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. It is a good thing to remember the Lord’s example of humility. However, at the same time, we should avoid ritualistic observances of holidays unless they are truly focused on God and our relationship with Him.

Observing a special Lord’s Supper service on Maundy Thursday/Holy Thursday in remembrance of the Last Supper is a good thing to do. Doing a foot-washing in remembrance of how Christ humbled Himself and washed the feet of the disciples is a powerful reminder of how we are to live the Christian life (Philippians 2:1-11). Let’s just make sure we are observing Maundy Thursday in a way that truly honors what happened at the Last Supper.

APR 2, GOOD FRIDAY

Joh 18:1-19:42

Crucifying Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

Why did the Jews want to kill Jesus? Because He had claimed to be the Son of God; that was blasphemy and punishable by death according to Jewish law. Because He had claimed to be King of the Jews, and anyone setting Himself up as 'king' defied Caesar and warranted the death penalty.

But Jesus' death was no accident nor a craft of human design. It was an integral part of God's sovereign plan to rescue us from the stranglehold of sin and to put us right with Himself. That necessitated Jesus coming down to earth as a human being (John 1:14), showing us the ways of the Father, and then giving up His life for us in utter obedience to His Father's will. Jesus said, 'No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do.' (Joh 10:18, GNT)

"It is finished. "On the one hand, it meant Jesus' death. But more significantly, it meant that His life's work on behalf of His heavenly Father, for our benefit, was done. Mission accomplished! And our gains? Our sins forgiven, pardoned. Our peace with God restored. Our place as sons and daughters in God's family secured. Our fear of the grave buried. Our hope of life in all its fullness fulfilled.

**Reflect on the journey that Jesus underwent before His final death on the cross.**

**What, in particular, resonates with you? What does it mean for you?**

*Dear God, I will never fully understand Jesus' death for me—the journey He underwent, the crucifixion, and why. But I know that He died for me because of Your utter love for us. Teach me to live in light of Your grace always. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 2, GOOD FRIDAY

Joh 18:1-19:42

Crucifying Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

John tells us that when Jesus cried from thirst on the cross he was fulfilling the words of scripture from Psalm 69:21: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Jesus' death was no mere accident of fate but a direct fulfillment of the will of his Father. He came to lay down his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. John's mention of the hyssop (19:29) would remind the Jews of the first Passover feast when God instructed the people to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb with hyssop over the lintels of their doors that they might be spared from death (Exodus 12:22). Jesus is the true Passover Lamb whose blood sprinkles us clean from sin and saves us from eternal death.

As Jesus expired he cried out a "loud shout". Both Matthew and Luke mention this shout (Matt. 27:50 and Luke 23:46). John tells us that Jesus died with these words on his lips, "It is finished" (John 19:30). These parting words express triumph rather than defeat. Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit knowing that the strife was now over and the battle was won. Even on the cross Jesus knew the joy of victory. What the Father sent him into the world to do has now been accomplished. Christ *offered himself without blemish to God and he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself* (see Hebrews 9:24-26). We can find no greater proof of God's love for us than the willing sacrifice of his Son on the cross. *"O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Cor. 15:55-57)

In the cross of Christ we see the triumph of Jesus over his enemies -- sin, Satan, and death. Christian writers down through the centuries have sung the praises of the Cross of Christ. Paul the Apostle exclaimed, *"But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 6:14).

Hear what Gregory Nazianzen, a 6th century church father, has to say: *"Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a cross, the sun made dark and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its creator. The temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from his side: the one as from a man, the other as from what was above man; the earth shaken, the rocks shattered because of the rock; the dead risen to bear witness to the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the sepulcher and after the sepulcher, who can fittingly recount them? Yet no one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of blood renew the whole world and do for all men what the rennet does for the milk: joining us and binding us together."* Abbot Rupert of Deutz, wrote in the early 12th century: *"The cross of Christ is the door to heaven, the key to paradise, the downfall of the devil, the uplifting of mankind, the consolation of our imprisonment, the prize for our freedom."*

The Cross of Christ is the safeguard of our faith, the assurance of our hope, and the throne of love. It is also the sign of God's mercy and the proof of forgiveness. By his cross Jesus has redeemed our sin and atoned for our punishment. The way to peace, joy, and righteousness in the kingdom of God and the way to victory over sin, despair, and death is through the cross of Jesus Christ. Do you willingly follow Jesus in his way of the cross with joy, hope, and confidence?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, by your death on the cross you have won pardon for us and freedom from the tyranny of sin and death. May I live in the joy and freedom of your victory over sin and death."*

## GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday, also known as "Holy Friday," is the Friday immediately preceding Easter Sunday. It is celebrated traditionally as the day on which Jesus was crucified. If you are interested in a study of the issue, please see our article that discusses the various views on which day Jesus was crucified. Assuming that Jesus was crucified and died on a Friday, should Christians remember Jesus' death by celebrating Good Friday?

The Bible does not instruct Christians to remember Christ's death by honoring a certain day. The Bible does give us freedom in these matters, however. Romans 14:5 tells us, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

Rather than remembering Christ's death on a certain day, once a year, the Bible instructs us to remember Christ's death by observing the Lord's Supper. First Corinthians 11:24-26 declares, "...do this in remembrance of me...for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Why is Good Friday referred to as "good"? What the Jewish authorities and Romans did to Jesus was definitely not good (see Matthew chapters 26-27). However, the results of Christ's death are very good! Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." First Peter 3:18 tells us, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

Many Christian churches celebrate Good Friday with a subdued service, usually in the evening, in which Christ's death is remembered with solemn hymns, prayers of thanksgiving, a message centered on Christ's suffering for our sakes, and observance of the Lord's Supper.

Whether or not Christians choose to "celebrate" Good Friday, the events of that day should be ever on our minds because the death of Christ on the cross—along with His bodily resurrection—is the paramount event of the Christian faith.

APR 3, SATURDAY

Mat 27:57-66; Joh 19:38-42

Room For Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

And she (Mary) gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luk 2:7). Jesus, the Son of God and God-with-us, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Israel (Luk 1-2); yet "there was no room for them in the inn", and He had to be laid in a manger.

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luk 9:58). Jesus came to bear God's message of love and salvation for all; yet, when He came to his own, they rejected Him, hounded Him, and finally crucified Him. He came to give them life, but there was no room for Him in their lives.

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb. At birth, so too in death, Jesus did not have His own place to pray. rest. He was laid in a borrowed tomb, that of Joseph of Arimathea.

**Is there room in your heart for Jesus?**

**Is there room in your life for Jesus?**

**Reflect and Pray.**

*Dear God, forgive me for shutting You out of my life. I hear Your knocks on the door of my heart and I open it for You. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Make Your home in my life. Amen.*

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

APR 3, SATURDAY

Mat 27:57-66; Joh 19:38-42

Room For Jesus

LENT MEDITATION – HOLY WEEK

Jesus not only died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3); he also, by the grace of God, tasted death for every one (Heb. 2:9). It was a real death that put an end to his earthly human existence. Jesus died in mid afternoon and the Sabbath began at 6:00 pm. Since the Jewish law permitted no work on the Sabbath, the body had to be buried quickly. Someone brave enough would have to get permission from the Roman authorities to take the body and bury it. The bodies of executed criminals were usually left unburied as carion for the vultures and dogs. Jesus was spared this indignity through the gracious intervention of Joseph of Arimathea.

Who was this admirer and secret disciple of Jesus? Luke tells us that Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council that condemned Jesus. We are told that he did not agree with their verdict. He was either absent from their meeting or silent when they tried Jesus. What kind of man was Joseph? Luke tells us that he was "good and righteous" and "looking for the kingdom of God" (Luke 23:50-51). Although he did not stand up for Jesus at his trial, he nonetheless, sought to honor him in his death by giving him a proper burial.

Nicodemus, another secret disciple of Jesus and a member of the Sanhedrin, also assisted in the burial of Jesus by providing the burial clothes and spices. This was to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah had foretold: "He was cut off out of the land of the living ..and they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:8-9).

In the Book of Revelations, the Lord Jesus speaks: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one: I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17-18). No tomb in the world could contain the Lord Jesus for long. His death on the cross purchased our redemption and his triumph over the grave on Easter morning defeated death. What preserved the Lord Jesus from corruption? He was kept from decay and he rose from the dead by divine power. "My flesh will dwell in hope. For you will not let your Holy One see corruption" (Psalm 16:9-10) .

The mystery of Christ's lying in the tomb on the sabbath reveals the great sabbath rest of God after the fulfillment of our salvation which brings peace to the whole world (Col. 1:18-20). Is your hope in this life only, or is it well founded in the resurrection of Christ and his promise that those who believe in him will live forever?

*"Lord Jesus, you died that I might live forever in your kingdom of peace and righteousness. Strengthen my faith that I may I know the power of your resurrection and live in the hope of seeing you face to face for ever."*

## EASTER SUNDAY or RESURRECTION SUNDAY

There is a lot of confusion regarding what Easter Sunday is all about. For some, Easter Sunday is about the Easter Bunny, colorfully decorated Easter eggs, and Easter egg hunts. Most people understand that Easter Sunday has something to do with the resurrection of Jesus, but are confused as to how the resurrection is related to the Easter eggs and the Easter bunny.

Biblically speaking, there is absolutely no connection between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the common modern traditions related to Easter Sunday. As a background, please read our article on the origins of Easter. Essentially, what occurred is that in order to make Christianity more attractive to non-Christians, the ancient Roman Catholic Church mixed the celebration of Jesus' resurrection with celebrations that involved spring fertility rituals. These spring fertility rituals are the source of the egg and bunny traditions.

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week, Sunday (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19). Jesus' resurrection is most worthy of being celebrated (see 1 Corinthians 15). While it is appropriate for Jesus' resurrection to be celebrated on a Sunday, the day on which Jesus' resurrection is celebrated should not be referred to as Easter. Easter has nothing to do with Jesus' resurrection on a Sunday.

As a result, many Christians feel strongly that the day on which we celebrate Jesus' resurrection should not be referred to as "Easter Sunday." Rather, something like "Resurrection Sunday" would be far more appropriate and biblical. For the Christian, it is unthinkable that we would allow the silliness of Easter eggs and the Easter bunny to be the focus of the day instead of Jesus' resurrection.

By all means, celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday. Christ's resurrection is something that should be celebrated every day, not just once a year. At the same time, if we choose to celebrate Easter Sunday, we should not allow the fun and games to distract our attention from what the day should truly be all about—the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and that His resurrection demonstrates that we can indeed be promised an eternal home in Heaven by receiving Jesus as our Savior.

APR 4, RESURRECTION SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

APR 5, MONDAY

Mat 19:13-15; Mar 10:13-16; Luk 18:1-17

Persistent and Childlike-Faith

Luk 18:1b

*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Luk 18:17*

The longer we wait for the Lord's return, the more we need persistent and humble childlike trust in our Lord. The widow's request is eventually obtained through her persistence (v.2-5). A superficial reading of the story might seem to make a comparison between the judge and God (v.6-8). We do not pray constantly to wear' God down because He always hears our prayers. Instead, we should pray in a way that leaves judgment to the Lord. We are to serve Him with diligence until He comes.

The Pharisee and the tax-collector contrast pride and humility. They came from different backgrounds (v.9-10) and prayed different prayers (v.11-13). The Pharisee is sure that he is a blessing to God but the tax-collector knows he is a sinner and seeks mercy. Jesus endorses the tax-collector's humility (v.14). The one justified before God, the one whose prayer was heard, is the tax collector. The prayer God hears is the call for mercy.

The following story (v.15-17) shows how subtle and difficult humility is. When Jesus was ministering, many sought to bring their children. The disciples were convinced that children were not important and a waste of time. Jesus took the opposite attitude. One must trust God with the simple faith and humility of a dependent child. Entrance into the kingdom is a matter of humility that recognizes a need for God. What is commended in children is their inherent dependency. They bring nothing but themselves to the feet of Jesus.

**A child is persistent when in need and humble enough to know that help is needed to survive. The happiness and simple acceptance that a child displays when her needs are met are a joy to behold. All these are attitudes that can help us in our life of faith and journey with our Lord.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 5, MONDAY

Mat 19:13-15; Mar 10:13-16; Luk 18:1-17

Persistent and Childlike-Faith

Luk 18:1b

What can a shameless and unjust judge pitted against a crusty and pestering woman teach us about justice and vindication in the kingdom of God? Jesus tells a story that is all too true -- a defenseless widow is taken advantaged of and refused her rights. Through sheer persistence she wears down an unscrupulous judge until he gives her justice.

Persistence pays off, and that's especially true for those who trust in God. Jesus illustrates how God as our Judge is much quicker to bring us his justice, blessing, and help when we need it. But we can easily lose heart and forget to ask our Heavenly Father for his grace and help. Jesus told this parable to give fresh hope and confidence to his disciples. In this present life we can expect trials and adversity, but we are not without hope in God. The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices perpetrated by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death (Song of Songs 8:6). The just can look forward with hope to that day when they will receive their reward.

Jesus ends his parable with a probing question for us. Will you and I have faith—the faith that perseveres to the end—of time when Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead? Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to us. If we want to live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end, then we must nourish it with the word of God and ask the Lord to increase it (Luke 17:5). When trials and setbacks disappoint you, where do you place your hope? Do you pray with expectant faith and confidence in God's merciful care and providence for you?

*"Lord, give me faith to believe your promises and give me perseverance and hope to withstand trials and adversities. Help me to trust in your unfailing love and to find joy and contentment in you alone."*

Scripture warns us that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; Prov. 3:34). Jesus paints a vivid story of two men at prayer. What's the point or lesson he wants us to learn? Luke gives us a hint: Jesus warns us about the danger of despising others. Contempt is more than being mean-minded. It springs from the assumption that one is qualified to sit in the seat of judgment and to ascertain who is good and just. Jesus' story caused offense for those who regarded "tax collectors" as unworthy of God's grace and favor. How could Jesus put down a "religious leader" and raise up a "public sinner"? Jesus' parable speaks about the nature of prayer and our relationship with God. It does this by contrasting two very different attitudes towards prayer. The Pharisee, who represented those who take pride in their religious practices, exalted himself at the expense of others. Absorbed with his own sense of self-satisfaction and self-congratulation he mainly prayed with himself. His prayer consisted of prideful boasts of what he did and of disdain for those he despised. The Pharisee tried to justify himself; but only God can justify. The tax collector, who represented those despised by religious people, humbled himself before God and begged for mercy. His prayer was heard by God because he had remorse for his sins. He sought God with humility rather than with pride.

This parable presents both an opportunity and a warning. Pride leads to illusion and self-deception. Humility helps us to see ourselves as we really are and it inclines us to God's grace and mercy. God dwells with the humble of heart who recognize their own sinfulness and who acknowledge God's mercy and saving grace. *I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit* (Isaiah 57:15). God cannot hear us if we despise others. Do you humbly seek God's mercy and do you show mercy to others, especially those you find difficult to love and to forgive?

*"Lord, may your love control my thoughts and actions that I may do what is pleasing to you. Show me where I lack charity, mercy, and forgiveness toward my neighbor. And help me to be generous in giving to others what you have so generously given to me."*

**APR 6, TUESDAY**      **Mat 19:16–30; Mar 10:17–31; Luk 18:18–30**

**A Different Choice**

**Mat 19:26**

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Mat 19:26*

Most churches are short of workers and less and less numbers are entering the full-time Christian ministry. Is it a difficult choice to leave family, the world and all it has to offer?

The rich young man who came to Jesus must have been very sincere in his question about eternal life. That is why Jesus enumerated some of the commandments he should obey. What then was the lesson the young man had to learn? He had to learn that we live by our choices. If he wanted eternal life, then his love for God had to supersede just being good and his love for material things. It was a difficult lesson to learn and an even more difficult lesson to follow.

In Jewish culture, as in Asian culture, wealth is considered a blessing from God. So, it came as a surprise to the disciples when Jesus said that riches could be a deterrent to those wanting to enter the kingdom of God (v.23). When questioned further, Jesus said that with God all things are possible (v.26). God can make our desire for the things of the world and its attractions give way to our love for the kingdom.

Jesus went on to assure Peter and the disciples that their sacrificial life would have its reward in God’s kingdom. Jesus made it possible for Zacchaeus (Luk 19:1–9) and Nicodemus (Joh 3:1–21) to make difficult though right choices in their lives. May we also turn to Jesus to give us the enabling to make the choices that God wants us to make, however difficult they may be.

**Thank You, Lord, for making eternal life possible for me. Help me to make choices in my life according to Your will, choices that will assure me of Your favor.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 6, TUESDAY

Mat 19:16–30; Mar 10:17–31; Luk 18:18–30

A Different Choice

Mat 19:26

What gives hope and satisfaction to our desire for happiness and security? A person of position and means who had the best the world could offer -- wealth and security -- came to Jesus because he lacked one thing. (Who was this ruler? He was likely a Pharisee, a religious leader. Matthew's gospel says he was young (19:20.) This person wanted the kind of lasting peace and happiness which money could not buy him. The answer he got, however, was not what he was looking for. He protested that he kept all the commandments; but Jesus spoke to the trouble in his heart. One thing kept him from giving himself whole-heartedly to God. While he lacked nothing in material goods, he was nonetheless possessive of what he had. He placed his hope and security in what he possessed. So when Jesus challenged him to make God his one true possession and treasure, he became dismayed.

Why did the rich ruler go away from Jesus with sadness rather than with joy? His treasure and his hope for happiness were misplaced. *Treasure* has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. The Lord himself is the greatest treasure we can have. Giving up everything else to have the Lord as our treasure is not sorrowful, but the greatest joy. See Jesus' parable about the treasure hidden in a field (Matt 13:44). Selling all that we have could mean many different things--our friends, our job, our "style" of life, what we do with our free time. Jesus challenged the young man because his heart was possessive. He was afraid to give to others for fear that he would lose what he had gained. Those who are generous towards God and others find that they cannot outgive God in generosity. God blesses us with spiritual goods that far outweigh the fleeting joys of material goods. He alone can satisfy the deepest longing and desires of our heart.

Are you willing to part with anything that might keep you from seeking true joy with Jesus?

*"Lord, you alone can satisfy the deepest longing in my heart. No other treasure can compare with you. Keep me free from being possessive or discontented and give me joy in having you alone as my Treasure and my Portion."*

What's the best investment you can make with your life? The gospel presents us with a paradox: we lose what we keep, and we gain what we give away. When we lose our lives for Christ, we gain a priceless treasure and an inheritance which last forever. Whatever we give to God comes back a hundredfold. Generosity flows from a heart full of gratitude for the abundant mercy and grace which God grants. Do you give freely and generously? And why do you give, for reward or for love? Right after a wealthy young man refused to follow Jesus, Peter, somewhat crudely, wanted to know what he and the other disciples would get out of it since they had freely accepted Jesus' offer to follow him unconditionally.

Jesus spoke with utter honesty: Those who left all for him would receive a hundred times more now, even in this life, as well as unending life in the age to come. Jesus' disciples can expect opposition and persecution from those who are opposed to Christ and his gospel. Should we be surprised if we lose favor and experience ridicule, intimidation, and injury when we take a stand for truth and righteousness? In place of material wealth, Jesus promised his disciples the blessing and joy of rich fellowship with the community of believers. No earthly good or possession can rival the joy and bliss of knowing God and the peace and unity he grants to his disciples. The Lord wants to fill our hearts with the vision of heaven and with his joy and peace.

Do you know the joy of following the Lord as his disciple? Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the joy of the gospel and the knowledge of God's personal love.

*"Lord I want to follow you as your disciple and to love you wholeheartedly with all that I have. Fill my heart with faith, hope, and love that I may always find peace and joy in your presence."*

APR 7, WEDNESDAY Mat 20:1-16

Heavenly Generosity

Mat 20:16

*“Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So the last will be first, and the first will be last Mat 20:15-16*

Our common sense may lead us to agree with the early workers in this parable; that their expectations were fair. Even in the church there is often a careful calculation of duties performed. Do those who do more, expect more respect? More honor? More status? Certainly those who have served longer expect some form of recognition.

Jesus teaches us, through this parable, that in God’s kingdom, He is the judge. He is almighty and He decides what rewards we will receive. And there is nothing unjust about His decisions for He gives what He promises (v.13). God does not use man’s standards in evaluating our service as it is in His nature to be generous. This parable would have upset the self-righteous religious leaders of Israel for they believed that only they were the worthy recipients of God’s generosity. Because of their wrong understanding of God, they had the wrong attitude to service. Our attitude should be to serve God because of our love for Him.

Jesus’ teaching, should serve as an encouragement for young Christians who are just starting to serve their Lord. It should teach long-standing leaders in the church not to begrudge or judge the service of others. It is God’s vineyard and He is the landowner. He is just and generous, and He will give us immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us (Eph 3:20).

Teach me my God and King, In all things Thee to see  
And what I do in anything, To do it as for Thee. - George Herbert –

**Are you expecting rewards from God for service rendered to Him? For worshipping in a particular church for many years? For serving as warden/elder or treasurer for many years?  
God is more interested in your attitude than your work.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 7, WEDNESDAY

Mat 20:1-16

Heavenly Generosity

Mat 20:16

What can work and wages, welfare and the unemployed tell us about the kingdom of God? In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard we see the extraordinary generosity and compassion of God.

There is great tragedy in unemployment, the loss of work, and the inability to earn enough to live and support oneself or one's family. In Jesus' times laborers had to wait each day in the marketplace until someone hired them for a day's job. No work that day usually meant no food on the family table. The laborers who worked all day and received their payment complain that the master pays the late afternoon laborers the same wage. The master, undoubtedly, hired them in the late afternoon so they wouldn't go home payless and hungry.

God is generous in opening the doors of his kingdom to all who will enter, both those who have labored a life-time for him and those who come at the last hour. While the reward is the same, the motive for one's labor can make all the difference. Some work only for reward. They will only put as much effort in as they think they will get back. Others labor out of love and joy for the opportunity to work and to serve others. The Lord Jesus calls his disciples to serve God and neighbor – his heavenly kingdom and our earthly community – with generosity and joy.

Do you perform your work and responsibilities with cheerfulness and diligence for the Lord's sake?

And do you give generously to others, especially to those in need of your care and support?

*"Lord, may I serve you and my neighbor with a glad and generous heart, not looking for how much I can get but rather looking for how much I can give."*

APR 8, THURSDAY

Mat 20:17-28; Mar 10:32-45; Luk 18:31-34

What Is Important In Our Lives ?

Mar 10:45

*Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mar 10:43-45*

Every one of us has our priorities and we know what we want to achieve in life. No doubt many of us want to be great and this is fueled by the public media. However, what is it that is really important to us? A big house, a big car or a big name? What are our priorities in life?

The disciples, at times, had misplaced priorities. Our text today is an illustration of this fact. James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, had some great ambitions. They wanted to go places. They had some dreams, some ambitions, and some very definite wants. But they often did not understand the implications of what they wanted.

Now, if our priorities are wrong, what we desire can hurt us. Like the disciples, we can have misplaced priorities. But we need to understand what is important to God. And we need to evaluate what our priorities should be in the light of His priorities for us. As believers, it is important for us periodically to be engaged in a re-evaluation of our values so that our lives stay right on target. We need to keep clearly before us just what is really important.

The path to greatness is service. Verse 45 says it all: *‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’* As the chorus says: *‘Brother, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you ...’* The path to greatness is SERVICE.

**Pray that we will have the humility to serve others instead of desiring service from them.  
Remember the time when your church needed help with some menial tasks?  
What was your response? Be the first to volunteer no matter how menial the task is!**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 8, THURSDAY

Mat 20:17–28; Mar 10:32–45; Luk 18:31–34

What Is Important In Our Lives ?

Mar 10:45

Was Jesus a pessimist or a stark realist? On three different occasions the Gospels record that Jesus predicted he would endure great suffering through betrayal, rejection, and the punishment of a cruel death. The Jews resorted to stoning and the Romans to crucifixion—the most painful and humiliating death they could devise for criminals they wanted to eliminate. No wonder the apostles were greatly distressed at such a prediction! If Jesus their Master were put to death, then they would likely receive the same treatment by their enemies. Jesus called himself the “Son of Man” because this was a common Jewish title for the Messiah.

Why must the Messiah be rejected and killed? Did not God promise that his Anointed One would deliver his people from their oppression and establish a kingdom of peace and justice? The prophet Isaiah had foretold that it was God’s will that the “Suffering Servant” make atonement for sins through his suffering and death (Isaiah 53:5-12). Jesus paid the price for our redemption with his blood. Slavery to sin is to want the wrong things and to be in bondage to destructive desires. The ransom Jesus paid sets us free from the worst tyranny possible-- the tyranny of sin and the fear of death. Jesus’ victory did not end with death but triumphed over the tomb. Jesus defeated the powers of death through his resurrection. Do you want the greatest freedom possible, the freedom to live as God truly meant us to live as his sons and daughters?

Jesus did the unthinkable! He wedded authority with selfless service and with loving sacrifice. Authority without sacrificial love is brutish and self-serving. Jesus also used stark language to explain what kind of sacrifice he had in mind. His disciples must drink his cup if they expect to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup he had in mind was a bitter one involving crucifixion. What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some disciples such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of martyrdom. But for many, it entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, struggles, and temptations.

A disciple must be ready to lay down his or her life in martyrdom and be ready to lay it down each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required. An early church father summed up Jesus’ teaching with the expression: *to serve is to reign with Christ*. We share in God’s reign by laying down our lives in humble service as Jesus did for our sake. Are you willing to lay down your life and to serve others as Jesus did?

*“Lord Jesus, your death brought life and freedom.  
Make me a servant of your love, that I may seek to serve rather than be served.”*

APR 9, FRIDAY Mat 20:29–34; Mar 10:46–52; Luk 18:35–43

The Desire Of A Blind Man

Mar 10:47

*When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Mar 10:47*

I suppose it is ridiculous to ask a blind man what his greatest desire in life is. Mark, in this passage, wants us to go beyond the facts of the story and see some spiritual implications of the healing.

What we see in Bartimaeus is a suggestive aspiration. Bartimaeus was blind, and he had a desire to see. There is a symbolic application here. Bartimaeus was blind and he knew it. Jesus asked him the same question He had asked His disciples, 'What do you want Me to do for you (v 36)?' Bartimaeus' answer was far different from that of the disciples. He said: Rabboni, I want to regain my sight. 'The disciples were 'blind' as well, but they did not know it. They thought they could see but could not. Bartimaeus knew he could not see.

I believe what Mark is communicating is that we need to ask God to open our eyes, that we may see the implications of our desires. We need to have our eyes opened, that we may see what is important, really important to God. Because what is important to God ought to be important to us. The disciples' blindness is symbolic of the blindness of all God's children. With our eyes upon self, we cannot see. Our prayer needs to be, 'Lord, / want to regain my sight I want to see through Your eyes. I want to understand what's really important to You. Lord, help me to see.'

**Spiritual blindness can only be healed by spiritual medication.  
Pray that we will not be spiritually blind and be able to see our condition as one that  
needs God's help.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 9, FRIDAY

Mat 20:29–34; Mar 10:46–52; Luk 18:35–43

The Desire Of A Blind Man

Mar 10:47

Have you ever encountered a once in a life-time opportunity you knew you could not pass up? Such a moment came for a blind and destitute man, named Bartimaeus. He was determined to get near the one person who could meet his need. He knew who Jesus was and had heard of his fame for healing, but until now had no means of making contact with the *Son of David*, a clear reference and title for the Messiah.

It took a lot of "guts" and persistence for Bartimaeus to get the attention of Jesus over the din of a noisy throng who crowded around Jesus as he made his way out of town. Why was the crowd annoyed with the blind man's persistent shouts? He was disturbing their peace and interrupting Jesus' discourse. It was common for a rabbi to teach as he walked with others. Jesus was on his way to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem and a band of pilgrims followed him. When the crowd tried to silence the blind man he overpowered them with his emotional outburst and thus caught the attention of Jesus.

This incident reveals something important about how God interacts with us. The blind man was determined to get Jesus' attention and he was persistent in the face of opposition. Jesus could have ignored or rebuffed him because he was disturbing his talk and his audience. Jesus showed that acting was more important than talking. This man was in desperate need and Jesus was ready, not only to empathize with his suffering, but to relieve it as well. A great speaker can command attention and respect, but a man or woman with a helping hand and a big heart is loved more.

Jesus commends Bartimaeus for recognizing who he is with the *eyes of faith* and grants him physical sight as well. Do you recognize your need for God's healing grace and do you seek Jesus out, like Bartimaeus, with persistent faith and trust in his goodness and mercy?

*"Lord, may I never fail to recognize my need for your grace.*

*Help me to take advantage of the opportunities you give me to seek your presence daily and to listen attentively to your word."*

## Did Jesus heal two blind men (Matthew 20:29–34) or one blind man (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43)?

In spite of apparent discrepancies, these three passages do refer to the same incident. The Matthew account cites two men healed as Jesus left Jericho. Mark and Luke refer to only one blind man healed, but Luke says it happened as Jesus was entering Jericho while Mark records it happening as He left Jericho. There are legitimate explanations for the apparent discrepancies. Let's look at them rather than deciding this is a contradiction and the Bible is in error.

That this is the same incident is seen in the similarity of the accounts, beginning with the two beggars sitting on the roadside. They call out to Jesus, referring to Him as "Son of David" (Matthew 20:30; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:38), and in all three accounts, they are rebuked by those nearby and told to be quiet but continue to shout out to Jesus (Matthew 20:31; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39). The three accounts describe nearly identical conversations between Jesus and the beggars and the conclusions of the stories are also identical. The beggars receive their sight immediately and follow Jesus.

Only Mark chooses to identify one of the beggars as Bartimaeus, perhaps because Bartimaeus was known to Mark's readers, or they knew Bartimaeus's father, Timaeus, whereas the other blind man was a stranger to them. In any case, the fact that Mark and Luke only mention one beggar does not contradict Matthew's account. Mark and Luke never say there was *only* one beggar. They simply focus on the one, Bartimaeus, who was probably the more vocal of the two. Matthew refers to both of the blind men calling out to Jesus, clearly indicating there were two.

The other issue in question is whether Jesus was entering Jericho or leaving it. Bible commentators cite the fact that at that time there were two Jerichos - one the mound of the ancient city (still existing today) and the other the inhabited city of Jericho. Therefore, Jesus could have healed the two men as He was leaving the ancient city of Jericho and entering the new city of Jericho.

In any case, to focus on these minor details to the exclusion of all else is to miss the point of the story—Jesus healed the blind men, proving that He was indeed the Son of God with powers beyond anything a mortal man could have. Unlike the Pharisees who refused to see what was before their eyes, our response to Jesus should be the same as that of the blind men—call on Him to give us eyes to see spiritual truth, recognize Him for who He is, and follow Him.

APR 10, SATURDAY

Mat 25:14-30; Luk 19:1-27

The King's Servants are to be Found Faithful

Luk 19:26

*He replied, I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.' Luk 19:26*

The Bible tells us that we will have to give an account of our lives to God when we face Him. As Jesus draws near to Jerusalem, expectation rises that the kingdom will be decisively brought in (v 11). Jesus must inform His disciples that the full expression of kingdom authority will not come until His return, and He must explain what He expects of them in the meantime.

A man of noble birth goes to a far country 'to have himself appointed king and then to return.' He calls ten servants and gives each of them a mina (v.12-13). On his return, the first servant has earned ten more and the second five more. The third servant simply returns the mina, having hid it in a cloth, and explains why. Those who earn more are rewarded but what the third servant has is taken away. The third servant is called 'wicked' (v 22) and he is judged according to his own attitude.

The judgment is a time of blessing to those who have walked with God. We have nothing to fear if we have been faithful stewards and it will be a time for affirmation. God has given us abilities and resources (minas) through which to serve the church. We increase the benefits that come to the body through our applying these gifts. Jesus exhorts us here to apply ourselves fully to the task, so that in the day of His assessment, our stewardship may be an occasion for rejoicing (I Cor 4:5).

**This is the last of the parables in Luke. So far, Jesus has been preparing His disciples for the climax in the Gospel story. Here He also prepares them for the timing of His coming again. This parable is to teach us to be productive disciples until He comes. Is there anything we need to do so that we can give a good account to our Lord when He comes?**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 10, SATURDAY

Mat 25:14-30; Luk 19:1-27

The King's Servants are to be Found Faithful

Luk 19:26

What can economics and productivity teach us about the kingdom of heaven? Jesus' story about a businessman who leaves town and entrusts his money with his workers made perfect sense to his audience. Wealthy merchants and businessmen often had to travel abroad and leave the business to others to handle while they were gone. Why did Jesus tell this story? Most importantly it tells us something about how God deals with us, his servants. The parable speaks first of the Master's trust in his servants. While he goes away he leaves them with his money to use as they think best. While there were no strings attached, this was obviously a test to see if the Master's workers would be industrious and reliable in their use of the money entrusted to them. Third, the master rewards those who are industrious and faithful and he punishes those who sit by idly and who do nothing with his money.

The essence of the parable seems to lie in the servants' conception of responsibility. Each servant entrusted with the master's money was faithful up to a certain point. The servant who buried the master's money was irresponsible. One can bury seeds in the ground and expect them to become productive because they obey natural laws. Coins, however, do not obey natural laws. They obey economic laws and become productive in circulation. The master expected his servants to be productive in the use of his money.

What do coins and the law of economics have to do with the kingdom of God? The Lord entrusts the subjects of his kingdom with gifts and graces and he gives his subjects the freedom to use them as they think best. With each gift and talent, God gives sufficient the means (grace and wisdom) for using them in a fitting way. As the parable of the talents shows, God abhors indifference and an attitude that says it's not worth trying. God honors those who use their talents and gifts for doing good. Those who are faithful with even a little are entrusted with more! But those who neglect or squander what God has entrusted to them will lose what they have.

There is an important lesson here for us. No one can stand still for long in the Christian life. We either get more or we lose what we have. We either advance towards God or we slip back.

Do you earnestly seek to serve God with the gifts, talents, and graces he has given to you?

*"Lord, be the ruler of my heart and thoughts, be the king of my home and relationships, and be the master of my work and service. Help me to make good use of the gifts, talents, time, and resources you give me for your glory and your kingdom."*

APR 11, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

APR 12, MONDAY

Joh 11:1-44

'Loose him and let him Go'

Joh 11:25-26

*'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.'* Joh 11:25-26

Bethany was a small village a short distance away from Jerusalem. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrives. Martha, on hearing of His imminent arrival, goes out to meet Him.

Some might construe that what she says to Jesus is an expression of a gentle reproach (v.21) for having delayed His arrival; perhaps it is more likely an utterance of poignant grief as she knew that He would not be able to make it on time. In the exchange that takes place between them she expresses her confidence that God will grant Jesus any request He makes. To His assurance that Lazarus will rise again, she expresses the general belief that it will happen 'at the last day'. Jesus then makes His fifth great 'I am' statement: 'I am the resurrection and the life'. One who believes in Him (is united with Him) will be raised again or be transformed and will enter into life that is life indeed. 'Do you believe this?' He challenges her.

Martha's confession, 'You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world' (v.27) is one in a long line of confessions concerning Jesus mentioned by John in the Gospel (1:29,41,45; 4:29,39,42; 9:38). Later, Mary meets Jesus and falls at His feet weeping. Her tears and those of her companions cause Him to be 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled' and He weeps too. Was it just a natural human response or a revulsion to the ravaging effect of human sin?

When Jesus orders that the tomb be opened, Martha protests, assuming that there will be a bad odor from a decaying corpse. They listen to Him, however, because He says. 'If you believe you will see the glory of God'. He then orders Lazarus to come out of the tomb, which he does. He then says to them. 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go'. This is the last miracle recorded by John to establish his case that 'Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God' (20:31).

**This miracle finds expression in the believer's experience. When persons dead in sin are made alive through faith in Jesus Christ, the 'wrappings' that bind them in their old state must be ripped off. They are then set free to walk in newness of life.  
Loose them and let them go!**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

*"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" Joh 11:4*

Jesus remained in the region 'across the Jordan' (10:40) for three or four months. He returned to Judea on receiving the urgent message from His good friends, Mary and Martha, that their brother Lazarus was seriously ill at their home in Bethany.

Jesus says. 'This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it' (v.4). So in spite of loving this family. Jesus delays going to them for two more days. However, then in what seems to be a sudden change of mind. He says, 'Let us go back to Judea.' His disciples are nonplussed for He had nearly been stoned when He was last there. His reply is very much in line with what He said when He healed the blind man (9:3-5). Beyond the obvious, surface meaning of His words, He was saying that He who is the light of the world must fulfil the Father's will (i.e. glorify Him) in the time that is available to Him. The disciples needed to learn that He had to fulfil His mission; there was no question of withdrawing from the confrontation with the hostile authorities.

Jesus then tells them that Lazarus is really dead but He will raise him. 'For your sake,' He says. 'I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe'. (If He had been there, Lazarus would not have died; it would have been just another case of healing.) They will now see such a manifestation of the glory of God that their faith in Him will be strengthened. Thomas is 'despairingly yet doggedly faithful' and says to the rest of disciples, 'Let us also go that we may die with him' (v.16).

Mary and Martha did, in their time of distress. 'send word to Jesus' that their brother was sick. Initially they didn't get the response they expected and hoped for.

- **It is a sound spiritual instinct for Christians to appeal to Jesus (through prayer) when in need. Christians have the great privilege of praying and making their requests known (Phi 4:6).**
- **God may grant, defer or deny such requests. Whatever He does will be in accordance with His will so that His name may be glorified.**
- **Christians may be inclined to maintain a low profile when confronted by hostile forces (v.8). They are challenged to develop a robust faith and be prepared to take up their cross and follow their Lord.**

Apr 13, TUESDAY Mat 26:6-13; Mar 14:1-9; Luk 7:36-50; Joh 12:1-11

**We Are That Woman**

Luk 7:47

*"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Luk 7:47*

Jesus is at a Pharisee's house. A woman with a bad reputation comes in and performs a very intimate act: wiping Jesus' feet with perfume. Jesus, not for the first (nor last) time, becomes a target of murmuring and accusing voices.

But then what happens?

Jesus tells a wonderful story about outrageously forgiven debt and applies this to the woman. Her deed reflected her overpowering gratitude at having a great deb cast aside.

She has experienced the full removal of her burden, hence her all-out display of gratitude and love. The Pharisees, on the other hand, do not understand forgiveness (and barely consider themselves in need of healing), and therefore are unlikely to betray any emotional outpouring of gratitude like the woman. Indeed, 'her many sins have been forgiven-for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.'

This story is really about you and me. We put others under judgment, believing ourselves better than average. But the truth is that we are like the woman, as hopeless and stained as she is.

**Do we realize the depth of our debts?**

**Is our personal corruption, and hence personal need for God, clear to us?**

**Or are we blinded by our critical view of others, especially 'easy targets' like people with questionable reputations?**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

Apr 13, TUESDAY Mat 26:6-13; Mar 14:1-9; Luk 7:36-50; Joh 12:1-11

## We Are That Woman

Luk 7:47

The Feast of Passover was a time of great anticipation for the Jews. Emotions ran high as people recalled the history of their ancestors' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For weeks leading up to the feast intense preparations were made. The Romans sent extra forces to Jerusalem to deal with potential disturbances and uprisings. It was Jewish belief that the Messiah would come at Passover to deliver his people from oppression. Jesus' enemies were expecting him to make his appearance in Jerusalem and they were hoping to arrest him before he had the chance to incite the crowds to make him their Messiah and King.

As Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem for what he knows will be his last Passover with his disciples, he stops in the village of Bethany where he is invited to dinner by a well-to-do host named Simon. Mark (14:1-11) and John (12:1-8) recount this story as well and Luke tells us that Simon was a Pharisee. In Luke's account (7:36-50) we are told that Simon did not treat Jesus with the normal courtesy given to guests, such as washing their feet and anointing their head before they reclined at table. Why did Simon invite him to dinner and then neglect to give him the customary signs of respect and honor? Simon was very likely a collector of celebrities. He patronized Jesus because of his popularity with the crowds.

When a woman interrupts the meal to anoint Jesus's feet, she causes a scene and provokes Simon's company to criticize her action. Why did this woman approach Jesus and anoint him at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others? Her action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus. She was oblivious to all around her, except for Jesus. She also did something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. She didn't just pour a few drops of ointment on Jesus. She poured out all the contents! Her love was not calculated but extravagant. The perfume she anointed Jesus with was a very precious ointment made from a rare plant in faraway India. This ointment was often used for anointing the body at burial. It was very expensive, almost a year's wages for an ordinary worker. In a spirit of gratitude and with intense love, this woman lavishly served the one who showed her the mercy and kindness of God.

John's Gospel tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, close friends of Jesus. Since Jesus was passing through her neighborhood she lost no time to show him a spontaneous act of love and gratitude.

Why did Simon's company view this woman's act as extravagant wastefulness? They were greedy. A person views things according to what is inside the heart or soul. Jesus remarked that this woman had done a lovely deed. We can never outmatch God in kindness and generosity. The greatest proof of his love for us is the willing offer of his only begotten Son who poured out his blood upon the cross for our sins.

Are you ready to pour out your love upon the One who gave himself without reserve for your sake?

*"Lord, your grace is sufficient for me. Fill my heart with love and gratitude for the mercy you have shown to me and give me freedom and joy to love and serve others as you have taught."*

## Are Simon the Leper and Simon the Pharisee the same?

*NOTE by Ps Ng : This is just one explanation that assumes only ONE ANOINTING. Others think there were TWO ANOINTINGS while a few even suggest THREE ANOINTINGS events. The lesson and application however remains the same irrespective of the numbers.*

All four Gospels tell a story of a woman who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, but the accounts differ, and it is usually presumed that they are based on two events – with two different women anointing Jesus on different occasions, one in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany and the other in the home of a Pharisee named Simon.

But a careful comparison of the stories reveals a clearer picture – and carries an important lesson. The accounts of Matthew, Mark and John are often thought to reflect an occasion regarding Mary, the sister of Martha (John 11:2), and the account in Luke to reflect another incident regarding a different woman who had lived a sinful life. But all the apparent differences between the stories can be easily reconciled. For example, Matthew and Mark say the woman anointed Jesus' head, the other gospels say his feet were anointed. But the woman may well have anointed Christ's head and feet – recorded differently according to the stress the individual Gospel writers had in mind (i.e., the head for a kingly anointing, or an anointing for burial).

It would be a strange coincidence if two women had both anointed Jesus with the same kind of expensive perfume and wiped his feet with their hair. If they were different women, why did the Gospel writers not differentiate them in some way? On the other hand, that Mary sister of Martha was the one woman who anointed Christ may perhaps be seen earlier in John's account where he tells us: "(This Mary... was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.)" (John 11:2) – saying "the same one who" rather than "one of the women who." It would also be strange if not one of the four gospel writers recorded both events, if two similar events had occurred. This is especially true considering Jesus' words in Mark 14:9: "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Would Christ have put so much emphasis on this event if it was the second instance of two virtually identical cases? If this had been done by two different women, surely both would be clearly recorded.

That the various accounts regarding the woman who anointed Christ's feet involve the same event has another aspect to it. Luke's account says the event occurred in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, the others say it was in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany. But Simon the Leper and Simon the Pharisee were probably one and the same. A leper could never have hosted a dinner nor have partaken in one with other people – Simon the Leper must have been healed and could thus have been the same as Simon the Pharisee. Simon may well have been referred to as "the Pharisee" in Luke because Luke stresses Jesus' reply to Simon's pharisaical and self-righteous attitude, while the other Gospels remember him as Simon the Leper.

Why does this matter? If Simon the Leper and Simon the Pharisee are one and the same, then Jesus' words to this man take on far greater meaning. Commentaries on Luke: 7:36-50 usually stress the fact that Jesus pointed out to the Pharisee that he had not welcomed Jesus as the woman did, but we should notice the context, and what Jesus actually stresses before he continued to make a comparison between the woman and Simon:

"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. 'Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said" (Luke 7:40-43).

Why did Jesus talk to the Pharisee about gratitude for forgiveness? Notice Christ said two people had been forgiven, one of much, one of less – and made the point that the one forgiven more, loved more. If Simon the Pharisee had been forgiven sins and healed of leprosy by Jesus, this part of the story makes perfect sense. Simon is the one forgiven a smaller amount, Mary the one forgiven a greater amount, but who then loved more.

But Jesus' comment to the Pharisee cuts to the heart of any self-righteous understanding of forgiveness. In speaking to the Pharisee as Jesus did, he showed the man the hypocrisy of accepting forgiveness and still looking askance at others as sinners. Jesus' words showed not only that those forgiven more, love more – and may show much more gratitude – but also that those of us forgiven anything are in no position to judge others self-righteously, no matter how much they may have sinned. To look at God's forgiveness in any other way, Jesus shows us, is to walk in the shoes of someone blind to their own self-righteousness. It is to walk in the shoes of a Pharisee.

APR 14, WEDNESDAY    Mat 26:1-5,14-16; Mar 14:10-11; Luk 21:37-22:6; Joh 11:45-57

An Insider's Plot

Joh 11:49-50

*And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. Luk 22:4*

When sin is exposed, our curiosity first leads to an interest in the scandalous aspects of the case. We then ask questions to find out the reasons behind the actions. In this way, we distance ourselves from the specifics of the other's situation and distract ourselves from looking at our own potential to sin.

Sin comes in different guises. As the destructive effects take their course, it always involves a betrayal of God, of others and of the sinner himself. Luke does not give us any specific explanation for Judas Iscariot's disloyalty to his Master, except to tell us that 'Satan entered Judas' (v.3). Greed for money may have played a part as well (v.5). Satan's part in the betrayal of Jesus does not remove any of the responsibility from Judas.

Each one of us is responsible for our sin. Our own evil desires are frequently the real source of temptation (Jam 1:14). This does not exclude the power of Satan, but it is only when we act upon Satan's ungodly suggestions that we actually commit sin. Here, Satan has his way with Judas, leading him in a sinister direction, right into the hands of the chief priests and teachers of the law. These men from the religious establishment had long since wanted to arrest Jesus but were awaiting an appropriate time. Thousands had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Had they made a premature move, they might have caused an uprising among the people, for Jesus was greatly admired. As an insider, Judas' scheme gave them the perfect opportunity.

Judas' treachery reminds us to be aware of our own potential to betray Jesus. Judas was an insider, part of the company of the Twelve who had accompanied Jesus throughout His ministry. Therefore Christians, even those in leadership, are susceptible to such failure. We too can betray Jesus in subtle ways, as the temptations of life ensnare us.

**Lord, I acknowledge that even I could betray You.  
Grant me the strength and grace to remain faithful to You always. Amen**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 14, WEDNESDAY Mat 26:1-5,14-16; Mar 14:10-11; Luk 21:37-22:6; Joh 11:45-57

## An Insider's Plot

Joh 11:49-50

Do you allow fear or opposition to hold you back from doing God's will? Jesus set his face like flint toward Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaited him there (Luke 9:51; Isaiah 50:7). It was Jewish belief that when the high priest asked for God's counsel for the nation, God spoke through him. What dramatic irony that Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus must die for the nation. The prophet Ezekiel announced that God would establish one people, one land, one prince, and one sanctuary forever (Ezek. 37:26-28). Luke adds to Caiaphas's prophecy that Jesus would *gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad*. Jesus came to *lay down his life for the many*, but not in a foolish reckless manner so as to throw it away before his work was done. He retired until the time had come when nothing would stop his coming to Jerusalem to fulfill his Father's mission.

Augustine wrote: *"The passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the hope of glory and a lesson in patience. ..He loved us so much that, sinless himself, he suffered for us sinners the punishment we deserved for our sins. How then can he fail to give us the reward we deserve for our righteousness, for he is the source of righteousness? How can he, whose promises are true, fail to reward the saints when he bore the punishment of sinners, though without sin himself? Brethren, let us then fearlessly acknowledge, and even openly proclaim, that Christ was crucified for us; let us confess it, not in fear but in joy, not in shame but in glory."*

The way to glory and victory for us is through the cross of Jesus Christ.  
Are you ready to take up your cross and follow Christ in his way of victory?

*"Lord, may we your disciples be ever ready to lay down our lives in conformity to your will, to willingly suffer and die for you, that we may also share in your victory and glory."*

Why did Judas betray his Master? Was his treachery motivated by greed, bitter disappointment with Jesus or hatred because of disillusionment? It may be that Judas never intended for his Master to die. Maybe he thought Jesus was proceeding too slowly and not acting aggressively enough in setting up his messianic kingdom. Perhaps Judas wanted to force Jesus' hand by compelling him to act. Nonetheless, his tragedy was his refusal to accept Jesus as he was. Aren't we tempted to use God for our own purposes? It is not God who must change, but we must be changed by him. Jesus knew beforehand what would befall him. As Jesus ate the Passover meal with his twelve apostles he put them under trial and suspicion (one of you will betray me) to teach them to examine themselves rightly, lest they be high-minded and think themselves more strong than they were. We, also must examine ourselves in the light of God's truth and grace and ask him to strengthen us in faith, hope, and love that we may not fail him or forsake him when we are tempted. Do you pray with confidence in the words Jesus gave us to pray: *Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil?*

Every male Jew, who was of age and lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem, was bound to celebrate Passover every year in Jerusalem. This annual feast commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12). On that night the angel of death slew the first-born of the Egyptians; but he "passed over" the homes of the Israelites, because the lintel of their doors was smeared with the blood of an unblemished lamb sacrificed for the occasion. It was at Passover time that Jesus came to Jerusalem knowing he would be betrayed and put to death as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus fulfilled the Passover. His death and resurrection, which occurred at Passover time, redeems us from enslavement to sin, death, Satan, and the world. His blood, like the blood of the first Passover lamb, protects God's people from the angel of death and breaks the oppressive rule of Satan. Easter is the Christian Passover (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Do you celebrate the Passover with sincerity and truth (see 1 Cor. 5:7-8)?

*"God our Father, we are exceedingly frail and indisposed to every virtuous and gallant undertaking. Strengthen our weakness, we beseech you, that we may do valiantly in this spiritual war; help us against our own negligence and cowardice, and defend us from the treachery of our unfaithful hearts; for Jesus Christ's sake."*  
(Prayer of Thomas a Kempis)

APR 15, THURSDAY Mat 21:1-11; Mar 11:1-11; Luk 19:28-44; Joh 12:12-19

The Servant King

Luk 19:38

*"See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." Joh 12:15*

While the other Gospels refer to how the young donkey (colt) was obtained, only John mentions that 'Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it.' His riding into Jerusalem fulfilled the prophecy mentioned in Zechariah 9:9. It is obvious that Jesus deliberately set out to fulfil the prophecy. His purpose being to arouse the enthusiasm of the masses. However by riding into Jerusalem on a lowly colt, the foal of a donkey and not on a war charger. He indicated that He had not come as the conquering hero - the type of Messiah they long hoped for - but as the Prince of Peace. Who were the people who witnessed this visitation of Jesus?

First of all, there were those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These 'continued to spread the word' (v.17) regarding the miracle. Then there were the 'many people' who had gone earlier to Jerusalem for the feast and had 'heard that He had given this miraculous sign'. These went out to meet Him with palm branches, shouting 'Hosanna', greeting Him as King of Israel (vs 12-13. 18).The Pharisees reacted very differently. They were completely frustrated at the turn of events - 'Look how the whole world has gone after him' (v.19).They had originally decided to kill Him after the Passover Feast (Mar 14:2) but the excitement of the crowd was one of the factors that caused them to hasten the arrest and trial of Jesus. It is ironic but significant that He, the antitype of the Passover Lamb, should be earmarked for sacrifice at the time of the Passover Feast. Finally, we read that the disciples (who were also present) did not understand what was happening (v.16). Only after the death and resurrection of the Lord did they realize that it was all in accordance with God's plan.

The experiences of those involved in this episode may well reflect the conversion experience of Christians. Like the disciples, we need to understand and appreciate Christ's atonement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. Like the 'many people' who heard what Christ had done, we need to respond with our 'hosannas' and 'shouts' of gratitude. Like the crowd which saw the miracle of the 'dead' becoming 'alive', we too need 'to spread the word' (v.17).

**The conversion experience includes knowing (understanding),feeling (gratitude) and acting (spreading the word). Unfortunately, there are those like the Pharisees, who for various reasons, stubbornly reject the revelation of the Christ.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 15, THURSDAY Mat 21:1-11; Mar 11:1-11; Luk 19:28-44; Joh 12:12-19

## The Servant King

Luk 19:38

Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing full well what awaited him -- betrayal, rejection, and crucifixion. The people of Jerusalem, however, were ready to hail him as their Messianic King! Little did they know what it would cost this king to usher in his kingdom. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem astride a colt was a direct fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah (9:9): *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, and riding on an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass.* The colt was a sign of peace. Jesus enters Jerusalem in meekness and humility, as the Messianic King who brings victory and peace to his people. That victory and peace would be secured in the cross and resurrection which would take place in a matter of days at the time of Passover.

Psalms 24 is another prophetic passage which echoes this triumphal procession of the King of glory: *Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.* Jesus Christ came to bring us the kingdom of God. He is the true King who offers peace, joy, and everlasting life for those who accept his kingship. Does the King of glory find a welcome entry in your heart and home? Do your walls echo with the praise of his glory?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, may you always be the King of my heart and the Ruler of my home. Let your peace reign in my life that I may find joy in your presence now and forever."*

Do you know what makes for peace—the peace which produces lasting joy, security, and friendship with God? Jesus' earthly ministry centers and culminates in Jerusalem, the holy city, dwelling and throne of God (Jeremiah 3:17ff.); the place which God chose for his name to dwell there (1 Kings 11:13); and the holy mountain upon which God has set his king (Psalm 2). Jerusalem derives its name from the word "salem" which means "peace". The temple in Jerusalem was a constant reminder to the people of God's presence with them. Why does Jesus weep and lament for this city? God had sent them the prophets and now his only begotten Son. They did not understand God's word of judgment because of pride and unbelief. Its inhabitants did not recognize God's visitation in his Son Jesus. Jesus' entrance was a gracious visitation. Jerusalem's lack of faith, however, leads to its destruction. Jesus' lamentation and prophecy echoes Jeremiah's of the first destruction of Jerusalem and its first temple. Jeremiah's lamentation offered hope of deliverance and restoration: *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies are new every morning; great is your faithfulness* (Lamentations 3:21-22). Jesus' death and resurrection would bring about a new temple in the Holy Spirit, the church as the bride of Christ and the people of God. Do you recognize God's visitation today?

When God visits his people he brings justice and peace. God actively works among his people both to judge and change us and to save us from destruction, if we heed his warning and respond to his grace with faith and contrition. Are God's judgments unjust or unloving? *When God's judgments are revealed in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness* (Isaiah 26:9). To pronounce judgment on sin is much less harsh than what will happen if those who sin are not warned to repent. The Lord's mercy gives us grace and time to turn away from sin, but that time is right now. If we delay, even for a moment, we may discover that grace has passed us by and our time is up. Do you accept the grace to turn away from sin and to walk in God's way of peace and holiness?

*"Lord, you have visited and redeemed your people. May I not miss the grace of your visitation today as you move to bring your people into greater righteousness and holiness of life. Purify my heart and mind that I may understand your ways better and conform my life more fully to your will."*

APR 16, FRIDAY      Mat 21:12–22; Mar 11:12–26; Luk 19:45–48

Faith and Forgiveness

Mar 11:24

*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mar 11:24*

In this passage Jesus is not giving a formula for cursing fig trees. Rather, He is revealing the principle and priority of life. He is revealing to us the dynamic of a faith priority, the dynamic of a life of faith, so that we will not be cursed like that fig tree.

Faith should be the priority of our Christian living. God is calling us to a relationship with Himself, to communion with Him and fellowship with Him. He is calling us to a life of prayer, a life of trust, a life of faith. Through a relationship with Jesus Christ, we come to know God. Through daily communion with Him in prayer and reading His word, our faith is built up and grows strong. As we follow Jesus daily, we come to trust Him more. As we grow in that trust and in the knowledge of His word, we come to know His will. And when we know His will, we do not doubt, but we are able to pray in power, knowing the Lord hears us. And when we know His will, we know that those things for which we pray will be done, perhaps not according to our timetable, but they will come to pass.

To live a life of faith, we must also live a life of forgiveness. Unforgiveness, which is based on pride, is certainly one mountain that needs to be moved out of the way. Unforgiveness, in itself, is a block to our receiving forgiveness. V.26 in our text is also found in the Lord's Prayer. He says, 'But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, who is in heaven, forgive your transgressions.' Unforgiveness blocks our relationship with God. God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others. Unforgiveness blocks our faith. It blocks our power in prayer.

**We can avoid lifeless, fruitless religion by:**

- cultivating a life of faith
- developing our relationship with Jesus
- rekindling our first love
- coming to Him in humble repentance
- being willing to forgive and receive His forgiveness.

**Where are you in your relationship with God right now?**

**Do you see the emptiness of religion without a vital faith relationship with Jesus?**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 16, FRIDAY

Mat 21:12–22; Mar 11:12–26; Luk 19:45–48

Faith and Forgiveness

Mar 11:24

What do God's acts of judgments teach us? Do they inspire reverence for God, for his holiness and majesty? Few seem to pay much attention to God's judgments today. His acts of judgments, nonetheless, are intended to bring us into greater purity, holiness, and reverence for God's word of truth and love. Jesus went to Jerusalem, knowing he would meet certain death on the cross, but victory as well for our sake. His act of judgment in the temple is meant to be a prophetic sign and warning to the people that God takes our worship very seriously. In this incident we see Jesus' startling and swift action in cleansing the temple of those who were using it to exploit the worshipers of God. The money changers took advantage of the poor and forced them to pay many times more than was right—in the house of the Lord no less! Their robbery of the poor was not only dishonoring to God but unjust toward their neighbor. In justification for his audacious action Jesus quotes from the prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11).

His act of judgment aims to purify the worship of God's people and to discipline their erring ways. Despite the objections of the religious leaders, all the people present stood in awe of Jesus and they *hung upon his words*. The Lord disciplines and chastises us in love to lead us from the error of our ways to his truth and justice. *God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness* (Hebrews 12:10). Do you worship God with reverence and gratitude for his mercy and do you submit to his word with faith and obedience?

*"Lord, you open wide the door of your house and you bid us to enter confidently that we may worship you in spirit and truth. Help me to draw near to you with gratitude and joy for your great mercy. May I always reverence your word and give you acceptable praise and worship."*

Why did Jesus curse a fig tree? Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the Jews. Bad figs or a decaying fig tree was linked with evil deeds and spiritual decay. The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's unresponsiveness to the word of God. The prophets depicted the languishing fig tree as signifying the desolation and calamity of Israel due to her unfaithfulness to God (see Joel 1:7,12; Habakkuk 3:17; and Jeremiah 8:13). The history of Israel is one long preparation for the coming of the Promised One. But the promise is unfulfilled in those who reject Jesus through unbelief. (See also Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6-9). Jesus' cursing of a fig tree is a prophetic action against the faithlessness of those who rejected his message. For faith to be fruitful and productive, it must be nourished with the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; Col. 3:16) and be rooted in love (Galatians 5:6). Jesus' cleansing of the temple was another prophetic action. In this incident we see Jesus' startling and swift action in cleansing the temple of those who were using it to exploit the worshipers of God. The money changers took advantage of the poor and forced them to pay many times more than was right—in the house of the Lord no less! Their robbery of the poor was not only dishonoring to God but unjust toward their neighbor. In justification for his audacious action Jesus quotes from the prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11). His act of judgment aims to purify the worship of God's people and to discipline their erring ways.

After this incident Jesus exhorts his disciples to "have faith in God". They are to pray with expectant faith no matter how difficult the situation may be. The phrase "to remove mountains" was a common Jewish expression for removing difficulties. A wise teacher who could solve difficulties was called a "mountain remover". If we pray with faith God will give us the means to overcome difficulties and obstacles. If we want God to hear our prayers we must forgive those who wrong us as God has forgiven us. Do you pray with expectant faith?

*"Lord increase my faith and make my fruitful and effective in serving you.  
Help me to forgive others just as you have been merciful towards me"*

APR 17, SATURDAY

Mat 21:23-27; Mar 11:27-33; Luk 20:1-8

They Feared the People

Luk 20:7

*So they answered, "We don't know where it was from." Luk 20:7*

What a telling exchange between Jesus and the religious establishment! The question regarding the source of Jesus' authority comes from the chief priests (former high priests and priests with permanent duties in the temple), the teachers of the law (learned legal experts) and the elders (laymen drawn from the wealthy aristocracy). These leaders had their security shaken by the popularity Jesus was gaining among the people. This moment disclosed their motives. They had failed to recognize John's baptism as authentic. Many of them had refused to be baptized by John (7:30), thus privately declaring they did not need the baptism of repentance.

Now confronted by Jesus' piercing question (v.4), they hold a behind-the-scenes dialogue to formulate a politically correct answer. Their answer, pleading ignorance, was no more than an evasion of the truth that they knew was evident even to the people. Their response clearly revealed their duplicity as religious politicians, concerned with power and position, rather than the truth as revealed by Jesus.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus had given plenty of evidence about the true source of His authority (5:24, 11:20). His ministry was sufficient testimony. It was not due to any lack of evidence that they doubted. The leaders' show of religiosity was meant to please the people, not primarily to honor God. This is always a danger for those who have been Christian leaders for many years. It is easy for us to pay more attention to religious structures rather than to maintain God's truth, because that may make us unpopular. When this happens, our Christian witness is deeply compromised. Such a lack of integrity has serious consequences for the body of Christ. It takes deep courage and honesty to allow God to challenge our 'status quo', to humbly admit any mistakes and to honor God's truth.

**Pray for those in positions of Christian leadership, both in churches as well as Christian organizations. Ask God to help them remain faithful to His truth and to honor Him rather than find their security in popular opinion.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 17, SATURDAY

Mat 21:23-27; Mar 11:27-33; Luk 20:1-8

They Feared the People

Luk 20:7

Are you willing to take a stand for the truth, even when it costs? Or do you look for the safe way out? Jesus told his disciples that the truth would make them free (John 8:32). Why were the religious leaders opposed to Jesus' and evasive with the truth? Did they fear the praise of their friends and neighbors more than the praise of God for those who stand up to his truth?

The coming of God's kingdom or reign on the earth will inevitably produce conflict -- a conflict of allegiance to God's will or my will, God's way of love and justice or the world's way of playing fair, God's standard of absolute moral truth or truth relative to what I want to believe is good and useful for the time being. Why did the religious leaders oppose Jesus and reject his claim to divine authority? Their view of religion did not match with God's word because their hearts were set on personal gain rather than truth and submission to God's plan and design for their lives. They openly questioned Jesus to discredit his claim to be the Messiah.

If Jesus says his authority is divine they will charge him with blasphemy. If he has done this on his own authority they might well arrest him as a mad zealot before he could do more damage. Jesus, seeing through their trap, poses a question to them and makes their answer a condition for his answer. Did they accept the work of John the Baptist as divine or human? If they accepted John's work as divine, they would be compelled to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They dodged the question because they were unwilling to face the truth. They did not accept the Baptist and they would not accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Do you know the joy and freedom of living according to God's truth?

*"Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Let your light shine in my heart and mind that I may know your truth and will for my life and find freedom and joy in living according to it."*

APR 18, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

APR 19, MONDAY

Mat 21:28-46; Mar 12:1-12; Luk 20:9-19

God's Forbearance

Luk 20:17

*Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love: perhaps they will respect him.'* Luk 20:13

What does the long-suffering patience of God look like? In this parable, Jesus gives a vivid description: a landowner rented his vineyard to tenant farmers but when it was time to collect payment, he reaped only insults in the form of battered servants who were sent away empty handed. He finally decides to send his beloved son, in the hope of a more positive result. After the shameful treatment of his servants, this action seems imprudent, if not downright foolish and, indeed, his son is brutally murdered. This parable reviews Israel's history of response to God and God's activity in salvation. The nation is persistently unfaithful (Neh 9:26, Jer 44:4) and abuses the many prophets sent to them. They have no fruit to give God (13:6-9).

When we look back, we will surely remember times in our lives when we ourselves took advantage of God's provision. We were irresponsible with His gifts and treated Him like an absentee landowner, easily betrayed and cheated. Yet, in His loving way, God pursued us, sometimes for many years, before we responded to His loving overtures. In the Old Testament, God's forbearance and faithful love is beautifully expressed by the prophet Hosea (Hos 2:14-20). Before taking note of God's judgment (yes, continued rebellion will meet with certain judgment), it is important that we pause first to appreciate God's forbearance.

Sometimes, we easily lose patience with those who have yet to experience God's transforming grace. Sharing the Gospel includes being a witness to God's long-suffering love and patience for a lost world. It may not make sense to keep trying, to repeatedly extend grace to those who laugh in our face. But neither did it make sense for God to send His Son to those who would scorn and finally kill Him.

**In Scripture, God describes Himself as 'compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love' (Exo 34:6). How much of God's compassion and steadfast love have you experienced? How much of His forbearance are you willing to extend to others?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 19, MONDAY

Mat 21:28-46; Mar 12:1-12; Luk 20:9-19

God's Forbearance

Luk 20:17

What kind of future are you preparing for? Jesus encourages us to think -- to think about the consequences of our choices, especially the choices and decisions that will count not just for now but for eternity as well. The choices we make now will affect and shape our future, both our future on earth as well as in the life of the age to come.

Jesus tells a simple story of two imperfect sons to illustrate the way of God's kingdom. The father amply provided for his sons food, lodging, and everything they needed. Everything the father had belonged to them as well. The father also rewarded his sons with excellent work in his own vineyard. He expected them to show him gratitude, loyalty, and honor by doing their fair share of the daily work. The "rebellious" son told his father to his face that he would not work for him. But afterwards he changed his mind and did what he father commanded him. The "good" son said he would work for his father, but didn't carry through. He did his own pleasure contrary to his father's will. Now who was really the good son? Both sons disobeyed their father; but one repented and then did what the father told him. Jesus makes his point clear: Good intentions are not enough. And promises don't count unless they are performed. God wants to change our hearts so that we will show by our speech and by our actions that we respect his will and do it. God offers each of us the greatest treasure possible-- unending peace, joy, happiness, and life with him in his kingdom. We can lose that treasure if we refuse the grace God offers us to follow in his way of truth and righteousness. Do you respect the will of your Father in heaven?

*"Lord Jesus, change my heart that I may only desire that which is pleasing to you. Help me to respect your will and give me the strength, joy and perseverance to carry it out wholeheartedly."*

What is the point of the parable of the vineyard? Jesus' story about an absentee landlord and his not-so-good tenants would have made sense to his audience. The hills of Galilee were lined with numerous vineyards, and it was quite common for the owners to let out their estates to tenants. Many did it for the sole purpose of collecting rent at the right time. Why did Jesus' story about wicked tenants cause offense to the scribes and Pharisees? It contained both a prophetic message and a warning. Isaiah had spoken of the house of Israel as "the vineyard of the Lord" (Isaiah 5:7). Jesus' listeners would likely understand this parable as referring to God's dealing with a stubborn and rebellious people.

This parable speaks to us today as well. It richly conveys some important truths about God and the way he deals with his people. First, it tells us of God's generosity and trust. The vineyard is well equipped with everything the tenants need. The owner went away and left the vineyard in the hands of the tenants. God, likewise trusts us enough to give us freedom to run life as we choose. This parable also tells us of God's patience and justice. Not once, but many times he forgives the tenants their debts. But while the tenants take advantage of the owner's patience, his judgment and justice prevail in the end.

Jesus foretold both his death and his ultimate triumph. He knew he would be rejected and be killed, but he also knew that would not be the end. After rejection would come glory -- the glory of resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. The Lord blesses his people today with the gift of his kingdom. And he promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him (see John 15:1-11). He entrusts his gifts and grace to each of us and he gives us work to do in his vineyard -- the body of Christ. He promises that our labor will not be in vain if we persevere with faith to the end (see 1 Cor. 15:58). We can expect trials and even persecution. But in the end we will see triumph. Do you labor for the Lord with joyful hope and with confidence in his victory?

*"Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given us; for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother, may we know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, for you own sake."  
(prayer of St. Richard of Chichester, 13th century)*

APR 20, TUESDAY Mat 22:15–33; Mar 12:13–27; Luk 20:20–40

Majoring in the Minors

Mar 12:27

*Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” Mar 12:24*

The Bible is a living illustration of man’s tendency to major on the minors. Over and over in its pages, we see God calling His people back to Himself. In our text today, Jesus confronts the unbelieving Sadducees who were notorious for their lack of perspective. They were too focused on their own social status to focus on the things that were really important.

The Sadducees came to Jesus with a ridiculous question on the resurrection, which no one had been able to answer. Even though they did not believe in the resurrection (Acts 23:8), they used it to put Jesus in a bind. It was an unlikely scenario they described for Jesus, based on the law of levitate marriage (v 19) which was given by Moses in Deuteronomy 25.

It was an ancient custom whereby, if a married man died, his brother would marry the widow, thus preserving the family from dying out and keeping the family wealth intact. It was a convenient social custom. But the picture the Sadducees painted was a very unlikely one indeed. The question the Sadducees had was: whose wife would she be in the resurrection after seven husbands? Jesus, however, believed in the resurrection of the dead and He replied them in verse 24. He told them that they were greatly mistaken about the resurrection because of their ignorance of God’s word and power. The Sadducees were sidetracked on peripheral issues instead of concentrating on the things that really count - understanding the Scriptures and the power of God.

**Too often the church has spent too much of her time and energy on the man-made peripheral issues of the church and left out the more important issues.  
 What are some things that are neither important, necessary nor Biblical?  
 Look through them and see if you have neglected the more important things.  
 Pray that we will always have a clear understanding of God’s word and live by it.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 20, TUESDAY

Mat 22:15–33; Mar 12:13–27; Luk 20:20–40

Majoring in the Minors

Mar 12:27

What do we owe God and neighbor but to love and to give each what is their due (Romans 13:6-8)? The Jewish authorities sought to trap Jesus in a religious-state issue. The Jews resented their foreign rulers and despised paying taxes to Cesar. They posed a dilemma to test Jesus to see if he was loyal to their understanding of religion. If Jesus answered that it was lawful to pay taxes to a pagan ruler, then he would lose credibility with the Jewish populace who would regard him as a coward and a friend of Cesar. If he said it was not lawful, then the Pharisees would have grounds to report him to the Roman authorities as a political trouble-maker and have him arrested. Jesus avoided their trap by confronting them with the image of a coin.

Coinage in the ancient world had significant political power. Rulers issued coins with their own image and inscription on them. In a certain sense the coin was regarded as his personal property. Where the coin was valid the ruler held political sway over the people. Since the Jews used the Roman currency, Jesus explained that what belonged to Caesar must be given to Caesar. This story has another deeper meaning as well. We, too, have been stamped with God's image since we are created in his own likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). We rightfully belong, not to ourselves, but to God who created us and redeemed us in the precious blood of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Paul the Apostle says that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). Do you acknowledge that your life belongs to God and not to yourself? And do you give to God what rightfully belongs to Him?

*"Lord, because you have made me, I owe you the whole of my love; because you have redeemed me, I owe you the whole of myself; because you have promised so much, I owe you all my being. Moreover, I owe you as much more love than myself as you are greater than I, for whom you gave yourself and to whom you promised yourself. I pray you, Lord, make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge; let me know by love what I know by understanding. I owe you more than my whole self, but I have no more, and by myself I cannot render the whole of it to you. Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of love. I am wholly yours by creation; make me all yours, too, in love." (prayer of Anselm, 1033-1109)*

The Sadducees had one big problem — they could not conceive of heaven beyond what they could see with their naked eyes! Aren't we often like them? We don't recognize spiritual realities because we try to make heaven into an earthly image. The Sadducees came to Jesus with a test question to make the resurrection look ridiculous. The Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in immortality, nor in angels or evil spirits. Their religion was literally grounded in an earthly image of heaven.

Jesus retorts by dealing with the fact of the resurrection. The scriptures give proof of it. In Exodus 3:6, God calls himself the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He defeats their arguments by showing that God is a living God of a living people. God was the friend of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when they lived. That friendship could not cease with death. As Psalm 73:23-24 states: "I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory."

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the eternal truths of God's unending love and the life he desires to share with us for all eternity. Paul the Apostle, quoting from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 64:4; 65:17) states: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him," God has revealed to us through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The promise of paradise — heavenly bliss and unending life with an all-loving God — is beyond human reckoning. We have only begun to taste the first-fruits! Do you believe the scriptures and do you know the power of the Holy Spirit?

*"May the Lord Jesus put his hands on our eyes also, for then we too shall begin to look not at what is seen but at what is not seen. May he open the eyes that are concerned not with the present but with what is yet to come, may he unseal the heart's vision, that we may gaze on God in the Spirit, through the same Lord, Jesus Christ, whose glory and power will endure throughout the unending succession of ages."*  
(Prayer of Origen, c. 185-254)

APR 21, WEDNESDAY Mat 22:34-46; Mar 12:28-44; Luk 20:41-21:4

Love is a Many Splendored Thing

Mar 12:30-31

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these. Mar 12:30-31*

Often we are surprised when the simplest concepts turn out to be the most profound. Yet, that is often the case. Take love for example. It is so simple, yet it defies a simple definition. If there ever was a topic, which could qualify as the most thought about, written about, talked about, sung about, it is certainly love.

In His reply to the scribe, Jesus pulls together two well-known passages of the Old Testament. One concerns our love for God; the other our love for our neighbor. The key is found in verse 30: 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is where we begin. Without a love for God, we will never go on to love our neighbor. The same can be said of the church. A church can be large and powerful, doctrinally pure and hard working, but when a church loses its first love, all else counts for nothing.

Without a love relationship with God, all that we do become meaningless. Without a love relationship with God, we lack the motivation and the passion to do His work. There is a desperate need today for a passionate, hot-hearted, intense, consuming love relationship with God. We must live it. We must commit our lives to it. We must surrender all that we are to all that He is, and dedicate ourselves to live for Him. Pray that the love for God will so permeate all that we do in and out of the church.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

**Analyze the many things you are doing today. How many are motivated by your love for God and how many are motivated by self? Pray that God will change that. Let everything be motivated by your love for God.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 21, WEDNESDAY Mat 22:34–46; Mar 12:28–44; Luk 20:41–21:4

Love is a Many Splendored Thing

Mar 12:30–31

What is the purpose of God's law or commandments? The Pharisees prided themselves in the knowledge of the law and their ritual requirements. They made it a life-time practice to study the 616 precepts of the Old Testament along with the numerous rabbinic commentaries. They tested Jesus to see if he correctly understood the law as they did.

Jesus startled them with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. What does God require of us? Simply that we love as he loves! God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. God loved us first and our love for him is a response to his exceeding grace and kindness towards us. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God. The more we know of God's love and truth the more we love what he loves and reject what is hateful and contrary to his will. What makes our love for God and his commands grow in us? Faith in God and hope in his promises strengthens us in the love of God. They are essential for a good relationship with God, for being united with him. The more we know of God the more we love him and the more we love him the greater we believe and hope in his promises. The Lord, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new freedom to love as he loves.

Do you allow anything to keep you from the love of God and the joy of serving others with a generous heart? Paul the Apostle says: hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Romans 5:5). Do you know the love which conquers all?

*"Lord, your love surpasses all. Flood my heart with your love and increase my faith and hope in your promises. Help me to give myself in generous service to others as you have so generously given yourself to me."*

How could King David recognize the Christ as both his son and his Lord? Among the Jews the most common title for the Messiah was the Son of David. The Jews looked forward to the long-expected Savior who would come from the line of David. Jesus was often addressed with that title, especially by the crowds (Mark 10:47ff, Matthew 9:27; 12:23). David acknowledged that the Messiah would indeed come from his line as God had promised him. But David also prophesied in Psalm 110 that the Messiah would not simply be his son and heir, but his Lord and Redeemer who would rule, not just Israel, but all the nations as well.

How could David recognize the Messiah as both son and lord? Jesus proclaims that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired David (Matt. 22:43). David recognized from afar that the promised Messiah would not simply be a prince of David's line who would conquer lands and peoples like David himself. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, David recognized that the Messiah would be the true Son of God who would redeem his people and establish them as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal the true identity of Christ to all who will open their hearts and minds to receive this revelation.

Jesus points to himself as the true heir of David's throne and the true Lord of David as well. Paul the Apostle states that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Jesus did not come with an army to conquer nations and territories, but he came in the power of the Spirit to conquer the hearts of men and women for his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy (Romans 14:17). He won pardon and freedom for us through his sacrificial love and victory on the cross.

What does it mean to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord? The word Lord means "ruler" or "king" -- the one who is owed personal fealty, familial loyalty, and willing submission. Whether we recognize it or not, we indeed are all ruled by someone or something. The Lord or Master of our lives is the person or power we give our lives over to and submit to in a full way. We can be ruled by many different things -- such as our unruly passions (such as rage, lust, envy, pride, hatred, etc.), the love of money, alcohol, drugs, possessions, etc. Only one Lord can truly set us free to love and to be loved as God intended from the beginning. When we acknowledge that Jesus is Lord we invite him to be the Master of our heart and the Ruler of our thoughts and actions, relationships and home, and all that we do and say. Is the Lord Jesus the true Master and King of your heart and do you give him free reign in every area of your life?

*"Lord Jesus, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of David and the Son of God.  
You are my Lord and I willingly submit myself to your rule in my life.  
Be Lord and King of my life, my thoughts, heart, home, relationships, work and all that I do."*

APR 22, THURSDAY

Mat 24:1-51

Are You Ready?

Mat 24:42

*"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."  
Mat 24:42*

Some of us still have nightmares of sitting for exams for which we were not ready. What a relief it is when we wake up and discover it to be only a dream!

The nightmare scenario of what will happen to people who are not ready to receive Jesus when He returns is real. There is no way anybody can wake up one day and discover a completely different reality in life.

We are told in 2 Pet 2:5 that Noah warned the people of his day of impending judgement for their violent and corrupt ways. Knowing him to be a sane and righteous man, they ought to have taken his words seriously, but they chose not to. They carried on with life as usual to their own detriment (v.38, 39a). Likewise, those who reject the message of the Gospel will be totally unprepared to face Jesus when He returns (v.39b). At that time, the world's population will be divided, not according to race, color, status or wealth but according to whether they are ready to receive Jesus or not. Those who are ready will be taken away by Him (vs 40-41) while the rest will be left behind to face judgement.

Since Jesus mentions repeatedly (v.36, 42) that no one knows the time of His return (not even He), we should believe Him and not waste our time and money on speakers and books that attempt to work out the date of His return. Jesus says we are to, instead, 'keep watch' (v.42). There is a sense of urgency. The apostle Paul says we are to be alert and self-controlled (1 Thes 5:6). And if we happen to be leaders in church or in a Christian Fellowship, it will be to our benefit to take special note of verses 46-51. Leaders who nurture those under their care with gentleness and respect will be rewarded with greater responsibility while those who abuse or exploit them will be severely punished.

**Reflect on your readiness to meet the Lord when He returns.**

**Are you living your life with yourself at its center or is your life centered around Jesus?  
If you need to turn your life around, it is better to do it now because later may be too late.**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 22, THURSDAY

Mat 24:1-51

Are You Ready?

Mat 24:42

Do you take God's judgments lightly or seriously? When Jesus warned his disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and its holy Temple, he quoted from the prophet Daniel who prophesied the desecration of the holy place in Jerusalem as "an abomination that makes desolate" (Daniel 12:11). This came to pass around 170 BC when the king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, determined to wipe out the religion of Israel. He captured Jerusalem and set up an altar to Zeus in the temple court and sacrificed swine's flesh on the altar. He also turned the priests' room and temple chambers into public brothels. Jesus now prophesies that the holy place would be desecrated again. This time the destruction would be far worse for Jerusalem and its inhabitants. This time there would be no deliverance, no restoration nor purification. Jesus' advice was very practical - flee before the destruction comes!

When the Romans decided to destroy Jerusalem in 70 AD, they first cut off all food supplies to the walled city and allowed no one to escape. They then waited for its inhabitants to starve to death before they entered the city and destroyed it and leveled it to the ground. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, over a million inhabitants died. Josephus described in detail the siege and famine. "The famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just going to die looked upon those who were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. A deep silence, also, and a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city. ...And every one of them died with their eyes fixed upon the Temple." (Josephus, War of the Jews, 5.12.3)

While Daniel prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem because of the stubborn pride and rebellion of its inhabitants, he also foretold that God would send his Anointed One, the *Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven* to bring God's reign on the earth (see Daniel 7:13-15). Daniel's vision describes a royal investiture of a human king before God's throne. This king, whose authority comes from God, is given worldwide rulership and power which lasts forever. Many Jews in Jesus' time expected the Messiah King to come at any moment. Jesus warns his disciples that many false Christ's (the Greek form of the word for 'Messiah') and false prophets would lead people astray. The Jews were looking for the right sign to show them who the true Messiah would be. Jesus pointed to himself as the definitive sign of God's imminent kingdom.

Jesus illustrated his point with two parables or word pictures - how lightning strikes the earth and sky and how eagles search out their prey. When lightning appears in the darkened sky, its powerful surge of flashing energy and light and its piercing noise strike awe and terror. You don't need a special sign to make it visible or to show where it is striking. It manifests itself quite clearly. In like manner, when "the son of Man comes" it will be as clear as the lightning in the heavens. Jesus quoted a familiar proverb to his audience: *"Where the body is, there the eagles (or vultures) will be gathered together."* Eagles, like vultures, are attracted to carrion - dead or dying prey. The Book of Job describes the eagle spying out its prey from afar (Job 39:29). What's the point of this analogy? If we are not spiritually alive in Christ, then the Day of Judgement will catch us unprepared to meet the Lord when he comes to separate the "sheep from the goats" (Mat 25:31-33) and the "wheat from the weeds" (Mat 13:24-30).

Jesus used the image of a fig tree to teach his disciples an important lesson about reading the "signs of the times". The fig tree was a common and important source of food for the Jews. It bore fruit twice a year, in the autumn and in the early spring. The Talmud said that the first fruit came the day after Passover. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came he would usher in the kingdom of God at Passover time. The signs of spring are evident for all who can see. Just so are the signs of God's kingdom and his coming in judgment. The "budding" of God's kingdom begins first in the hearts of those who are receptive to God's word. Those who trust in God's word will bear the fruits of his kingdom. And what are the fruits of that kingdom? The kingdom of God *...is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17).

We do not know when the Lord will return again. But the Lord does give us signs, not only to "wake us up" as a warning, but also to "rouse our spirits" to be ever ready and eager to see his kingdom come in all its power and glory. The "Day of the Lord" will strike terror in those who reject the kingdom of God, but it will be a day of joy and rejoicing for those who long to see the Lord face-to-face. The Lord wants us to be filled with joyful anticipation for his coming. He surely comes to us each day and knocks on the doors of our hearts. And he will surely come again to establish his kingdom in all its fulness. Do you read the "signs of the times" with God's perspective and do you pray with joyful confidence for God's kingdom to come in all its fulness?

*"Lord, fill me with gratitude for the gift of redemption and increase my hope and longing for your return again in glory. May that day bring joy to my heart rather than sorrow. Help me to serve you faithfully and to make the best use of my time now in the light of your coming again."*

**Be Not Deceived**

**Mar 13:5**

*Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you." Mar 13:5*

The FBI, it is said, trains its agents to recognize counterfeit money by repeatedly examining the genuine dollar notes closely. It is not the failure to discern the fake but the inability to recognize the genuine that stumbles us.

Jesus gives us warnings of what will happen in the end times. If we do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, we will not be able to recognize Him and His voice (Joh 10:4,14) and we will become discouraged. Watch out! We will be persecuted. We need to stand firm, keep our faith and boldly share the Gospel and our testimony. Do not be fearful or anxious for God will never let us down; He will never let us be pushed beyond our limits (1 Co 10:13). The Spirit of wisdom and truth will always be there to help us.

If we are not careful and watchful, we will be misled. In Asia, these days, we have all sorts of internationally acclaimed preachers holding seminars and conferences for those who are eager to go deeper or catch the fire of God. Signs and wonders are often present in these meetings. Our spiritual antennae need to be properly tuned because Jesus repeatedly warns against false prophets and false teachers. These are meant to deceive even the elect of God.

The elect of God are those who have repented and accepted Christ as Lord. They imitate Christ, endure suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit, and model faith and righteousness. They believe the message, obey God’s word and live it out in their lives. They make every effort to grow in faith, goodness, knowledge, perseverance, godliness, self-control, brotherly kindness and love (2 Pe 1:5-7).

**What steps can we take to avoid being deceived by false teachers?**

**Pray for church leaders to be vigilant, that they may guard their flocks from false teaching.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 23, FRIDAY

Mar 13:1-37

Be Not Deceived

Mar 13:5

What does the Lord expect from us and are we ready to meet his expectations? The Lord Jesus told a story that was familiar to his followers -- the necessity for laborers to be ready for action and ready to give their best when the master returned from his journey. Were these servants excited or anxious about their master's return? The watchful servants looked forward to the future because they knew their master would be pleased and would reward them for their vigilance and hard work. Disaster and reprisal, however, awaited those who were unprepared because of carelessness or laziness.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that God will surely reward those who wait for him: "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who works for those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4). Our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, entrusts us with his gifts and grace and he expects to be ready for action and prepared for the future. Our call is not only believe, but to watch; not only to love, but to watch; not only to obey, but to watch! What are we to watch for?

The greatest event to come --the return of our Master and Lord Jesus Christ when he comes again in glory at the end of the age. The kind of watching our Lord has in mind is not a passive "wait and see what happens" approach to life. The Lord urges us to vigilance and to active prayer that his "kingdom may come" and his "will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We are not only to watch *for* Christ, but to watch *with* Christ. The Lord wants us to have our hearts and minds fixed on him and his word. He wants us to be ready for his action and grace in our lives and in our world. Those who "wait" for the Lord will not be disappointed. He will surely come with his grace and saving help.

Do you watch for the Lord's action in your life with expectant faith and with joyful hope?

*"Lord, awaken my heart and mind to receive your word and to prepare for your coming again. Free me from complacency, from the grip of sin and worldliness, and from attachments to things which pass away.*

*May I always be eager to receive your word and be ready to meet you when you came again."*

APR 24, SATURDAY

Luk 21:5-36

Be Prepared! Pray!

Luk 21:33

*Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. Luk 21:36*

The temple in Jerusalem was not just beautiful. It was the national and religious symbol of God's presence among His people and the heart of their worship. Yet, it was going to fall apart. As a good leader, Jesus does not leave His disciples unprepared for the difficult times ahead. He warned them about false messiahs, natural disasters and persecutions. At the same time, He assured them that He would be with them. Moreover, He will return in glory to bring about His reign of peace and justice. However, the time is not for us to know (Act 1:7).

The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. The persecutions prophesied by Jesus began soon after. Luke records many of them in the book of Acts. The apostle Paul and his fellow workers suffered much in the course of spreading the Gospel. In our own age, many are being persecuted for their faith. Natural disasters add to a seemingly gloomy picture of our world but we know that God is in control of the direction of history. Moreover, these are signs of Christ's imminent return.

As Christians, we are to be watchful and keep ourselves spiritually fit. Our minds and hearts can easily be dulled by careless living, or the excessive pursuit of pleasure to the extent of drunkenness and other addictive behavior. Even the normal cares of life can become a burden if we are not watchful. God's hand in history assures us that He determines the final outcome. We wait and watch with great anticipation, confident that Christ will return.

**What are the things that consume much of your time and attention? Commit these to God.**

**Pray for strength and resolve to endure to the end.**

**We have Christ's promises to be with us to the end of the age (Matt 28:20).**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 24, SATURDAY

Luk 21:5-36

Be Prepared! Pray!

Luk 21:33

Do you believe that the world as we know it is going to end just as Jesus foretold? Jesus' prophetic description of the end of time, the day of judgment, and the destruction of Jerusalem was not new to the people of Israel. The prophets had foretold these events many centuries before. Behold the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it (Isaiah 13:9-13; see also Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-18).

Jesus warns of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem for the rejection of the gospel. According to the historian Josephus, over a million inhabitants died when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem with its temple in 70 A.D. Jerusalem's vengeance resulted from her indifference to the visitation of God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 19:44).

Jesus also speaks about the judgment at the end of the world. Only spiritual blindness can keep us from recognizing the obvious signs of approaching disaster which awaits the day of judgment for those who refuse to heed God's word of grace and salvation. Jesus was completely honest. He told his disciples what it would cost to follow him. And he promised that he would never leave them alone, even in their time of tribulation. The saints and martyrs who underwent torment and death made their prisons a temple of praise and their scaffolds a throne to the glory of God. They knew the saving presence of Christ with them in all circumstances. Jesus offers us safety in the face of earth's threats. Not a hair of your head will perish (Luke 21:18). The disciple who walks with Christ may lose his body but not his soul.

The greatest gift we have to be thankful for is our redemption and adoption as children of God. Jesus Christ has redeemed us from slavery to sin, from fear of death, and from final destruction. We can be thankful because our hope is in heaven and in the promise that Jesus will return to fully establish his reign of peace and righteousness. Jesus speaks of the second coming as a known fact, a for certain event we can expect to take place. This coming will be marked by signs that all will recognize; signs which will strike terror in those unprepared and wonder in those who are ready to meet the Lord. When the Lord returns he will establish justice and righteousness and he will vindicate all who have been faithful to him. His judgment is a sign of hope for those who trust in him.

Do you hope in God and in his promise to return again to establish his reign over all the earth?

*"Lord, fill me with gratitude for the gift of redemption and increase my hope and longing for your return again in glory. May that day bring joy to my heart rather than sorrow. Help me to serve you faithfully and to make the best use of my time now in the light of your coming again."*

APR 25, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

APR 26, MONDAY

Mat 25:1-13

Locked Out !

Mat 25:13

I can still remember the night I locked myself out of my house. My wife and son had just left for the evening, and I had gone outside to close up the garage. When I went back to the house, I discovered that the door had blown shut. Everything was tightly secured. I had no choice but to remain out in the chilly air until my family returned.

As I sat there for several hours, I thought about how dreadful it will be for all who are "locked out" of heaven for eternity. Having waited too long and having never received Christ, they will suddenly face the terrifying reality that the door of salvation is closed to them forever!

In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus told of five who had prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. When he came, they "went in with him to the wedding" (Mt. 25:10). Later, however, when the five foolish virgins tried to go in, the door was shut! In response to their pleas, they heard him answer, "I do not know you" (v.12).

If Christ should return right now, millions would share a similar fate. What about you? Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (Jn. 10:9). Have you accepted forgiveness through faith in the Savior? Don't risk being "locked out"!

By **Richard DeHaan**

**The day of life is passing by,  
Soon night your soul will hide;  
And then "too late" will be your cry  
If you are just outside! —Rowe**

*It's never too early to receive Christ, but at any moment it could be too late!*

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 26, MONDAY

Mat 25:1-13

Locked Out !

Mat 25:13

Are you missing out on what's most important in life? Being unprepared can lead to a lot of unnecessary trouble and even disastrous consequences! What good is a life-jacket left on shore when the boat is sinking? Jesus' story of ten silly girls seems strange to westerners today. But his audience knew all too well how easily this could happen to them.

Wedding customs in ancient Palestine required extra vigilance and preparation for everyone involved. (Some near eastern villages still follow this custom.) The bride and groom did not go away for their honeymoon but celebrated for a whole week with their family and friends. It was the custom for the groom to come at his discretion and get his bride and bring her to the wedding party. If he came at night lamps were required by necessity. To show up for a night party without a wedding garment and a lamp is like showing up for a play or movie that requires a reservation and a ticket. You just don't get in without the proper pass. Can you imagine the frustration one experiences in traveling abroad and finding out you can't get into some country because you don't have a valid passport or visa.

Jesus warns us that there are consequences for being unprepared. There are certain things you cannot obtain at the last moment. For example, a student cannot prepare for his exam when the day of testing is upon him. A person cannot get the right kind of character or skill required for a task at hand unless he already possesses it. Our eternal welfare depends on our hearing, and many have trained themselves to not hear. We will not be prepared to meet the Lord, face to face, when he calls us on the day of judgment, unless we listen to him today. The Lord invites us to feast at his banquet table.

Are you ready?

*“Lord, make me vigilant and attentive to your voice that I may heed your call at all times.  
May I find joy in your presence and delight in doing your will.”*

APR 27, TUESDAY

Mat 25:14-30; Luk 19:11-27

The King's Servants are to be Found Faithful

Luk 19:26

*He replied, I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.' Luk 19:26*

The Bible tells us that we will have to give an account of our lives to God when we face Him. As Jesus draws near to Jerusalem, expectation rises that the kingdom will be decisively brought in (v.11). Jesus must inform His disciples that the full expression of kingdom authority will not come until His return, and He must explain what He expects of them in the meantime.

A man of noble birth goes to a far country 'to have himself appointed king and then to return.' He calls ten servants and gives each of them a mina (v.12-13). On his return, the first servant has earned ten more and the second five more. The third servant simply returns the mina, having hid it in a cloth, and explains why. Those who earn more are rewarded but what the third servant has is taken away. The third servant is called 'wicked' (v.22) and he is judged according to his own attitude.

The judgment is a time of blessing to those who have walked with God. We have nothing to fear if we have been faithful stewards and it will be a time for affirmation. God has given us abilities and resources (minas) through which to serve the church. We increase the benefits that come to the body through our applying these gifts. Jesus exhorts us here to apply ourselves fully to the task, so that in the day of His assessment, our stewardship may be an occasion for rejoicing (1 Cor 4:5).

**This is the last of the parables in Luke. So far, Jesus has been preparing His disciples for the climax in the Gospel story. Here He also prepares them for the timing of His coming again.**

**This parable is to teach us to be productive disciples until He comes. Is there anything we need to do so that we can give a good account to our Lord when He comes?**

**P.R.A.Y** PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 27, TUESDAY

Mat 25:14-30; Luk 19:11-27

The King's Servants are to be Found Faithful

Luk 19:26

What can economics and productivity teach us about the kingdom of heaven? Jesus' story about a businessman who leaves town and entrusts his money with his workers made perfect sense to his audience. Wealthy merchants and businessmen often had to travel abroad and leave the business to others to handle while they were gone.

Why did Jesus tell this story? Most importantly it tells us something about how God deals with us, his servants. The parable speaks first of the Master's trust in his servants. While he goes away he leaves them with his money to use as they think best. While there were no strings attached, this was obviously a test to see if the Master's workers would be industrious and reliable in their use of the money entrusted to them. Third, the master rewards those who are industrious and faithful and he punishes those who sit by idly and who do nothing with his money.

The essence of the parable seems to lie in the servants' conception of responsibility. Each servant entrusted with the master's money was faithful up to a certain point. The servant who buried the master's money was irresponsible. One can bury seeds in the ground and expect them to become productive because they obey natural laws. Coins, however, do not obey natural laws. They obey economic laws and become productive in circulation. The master expected his servants to be productive in the use of his money.

What do coins and the law of economics have to do with the kingdom of God? The Lord entrusts the subjects of his kingdom with gifts and graces and he gives his subjects the freedom to use them as they think best. With each gift and talent, God gives sufficient the means (grace and wisdom) for using them in a fitting way.

As the parable of the talents shows, God abhors indifference and an attitude that says it's not worth trying. God honors those who use their talents and gifts for doing good. Those who are faithful with even a little are entrusted with more! But those who neglect or squander what God has entrusted to them will lose what they have. There is an important lesson here for us. No one can stand still for long in the Christian life. We either get more or we lose what we have. We either advance towards God or we slip back.

Do you earnestly seek to serve God with the gifts, talents, and graces he has given to you?

*"Lord, be the ruler of my heart and thoughts, be the king of my home and relationships, and be the master of my work and service. Help me to make good use of the gifts, talents, time, and resources you give me for your glory and your kingdom."*

APR 28, WEDNESDAY

Mat 25:31–46; Joh 12:20–50

Not Judge But Savior

Joh 12:25

*"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."*  
 Joh 12:46

In chapters 2–12 of John’s Gospel, Jesus presents His claim, as having come from God, both by His words and His works, but the Jews, by and large, do not believe in Him. John, commenting on the attitude, gives the reasons for their unbelief. Quoting the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53), he says it is a fulfilment of the prophecy made by the prophet 700 years earlier. Quoting him again, John gives the reason for their unbelief.

Their eyes had been blinded and their hearts deadened (Isa 6:10).The result will be that they (the Jews) will not respond and be 'healed' (saved). John, however, comments that some of them, even among the Jewish leaders, 'believed' in Jesus, but were not prepared to confess their faith in Him publicly for fear of being ostracized and excommunicated' for they loved praise from men more than praise from God' (v.42–43).

Jesus' final comment is that whoever believes in Him, believes in God who sent Him. He did not come into the world to judge it but to be a light so that mankind by believing in Him need not grope in spiritual darkness and be cut off from God. But a day will come when those who reject the word He has spoken will be judged by the word. What He speaks is by command of God and His command leads to eternal life.

The great danger of consistently rejecting or neglecting God's message is that one can become 'Gospel hardened'. Jesus reiterates that it is not He but it is that rejected word that will bring condemnation 'at the last day'. What He says is what the Father has told Him to say.

There are many today who reject the message of the Gospel for various reasons. Some question the Lord's credentials ('Who is this 'Son of Man'?' v.34); others reject the words He spoke (v.48) and yet others, though they believe, will not confess their faith for fear of being ridiculed, rejected or persecuted or because they love men's praise rather than God's (v.42–43).

**As Christians, we need to faithfully proclaim the word regardless of negative reactions.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 28, WEDNESDAY

Mat 25:31–46; Joh 12:20–50

Not Judge But Savior

Joh 12:25

Do you allow the love of God to rule in your heart? Augustine says, “Essentially, there are two kinds of people, because there are two kinds of love. One is holy the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal Him.” Jesus came not only to fulfill the law, but to transform it through the gift of the Holy Spirit who fills our hearts with the love of God (Romans 5:5).

Do you allow God’s love to purify your heart, thoughts, and actions?

Jesus’ story about the separation of goats and sheep must have unsettled his audience. In arid lands goats and sheep often grazed together during the day because green pasture was sparse. They were separated at night because goats needed shelter. Goats were also less docile and more restless than sheep. They came to symbolize evil and the expression scape-goat has become a common expression for someone bearing blame for others. (See Leviticus 26:20-22 for a description of the ritual expulsion of sin-bearing goat on the Day of Atonement.)

Separation is an inevitable consequence of judgement. The Day of Judgement will reveal who showed true compassion and mercy toward their neighbor. As much as we might like to judge the parables, the parables, nonetheless, judge us. Jesus teaches us a very important lesson about loving our neighbor and taking responsibility for others. God will judge us not only for the wrong we have done but also for what we have failed to do. Now is the time of God’s mercy for seeking his help and grace to turn away from sin and to walk in his way of love. Ask the Lord to purify your heart that you may love as he loves and live charitably with all.

This parable is similar to the parable about Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man let Lazarus die on his doorstep and was doomed to crave for drops of cold water he had not thought of giving to the poor man.

When Martin of Tours (who lived in the 4th century), a young Roman soldier and seeker of the Christian faith, met an unclothed man begging for alms in the freezing cold, he stopped and cut his coat in two and gave half to the stranger. That night he dreamt he saw the heavenly court with Jesus robed in a torn cloak. One of the angels present asked, "Master, why do you wear that battered cloak?" Jesus replied, "My servant Martin gave it to me." Martin’s disciple and biographer Sulpicius Severus states that as a consequence of this vision Martin “flew to be baptized” .

God is gracious and merciful; his love compels us to treat others with mercy and kindness. When we do something for one of Christ's little ones, we do it for Christ.

Do you treat your neighbor with mercy and love as Christ has treated you?

*"Lord Jesus, be the Master and Ruler of my heart.  
May your love rule in my heart that I may only think and act with charity towards all."*

APR 29, THURSDAY

Mat 26:17-19; Mar 14:12-16; Luk 22:7-13

The Preparation ...

Luk 22:13

Lest we have doubts, these few verses reminds us that Jesus knew what he was getting into. Nor are we talking only about the foresight that prompts him to tell his disciples on several occasions that he will meet his death in Jerusalem.

Rather, we are at the level of something far more mundane: making arrangements to celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples in Jerusalem, the hotbed of the controversy surrounding him and stronghold of his opponents.

Some, I imagine, may read this passage as indicating Jesus' predictive ability – that he was prophesying that his disciples would meet a certain man who had a room available for them. But I think this was, as I said, far more mundane.

Anticipating his desire to spend the Passover – and, indeed, the last moments of his earthly life – with his disciples, Jesus had made plans ahead of time and now directed his disciples to execute those plans.

Mundane. But also courageous. It's one thing to respond to difficult or dangerous events that come upon us unexpectedly with a burst of sudden courage. It's another to see the difficulty and danger a great distance off and walk steadfastly toward it, facing the mounting fear and anxiety that such a fate occasions.

This is what these verses reveal: the mundane details of a courageous man who embraced his destiny in faith and confidence...all out of love for us.

**Dear God, encourage us through the example of Jesus' courage; strengthen our faith as we witness his; increase our love as we recognize his love for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**P.R.A.Y**

PRAY &amp; PRAISE | READ &amp; REFLECT | ASK &amp; APPLY | YIELD &amp; YAKHAL

APR 29, THURSDAY

Mat 26:17–19; Mar 14:12–16; Luk 22:7–13

The Preparation ...

Luk 22:13

In Matthew 26:17, the disciples raise the question about preparing for the Passover. According to the next verse, Jesus answered, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; at your [home] I will observe the Passover with my disciples.'" While not expressed in question form (as in Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:11), the words in Matthew 26:18 do convey the basic thought about the observance of the Passover meal in the owner's house. Moreover, all of the accounts are highly condensed. At least in part, the differences may be attributed to paraphrasing in Greek what was said in another language.

Only Matthew 26:18 includes the statement, "My time is near." These words reflected Jesus' awareness that the time had come for him to lay down his life for the world of mankind.

According to Luke (22:8, 9), Peter and John, after Jesus told them to make preparations for the Passover meal, asked him where they should do so. The narration in Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 represents the disciples as asking the question. It is possible that the question was raised before Jesus designated Peter and John to make preparations and then a second time by the two disciples (with Peter [as on other occasions] acting as the spokesman). The other possibility is that Luke 22:8-11 provides the chronological sequence, with Jesus first telling Peter and John to make the needed preparations for the Passover meal.

Many have attempted to explain why Matthew, Mark, and Luke refer to Jesus as observing the Passover with his disciples, whereas John 18:28 indicates that those who led Jesus to Pilate had not as yet eaten the Passover meal. The Scriptures and other extant ancient sources, however, do not provide sufficient details to account for this in a definitive way.

APR 30, FRIDAY Mat 26:20–29; Mar 14:17–25; Luk 22:14–22

The Lord’s Supper

Luk 22:19–20

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many," he said to them. Mar 14:22-24*

The Lord Jesus instituted the Lords Supper on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover Lamb. The Lord Himself was the Passover Lamb (Joh 1:29) and all the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah who was King but also a suffering Servant (Isa 53) were about to be fulfilled in Him.

It was an unimaginably sorrowful evening for the Savior. The agonies of the cross lay ahead of Him. One of the 12 men who had shared His life was now going to betray Him. All of them would fall away (v.27) and Peter would disown the Savior three times (v.30).

The evening was also part of the most important week in the life of the Lord Jesus, and for us His church. Inscrutably resolute in His mission, the Lord Jesus gives thanks for the bread and cup (v.22–23) and declares the new covenant sealed by His blood (v 24).The disciples would only understand after all the events had unfolded and after the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection of the Lord. Jesus spoke about His resurrection but a befuddled Peter reacted in rash bravado (v.29,31).

Let us partake of the Lord’s Supper with sobriety and reverent awe. Guard against carelessness and frivolity. But don’t forget the joy. Unmistakable joy! The Savior has died and risen again for me. My sins are forgiven. I am my Lord’s and He is mine.

**Lord, forgive me for the times I’ve come to Your Table carelessly. Please renew a right spirit within me and enable me to partake with sobriety, reverent awe and joy.**

<b>P.R.A.Y</b>	PRAY & PRAISE   READ & REFLECT   ASK & APPLY   YIELD & YAKHAL

APR 30, FRIDAY

Mat 26:20-29; Mar 14:17-25; Luk 22:14-22

## The Lord's Supper

Luk 22:19-20

Matthew ties the last supper meal with Jesus' death and the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus transforms the Passover of the old covenant into the meal of the "new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to their Creator.

Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine, who was both priest and king (Genesis 14:18), prefigured the offering made by Jesus, our high priest and king. The unleavened bread at Passover and the miraculous manna in the desert are the pledge of God's faithfulness to his promises. The "cup of blessing" at the end of the Jewish Passover meal points to the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Jesus gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup when he instituted the "Lord's Supper" or "Eucharist". He speaks of the presence of his body and blood in this new meal. When at the Last Supper Jesus described his blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28), he was explaining his coming crucifixion as a sacrifice for sins. His death on the cross fulfilled the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. That is why John the Baptist called him the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" Jesus made himself an offering and sacrifice, a gift that was truly pleasing to the Father. He "offered himself without blemish to God" (Hebrews 9:14) and "gave himself as a sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). This meal was a memorial of his death and resurrection.

Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum - giving his disciples his body and his blood (John 6:51-58). Jesus' passing over to his Father by his death and resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Last Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the church in the glory of God's kingdom. This is the most significant meal of Jesus and the most important occasion of his breaking of bread. In this meal Jesus identifies the bread as his body and the cup as his blood. When the Lord Jesus commands his disciples to eat his flesh and drink his blood, he invites us to take his life into the very center of our being (John 6:53). That life which he offers is the very life of God himself.

Jesus' death on the cross, his gift of his body and blood in the Supper, and his promise to dine again with his disciples when the kingdom of God comes in all its fullness are inseparably linked. Jesus instructed his disciples to "do this in remembrance of me". These words establish every Lord's Supper or Eucharist as a "remembrance" of Jesus' atoning death, his resurrection, and his promise to return again. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Our celebration of the Lord's Supper anticipates the final day when the Lord Jesus will feast anew with his disciples in the heavenly marriage feast of the Lamb and his Bride.

Do you know the joy of the drinking Christ's cup and tasting the bread of his Table in sincerity?

*"Lord Jesus, you are the "Bread of Life" and the "Cup of Salvation". May I always follow in the narrow way of the cross toward the heavenly banquet where you will seat all the elect at the table of your kingdom."*

MAY 1, SATURDAY

Luk 22:23–30; Joh 13:1–30

The Servant Leader

Luk 22:26

*But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. Luk 22:26*

Jesus makes a simple yet powerful statement about the Christian definition of authority. It must have grieved Him. In the midst of sharing His last meal with His disciples, and reflecting on His coming suffering, the disciples began arguing over who was number one among them. This issue must have been an ongoing discussion among the disciples. Matthew and Mark have recorded this dispute in earlier settings (Mar 10:41–45, Mat 20:24–28).

Jesus points to the character of His own ministry. In the culture of His time, the greater person, the master, sits at table, while the lesser serves (v.27). Instead, Jesus has been among them 'as one who serves' (v.27). This is the spiritual legacy He leaves His disciples. He served the people with great compassion and He would soon demonstrate a service of even greater proportions, in laying down His life. John 13 tells us that before the meal, Jesus washed His disciples' feet as an act of humble service. His words are deeply rooted in personal example (Phil 2:5–11).

In our world today, leaders wield power and authority and seek glory and honor for themselves. People of rank and position expect and even demand to receive service and are offered the opportunity to 'call the shots'. The kingdom of God, however, does not operate according to power politics. Christians in positions of authority are mere stewards of the gifts they have been given to enable them to serve others. Biblical leadership is about humility and service. True greatness in God's eyes is not defined by position or office but by one's attitude towards service. God exalts those who humble themselves by serving the people they lead. Christianity must not sell out to the world's model of authority. The world's way of achieving honor and power has no place in God's kingdom.

**What kind of leader are you? What kind of follower are you? Pray that whether we lead or follow, we may always serve others with a spirit of humility.**

**P.R.A.Y****PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & 'YAKHAL'**

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MAY 1, SATURDAY

Luk 22:23–30; Joh 13:1–30

The Servant Leader

Luk 22:26

As Jesus' hour of humiliation draws near he reveals to his disciples the supreme humility which shaped the love he had for them. He stoops to perform a menial task reserved for servants -- the washing of smelly, dirty feet. In stooping to serve his disciples Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of them and that the rest would abandon him through disloyalty. Such knowledge could have easily led to bitterness or hatred. Jesus met the injury of betrayal and disloyalty with the greatest humility and supreme love. Jesus loved his disciples to the very end, even when they failed him and forsook him. The Lord loves each of us unconditionally. His love has power to set us free to serve others with Christ-like compassion and humility. Does the love of Christ rule in your heart and thoughts and in your actions?

*"Lord Jesus, your love conquers all and never fails. Help me to love others freely, with heart-felt compassion, kindness and goodness. Where there is injury, may I sow peace rather than strife."*

How do you treat people who have caused you grief or disappointment, especially those who might be related to you in bonds of friendship or kinship? In his last supper discourse, Jesus addressed the issue of fidelity and disloyalty in relationships. Jesus knew beforehand that one of his own disciples would betray him. Such knowledge could have easily led Jesus to distance himself from such a man and to protect himself from harm's way. Instead, Jesus shows affection and loyalty to those who were his own, even to the one he knew would do violence to him through betrayal. Jesus used a quotation from Psalm 4:9 which describes an act of treachery by one's closest friend. In the culture of Jesus' day, to *eat bread* with someone was a gesture of friendship and trust.

Jesus extends such friendship to Judas right at the moment when Judas is conspiring to betray his master. The expression *lift his heel against me* reinforces the brute nature of this act of violence. Jesus loved his disciples to the end and proved his faithfulness to them even to death on the cross. Through his death and resurrection Jesus opened a new way of relationship and friendship with God. Jesus tells his disciples that if they accept him they also accept the Father who sent him. This principle extends to all who belong to Christ and who speak in his name. To accept the Lord's messenger is to accept Jesus himself. The great honor and the great responsibility a Christian has is to stand in the world for Jesus Christ. As his disciples we are called to speak for him and to act for him. Are you ready to stand for Jesus at the cross of opposition and hostility?

*"Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)*

Jesus' disciples were put to the test as Jesus prepared to make the final and ultimate sacrifice of his own life for their sake and for all the world. What was different between Peter and Judas? Judas deliberately betrayed his Master while Peter, in a moment of weakness, denied him with an oath and a curse. Judas' act was cold and calculated. Peter, however, never meant to do what he did. He acted impulsively, out of weakness and cowardice. Jesus knew both the strength of Peter's loyalty and the weakness of his resolution. He had a habit of speaking with his heart without thinking through the implications of what he was saying. The treachery of Judas, however, is seen at its worst when Jesus makes his appeal by showing special affection to him at his last supper. John says that Satan entered into Judas when he rejected Jesus and left to pursue his evil course. Satan can twist love and turn it into hate. He can turn holiness into pride, discipline into cruelty, affection into complacency.

We must be on our guard lest Satan turn us from the love of God and the path which God has chosen for us. The Holy Spirit will give us grace and strength in our time of testing. If we submit to Jesus we will walk in the light of his truth and love. If we turn our backs on him we will stumble and fall in the ways of sin and darkness. Are you ready to follow Jesus in his way of the cross?

*"Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart which no unworthy thought can drag downwards; an unconquered heart which no tribulation can wear out; an upright heart which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow upon me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ, our Lord."*  
(Prayer of Thomas Aquinas)

MAY 2, SUNDAY

*Sunday Worship Celebration*

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

“HE APPOINTED TWELVE THAT

*they might be with him*

AND THAT HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH AND TO  
HAVE AUTHORITY TO DRIVE OUT DEMONS.”

MARK 3:14-15



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