

We have just completed the accounts from the Gospels regarding the early life and works of Jesus. Like the first four books of the New Testament, The Dots Connected devotionals will continue into the many miracles and parables of Jesus as well as the Sermon on the Mount. Dig in, enjoy, and continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

Week 14 The Samaritan Woman at the Well-----

----- Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read John 4:1-11

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

When Jesus meets someone who needs His touch, He often uses their situation to bring out the Gospel. Jesus knew this woman was a slave to her sin and He was meeting her where she was. He didn't allow her sin, status, or anything else get in the way of

telling her the truth. Most Christians associate with people who act, vote, talk, and have the same interests as they do. We often avoid those not like us.

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

Day 2

Read John 4:12-15

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

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

James Proctor said, "I've tried in vain a thousand ways, my fears to quell, my hopes to raise; but what I need, the Bible says, is ever, only Jesus." The Samaritan woman knew about Jesus, but was so consumed in her sin, she didn't understand what Jesus was saying to her. She wanted from Jesus what no one else could give her.

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

Day 3

Read John 4:16-24

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

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

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

Day 4

Read John 1:25-42

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

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

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

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

Day 5

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

Today we look both at the Old and New Testament. Our account this week has taken us to Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman. Jesus wasn't concerned about His being a Jew and she a Samaritan, or that He was a man and she was a woman. He was more concerned with what was in her heart.

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

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

WEEK 15 GOOD NEWS----- Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Luke 4:14-21

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

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

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Luke 4:22-30

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

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 4:31-37

James 2:19 tells us even demons believe in God and they tremble. We are reminded that putting our trust and hope in Jesus is what saves us, not simply having intellectual knowledge or belief of Him. Again, the demons believe in Jesus. In fact, they knew who Jesus truly was, even calling Him, "...the Holy One of God." **(Luke 4:34)**

In this account, a man had been held captive by demons for some time. Jesus released him from the demons. Jesus has done the same for us. Before becoming believers, we were held captive by our sin and disobedience to God. When our eyes were opened and we saw the truth of how our sin and the enemy held us captive, Jesus freed us. When we put our trust in Jesus, we are set free from the enemy. While we still live in a sinful and fallen world and we may be tempted to return to our sinful ways, God will deliver us if we call on Him. Just as He delivered the man from the demons, God has delivered us from our sin.

Notice how the news of Jesus' actions spread. (Luke 4:37) When one man was healed of demon possession, the truth of God spread throughout the area. When God works in a person's life, whether in difficult times or in times of special blessings, God's name is lifted high for all to see. I have recently seen God's work in several situations and God used those situations to draw others to Himself. Even in our struggles God is working.

Take some time today and thank God for delivering you from your sin. If there are sins you struggle with, lay them at God's feet and ask Him to help you. When you see God working in your life, you can know He is using your situation, difficult or blessed, to refine you and maybe even to draw others to Himself.

Day 4

Read Luke 4:38-44

In **Luke 4:43**, Jesus says, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” Not long ago, we looked at 2 Corinthians 5:20 which instructs believers to be Christ’s ambassadors and for us to spread the gospel. **Romans 10:14-15** says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” Jesus was sharing the good news because others had not heard; He was doing His father’s will. What about you?

Often people say, I will go to _____ (insert whatever country or city) when God calls me. I believe we should pray for God’s direction in going on mission with Him to share the gospel. However, we don’t have to pray about whether or not God wants us to go, for He has commanded us when He said, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel” (**Mark 16:15**). We have already been charged with the responsibility and privilege to share the gospel to those across the street and around the world. The question is, “Am I doing it?” Are you? Are you sharing with your neighbor, your friend, coworker, family and others around the world? Where and with whom would God have you share His love?

Many of you might need to jump on the opportunity of a short term mission trip to China, Canada, or Russia, in partnership with the church. Maybe others need to chaperone a youth national trip to get their feet wet. Whatever the case, would you stop and ask God how He might want you to be on mission with Him? Would you be open for anything? If you are physically unable to go, would you pray and give so others can go? Pray and be open, for “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...” (**Luke 10:2**)

Day 5

Read Ezekiel 37:24-28

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

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

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

WEEK 16 THE MIRACULOUS CATCH-Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read John 1:40-51

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

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

These passages indicate there is a two-step process. First, someone comes to Jesus and follows Him. Then, those who come and follow Him bring others to follow Him. This is the process the Lord God intended. This is His plan to take the good news to the whole world. It was never intended to be mass communication, one

telling hundreds or thousands at a time. That method is well and good, but the original plan was for each person to tell their family, friends, and others. This is the process of multiplication. One tells one, then they each tell one until the globe is eventually covered.

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

Day 2

Read Luke 5:1-9

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

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people from Peter's boat. Peter and the others had been fishing all night. When Jesus told them to launch the boat out into deep water and throw in their fishing nets, Peter balked, saying, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing." **(Verse 5a)** If he had stopped there, he would have missed a miracle. Instead of making excuses and disobeying, Peter said, "...Nevertheless at your word I will let down my net." **(Verse 5b)** The result was such a huge catch that his nets began to break and he had to call his partners in another boat to come and help him. They filled both boats with so many fish that their boats began to sink. This confirmed to Peter that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. Although his brother Andrew had already told him, "We have found the Messiah," **(Luke 1:41)** now he was convicted and convinced. He fell on his knees confessing his sin and asked Jesus to go away from him because he was a sinner.

Notice a few things. First of all, Peter was made aware that Jesus was the Messiah. He was not just any man. When this became a reality to Peter, he was convicted of his sin and fell down before Jesus, confessing his unworthiness to have Jesus in his presence. The Lord only saves the undeserving. Peter brought nothing to Jesus except his sin. The same is true of you and I.

Second, notice there is often a thin line between obedience and disobedience. Obedience opens the way to experience God's power. Peter complained, but obeyed. Too often people complain and stop there. They miss out on seeing what only the Lord God can do. Sometimes, complaining becomes a way of life. Live in the presence of Jesus. Regularly confess your sin and carry on trusting Him to show Himself great for His name's sake.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 5:10

On Wednesday each week, we see how the week's accounts connect to the gospel. Simply stated, the gospel is the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to accomplish our salvation.

Jesus set Peter up to experience the Lord's grace. Peter obeyed the words of Jesus, went back out to cast his nets, and was blessed with an amazing catch of fish. Peter was so overwhelmed with the miracle and the presence of Jesus that he fell down and confessed his sin. Instead of judging and condemning Peter, Jesus told him, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men." (**Luke 5:10**) Jesus comforted Peter telling him he did not need to fear. Jesus knew He had come to be Peter's forgiveness so he had no need to fear. Jesus also told him he would now be catching men. In a similar situation recorded in Matthew and Mark, Jesus told Peter, James and John that they would be fishers of men. Peter was no longer a sinner deserving judgment but a fisher of men, pointing others to Jesus and His saving grace.

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

Do not focus on your weaknesses. We are unworthy of all He has done, but don't focus on that. Allow Jesus to reassure you so you no longer live as a person characterized by sin, but as one who is winning people to Jesus. Make the connection! It's a miraculous catch indeed!

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

Day 4

Read Luke 5:11

What a way to close down your fishing business! Peter, James, and John were fishermen and had just experienced their biggest catch ever! They were going out on top. They were leaving the fishing business to follow Jesus. Luke records that when they got back to shore they left behind their normal way of life to follow Jesus. They had heard Jesus was the Messiah, but now they had seen for themselves this great miracle of the huge catch. Nothing would ever be the same. They now had a new normal. Normal does not have to be boring.

I spoke with a man the other day that had spent about thirty years as a pastor and was now working with the North American Mission Board. He said he got bored being a pastor. At first, I was shocked and somewhat insulted. Then, I realized he was in the same kind of work, just in a different way. You see, there are people who are pastors, missionaries, seminary professors, student pastors, worship leaders, and many other kinds of church workers that are all fishers of men. There are also school teachers, business owners, mechanics, realtors, construction workers, bankers, insurance people, and so many other kinds of workers. As believers in Jesus Christ, we all have the same calling, to be fishers of men. We should all be catching people for Jesus. We may have different venues, but the task is the same, connecting people to Jesus.

Don't get bored. Keep praying, sharing, and inviting people to Jesus in the way that works best for you and for them. He has called you. He is faithful. Start fishing—for people.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 43:8-13

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

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

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

WEEK 17 JESUS HEALS THE PARALYZED MAN---

-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Luke 5:17-20

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

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

When Jesus saw their faith He said, "... Man your sins are forgiven you." (**Luke 5:20**) Jesus saw their faith, the faith of the man's friends and the faith of the paralyzed man. It is important to have godly friends who lead you to the Lord and not away from Him. When we are in trouble and cannot do for ourselves, godly friends will not leave us, but will help lead us to Jesus. We should all want friends like this, friends that will help us with our real needs.

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

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

Day 2

Read Luke 5:21-23

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

Jesus was the Son of God and He was trying to help the religious leaders see this. Not only in this instance, but in Verse 22 we see that Jesus knew the leaders thoughts even before they spoke, so He asked them “...why are you reasoning in your hearts?” This should have been more proof He really was who He said He was. Jesus can forgive sins and He can heal. He knows what is in the hearts and minds of all people.

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Luke 5:24-26

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

Verse 26 says others were amazed and glorified God saying they had seen strange things that day. The religious leaders might have praised God as well, thinking this man was just a prophet. Most likely, they were probably mad trying to figure out who this man was. If He was just a prophet, He couldn't forgive sins.

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

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

Day 4

Read Matthew 9:1-8

Psalm 139:1-5 says, “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.”

Today, we are reading Matthew’s account of Jesus healing the paralytic man. Read Verse 4 again, “...But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said ‘why do you think evil in your heart?’” Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking. Jesus knows what you and I are thinking right now, what we have thought in the past, and what we will think in the future. He knew the thoughts of Adam and Eve and knew they would choose to sin and disobey Him rather than to obey. He knows all of our thoughts and actions, good and bad and yet He still chose to die for our sins. He wants to know us and be in a relationship with us.

Jesus, knowing the thoughts of the religious leaders, told them what they were thinking and had an answer for their questions, even before they asked them. Jesus knows our every thought, even the ones we are thinking right now. Do your thoughts glorify God? Are your thoughts what God desires? Are your thoughts ungodly and of this world? Do your thoughts lift up Jesus or bring down the things of Jesus? Be thankful that Jesus knows your thoughts and actions and still chose to die for you! Thank Him that He, using the direction of the Holy Spirit, can direct your thoughts if you yield to Him. Take some time to pray and ask God to help you match your thoughts and actions with the very heart, mind, and thoughts of Jesus, so all you do glorifies Him.

Day 5

Read Psalm 119:97-104

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

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

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

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

WEEK 18 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—THE BEATITUDES-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 5:1-12

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

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

The beginning of each beatitude contains high ethical standards and practices which are not contrary to Christian living; in fact, it expresses the mind of Christ which should be the mind of the Christian also. The great principles set down here are profitable for the Christian to study and learn, but he can never attain them in his own strength; he must go elsewhere to look for the power. What you have in the Sermon on the Mount is a marvelous electric light bulb, but you do not have the generator that produces the

power that will make the light. And it is the light, not the bulb that is all important.¹

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

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

¹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Day 2

Read Matthew 5:13-16

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

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

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

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

Be salty, shine, and give glory to Jesus!

Day 3 CONNECT TO THE GOSPEL

Read Matthew 5:17-20

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

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

Do you ever look around and think you will never be as good as another person? I have talked to many people who feel they cannot measure up. Jesus made it clear that our righteousness had to be better than that of the religious leaders. Is that impossible? No, because Jesus is our righteousness! There is no righteousness by accomplishment. Jesus has come to give you His righteousness, a righteousness which is received not achieved.

Thank the Lord God for salvation that is a gift, rather than an accomplishment.

Day 4

Read Matthew 5:21-28

Jesus chose a couple of the Ten Commandments to point out to the religious leaders they were sinners. No matter how good they thought they were, they were still guilty sinners. Most people could safely say they have never broken the commandment against murder. Murderers are going to be judged. I don't even know a murderer, however, Jesus took the law further when He said that anyone who has been angry without cause is guilty. He went on to say that calling someone a derogatory name like fool was guilty as well. Jesus was not just dealing with the act, but with the heart and attitude behind the action. I can now honestly say that everybody I know has committed murder. You may never murder a person by literally killing them, but you might murder them in your heart.

We are really in trouble! Jesus went on to talk about adultery. He said you do not have to be physically involved with someone you are not married to in order to commit adultery; you commit adultery by lusting after someone. It is a heart thing. Jesus wanted people to know that all have sinned. It is a matter of what is on the inside, not just what we actually do.

A true follower of Jesus is one who knows he cannot be perfect through his own efforts. Instead, a true follower trusts in the good work of Jesus. He gives us His righteousness when we trust in Him. We have no hope of keeping God's rules by our own power. Our hope is totally in Jesus.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 55:1-13

Connecting the prophets and the Psalms to both Jesus and the gospel is a very enlightening part of our dot-connecting. When Jesus cast out demons in Luke 4:34, the demons called Jesus *the Holy One of God*. In today's passage, Isaiah referred to the *Holy One of God* in Verse 5. Isaiah also gave an invitation for the thirsty and hungry to come drink and eat without having to spend money. Jesus spoke in the beatitudes, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst." (**Matthew 5:7**) Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (**John 6:35**)

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

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

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

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

WEEK 19 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES----- Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 5:38-42

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

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

Bill Bright says, "If a Roman soldier saw a Jewish man or boy, he could command them to carry his backpack or burden for a mile. The Jewish boy or man was required by law to carry the soldier's burden for a mile. However, most Jews would not carry this

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Matthew 5:43-48

In today's passage, Jesus told the multitudes, particularly the Jews, to love not only those who love you, but your enemies as well. I don't know about you, but that does not come natural for me. It is not natural to love those who are unkind, unloving, or simply impolite to me. I can't do it; God must do it through me.

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Romans 5:8-10

Today, we connect our study straight to the Gospel, the Good News. Romans 5 speaks of Christ taking our place on the cross. We know Jesus didn't sin, but He became sin for us and He took our punishment. **Verse 8** tells us "God demonstrated His love for us, for while we were sinners Christ died for us."

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

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

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

Day 4

Read Matthew 5:48

We have been looking at Jesus' sermon to the multitude this week as He preached on loving our enemies. He told the crowd to love not only those like them, but to love those that were not like them, even their enemies. He got to the end of His thoughts on this and said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (**Matthew 5:48**) I imagine some in the crowd were confused. I imagine people like the Pharisees were also angry because they thought they were better than most of the others and they knew they couldn't love people who were not holy like them. Many of them probably thought, I can't love everyone perfectly. Neither can we. We may want to or try hard to, but we can't. Some people are easier to love than others. Jesus makes it very clear in this passage that it's the difficult ones which are hard to love, but we are to do it anyway. How do we love these people? Through Jesus! How can we be patient with them? Through Jesus! How can we be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect? Through Jesus!

We can't love our neighbors or our enemies perfectly. We can't be 100% perfect like Jesus and we certainly can't do it on our own. Jesus worked this out at the cross. When we place our faith in Him, we are made right and we are seen as perfect through Jesus. Even after salvation, we struggle with sin and will continue to until the day we die or the day Jesus comes back, whichever comes first. Until then, with the love and grace He's given us, we can be perfect through His blood and we can offer that love and grace to others. Today, let us be perfect as our Father is perfect. Not by our own actions, but by what Jesus has done for us. In doing so, we can truly show and offer God's love and grace to others.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 50:5-6

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

What is our Father's will? We see it clearly stated, the greatest commandment is to love God with all we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission, we are instructed to go and make disciples. In doing this we can and should expect to be persecuted and laughed at just like Jesus. If we are followers of Jesus, this reaction should not be a surprise. We should respond with grace and dignity, all while speaking the truth. Jesus spoke truth to all around Him, yet He did so peacefully and with a right and holy heart. We know what God wants and desires for us to do as we spend time with Him and grow in Him. Buck Parsons recently said, "So many are looking for special revelation from God while it sits on their shelves gathering dust." Ouch, but so true! How are we to respond when ridiculed or laughed at like Jesus? First, because we know how Jesus would respond, we spend time with Him and His Word, then we know how to love and respond as He wants us to.

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

WEEK 20 THE LORD'S PRAYER-----Dennis Watson

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

DAY 1

Read Matthew 6:1-6

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

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

Prayer is not for show. It is not for public consumption. In fact, prayer is not seeking our will at all. We can tell the Lord what we want, but our prayer, in the end, should be as it was with Jesus. When it was time for Him to go to the cross, He struggled. He

begged His Father that if there was any other way to “...take this cup from me; nevertheless not my will but Yours, be done” (**Luke 22:42**). Jesus’ number one motivation was for His Father’s will to be done. He prayed His desires, but surrendered to His Father’s will. If it was true for Him, it must be true for us. That is why Jesus warned us against making prayer about us, but to keep it about His Father.

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

Day 2

Read Matthew 6:7-13

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

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

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

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

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

The next part does not refer to our salvation when we read, “And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” **(Verse 12)** “He is speaking here to those who are already saved, those who already have the nature of God. He does not wait for you to forgive before He forgives. This is not His method of settling the sin question. He gave His Son to die, and it is on this basis that God forgives.”² Our desire should be to give others what we have already received—forgiveness.

“And Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” **(Verse 13)** These are two sides of the same coin. We will be tempted, but the prayer is “Don’t leave us there, deliver us.” Don’t abide in temptation. Join God in seeking to flee the enemy.

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

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

²Through The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Day 3

Read Matthew 6:14-15

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

The point of the words in Matthew 6:14-15 is that the basis of believers forgiving others is the extent to which they are aware of how much their own forgiveness cost Jesus. He was not saying that *if* you forgive you will be forgiven. He was saying that *since* you have been forgiven, you should live from that reference point and forgive others. How much have you been forgiven? It is immeasurable! Therefore, forgive others as you have been forgiven. Paul said it this way, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” **(Ephesians 4:32)**

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

Day 4

Read Matthew 6:16-18

Sin is an ongoing struggle for all people. The Bible makes it clear that all people are sinful. Not everyone struggles with drugs, alcohol, immorality and the like. However, we all struggle with the root of sin—pride. It may show up in jealousy, envy, or seeking attention for ourselves. Jesus addressed this sin in these passages. He gave a warning for us not to be like the hypocrites. This was the same warning we saw in day one this week. Jesus said when a person fasts they should not try to look like they are fasting. Some people fasted and sought to have a sad and down-cast look on their face. These people were attracting attention to themselves. They looked like this for the recognition of other people. Jesus said that was the extent of their reward—the attention and perhaps praise of other people. Jesus said to wash up so as not to have the look of one who had been fasting.

Jesus is dealing with motive and goal. The hypocrite's motive was to impress people and the goal was to receive the praise of people. Instead, Jesus says our motive should be to please God and the goal is to bring glory to God. The ultimate outcome is a reward from the Lord in eternity. One reward was momentary and temporal, the other was lasting and eternal. Which are you seeking?

The Lord's rewards are not always immediate. Delayed gratification is not a very popular thing these days. The immediate is the praise of people, we need to trust the Lord for His reward. Allow your relationship with Jesus to be the motivation and the goal of your life. Paul said it this way: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." **Colossians 3:23-24 (NKJV)**

Make it your prayer that everything you do will be for His glory and honor.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:8

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

The words of Verse 8 speak of His arrest and His judgment, which was a complete mockery. All this was done because of our sins so that He, being taken away from life, accomplished the taking away of our sins. This whole section of prophecy about my Savior is so vivid. The last part of Verse 8 paints the picture in a very personal way. He was stricken, which means He was punished. This was done for our transgressions, our sins. Jesus went through all of this suffering for my sins! His arrest, the mock trial, beating, rejection, and ultimately the crucifixion, was in my place. Do you get the picture? There is an old gospel song titled, "When He Was On The Cross, I Was On His Mind." While this is true, this passage, and many others, tell me that I was on His mind long before He was on the cross. From before the beginning of history, I was already on His mind. It was with the unfolding of His-story that it became a reality.

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

"He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken."
Isaiah 53:8 (NKJV)

WEEK 21 TREASURES IN HEAVEN-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 6:19-24

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

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

Jesus reminded us that treasures on this earth will one day rot away or be gone, but our relationship with God and the things we do out of love and obedience for God, will not. (Verses 19-21) In fact, He told us to lay up treasure in Heaven where they are not destroyed. (Verse 20) Later in the New Testament, it speaks of

rewards in Heaven based on a pure love and service for God. In other words, know and follow God, obey Him, and let your heart and mind be pure in the process. If we are so focused on treasures on this earth which will one day be gone, we will not be storing up treasures in Heaven. Let us serve God today through the way we love our family, do our job, spend our money, and spend our time. After all, we can't serve two masters; God wants all of our hearts and our minds. Who do you serve? Take some time to ask God to refocus your priorities and even shift what you may spend your time and money on so it will be focused on God.

Day 2

Read Matthew 6:25-32

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Matthew 6:33

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

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

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

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

Day 4

Read Matthew 6:34

Warren Wiersbe says that the “Christian life is not a playground, it is a battlefield.” While God knows, cares, and provides for His children, we still face trouble and difficulties because we live in a sinful world. In the first several verses of this week’s passage, we were reminded we are not to worry, but instead to seek God with all we have. Jesus went on to admonish His listeners that they were not to worry about the distant or near future, not even tomorrow because today gives us enough to worry about.

If we are not careful in reading this last verse, we might think that all we are going to face is trouble. No doubt we will face trouble, but we don’t need to borrow trouble from tomorrow. Rather, we need to deal with today. The enemy wants us to worry about tomorrow, next month, and next year while God instructs us not to and to take each day as it comes. We need to trust God and understand that He is in control so we can have peace. We will face struggles and difficulties each day; we don’t need to borrow them from tomorrow. The enemy will try to get us off course by turning our focus to future troubles.

We also need to be reminded of Jesus’ words in **John 16:33**, “In this world you will face trouble, but take heart I have overcome the world.” Jesus told us we would face trouble. We should expect it and not be surprised by it. God has overcome the world, so He will give us what we need to make it through. Most importantly, when we spend eternity with Him in the New Heaven and Earth, there will be no more trouble because Redeemer God has overcome the world and the enemy. Because we know God, we are overcomers as well.

As you begin or end your day, don’t borrow trouble from tomorrow. Don’t seek to solve all the world’s problems and don’t dwell on trouble that is not here yet. Deal with today, seek God and trust Him. He is in control! Ask God to help you keep your heart and mind where it needs to be today and trust Him with the future.

Day 5

Read 2 Samuel 22:1-4

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

When we face trouble, we can trust God that He will protect us and be our guide. It may not be exactly the way we think it should be, but it will be as He sees fit. Many of the words David uses seem to have similar meanings, like rock, fortress, refuge and stronghold. David recognized that God was his anchor. God kept him in a safe place. Although he spent time running from his enemies, he still knew God was protecting Him. While I am sure David was scared at times, he knew that God would hold him in place.

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

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

WEEK 22 THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS----- -----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 7:15-20

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

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

False teachers who teach false doctrine can produce only a false righteousness. Their fruit is fake and cannot last. The teachers themselves are false; the closer we get to them, the more we should see the falsity of their lives and doctrines. They magnify themselves, not Jesus Christ, and their purpose is to exploit people, not to edify them. The person who believes false doctrine or who follows false teachers will never experience a changed life. Unfortunately, some people do not realize this until it is too late.

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

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

Day 2

Read Matthew 7:21-23

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

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

Often the question asked is, “Do you know Jesus?” The question could mean do you know about Him, or do you know about salvation? Some even equate the question with church attendance or religious activity. Perhaps a better question is the focus of this passage of scripture—“Does Jesus know you?” The people described were apparently busy about religious activity. They were doing wonderful things. Jesus said the day would come when He would say to them, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

Matthew 7:23 I have often said that I do not want people to doubt their salvation unless they can. I must say that I have tried, but I know Jesus has done a work in me and lives in me. There is no other explanation of the transformation that has happened and continues to happen.

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Matthew 7:24-27

In Matthew 7:13-14, we have a picture of two ways. Then in Verses 17-18 we see two trees. Jesus then closes this section with a vivid picture of two builders and their houses. The two ways illustrate the start of the life of faith; the two trees illustrate the growth and results of the life of faith here and now; and the two houses illustrate the end of this life of faith, when God shall call everything to judgment. There are false prophets at the gate that leads to the broad way, making it easy for people to enter. But at the end of the way, there is destruction. The final test is not what we think of ourselves, or what others may think. The final test is: What will God say?³

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

³ TheBible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-New Testament Volume 1

Day 4

Read Matthew 7:28-29

What do you think of when you hear the word authority? It brings to my mind a school administrator, police officer, or a boss. These are the authority; they are in charge. After Jesus had finished teaching, Matthew records the people were amazed because Jesus spoke as *one having authority*.” He was not teaching mere ideas, He was teaching the truth.

A person who speaks with authority may be speaking on behalf of someone in authority. They may also be speaking of firsthand experience. Jesus had both. He had been with the Father who is the God of all things. He also had firsthand experience of being One with the Father from all eternity and He spoke the words the Father had given Him to speak.

In the second half of **John 8:28** Jesus says, “I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.” He says something similar in **John 12:49**, “For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”

The people realized that Jesus was speaking with authority and they were amazed.

Now what about us? When I speak my opinion on things, I speak with limited authority. I am only expressing what I know with my limited knowledge. When Jesus spoke He spoke words which came from His Father. He spoke with authority because He was doing as the prophets were doing when they said, “*Thus says the Lord*.” I have discovered that I, too, can speak with authority when I speak what the Lord God says in the Bible. We, too, can speak as to say “*thus says the Lord*.”

Do you ever feel ridiculous when you tell people what you believe and the reason you believe it is because it is in the Bible? Well, at least we have the Bible. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the Old Testament prophets when they gave messages

from God proclaiming “Here is what God says?” When people asked, “Where did you get that?” the prophets would say, “from God.” The response was probably very cynical. Again, when we speak what God says, at least we have the authority of the Bible!

Day 5

Read Isaiah 51:5-8

In their past, Israel had been delivered from their enemies on several occasions. The first was from Egypt in the event known as the Exodus. The Lord had saved them from foreign enemies and delivered them from captivity, but each time they disobeyed again. These verses look to Israel's future. The Lord tells them about a righteousness and salvation to come that will be eternal. Isaiah recorded that the earth will wear out like a garment and the heavens will disappear like smoke. He also said people will die. "For the moth will eat them up like a garment, And the worm will eat them like wool; But my righteousness will be forever, and my righteousness will not be abolished." **(Verse 8)**

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

WEEK 23 A HOUSE DIVIDED CANNOT STAND

-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read Mark 3:20-26

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

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

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

Then came the Jewish religious leaders. Their attack was suggesting He was full of Beelzebub. Beelzebub was a particularly contemptible deity and his name was used by the Jews as an epithet for Satan. In other words, the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of being

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

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

Day 2

Read Luke 11:17-22

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

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Luke 11:23-26

This passage is very similar to the others we have already read this week. Jesus was telling a parable about neutrality. He says, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” (**Luke 11:23**) Just like in Jesus’ day, people today want to come across as being neutral. He explains being neutral does not work. Religious people all seem to have the same problem which is trying to be neutral on the issues which really matter. Neutrality is a spiritual black hole. According to astronomy, a black hole is a region of space having a gravitational field so intense that no particle matter or electromagnetic radiation can escape. If we are making a spiritual application a black hole is a place people get sucked in by spiritual neutrality; their impact for spiritual advancement disappears without a trace. It is not possible in this spiritual war to be neutral because neutrality means standing against Jesus. We are either for Jesus or against Him. We are either gathering or scattering. I have said for many years that there is coming a day of separation within the church. For those who are truly with Him, it will be evident, but those who are just hanging out, their true colors will be revealed.

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

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

Warren Wiersbe explains it this way:

“There are two spiritual forces at work in the world, and we must

choose between them. Satan is scattering and destroying, but Jesus Christ is gathering and building. We must make a choice, and if we choose to make no choice, we are really choosing against Him.”⁴

⁴ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - New Testament, Volume 1.

Day 4

Read Matthew 12:31-32

“God could never forgive me.” How often does this statement come up? People will stay away from God, His church, and other believers because they feel and believe they have committed the unpardonable sin. The only place in scripture where a sin is said to be unforgivable, is in Matthew 12:31. What is the sin God will not forgive? Is there an unpardonable sin? Do you think you have committed it? Jesus was speaking of blasphemy **against the Holy Spirit**. Blasphemy is defiant irreverence. Here, He referred to attributing to Satan the works of Jesus. Such sins as cursing God or willfully degrading things considered holy would be blasphemous.

A host of preachers, biblical scholars, and theologians believe what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 was a circumstance, which cannot be duplicated because Jesus is not physically walking on the face of the earth today. While this particular sin may have been possible only when Christ was physically present on earth, in a broader sense there is no hope left for anyone who persistently rejects the convicting work of the Spirit. The only thing that is unforgivable is to remain in a state of unbelief. The only unpardonable sin is to die in such a state.

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

Consider a few passages:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Day 5

Read Philippians 1:27-2:4

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

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

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

Please pray for and seek the unity of the faith.

WEEK 24 THE FOUR SOILS-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 13:1-9

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

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

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

Word, and he ends up having no time for it. The good ground portrays the one who hears, understands, and receives the Word—and then allows the Word to accomplish its result in his life. The man represented by the ‘good ground’ is the only one of the four who is truly saved, because salvation’s proof is fruit (Matthew 3:7-8; 7:15-20).”⁵

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

⁵ <http://www.gotquestions.org/parable-sower.html>

Day 2

Read Matthew 13:10-16

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Matthew 13:17

Sometimes we may wish we could have experienced what Noah experienced, or been alive during Abraham's time, or maybe even walked through the Red Sea when it was parted by God. Our passage today tells us many prophets and righteous men desired to see Jesus in person and experience the Messiah for themselves, but were not able as they grew old and passed away. Many godly men, women, and prophets knew of the Messiah (Jesus), but didn't physically see Him. They were never able to read of His account in the Gospels like we do. While the prophets and those who went before us had God's words through the Torah and the prophetic writings, we have been blessed to have the whole account from Genesis to Revelation.

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

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

Day 4

Read Matthew 13:18-23

These verses help us clearly see that only one soil bears fruit. The person represented by this soil hears the word, understands it, and then produces fruit.

The main difference between the good soil and the bad soils is the fruit the good soil produces. The other soils produce no fruit because the roots never took hold; they never dug deep, so difficulties and the stresses of life withered them away. Jesus told us as believers, we will bear fruit. In other words, God in us will bear much fruit. In **John 15:4-5** Jesus says, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” We are not the ones who bring forth the fruit; we are just the instruments in which the fruit grows. Jesus is the One that brings fruit (growth and life change), as we allow Him to work in us.

What kind of fruit are you bearing? Is it rotten fruit or is it godly fruit? I want to be a Christian in whom Jesus brings forth good fruit. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice patience.” (**1 John 1:6**) As believers we are all to have fellowship with Jesus and such fellowship brings forth godly fruit which grows and benefits others. Is God bringing forth good fruit in you? If not, ask Him what needs to change. How might He speak to you so good fruit can be produced? Remember that God brings the fruit, we are just to follow and be obedient to Him.

Day 5

Read Psalm 14:1-7

If you turn to Romans 3:10-12, you will read some of the same verses which are found in our passages today. In the first five verses of our text today, we read the author's words regarding the foolishness of those who are ungodly, particularly those who say there is no God.

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

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

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

WEEK 25 THE HIDDEN TREASURE-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read Matthew 13:31-33

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

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Matthew 13:34-35

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

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

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

Common sense tells us that God will reveal things to a person who really believes in Him and draws near Him—things that He cannot reveal to a person who ignores, neglects, and could not care less about God. Therefore, Christ puts it very simply: *"It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [unbelievers] it is not given."* God does not reward unbelief; He rewards belief and trust.⁶

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

⁶ Preachers Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary Matthew 1

Day 3

Read Matthew 13:44

The common interpretation of this parable is that the sinner finds Christ and gives up all he possesses to gain Him and be saved but this interpretation presents several problems. To begin with, Jesus Christ is not a hidden treasure. He is perhaps the most well known person in history. In the second place, the sinner cannot find Christ, for he is blind and stubborn (Rom. 3:11). It is the Savior who finds the lost sinner (Luke 19:10). No sinner could ever purchase salvation! Please note that the man in the parable did not purchase the treasure; he purchased the whole field. "The field is the world..." (**Matt. 13:38**). Must the lost sinner purchase the world to gain Christ? Does he hide Him again? Can he?

Once again, Old Testament symbolism assists us in our interpretation. The treasure is the nation of Israel. (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4) Israel was placed in the world to bring glory to God, but it failed. It became a nation hidden, a treasure not being invested to produce dividends for God. Jesus Christ gave His all to purchase the whole world in order to save the nation (John 11:51). On the cross, Jesus died for the whole world, but in a particular way, He died especially for Israel (Isa. 53:8). The nation suffered judgment and it seemed destruction, but in God's sight it is hidden and will be revealed again in glory.

There is, then, a future for Israel. Politically, the nation was reborn on May 14, 1948, but the nation is far from what it ought to be spiritually. God sees Israel as His treasure, and one day He will establish her in her glorious kingdom.⁷

This parable is a wonderful picture of the mystery of Israel and the next is a picture of the mystery of the church. I figured Warren Wiersbe could do the best job of explaining this. "Jesus is the One who purchased the world. God loved the world so much He bought the whole thing with His Son in order to get Israel!" Jesus purchased the whole world to get the treasure, Israel, and He also got the pearl of great price, the Church. Thank God for His amazing love!

⁷ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-New Testament -Vol.1

Day 4

Read Matthew 13:45-46

Like the parable yesterday, this parable is different than we often think. Sinners are not looking for salvation. The merchant in this parable cannot be the sinner because he has nothing with which to pay. To go even further, salvation and Christ are not for sale. In this parable, the merchant is Jesus Christ. He left His heavenly home to come to earth to find the pearl of great price. He found sinners and paid the ultimate price in dying for them. He sold all He had to purchase us. In **2 Corinthians 8:9** Paul writes about Jesus, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

The pearl in the parable represents the church. The church is the body of believers which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. A pearl is not like other gems. It is a unity and is formed over time by suffering. The church is a unity—many parts made up of many members. It has been formed over time and was the result of the suffering of Jesus on the cross and the suffering of many believers over these 2,000 years.

Christ has been forming His church and this continues today. Jesus sold all He had to purchase the church, His pearl of great price. Are you a part of the body of Christ? He came seeking you. You did not and are not seeking Him. He came seeking you to purchase you with His body and blood. He did this because you are of great price to Him. He paid that price! Give thanks that Jesus values you so much.

Day 5

Read Amos 9:5-15

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

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

Here is how Warren Wiesrbe describes it:

“But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one king. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord.”⁸

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

⁸ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Prophets

WEEK 26 JESUS CALMS THE STORM---Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read Luke 8:22-25

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

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Luke 8:26-33

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

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Luke 8:34-39

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

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

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

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

Day 4

Read Luke 8:40-56

As we have seen in prior weeks, Jesus had (and has) the authority to heal. In the account we read today, Jesus was the One who healed both the woman and raised Jarius' daughter from the dead. It was Jesus who did it, but look at the avenue by which it was done. Jesus told the woman "...your faith has made you well." **(Verse 48)** Later, Jesus told the people and Jarius, "...only believe and she will be made well." **(Verse 50)** Notice both of these responses come from Jesus as only He had the authority to speak like this. This was no name it and claim it, pie-in-the sky belief or faith. This was true as God said it.

The channel by which these two things happened was faith and belief. It wasn't why they were healed, but it was the channel that was used for the act to flow through. The faith of the people didn't cause the healing; Jesus wanted to strengthen their faith in Him when He healed the woman and the girl.

When we are saved, we simply put our faith and belief in what God has already done for us. The focus is not us, it's not that our faith or belief is great. Jesus is the One who is great and has done the work. However, there is an action required on our part, which is to believe and put our faith in Jesus. Jesus, Himself is the object. Our faith and belief is how that object is received.

Thank God today for what He has done for you. He has healed you from your sins. He has saved you from a life of torment, much like He saved the woman and the little girl. All we do is put our faith and belief in Him. God does the work. Once we put our faith in Him, we then follow Him, knowing He has all that we need. Thank God today for saving you.

Day 5

Read Psalm 23

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

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

David said the Lord was his Shepherd and David knew shepherding well. Many of the things David did for his sheep, God does for us. He allows us to rest, He quiets our hearts and souls, and He leads us down the correct path, not letting us go to the left or the right.

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

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

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