

As we continue our journey through The Dots Connected, we are looking at the work of Jesus. Jesus came to do His Father's will and His work. Jesus told a group of religious leaders, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." **John 5:16** This volume begins with the acknowledgement that Jesus is sovereign over demons. We learn that even the demons and Satan, himself are under His control. He even uses their antics to accomplish His purposes and plans. We will continue studying about His miracles and teachings and then conclude with the raising of Lazarus. Dig in and allow God's Word to transform you!

WEEK 27 JESUS CONTROLS DEMONS-----Dennis Watson

Jesus said that knowing the truth sets us free. This is applied to many of the specific truths we find in God's Word. This week we will look at some truths about Satan, the devil, and demons. The greatest truth regarding these invisible powers and persons is that they have been defeated already and they are subject to the one true sovereign God.

"What may not be widely known is that Lucifer was already defeated the moment he sinned. He was defeated strategically, since as one of God's creatures he would be forced to depend upon God for his continued existence. Any power he would exercise would always be subject to God's will and decree. Thus moment by moment he would suffer the humiliation of knowing that he could never be the ultimate cause of his existence and power."¹

Day 1

Read Acts 2:22-24

Who is in control? This is a good question. Is this world in which we live subject to fate, evil, or good? I believe this question was answered at the cross of Jesus Christ. This week, we look at how the demonic forces are, like everything else in all of creation, subject to the sovereign control of God. In his book "God's Devil," Erwin Lutzer gives a concise statement regarding God's sovereignty and evil:

"My first premise is that God has absolute sovereignty in His universe. That means that even evil is a part of the larger plan of God. Of course, I do not mean to imply that God either does evil or approves of it. However, I do mean that by virtue of His role as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God is the ultimate (though not the immediate) cause of all that comes to pass."²

¹Lutzer, Erwin W. God's Devil (pp.13-14). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

²Lutzer, Erwin W. God's Devil (p. 22). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition

What makes the difference in life and history? The difference is whether you are responding to the resources of God or the wiles of the devil. If Satan is in control, then we are powerless over him. If God is in control, then He gives us what we need to not only be victorious, but to experience the life shaping of God in all circumstances.

Even in the trials, struggles and evil we face, God will use to work His transforming power in us.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." **James 1:2-4**

Be reminded He has given us what we need to live godly lives.

"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." **2 Peter 1:3**

He is always at work to conform us to the image of His Son.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." **Romans 8:28-29**

An old song says, "Nothing will happen to me today, nothing good, nothing bad without first passing through the hands of God." This is true and we can trust the good sovereign God in all things.

Day 2

Read Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-19

The Isaiah passage is part of a proverb against the King of Babylon, it is not about the king, but the power behind the king. In **Verses 12-14** we are introduced to a being named Lucifer. This being has fallen from heaven.

The lament in Ezekiel 28 was toward the King of Tyre. However, the very words and wording in **Verses 12-19** are clearly not words spoken about a man, but about the power behind the king. **Isaiah 14:12** introduces us to Lucifer. The name means morning star, or shining star. Combined with Ezekiel 28:12-19, there are several things we learn about Lucifer.

He was formed and created by God.

He was perfect and beautiful.

He was in the Eden, the garden of God.

He was perfect.

He was the anointed cherub.

He was the worship leader of the angelic choir.

He was the highest of God's created beings.

Iniquity was found in him.

He exercised his choice to rebel against God trying to assume rule.

He was fallen from heaven.

His sin was that of pride and a power-grab to make himself be God.

Jesus said of him, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” **Luke 10:18**. Revelation 12:4-9 says that one third of the angels fell with him.

All of these passages and many more help us to understand that Satan was a fallen angel created by God. However, we also see from many other scriptures that he is under the control of the sovereign God. He cannot do anything which God does not, at least, allow and then, it is for God’s purposes.

Rejoice that because of the victory won at the cross and at the empty tomb, we have certain victory. Although at times we are harassed and aggravated by the devil and his demons, God will use all of His exploits to work and shape us as we look to Jesus.

Day 3

Read Luke 22:47-53

Jesus knew Satan had come "...to seek and to save that which was lost." **Luke 19:10** He knew this would entail the cross, but Satan persisted in his attempts to thwart the move of God to crush his head.

When Jesus was born, Satan's strategy was to kill Him. The plot was the killing of the baby boys under the age of two in the attempt to kill Jesus. However, the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to take his family to Egypt. The plot was foiled by the Lord speaking to Joseph.

Satan then sought to corrupt Jesus in the temptations in the desert after His baptism. Jesus used the Word of God to resist the attempts of Satan. Satan later sought to use Peter and Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan" **Mark 8:33**.

On the evening of His betrayal, Satan entered Judas and sent him on the mission to turn Jesus over to the authorities. Judas became the human vehicle to a satanic deed.

Jesus, all the while, knew what was going on. He knew this was the work of Satan under the watchful eye of His Father for the purpose of salvation for all who would believe.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." ³³ This He said, signifying by what death He would die." **John 12:31-33**

In **Luke 22:53**, Jesus says to the religious leaders who had come to arrest Him, "...But this is your hour, and the power of darkness..." Satan had a moment of victory. That is the way of sin and rebellion. It seems to work for a time.

Erwin Lutzer writes, “The conflict between God and Satan is always waged over us.” If time belonged to Satan, eternity would belong to God.”³

Our victory comes from the victory over Satan at the cross. Again Erwin Lutzer writes, "We've often heard that Satan was judged at the cross. We know that he was “cast out” on this decisive battle, the focal point of history.”⁴

Now we live from the victory. “Oh, victory in Jesus!”

³ Lutzer, Erwin W.. God's Devil (p. 103). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Lutzer, Erwin W.. God's Devil (pp. 103-104). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Day 4

Read Matthew 8:28-34

This biblical historical event clearly demonstrates Jesus' authority over the devil and his demons. After Jesus had calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He came to the region of the Gergesenes where He encountered two men who were demon-possessed.

They were coming out of the tombs or the cemetery. Demons operate in the realm of death. The demons possessing the two men spoke to Jesus by name and acknowledged Him as "...You Son of God." **Verse 29** It is very interesting that the demons knew who Jesus was. This is right in line with the words of **James 2:19**, "Even the demons believe and tremble." The demonic realm recognizes Jesus and His authority over them.

Not only did the demons recognize Jesus, they asked, "What do you have to do with us?" They were asking Him why He was concerned with them. Then, they reveal more of their understanding by asking, "...Have You come to torment us before the time?" **Verse 29** The demons obviously knew their days were numbered and they knew a day of judgment was coming.

The authority of Jesus over the demons continued when they begged Him to send them into a herd of pigs when He casts them out. They pleaded with Him to allow them to be materialized. Jesus granted permission. His word "go" was not a command, but permission granted to their begging to allow them to enter the pigs.

Warren Wiersbe has some very encouraging words regarding the authority of Jesus over the devil, Satan and demons:

"We can construct a "statement of faith" from the words of the demons. (Demons do have faith; see James 2:19.) They believed in the existence of God and the deity of Christ, as well as the reality of future judgment. They also believed in prayer. They knew Christ had the power to send them into the swine.

The fact that the demons destroyed 2,000 pigs is nothing compared with the fact that Jesus delivered two men from the powers of Satan. God owns everything (Ps. 50:10-11) and can do with it as He pleases. Jesus values men more than pigs or sheep (Matt. 12:12). He brought peace to these men's lives and to the community where, for a long time, they had been causing trouble."⁵

Be encouraged, God is in control all of the time over all powers.

⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - New Testament, Volume 1.

Day 5

Read Revelation 12:11-12 and 20:7-10

Satan is a defeated foe awaiting his final demise. We have to remember that the devil and his demons know a lot, but they do not know everything. They are not omniscient. They know our past life and our weaknesses. They can also read. They know what God is up to. Therefore, we see in Revelation 12 and 20 several things the devil knows about his impending future. In these last days, he will be kicking harder, but fear not! Remember he has already been defeated.

When I was attending seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, we lived in the parsonage of Hazelwood Baptist Church. The house was nice, but old, with high ceilings with French doors between the dining room and the living room. We had a mouse problem in the old house. One evening, Sheila, Denise and I were watching TV in the living room when a very bold mouse ran under our legs. We got up and started moving furniture to find the little beast. Sheila and Denise went in the dining room and closed the doors. From there they watched the battle. I got the broom and went to battle with this creature. I finally got him cornered after moving the sofa. I took a few swings with the broom. He knew his time was up and he reared up on his hind legs as though he was going to make his last stand to fight. He was no match for the big man with a broom. The deed was done and he went to wherever dead mice go. He was willing to fight even though it was futile. The same is true of the devil and his demons. They know their time is short and there is a place prepared for them in the everlasting fire. In the last days, particularly in the tribulation period, he will make an all out attempt to win an unwinnable war. He can only kick harder but he has no hope of prevailing. His end is certain.

God has already defeated him at the cross. Satan thought he had won, but on day three, the truth was known to him and to the world. Jesus defeated Satan, sin, death and the grave. Yes, he is still active, but he is defeated. His days are numbered. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

James 4:7

Week 28 Jesus Sends out the Twelve -----Chris Watson

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted about 3 years and while He healed the sick and preached to the multitudes, I would argue His biggest investment was when He mentored the 12 disciples. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Gospel would spread like wildfire. God would use the disciples to carry this out. The word disciple simply means learner or follower. May we be followers of Christ daily.

Day 1

Read Matthew 10:1-15

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus performs miracle after miracle. At the beginning of His miracles, large crowds gathered: however, as Jesus began to teach and preach, the crowds got smaller and smaller as time went on. In fact, John 2:22-25 tells us that Jesus did many miracles, but He didn't entrust Himself to some because He knew their hearts. Warren Wiersbe said, "It was one thing to respond to a miracle but quite something else to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and continue in His Word." Those who followed Jesus at first began to scale back, but those who truly followed Him, were all in. In our passage today, the disciples were commanded to preach to the lost sheep of Israel and tell them the kingdom of heaven was at hand. As Jesus sent them out, they were basically to take only what was on their back because God would provide for them. Some would listen and accept, and others would not. The disciples were very excited to share that the kingdom of God was at hand. They followed Jesus not worrying where their next meal might come from or where they would lay their heads, they were simply seeking to obey Jesus.

Do you and I follow Jesus like this? Do we take Him at His Word? If He tells us to go, do we go? If He says go and gives us further commands, do we follow them no matter what the commands may be?

I'm reminded of a song we sing at the Hollonville Campus,
(Spirit Lead Me by Michael Kettefer):

This is my worship, this is my offering
In every moment, I withhold nothing
I'm learning to trust You, even when I can't see it
And even in suffering, I have to believe it

If You say, "It's wrong, " then I'll say, "No"
If You say "Release, " I'm letting go
If You're in it with me, I'll begin
And when You say to jump, I'm diving in
If You say, "Be still, " then I will wait
If You say to trust, I will obey
I don't wanna follow my own ways
I'm done chasing feelings, Spirit lead me
O Spirit lead me

Take time today and ask the Lord to help you obey Him no matter what. Pray that you would follow when He shows you specifically what to do or where to go. In the meantime, seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Pray that God would lay someone on your heart that you could meet with on a regular basis and pour the love of Jesus into.

Day 2

Read Matthew 10:16-26

While we see the government of the United States, along with other leaders and countries, seeking to crack down on Christians and Christianity, we have yet to see the extent of the persecution of Christians in many other countries. We have seen the media and fact checkers seeking to discredit the truth of what is happening in our country and we know it will continue. However, look back at our passage today. Jesus tells the disciples they will go in front of governors and kings to answer for their faith but not to worry as the Holy Spirit will be with them and give them what to say. He goes on to say in **Verse 22** "...you will be hated for My names sake." If we put a sign-up sheet out for people to put their name on when they left Sunday's service which said, "Sign up to be hated, brought before kings and governors for your faith and to be ridiculed," I'm not sure the list would have any names on it. Jesus told the disciples they would be hated because they knew Jesus was King.

Will we trust God if in our lifetime we are brought before kings and governors to give an account for our faith? We are already hated for knowing Jesus and following His teachings. This is sometimes not only from the outside world, but those who claim to know Jesus and connect to His Church, but follow their own truth. Scripture reminds us the reason the world hates God is because they love darkness (John 3:19). The last part of **Verse 22** says, "...but he who endures to the end will be saved." Does this mean we try our hardest, do our best, and try with all our might to endure to the end? Absolutely not. Rather it means, if one has really trusted in Christ, they will endure to the end (not reject Christ or turn from their faith).

Jesus keeps us, meaning He not only saved us when we trusted in Him, but He keeps us from ourselves and to Himself each day. While the world may laugh, point, question, arrest or even kill us, it doesn't matter. Man(kind) can't do anything to me. Today, let's follow Jesus no matter what, knowing that soon our reward will be fully made known, to be with Him forever, without sin!

Day 3

Read Matthew 10:32-11:1

Today is our Connect to Jesus day. When I read these verses, Jim Elliott's quote comes to mind; "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." When we think of the life of Jesus and the world we live in today, there are really only 2 choices, to follow Jesus or to not follow Jesus. There is really no in between. Jesus says if we are in between, He wants to spew us out of His mouth. Jim Elliott knew something about "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Called to evangelize the Huarani people of Ecuador, he was murdered. However, God would use his obedience to eventfully bring the Gospel to these people. Jim knew he could be killed physically, but, he knew "...to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord." **2 Corinthians 5:8**

Jesus, Himself, was obedient, to the point even unto death. Jesus was following the will of His Father, just as He asks us to do. **Verse 38** tells us, "...and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of me." Taking up our cross is a picture of dying to ourselves, which is dying to our pride, selfishness, and our me first mentality. It is dying to us and living to Jesus. When this is our mindset through Christ, we know, like Jesus did, they may kill us physically, but they can't have our relationship with the Father.

Are you confident your hope is in Jesus? Are you following Him? Remember no matter what may come your way, there is nothing that can keep you from the love and goodness of the Father. Today, know that as a child of God you are loved, you are forgiven and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. As you remember this, seek today to yield all to Jesus.

Day 4

Read Matthew 10:27-31

Our passage today, particularly Verses 29-31 mirrors Matthew 6:25-34 where we are reminded that if the Lord will provide for the sparrow, He will provide for us, too. Have you ever thought you were in control of something or a situation only to later find out you were never in control because of circumstances or because someone else was really in control? So often we think we are in control, but truth be known, that is just not true. I look at our world and think this person or that person is in control, then I get frustrated or concerned. God reminds me He is in control and He causes all things to work together for those who love Him.

We don't have to worry, fret or fear. In fact, it's been said that when we worry, it doesn't take away tomorrow's trouble, but it takes away today's peace and peace is what God through Jesus gives us. God has given us the freedom to make our own choices. As believers, we are free, as we submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't live to ourselves but to the Lord.

Today, may we understand that God is faithful and in control, and we must simply obey and follow Him. Ask God to help you trust that He is in control. Be reminded that while He is in control, it is His desire for us to trust and follow Him freely.

Day 5

Read Psalm 72

We already know this but just in case we have forgotten, God ultimately wins. If you know Him through Jesus Christ, you win also. All the different gods the world worships are either dead or can't be known personally. Think about that for just a minute. Either they serve a dead god or a god that is not personable. We serve one who is alive, the one true God, the One who can be known through Jesus Christ.

Today's psalm is a Psalm of Solomon about the Lord. He speaks of the Lord, who is His, what He has done, and what He will do. God knows and God sees and today's passage reminds us that God will make everything right. Remember, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

Look again at **Verses 17-19** of today's passage:

"His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And men shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.
Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
And blessed be His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen and Amen."

Have you ever thought about how long forever is? I have and I can't wrap my mind around it. Verse 17 says He will continue to endure as long as the sun endures. Remember God has always been, and He will always be. If we know Him, we will live with Him eternally. We serve a mighty God, the only true God. He is faithful, He is sovereign (in control) and He wins. Today, be reminded no matter what you are facing, God has you in His hands and He will carry you.

WEEK 29 JESUS FEEDS THE MULTITUDE-----

-----Dennis Watson

I really enjoy reading about the miracles of Jesus. They remind me that nothing is impossible with God. Think about it. God became a little baby, born of virgin. He lived a sinless life, He worked incredible miracles, He died on the cross to bring forgiveness of sin and three days after His death, He was raised to live again. Remember this when you go through seemingly impossible situations. This week, we find the disciples in a seemingly impossible situation. Wherever Jesus went, large crowds gathered to see and hear Him. This was the setting: a large crowd that became hungry and a very limited supply of food. Impossible? Let's see.

Day 1

Read John 6:1-4

Several years ago, our family was vacationing at the beach. I had been running and walking on the beach early in the morning. On that particular morning, I spotted activity up the beach in the sand away from the waves. Sand was flying everywhere as though someone were lying on the beach throwing sand up into the air. I went to see what was happening and found a huge sea turtle digging a place in the sand to bury her eggs. All I could think of at that moment was getting my kids down to the beach to see this. This was before anyone had cell phones, so I had to run all the way back to the condo, wake everyone up, and hurry them to see what I had seen. This year, two little sea turtles hatched and were making their way to the ocean. A large crowd gathered quickly because people pulled out their cell phones to let people know.

In Jesus' day, there were no cell phones and little opportunity to tell people Jesus was in a certain place. However, on this occasion, the word traveled fast and a large crowd gathered to see and hear Him and possibly be healed by Him. There were more than five thousand people!

It was also the season of Passover. At this time, each year, the Jews celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The blood of a sacrificed lamb was placed on the doorpost of every

Jewish home so the angel of death would pass over them. Little did this crowd know that the teacher, healer, and miracle worker would also be their Passover Lamb!

Be reminded of all the miracles of Jesus and remember that nothing is impossible with Him and with Jesus, you always get much more!

Day 2

Read John 6:5-13

Yesterday we read that a very large crowd had gathered to hear and to receive healing from Jesus. He became concerned that the people were hungry and He posed a question to Phillip about where they could get food to feed all the people. The question was asked, not because Jesus did not know what to do, but because this was going to be a faith producing moment. Jesus had a plan. Phillip had a negative suggestion, “Two hundred denarii of bread is not sufficient.” **Verse 7** What kind of answer is that? I sometimes give those answers instead of seeking a faith solution. Remember, this was a faith producing moment.

Phillip was a quiet and reserved disciple. He was one of the more do something, take charge disciples. Andrew had been making his way through the crowd and thought he found something which could help. He found a little boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish. He found some food, **but** what good would that little bit of food be when there were so many people? Uh-oh, another doubter! Jesus already knew about the little boy’s bread and fish. I think that was His plan. Without rebuking the two disciples for their small faith, He told them to instruct the people to sit down. He then took the loaves, blessed them, and gave them to His disciples to distribute to the crowd. Everyone ate until they were full. Then, Jesus had His disciples gather up the fragments so nothing would be wasted. After feeding as many as 15,000 people (5000 men along with their wives and children), they gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers!

You cannot explain this miracle away! Do you trust Jesus in those seemingly impossible situations? With Him, there are no impossible situations!

Day 3

Read John 6:14-27

After all of the people had eaten, some of them wanted to make Jesus their king. They remembered Moses had taught that a prophet like Him would come and they remembered how Moses had fed the people and led them out of bondage. Jesus had miraculously fed the people and they wanted Him to be their king and lead them out of Roman bondage. He knew He had come to deliver people from the greatest enemies, sin and death. Jesus knew His time had not yet come and He left and went to the mountain alone.

Later that day, as the disciples traveled by boat toward Capernaum, a storm came up. They saw Jesus walking on the water toward them and were fearful. After reassuring them, Jesus got into the boat and they were immediately at the shore. A crowd found him again the next day. Most of these were people who had been present when Jesus fed the multitude. They were inquisitive about when He had arrived. He knew they were hoping He would feed them again. Basically, all they wanted was another satisfying meal.

The people wanted a king to deliver them from their perceived enemy, which was Rome. They wanted more food to temporarily satisfy their hunger. Jesus came to give them much more than what they thought they needed and wanted. Jesus wanted to give them a real and eternal deliverance. He wanted them to have the food and water that would fully satisfy.

Our immediate perceived needs, too often, cause us to miss what Jesus really has for us. Allow Jesus, Himself, to be your real satisfaction. As the David Akin song says, "Jesus Fills My Needs."

Day 4

Read John 6:28-40

What a huge jump Jesus makes in this passage. The people wanted a king to deliver them from Roman bondage and they wanted food to eat. Now, He led the conversation to what He had really come to bring them. The people were not perceptive enough to see that the feeding of the multitude was Jesus letting them know He would provide for their greatest needs, not just the ones which seemed urgent at the moment. He provides what we need now, but also what we need forever in eternity. The greatest far-reaching need we all have is forgiveness.

There was a verbal exchange between Jesus and the people. They wanted to know what they needed to do to please God. They asked, “What shall we do that we may work the works of God?” **Verse 28** Jesus told them the work of God was to believe in the One God had sent—Himself. Then, they asked Him for a sign so they could believe in Him. They told Him Moses fed the people with manna which was bread from Heaven. He told them He was the new bread God had sent from Heaven. He told them this bread gives life to the world. He then invited them to come to Him, the true bread, and He would give them salvation forever. He would raise them to life everlasting when the end of the world, as they knew it, had come.

Jesus is the Savior. Don’t sell Him short as if all He can do is put food on your table and get you out of messes, most of which, you cause yourself. Jesus will give you far more than your daily bread. He is your bread, daily and eternally. Please allow the temporal needs to cause you to recognize your greatest need of all which is eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. When you eat the bread, do not miss whose hand has given it.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 29:18-20

The passage today gives a brief snapshot of the millennial reign of Christ. In today's passage, we read that Jesus was referred to as the Holy One of Israel. When Jesus comes again to reign for a period of 1000 years, it will be characterized by some of the things found in these verses.

The deaf shall hear and the blind shall see. Jesus, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, will rule and reign and diseases and physical infirmities will no longer exist. The lowly and humble will be lifted up and have great joy and the poor will rejoice and celebrate. The distinctions brought on in the temporal will no longer exist. Our joy and satisfaction will come from the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. The ones who had persecuted God's people will be no more. The scorner and the ones who seek and watch for evil will be cut off. The world described here, under Christ's rule, will be far different from the one we live in today. There will be no more violence or gloom. This new world will be characterized by joy, understanding, justice, and praise to God.

Praise the Holy One of Israel for His healing and the rule of righteousness to come!

WEEK 30 JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED----- -----Dennis Watson

In the account of the beheading of John the Baptist there are four specific players which make up the drama surrounding his execution: Herod Antipas the ruling king, Herodias, Herod's wife, and Salome, Herodias' daughter.

Day 1

Read Matthew 11:1-19

In the opening verses of Chapter 11, we find John the Baptist in prison. Later this week, we will see the events surrounding his imprisonment and the ultimate outcome. The first part of Chapter 11, **Verse 3** is John's apparent struggle and understanding if Jesus was the "...coming One, or do we look for another?" This was a crisis of belief. John sent messengers to Jesus to ask this question. Jesus responded by telling him the gospel is being preached and people are being healed and what he was doing was in keeping with what was prophesied in **Isaiah 61:1**, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison *to those who* are bound."

Jesus continues speaking to the crowd about John the Baptist. He told them John was not a soft man but he was indeed the prophet spoken of by the prophet, Malachi. "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'" **Matthew 11:10**

Jesus goes on to affirm John the Baptist by saying in **Verse 11**, "...among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." It sounds like a letter of recommendation written by the president of a major company. But it was not the president of a company but the Son of God, the One who would be revealed as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This was extremely high praise from Jesus, the Messiah, because John had carried out faithfully the purpose of God for him to prepare the

way for the Savior. He preached the message of repentance pointing to Jesus, but King Herod would not repent because he would not confess his sin. The only thing John the Baptist was guilty of was telling Herod the truth. Herod could not handle this truth.

Day 2

Read Matthew 14:1-5

As was the case with many people in the past, Herod The Great and Herod Antipas, were used by the devil to try and stop the message of God's salvation from becoming a reality. Nothing would stop or hamper the message from getting through. This was beautifully expressed in **Isaiah 8:10**, "Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; Speak the word, but it will not stand, For God is with us." No single person or alliance can stop God's message and messenger of salvation.

Before we look at Herod Antipas, we must first talk about his father, Herod the Great who ruled from 37-4 BC. Herod the Great was the King of Judea who had all infant boys under the age of two killed in Bethlehem. He was attempting to kill the One sought by the wise men whom they called the King of the Jews. He was motivated by paranoia. He was thinking a worldly king was coming to take his place; however, Joseph was warned in a dream and he took the child Jesus and His mother and fled to Egypt.

When Herod the Great died, his son, Herod Antipas, became king in Judea. He, like his father, was paranoid and he felt threatened by John the Baptist because John told Herod that it was unlawful for him to marry his brother's wife. Yet Herod Antipas, would not harm John because he "...feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly" **Mark 6:20**. He was paranoid and fearful! What kind of leader could he have possibly been?

His father was pretty much the same way; like father like son. They must not have been very confident in their stance as leaders. What about you? Do you fear what others may think of you? Are you hesitant to stand boldly due to the lack of confidence in what you believe? John the Baptist stood boldly. He was killed for his stance. It is believed that all the disciples of Jesus were martyred for their stand.

Make it your prayer that your life will be motivated by the grace of God and His gospel!

Day 3

Read Matthew 14:6-8

We have looked at John the Baptist and Herod Antipas, now we come to Herodias and her daughter, Salome. We look at them together because at this particular event, they plotted together. The occasion was Herod's birthday celebration. During the celebration, Herodias sent her daughter to perform a seductive dance for Herod, his friends and his guests. Herod was so pleased with her dance that he promised to give her whatever she asked. This foolish dealing was done without consideration about what might be requested. She consulted with her mother who told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

Herod was grieved because of the request, because of his promise, and because his friends were close by. He had no choice but to follow through or look weak as a leader. He was, for sure, in a quandary. Instead of trying to figure out and do what was right, he had backed himself into a corner and the only way out was to do exactly what he said he would do. So, Herod was guilty.

Herodias was guilty. She was now not only guilty because of her marriage to Herod, she was also guilty of taking revenge. She was responsible for ordering the execution of John the Baptist.

Herodias' daughter was also guilty. She was guilty of taking up the offense of her mother and became complicit in the crime against the man of God, John the Baptist.

What a mess and what a tangled web. All three of them were complicit in the murder of John the Baptist. Be careful not to take up the offense of another. Be responsible to do what you know to be right. The daughter was as guilty as her mother. She participated in the plot to murder John the Baptist.

Day 4

Read Mark 6:7-18

There was a looming question in the air all around Jerusalem and the surrounding area about the identity of Jesus. Even Jesus brought up the question of His identity to His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" **Matthew 16:13** Herod Antipas was raising the same question out of his paranoia. He had on his conscience his murdering of John the Baptist. For this reason, I can imagine he must have seen John the Baptist everywhere due to his guilty conscience. In today's passage, we see the paranoia coming out in Herod Antipas. He was trying to figure out who Jesus was. Some people were saying what the disciples were saying about Jesus, "Others said, "It is Elijah." or, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." **Mark 6:15**. Here are his words, "Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him" **Mark 6:14**.

I can only imagine what it was like for King Herod Antipas to live the rest of his life knowing he had murdered the forerunner of the Savior of the world? He was so filled with guilt, he could not see Jesus for who He was.

I see people who are so full of hate, bitterness, and guilt, they cannot see the truth. They cannot see the most significant truth of all. I am thankful that His disciples got it right in the great confession of Peter, "Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." **Matthew 16:16**

Look to Jesus who heals, not only our diseases, but also our mind, heart and emotions.

Day 5

Read John 15:18-25; Matthew 5:10-12

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus. He came preaching repentance preparing the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He was in the company of those associated with God's deliverance through Jesus. Jesus told His disciples that just like the world hated Him, they, too, would be hated. This reality also applied to those who surrounded Jesus before and after His death. John the Baptist was hated and was ultimately persecuted by imprisonment and death.

The world system headed by the god of this world, Satan, hated Jesus. Therefore, all followers of Jesus can expect to be persecuted and to suffer.

We have this great account of Peter and some of the other apostles who had been put in jail for preaching about Jesus. At midnight, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and told them to go and preach the gospel in the temple. Were they asking for trouble? No, God was putting His message and His messengers on display. They were arrested again and brought before the authorities again and again they were told they were not to preach in the name of Jesus. I know the word *again* was used in the previous sentence three times which seems redundant, but it is for emphasis. They had already been put in jail for preaching, released by an angel and told again not to preach Jesus. And again they continued to preach. The authorities were also persistent, and they again brought them before the council and again told them to stop preaching Jesus.

Here is Peter's response to the authorities, "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." **Acts 5:29-32**

What persistence! The enemy is busy at work to stop the message of the gospel. May we be more persistent because greater is He that is in us, than He that is in the world.

WEEK 31 JESUS WALKS ON WATER ----Chris Watson

As we have said in weeks prior, many of the things Jesus did was done not only to draw people to Himself, but also to help His followers, particularly His disciples, truly connect with Him and come to trust Him, not just as any man, but as the Son of Man. We come to one of those accounts this week. There are many times God allows circumstances in our lives so we can truly know Him more.

Day 1

Read Matthew 14:22-23

We are all human, which means we are all limited. Sometimes we like to think we are superman or superwoman, but, in the end, we have to have a break; we need a time out. Over the years, especially the last eight and a half years, I have learned that I must make time for Jesus.

Jesus had just fed well over 5000 people. Before this, He had traveled around healing various people and working in difficult situations. Remember, Jesus was fully God and fully man, therefore, He was human. He needed to spend time with the Father and He told His disciples He needed to go and pray.

If Jesus needed to do this, we most definitely need to. After all, I am a human being and I must spend time with the Father. Sometimes, we say we don't have time to spend with God or we are too busy with this or that. Church, we must spend time with God! At times, we might even have to call a time out and retreat. A time to fill our tanks back up because if we are giving out more than we are taking in, we will run dry. That's why we must set aside time daily to pray and read God's Word, just like you are doing now. We must make it a priority.

Remember, we are limited and while I wish I weren't, I am. I know my limits, although at times, I try to push beyond them. Jesus continually reminds me that I need Him. Have you neglected faithful time with the Lord? Are you trying to be unlimited when in truth you are limited? Spend time daily with the Father and seek Him. Jesus is all that we truly need.

Day 2

Read Matthew 14:24-32

Peter was an all or nothing kind of guy. Sometimes he laid it all on the line even though it didn't always work out well for him. In our passage today, we see the disciples, including Peter, sailing in the middle of the sea when the winds become pretty high. They saw someone walking toward them and thought it was a ghost, but it was Jesus.

Being that all or nothing type of guy, once Peter saw it was Jesus walking on the water, he asked Jesus to let him come to Him. Jesus granted his request and Peter got out of the boat and began walking. Before we criticize Peter for taking his eyes off Jesus, remember that Peter did get out of the boat, which is more than the other disciples did. He had total faith in Jesus to allow him to walk on water, so with his faith, he went all in. We are not totally sure what the other disciples were doing or thinking, but we do know they didn't get out of the boat. Our faith needs to be strong, so strong that we are not only willing to get out of the boat, but we will also carry through with the action we started.

Though Peter got out of the boat, when the winds got worse he panicked; he was focused more on the action and his surroundings than he was on Jesus. He started off well, but when things seemed out of control, he forgot Who was really in control. How often do you and I do this? We put our trust in Jesus, but when things don't go the way we think they should or things seem out of sorts, we panic. We start looking at our situation and all that is going wrong rather than keeping our eyes on Jesus. I know I have been guilty of this.

Practice trusting God today with EVERYTHING. Seek to trust Him with everything that is going on in your life. When things get crazy, don't try and look at everything else going on around you, keep your eyes on Jesus. When we put our eyes on our situation and not on Jesus, we get off track. Get out of the boat and, while out of the boat, be sure to keep your eyes on Jesus and don't worry about the waves. God will take care of them.

Day 3

Read Matthew 14:33

Jesus performed many miracles during His time on earth. Once, during a storm, Jesus allowed Peter to walk on water and when He calmed the storm, the disciples realized Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God. Perhaps one of the reasons Jesus allowed Peter to walk on water was to allow the disciples to be fully convinced He truly was who He said He was.

Jesus didn't perform miracles or allow Peter to walk on water just for effect or for people to be in shock. Rather, His desire in everything He did was to point people to God. Jesus' life was spent according to God's plan and following His will.

When God works in our lives, it often directs us or keeps us in close fellowship with Him. However, it is not always just for our benefit. When we allow God to work in our lives, we share what He's doing. We are writing a testimony. With our lives, we are writing a God story that can be evident for believers and non-believers alike. Hopefully, they will see the glory of God and be drawn to Him.

When you obey the Lord and follow Him, whether through a valley or on a mountain top, it may not be just for you. It could be that others around you are watching God write His story on your life and because of what God does in you (God being the focus) they might be drawn to Him. This event reminds us that our obedience and disobedience matters. Will you follow God and get out of the boat? Who knows who might be watching? Most importantly, we know God is watching what we do.

Day 4

Read Matthew 14:34-36

Those that recognized Jesus sent word throughout the community to bring others which were sick to Him so they could be healed. This verse is upfront with who Jesus was and what He could do; Jesus could do anything. In this situation, they desired to be healed physically. Sometimes we have that same desire. Maybe you desire to be healed, maybe a family member or friend is in need of healing. God tells us to cast our cares and burdens on Him because He cares for us. He taught us how to pray, not for our will, but for His will to be done. We should pray for healing and trust God's plan, whatever that may be.

These men knew Jesus could potentially give them what they wanted. They had seen or heard what He could do! Don't we also know what Jesus can do and what He wants to do? Scripture tells us He desires all people to come to repentance and to put their faith in Him. He wants people to know Him. If that's the case, we should be like the men going to tell their friends about Jesus. We should be telling the community about Jesus, telling them what Jesus has done for us and what He wants to do for them! But do we? Do we share Jesus with our neighbors to our right and left, or those that live in front or behind us? Maybe they live just down the road. If not, why not? Are we too busy? Is it that we don't know what to say? Maybe we don't think we have the time.

I challenge all of us this week to make time to share Jesus with our close neighbors. Maybe they live close to you or maybe you work or go to school with them. If you see them on a regular basis, make a point to engage in conversation with them. Ask about their family, their job, where they go to church and how you can pray for them. Questions like these often open conversations and lead to many opportunities. We know what our community needs---it's Jesus. May we be like these men and spread the truth of Jesus everywhere! Who will you share Jesus and your story with today?

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:4

Jesus was sinless. “He became sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.” **2 Corinthians 5:21** Jesus became sin for us. The beginning of this verse tells us that He bore our grief and carried our sorrows. The sins Jesus died for were not His own, they were yours and mine.

Many of the Jews thought He was being crucified justly and believed He was a fake which God was punishing for blasphemy. Jesus willingly gave His life for us. The pain and agony was so bad that we recall Jesus saying, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” **Matthew 27:6** God poured out His wrath and anger on Jesus for our sins and Jesus definitely felt that wrath and anger. Although it was nothing that He did, He died for our sins.

The Jews thought they were doing service to God by putting Jesus to death. After all, they didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah and they were taking care of Him. "When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'" **Matthew 27:54** How quickly things changed! Some of those who put Jesus to death soon realized who He really was.

Jesus took on our death, pain, and agony, not so we do not have to, but in order that we might know God. No one is too far gone to know God. Look at Paul, who participated in killing thousands of Christians and in just a moment, on the road to Damascus, he was changed. He became the greatest missionary ever known.

Jesus took what we deserved, so we might know God and be saved. Thank Jesus for your salvation. Thank Him for not only saving you once and for all, but He daily saves you and me from walking away from Him and making ungodly choices. Jesus is all we need. Thank Him for His love and grace.

WEEK 32 TAKE UP YOUR CROSS-----Dennis Watson

Did you know the average dollar bill wears out after about eighteen months of circulation? This piece of money, after such a short time of being handled, is taken out of circulation and shredded after just eighteen months of use. It is then replaced by another which will serve its eighteen months of being passed around before it, too, is shredded and replaced. This knowledge makes you realize how foolish it is to live your life for money. The same is true with the material fortune a person accumulates because after death his fortune is lost. However, the treasure God gives lasts forever. Things of earthly value come at a cost. That which is of eternal value also has a cost. This week we look at the cost of Jesus and the reward which is everlasting.

Day 1

Read Luke 9:18-20

Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying that He was. He was setting them up for the next question. They told Him what other people were saying, He was John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets who had been resurrected. Was Jesus really concerned about gossip out in the community about Him? I don't think so. He was getting around to the real issue at hand: "But who do you say that I am?" **Verse 20** Peter quickly responded confessing Jesus as the Christ. This biblical historical account is also found in **Matthew 16:13-20** where a longer response of Peter is given, "You are the Christ, the Son of the loving God." Jesus, in the Matthew 16 account, tells Peter the only way he could have known that was for God to have revealed it to him. Christ was Greek for Messiah, which means anointed. Peter was saying that Jesus was the anointed of God. He was acknowledging Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. This meant Peter was making the great confession that Jesus was the King from the line of David which had been prophesied over and over again in the Old Testament! Peter connected the dots!

Have you connected the dots? Who do YOU say Jesus is? Is He your Savior, Lord, and Messiah? If not, now is the time!

Day 2

Read Luke 9:21-22

After Peter made his confession of Jesus as the Christ, Jesus told His disciples not to tell anyone what they had come to know about Him. When they found out He was the Messiah, He quickly instructed them to keep it a secret. His time had not come. Don't you find that strange? It would seem He would want them to go and make it known! However, He was only getting started on His mission. Many of the people around Him wanted to force His hand and make Him their earthly king so He could rescue them from Rome. They had only a small and temporal understanding of a king. Jesus wasn't to be a local or national king, but the king of all and for eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth. He knew His time had not come because first there was to be a cross and a tomb followed by the resurrection. He had come to die for sins and then achieve victory over sin, death, and the grave, so He could be their Savior, Lord, and King of Kings!

I can understand the smallness of their thinking. They did not grasp His Kingdom. His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). His Kingdom was far greater and eternal. Even for us, sometimes we want Jesus to merely fix our temporal problems, unaware that our temporal problems are an indication of our greatest problem—sin. So, before we get too hard on them, look at our own expectations of Jesus.

Peter made the great confession and then stumbled over small thinking (See Matthew 16:22). Jesus was heading for a different kind of coronation. Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the anointed of God. He could not accept that His Kingship would require rejection and death before His exaltation. Before He could be the King and fulfill His role as Messiah, He had to fully submit to His Father's will.

Be careful of small thinking. Our ultimate prayer will be answered—"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." **Matthew 6:10** Sometimes it looks like things are going the wrong way—let Him finish!

Day 3

Read Luke 9:23-25 and Matthew 16:21-25

It seemed that Peter had climbed the summit of faith, only to stumble down the other side. Jesus rebuked Him for his small thinking because as Jesus said, "... you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." **Matthew 16:23** Wow! What a rebuke! Peter was thinking God's way and then man's way. I often suffer from that same malady. One moment I am thinking based on the truth and then in the next, those things contrary to the truth. Do you suffer from the same disorder? What do you suppose the cure is for this disease?

The cure is death to self. Jesus had made it known that His role as King and Savior would include rejection, death, and resurrection. Jesus then turned His attention to the larger crowd. He told them there was a cross for all of His disciples. He told them that to follow Him, they would need to deny themselves and take up their cross. He wasn't telling them they had to die on a literal cross like He would. To be His disciple, we must die to our own desires and the things we love more than Him. Jesus rebuked Peter because he had in mind man things rather than God things. Those contrary to truth things are usually what Jesus called in today's text, "...the things of men." **Matthew 9:23** To die to self is to give up the things of men and take on the things of God. This is about loving Jesus more than our money, stuff, toys, and our very lives.

Our mission as Harp's Crossing Baptist Church is "Building Relationships That Lead To Gospel Transformation" Our lives and our own stuff should take a distant second place. This is the process of growing and maturing as a believer. Paul expressed it this way ¹²"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." **Philippians 2:12-13**

None of us have arrived. We are growing and learning. Don't be overly hard on yourself when you suffer this malady. Seek to do just as He said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me." **Matthew 6:24**

Day 4

Read Luke 9:26-27

The very first step of being saved is to identify with Jesus Christ. This means a person acknowledges their sin. Shame and embarrassment often prohibit such a confession. It means a person is not perfect. It means they have failed and, as such, are a failure unable to correct their basic problem--sin. They must also acknowledge that when Jesus went to the cross, He became sin for them. In this we die with Him. Some would find this shameful and embarrassing. To this point, we have identified with Him in His death. This is wonderful because in Romans 6, we read that if we have been united with Him in His death, we will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection. Acknowledgment of sin and our inability to resolve the problem results in resurrection life. Is this something to be ashamed of? Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16).

To come to salvation through Jesus Christ leaves us unashamed. Therefore, the true believer has already identified with Jesus Christ in His death for sin and His resurrection to life eternal.

J. Vernon McGee expresses it perfectly. "The words Jesus spoke in this setting must be understood in their historical context. Not long before this the disciples had been actively engaged in telling the nation about the Messiah and His kingdom program. No doubt many thought the disciples were throwing their lives away. They had given up their sources of income and were in danger because they associated with Jesus. Jesus assured His disciples that they were doing the right thing. They had chosen the proper values (9:24-25). People were to respond in faith and identify with that program (v. 4). Those who did not identify with the kingdom program would be rejected (v. 5). In the same manner Jesus noted that if one is ashamed of Him (i.e., will not identify with Him or believe on Him) and His words (i.e., His message), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him in the future. It was vital that the people of that generation side with Jesus and His disciples in order to escape future judgment. That judgment will occur

when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-10).”⁶

Share Jesus and the testimony He has given you. Give the credit to Him, not in shame, but in joyful praise!

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

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:1-3

How does it make you feel when you tell someone something very important, but they ignore you, or worse, they tell you they do not believe what you said? When the Lord God called Isaiah to be His prophet and deliver His message, the Lord told him people would not believe his message and they would not listen to him (Isaiah 6). The truth is, some believe but many others do not. They fail to hear and accept the report. In Isaiah 53, Isaiah gives prophecy of the coming Savior. He would be like a plant which comes up out of dry ground. This chapter speaks of Jesus' life and ministry, His death, resurrection and exaltation. He would be revealed by the strong arm of the Lord God. Yet, still some would not accept but would remain unchanged by what He has done.

It is amazing to read these words which were written 700 years before Jesus was born. In Isaiah, we read the prophecy of Jesus' suffering and His death. This week in Luke 9:22, Jesus also prophesied of His suffering and death. We know Jesus was arrested, rejected, denied, spat upon, beaten and crucified. Isaiah called Him a man of sorrows. Jesus was filled with sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed just before He was arrested. All of this was planned by the Lord God, Jesus' own Father.

Read these words by Peter that he preached on the Day of Pentecost when the church was birthed: ²²"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know- ²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." **Acts 2:22-24**

Indeed, the arm of the Lord has been revealed. Talk about the dots connected! God has made His plan known to us, has carried it out and is not yet finished!

WEEK 33 THE TRANSFIGURATION-----Chris Watson

We often mentally know God is in control and He truly is who He says He is. There are times Jesus works in our life, not to prove Himself, but to remind us He is both in charge and in control and He can be trusted. In our account this week, Peter, James and John have a life changing experience which will help them see who Jesus really is. It was an experience that would stay with them for the rest of their lives. Many times, Jesus works in our lives and it is life changing, something that sticks with us until we spend eternity with Him.

Day 1

Read Mark 9:2-4

Can you imagine what this whole experience must have been like? Can you imagine what was going through the minds of Peter, James, and John? The word transfigured in Greek is actually metamorphosis. If you remember science as a child, you may recall this word is used to describe what happens to a larva before it eventually becomes a full grown butterfly. Metamorphosis is a major change in the appearance or character of someone or something.

In our passage today, Jesus transfigured into God. Not only does He transfigure into God, both Elijah and Moses appeared with Him. Elijah represented the prophets and Moses the law. These two men had already passed away and were with the Lord, but appeared here with Jesus. Upon the transfiguration, Jesus' clothes were shining, totally white like nothing ever seen. This is because Jesus/God is holy and Jesus took on the appearance of holiness. As we work through the passage this week, we will find more about why the transfiguration occurred.

From today's passage, though, we can ask "Have I been changed?" "Have I gone through a metamorphosis?" "Has God changed me?" Warren Wiersbe said, "The word transfigured describes a change on the outside that comes from the inside. It is the opposite of 'masquerade' which is an outward change that does not come from within." There is not a truer statement. If we

have met Jesus and He has given us a new heart, scripture tells us we are a new creature. We are still the same person in body, but not necessarily in heart and mind, for God has brought change. Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds: God does this as He works in us. Has God changed you? Has He replaced your heart of stone with a heart of clay? Has He opened your eyes to the truth? Has He done a work like only He can do? Thank Him for changing you and for the life which He has given you.

Day 2

Read Mark 9:5-8

We can imagine that Peter, James, and John were probably all in shock. In fact, Verse 6 tells us they did not know what to say as they were greatly afraid. I think we can understand this. We would probably have been afraid and in awe as well. Notice a main focus of the transfiguration, **Verse 7** says that God said to them, “This is My beloved Son, Hear Him.”

God wanted to convey that Jesus was, in fact, who He said He was. God knew what was to come and He knew the days would get harder and harder for the disciples. He also knew that these men would doubt Jesus and what He would say. This was an opportunity for the experience to be etched in their minds, so they would know they could trust God because they had heard directly from Him.

Isn't it interesting that after all of this, they still struggled with the things that Jesus would say and do? Peter would later cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest, even though he knew these things had to happen to fulfill God's plan. Jesus had been telling the disciples what was coming. In their defense, we have the rest of the story. Although Jesus told them what would happen, they didn't want to believe it because they loved Jesus and wanted to fight for Him. They probably had a hard time piecing everything together.

Again, **Verse 7** says “This is My beloved Son, Hear Him.” In other words, hear and follow Him. We still struggle with that today, don't we? We know Jesus, we know the account of Jesus and God which is all through scripture. We know what He wants us to do but sometimes we just don't want to believe it or we willfully disobey. Thank the Lord for His forgiveness and listen for the words of God, “This is My beloved Son, Hear Him.”

Day 3

Read Mark 9:9-13

After having this incredible encounter with Jesus and God, the disciples were told not to tell anyone. Verse 10 says they were discussing what rising of the dead meant, so they were trying to piece all of this together. Then they asked, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" What does this mean?

John MacArthur says it well, "There will be the coming of Elijah before the Lord comes to judge and establish the Kingdom, but when he came the first time, there was a forerunner who came in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare a people for the arrival of Messiah. He was that Elijah-like prophet. Matthew chapter 17, a very important passage that's a parallel passage to the one that we're looking at in Mark, and in Verse 12, "I say to you that Elijah already came and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they wished, so also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands" He is that Elijah-like prophet that came. They didn't recognize him. They did to him whatever they wished, which, of course, as you know was to cut his head off. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands, verse 13, "Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist." He is not the actual Elijah but, believe me, from his youth his father must have told him a thousand times about the angelic visit, that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah as the forerunner to the Messiah and prepare people for His arrival"

In fact, Luke 1:17 tells us that John the Baptist will come in the spirit and power of Elijah. So the first Elijah that Mark 10:13 speaks of is John the Baptist. Verse 12 speaks of Elijah, himself. **Malachi 4:4** says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." We know from our Old Testament study of Daniel that the dreadful day refers to the end of time.

So much prophecy has already come true. As we wait on the Lord to return, we share the truth. God did not tell us not to stay silent like He told Peter, James, and John. Rather, He told us to share the good news so that people will know. Are you sharing?

Day 4

Read Mark 9:14-29

In this passage, Jesus encounters a crowd in which there is a father in search of healing for his son. His son was possessed by a spirit that caused him to be mute along with many other awful things. The disciples tried to heal him, but couldn't. When the father asked Jesus why the disciples couldn't heal his son, Jesus looked at the crowd and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I stay with you?" **Verse 19** These words were most likely meant for the disciples. We go on to discover in Verse 29 why the disciples were not able to heal him; such a spirit was to come out only by prayer and fasting.

This is quite convicting. We have heard it said that when we work, we work, but when we pray, God works. God works how He sees fit, but He does use the prayer of His people. Many times we try, out of our own resources, to accomplish great and wonderful things. These things we try to accomplish may be noble, however; we may have neglected prayer and fasting. Prayer is communing with God; it is speaking your heart to Him in thankfulness, in awe, and voicing your hopes and your requests. It is also listening to His heart. Sometimes hearing His heart might come in the moment of prayer or it may come later. Fasting goes right along with prayer. Fasting allows us to put a more focused prayer on the situation at hand.

What does your prayer life look like? Does it include fasting? As a child you may have used a magnifying glass to burn a hole through a leaf. The process begins as the sun's rays pass through the lens of the glass focusing the heat at one specific area of the leaf. Fasting provides the focus of what we are seeking from God. We may fast from food, TV, technology or anything important to us. For example, when we think it's time to eat lunch, instead of eating, try praying. I challenge all of us to ramp up our prayer and fasting life so we may put all of who we are into all of who God is.

When fasting and praying, in accordance with God's will, we should believe. Here is one of my favorite verses.

“Immediately the father of the child cried out and with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.’” **Mark 9:24** This man desperately wants his son to be healed. Such honesty is shown from this father. He truly believed God could heal his son, but the boy had been possessed by the unclean spirit for such a long time that the father was probably at his wit’s end and was losing hope. Therefore, he responds he believes, but obviously, there is a part of him that doesn’t. Jesus turns to him saying, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” **Verse 23**

Let us be as honest as this father. God already knows what we are thinking. May we believe God for what only He can do in accordance with His will, and when we find ourselves struggling to believe, let us cry out like this father “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” **Verse 24**

Day 5

Read Psalm 72:11-13

King Solomon wrote these words to describe a king who would rule over the whole earth. Revelation 17:14 tells us that Jesus will rule over all the earth and He will be called the Lord of lords and King of kings. We read in **Matthew 11:5**, “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” This is right in line with what we read in Psalm 72 today.

Jesus is the King of all kings. Verse 11 tells us that all kings will fall down before Him and all nations will serve Him. This reveals that all other gods will one day be done away with. All other religions of the world share one of two things, if not both. Their gods can either not be known on a personal level (relationship) or their gods are dead. What good is a god that is dead? What if your god claims to be alive but there is no relationship allowed because the god is too mighty and prideful to have a relationship with his people?

The fact our God is alive and desires to have a personal relationship with us sets Him apart as He is the One True God. Not only does He desire a relationship with people, but Verse 12 tells us that He will deliver the needy and help those who have no helper. Verse 13 goes on to say that He will also spare the poor and needy and save their souls. As we study the Gospels, we see some of this has already taken place and in the end, we know God will take care of those who belong to Him.

Be thankful He is mighty and holy and yet He is a personal God. Thank Him for that He cares for us and we can cast our burdens and struggles on Him. What a great God we serve.

Week 34 Parable of the Good Samaritan---Chris Watson

When I read this week's passage, I am reminded of another account in Matthew 25. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Matthew 25:31-40

The Good Samaritan simply gave help and aid and we see from the above passage it was like doing it unto Christ Himself.

Day 1

Read Luke 10:25

Read Luke 10:25 again. Our account is simply one verse today, but there is so much in this verse. The lawyer asked Jesus what he has to do to **inherit eternal life**. Fundamentally, there are really 2 things wrong with this question and that is he thought there was something he could do for eternal life and the word inherit indicates that he thought he was entitled to it.

Galatians 2:15-16 says, ¹⁵ "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have

believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” The lawyer wanted to know what he could do to inherit eternal life. What action could he take? Where could he go? How could he serve? The questions go on and on. Eternal life is a GIFT. A gift is something you receive not for anything you have done, but because someone wanted to give it to you. There is nothing that we can do to earn the gift offered by the Lord, in fact, the Bible tells us our righteousness is like filthy rags. Eternal life with Jesus is a gift and it was what He did for us, on our behalf, so we could know Jesus and spend eternity with Him.

Do you know Jesus? If not, ask Him to save you. Receive His gift! If you know Him thank Him for the salvation that He has given you.

Day 2

Read Luke 10:25-29

People were saved before Jesus' death, burial and resurrection by their faith in God (Abraham, Moses, etc.). We are saved as we put our trust in Jesus and His life that was given for us. The lawyer continues the conversation with Jesus and wanted to justify himself by asking who his neighbor was. I imagine he was expecting an answer to which he could respond "I have done that," but we will see later this week, Jesus gives him a different answer.

Like the lawyer, we often try and justify ourselves. We compare ourselves with other people. We compare sins, situations, and how we are better than they are. Scripture reminds us that no one is righteous, not one. The lawyer was looking for an answer from Jesus which would have allowed him to say, "yes, I do that or I have done that," however, that's not the answer Jesus gives. Jesus tells him that basically, everyone is your neighbor.

Are you trying to live on your own justification today? Are you seeking to do things that will make you justified before the Lord? There is nothing we can do that will justify us before our Lord except to trust in what He has done for us. When we trust in His justification, everything else follows. We don't do good works in hopes we will be justified, because we already are. Thank the Lord you have been justified and if you haven't been made right before Jesus, ask Him to save you.

Day 3

Read Luke 10:37

Today is our connect to Jesus day. Tomorrow, we will look at the account that brought Verse 37 as the lawyer's answer. The Samaritan showed mercy on the certain man. When you look at the word mercy in the Greek, you see it means pity and or compassion. If you look at it further, it shows it is exactly what Jesus had for those whom He died. Like the man who was wounded, stripped and left for dead, there is nothing we can do for ourselves. The man was totally dependent on others. A priest, a Levite and a Samaritan passed by, but only the Samaritan stopped to help him.

The world tries to tell us it can help us but, the world's help is actually no help at all, it only makes things worse. What did the lawyer do to receive the Samaritan's mercy? Nothing, absolutely nothing. The man was helpless until the Samaritan helped him. We are helpless, left for dead, unless God does something. Praise be to God, He has sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. We are saved when we trust what God has done for us and ask God to save us. Jesus did the work; we just trust in what He has already done.

Take some time today to thank God for His mercy and grace. We did absolutely nothing to deserve it. We do many things to not deserve it, but thankfully, God shows mercy to us and gives to us what we do not deserve. Not only has He done this in salvation, He does it every day of our lives, praise be to Jesus. We have every day to walk in this mercy and grace as we experience God's love and free gift.

Day 4

Read Luke 10:29-37

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was indeed a dangerous one. Since the temple workers used it so much, you would think the Jews or Romans would have taken steps to make it safe. It is much easier to maintain a religious system than it is to improve the neighborhood.

Most of us can think up excuses for the priest and Levite for ignoring the victim. (Maybe we have used some of the same excuses ourselves!) The priest had been serving God at the temple all week and was anxious to get home. Perhaps the bandits were still lurking in the vicinity and using the victim as “bait.” Why take a chance? Anyway, it was not his fault that the man was attacked. The road was busy, so somebody else was bound to come along and help the man. The priest left it to the Levite, and then the Levite did what the priest did—nothing! Such is the power of the bad example of a religious man.

By using a Samaritan as the hero, Jesus disarmed the Jews, for the Jews and Samaritans were enemies (John 4:9; 8:48). It was not a Jew helping a Samaritan but a Samaritan helping a Jew who had been ignored by his fellow Jews! The Samaritan loved those who hated him, risked his own life, spent his own money (two days’ wages for a laborer), and was never publicly rewarded or honored as far as we know.

What the Samaritan did helps us better understand what it means to “show mercy” (Luke 10:37), and it also illustrates the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Samaritan identified with the needs of the stranger and had compassion on him. There was no logical reason why he should rearrange his plans and spend his money just to help an “enemy” in need, but mercy does not need reasons. Being an expert in the Law, the scribe certainly knew that God required His people to show mercy, even to strangers and enemies (Ex. 23:4–5; Lev. 19:33–34; Micah 6:8).

See how wisely Jesus “turned the tables” on the lawyer. Trying to evade responsibility, the man asked, “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus asked, “Which of these three men was neighbor to the victim?” The big question is, “To whom can I be a neighbor?” and this has nothing to do with geography, citizenship, or race. Wherever people need us, there we can be neighbors and, like Jesus Christ, show mercy.

Christ has shown mercy on us and we are to show mercy to others. Who is our neighbor? Not just the person who lives next to us or across the street but anyone we come in contact with. Today may we be a good neighbor to others and show them the love of Jesus by both word and deed. ⁷

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 212). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Day 5

Psalm 34

This psalm is LOADED with reminders and truth for us to practice as believers. It was written by David. It is broken up into 7 sections.

¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together. (Verse 1-3)

When will I bless the Lord? At all times! When shall His praise be on my lips? Continually! What if you and I practiced this? What a difference it would make! In addition, our boasting is to be in the Lord as we seek to glorify and magnify Him. When we do this, others will observe and some will join us.

⁴ I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.
⁶ This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.
⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him,
And delivers them. (Verses 4-7)

As I read these verses, I think of **Proverbs 18:10**, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe." I'm also reminded of **Isaiah 55:6**, "Seek the Lord while He may be found." God hears us, He hears our cries and even our moans when we don't know what to pray. David cried out to the Lord and the Lord heard Him. No matter what we are facing God already sees, hears and knows about it so we can cast our cares on Him. Be encouraged today because He knows you like no one else does.

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

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

¹⁰ The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good
thing. (Verses 8-10)

I remember years ago hearing Dave Busby, who's since gone to be with the Lord, talk about this verse and others on tasting. He would lick his fingers and say "Do you taste it? The Lord is good." Now we know, as did he, we are not talking physically, but spiritually. When we see the Lord, we have experienced and tasted His goodness and we are satisfied and will continue to want to taste His goodness.

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

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

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

¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.)Verses 11-14)

God's Word speaks a lot about the tongue. James describes it as a spark which starts a forest fire and a rudder that drives a large ship. It's small compared to the rest of the body, but it can cause destruction if used wrongly. This is why David says, to "...keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit." How are you doing at keeping a reign on your tongue? Ask God to help you control it, we can't do it on our own.

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

¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
(Verses 15-16)

Remember we are not saved by our works, but by the work Jesus did on the cross. If we have been saved, however, our good works will show because of what the Lord has done for us and is doing in us. I'm sure, like me, you have seen people get away with evil or ungodliness and maybe they even prosper doing so. We know in the end, they are not prospering, they are going against the Lord. Ask God to help you seek Him and walk with Him.

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

¹⁸ The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit. (Verses 17-18)

Have you ever been broken hearted? I know I have been. I've felt at times that I couldn't go on or I couldn't face another day because I was hurting. David tells us that God is near to those who are broken hearted and have a contrite spirit (broken). No matter what you are facing, God is near.

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

²⁰ He guards all his bones;
Not one of them is broken.

²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.

²² The LORD redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.
(Verses 19-22)

God is our deliver and when we trust in Him we are not condemned. Scripture reminds us that there is not condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Call on your deliverer today and rest in Him. He is worthy. There is a lot with our chapter today. Focus on one section and ask God to speak to you.

WEEK 35 PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON----- -----Dennis Watson

This week, we will be looking at the account of the parable of the prodigal son. However, there are actually five parables in Luke 15. The first two found in Verses 1-7 are of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The other three found in Verses 11-31 are about the prodigal son. Jesus told these parables for a reason, because He had something He wanted the listeners to understand. The Pharisees and the scribes hated the fact that Jesus was spending time and eating with tax collectors and sinners they thought should be avoided.

Day 1

Read Luke 15:1-7

Jesus attracted the sinful and rejected. Those rejected by the religious leaders were the very ones Jesus drew to Himself. The very ones He reached out to and intentionally spent time with. The sinners and tax collectors were repulsive and unacceptable to the religious people who believed they had cleaned up their lives.

Jesus told this parable for all to hear, especially the religious leaders. He obviously wanted everyone to hear and understand the love of and concern of the shepherd for the lost one even though the ninety-nine others were safe.

We see here the concern of the shepherd for the one. He was thankful the ninety-nine were safe. His concern was, however, for the one which had wandered away and could be in danger of being killed by a wild animal or by falling into a ravine. Jesus then asked a question of His audience, "If you were a shepherd and one of your one hundred sheep went missing, wouldn't you go look for it until you found it?" The religious leaders were being like the ninety-nine who were safe in the fold, but were whining because one was being sought and they were being ignored. The **one** was getting the attention. The shepherd, the Good Shepherd, was thankful the ninety-nine were safe, but He was going to find the one which was in danger. We see here the concern of the shepherd, He had come to seek and to save that which was lost!

We see the diligence of the shepherd to find the one. He was not just going to casually look for the *one*, he was diligently going to look until He found it. He was not on a mere hunting expedition that at the end of the day he would be satisfied with the hunting trip. The hunting trip was not the goal. The goal was finding the *one*.

We see the rejoicing of the shepherd over the one when he is found. The shepherd places the found one on his shoulders and has a party inviting over his neighbors and friends to celebrate the lost one being found. He was not content within himself, he wanted his friends and neighbors to join in his joy.

The religious leaders did not get it. They needed to learn why Jesus came. He came to seek and to save the one. The one who is lost and needs to be found. Instead of complaining and criticizing Jesus, they should have been rejoicing because lost sinners were being sought and found.

Day 2

Read Luke 15:8-10

Like the parable of the lost sheep, this parable teaches the great worth to God of one lost sinner. The religious leaders of the day must have certainly been shocked that God actually searches for lost sinners! This is the essence of the gospel, Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost.

The coins, in this parable were not just some coins this woman had lying around. When a Jewish girl married, she would wear a headband of ten silver coins, like a woman's wedding ring today. Losing a coin out of that headband would be comparable to losing a diamond out of her wedding ring. It was not just the value of the lost coin in terms of money, but the sentimental value it represented.

The woman diligently searched to find the lost coin. She used a small hand-held oil lamp which gave off only minimal light, but probably more than the light coming in through a window. The floors were usually made of rough stone with many crevices where the coin could be tucked away. Like the lost sheep, the woman was not going to stop looking until the coin was found. Upon finding the coin, she also invited her friends and neighbors over to celebrate finding the lost coin.

The value of the lost possession increases in value at least in terms of the number. The parable of the lost sheep was one missing sheep out of one hundred. The lost coin was one missing out of ten. The significance is the one lost. Jesus is making it clear that each one who is lost is significant and He came for the one. Do you know one who is lost? Join Jesus in seeking to bring them out of lostness and into the found ones.

Day 3

Read Luke 15:11-19

The first character we meet in this parable, made up of three, is the younger son. The younger son wanted his inheritance and he wanted it now. He was ready to leave home, go out on his own, and live the good life. Not only was he being self-centered, he was being disrespectful of his father. It was as if he were saying to his father, “I wish you were dead, give me what is mine.”

He received what was his and went out to experience life his way. He believed he knew what was best and he was going after it. The immature often believe they know what is best for them and that becomes the course of their life. In his state of immaturity, he went quickly through his inheritance. He did not make any provisions for what might come. As a result of a severe famine, he was in great need. He was homeless and without food. He got a job, obviously with a gentile because his employer was a pig farmer. This was totally unacceptable for a Jew. He was so hungry that he would have willingly eaten the slop being fed to the pigs.

It was at this moment he woke up. He came to himself realizing that his father’s hired servants were far better off than himself. His father’s servants had more than enough to eat and here he was starving. The good life was not at all what he had been expecting. His pursuit of the best, in his own way, was a disaster. His decision was to go back home, confess his sin, and ask to work for his father as a hired servant. He knew he was no longer worthy to be his father’s son.

What a blessing he woke up when he did, but how many of us do not wake up? How many continue and lose their lives in that state? Perhaps you are wandering in a place far from your heavenly Father. Wake up and return, He is waiting for you. Maybe you know someone in this place. Ask the Lord to bring everyone to their senses and that they will return to their heavenly Father.

Day 4

Read Luke 15:20-24

As the younger son travels home after wasting his inheritance, we meet the father. Guess where his father was? He was at home taking care of the farm, but he was also watching for his son to return from the same direction he had seen him leave.

When the son was still a long way off, the waiting and expecting father saw him because he was watching for him and expecting his return. He already had compassion in his heart for his son. He loved his son even though he had been disrespectful and foolish. As soon as the father saw his son, he ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. He did not greet him with disappointment and with a lecture. It was quite the opposite. The younger son could only hope to return and be treated as one of his father's hired servants. To the younger son, he no longer deserved to be treated as his father's son. To his father, he was still his son and now he was home. The son began to confess, but the father told people to make preparations for a celebration. There would be a party because the son who had been lost and was like a dead son, was home and alive again. It was time to celebrate!

Here are Tony Evans words about the picture:

“That’s a beautiful picture of salvation and the restoration of erring saints. A destitute sinner comes to a holy God in repentance and faith with nothing to offer but desperate need. God the Father responds with love and compassion, granting the sinner all the privileges of sonship in the family and showers him with blessings—“every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ” (Eph 1:3).”⁸

Do you feel far from God, your Heavenly Father? Is so, guess who is waiting for you to return? He is expecting you and longing for you to return.

⁸ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

Day 5

Read Luke 15:25-32

The older son was out working in the field. As he was coming back to the house, he heard the sounds of music, laughter, and dancing. He asked one of the servants what was going on and was told it was a celebration because his younger brother had returned home. He was told his father had the fatted calf killed for food for the celebration. The older son was immediately filled with anger and jealousy. He could not understand why his father would do this. To him, he was being disrespected by his father because he had been there working, every day, and there had never been a party with special gifts, rings or clothing for him.

Do you think maybe the message was sinking in to the religious leaders? Or perhaps the obvious message of the parable was hidden from them because of their hardened hearts. Here they were, the special people chosen by God, and Jesus had come to reach out to those who were lost and wandering. The Jewish religious leaders felt slighted and they were angry. However, I do not think they got the message.

The younger son was back at home under his father's care, protection and provision. The father was rejoicing that his son was back home, he was enjoying the relationship and fellowship. The older brother was left with his anger, his father's reply and actions, but we do not know the outcome of the parable, as the parable ends here. We do know the outcome of the Jewish religious leader's anger because they participated in the crucifixion of Jesus, the One who came to seek and to save the loss.

Do you ever resent people who you do not believe are worthy of God's forgiveness, mercy and grace? Do you ever look around and make judgements that certain people are undeserving of God's blessings? None of us are deserving of God's grace, mercy and great salvation. Do not be like those religious do-gooders. Rejoice when any and all who repent and turn to Jesus.

WEEK 36 JESUS CLEANSSES TEN LEPERS-----

-----Dennis Watson

I believe, for believers in particular, we should err on the side of grace and gratitude. After all, we have been graced by God in so many ways. We should be looking for someone to show grace to and we should be looking for something to be thankful for. This week, we are going to look at forgiveness and being thankful.

Day 1

Read Luke 17:3-10

So often the teachings of Jesus seem contrary to our way of thinking; not only contrary, but strange. The environment we want to create for believers is one where sin is avoided and we do nothing to cause another to stumble.

But, Jesus seems to say, when a brother does stumble and sin, here is what you do. First, there is to be a loving and gracious rebuke. I recently experienced this with someone. A young man had a very downcast attitude and disposition over his sin. Pity is not what a person needs when they sin. Neither self-pity or the pity of others. They need a rebuke for the purpose of getting them back on track. The rebuke is never to belittle or to embarrass, but to assist in repenting and obeying. The goal is to restore (Galatians 6:1). After the rebuke, if the offender repents, then he is to be forgiven, and not begrudgingly. Then Jesus, seeking to drive home His point, says even if the person does it seven times in one day and each time repents, you are to forgive!

It seems like the disciples were blown away by these instructions. They did not ask Jesus to increase their love, but their faith. They needed trusting, obedient faith to practice such forgiveness. Think about how God has forgiven you so freely in Jesus Christ. He took the initiative to accomplish for us the very basis of our forgiveness. He sent Jesus to become sin for us and to die on the cross to bring about His forgiveness. The very basis of that forgiveness is the forgiveness that He has shown us! We may become exasperated with the situation Jesus described. How

could the gracious, saving God, who sent His own Son to deal with our sin express exasperation over our sin? We are to give to others what God has, in Christ, so graciously given to us.

When we think about how much God has forgiven us, it seems like we should all go and find someone to whom we might show forgiveness. Is there someone you need to forgive?

Day 2

Read Luke 17:11-14

In the days of Jesus, many diseases were death sentences. Today, many of the killer diseases of that day are treatable or curable with modern medicines. One such terrible disease was leprosy and there was no cure. People often saw it as judgment from God. It was not only a deadly disease but also highly contagious. For this reason, the people who had leprosy were put outside the city and could not be around other people. It was required that when other people approached them, they were required to shout out loud, “unclean, unclean.” People would avoid them and they became outcasts.

Since people with leprosy could not go into the towns and villages to see Jesus, they hoped they would be able to see Him when He passed by. On this occasion, in Luke 17, we read about ten lepers traveling together when Jesus passed by on His way to a village. Instead of shouting, “unclean, unclean” they shouted, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” They had a need, and Jesus was the answer to their need. They believed He could bring healing to them. They were most likely traveling together as a small leper colony. Jesus’ response was to tell them to go show themselves to the priests because the priests had to pronounce a person cured and clean before they could come back in among the others. As they were obeying Jesus, heading to see the priests, each one of the ten was healed. There was no more leprosy.

What would you have done? Often when God does a great work in our lives, we often just carry on. God is always doing great works in our lives. Give Him praise and thanksgiving!

Day 3

Read Luke 17:15-16

It is very interesting to note here that there were ten men who had leprosy and one of the ten, was a Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritans would not normally live together. However, misery loves company and all ten were outcasts. What difference does birth make if you are experiencing a living death? These men now had hope, because Jesus was there, and they cried out for mercy. The word master translated means chief commander. They knew Jesus was in command of even disease and death and they trusted Him to help them. They had faith that Jesus alone was their hope.

When one of the ten lepers realized he had been healed, he returned to Jesus to praise Him and give Him thanks for healing him. Oddly enough, the one who returned was the Samaritan. When he returned to give thanks, Jesus did something else, He forgave his sins. The other nine were healed, but not saved. The believer should live a life characterized by thankfulness.

Why do you go to church on Sunday? Do you go to worship God and thank Him for all He has done for you? Part of your worship is to thank Him. About the only thing we can give to God is our thanks. How wonderful it is just to thank Him! We are even to make our requests to God with thanksgiving. We should have a thankful heart toward Him. This is the attitude of gratitude. A rejoicing, thankful heart is a glorious benefit of our great salvation!

Day 4

Read Luke 17:17-19

The thankful Samaritan was the only one who returned to give thanks. Jesus even asked the Samaritan man where the other nine were. You would expect all ten men to run to Jesus and thank Him for a new start in life, but only one did and he was not even a Jew. How grateful the men should have been for the providence of God which brought Jesus into their area, for the love that caused Him to pay attention to them and their need, and for the grace and power of God that brought about their healing. One of the great things about salvation and the Lord's work in our lives is the overwhelming joy that comes with it! As I write these words, I am listening to a choir sing that wonderful song, We Will Remember. I really enjoy singing this song! If only we all would live with an increased GQ —gratitude quotient.

It is as though this Samaritan's healing was not really complete until he experienced the joy of giving praise and thanks! One of my favorite verses is **Proverbs 4:23**. It tells us to "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life." Don't allow your heart to grow accustomed to the wonderful works of the Lord. Praise Him! Worship Him! Give thanks to Him! Keep cultivating your gratitude quotient!

I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. ¹² I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. **Psalms 77:11-12**

Pause right now and remember as many of the Lord's blessings as you can! Give praise and thanks to Him!

Day 5

Read Zechariah 13:1

Can you think of a time when you were hot, dry, and thirsty and you found refreshing water to drink and pour over you? This is what the writer is speaking of here. However, it is not physical refreshing, but complete spiritual, mental, and emotional refreshing. It is the fountain of cleansing from sin and the separation from God which is brought on by sin and a guilty conscience. Many people live their lives with the plague of guilt. It is like a dark cloud that follows them all the time. The only hope is the cleansing fountain of God. God, through Jesus Christ, has promised us that cleansing fountain.

The phrase “*in that day*” occurs 16 times in the last three chapters of Zechariah. *That day* refers to the future day of the Lord. On the day of Christ’s crucifixion, the fountain of cleansing was potentially opened for all Israel. At the Second Coming of Jesus, the fountain will be opened experientially for the Jewish nation. This verse is addressed, in particular, to the Jews. However, the church (Gentiles), through the crucifixion, resurrection and the Holy Spirit, has been grafted in and made recipients of the same cleansing fountain.

Romans 8:1 tells us “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” For all who turn to the Lord God’s cleansing fountain, the condemnation is removed! Give thanks for the cleansing which comes through the blood of Jesus Christ.

WEEK 37 JESUS CLAIMS TO BE GOD---Chris Watson

Many people in our world today claim many things, though they end up not being true. For instance, people for many years have claimed they knew when the world would end. Books have been written about it, convincing people to sell their possessions and hoard resources, only for the date to come and go and nothing happens. Some people have even claimed to be Jesus Himself, though we know it is not true. This week, Jesus claims to be God and it really ruffles the religious folk's feathers.

Day 1

Read John 10:1-6

In scripture, especially in the Gospels, the term shepherd is often used to represent Jesus and we are His sheep. This is the case in John 10. Jesus is the only way to know God, not a way, but the only way. In this passage, we are told there is only one way to enter the sheepfold, or sheep pen, and it is by the door. Much like we can only know God through Jesus.

Two important words are mentioned in Verses 3-4 and they are hear and voice. Verse 3 states the sheep *hear his voice* and for us, that voice is the voice of Jesus. Whether we hear it audibly, through God's Word, or directly to our hearts, as believers, we can hear God's voice. At times, there is little doubt that it is God's voice. We hear His voice because we are His sheep; we are in His family, the family of God.

Verse 4 uses the word voice as well, in the context of "...the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." **Verse 5** follows up with "They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." The sheep are so in tune with the voice of their shepherd they will follow him anywhere, but a stranger or the wrong voice, they will not follow. Why is that? They know the shepherd feeds them, takes care of them, and protects them from wild animals. This is exactly what Jesus has done and continues to do for us. We should be so in tune with His voice that we follow it wherever it leads us.

We should be so in tune with our shepherd, Jesus, that we follow no other voices. Only Jesus' voice will do, for we know that Jesus knows best and will lead and guide us. Who are we listening to and who is leading us? If we are not listening to God's words, let us learn to recognize His voice so all other voices are strangers and they are drowned out by Jesus.

Day 2

Read John 10:7-10

In **John 14:6**, we read “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” Jesus is the only way into the sheep pen. In Verse 7 of today’s passage, Jesus says He is the door of the sheep pen. If we put our trust and hope in Jesus, we can enter the sheep pen to find rest and peace.

The enemy (the thief) in Verses 8 and 10 is the devil himself. Verse 10 tells us the enemy’s game plan. He wants to steal, kill and destroy. From God’s Word we know exactly what the enemy is all about. He wants to steal and utterly destroy the sheep, if he can. If we are the sheep of Jesus, we know that the devil cannot destroy us. He may seek to steal our joy and peace, but if we know Jesus, we will not be taken from the fold of God.

The enemy offers death and destruction, but Jesus offers life, abundant life. Abundant life is what I want, what about you? I don’t want to follow the enemy; I don’t want what he offers. While scripture tells us that sin is fun for a season, we know it leads to destruction. In the end, it leads us where we never wanted to be in the first place. As we come in tune with God and His voice, we will desire to follow only Him.

Who are you following? Are you following Jesus, the good Shepherd or are you following this world and the enemy? May we know and follow the One True Shepherd.

Day 3

Read John 10:11-18

We know Jesus is the good Shepherd. Let's look again at just what the good Shepherd does:

Verse 11 and 15- He gives His life for His sheep. This would happen not long after Jesus uttered these words. He would willingly give His life for His sheep.

Verse 14- The good Shepherd is known by His own because of what He has done for them. Because of His faithfulness and His giving of His own life, His sheep can know Him.

Verse 16- Other sheep refers to unbelievers, but particularly Gentiles, those who were not Jewish. Both Jews and Gentiles would be one flock and would have one Shepherd, Jesus. We see this begin in the Gospels, but truly take root in Acts, the beginning of the New Testament church. In Romans 11, we read of Gentiles being grafted into God's love and His plan.

Verses 12 and 13 speak of a hireling that is not the shepherd. This is someone who watches over the sheep and when the wolves come to attack, the hireling will leave the sheep to fend for themselves. Jesus does not do this: He stays right with His sheep, He protects and guides them.

Our passage today ends when Jesus reiterates that He will give His life, no one will take it from Him. In other words, His death, burial and resurrection didn't randomly happen to Him. Rather, it was all part of God's plan. Jesus willingly went to the cross so you and I might be saved from our sin. No one took Jesus' life, He freely gave it for us. Not only did Jesus give His life, but He never leaves us.

Thank God today for being the good Shepherd and thank Him that we can be a part of His flock!

Day 4

Read John 10:19-42

Jesus is the good and faithful Shepherd. He loves us and we love Him. In our passage today, the religious leaders are trying to back Jesus into a corner and are seeking to question Him. They claim He is a liar and is not who He claims to be. It is their intent to stone Him.

Verses 27-28 may be the most important verses in this passage, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them, and they follow me.” Jesus said He gives eternal life and no one person or thing can snatch the sheep out His hand.

Salvation is all about what Jesus has done for us. We are saved when we put our faith and belief in what Jesus has done for us. When we know we can’t fix our sin problem, we realize that Jesus is our only hope. Salvation is a response to what has already been done.

Entering into a relationship with Jesus is a one-time decision, but it’s also a daily decision. As believers, there is a time when we put our faith in Him and choose to follow Him. At that time, we are saved forever. All the following days, we must recognize we need to be saved from ourselves. In other words, our eternity is secure but we need Jesus to save us from ourselves daily. We need to be saved from our foolish choices, our mindsets, our foolish hearts, and actions on a moment by moment basis.

Dr. Earl Rademacher said, “I have been saved, I am being saved and I will be saved.”

Chuck Missler describes it as:

Justification- The separation from the penalty of sin received by faith in Christ alone.

Sanctification- Separation from the power of sin, a work in progress that requires both faith and works for a believer. This is our daily Christian life where God is constantly working on us.

Glorification- Separation from the presence of sin and spending eternity with God.

Thank God for the salvation He has given you. Thank Him, as well, that no person or thing can snatch you out of His hand. Also, thank Him for continuously saving us from our own choices and our sin. Praise be to God for what He has done.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 45:17

Our verse today reiterates what we looked at yesterday. As a child, I remember lying in my bed trying to wrap my head around eternity. Of course, I couldn't do it and even now it's hard to grasp. Eternity will never end; it will go on and on. The only thing we have ever known is time, a beginning and an end, birth and death. To try and grasp eternity is literally impossible.

In our passage today, Isaiah speaks of an everlasting salvation. He is speaking in regards to Israel, but as we were reminded yesterday, this salvation is for us as well. It's a salvation that will never end. Paul tells us in **Romans 8:37-39**, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing will separate us from God.

There is no suffering, no difficulty, no struggle, or heartache, which can separate us from God's love. This is encouraging to know, but also to experience. The salvation we have from the Lord will last for eternity. We will continue to know God in Heaven as we know Him now, but that knowledge and understanding will be much greater.

Thank God for His everlasting love. Thank Him that nothing can separate us from that love. Be thankful He is with us always, through the good and bad times. Hallelujah!

WEEK 38 JESUS AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read Luke 18:9-12

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

In the passage we read today, Jesus tells a parable about a religious man (a Pharisee) and a tax collector. Both of these men, as Jesus tells in the parable, went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was a religiously devout man who kept all of the laws. He was a great legalist. On the surface he did everything right. The tax collector was a man with a despised trade. He worked for the Roman government collecting taxes that were due. Tax collectors were known to cheat people.

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Luke 18:13

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

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

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

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

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

Day 3

Read Luke 18:14

We need to do a quick review of yesterday's verse. The Pharisee was characterized by pride and arrogance and it came out in his prayer. He was self-righteous and worshipped not the one true God, but himself. Actually he was practicing practical atheism. In his mind, he believed in God, but in his living, and even in his worship, he lived like there was no God. There are people who by confession are atheists. This means that they say there is no God and believe it. Then there are those who claim to believe in God but live as though He does not exist. There are plenty of religious people. They have a strong confession but their lives tells another story.

Jesus said that the tax collector went down to his house justified. (NKJV) Someone has said that a good way to think about what the word justified means is to use the word itself—just as if I'd never sinned. To be justified is to be declared righteous in the sight of God on the basis of His forgiveness given through Jesus Christ. This is an encouraging verse, especially in contrast to what has gone before. What did the tax collector do to get this justification? The tax collector simply confessed he was a sinner in need of the mercy of God. The Pharisee, on the other hand, was self-righteous. The sad fact was the Pharisees were completely deluded and thought they were right and Jesus was wrong. This is a parable and Jesus used it to make a point. No one can be made righteous before God apart from God's provision. The only hope is found in the grace and mercy God gives through Jesus Christ.

So simple, but so costly! The old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow." Give thanks for the work of forgiveness God accomplished through His Son Jesus and rest in His finished work.

Day 4

Read Luke 18:15-17

In today's scripture, we read that people were bringing their children to Jesus in hopes that He might touch them and bless them. The disciples sought to prevent this from happening. As was always the case with Jesus, this became a teaching moment. After telling the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee praying in the temple, He used this situation with the children to teach the disciples more about how to approach the Lord. We cannot come to Him on our own abilities and accomplishments; we must come to Him and receive His kingdom like a child. Children have no airs of superiority or accomplishment. With a child there are no reservations. Children come trusting, ready to follow, and willing to be instructed.

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

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

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

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:11

Isaiah 53 is one of the servant songs found in Isaiah 49-57. Isaiah 53 is about the suffering servant, Jesus. The verse for today expresses several things. First, it says that Jesus, the suffering servant, will by His own labor, suffering, and death on the cross satisfy the heart of His Father. It was His Father's plan to hand Him over to die to make sinners righteous because the Father is "...not willing that any should perish but all to come to repentance **2 Peter 3:9b**. His death also satisfied the righteous demands of the law. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way:

God is angry at sin because it offends His holiness and violates His holy Law. In His holiness, He must judge sinners, but in His love, He desires to forgive them. God cannot ignore sin or compromise with it, for that would be contrary to His own nature and Law.⁹

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

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

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

⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary-The Prophets.

WEEK 39 THE RAISING OF LAZARUS--Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read John 11:1-16

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

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

Jesus told us to pray and ask specifically for what we want, but in the end to pray for His will to be done. We are ultimately to trust Him for whatever the outcome may be. Above all, it's for God's glory and He tells us that He causes all things to work together for good to those that love Him and to those that are called according to His purpose. God may use what we call a delay to strengthen us, to work in us, or to get us ready for what He may be doing. It may be painful. It certainly was for Lazarus' family; they were hurting, but God was still working.

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

Day 2

Read John 11:17-24

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

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

I can identify with Martha, can you? At times, I have prayed and sought God for what only He could do. In some instances, I believed He should have worked in a certain way, but He chose not to. I still trusted Him but, like Martha, I was hurting and disappointed it didn't work out like I wanted. Notice all the "I's"? It was all about what I wanted, my selfishness, my desires, my hopes, etc. God tells us to pray and seek Him and tell Him what's on our hearts, but to ultimately trust Him and pray for His will to be done. It doesn't mean we will understand it or embrace it. It doesn't even mean we like it, but, in the end, we must trust God asking for His will to be done and His name to be lifted high. God often works in ways we don't see to comfort, love, and encourage us as He walks this life with us.

Have you ever thought God was late in answering a prayer? Have you ever thought God missed it? Maybe you thought God was sleeping and just wasn't aware of what was going on? All of these thoughts have probably crossed our minds at some point or another, but, in the end, we know God knows and does best! We must trust His heart and trust His plan, even when we are hurting

like Martha and it doesn't make sense. What are you struggling with today? Will you lay it at His feet, trusting and knowing that He knows best?

Day 3

Read John 11:25-27

Looking at today's account, we read that Martha believed and trusted in God, believing He could do anything. However, she most likely believed Lazarus was gone and he would rise again, but not until the resurrection in the last day. Jesus then responded to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" **John 11:25-26** Martha then affirmed that she truly believed this.

We know when Adam and Eve sinned, they died. Of course, their physical death was not immediate, but they died spiritually. They were separated from God and eventually they died physically as well. With the exception of Enoch and Elijah, everyone in the Bible experienced a physical death and, unless the Lord returns first, we, too, will experience a physical death. The physical death is a result of sin, as is the spiritual death.

Jesus said, that though we die (physically) we shall live and if we live (spiritually), we shall never die. Paul puts it this way: ...to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. **2 Corinthians 5:8** While our physical bodies may die, our spirit and soul live on with Jesus for eternity. In time, God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth where we will spend eternity with Jesus and all those who know Jesus. That is the hope you and I have, praise the Lord!

At most funerals I have presided over, I ask myself this question, "How does anyone cope with death without hope?" As believers, we don't grieve as those without hope, but as those who have hope; hope in Jesus. Our belief and our hope is not casual. In Jesus' time, many Jews were God fearing people and sought to do what was right before God, although sometimes with wrong motives. Some Jews believed it was more than just a casual belief in Jesus. Rather, it was their life and all they needed. Their belief is exactly as ours should be, a belief to follow God wherever He leads, a belief to die to ourselves and follow Him. He is all we need.

Is your commitment to Jesus a casual commitment or are you all in? Is it just a commitment to escape hell and go to heaven or is it to know and walk with God? Pray and ask God to help you commit all you are to all of who He is. After all, in times of life and death, He is truly all we need.

Day 4

Read John 11:28-53

We know Jesus is totally God and He was also totally man. However, we are vividly reminded of this in the account of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Mary told Jesus, “Lord if you would have been here my brother would not have died.” **Verse 32** When Mary relayed this she was essentially saying, “Jesus, you got this one wrong.” Jesus knew what God was doing.

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

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

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

Isn’t it a relief to know God mourns when we mourn, and He feels our pain? He understands what we are going through and

He is always there for us. Whether or not that healing we asked for occurs or what we are asking for ends up the way we want, our hope is always in Jesus. He knows what we are feeling and, although we may feel the results of sin in general, God is in control and He is a great father. Thank the Lord for His compassion and that He knows what we are going through. He is our hope and our peace. We know death is the result of sin and sin is disobedience toward God. As you begin or end each day ask God to help you overcome sin through Him.

Day 5

Read Hosea 13:14

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

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

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

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

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

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