

Volume 4 - Weeks 40-52

The focus of the Bible is Jesus! Connecting the Dots and The Dots Connected are about how the entire Bible is focused on God's plan of salvation which was accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah. This set of devotions begin with passion week. It surveys the events leading up to the crucifixion and the crucifixion itself. These devotions conclude with the most significant event in all of human history, the resurrection of Jesus. Keep in mind how God has set the stage for this crown of the gospel message and reflect about the outcome on human history since these events.

WEEK 40 JESUS AND ZACCHAEUS-----Dennis Watson

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, but He had one more place to go before the event known as the Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem took place, and He would face the final week of His life. He entered and passed through Jericho and in doing so, He encountered and healed a blind man and then found and saved Zacchaeus. We see in this week's passages Jesus did truly come "...to seek and to save that which was lost." **Luke 19:10** He did this as He lived. He traveled from town to town and in these travels, He encountered people—the lost.

Day 1

Read Luke 18:35-43

Jesus was traveling to Jericho and on the way crowds gathered along the road, obviously making a lot of noise. A blind beggar was seated along the road and asked what the commotion was all about. He was told that Jesus of Nazareth was coming down the road. Immediately, the blind beggar began to shout, "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me." (Verse 38b) His words gave him away as one who believed in the coming Messiah. He called Jesus The Son of David. This title makes us aware that the blind beggar believed Jesus to be more than just a man, but the promised Messiah and his only hope. The blind beggar believed Jesus could heal his blindness. He could not be discouraged from crying out to Jesus. His persistence got the attention of Jesus and Jesus ordered the man be brought to Him. When He asked the blind beggar what he wanted, the response was that he wanted to see. I believe the blind beggar was oblivious to everything else around him. Jesus told the blind man two things—"Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." (Verse 42)

The blind man received his sight, and by his faith, he received much more; his faith had made him well. Not only could he see, but he was saved—delivered from his lostness. The blind beggar sought Jesus in his desperation. He knew Jesus was his only hope. He had nowhere else to turn and no one else to turn to. He was all alone in his desperation and Jesus healed him and made him whole.

When was the last time you desperately cried out to Jesus knowing you had nowhere else to turn and no one else to turn to? The old hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Until the blind beggar heard Jesus was coming, he had no hope. When he met Jesus, He became his only hope. Is He your only hope? Believe it or not, He is your only hope.

Day 2

Read Luke 19:1-8

The very first words of this passage say that "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho." He was traveling from Samaria to Jerusalem, but He took what appeared to be a detour to go to Jericho. He also entered and passed through when He came to earth; He was on a mission. The mission was to seek and to save that which was lost. He knew there were at least two people in Jericho which were lost whom He needed to save. Yesterday, we looked at a blind beggar. Jesus went there because He knew the blind beggar needed to be saved. He knew there was a chief tax collector who also needed salvation. It may appear Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, but in reality, Jesus went seeking Zacchaeus. Tax collectors worked for the Roman government and had to pay a certain amount of money to the Roman government to cover the taxes of their region. Anything they collected over that amount was theirs to keep. These tax collectors were ruthless cheats. They were despised by the Jewish people who were citizens of Rome.

Perhaps Zacchaeus, a tax collector, was weary with his job, knowing that he was cheating people and getting rich off of them. He wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus, but he got much more. He was a small man, and in order to see Jesus, he had to climb up into a sycamore tree. There, he waited for Jesus and His entourage, hoping to hide in the tree beneath the cover of the leaves. When Jesus looked up into the tree and saw Zacchaeus, Jesus told him to come down quickly because He was going to his house right then!

This was the beginning of Zacchaeus getting much more than he bargained for. He joyfully came down out of the tree and took Jesus to his house. We are not privy to what went on between them, but we can imagine. It is obvious that Zacchaeus was convicted of the wrong he had done as a tax collector. He said that he was going to give half of his possessions to the poor, and repay those he had cheated, four times the amount he owed! Zacchaeus was a changed man. He repented and sought to do what was right.

Tomorrow we will read about his visit with Jesus.

I am so glad Jesus came seeking the lost. He found me and I am a new man! What about you?

Day 3

Read Luke 19:9-10

The gospel is the message of the New Testament. The gospel is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to accomplish salvation for sinners. The Bible teaches that all people are sinners. Zacchaeus was a sinner. He had been cheating people out of their money and he had become rich at the expense of others. Although, in terms of the world's riches, Zacchaeus was a rich man, he came to realize he was actually poor. He wanted to see Jesus. The Lord God was drawing Zacchaeus to Jesus. Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house." (Verse 9) This did not mean the act of giving to the poor had saved Zacchaeus, but his change in lifestyle was a sign of his changed life. Zacchaeus was a descendant of Abraham by birth and, therefore, had a right to enter the kingdom. It was not his birth heritage which saved him. His birth heritage made him a Jew and, at this point, Jesus had come only for the Jews. It was his relationship to Jesus which saved him.

Zacchaeus did not know Jesus was on His way through Jericho to Jerusalem where He would be arrested, falsely charged, found guilty, beaten, and nailed to a cross. Jesus had come to seek and to save the lost. He was traveling to Jerusalem to become the payment and solution for Zacchaeus' sin. Zacchaeus received far more than he bargained for. He just wanted to see Jesus and he did. Jesus went to his home and He told Zacchaeus of His plan to seek and save lost sinners. Zacchaeus placed his faith in Jesus and his first step of being a follower of Jesus was to stop cheating people and make restitution. Repentance is always followed by obedience.

What about you? Are you a Jesus follower? If so, follow closely and be alert to repent and be obedient as you follow Him.

Day 4

Read Luke 19:11-27

The popularity of Jesus was certainly at an all-time high. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, He had healed a blind man, and now He had spent a little time with Zacchaeus, who had become a changed man. Zacchaeus had cheated people in his tax collecting business, but now he was restoring to them four times the amount he had taken from them. The disciples and others knew Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and they believed it was at this time He would establish His rule as King. They did not understand He was going to Jerusalem to die a brutal death by crucifixion. He told them a parable to show them the kingdom of God was not going to come soon.

The parable pointed to Jesus. He was the nobleman in the parable. He had been sent by God and had given to His followers the gospel represented by the mina. A mina was three months' salary for a working man. Remember this is about the kingdom. The noble man would leave and return expecting something to be done with the mina he had entrusted to ten people. The parable is teaching that Jesus has entrusted something to us—the gospel. He has gone away, but will return and expects we have been faithful with the gospel message He entrusted to us. Some will put it to work by faithfully sharing it and gaining a following of the gospel message. Those are faithful servants who are busy about His work, anticipating His return and the establishment of His kingdom. One servant was unfaithful because he feared his master. He did nothing; he hid the mina and was rebuked. What he had been given was taken away and given to the one who had been faithful and increased tenfold.

Jesus is coming again to set up His eternal kingdom. He is expecting that we will be faithful and obedient and put the gospel to work and achieve gain. Two servants in the parable were faithful, obedient, and put the gospel to work and achieve gain. Two servants in the parable were unfaithful, one was not.

Are you expecting Jesus to return? Are you living faithfully with the gospel He has entrusted to you? When He returns, will you have the opportunity to present to Him fruit of the gospel?

Day 5

Read Isaiah 11:10-16

I had chinaberry trees in my yard when I was a child and they were great trees for climbing. They have a root system which has shallow feeders and those feeders will often have little trees or shoots grow from them. Isaiah wrote that from the root of Jesse, a banner would grow. That banner would be Jesus. The banner Jesus, will be for the rallying of the people of God, Israel. They will be gathered from all over the earth and brought to Jerusalem. It will be like a second exodus as the Lord God will open the way for His people to return to their land. The ultimate goal will be the kingdom of God in the millennium and the gathering of all of God's people, including the gentiles who come to Him by faith.

For the Jews who remained faithful, these words of the future regathering of Israel back to their homeland would have been extremely encouraging. Equally, this was and is encouraging to the non-Jews. Most of those reading this devotion today are non-Jews. We are gentiles. He will not only provide the banner, which is Jesus Christ, to gather scattered Israel; He will provide the banner for the nations, the gentiles, who through Jesus Christ have been grafted in. Eight hundred years before Jesus came as the prophesied banner which is from the root of Jesse, this picture was given. When that day comes, we will rejoice that Jesus, from the root of Jesse, is also our banner. Jesus put it this way, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." **John 14:6** Jesus is the banner who gathers and rallies His own to Himself.

Give thanks to The Lord God that He is your banner!

WEEK 41 JESUS CLEARS THE TEMPLE-----

-----Dennis Watson

In John 2, we read about the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry when He first cleansed the temple. In this chapter, we understand why John wrote in **Verse 17**, "His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house has eaten me up.'" Jesus wants us to love the place of worship which is a house of prayer. This week's scriptures will detail the second cleansing of the temple by Jesus.

Day 1

Read Psalm 122

Psalm 122 is one of three Pilgrim Psalms attributed to David which focuses on Jerusalem and the house of God. Another is Psalm 124 which describes God's protection of Israel from enemies. The last is Psalm 131 which is about David's submission to the Lord.

At the time this passage was written, there were many faithful Jews who made lengthy pilgrimages several times a year to Jerusalem to worship at the Tabernacle. At that time, the Tabernacle was just the tent of worship as the temple had not yet been built. Building the temple would happen later and would be Solomon's project. David lived in Jerusalem which meant he did not have a long pilgrimage. Nevertheless, David did go frequently to the Tabernacle to worship. In Verse 1 David expresses delight at coming to the house of the Lord. The words, "Let us go" would better be translated, "We will go." It was a declaration not an invitation.

David had a heart for God as he loved to go to the place of worship. If we truly love God, we will love the place of worship, the person of worship, and the people who worship Him. Today, more than ever, it is a treat to gather with other believers (the people of worship) at the place of worship (the church) to worship the person of worship—Almighty God.

Not only did David have a heart for God, he had a heart for praise. Twenty-six times in Psalms, the phrase “I will praise” is found. The Lord had told His people that one day there would be a central place where they would worship and that place was Jerusalem. David was told by the Lord that Mount Moriah, where he built the altar, would be the site of the temple. Jerusalem became known as the Holy City and the City of David. Those who are God’s people will have a heart for God and a heart of praise.

In Verses 6-9, all people are called upon to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. God’s people are to have a heart for prayer. Prayer originates in the heart of God. Jesus taught us to pray in agreement with God, “Your Kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” **Matthew 6:10** The peace of Jerusalem and peace on earth will not be a reality until the Prince of Peace reigns of David’s throne. The heart for prayer is rooted in praying for the day when God, through Jesus, reigns supreme. Those who love God have a heart for Him, a heart for praise and a heart for prayer.

I hope you love to gather with God's people to worship God.

Day 2

Read Matthew 21:1-11

We often neglect context when we read or study the Bible. This week, we are looking at the second biblical account of Jesus driving out those who were abusing the temple. The first is recorded at the beginning of His ministry in John 2:13-17. The other gospel accounts only record the second cleansing of the temple which took place the last week of His life and ministry on earth.

Jesus knew He had just made a prophesied ride into Jerusalem to carry out the ultimate purpose of His Father.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." **Zechariah 9:9**

The second account of the cleansing of the temple took place immediately after Jesus made the prophesied triumphal entry into Jerusalem the week of His arrest and crucifixion. Jesus knew what was coming. He knew He had come to seek and to save the lost. He knew He had come to bring unconditional love to all people. He loved the things His Father loved.

I do not want to read too much of my own humanity into Jesus, but with what had been prophesied, the ride He had just made, and knowing what He was about to face, I can see some hostility coming on. John wrote "Then the disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house has eaten me up.'" **John 2:17**. They saw the reason and context of what He had done. He loved His Father, He loved the Temple and He loved His mission. What was happening in the temple, He no doubt hated. He did not hate the people, He hated what they were doing. He had come to bring cleansing.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. In light of what Jesus knew and what was going on, His actions, though they seem out of character, are very understandable. Today, we live in a time when much of what Jesus' followers hold dear is being mocked

and even torn down by our laws and culture. Zeal for the truth should eat us up, and we should be firm and more outspoken than ever. We should bring cleansing and refreshing to our world.

Day 3

Read Matthew 21:12-14

Our passages today are a historical narrative indicated by the use of the word *then*. Historical narrative indicates a flow of activity that is being written about. After Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling prophecy, He entered the temple and took authority over what was going on in the temple.

What was going on in the temple? Jewish males were to make three pilgrimages a year at festival time to the temple in Jerusalem. The three festivals were Pesach (Passover, The Feast of Unleavened Bread), Shavuot (The Feast of Weeks), and Sukkot (The Feast of Booths). This occasion was Passover. All of Jerusalem was filled with people who had come to worship and celebrate. The worship included making sacrifices. Most of the pilgrims were making long journeys and were not able to bring their sacrifices with them. This made it necessary to purchase animals for their sacrifices which would require exchanging their money. Jesus saw what was going on and drove the sellers and the money-changers from the temple.

Jesus had begun His public ministry with a similar act described in John 2:13-25. Three years later, the temple was being defiled again by the business dealings of the religious leaders. They were more concerned with their own business than the business of the Lord. They had turned the court of the Gentiles into a place where foreign Jews could exchange money and purchase sacrifices. What had begun as a service and convenience for visitors from other lands soon turned into a lucrative business.

The purpose of the court of the Gentiles in the temple was to give non-Jews an opportunity to enter the temple and learn from Israel about the true God. The presence of the commercial activity turned many sensitive Gentiles away from the witness of Israel. The commercialism became a distraction. The court of the Gentiles was used for commercial business, not missionary business.

Jesus rebuked the sellers and money-changers, charging them with turning His house into a den of thieves. He was quoting from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

"Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." **Isaiah 56:7**

"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD." **Jeremiah 7:11**

Jesus was calling Himself God by calling the temple "My house," and He was giving its major purpose—prayer.

Many things go on in the house of God, but it is mainly to be a place to cry out to the Lord, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." **Matthew 6:10**

Day 4

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-24

Have you ever noticed that the really important events and ceremonies, over time, can lose their significance? It is due to human contempt. I have watched more than my share of Perry Mason and other lawyer shows. Often the terminology, Contempt of Court is used when someone is not showing proper respect for the court and/or the judge. It is usually due to a sloppy procedure or downright disrespect. Believers have a tendency to get to a point of being sloppy about the things of God and at times are disrespectful. It is easy to get to the point where we just go through the motions of things which are good and of the Lord.

I am not sure what caused the contempt the people held toward the temple activities, but Jesus was driving the people out due to their contempt for the things of God.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-24, Paul is warning the believers in Corinth not to treat holy things with contempt. He was speaking of the Lord's Supper and the events surrounding its observance. One of the activities of the church at Corinth was the gathering of church members in homes to share meals. In some places in scripture, they were referred to as love feasts. Paul rebuked the people for how they were going about these activities, even observing the Lord's supper without seeing or recognizing the Body of Jesus. The body of Jesus is seen in the Lord's Supper—in remembrance, and in seeing His body which is His church.

Here is how one writer describes what may have caused the contempt and brought on Paul's rebuke:

"Paul's rebuke of the love feasts of Corinth concerns the gluttony, drunkenness, and selfishness exhibited by some in the church: "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1 Corinthians 11:21–22)

These were love feasts without love, and Paul says their holding of the feasts were "not for the better but for the worse" (verse 17). Some in the Corinthian church were not sharing their food but enjoying their own private feasts while others had nothing to eat; some were even getting drunk. This bad behavior led Paul to say, "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat" (Verse 20)—it was their own supper, and their gorging was dishonoring the Lord." (<https://www.compellingtruth.org/love-feasts.html>)

Their participation in the Lord's Supper and other associated activities had become contemptible. Their focus was lost and they were not allowing the Lord's Supper to enable them to remember the body of Jesus crucified for them, and to see the body of Jesus in the church.

When worship gatherings become anything other than about the Lord, His body and the gospel, it is out of line and in need of cleansing, just as Jesus cleansed the temple. He drove out the sellers and the money-changers to restore what the temple was to be about. Ask the Lord to enable all of us to keep our focus on Him.

Day 5

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

In the last few months we have emerged from the shut-down of the pandemic of 2020. During this time, certain workers and places of business were allowed to reopen if they were considered essential. It was interesting to see that some places were considered essential like Wal-Mart, Lowes and Home Depot. Early on liquor stores were allowed to remain open. However, in some states churches were not allowed to meet at all. Harp's Crossing opened up quickly, following all of the CDC guidelines, such as cleaning, social distancing and the wearing of masks. We were one of the first churches in our area to open up. The reason? I believe the gathering of believers on a regular basis is essential. It is essential for the welfare of the people of God.

One of the tactics of the enemy is to divide and conquer. When followers of Christ become separated from the body, they are much more readily exposed to spiritual failure. Just like God gave us family and community, He gave the church to believers. In order for the church to carry out its mission, purpose and vision, each of the members need the strength which comes from the Word of God. They need the Spirit of God, and they need other believers in the church of God.

Church attendance and involvement can become old hat. It should be part of our nature, but it should never become routine. Gathering together must be an integral part of your spiritual journey. It should be like breathing. We breathe in and we breathe out. We take in and we put out. We receive and give encouragement, blessings, and the power of God's testimony which is always working and transforming us. I do not see church involvement as an option for any Jesus follower. We must practice gathering for strength so the church can be the effective light for which it was placed here to be. The writer adds another phrase, "And even more so as we see the day approaching." **Verse 25b** The day, meaning the last days which could bring with it great difficulty. We are living in hostile times for the believer and the church. So, more than ever, you need the church body. Do not stay away unless it is absolutely necessary. You need the body and the body needs you!

WEEK 42 THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY----- Chris Watson

Have you ever had someone sing your praises one minute and, a minute later, turn around and think you are the worst person on earth? This week, we will see Jesus riding into Jerusalem to the people laying down palm branches and singing His praises. Then, just days later, possibly some of the same people were calling for His crucifixion. People, including myself, can be fickle and, too often, we choose to go along with the crowd rather than thinking for ourselves. Instead, we should choose to follow Jesus no matter what others think or do.

Day 1

Read John 12:1-8

It is thought that in today's economy, the amount of perfume Mary used to wash Jesus' feet would cost over \$35,000. Judas expressed his opinion that it was such a waste for her to use the perfume for Jesus when she could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor. Contrary to what he said, we know Judas was the keeper of the money for the disciples and from time to time he took money. He had no real concern for the poor; his thoughts were for himself and his desire to have the money available for the taking.

Jesus served and met many needs, the poor included. The Gospels direct us to care for the poor and needy, but the focus in this passage is Jesus' coming death. Mary's attention was on Jesus and she spared no expense while He was in her presence. She might have sensed the time was near and she gave Jesus all she had in worship of Him. What about us?

I am not saying we must literally take all we have, sell it, and give the proceeds to God, His Church, or the poor, unless God leads you to that conclusion, but what about our attitude toward giving God all we have? What about laying ourselves at Jesus' feet with reckless abandon? Why not trust Him with all that we have: our lives, our families, our homes, our cars, and anything else we consider to be ours? After all, it is all His anyway; we are merely the stewards of what He has given us. Mary knew who Jesus was and

she wanted to give Him all that she had, including herself. Will we do the same? If I am honest with myself, sometimes I give Jesus only some of what I am and have, the parts that I might not miss or that I'm comfortable with handing over to Him. But all? Everything? Yes! Jesus wants it all! He wants our hearts, minds, spirits, souls, attitudes, and even our possessions, to be under His control. Today, consider how you might release more of yourself to Jesus so that one day you will be totally under His control. Think of ways you can practically and obediently give Him all that you are and all that you have.

Day 2

Read John 12:9-19

Jeremiah 33:17 tells us, “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.” Many Jews would have been familiar with this passage and we know some were already beginning to believe and follow Jesus. So many, in fact, that to the religious leaders, it seemed almost as if the whole world was following Him (John 12:19). Granted, we now know that some of the followers were calling for His crucifixion within just a few days.

Our passage today reminds us of the real issue, it looked as though the religious leaders were losing their positions of power and influence among the people. Many of their followers had transferred their attention to Jesus and away from their religious leaders. Again, John 12:19 reminds us this really bothered the Pharisees and the other religious leaders more because of their status and the potential loss of that status than out of concern for the people and their spiritual lives. In fact, one of the reasons these leaders wanted to put Jesus to death was because they perceived Him as a threat or competition to their positions.

Jesus competes with no one. Scripture tells us we cannot serve both God and money (or whatever else you might be tempted to put before God). In other words, we cannot serve our own pride, greed, desires, will, or selfishness and seek to serve God. God will not compete; He wants our entire being.

God won't compete with our agenda. At times, we make everything about us. It's what we want and what we want to accomplish even if what we want might be considered good. While in the process, we leave God and His wisdom and direction totally out of our decision-making. But it's not about me and it's not about you; it never has been and if we think it is, we are wrong. It's not my kingdom or my family or my church. Everything is God's. Therefore, I cannot be selfish about what I want or, like the Pharisees, start panicking about what I'll do when the focus is rightfully turned away from me and back to Jesus and His plan. Don't we

want to be in His heart, His will, and His plan? Isn't that what really changes people? We are simply instruments or tools in His process. We must be able to turn to God and say, "It's not about me, as if You should do things my way. You alone are God and I surrender to Your ways."¹

Is your life all about you? Have you had pity parties about not getting your way? Have you ever decided to take your toys and go home? Ask God to change your heart. Ask Him what He wants, what His plan is, and what He wants to accomplish in and through you. Surrender to Him and ask to be part of His plan.

¹ "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," Paul Oakley, 1996, Integrity Music.

Day 3

Read John 12:20-33

John 12:25-26 reads, “He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.” These verses contradict what the world says. In fact, in Matthew 20:16, we read that those who want to be first will be last and those who want to be served will be the servants. Jesus was explaining to us that it’s not about our lives, our will, or our desires; it’s all about God’s plan. If we surrender to Him and die to ourselves and begin to serve and follow Jesus, we are doing what God desires.

Jesus’ time of death was near and He wanted His disciples and other followers to grasp this truth so they would follow Him completely. Jesus told them that He, the Son of Man, came to serve, not to be served, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). In our passage today, Jesus was well on His way to being crucified for your sins and mine and on His way to fulfilling His Father’s will so you and I could be saved. Jesus’ life was not about Himself, it was about doing His Father’s will and carrying out God’s plans. He told His followers that through doing His Father’s will and dying on the cross, He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32-33).

Jesus was troubled (John 12:27), but He knew the reason He had come was to free people from their sins. Jesus was all about doing His Father’s business. Whose business are you about? Your own? Someone else’s? We are to be about Jesus’ business and no one else’s. We are to serve Him and serve Him alone. Jesus was so much about His Father’s business that He saved us from eternal damnation and an eternity apart from Him. You and I should be about God’s business so much that we, through God’s drawing and power, seek to point others to God so they might be saved.

As you begin or end your day, ask yourself whether or not you are about God’s business. Ask God how He might have you join Him in carrying out His will so you can be focused on Him and less concerned with yourself.

Day 4

Read John 12:34-50

Jesus gave people many reasons to believe in Him during His ministry on earth. In addition, the Old Testament scriptures point directly to Him. Though He did many signs and wonders, the people still didn't believe in Him and it is implied that they didn't really want to believe (John 12:37-43). Adam Clark says, "Why? Because they did not believe the report of the prophets concerning Christ; therefore they credited not the miracles which he wrought as a proof that he was the person foretold by the prophets, and promised to their fathers. Having thus resisted the report of the prophets, and the evidence of Christ's own miracles, God gave them up to the darkness and hardness of their own hearts, so that they continued to reject every overture of Divine mercy; and God refused to heal their national wound, but, on the contrary, commissioned the Romans against them, so that their political existence was totally destroyed."² The people were given many chances to believe and put their trust in Jesus and, yet, they continued to deny Jesus and do things their own way.

Praise God, some did believe! (John 12:42-43) but they did not make a public confession because they didn't want to be put out of the synagogue and they enjoyed the prestige they had there. They saw Jesus as the light in a dark world. They sought to follow Him, but still retain the approval of men. Honestly, we cannot have things both ways. Either we follow God, whether or not others follow along with us, or we follow men and their philosophies. When we truly believe in Jesus and His good news, we cannot keep it inside. Jesus told His listeners He was the light of the world and whoever believes in Him should not abide in darkness, meaning we should not continue in sin, nor should we hide the fact that we believe in Jesus.

Scripture tells us (Matthew 10 and Luke 12) we are to confess our Father before men and follow Him. If we deny Jesus, He will also deny us before His Father in heaven. In other words,

² Adam Clarke Commentary

there is no such thing as a closet Christian. We cannot be Christians and keep the news to ourselves. To the contrary, we will be compelled to share the news with others. We will desire to be in the light as God is in the light and share with the world and other believers what God has done for us. Are you ashamed of your faith, of your God? Confess Him before men and confess Him to the world. They need to know. Do what the four men did when they brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus; they abandoned all and did what they could to help their friend regardless of what others thought or said. We must stand on the Truth and for the Truth and that Truth is the person, Jesus Christ.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 6:9-10

To some, the Gospel is great and glorious while to others, it is a stumbling block. To some, it is the best news ever and to others, it is something to ridicule. Why is that? By the grace and love of God, some have seen the gospel as salvation and hope for now and eternity. Yet, others are so blinded and caught up in sin and in their own desires, they cannot hear or grasp the reality of the gospel.

Some people's hearts have become hardened to the preaching of the gospel. While the hearts of others have been softened by the very same gospel and they have received salvation from God through Jesus' death on the cross. It all goes back to darkness and light. If someone lived in a dark room for years and someone comes in and turns on a light, the person who had lived in darkness for so long might beg for the light to be turned back off. This person would have no concept of light and it would probably hurt his eyes. The same is true of spiritual blindness. Many live in spiritual darkness (sin) daily. They are used to it and they even enjoy it. When the gospel is preached, they don't want to hear it because it makes them uncomfortable and they try to avoid exposure to God's Word. They want people to stop talking about it because they would rather continue to live in the darkness, comfortable with their sin, than to have their sins exposed to others and have to deal with those sins.

Matthew Henry adds, "God sends Isaiah to foretell the ruin of his people. Many hear the sound of God's word, but do not feel the power of it. God sometimes, in righteous judgment, gives men up to blindness of mind, because they will not receive the truth in the love of it. But no humble inquirer after Christ, need to fear this awful doom, which is a spiritual judgment on those who will still hold fast their sins. Let every one pray for the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, that he may perceive how precious are the Divine mercies, by which alone we are secured against this dreadful danger."³

³Matthew Henry Concise Commentary

We must constantly seek to be in the light and our prayer must be for God to open the eyes of those in the darkness, to pull them from their blindness, and to allow them to see the Truth for what it really is.

How can God use you today to shine His light in a dark world?
Who has God prepared for you to share the Gospel with today?
Be the light!

WEEK 43 THE WIDOW'S OFFERING-- Dennis Watson

Jesus was concerned about the inconsistency between what was in a person's heart and how they presented themselves to the public. The religious leaders in His day had an appearance which differed from their heart conditions. They looked like servants of God to the eye, but in reality, they were cheating widows and praying prayers only for show. The disciples were prone to be impressed with the appearance of the temple, but it was soon to be destroyed. There was a misalignment between what was on the lips and what was in the heart. This week, we will look at passages that address this discrepancy which can be a danger in religion.

Day 1

Read Luke 20:45-47

Jesus spoke directly to His disciples, but did so in a way that all around Him could hear Him. He warned them about the religious leaders. First, He warned them about display. He said that the religious leaders liked to walk around with the long flowing robes, each one relishing the appearance of his position and flaunting it. Second, He warned them about the danger of seeking attention. The religious leaders enjoyed being greeted in the market place. Third, He warned them about seeking prominence. The religious leaders liked their special seating in the synagogue and at the feasts. Fourth, He warned them about the religious leader's propensity for taking money from the poor widows. Last, He warned them about praying only for show, not focusing on God. Jesus told them that for these reasons, the religious leaders would face greater condemnation.

What do you suppose the real issue was? I think it was their inconsistency. They expressed one message with their lips, but their lives expressed a completely different message. How did they get to this point? They may have grown cold and were going through the motions, to the extent they even slipped into wrong and illegal behavior. Could it be they learned this at home? Too often, religious inconsistency is learned behavior. Parents who live one way at church and another way at home or away from

church, professing a belief they don't live out in their daily lives, demonstrate a lack of depth in their faith. Jesus was warning the people against practicing what they don't really believe. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were often fakes. They did the right things, but frequently from impure motives, rather than from a real and living faith in the one true God whom they were supposedly serving. Over time, their real motives became evident to those around them.

Please pray that we will all have true depth in our walks with Jesus and we will live from the inside out. Make sure you are living a consistent, godly life.

Day 2

Read Luke 21:1-4

In stark contrast to the religious leaders Jesus warned about in yesterday's passage, today, we meet a widow. Jesus used what she did as an example to follow. Jesus saw the people putting their gifts into the temple treasury and, as He often did, began to use this as a teachable moment for His followers. He pointed out that the widow had put into the treasury what amounted to 1/8 of a cent, yet, He commended her gift, because "... she had given out of her poverty, put in all the livelihood that she had." (Verse 4b) She had given all she had, whereas, others gave out of their abundance or surplus. Jesus knew that for the temple expenses, her gift would not go very far, but this was not His point. Jesus measures differently than you and I. He measures not what you give, but what you keep for yourself.

As believers, followers of Jesus Christ, we live by grace, not by law. The tithe (one tenth) is the beginning place and grace always goes beyond the law. What you keep for yourself should indicate grace giving. This widow was trusting God with her whole being. She gave from the abundance of her heart. God told Samuel, "... man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" **1 Samuel 16:7**. For many people, the tithe often comes out of their surplus. When I think of this, my mind goes to a man of God who set an example for us and we would be safe to follow his example. Truett Cathy was the founder and president of Chick-fil-A. He was a godly man who taught Sunday School to young boys for 50 years. He was also a billionaire at the time of his death late in 2014. More than this, he was a giver. He gave much more than he kept for himself. He made a life by giving, rather than keeping.

Jesus applauded the widow and used her as an example of abundant giving. Have you ever thought about getting to the point of giving more than you keep? The tithe is the starting line, not the finish line. The heart of the giver displays the desire to give more and more. What is on the inside matters more than the outward display. The woman demonstrated the connection between her heart faith and her actions.

Why not begin to consider what you give and what you keep? It is a good time to think about growing in your faith by growing your giving.

Day 3

Read Mark 12:41-44

Many of you were high school and middle school students in the 1990s and may remember a youth speaker named Dave Busby. Dave was a powerful speaker who touched the hearts of students and adults, especially me. His book, The Heart of the Matter: Moving from the External Pressure of Religion to the Internal Passion of Christianity was powerful and our focus this week agrees with the title. It is the heart motive that matters rather than what we can display through trying to live up to religious demands.

Today, we are connecting our topic to the gospel message. We all have a choice to make. Will we be like the widow or will we be like the rich people in this biblical historical account? Will our hearts reflect a giving spirit as she did, or will we hold on to as much as we can as we give what we feel we must to be good Christians. Remember, it is the heart that matters. The widow was not following the ways of the world and self-gratification. She was making her choices and decisions from a different heart. By giving all she had, she chose to trust God, rather than money. God knows what is in our hearts and He knows that our hearts are often focused on evil.

God sent Jesus to deal with our corrupt evil hearts. Jesus died on the cross and was raised to life again, so that we, too, can die to ourselves and be raised with Him to eternal life. “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Romans 6:11** When we are following Jesus, we are counting self as dead to sin, but alive to Him. This is the power of the Holy Spirit living in and through the Jesus follower. By giving all she had, the widow was trusting the Lord God above worldly riches. Jesus commended her faith.

Consider the word of Jesus in this regard, “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” **Luke 9:23**

Live as a follower of Jesus, dead to sin and alive to Him.

Day 4

Read Mark 13:1-2

I remember watching the Atlanta Fulton County Stadium being built. I was always excited to go up the interstate through downtown Atlanta with my parents and see what progress had been made. I was thrilled to see and anticipate its completion which would coincide with the Milwaukee Braves coming to Atlanta to become the Atlanta Braves. Later, I watched as it was systematically destroyed by implosion in 1997. When I was a teenager, my daddy would take me to games. The stadium was impressive and I was amazed. Yet, only thirty-two years later, it was demolished. Jesus' disciples were equally amazed by the temple and its huge stones. His disciples were more impressed with this marvel than they were with Jesus. They missed the idea that the temple was to point to Jesus, the true temple in Whom the presence of God lived. Jesus referred to His own body as the temple (John 2:21).

Jesus shocked them back into reality by telling them there would come a day that the temple would be destroyed and not one stone would be left upon another. Some of the stones were massive, some as long as thirty feet, yet, they would be thrown down. About forty years later, this prophecy became a reality when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

The disciples seemed to miss this idea. Like the old Atlanta Stadium, the temple no longer exists. The disciple's eyes were on the wrong thing. They were missing the real deal, Jesus, and His plan for a far greater temple not built with human hands. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 6:16**, "For you are the temple of the living God." Peter wrote "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." **1 Peter 2:4-5**

Jesus was the temple of God. He has made His followers into a living house, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Don't become overwhelmed with man's buildings. Be in awe of what God has built in the body of Christ. Give thanks for the living building of God, the body of Christ.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 29:13-14

We began this week talking about the discrepancy between what is in a person's heart and how that person lives life. Being a Jesus follower is more than trying to be good and going to church. In fact any attempts we make to be good might be an indicator of the real problem. When we choose to be crucified with Christ, we choose to let Him live in and through us. This is an ongoing experience as we daily count ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. In today's passage, Isaiah wrote about the problem which faces religious people, they "...honor me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me." **Matthew 15:8** I only know to call this a disconnect between what we profess and the very essence of our lives. This is called hypocrisy, saying one thing while doing and/or living another.

Followers of Jesus should seek to live by heart. By that, I mean the relationship with Jesus which rules the heart should be the overflow of living. For instance, I often hear Jesus followers say, "I will never be able to forgive that person." Yet, they claim to be a forgiving people. They may even teach forgiveness as God's way for all of His people. Do you see this disconnect? We are hard on the religious leaders of Jesus' day, but fail to see our own hypocrisy. Every thought, attitude, and act should flow from the place where Jesus resides on the throne of our hearts. Jesus is salvation! He rules in our hearts. He made it clear that to follow Him is to deny self and take up one's cross.

Ask the Lord to enable you to live with Jesus as Lord over all aspects of your life, even in those areas which seems impossible to submit to Him. What is impossible with man is possible with God (Matthew 19:26).

WEEK 44 JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLE'S FEET

-----Chris Watson

In the gospels, we see Jesus ask His disciples to follow Him, but we never see Him ask His disciples to do something He had not already done or was not willing to do Himself. Jesus was the perfect model; He did not instruct His followers to do something and then leave them on their own to do it. Rather, He guided and led them by His own example. We see this very vividly in our account today.

Day 1

Read Mark 10:32-45

The rest of this week's devotions will be devoted to servanthood and the example Jesus gave while washing His disciple's feet. In our passage today, Jesus was sharing what was to come with His disciples. He told them that He would be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, and killed, but He would rise again on the third day. We might logically expect to read of the disciple's sadness or of questions they might have had for Jesus. This is not what happened. Instead, James and John were more concerned about their position in God's kingdom.

Do you see what just happened? The situation went from Jesus soon to be betrayed, mocked, and killed to, "Thanks Jesus, but will we be able to sit at your right and left in Your kingdom?" In other words, their concern was about who would be the greatest when all was said and done. I am quick to think, "Really, guys, you turned Jesus' death into who of you would be the greatest in His kingdom?" Yet, I have done similar things, myself. At times, I have sought to turn the focus from Jesus to myself. I have tried to take the glory for myself or shift the spotlight from Jesus to me.

Jesus was coming to the end of His life and two of His disciples were wondering who was the best among them. Jesus gave an answer they were not really seeking. He told them the greatest among us shall be our servant and whoever desires to be first shall be last and Jesus follows up by telling them He came to serve, not to be served. Jesus was like no other king they had seen or heard

of before. He came to do the King's business and to serve others at the same time. He instructed His followers to do the same thing.

Is this life about you or is it about Jesus? Are you concerned with being in the spotlight or being thought of as the greatest or the best? Ask God to help you be a servant and serve Him while keeping the focus where it belongs, squarely on Jesus. After all, He is our life. How can you serve someone today? Think and pray for some practical ways that you might make much of Jesus today.

Day 2

Read John 13:1-5

In yesterday's devotion, we were reminded Jesus came to serve, not to be served. In fact, He came to give His life as a ransom for many. In today's passage, we see Jesus carrying out a service to those closest to Him, His disciples. He was doing for them what was usually done by the lowliest of servants. Adam Clarke notes, "This was the office of the meanest slaves. When David sent to Abigail, to inform her that he had chosen her for wife, she arose and said: Behold, let thy handmaid be a Servant, to Wash the Feet of the Servants of my lord, 1 Samuel 12:41."⁴ The foot washing job was truly one for a servant to perform. When Jesus began washing the disciples' feet, they would have known He was serving them and they would have been reminded of the conversation between Him and the two disciples who were so concerned about being first in the kingdom.

Jesus, by example, was showing the disciples exactly what He was sent here to do. In Jesus' time, there were no sneakers or closed-toed shoes. Sandals were the footwear of the day and they walked almost everywhere they went. The disciples' feet could have been caked with mud, covered with dry and nasty dirt, or just plain smelly from walking all day. As Jesus washed their feet, He was demonstrating to them that nothing was beneath Him. Jesus was the servant of all servants.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus modeled servanthood for us. In following Him, we are to serve others, including those who believe as we do and those who don't along with those who look like us and those who don't. God has called us to serve when it is easy and to serve when it is difficult. In this account, Jesus served those who were closest to Him. How can you serve those closest to you today? Whether that includes your spouse, children, parents, siblings, co-workers, or best friend, how can you serve them today and do it in such a way which brings glory to God?

⁴ Adam Clarke Commentary

Day 3

Read John 13:6-11

Jesus began to wash His disciple's feet and when He came to Peter, Peter said, "You shall never wash my feet." He quickly changed his mind after Jesus told him that if He didn't wash Peter's feet, Peter could have no part with Him. Peter then asked Jesus to wash his entire body.

Take note this passage illustrates more than the simple washing of His disciples' feet. The foot washing was foretelling what would happen as Jesus died on the cross, washing away the sins of the world. The passage seems to indicate Jesus washed the feet of all of the disciples, including those of Judas. However, Jesus told Peter "...you are clean, but not every one of you" **John 13:10**. He knew who would betray Him. Though Judas' feet were washed, he was not truly clean because he planned in his heart to betray Jesus. He turned on Jesus. Though he had the outward manifestations of a true disciple, he wasn't. Adam Clarke says, "Eleven of you are upright and sincere; the twelfth is a traitor. So it appears he had washed the feet of all the twelve; but as no external ablutions can purify a hypocrite or a traitor, therefore Judas still remained unclean."⁵

We might appear to be a Christian. Maybe we attend church regularly, read our Bible, pray out loud, and even keep some of Jesus' commandments. In fact, we might even teach others about Jesus, but if we are not washed in His blood or have never trusted in Jesus' blood to take away our sins and make us right before God, then, we are, in fact, lost. We could compare ourselves to Judas who looked the part and even associated himself with others who knew Jesus. Just as Jesus knew Judas' heart, He knows our hearts as well. If we have not trusted in His saving power, then we aren't His.

Jesus was clearly referring to Judas when He told His disciples not every one of them was clean. The other disciples were

⁵Adam Clarke Commentary

not sinless, but Jesus knew their hearts; He knew they were following Him with their whole hearts and for the right reasons. He knew they were trusting in Him because they knew Him and believed Him, but He also knew that Judas was only putting on a show.

Looking the part of a Christian and being one are two different things. Do you know Jesus? If not, confess your need for Him now. If you do, thank Him that He has washed your sins away and has made you holy.

Day 4

Read John 13:12-17

Jesus didn't wash His disciples' feet for only one purpose. He showed them how to serve and then told them to do so to one another. He was demonstrating by His own example we are to serve everyone. Jesus later told the disciples the world would know them as His by the way they loved one another.

One way we can love others is by serving them. We can serve anyone; our co-workers, our bosses, our family, our friends, even those we might consider our enemies. If we think there is anyone we cannot serve, we should remember Jesus even served Judas. This disciple who would soon turn his back on Jesus and betray Him to the authorities who had been looking for any reason to crucify Him. How can you serve those around you today and this week? How can you begin serving others as a lifestyle? Take some time to brainstorm how you can serve others in any of the following categories that may apply to you.

Spouse:

Children:

Parents:

Grandchildren:

Classmates:

Brothers/Sisters:

Co-workers:

People you see at the ball field or as you're going about town:

After thinking of some ways to serve, be intentional about serving at least two people today. Think about who that should be and go for it! Remember you are to serve and love them as you would serve the Lord.

Day 5

Read Psalm 40:4-10

Take additional time to read Hebrews 10:1-10. In reading the Hebrews passage, we see that Verses 5-7 come from Psalm 40. We know the sacrifices made in Old Testament times pointed to the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus. In fact, we are reminded of this, specifically, through the Passover and the Passover Lamb. The writer of Hebrews tells us these sacrifices were a reminder of the sins that needed to be washed away and were prophetic as they pointed to the cross.

In Hebrews 10:4, we are reminded the blood of animals could not take away sin; they merely covered over the sin. Hebrews 11, known as the Faith chapter, gives example after example of people who were made right with God through their faith in Him. When Jesus died, He died for all of the sins committed since the creation of the world and not just for the ones that were committed after His death. He died for the sins of Abraham and Moses, just as He died for my sins and the sins of those that will come after me. Just as Abraham and Moses placed their faith in the one true God, we have to place our faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

Scripture again reminds us without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins and the only blood that could take away our sins is the blood of Jesus. He is the one and only perfect, spotless, holy, and blameless sacrifice. We don't sacrifice animals for our sins anymore, thankfully. Instead, we trust in the shed blood of Jesus to wash away our sins rather than simply covering them.

I still don't fully grasp how Jesus' perfect blood washes away my sin, but I know it does. I don't understand why He would want to do this for me, but I'm grateful for the love and grace that led Him to do so. I didn't deserve Jesus' sacrifice, love, mercy or grace, but He gave it to me anyway. Thank Him for the gift of His salvation and grace.

WEEK 45 THE LAST SUPPER ----- Dennis Watson

This week, we look at the event known as The Last Supper. This was the Passover meal which Jesus shared with His disciples before He was crucified. The Passover reminded the Jews of the Exodus from Egypt, but this Passover pointed to the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Jesus was the Lamb of God, the sacrifice God provided for the removal of sin. The disciples did not fully understand all that was happening, but would later grasp what they had seen.

Day 1

Read Luke 22:1-6

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were anything but godly. They were seeking to kill Jesus. They did not want to do it in the daytime because they feared the people who were following Him. They sought to do their wicked deed at night. These men were hypocrites of the worst kind! Apparently, Judas knew of their plot and chose to join them. In Verse 3 of today's passage, we read that "...Satan entered Judas." Judas was one of the twelve closest followers of Jesus, yet, he was like the religious leaders as he had the appearance of godliness, but did not possess the real thing. Can a believer be demon-possessed? Talk about an oxymoron! Jesus and Satan cannot abide in the same place. Since true believers are inhabited by Jesus through His Holy Spirit, Satan cannot abide in the Jesus follower, too. Judas was a thief; he kept the money box for the disciples, but would often take from it for himself (John 12:6). This should be a warning for church people and religious people today. Some of the meanest people I know call themselves Christians. I am not judging anyone's salvation, but if a person can regularly do the enemy's work, that person needs to do some soul-searching!

After Satan entered him, Judas went to the religious leaders and agreed to help them with their plot to kill Jesus by handing Him over to them. For this, he was to receive thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). The plot involved waiting until the crowd left Jerusalem. They wanted to get Jesus alone, so the people would

not know what they were doing; they planned to take Him secretly. Judas would bide his time and let the religious leaders know when the time was right. This time never came, because Jesus forced them to act immediately. The deed was done on Jesus' timeline, not that of the plotters.

Doesn't it seem odd that Jewish religious leaders were plotting this deed at the time of Passover? They did not realize what they were doing. They were preparing to slay the true Passover Lamb. In all occasions and in all things, God is in control. It was not Judas who handed Jesus over to wicked men. Jesus was "... delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." **Acts 2:23** God is in control!

It is amazing how God accomplishes His plans!

Day 2

Read Luke 22:7-13

The time to celebrate the Passover had come. It was time for the Passover lamb to be killed and for faithful Jews to observe the Passover meal. The Passover observance looked back to the event known as the Exodus. Jesus gave instructions to Peter and John to go and make preparations for the meal. They were to go into the city of Jerusalem and find a man carrying a pitcher of water. He would show them the place where they would have the Passover meal. It was unusual, in that culture, for men to carry the water jugs as this was considered woman's work. Therefore, it was quite obvious when they saw the man they were seeking.

I used to cut grass in our neighborhood when I was a child. I also cut our grass, but I didn't always cut it with a willing heart. Sometimes, I couldn't get our mower started. The problem was not so much with the lawn mower as it was with the one pretending to try to crank it. You see, my heart was not in it and I was not really giving the rope a sincere pull. Conveniently for me, there were times I couldn't get the mower to start.

How much information do you need to follow Jesus obediently? It isn't more information we need as much as we need hearts willing to obey. God provides the means and the methods and we must provide the willingness to obey. He will not provide anything until we are first willing to obey and we start doing what He's showing us to do.

Peter and John would not have found the man carrying the water pitcher had they not obediently set out to follow and obey their Master's instructions. They would not have received the assignment if they had not had willing and obedient hearts. They went eagerly to follow the instructions of Jesus and found things exactly as He told them.

What do you need to do to show that you are eager about following and obeying? Is there something you keep talking about doing, but have not yet taken that step of obedience? It's time, start moving!

Day 3

Read Luke 22:14-22

For over 1400 years, the people of Israel had been observing and celebrating the Passover, along with all the images it conveyed to them of the Lord delivering His people from Egypt. For them, Passover looked back in time, but that was about to change. Jesus used the Passover meal He shared with His disciples before His crucifixion to tell them that His body would be crucified and His blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. He was the true Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb they had anticipated for so long.

The disciples did not understand what He was talking about as He gave them the bread and said, “This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” He also gave them the cup of wine saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you.” They had no idea that shortly Jesus would be hanging on the cross as their and our Passover Lamb. Jesus Christ, the Lord’s Messiah, perfectly fulfilled the meaning and role of the Passover Lamb. John the Baptist had said of Him, “Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.”

John 1:29

The disciples observed that Passover as they had many times before, but I think this time must have felt different for them. Judas, the betrayer, was with Jesus and the disciples for the Passover meal. After supper, Jesus spoke of the cup saying, “Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.” In John’s account, the supper meal was being served and the devil had already put the thought into Judas’ heart to betray Jesus. (John 13:2) Jesus, knowing what was in Judas’ heart, showed all of His disciples who would betray Him and told Judas, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” (John 13:27) John noted that Judas did, indeed, go quickly and it was night.

The historical gospel account was fully unfolding and coming to its earthly high point with the crucifixion and resurrection. At every point God was in control. Give thanks for His accomplishment for our salvation! Jesus was pictured in the Passover just

before God delivered His people from Egypt. The Passover included the elements of a sacrificial lamb and bitter herbs. It included the blood of the innocent lamb, which was the mark that enabled the angel of death to pass over their homes. All of this pointed forward to Jesus. He is our deliverer. He is the One who enables us to escape the enemy of sin and death. This is the gospel message---the good news. The death and resurrection of Jesus was not an afterthought. It was God's plan all along.

Share the message with someone today. Put it in its historical context that reveals the plan of God to save.

Day 4

Read Luke 22:24-34

In a horse race, a jockey will maneuver his horse into a position to make a move near the end of the race to get in position to win. This is where the saying “jockeying for position” comes from. Jesus had just spent a very significant time with His disciples. He had washed their feet and shared the Passover meal with them giving the Passover Meal new meaning. They were more concerned with their own self interest and advancement. Some of the disciples were jockeying for position as they began to debate which of them would be the greatest. Jesus had to explain to them that they were behaving like unsaved Gentiles and not like God’s children. He sought to help them understand that they were not to be concerned with position, but with servanthood. He had shown them this by His own example. He did affirm them for their faithfulness, letting them know they would have a future reward in His kingdom.

It must have been hard to hear that all of them would be sifted by Satan, not just Simon Peter. (Matthew 26:31, Mark 14:27) Simon Peter, who was their leader and spokesman, seemed to be the strongest of them all and if he failed, what would the rest of them do?

Peter did his usual boasting, insisting he was ready to go to prison and even to death with Jesus. Jesus told Peter “... before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.” (Verse 34) Jesus also told him He would be praying his faith would not fail. Peter’s faith did not fail, but Peter did. Jesus told him that after failing he would turn again and he would later be able to strengthen his brethren when they needed him.

Sin is a troubling thing, no doubt. It seems to rear its ugly head at very strange times. Ask the Lord to enable you to live so close to Him that your greatest concern will be His will, not yours.

Day 5

Read Zechariah 11:12-13

In Zechariah 11, we read about the coming Messiah, but the majority of the nation would reject Him. For their rejection of Him, the nation would be scattered throughout the world. However, there would be a small remnant left of those who did not reject Him.

Judas went secretly to meet with the religious leaders to plot against Jesus. Although he thought it was a secret, the Lord knew about it hundreds of years before it happened. This is an amazing prophecy with such attention to detail. Here is how the fulfillment is described in **Matthew 26:14-16**. “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.” This was a very low price for such a deed as the religious leaders were not willing to pay very much.

The prophecy went even further and the fulfillment matched. Zechariah prophesied, “So I took thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.” (Verse 13b) In Matthew 26, we read Judas felt such remorse after Jesus was taken that he tried to return the thirty pieces of silver to the religious leaders, but they refused to take the money back. Judas then took the silver and threw it down in the temple and went and hung himself. This is a sad historical account, but it was prophesied to such great detail and fully carried out. Since it was blood money, the religious leaders could not put it in the temple treasury, so they bought a field referred to as the potter’s field. It was a place used to bury foreigners.

Once again, Connecting the Dots and seeing the The Dots Connected is amazing. It is a continuing reminder that God, not man, is in control. Even man at his worst is still under God’s control. His will is not to be thwarted or prevented. Thank the Lord for His sovereignty.

WEEK 46 JESUS PROMISES TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT ----- Dennis Watson

We are never alone, praise God. Upon Jesus' ascension into heaven, He left the Holy Spirit with us, which is Jesus in spirit form. We don't see Jesus with our eyes, but we know He lives in the hearts and minds of every believer. He didn't leave us with just His Word and exhort us to figure the rest out, but gave us His Word and the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct us. What great news!

Day 1

Read John 14:1-14

The disciples were beginning to understand more and more what Jesus was trying to tell them, yet, they were still unsure about some of His teachings. Jesus told them not to be troubled. "After having answered St. Peter's question (prediction of denial), He addresses himself again to his disciples, and tells them not to be afflicted at his leaving them, nor to lose courage because of what he said concerning Peter's denying him; that if they reposed their confidence in God, he would protect them; and that, howsoever they might see him treated, they should believe in him more firmly, as his sufferings, death, and resurrection should be to them the most positive proof of his being the Messiah, the Savior of the world."⁶

Jesus was giving His disciples instructions which were to be encouraging and enlightening, not just in their present time, but in the future, as well. He knew what was coming and He wanted to leave them with truth and hope. The words He spoke to His disciples then are still true for us as disciples today. This was and is a timeless promise. As believers, our hearts need not be troubled by what is happening in the world today. As of the first writing of The Dots Connected, the Syrian Crisis was happening in our country and our government was trying to decide how to deal with millions of Syrian refugees entering our country. There

⁶ Adam Clarke Commentary

was also a terrorist attack in Paris and a plane was brought down by what is now believed to be a bomb. These troubles are just a few of what we see in the news each week, not to mention the difficulties we face with our families, at home, and at work. These are real troubles. Jesus tells us that if our hope is in Him, we can have true peace now and in the future, regardless of our circumstances.

Just look at the words He gave His disciples. “And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” **John 14:3** No matter what situations or trials we face as believers, we know how the story ends; we know, in time, we will spend eternity with Jesus, where there will be no more pain, sorrow, wars, crime, cancer, or death. What a peace we have in this truth. In knowing Jesus, we already know the Father, so we will be ready to spend eternity worshipping Him.

Do you have that peace? If you do, are you trusting in Him daily? Do you find yourself on edge? Rest in the peace of Jesus. Trust Him and know He is our peace, regardless of the troubles we may face.

Day 2

Read John 14:15-20

Depending on your translation, Verse 16 may refer to the Holy Spirit as Helper, Counselor, or Comforter. The actual Greek word is *parakletos*, which means counselor, intercessor, helper, one who encourages and comforts. In the New Testament, this word refers exclusively to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ.

As Jesus was telling the disciples what was coming and they were beginning to truly understand more and more of what He was telling them, they were probably troubled indeed. Jesus shared with them that He would still be with them, always, and that He would leave the Holy Spirit with them. We know the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

Jesus speaks to our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord, He left us both His Word and Himself in the form of the Holy Spirit. Like me, you may have thought how wonderful it would have been to have lived when the disciples did and have walked and talked with Jesus face to face. We need to remember we have the same access to Jesus the disciples had. We may not be able to see Jesus physically, but we can talk to Him and He can talk to us all the same. In fact, I have heard the Holy Spirit speak to my heart on many occasions and it was just as clear to me as if Jesus had been physically speaking to me. In other words, I knew Jesus was speaking to my heart. I am sure that other believers have experienced this as well.

Have you seen the Holy Spirit working in your life? Have you been troubled? Know that the Holy Spirit is right here with you and me. He has not left us here alone, praise God. As you face your week, know and be thankful that the Holy Spirit guides, leads, instructs, and comforts us at every moment. Be thankful that, until we see Jesus again, He has left us His Holy Spirit as our counselor, comforter, and intercessor.

Day 3

Read John 14:21-24

"... God is not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:9** As we see in Verse 22 of today's passage, Judas seemed to think the gospel was meant only for the disciples or those who were physically with Jesus. However, Jesus told him it was for anyone who would follow Him and keep His commandments. Therefore, you and I are to take the gospel to those both across the street and across the ocean.

Jesus told His disciples in Verse 21 that he who has His commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Him. It is implied and understood from the rest of scripture that believers keep His commandments because they have trusted in Him and are following Him. In other words, keeping Jesus' commandments is not or should not be from a sense of legalism or obligation, but should come from love for Him and out of a growing relationship with Him.

When I counsel with children who want to be saved or have been saved and want to be baptized, we talk both about the baptism and the life we are to lead after deciding to follow Jesus. I want them to understand that being a believer doesn't mean we will never sin or be tempted to sin again. Rather, it means when we are tempted, we are to trust God, follow His ways, and yield to Him, instead of giving in to our selfish hearts. Because we live in a fallen world, we will continue to struggle with sin. The question for us as believers is whether or not sin bothers us. Are we convicted when we sin? Do we want to choose God's way instead of our own? This is what Jesus meant when He said that those who love Him obey His commandments. We will certainly fall short sometimes, though this does not give us an excuse to sin, but even when we fall short we are reminded of God's desires, His heart, and His plan. We are taken back to what He did on the cross for us and realize we can be forgiven and begin anew, desiring to obey His commandments.

Several authors I have read recently have said that a clear indication you are a growing believer is that you are bothered when

you sin. Does it bother you when you disobey God and choose not to follow His ways? If so, that's a good thing; it means that you are hearing the Holy Spirit as He speaks to your heart.

Take some time to thank God today for His grace on the cross, thanking Him also for His grace when you sin. Let your prayer be, "God, I want to follow and obey you and when I fail, please help me to respond correctly to the Holy Spirit's conviction. Thank you that I am in Christ Jesus and that I am no longer condemned." Confess any known sin to the Lord and seek to walk in His ways.

Day 4

Read John 14:25-31

The Holy Spirit is so many things. Not only is He our counselor, but He is also our teacher (John 14:26). He teaches us the truth. Think of the two best teachers / preachers of God's Word you have ever heard. Should their teachings not compare to those of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is to be our best teacher. He may use a human teacher or preacher, but it is the Holy Spirit doing the work. In my life, I have learned that the two best teachers are God's Word and the Holy Spirit. I definitely read, study, and learn from other teachers, but the two that rise to the top are God's Word and Holy Spirit, which go hand in hand.

The Holy Spirit teaches us many things, including what gives us peace and what does not (John 14:27). The world and the things of this world offer false peace at best. Barnes notes the things that do not bring forth peace:

1st. Not as the objects which men commonly pursue---pleasure, fame, wealth. They leave care, anxiety, remorse. They do not meet the desires of the immortal mind, and they are incapable of affording that peace which the soul needs.

2nd. Not as the men of the world give. They salute you with empty and flattering words, but their professed friendship is often feigned and has no sincerity. You cannot be sure that they are sincere, but I am.

3rd. Not as systems of philosophy and false religion give. They profess to give peace, but it is not real. It does not still the voice of conscience; it does not take away sin; it does not reconcile the soul to God.

4th. "My (Jesus) peace is such as meets all the wants of the soul, silences the alarms of conscience, is fixed and sure amid all external changes, and will abide in the hour of death and forever. How desirable, in a world of anxiety and care, to possess this

peace! And how should all who have it not, seek that which the world can neither give nor take away!”⁷

As believers, we should not seek after false peace and hope, but rather seek after the Giver of true hope, Himself, Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Where do you seek peace? Are you trying to gain from others what only God can give? Will you place your hope and find your peace in Jesus, our Helper?

⁷ Barnes Notes on the New Testament

Day 5

Read Joel 2:28-32

God prophesied through Joel that the Holy Spirit would come to all believers at a future time. In Acts 2:14-21, we read of Peter preaching this passage of Joel to the believers on the day of Pentecost. Earlier in Acts 2, we see the Holy Spirit being poured out on what we now refer to as the New Testament Church. Peter then shared the words from Joel. Both passages account for what the Holy Spirit will do as He works through the believers. Joel prophesied about what took place as recorded in Acts 2 hundreds of years before it happened. This prophecy was fulfilled then and continues to be fulfilled today; God continues to pour our His Spirit on us.

We read in **Joel 2:32**, “And it shall come to pass, that whoever calls on the name of the lord shall be saved.” Part of the reason the Holy Spirit is poured out is so others can be saved. Scriptures tell us no one comes to the Father unless he is drawn to the Father. The Holy Spirit (Father – Trinity) is the one who draws people to Himself. Who does He draw? Scripture says whoever, but what does whoever mean? Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. When they call on the name of the Lord, they receive God’s Holy Spirit, the same Spirit we see mentioned in both Joel and Acts.

They can only call on the One they have heard and they can only hear if someone tells or preaches the truth to them, according to scripture. If you are a believer, you are that someone (preacher). We are commanded to share the truth everywhere, whether that be across the street or around the world. If you are a believer, you were once a whoever. Someone told you or preached to you the gospel of salvation and God drew you to Himself. Scripture tells us that the gospel will be preached to every nation and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

How might God use you to tell the world about Him? How might you give? How might you pray? How might you go? Be praying for a willing heart to respond when God shows you how He wants to have you on mission with Him.

WEEK 47 JESUS IS ARRESTED ----- Dennis Watson

The arrest of Jesus was in God's timing. Everything we read about Jesus in the Bible is in God's timing. Jesus agonized in prayer in the garden. This week, we look at Jesus' prayer and the account of some of His disciples sleeping at a very intense time. We will see the betrayal of Judas and the scattering of His followers.

Day 1

Read Mark 14:32-42

After His time at the Passover meal with His disciples, they went to Gethsemane where they often went to get away from the crowds. He left the larger group and took Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden. As He was walking along with them, He became troubled and told them, "... My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Verse 34) He then asked them to stay there and watch and pray while He went further still to pray alone. Luke records that as He agonized in prayer "... his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground." **Luke 22:44** Jesus asked His Father to take the cup from Him, if there were any other way, but more than anything else He wanted His Father's will to be done.

Our Lord's struggle in the Garden can be understood only in light of what would happen to Him on the cross. He would be made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and bear the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13). It was not the physical suffering that almost overwhelmed Him with "anguish and sorrow," but the contemplation of being forsaken by His Father (Mark 15:34). This was "the cup" that He would drink (John 18:11). According to Hebrews 5:7-9, He asked to be saved, not "from death," but out of death; that is, raised from the dead; and the Father granted His request.⁸

Jesus knew what was coming. We have already read that He told His disciples several times His hour had not yet come. The time

⁸ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1.

of His death had now come. He had taken three of His closest disciples with Him. He knew the hour had come and He wanted these three with Him as He prayed. However, three times He returned to find them sleeping. He had told them to be alert and prepared because the time of the betrayer was coming. Yet, they slept.

Like those disciples, we are instructed to be watching and praying, because the time is short. The time in Gethsemane was no time for sleeping. It was a time to be alert and to be praying. The same is true today. We need to be watchful and prayerful, so that we can join God in what He is doing. He is at work. We need to pay attention and be prepared to point people to Jesus.

Day 2

Read Mark 14:43-50

Immediately after Jesus spoke to Peter, James, and John, after finding them napping for the third time, Judas entered Gethsemane. He was followed by "... a great multitude with swords and clubs," on behalf of the religious leaders. (Verse 43) Judas had told them he would kiss the man they sought to arrest.

How do you fight Spiritual warfare? Paul made it clear we are in a real battle which must be fought with weapons which are not of this world. We are not fighting flesh and blood, but principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. It appears that neither Jesus' enemies nor at least one of His disciples understood this. His enemies came in a large mob with clubs and swords. Peter likewise drew a sword and proceeded to cut off the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest. Jesus asked them why they came as a mob. He had been right there in broad daylight with them all week. His arrest and crucifixion was on His time schedule, not theirs. He rebuked Peter for cutting off the servant's ear, telling him that He must drink the cup His Father had given Him (John 18:11). This scene was a difficult one, but it was part of what Jesus had come to accomplish. Difficult? Yes! Yet, it was still part of the divine plan of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fearing for their lives, the disciples ran away and scattered. Jesus had told them this would happen. They deserted Him, leaving Him all alone with just His Father (John 16:32). However, soon the Father would forsake Him, too.

Thus, the journey to the cross had begun. All things were now in place. This is a sad story for a moment, but since we know the outcome, it does not stay sad. It was all part of the journey, a journey that would take Jesus through a mock trial, a beating, the crucifixion, and, ultimately, a victorious resurrection. We should always study His death with the backdrop of the resurrection.

Give thanks to God for His glorious plan to save.

Day 3

Read John 10:1-18

It is a good thing to be reminded the gospel is good news. The good news is that Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, lived a sinless life, and died for our sins to remove our guilt and make us acceptable to God. The outcome is eternal life, a home forever with the God of the universe.

In today's passage, Jesus refers to Himself as the good shepherd or as the door of the sheep (Verse 7), the One Who lays down His life for the sheep. He makes a clear distinction between Himself as the good shepherd and the hireling who is merely an employed shepherd who has no real concern for the sheep under his care. The hireling would run away when the sheep were in danger. In contrast, Jesus knows His sheep and they know Him. The "know" in John's gospel is a word which describes more than just intellectual knowledge. It describes an intimate relationship. Jesus knows your name. It is a blessing when someone calls you by name. It is life-changing when Jesus both knows you and calls you by name. He also knows your nature. All sheep have different natures. All disciples, even the first twelve, had different natures, too. Peter was impulsive and outspoken. Thomas was hesitant and doubting. Andrew was a people person, always bringing people to Jesus. Like them, we are all different. Jesus knows us and loves us and cares genuinely for us. He knows our names, our natures, and our needs. The shepherd knows what the sheep need even when they do not. He knows they need safety and security, a place to lie down and rest and they need water and food. In Psalm 23, David tells us how the shepherd cares for the needs of the sheep. Jesus knows your needs, even the ones you don't know about yet.

Jesus spoke primarily in the context of the one sheep fold that was made up of the Jews. He also told them that He has "...other sheep which are not of this fold." (Verse 16) This described the Gentiles who were and are outside of the covenant between God and Israel. When Jesus came, His focus was on the "lost sheep of

the house of Israel” **Matthew 15:24**. Even on the Day of Pentecost, those who were saved were the Jews. The church did not remain Jewish. Peter took the gospel to the Gentiles and Paul took the message to the Gentiles of the Roman Empire. I love to read those parts of scripture that were predictive of our coming into the Kingdom of God.

Give thanks that the message of the gospel has come to you!

Day 4

Read Mark 14:53-65

There were three parts to the Jewish trial of Jesus. The first was a preliminary hearing before the former High Priest, Annas. Then, the trial moved to the full council of the Sanhedrin to hear witnesses. The final phase was the vote of condemnation. He was then sent to Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate for the Roman trial. Pilate gave into the mob and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

Today's passage covers the second part of the Jewish trial before the High Priest, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin. This group was determined to convict Jesus and to sentence Him to death. They had false witnesses to testify against Him, but their testimonies were not in agreement. The High Priest, Caiaphas, became frustrated with the witnesses and lashed out at Jesus, but Jesus remained silent. The High Priest then asked Jesus a direct question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Verse 61) Jesus gave the answer that condemned Him, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Verse 62) The High Priest tore his clothes and accused Jesus of blasphemy. Tearing of clothes was a sign of grief and sorrow. The religious leaders knew that when Jesus called Himself the Son of Man He was claiming to be the Messiah. They should have known prophetic scriptures, such as Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 8:4. The High Priest believed Jesus to be just a normal man. He looked like a normal man. They all believed Him to be an ordinary, normal man. Now, because of His claim, they needed no more testimony. They had what they needed for their purposes. Jesus claimed to be God which was enough for them to hand Him over to be crucified.

Jesus was innocent of any and all wrongdoing. They knew they had nothing against Him. They could not even get false witnesses to accomplish what they wanted. The accusation of blasphemy was what condemned Him to death. Jesus merely claimed to be who and what He was.

The religious leaders refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah. Many people today also refuse to believe. For some, no proof or sign will ever be enough. Others, though, are hungry to believe. Pray for those who refuse to be drawn to Jesus by God's Spirit.

Day 5

Read Psalm 41

On Friday each week, we connect the study of the week with an Old Testament prophecy or a psalm. Connecting the Dots and The Dots Connected are all about seeing how God has been involved in history which finds its complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament journey, we saw Jesus on every page in some way. The Lord God is the author of history and the focus of history is Jesus. He is the fulfillment of history and all things and all people will ultimately find meaning in Jesus.

One of the things which keeps coming up is God's control and sovereignty. Since Jesus was God in the flesh, He knew what was going to happen. He knew about Judas' betrayal. In fact, Jesus quoted from a psalm of King David, written when he, too, was being betrayed not only by his friends, but also by his own family. In **John 13:18**, we read Jesus' quote of Psalm 41:9, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." He said this regarding Judas, His betrayer. Jesus did not use the part of **Psalm 41:9** which reads, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted." Jesus knew what was in man, so He knew what Judas would do to betray Him.

Jesus was vulnerable only in that He intentionally placed Himself in the position of vulnerability. He was not subject to any attack of man or the enemy. God was and remains sovereign, completely in control. Jesus knew He was in the hands and will of His Father who sent Him. It is tempting to be sad and have pity on Jesus when considering the events of His arrest, trial, beating, and crucifixion. However, this was the "...joy set before Him" (**Hebrews 12:2**). He was surrendered to His Father's will. Nothing happened by chance, accident, or coincidence. Every aspect of Jesus birth, life, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection were known and even purposed by God. Nothing took place without His foreknowledge.

Give thanks to God for His sovereignty and His plan to save sinful man---you and me!

WEEK 48 PETER DENIES JESUS-----Chris Watson

If you were told you would deny Jesus, how would you react? Would you be like Peter and deny the possibility, fighting it to the end? Jesus is the One who told Peter he would deny Him. If we heard such a thing from the mouth of Jesus, we would know it was true and then we would have to wrestle with that truth. As believers, we must remember we are human and we do fail God. We may not desire to do so, but we do. Thanks be to God for His grace and love. This week, we will look at the account of Peter denying Jesus, as Jesus prophesied.

Day 1

Read John 18:12-18

Peter was an all-or-nothing kind of guy. Remember, this is the same man that walked on the water at Jesus' command and cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant in an attempt to protect Jesus. When Peter was in, he was all in. And, yet, in today's passage, we see Peter deny Jesus the first of the three times which Jesus predicted he would. Why did Peter deny Jesus? To be honest and to be fair to Peter, he was human, just like you and me. He failed, just as we do. It's important we never put any human on a pedestal, as if he or she could do nothing wrong. This kind of worship is reserved only for Jesus. Peter, in his weakness and fear, denied Jesus.

“To his credit, although all the others had fled (Mark 14:50), Peter still followed Jesus after His arrest, but he kept his distance so as not to be identified with Him (Mark 14:54). There's no question that fear gripped him. From the courtyard, he watched Jesus being falsely accused, beaten, and insulted (Mark 14:57-66). Peter was afraid Jesus would die, and he was fearful for his own life as well. The world hated Jesus, and Peter found that he was not prepared to face the ridicule and persecution that Jesus was suffering. Earlier, Jesus had warned His disciples as well as us today, ‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first’ (John 16:18; cf. Matthew 24:9). Peter quickly found he wasn't nearly as bold and courageous as he had proclaimed, and in fear he denied the One who had loved him.”⁹

⁹ www.gotquestions.org

What Jesus had prophesied was now beginning to unfold, including Peter's denial of Him. Some have said Peter failed Jesus and while that may be true, Jesus didn't fail Peter. Although Peter denied Jesus three times total, Jesus never left and Peter came to his senses in time.

Have you ever surprised yourself by something you have done or have said or maybe an attitude you had? Unfortunately, I have. During that time, Jesus never went anywhere and He surely didn't disown me, praise God. Rather, through the Holy Spirit's conviction, I recognized my sin and my error and God drew me back to Himself. We live in a fallen world and because we are sinful ourselves, we face sin daily. As Paul tells us, that is not an excuse to sin. Thanks be to God He forgives us. It's most important when we sin against God to acknowledge our sin, confess it, learn from it, and move on with God. Peter did this and God desires no less from and for us. Whether you find yourself far away from God today or walking in step with His will, thank Him for His forgiveness and for the fact He doesn't give up or quit on us, even when we sin against Him.

Day 2

Read John 18:19-24

One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control and Jesus definitely showed self-control in our passage today. Actually, He was under the control of the Father, just like we are to be as Christians. Jesus always spoke truth; this is what He was telling those who asked about His disciples and doctrine. However, the religious leaders didn't like this and one of the officers struck Jesus with his hand. This was only a sign of things to come and how He would be treated as a criminal.

I don't know about you, but my response most likely would not have been the same as that of Jesus. Jesus knew there was something greater at stake than the way He was being treated by those He came to save. He knew He was headed to the cross. He knew the pain and agony He was about to endure. While the religious leaders physically put Jesus on the cross, it was actually His love for you and me that sent Him there. The leaders just played into God's overall plan.

Jesus asked what He did wrong for the officer to strike Him. Praise God that Jesus never fought back; rather, He acted with grace, truth, and love, just as God would have Him to do.

Thank God that Jesus knew the big picture. He knew this situation was just one part leading up to His death for our sins. Jesus had in His heart the mind of God, not the mind of a sinner like me. Thank God that Jesus took the ridicule, mockery, undeserved punishment, and death for us. Take time to thank God that Jesus was not a reactor, but He was an obedient Son to the Father. Take time to praise the Lord, even when He was being questioned and beaten, He had us on His heart and mind. He thought of sinners like you and me when He was going through this trial.

Day 3

Read Matthew 26:69-75

Mathew 26:34-35 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” Peter told Jesus he would never deny Him and if it came to it, he would even die with Jesus. To Peter’s credit, no one would like to be told he would deny Jesus. Since it was coming from Jesus, Peter should have listened to Him.

Peter did as most of us would do. Scripture tells us pride precedes the fall and Peter fell hard. He did, indeed, deny Christ three times, just as Jesus told him he would. When thinking he would never do such a thing, Peter thought he would be much stronger, but soon realized he wasn’t as spiritually strong as he had thought. We, too, are prideful and might find ourselves following in Peter’s footsteps. We need Jesus, not just to save us from our sins as He does in the beginning, but to save us from ourselves day after day. We can’t live the spirit-filled life on our own.

Peter realized this truth in time. When he heard the rooster crow, he remembered what Jesus had told him and went away and wept bitterly. He realized what he had done in denying Jesus, the One who had been with him day after day for three years, and the One who loved him. What Peter was feeling was conviction; God was speaking to his heart. What started off badly, as he denied Jesus, ended better as God was able to get hold of Peter’s heart.

Peter reminds me of myself sometimes. What about you? We say we will never do something, then we end up doing exactly what we said we would not because we think more of ourselves and our wants than we should. In the end, we realize we have nothing to offer God except what Jesus has done on our behalf. Today, if you feel as though you, like Peter, have failed Jesus, feeling as though you have really blown it and you know God is speaking to you, acknowledge your sin, confess it, and repent. Get up and go on with God. It’s the blood of Jesus that allows us to take the next step.

Day 4

Read John 18:25-27

In John's account of Peter's denial of Christ, one of the men who came to arrest Jesus recognized Peter. In fact, he asked Peter, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive garden?" (Verse 26) Peter denied it and said he was not. Peter was not only carrying out what Jesus had prophesied, but he was lying to the servant as well. Cutting off the ear of the High Priest's servant could have landed Peter in serious trouble and Peter didn't want trouble, so he lied to the servant in an attempt to protect himself.

We have often told our son, Landon, that he will be in more trouble if he lies to us, even when telling the truth might get him in trouble, too. God tells us we shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set us free (John 8:32). We know from scripture that Truth is a person, the person of Jesus Christ. In this instance, Peter is denying the person of Truth, Jesus, with his lies.

Do you have a difficult time telling the truth? It may not be what we like to call a big lie, but perhaps something small, something we refer to as a white lie or a little lie. Maybe we tell something that's mostly true, either leaving out something or adding untruth to it. Of course, we know that a lie is a lie, is a lie. There is no such thing as a big or little lie; they are all wrong. Yet, at times we seek to justify ourselves and leave out some of the truth or skirt around the truth in some way. Since we know the Truth, the person of Jesus, may we seek to be truthful at all times, knowing He sets us free. Seek to always be a person of truth. Ask God to help you speak truth in all cases, even when it's difficult.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:7

We know Isaiah 53 as “The Suffering Servant” passage. Note how this scripture describes what Jesus went through. From what you know and from what you have learned by looking through the gospels, take time to think about each of the following phrases and write down what you think Jesus went through.

How was Jesus oppressed?

How was Jesus afflicted?

What are some ways / times that Jesus did not open His mouth?

When a lamb or sheep has its wool cut off, the sheep doesn't try to get away or fight against the shearing. Rather, it quietly lets the shearer do his work. Our passage today, makes the comparison between the sheep and Jesus. Jesus went through such affliction and oppression, and, yet, He did not open His mouth. He endured it for you and for me. He did it because He loved us and He knew the bigger picture, as we noted earlier this week.

Thank Jesus for what He went through for us and how He died and still loves us so much as His children.

WEEK 49 THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE CRIMINALS

-----Dennis Watson

The most pivotal time in human history was the crucifixion of Jesus. For many, it was a tragedy, but according to God's plan, it was the greatest triumph of all time. It was a turning point for people. Specifically, it was a turning point for all mankind. Man's greatest predicament was settled, the predicament of sin and death. Personally, for those in this week's text, the settlement was eternal salvation for some while for others, it was eternal damnation. God provided forgiveness, but forgiveness must be received. One criminal received forgiveness and the other rejected it. The Roman centurion we will read about this week received forgiveness, but Judas rejected it even after betraying Jesus. This is a great week for you to make sure you are a recipient of God's forgiveness.

Day 1

Read Luke 23:32-34 and Mark 15:39

Forgiveness is a powerful word that describes a powerful concept. Jesus came to forgive sins and, in His death on the cross, sins were fully forgiven and removed. There were two criminals crucified along with Jesus. We will look at them more this week. While He was hanging on the cross, He spoke the most remarkable words in the presence of those who chose to be His enemies. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Verse 34) Instead of retaliation, He chose to forgive. You might ask, "What motivated Him to forgive instead of retaliate?" It was the purpose of His Father to forgive sin, not holding it against sinners, which was His motivation. This is why He came. He came to bring what could not be achieved by human merit, but could be received by faith.

No matter where a person is or at what time it is in their life—early, middle or the very end of life, the forgiveness Jesus came to give is offered to all. However, sin forgiven does not necessarily mean forgiveness received. There was a Roman centurion at the foot of the cross and when Jesus died he received the forgiveness offered. When Jesus died, the centurion made his own confession

of faith which was all he knew to do at the time. He said, “Truly this was the Son of God.” **Mark 15:39**

Warren Wiersbe says of the centurion:

"I believe that this was the confession of faith of this centurion and this was as far as he could go at this time. He couldn't have said anything that would have revealed his faith more than this. He acknowledged that Jesus is God's Son. He acknowledged who He was and certainly what He was doing. I do not believe that this man had all the details of theology. This man had never read Strong's theology or any of my books, but this man knew enough to take his place beneath the Cross of Christ. And, you know, that is all God has ever asked any sinner to do. He asks us to come in faith to Him. That is what this man is doing. We must remember that he was a pagan Roman, and he had the cruel job of crucifying men. He was certainly made very tender at this time."¹⁰

Have you received the forgiveness He offers? If so, are you amazed enough at His forgiveness to be giving it to others? Those who are forgiven much, will forgive much. Give thanks for the wonderful and incredible gift of forgiveness.

¹⁰ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Day 2

Read Luke 23:35-38

The people came to a crisis of belief. Just a few days earlier, the people lined the roadway to Jerusalem as Jesus passed by crying out, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” **John 12:13** A few weeks before, they had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. Now, the crisis of belief had put them in a difficult place. The One they believed to be the deliverer was hanging on the cross and the religious leaders and Roman soldiers were mocking Him. What had happened? Had they been led astray? Had they been taken in by a scam? I believe the people were not sure what to do or what to believe. Their expectations had been shattered.

It was the perfect storm. All things were converging to bring about a disaster. He was their King, Deliverer, and Savior, but here He was nailed to a Roman cross, dying. They saw the sign above His head written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, “This is the King of the Jews.” **Matthew 27:37** Was that an indictment or the truth? It looked like the indictment for which He was hanging on the cross. It was intended to be mockery, but it was the truth. Little did they know that what looked like a tragedy was the greatest victory of all history! It was time for the people to hang on and let God finish. He always gets the last word!

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt all alone, trusting and waiting on the Lord, but in the end, it appeared you were left looking foolish? Well, to many, Jesus looked foolish. The religious leaders mocked Him with words, but He was untouched. He was on a mission. In these cases faith stands, waits, and allows God to finish. He is faithful. What looked like a period at the end of a sentence at the ending of a book was merely a pause—a comma until all had been finished.

Keep your eyes on the Lord. He has the last word. Let Him finish!

Day 3

Read Mark 15:25-32

It was 9:00 in the morning when they put Jesus on the cross. The criminals being crucified had the charge for their crime inscribed on a sign that was hung above them on the cross. Jesus was now a convicted criminal. The charge against Jesus was His claim to be the King of the Jews. Crucified with Him were two thieves, one on each side of Him. This fulfilled the prophecy found in **Isaiah 53:12** which said He would be "... numbered with the transgressors."

Many people were mocking Jesus, including Roman soldiers and the Jewish religious leaders. The people who were passing by joined in the mockery. They wanted to see Jesus come down off the cross. Even though they were mocking Him, perhaps they had seen some of His miracles and thought that maybe He could do it. Since He had claimed He would rebuild the temple in three days, they thought He should be able to save Himself! If He had done what they were suggesting He could have vindicated Himself and proven that He was powerful. However, He would not have been the Savior of the world. He had to see it through until it was finished.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert after His baptism, one of the things Satan wanted Him to do was jump off a high place to demonstrate His power. He refused to do it because His time had not yet come. Jesus trusted His Father. Jesus' part was to follow and obey His Father until His plan was finished.

Jesus stayed the course. He did not come down off the cross and the people despised Him. We read in Matthew 26:53 that He could have asked His Father to provide 12 legions of angels (72,000) to rescue Him.

I go through tough times, just like you, and the temptation is to take a short cut or maybe even give up, but Jesus showed us that no matter how tough things get, we need to stay the course and allow God to take care of us. For Jesus, this meant suffering and ultimately dying on the cross, but we will see that God, in His faithfulness, raised and exalted Him. Remember faith never gives up! God is faithful and He will finish what He starts. Trust Him and stay the course.

Day 4

Read Luke 23:39-43

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, one of the thieves mocked Jesus asking Him to get them all off the crosses and save them if He really was God's anointed. Luke called this blasphemy. This word describes railing and mocking. He was not sincere, he was slandering Jesus. Then, the other thief lashed out at the one blaspheming, asking if he feared God at all. He also acknowledged both of them were there because they deserved the punishment for their crimes, but Jesus had done nothing wrong. He said "... But this man has done nothing wrong." (Verse 41B) I believe he was acknowledging the complete holiness of Jesus. He was acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. He then made a request of Jesus, the Messiah, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (Verse 42) Both of the thieves had access to the Savior, but only this one made the appeal for salvation. Jesus told him, "This day you will be with me in paradise." **Luke 23:43**

Here is how Warren Wiersbe speaks about this man's faith: The one thief imitated the mockery of the religious leaders and asked Jesus to rescue him from the cross, but the other thief had different ideas. He may have reasoned, "If this Man is indeed the Christ, and if He has a kingdom, and if He has saved others, then He can meet my greatest need which is salvation from sin. I am not ready to die!" It took courage for this thief to defy the influence of his friend and the mockery of the crowd, and it took faith for him to trust a dying King! When you consider all that he had to overcome, the faith of this thief is astounding.¹¹

Like all of us who have been saved by Jesus, this man was saved totally by grace. He did not deserve it. He had no time to join a church or be baptized. He had no time to do good works or do anything to earn his salvation. Clearly Jesus saved this man totally by grace through his faith.

Salvation is a free gift which must be received. Have you received it? Share the gospel with someone today.

¹¹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1.

Day 5

Read Psalm 22:17-18

In the Old Testament, we talked about connecting the dots. As we go through the New Testament, we are seeing the dots connected. Day five each week we look at either a psalm or prophetic book to see how it connects to the gospel and Jesus. All of Psalm 22 is a prophetic look at God's servant Jesus and how He would suffer and die. It is clear that most of the Jewish people knew the Psalms. Do you suppose anyone was aware of these prophecies?

Again, the dots connected enable us to see the fulfillment in what happened to Jesus. As people passed by, they stared at Jesus hanging on the cross. The soldiers divided His upper garment into four pieces and each one took a piece. His inner garment, or tunic, was woven of one piece and they agreed not to divide it, but to cast lots (draw straws) for it. The Roman soldiers knew nothing of the scripture they were unknowingly fulfilling. (Verse 18)

In these verses, especially backing up to Verse 16, David was describing something he did not know about. David described crucifixion. However, crucifixion was not a Jewish means of capital punishment and it's unlikely that he ever saw it take place. David the prophetic psalmist saw what would happen to the Messiah centuries later.

I am amazed each time we see God's Word so clearly written so many years in advance. Once again, it is a reminder that He is in the driver's seat.

Week 50 BARABBAS-----Chris Watson

A big topic in our country right now is injustice. However, the account of Barabbas and Jesus was an injustice for the ages. Jesus was arrested for doing nothing wrong and Barabbas was arrested for insurrection and murder. In the end, Barabbas was released and Jesus was crucified. Yet, Jesus knew this was God's plan and He followed it. Can you imagine being arrested for doing nothing wrong and they let the murderer next to you go free? Thank the Lord, Jesus was silent and said nothing for us.

Day 1

Read Matthew 27:15-20

Look at a few of the facts listed in our scriptures today:

Verse 16 Barabbas is called a notorious prisoner. This means he wasn't just in for stealing candy, he was a hardcore criminal. Other passages tell us he was a murderer.

Verse 18 tells us Jesus was handed over because of envy. Remember it was mainly the religious leaders who handed Jesus over to the authorities.

Verse 19 tells us that Pilate's wife warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus because of dreams she had concerning Jesus.

Lastly, Verse 20 tells us the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to go against Jesus.

There will be several important themes in our passages this week, 2 in particular we will look at closely:

- 1) We make our own choices.
- 2) God is in control.

The religious leaders made the choice to have Jesus arrested although He had done NOTHING wrong. We know Jesus was arrested at the people's will, and we know He soon died for the sins of all. God used their evil choices ultimately for His glory. Are we to take away from this, "live ungodly and God will use it?" Of course not. Though we may make foolish choices and decisions, if we are a child of God, there is nothing that can separate us from His love. If we are His child, we will be convicted of our sin and turn back to Him. As we learn, we will see those foolish choices aren't from God because God gives us free will. Remember Jesus' last words as they were crucifying Him, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." **Luke 23:34** Even as they killed Him, He saw what was going on. We are reminded by Paul in Romans that as believers, we have died to sin and we should not want to live in sin any longer.

Be reminded today that God can use everything for His glory. In everything that happens, He is faithful. I've heard it said, "If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, rest in this, you, my friend, are not that powerful" (unknown).

Know that God loves you; God wants to walk with you because He is faithful.

Day 2

Read Matthew 27:21

"The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" **Matthew 27:21**

What emotion does this stir up in you? No matter how many times I read this verse, my thoughts are, Jesus had done nothing wrong and yet Barabbas was a notorious criminal! **Luke 23:19** tells us "... he had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder." Jesus was a healer, forgiver, teacher, etc. Barabbas was rightly arrested, Jesus, wrongly. Barabbas was in jail as criminals should be, Jesus was falsely accused.

Here is a link for a youtube video that will put a very clear face on the injustice we are reading about. You can type in the link or google "Barabbas Judah Smith."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGOcLFqWtIE>

Day 3

Read Matthew 27:22-23

We live in a day and time where the mob rules. Whoever screams the loudest, makes the biggest scene, or can get the media behind them, they are heard and heard loudly. Pilate was ready to release Jesus as he realized Jesus had been wrongly arrested and He had done nothing wrong. The mob cried out loudly for the release of Barabbas, a man who had actually committed murder and deserved to be condemned to death, while it is demanded by the mob that Jesus, the One who had done nothing, be crucified.

Crucifixion was used for the worst of criminals because it was a drawn out and very painful process. It was now being demanded by the mob that a punishment meant for criminals be used on Jesus. I wrote in Day 1, that God would use this for His glory and Jesus would die for our sins. But what a turn of events! The murderer would be set free and the innocent would die. Notice I didn't say Jesus was murdered. Jesus' life was not taken from Him, it was given freely. If it had been taken from Him, He would not be sovereign. Christ willingly went to the cross for our sins. The religious people thought they were winning, they were getting rid of Jesus, but this was just the beginning.

Can you imagine what must have been going on in the minds of those who had been walking with Him for years? His mother, the disciples, what about Lazarus? They had heard His teachings, but a lot of it was still a mystery to them. I imagine they were confused and perplexed. They were trying to remember all of His works and what He had taught them. Did they wonder how Jesus could still be in charge once He was arrested? To the crowd following Jesus, they must have been confused and trying to put the pieces together.

So many times things happen in our lives which we don't understand. Things don't make sense and we question in our confusion. Over time, when we let things play out, God allows us to see He was faithful and in control the whole time. Remember, nothing is finished unless God says it is finished. Let Him finish. I came across this post the other day and it goes right along with today's devotion in letting God finish:

“I would have pulled Joseph out. Out of that pit. Out of that prison. Out of that pain. I would have cheated nations out of the one God would use to deliver them from famine. I would have pulled David out. Out of Saul’s spear-throwing presence. Out of the caves he hid away in. Out of the pain of rejection. I would have cheated Israel out of a God-hearted king.

I would have pulled Esther out. Out of being snatched from her only family. Out of being placed in a position she never asked for. Out of the path of a vicious, power-hungry foe. I would have cheated a people out of the woman God would use to save their very lives.

I would have pulled Jesus off. Off of the cross. Off of the road that led to suffering and pain. Off of the path that would mean nakedness and beatings, nails and thorns. I would have cheated the entire world out of a Savior. Out of salvation. Out of an eternity filled with no more suffering and no more pain.

And oh friend. I want to pull you out. I want to change your path. I want to stop your pain. But right now I know I would be wrong. I would be out of line. I would be cheating you and cheating the world out of so much good. Because God knows. He knows the good this pain will produce. He knows the beauty this hardship will grow. He’s watching over you and keeping you even in the midst of this. He’s promising you that you can trust Him. Even when it all feels like more than you can bear.

So instead of trying to pull you out, I’m lifting you up. I’m kneeling before the Father and I’m asking Him to give you strength. To give you hope. I’m asking Him to protect you and to move you when the time is right. I’m asking Him to help you stay prayerful and discerning. I’m asking Him how I can best love you, and be a help to you. I’m believing He’s going to use your life in powerful and beautiful ways. Ways that will leave your heart grateful and humbly thankful for this road you’ve been on.”

Kimberly Henderson Proverbs 31 Ministries

Day 4

Read Matthew 27:24-26

Read our passage again below:

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”

²⁵ And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Matthew 27:16-26

Pilate declared himself innocent of the blood of Jesus, and just a verse later he is handing him over to be scourged and crucified. It’s important to be reminded that God was using these events as part of His plan for the crucifixion of Jesus. So many times today we hear the mob and they are loud. We know the right thing to do or to stand up for, but the more we do it, the louder the mob gets. Sometimes the louder they get, the tendency we have is to give in. However, we are to stand on the Truth, the Word of God.

I mentioned one Sunday that people who actually believe and follow the Bible these days are few and far between. Many say they are Christians, but when it comes to believing the Bible, it’s a different story. In today’s time, we must stand and follow God’s Word. When others are yelling loudly, making a scene, and calling us crazy, we must stand taller. Today, recommit yourself to standing on the Word and following the Truth of God.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53

He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:3-6

He was despised

He was smitten by God

He was wounded

He was bruised

These are just a few of the words we read in the above verses. Ultimately, Jesus endured all these things for God's glory. All of the heartache He went through was to bring us to God. Jesus is the mediator between God and mankind. Without Jesus, we would have no hope, no peace, no joy, and no salvation.

Knowing that Isaiah was written some 700 years before Jesus was born, is another reminder of the mighty God we serve. Thank Him today for your salvation.

WEEK 51 THE DEATH OF CHRIST-----Chris Watson

It is natural to mourn a death, especially the death of someone we are very close to. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the mother of Jesus and His disciples? They had seen what had happened to Jesus up to this point and then they watched Him die on the cross. They knew enough to know His death was coming and Jesus told them that it was meant to be. I am certain they had many questions just trying to understand it all. This week, we look at something so painful to read and understand, yet so beautiful because it saved us from our sins.

Day 1

Read Matthew 27:27-31

The soldiers of the governor along with other Romans soldiers gathered around Jesus. They began to patronize and mock Him. They were mocking Jesus since He claimed to be King of the Jews. They placed a scarlet robe on Him. After they placed the robe and the crown of thorns on Him, they gave Him a staff to mock a scepter which would be carried by a real king. Everything the soldiers and leaders did to Jesus was to mock Him. They didn't believe He was God's Son whom He claimed to be. After they dressed Him like a king they began to mock Him even more, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They spit on him, took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they mocked Him, they took off the robe and put His clothes back on Him. (Verse 30b-31a)

Can you imagine the mockery, injustice, and ridicule Jesus went through? If that was the customary punishment for crimes, we might understand and say that it was justified treatment, but Jesus was holy and righteous, He had never sinned. We are the sinners! We deserve what Jesus went through, but Jesus became our substitute. He is our substitution atonement. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. Our death would have only brought eternal destruction apart from God.

Why would Jesus endure such pain, strife, and ridicule? He did it for you, for me, and for any other person who would call on the name of the Lord for salvation. Everything Jesus did was to glorify God, which would lead to His crucifixion and God being glorified through Christ's obedience.

Revelation 17:14 tells us that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is no other king higher than Jesus; there is no other king that deserves glory and praise. Jesus is worthy to be praised, not just because He died for our sins, but because He is God. He alone is blameless and holy. It was all for God's glory so you and I could be reconciled to God.

We see in Romans 10 we were once enemies with God, but because of what Jesus did, we are now friends of God through Jesus, if we will call on His name. Take time today to thank Jesus for what He did, what He went through leading up to His death. Thank Him that we can now have eternal life, the hope of heaven. We are no longer enemies of God.

Give Thanks!

Day 2

Read Matthew 27:32-44

Today's passage is Matthew's account of the crucifixion. In the gospels, each writer shares a different perspective of the crucifixion. Matthew's account is the only one which mentions Jesus was given wine mixed with gal, something intended to help ease the pain.

Notice in Matthew's account, the mockery and ridicule of Jesus only increase in intensity. "They said you can build the temple in three days, save yourself?" "You save others but you can't save yourself?" They even mocked God saying, "Let God save Him." When I read and study this passage, I find myself getting angry with the way Jesus was treated. But then, I have to realize the reason He was there in the first place was because of my sin. Yes, it was God's will, but it was my sin that put Him there.

Note two things in this passage. Verse 35 talks about casting lots for His clothes and this is prophesied in Psalm 22:18. In Verse 37, we read they placed a sign over His head that read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Little did they know how true those words were. Again, this was just mockery as they didn't believe He was King of the Jews, nor did they want to believe it. They were not the only ones that didn't believe it; neither did the two thieves on either side of Jesus. It was bad enough He was crucified for no reason, let alone having thieves crucified next to Him. The thieves began to join in the mockery with the rest of the people.

Notice the things for which they mocked Jesus. They couldn't find any bad in Him, only good. They mocked Him for claiming to be the Son of God, which He was. They mocked Him for being a King, which He was. They mocked Him for saying He would destroy and build the temple in three days, which He did. They mocked Him for being the King of the Jews, which He was. They mocked Him for healing and saving people, which He did. The things they mocked Him for were all true, every one of them.

They could truly find no fault in Him. Remember Pilate's words in **Luke 23:14-16** "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him."

No one could find true guilt or wrong in Jesus because there was none. Take time to thank Jesus for being the perfect sacrifice and doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Thank Jesus that though He was ridiculed, He endured it all for our salvation.

Day 3

Read Luke 23:44-49

Praise Jesus for His death on the cross. On one hand, it is hard to read about and contemplate while on the other hand thanking Him for the great and glorious thing He did for us. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves and because of what He did, we now have the hope of a relationship with God.

Verse 45 speaks of the veil being torn in two and this is of great significance. In Old Testament times, the Holy Place was separated from the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies), by a veil or curtain. The curtain blocked people from going into the Most Holy Place. Once a year the High Priest was allowed go into the Most High Place to make atonement for the sins of the people. This was the only time anyone was allowed inside the most Holy Place. People could not go in to commune with God except once a year, a time that was set up by God. Before Jesus' death on the cross, the Law demanded the veil separate the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place and it was strictly adhered to. However, after His death, the veil was torn in two which meant that all who believed in the Father could now have direct access to Him. We can speak directly to Him, walk with Him and commune with Him. Once we trust in Jesus' work on the cross and put our faith in Him, we have direct access to the Father. We don't need a pastor, priest, friend or family member to speak to God. We can do it whenever and wherever we want to.

This is why Jesus shed His blood. Jesus wants us to spend eternity with Him forever and if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, you will. Not only will you spend eternity with Him, but you can walk and talk with Him daily and because of what Jesus did for us, we can know God. Had Jesus not died for our sins, this would not be possible. **Hebrews 9:22** tells us "... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Thank God for His Son's death on the cross! Be thankful we have direct access to Him through Jesus Christ. Ask God who He wants you to share His free gift of salvation with today. It is the greatest news ever told. We were once separated from God, but because of God's grace we have been made right with Him.

Day 4

Read Matthew 27:45-56

“Jesus’ cry, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ found in **Mark 15:34**, has puzzled many. Jesus is actually quoting the opening line of Psalm 22 and using it to express His deep agony on the cross. He is suffering the penalty for our sin, in our place. The penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Death includes two dimensions—physical and spiritual. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. Since Jesus was dying for our sin as our substitute, He was experiencing the agony of separation from His Father. It was the agony of hell. There is an unfathomable mystery here. Jesus was both God and man united in one divine Person. He could not suffer and die with respect to His deity, but He could suffer the agony of separation from the Father and actually die physically with respect to His humanity. And He did, that we might, through repentance from sin and faith in Him as our Savior and Lord, be forgiven of our sin and reconciled with God.”¹²

Jesus’ question “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Verse 46) makes it evident He was separated from God. He had taken on the sins of the world and was feeling the wrath of God. When we think about this, we see the true love and grace God has given. The fact God punished His only Son, Jesus, for what I deserved is incredible, but God is holy and righteous and this had to be done. Our sin had to be paid for and either we pay the price, which we could not do and we would spend eternity in hell, or Jesus pay it for us so we could have the hope of Heaven and a relationship with God.

This passage helps us to see God takes sin seriously and yet His love overrides our sin. Praise the Lord! As you go throughout your day take time to thank God for His love. Seek to really focus on the grace that has been given to you and the hope that is now yours.

¹²<http://billygraham.org/answer/did-god-really-forsake-jesus-when-he-was-dying-on-the-cross/>

Day 5

Read Isaiah 53:5

Take some time to slowly read Mac Powell's song below that goes hand in hand with our scripture today.

He was pierced for our transgressions
He was crushed for our sins
The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him
And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed

We are healed by Your sacrifice
And the life that You gave
We are healed for You paid the price
By Your grace we are saved
We are saved

He was pierced for our transgressions
And crushed for our sins
The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him
And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed

We are healed by Your sacrifice
And the life that You gave
We are healed for You paid the price
By Your grace we are saved
We are saved

He was pierced for our transgressions
He was crushed for our sins
The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him
And by His wounds, by His wounds we are healed
And by His wounds, by His wounds

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Think of the ministry Jesus had on this earth. Everything He did, healing, teaching, and dying for our sins was all for God's glory and it brought the opportunity for us to know God through Him. Thank God for His free gift of salvation and the hope we have in Him.

WEEK 52 THE RESURRECTION-----Dennis Watson

The gospel rests upon two great truths - the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. These two events are game changers. His crucifixion is the final punctuation of Jesus becoming a man. The resurrection of Jesus confirms Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus was seen alive after His resurrection by more than 500 people, including His disciples. This week, we look at the resurrection of Jesus. Paul makes it clear that if there is no resurrection, our faith is futile.

Day 1

Read Matthew 27:57-66

Both Joseph and Nicodemus had become believers in Jesus Christ. In John 19:38, we read that these men participated in taking the body of Jesus and placing in it a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. It is not clear why a wealthy man like Joseph of Arimathea owned a tomb at this location. There is speculation that Jesus made arrangements with him before His death to use the tomb.

It seems the disciples of Jesus had forgotten about Jesus saying He would be resurrected after three days, but His enemies, the religious leaders, remembered. They urged Pilate to secure the tomb of Jesus by using the Roman seal on it. The Roman seal included wax and a cord, and when used, it would be obvious if the tomb was tampered with. They also insisted that guards be placed at the tomb. Why were they so concerned? Did they think the disciples would come and take His body trying to make people think He had risen from the dead?

This is one of those small details that is often missed. The Lord God allowed an event to confirm Jesus' body had not been taken. The Roman seal was very significant because when Jesus was resurrected, there was no way it could be said that His disciples returned to the tomb and moved His body. This is another case where what man meant for evil, God used for good. Clearly, Jesus was raised from the dead. No one could tamper with His

body after the tomb had been sealed and was being guarded by the Roman soldiers.

Our mighty God is a God of details. Here we are two thousand years later with many confirmations Jesus was raised from the dead, just as God had said. Tell someone today that Jesus is alive. He defeated sin, death, and the grave, and He lives in you!

Give praise to the Lord for His amazing plan!

Day 2

Read Matthew 28:1-10

Matthew tells us these events happened after the Sabbath. For the Jewish people, the Sabbath (Saturday) began at sundown on Friday evening and concluded at sundown on Saturday evening. He also tells us these ladies went to the tomb as the first day of the week was dawning. This would have been early Sunday morning. The ladies were the first to find what had taken place. There was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the opening and was sitting on it. The stone did not need to be rolled away for Jesus to exit the tomb, but it happened this way so others would see what had taken place and tell others. The tomb was empty! The appearance of the angel was bright and his clothing was white as snow. “The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.” (Verse 4)

One of the amazing things about this biblical, historical account is that the women were the first ones to discover the empty tomb and they were the first ones to see that Jesus had been resurrected. The angel told the women to go and tell the disciples. Women, in that culture and in that day, could not testify in court but the Lord used women to first proclaim that Jesus was alive! They announced the good news to the others.

J. Vernon McGee explains the focus of Matthew in his gospel: “Matthew presents Jesus as the King. The features of the resurrection story which contain the element of the spectacular and sensational are given. There is a fanfare of trumpets in the account given in Matthew. He was born a King. He lived as a King. He died a King, and He rose from the dead a King. Matthew tells of the earthquake, of the angel's descent, of the stone rolled away, of the frightened guards, and of the effort by the religious rulers to cover up the fact of the empty tomb.”¹³

On their way to tell the disciples, Jesus met the women and told them to tell the disciples that He would meet them in Galilee.

Tell someone or several people that Jesus is alive! This is what makes our faith alive and vibrant!

¹³Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Day 3

Read Luke 24:1-12

Today, day three of the week, is the day of connecting the biblical, historical account to the gospel. This week, we need to understand what Paul wrote, under Holy Spirit inspiration, about the significance of the resurrection: ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁴And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. ¹⁵Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up--if in fact the dead do not rise. ¹⁶For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" **1 Corinthians 15:13-17**

It is impossible to overstate the significance of the resurrection. Jesus told His disciples many times He would go to Jerusalem, die and He would be raised to life three days later, but it appears, as we see today, His disciples were slow to believe this and later they were rebuked for it. (Mark 16:14)

The three women, in Luke's account, that went to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus with spices were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna. They knew the tomb was guarded and had been sealed with the official Roman seal. How did they expect to get to Him? Maybe they simply thought, "We will deal with that when we get there."

Upon their arrival at the tomb, the stone had been rolled away and the tomb was empty. The women went into the tomb and they were perplexed that Jesus' body was not there. There were two angels in the tomb and they asked the women a rebuking question, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The angels then told them "He is not here, He is risen!" When the angels reminded them Jesus had told them this would happen, they remembered His words.

The women went immediately to the eleven disciples and told them what had taken place but to the disciples, “It seemed like idle tales.” What a disappointing response! Have you ever been excited to be the first to share good news and have no one believe you or share your excitement?

Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. He had to think about it for a while, but John, in his gospel, says that he (the disciple whom Jesus loved) “... looked in and believed.” **John 20:8**

There is no greater news known to man than Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised to life again. He is living in me! What about you?

“He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today. He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way. He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart!”

Day 4

Read Matthew 28:11-15

How could the guards not believe after what they had experienced? The answer is pretty clear; they were looking out for their own hides. While believers were rejoicing in the risen Savior, unbelievers were plotting how to stop the good news of the resurrection. The soldiers realized they were in a lot of trouble. For a Roman soldier to fail his duty as a soldier, the punishment was death (see Acts 12:19 and 16:27-28). The soldiers did not go to Pilate or their superior officers. They chose to plot with the Jewish religious leaders. They understood the Jewish religious leaders wanted to cover this up and they would most likely make a lot of money in the process. It was important for the religious leaders to put out this fire. For the soldiers, it would save their hides and pad their wallets.

At this point, I have to ask a question; what makes a person ignore the truth? For the soldiers, what they had seen and experienced was not worth the possible punishment. They had to make a decision based on their value system. They had experienced the earthquake and seen the angel; they had probably even seen the risen Jesus. Their value system led them to ignore the facts and side with the Jewish religious leaders. For a sum of money, they agreed to deny what they had personally seen and experienced. They were instructed to say that while they were sleeping, His disciples came and took His body. In exchange, the Jewish religious leaders gave them money and vouched for them before the governor, making them secure.

This plotting still goes on today. To choose not to believe typically begins with a value system which is driven by self-preservation. Acknowledging the resurrection of Jesus, as a fact by faith, would require surrendering to Him not only as Savior, but as Lord. Like the guards, many people are not willing to give up their lives. They think there is too much at stake. However, there is more at stake than they realize. Eternal life is at stake and is a high cost to pay to preserve life in the temporal realm.

The guards exchanged the truth for a lie which was a high cost for self preservation.

Day 5

Read Psalm 34:19-20

Death by crucifixion was a slow, agonizing process. Often the person crucified was not dead before sundown, so their legs were broken, hastening their death because they would suffocate. According to **John 19:30**, Jesus cried out from the cross and His last three words were “It is finished.” Notice He cried out before the process of breaking the legs took place. Remember, it was God who was in control. In today’s passage, it was prophesied that not one of His bones would be broken. In John 19, it is recorded that the guards broke the legs of the two thieves, but when they went to Jesus and saw He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead one of the guards pierced Jesus’ side with His spear. His hands and feet were also pierced as was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Psalms 34:20 tells us the word guard means to exercise great care over. The Lord God, Jesus’ Father, was able to keep or guard His Son and keep His bones from being broken as was prophesied. The Lord is able to keep our enemies in check. Their own evil deeds will destroy them. Warren Wiersbe often says, “Sin is its own executioner.” The sinful acts of God’s enemies will come back on them and ultimately crush them. Jesus’ enemies plotted to destroy Him. Not only did it not work, the plot destroyed them.

The entire crucifixion and resurrection was God’s plan from before the creation of the world. To be on this end and see how God connected the dots is an amazing faith producing work. He tells us in **Romans 10:17** that “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” Continue to dig into His word, be amazed and let your faith grow.

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