

“The Dots Connected”: The New Testament

Dennis Watson

What a blessing the *Connecting the Dots* journey has been! Both Chris and I can say for certain that we have learned more than anyone else. In fact, every devotion we write causes us some grief. You see, each one reminds us of all that we missed in past devotions. That’s right. When we started we didn’t know it all and when we finish, we still won’t know it all! I now understand why authors often come back to write revised editions. This is not to say the first edition was wrong, but that they have learned much more since writing the previous edition. This endeavor has certainly been a learning experience.

Now we will begin the New Testament study. Saint Augustine said “The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.” In the first 6 volumes of *Connecting the Dots* we looked at the Old Testament in a chronological overview. The order was based on a children’s devotional book by Marty Machowski, titled *Long Story Short*. The New Testament devotional, “The Dots Connected” will likewise follow the outline of Marty Machowski’s devotional, “*Old Story New*.”

The New Testament can be broken down into four sections—Gospels, Acts, Letters, and Prophecy or Apocalyptic. Just as “*Connecting the Dots*” did not cover the Old Testament verse by verse, “*The Dots Connected*” is chronological and will not cover the New Testament verse by verse. So, it is time to get started! If you fall behind, catch up or just jump back in. The daily devotions will cover the material that Pastor Chris and I will be preaching on the following Sunday. This will put everyone on the same page when we gather for worship each Sunday. There is power in God’s people being in God’s Word together.

WEEK 1 THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

Dennis Watson

Luke was a gentile doctor writing a summary of eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus. Luke was writing this account for a man by the name of Theophilus who was apparently a gentile official. His name means “lover of God.” Luke presents Jesus as the “Son of Man,” which is a Messianic title focusing on His humanity. In Luke’s genealogy of Jesus he traces the line back to Adam. This week we will look at the announcements made by the Angel Gabriel, one to Zacharias telling of the birth of John the Baptist and the other to Mary telling of the birth of Jesus. For a long time, as we journeyed through the Old Testament, we have anticipated this time—well, now here we are, studying about “The Dots Connected.”

Day 1

First Read Luke 1:1-38

The Angel Gabriel first appeared to Zacharias, the priest, when he was serving his time in the Holy Place at the temple. Gabriel told him that his wife, who had been unable to have a child, would have a son in answer to his prayers. His son would be great and would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. Zacharias was also told that the son’s name would be John. We read that John would drink no wine or strong drink which indicates that he was to be a Nazarite. Luke recorded that John would bring joy and gladness. In Luke 15, when lost things were found there was joy and rejoicing, which speaks of salvation. John would be the forerunner of the Messiah. This was spoken of in Malachi 3:1, prophesied more than 400 years before the event took place.

Then the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. Mary was probably in her teens. Luke called her a virgin and Mary says that “she had not yet known a man.” This was a way of saying that she had not yet become sexually active. Gabriel told her she would have a son but that He would not be just any son. Her Son would be “Son of the Highest” and would reign on the “throne of His father David.”

The response of Zacharias and Mary was markedly different. Both were granted the grace of God to participate in His plan to bring salvation to the world. However, Zacharias questioned Gabriel and said that he and Elizabeth were too old to have children. Gabriel told him that the sign he would be given would be that Zacharias would be unable to speak until the child was born. Mary asked how this could happen to her since she was a virgin and Gabriel explained to her that she would become pregnant by a miracle of the Lord, through the Holy Spirit. The Lord knew her heart. At this explanation Mary surrendered to the Lord’s will and plan. Nothing is impossible with the Lord.

Both Zacharias and Mary were used of the Lord to accomplish His purpose. What about you? Are you questioning the Lord with the intent of avoiding His plan? Or are you, like Mary, ready and willing to surrender to His plan and will? Thank the Lord that He uses common ordinary people to bring Jesus the Savior to the world. Surrender to His plan to use you, through His grace.

Day 2

First Read Luke 1:39-45

What an amazing biblical historical account. Elizabeth knew what had taken place with Mary before they spoke. When Mary and Elizabeth saw each other, the unborn baby, John the Baptist, immediately “leaped” in Elizabeth’s womb and was filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the power of the presence of Jesus, perhaps just days after conception! There was an instant connection between the two unborn babies. Neither of these unborn babies was to be merely a normal baby—they were both prepared by the Lord to carry out His plan and will. I believe that the recognition of Jesus as the Savior of the world is what caused John to leap in his mother’s womb.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with great joy. She called Mary, “Blessed among women.” Note that she did not call her blessed *above* women. Mary was an ordinary young lady but the Lord had shone His favor or grace on her. Mary should not be considered as something extraordinary but one who was obediently surrendered to the Lord. Elizabeth recognized that it was God’s activity on Mary’s behalf that made her blessed among women.

I am safe in saying that every conception is of the Lord. David expressed it in Psalm 139. Jeremiah was told by the Lord that He knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother’s womb. Samuel’s birth was obviously a miraculous plan of the Lord. It is important, as with Jeremiah, Samuel, John the Baptist and Jesus, that we all acknowledge that the Lord has purposed us. That is why we are here. We need to acknowledge this and seek to live out His plans, purposes, and His will.

Give thanks to the Lord for forming you and giving you life. Surrender your life to Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 1:46-56

Mary was overcome with joy and blessings as she considered what had taken place. She was chosen by the Lord to bear the Savior of the world. Mary's song is called "The Magnificent," which is Latin for her first three words, "My soul magnifies." Mary gives praise to the Lord for His grace shown to her. Her song can be broken into two parts. The first part (46-50) is praise for the Lord's special favor on her. She calls the Lord "my Savior." Here she expresses intimacy with the Lord, not only because He has chosen her to bear the Savior but that He would also *be* her Savior. That is an overwhelming thought. Mary was going to give birth to her Savior! She also spoke of His faithfulness, power, holiness, and mercy. In the second part (51-55), Mary praised the Lord for His special favor on Israel. Mary was aware that through the Child that she was to bear, God was being merciful to Abraham and his descendants. Mary was aware that the birth of her Child was a fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham and his people. Mary was aware that what the Lord had done in her reached back into the roots of her Jewish heritage and forward to generations of all people to come.

Can you imagine the joy and other emotions Mary felt? I know I can't. The Lord's favor, which is His grace, had been heaped on her. What an amazing position to be in. She was going to be used by the Lord to bring the Savior of mankind into the world. He was to be the Savior of all, including Mary. It is not surprising that she would breakout in a song of praise!

Have you been used by the Lord to bring the Savior to someone? It is equally amazing to bring the message of the Savior by which people, (family members, friends, work associates, and even strangers) come to personally know Jesus our Savior and Lord.

Get in the game! Join the Lord who brought you into the world and who brought the Savior into your life. Begin to be used by His grace to introduce others to Jesus the Savior, and then sing His praise!

Day 4

First Read Luke 1:57-80

It is always good to repeat that prophecy in the Bible is *the Lord God writing history in advance*. Of course, we think of this as the case in the Old Testament, but the New Testament is also filled with *the Lord God writing history in advance*.

In today's passage Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled, but the next aspect of this prophecy is extended when Zacharias celebrates the birth of his son John. When the angel Gabriel told Zacharias about the coming of his son, Zacharias questioned and doubted. For the entirety of Elizabeth's pregnancy, he could not speak and probably could not hear. When Elizabeth gave birth all of the people just assumed the baby would be named after Zacharias, his daddy, but Elizabeth said his name would be John. The people were shocked. They signaled to Zacharias asking about the name and Zacharias motioned for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." As soon as he wrote the name he could speak again. And oh, how he spoke! He immediately began to praise the Lord which connected Old Testament prophecy to what was taking place. Talk about dot connecting! This is exactly what Zacharias did. He was now able to make sense of what was going on—the announcement of John's birth and Mary's pregnancy. He saw that the Old Testament's prophet's words were becoming a reality and he was right smack dab in the middle of it. It is no wonder that he was so excited. He spoke of the "Horn of salvation" and the "House of David." He spoke of the promise made to Abraham. He spoke of how his son would prepare the way for the Messiah as was spoken of by the prophets. He also spoke of salvation, light, and the remission of sins. This was an amazing coming together of prophecy and the anticipation of what was to come!

Connect the dots! Just like Zacharias, we too, are recipients of the prophecy that has become a reality. The light has come to us. Salvation has come our way. But the light is also shining in and through us and salvation is taken through us to those who need it. We are not just connecting dots in the study; we are connecting dots as we connect people to the prophecy and the reality of Jesus Christ, the salvation and deliverer from sin!

Thank the Lord that He has and He continues to connect the dots through willing vessels like Zacharias and you!

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 4:2-3

As we read yesterday, Zacharias' song was very much a high point of *dot connecting*. He spoke of one to come, who would come from the line of David. He spoke about prophecy delivered by the Old Testament prophets, while at the same time he spoke of the One Who would come to bring salvation and light. When we read the Bible we are often simultaneously reading about prophecy that has been fulfilled and prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. We live in amazing times!

"In that day" refers to the Day of the Lord. This phrase occurs many times in Isaiah (as in all the prophets), and it is also used in the New Testament. The prophet Joel, in particular has something to say about it. We need to realize that all Hebrew days begin at sundown. The day begins with darkness and moves to the dawn. In this case "the day of the Lord" begins with the Great Tribulation and goes on into the millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah spoke of a 'branch,' which was like a code word used, by the prophets, to describe the future Messiah who would bring salvation. Both Zechariah and Jeremiah also called the future Messiah, the "branch." There are eighteen Hebrew words translated into one English word, "branch." All of these words refer to Jesus. In this verse, the word "branch" means "sprout." We are told that He is a branch out of a dry ground. He is something green that has sprung up in the desert.

Jesus came to save and to establish an eternal reign of righteousness and justice. A simple expression of this is that when He has completed His work and established His eternal reign, all of the people who remain will be called holy.

Jesus is the branch that was prophesied, that now has come. He would die on the cross for sinners, be resurrected from the dead defeating Satan, sin, death and the grave. He will ultimately return again to establish a reign that will be characterized by peace, perfect peace. Give thanks to the Lord God's amazing plan!

WEEK 2 the Birth of Jesus

Chris Watson

Much of our Old Testament study pointed forward to this week's devotion, the Birth of Jesus. Jesus was not an afterthought but was in God's mind the whole time to redeem mankind. Every book in the Old Testament, in one way or another, pointed forward to Jesus. We first saw this in Genesis 3:15, the very first book of the Bible, God was already pointing forward to Jesus. In books like Isaiah, chapter 53, we saw the suffering servant, which was about Jesus and what He would endure during His life and on the cross. This week we will see God's plan unfold as His Son is brought into the world, ultimately for our salvation.

Day 1

First Read Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 2:1-6

After our studies of the Old Testament, the birth of Jesus shouldn't be a surprise. As we have already seen, the accounts and prophecies in the Old Testament clearly lay the groundwork for Jesus' entrance into the earthly world. Micah 5:2 says, "*But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*" God, through the prophet Micah, had told His people that Jesus would come into the world. Not only would Jesus come into the world but He would be born in Bethlehem, though it was the smallest of the clans of Judah. God picked Bethlehem, a place lowly and humble, as the location of His Son's birth. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise us when we read in Luke that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that everyone should be registered in their home town, though the prophecy that Micah issued was given 600 years before Caesar Augustus was born. We know that Joseph was in the line of David, and therefore, he had to return to Bethlehem for the census. After arriving in Bethlehem to register, Mary gave birth to her son. Our Savior, Jesus, was born in the exact place that had been prophesied in the scriptures. We find in Matthew 2:4 that the chief priests even knew where He would be born, because they knew of Micah's prophecy. What an incredible plan! Galatians 4:4 confirms that in the "*fullness of time*" Jesus was born. The "*fullness of time*" means just the right time, not too early or too late. In God's time Jesus would be born; at this time, this place, and for this reason, our Savior would come.

Take some time today to thank God for His plan of sending Jesus and that it was not done haphazardly, but done as part of His plan, in His timing. Thank God for using even sinful people in His plan to carry out His purposes. Then, spend some time asking God how He might want to use you as a part of His plan. Most importantly, thank God for sending Jesus into this world!

Day 2

First Read Luke 2:8-21

We often think of this passage around Christmas time and don't really discuss it much throughout the year, although we should. This is the announcement of our Savior's birth. Verse 9 indicates that the shepherds were afraid and verse 10 reads, "*then the angel said to them, 'do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings (news) of great joy which will be to all people.'*"

While we could focus on many things stated in this verse, we are going to focus on two. We will focus first on the words "*good tidings*" or "*good news*." Why would the birth of Jesus be good news; why wouldn't His birth be just like that of any other baby? It would only be good news to the shepherds and others if they understood the bad news. Mankind is sinful and separated from God. Jesus, who had just been born, would fix that problem. This is why the news was good and worthy of great joy. The shepherds understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy. The good news was great to them because they knew the predicament that all mankind was in.

The second focus is on the words at the end of verse 10, "*which will be to all people*." In other words, this great birth and the good news that Jesus' birth brought, were to be for all people. It wasn't just for the Jews or any other particular group of people, but for the people of all nations. Jesus' birth was for you and me; it was for people on the other side of the world, in China or in Iraq. His birth was for people that look like me and for people that look completely different. God's gift of Jesus is for all who will receive Him. Have you received God's gift of Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus to take away your sins? If not, why not today? If you have, are you sharing it? Verse 17 in today's passage tells us the shepherds *made widely known* what had been revealed to them concerning the Child. Are you? Are you making Jesus known to all people? God has left us on this earth to know Him and to make Him known! How can you make Jesus known today?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 2:10-11

Yes, some of these verses are ones that we read yesterday. Today is our "CONNECT TO JESUS" day. Yesterday we focused on verse 10; today we will focus on verse 11. In verse 11 we see that the Savior was born who was and is Christ the Lord. Yesterday we focused on our need for a Savior. Our need for a Savior is not for salvation alone, as we often think when we first come to Jesus. It's not that we just put our faith in Jesus, are saved, and then are good to go, without the need of Christ anymore. In fact, it is quite the opposite. We not only need Jesus to save us from our sins so that we know God and go to heaven, we need Jesus to save us on a regular basis.

We are eternally saved when we put our faith in Jesus but we need Jesus to save us from many things throughout our days and years on this earth, mainly we need to be saved from ourselves. Looking back to what we learned about the Israelites in our Old Testament study in 2 Kings 17, we see that the Israelites also needed to be saved from themselves. They had put many things in God's place. Though they had been told the truth by the prophets, and they knew they needed to get things right and put God back in first place where He belonged, they didn't. Rather, they continued to follow their own desires.

God saves us daily from ourselves. The problems we experience are not centered as much in the people we live with, work or go to church with, as much as they are in us. It's our attitudes, our pride, wanting our way, and desiring to be right that causes the problems. These are some of the very things that God sent Jesus to help us overcome. When Jesus died on the cross He desired to save us **from** ourselves **to** Himself. We need to exchange our desires for His, our minds for His, our thoughts for His and our attitudes for His. We can only do this by trusting in Jesus everyday. As we spend time with Jesus daily through scripture, prayer, and worship, we submit ourselves to God, allowing Him to save us from poor choices we might make otherwise.

Think all of the ways you know that Jesus has saved you! Now imagine all the many ways He has saved you that you might not even be aware of. Thank God that He not only saved you from hell to heaven, but He saved you to Himself, and He saved you from yourself. Ask God today to help you die to yourself (Galatians 2:20) and live to Him.

Day 4

First Read Mathew 2:7-21

God's overall plan will not be messed up; it will not be thwarted. Many have tried, but they have all failed. Herod thought he could mess with God's plan but he didn't. Though his ungodly decree called for the killing of all the male children two years old and under, God's plan prevailed. Many might ask why God would allow something like this to happen. We know that just like us, Herod had the choice to follow God or not; he chose not to and others paid for his disobedience.

In verse 13 of today's passage we see that under God's direction, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus departed for Egypt. Later, as noted in verses 19-20, they were instructed to leave Egypt and return to Israel. In Hosea 11:1, the prophet foretold this, saying "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" From the beginning God knew that people would try to thwart His plan in Jesus, but it would not happen. In fact many of the Jews and leaders who killed Jesus thought they had taken care of Him, but we know that didn't happen. Since that time, there have been many attempts made to remove Jesus for this word, especially in America. But the good news is, if you know God personally, no one can remove Him! Though they may try and remove Him from the public square, God is with us everywhere we go through the Holy Spirit.

Just think! For two thousand years plus, people have tried to stop Jesus' plan and stop His name from being proclaimed. It hasn't worked. In fact, the persecution and pushback has often helped in advancing the gospel. We will see this in the New Testament. Thank God today that His plan will not be thwarted. Thank Him and trust that when you are ridiculed or persecuted for your faith, He may be using it to make Himself known and to grow you. Thank God that He is in control.

Day 5

First Read Hosea 11:1-2

Today's passage is one that has two meanings. The first is a meaning for Israel but the other meaning, and our focus for today, is the last part of verse one that says, "*And out of Egypt I called My son.*" We saw this scripture yesterday in Matthew 2:15. These were the words of Hosea, the prophet, and were written many years before Jesus would physically come into the world. The verse that we read in Hosea, and later in Matthew, tells us that Jesus would come out of Egypt. When we read the account in Matthew we learn that God protected Jesus and brought Him out of Egypt, saving Him, so that one day He could save the world from their sins.

From our Old Testament study and from your knowledge of the Bible, take some time to write down some of the prophecies seen in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament or that have been fulfilled up through today. This may take a while and it may be something you think about and come back to from time to time.

Take some time to thank God for fulfilling these prophecies and that His Word is true and can be trusted.

WEEK 3 JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE Dennis Watson

Luke 2 concludes with these words, *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”* Jesus grew in several different ways. Even at the very beginning of His life the law of the Lord was very significant, as it was throughout His life. James 2:10 says that if we break just one of the laws of the Lord we are guilty of breaking the whole law. Jesus fulfilled the whole law. Just think! He did not break one law of the Lord. Throughout His life, He observed the whole law, even from infancy. This week is about anticipation and realization. Anna and Simeon had been anticipating the coming of the Messiah and now that anticipation had become a realized experience.

Day 1

First Read Luke 2:21-24

Some people get a perfect SAT score. What an accomplishment! Imagine that same person taking it every day, for the rest of his/her life and getting a perfect score despite changes made in the test. That would be beyond exceptional, but can you imagine that same person being perfect in every way? Pitch a perfect game in baseball every time! Hit a homerun every time! Always perfect! Well, our idea of perfect isn't like that. For instance, a professional baseball player can get a hit 30% of the time and he is considered exceptional. However, God's scale of perfection is 100% perfect in everything. Jesus was always perfect, He had to be. In order to die for our sins, He had to be perfect. He had to do the right thing all the time!

From birth Jesus was sinless. He had to be perfect to fulfill His purpose. His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, were very conscientious Jews who sought to follow the Law of Moses. Through the Law of Moses, God said that every baby boy was to be circumcised when he was eight days old. So in keeping with the law, Mary and Joseph took Jesus when He was eight days old to be circumcised. Because the first born son belonged to the Lord, when the time of purification after having a baby was over, the parents were to take the first born son to offer a sacrifice and present him to the Lord. The parents were to redeem him by offering a lamb as a sacrifice. If they could not afford a lamb, they could offer a turtle dove or young pigeon. So once again, Mary and Joseph submitted to the Law of Moses which the Lord God had given.

The start of Jesus' life was lived according to the Law of Moses as given by the Lord God. Throughout His life Jesus submitted to the law because the law came from His Father, the Lord God. He kept the whole law. I am so thankful for this because I am a transgressor of the law. Just think about the Ten Commandments. How many have you broken? I'm pretty sure I have broken them all. Jesus expanded on the ten laws, speaking not just of the act but the thought behind the act. Jesus said that if we have broken the law in our heart we are guilty. That's me and it's you, too. There is nothing you and I can do to remedy that. We are guilty, but Jesus kept the law completely. He alone could die to cover our sin.

Thank the Lord God for His grace and mercy and how He does not expect perfection from us. Jesus was perfect for us and then He died for our imperfection.

Day 2

First Read Luke 2:36-40

I clearly remember the day that Denise, Chris and Josh were born. It was a time of celebration! Their arrivals had long been anticipated and looked forward to. There were special people there, family members and friends. It was such a special time.

The birth of Jesus was no different. One of the people present the day Jesus was presented at the temple at just about six weeks old, was a prophetess named Anna. Anna name means "grace." Anna was a prophetess, a woman who spoke forth the Word of the Lord God. Anna was part of what is called the remnant. People who make up the remnant are people who believe the Lord God to continue what He started and are expecting Him to finish fully. Anna was anticipating the coming of the Messiah. The passage here says that Anna lived at the temple. She fasted and prayed day and night. From what Luke says about her, she may have been over 100 years old. The Lord God had shown her, through His word, that the Messiah would come and that she would see Him. Upon seeing Jesus, she spoke to all who were like her—expecting His coming, telling them that this was the One they had been looking for.

What a day that must have been for Anna. Each day, probably all day, she was watching for the Messiah to come. What joy she must have felt when she declared that the Redeemer Who brought redemption had come.

Too many people in the days of Anna had pretty much forgotten about the coming of the Messiah. Either they had forgotten or they no longer believed. They were not looking forward to or anticipating His coming. Who is the remnant today? Our faith is not just "backward looking." We look back and see what God has been faithful to do. But we also take what He has said and look forward to what He says He is going to do. If you believe and trust Him for what He has said and done and are anticipating that He will do all He promised, you are part of the remnant. We are once again anticipating Jesus' return when He will deliver His church from the wrath to come and He will ultimately rule and reign in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Not only are we anticipating, but we need to be letting others know that He is coming again to finally, once and for all, deal with sin, death, and Satan.

So keep looking and anticipating! Jesus is coming again. Are you ready? What about friends and family?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 2:25-35

The truly devout Jews would have been living with knowledge of the prophecies given by the Old Testament prophets concerning the coming of the Messiah. They would have been living with an anticipating and watchful eye. Like Anna, there was another significant person at the dedication of Jesus at the temple. Simeon came to the temple the day Jesus was dedicated to the Lord. The Holy Spirit had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. Yesterday we saw that Anna was part of the remnant, a group of people who believed God for His promises about the coming of Jesus.

When Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms he began to prophesy that God's salvation had come to His people. This salvation was not just for the Jews but for all people. Simeon then blessed Mary and Joseph telling them that their Son would bring division and the rise and fall of many. He also predicted that Mary's own soul would be pierced, probably a reference to Mary's heartbreak as she would see her Son rejected and then crucified.

Of course, as agonizing as Jesus' death was, it was the means by which the salvation Simeon spoke of came to the Jews and to the whole world. He was proclaiming the truth that had been made known to him which in Jesus had become a reality.

Now we know that outcome. Jesus did grow up and many have risen and fallen based on their response to Him. We also know that Mary's soul was pierced as her Son was pierced on the cross.

All biblical prophecy and teaching point to the salvation that was brought into the world by Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. Anna and Simeon pointed to this truth and so should we.

Day 4

First Read Luke 2:41-52

Annually, the Jewish males were to go to Jerusalem to observe three feasts. Sometimes the whole family would go. When a Jewish son turned 12 years of age he was considered a son of the law. It was time for him to be taught the instruction of the law, fasting, aspects of worship and it was time to begin to learn a trade. According to this passage, Jesus' whole family went to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem every year. When Jesus was 12 years old and his family went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and the festivities were over everyone, started to head home. Jesus stayed behind, but no one noticed that He was not with them. He was still among the teachers—teaching the teachers. It says that He was listening to them and asking questions. I believe His questions were didactic; He was asking them questions to teach them. The questions were thought-provoking. The teachers were “astonished *at His understanding and answers,*” literally “beside themselves in amazement.” When his parents found Him, they too, were “amazed” or “struck out of their senses.” They were behaving like what they were—worried parents! Jesus answered them based on His own understanding of His mission. He asked them two questions. First, “*Why did you seek me?*” Second, “*Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?*” He had been asking the teachers teaching questions and now He asked His parents teaching questions, as well. Do you think that maybe Mary and Joseph had forgotten who He was and had claimed ownership of Him?

What a tough task it is to serve as a foster parent. To take in a little baby, care for it, love it and then release the child. That is similar to the way it was for Mary and Joseph. Jesus was really the Son of another and that was now become a reality. What do you think went through their minds when He asked, “*Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?*” Surely Joseph thought to himself, “I am your father.” But perhaps Joseph was immediately reminded that the time had come for their “son” to be on His real Father’s mission.

Thank the Lord God for the surrender of Mary and Joseph to serve the Lord (and us) by caring for the Son of God.

Day 5 First Read Psalm 9:7-14

Earlier this week we talked about Simeon and how he rejoiced when he held the baby Jesus and said, *"My eyes have seen your salvation."* Salvation in the Bible refers to two things. First, it refers to God's protection of His people from their enemies. David rejoiced in how the Lord God had protected him in the past from his enemies. It also has a forward look to the saving of people from sin. David anticipated this in the Psalms. David experienced and anticipated the righteous judgment of the Lord God. When you read the words of verses 13-14 it sounds much like the celebration of Simeon—*"Have mercy on me, O Lord...I will rejoice in your salvation."* David anticipated the coming salvation of the Lord God, but it was Simeon who experienced and proclaimed it.

Once again we are in a very privileged position. We read about David's experience of the Lord God's deliverance from his earthly enemies. We also read that David anticipated an even greater deliverance and salvation. The salvation he anticipated was coming through the Messiah and it was from sin.

You and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, also experience and anticipate God's salvation. We have experienced His deliverance from the power of sin in our daily lives. However, we also anticipate the time when the conflict will be over, when our salvation is complete and the flesh is totally done away with. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will ultimately be saved.

Thank the Lord that our salvation is complete and that one day we will fully experience it without the influence of flesh. I once heard a preacher say, regarding a believer who has passed away, "He breathed out his last breath of flesh and the next breath in was breathing in the Spirit life of eternity."

WEEK 4 The Ministry of John the Baptist

Chris Watson

Approximately 30 years passed between Matthew 2, where the wise men visited Jesus and Matthew 3 when we read about John the Baptist. John was born into the priesthood and his father was Zacharias (Luke 1:5). We know that John and Jesus were cousins, because of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). We will see this week that God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus.

Day 1

First Read Matthew 3:1-3

Long before John the Baptist was born, Isaiah and Jeremiah were prophesying concerning him. In fact, our passage today in verse 3 refers to Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 31:15 that John would prepare the way. This was all part of God's plan to get the people ready for Jesus.

Try to imagine John's job. In verse two of today's passage, John is preaching repentance saying "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" John the Baptist didn't exactly have an easy or desired job. He could have been locked up quickly but God was working through him to prepare the way for Jesus. John the Baptist was faithful to prepare the way. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 11:11 that there was no one greater of all the men were born than John the Baptist.

Notice the message that John was preaching. He said, "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Repent simply means to turn around, do a complete 180. You must realize you are going the wrong way, stop, and then turn and go the right way. The people were headed away from God and were involved in ungodly acts. John was telling them to stop, acknowledge they are wrong, and turn to God!

We all need to do this, both believers and unbelievers. Do you know Jesus? If not, repent and turn to Him. Recognize you are going the wrong direction, put your faith in Jesus, call on Him to save you, and then turn and follow Him. Those who know Him are also in need of repentance. Are you headed in the wrong direction? Maybe you are involved in an ungodly relationship, maybe harboring bitterness. Are you acting deceitful or hateful? Are you just empty? We can look back to Jonah and remember that the people of Nineveh were very wicked people and God sent Jonah to tell them to repent and turn to the Lord. The people, including the king, called on God and turned from their sin. Because of this God heard their cry and chose not to destroy them. So be reminded that when we repent from our sin it can bring about a right relationship with God and save us from many undesired consequences down the road.

Repent and turn to the Lord. He is our only hope. Call out to Him and follow Him with all you have!

Day 2

First Read Matthew 3:4-11

Many came to John the Baptist to be baptized. Many heard his call regarding repentance, the call to return to God, and we see in verse 5 that many repented and were baptized!

However, there were two groups of people that showed up to the baptisms just to check things out. They were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These were two groups of people that had many things in common but also disagreed about many things. The Pharisees were legalists and traditionalists, per se, and were consumed with keeping the law perfectly. The Sadducees were more powerful and their ranks included the chief priests and high priests. However, they were more concerned with politics than with the things of God. Later, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus and had problems with the authority of the Old Testament. In fact, they denied the inspiration of the Word of God. Both groups were supposed to be "religious" and they may have been, but they were not godly and they were not following the things of God. They were in it for themselves, what they wanted, and what made them look good.

It's not surprising that John calls them a "*brood of vipers.*" This actually refers to Genesis 3:15 and is actually calling them sons of Satan. Wow! That is pretty harsh but it seems to be true as they were religious but had not thoughts of the things of God. They seemed to look great and put together on the outside, but on the inside they were just like everyone else. They needed to repent of their sins and be baptized.

There are a lot of "religious" people today. People may look like they have it all together. They may have all the right answers, know a lot about the Bible, and they may even lead others in their ways. However, for some of these people it's not about Jesus or a relationship. It's about rituals, legalism, or looking good, while they are really just putting up a front. I pray this isn't the case with any of us. If it is, we must cry out to the Lord in desperation, repent from our selfish ways, and put our hope and trust in Jesus. We all need Jesus, DAILY!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 3:1-9

We see a very similar account in Luke's gospel with a little more detail. In fact, with the gospels we read many similar accounts from different angles. It would be as if four of us saw an event happen before our eyes. We would all see the same thing but would explain it in a different way and focus on different aspects of the event.

John says in verse 6 that "*all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*" This should have been an obvious picture to the Jews, that salvation was not just for the Jews but for all peoples. We will see in the weeks to come, the Jews, God's chosen people, believed that salvation was just for them, but Paul helped them see that Jesus came for all peoples. For anyone who would call on Him.

Marty Machowski says, "Jesus' death on the cross was the way God kept his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring, for Jesus was born into Abraham's family, and salvation is now offered to all people." We are reminded that Jesus is for all people, whether black or white, rich or poor, whatever our differences. Jesus is for all.

God continues to convey this to us through all of scripture. In fact He tells us often through Paul's writings that we are to take the message of Jesus to all people, to every nation and every tribe. As a believer this is not a burden but a blessing! We have an incredible responsibility to take the Gospel to our neighbors and to those around the world. Let us share Jesus not just with our lives but with our words, how will they know if they haven't heard the Truth? Who will you share Jesus with today?

Day 4

First Read Luke 3:10-18

John was the forerunner, the one who went before Jesus to prepare the way. John taught repentance (turning) and baptism. Jesus' ministry had not yet begun so John was preparing the people for this, telling them that they needed to turn from their sins. Turning from our sins and baptism alone won't save us, but totally putting our trust in Jesus for salvation is what saves us. We read in today's passage that John was baptizing people he told them that Jesus was coming and that Jesus would baptize them with "*the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

John was helping them see their need for Jesus, they were sinful and hopeless and only Jesus could save them. As you might remember from our Old Testament study, before Jesus came, people were saved by putting their trust in God, hearing what He said and putting their hope in Him. However, when Jesus came, He died for the sins committed before His physical life, during His life and after His death and resurrection. His death covered all the sins ever committed.

John the Baptist realized that he was not the focus; he was not the Messiah, even though others thought he was and asked him so. His purpose was solely to point people to Jesus. Sound familiar? That is what God desires for us all day, every day. Whether we are with our family, our friends, at work, at home, or out and about, we are always to point people to Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says that we are Christ's ambassadors, as if God is making His appeal through us! We don't point people to what we do, what we have done, or how great we think we are, we point them to Jesus. John the Baptist couldn't save anyone and neither can we. Who are you pointing to Jesus today? Who are you showing the way to salvation? Are you making sure your life glorifies God? Look for opportunities to show Jesus today. The opportunities are there, let's take advantage of them.

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 40:1-5

Isaiah lived hundreds of years before John the Baptist and yet he wrote about him. This was one of God's many ways of pointing to Jesus before Jesus was physically on this earth. Today we can look back and read the prophets, like Isaiah, and see that God's plan was in full swing before John the Baptist was born. God's plan and sovereign will was played out then and continues to be played out today.

In the Old Testament times God often used prophets to share the Truth and proclaim what was coming. Today we have something that those in the Old and New Testament didn't have; we have the fully inspired and infallible Word of God. We can see from Genesis to Revelation the whole account of God's plan. As Paul Harvey would say, we have the rest of the story. We know that God still uses people to convey His Truth through His Word but as individuals we can read God's Word daily. We can study it and learn from it. Just a few days back I saw a cartoon of someone looking up to God, in heaven, saying, and "God please speak to me." In response, God handed that person a Bible indicating "I have and you have the very Words in your hand, on your heart, they can be with you everywhere you go."

I am sure you are aware that there are still many people-groups across the world that doesn't have the Bible written in their language. Some groups have only a few books, while others don't have any part of the Bible at all. We have the very Words of God at our fingertips every day, yet we often leave it lying on our tables. We can't find them or we don't pick them back up until the following Sunday. Will you thank God for His Word? Will you continue to read and study it? Are you thankful that you have "the rest of the story", the account that tells us that one day we will spend eternity with Him? We will walk and talk with Him. Until then, may we know Him better as we connect through His Word? Will you cherish the Word of God?

WEEK 5 THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Dennis Watson

John the Baptist's baptisms, as we have seen, were for repentance. Jesus never sinned, yet Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize Him. Jesus came to this earth for sinners. To be specific, Paul writes that Jesus came to become "sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus completely identified with us in our humanity, though He was both fully God and fully man. He was born as a helpless infant just like we were. He grew up into an adult. He lived a sinless life and in His death He identified with our sinfulness, becoming sin for us. His baptism was identification with our sin. He didn't need to repent, but He was to take on our sin and His baptism was an example for us. This week we will look at the baptism of Jesus.

Day 1

First Read Matthew 3:13-15

We do not know how John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, but it was probably the Holy Spirit who let him know. It seems odd that he did not know his cousin was the Messiah. But John did know that he was not worthy to baptize Jesus. Jesus was without sin! Why then did He ask John to baptize Him? John had been calling people from all over the region to come to him for repentance of sin. Jesus said that He needed to be baptized to fulfill righteousness.

John's message was a message of repentance and those experiencing it were looking forward to the coming Messiah who would be righteous and who would bring in righteousness. If Messiah were to provide righteousness for sinners, He must be identified with sinners. It was therefore in the will of God for Him to be baptized by John in order to be identified (the real meaning of the word "baptized") with sinners.¹

Jesus took the initiative to identify with us. He was born as an infant—a helpless infant. Can you imagine that the God who created all things became an infant in need of the care and concern of a mother and father? By becoming a human He identified with our humanity. In baptism He identified with our sin, though He was sinless. In His death on the cross He identified with our guilt. He became human, sin, and guilt for us. Now we get to identify with Him. In baptism we identify with the death He died for us. In that death he took away our sin. Also in baptism, we are symbolically identifying with His resurrection. The old hymn says, "Jesus paid it all." He paid it all. He did the difficult identifying with us so that we could receive the benefit of His resurrection. Paul expressed it this way:

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. Romans 6:5 (NKJV)

The sinless Son of God put Himself in harm's way so that we would receive the benefits. Thank the Lord God for becoming flesh and sin for us so that we can receive the benefits of His resurrection.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Day 2

First Read Matthew 3:16-17

As Jesus came up out of the water following His baptism by John, heaven opened up and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. Then a voice from heaven declared, “*This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” Here at the baptism of Jesus all three of the persons of the Trinity of God were present. The Son Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove and rested on Jesus, and God spoke from heaven. The Trinity, humanly speaking, is impossible to explain. There have been many attempted explanations but none truly explain the Trinity. The Trinity describes or defines God as three in one. God is three but one. This is beyond human grasp, though we know that it is true. The Lord God is indescribable. We can only attempt to speak of the one true God in human terms but He is larger and greater than our words will ever express.

When the Spirit of God descended and God spoke, John truly understood that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:32-34). It also fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that the Spirit would rest on the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2). The descent of the Holy Spirit empowered the Son, the Messiah, for His ministry among people.²

The Lord God affirmed and authenticated Jesus in the virgin birth, the appearance of the Trinity at His baptism, at the transfiguration, and in His resurrection from the dead.

Give thanks to the Lord God for His many confirmations for us that Jesus Christ is the One God sent to be our Messiah.

² The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read John 1:29-34

John proclaimed that Jesus was, *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”* In the Biblical historical account of the Passover in Exodus the people were instructed to take a lamb and kill it and then to spread the blood of the lamb on the door frame of their homes. When the angel of death came along he passed over any house that had the blood of the lamb on the doorframe. The lamb’s blood saved those households from experiencing the death of the firstborn. Jesus is the Lamb of God. His blood provides salvation from sin, death and the grave for people who have placed their faith in Him and His shed blood.

John also said that Jesus was “before me.” Although John was a few months older than Jesus He knew and proclaimed that Jesus was before him. John spoke of the preexistence of Jesus. Jesus was present with God the Father in the beginning and all things were made by Him and for Him.

John acknowledged that Jesus was the Lamb of God and that Jesus had existed before him. John saw the Spirit come down and remain on Jesus when he was baptized and John was certainly familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 11:2) that the Spirit would come and rest on Him. For John the Baptist, this was God’s confirmation that Jesus was His Son and the promised Messiah. Because of all of this, John testified that Jesus was the Son of God.

There is some long term dot connecting going on here! John made the connection between Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Passover lamb whose blood spared families from experiencing the death of the firstborn. He also connected Jesus to His role as Creator. Give thanks that Jesus is all over and through the Word of God!

Day 4

First Read Mark 6:17-29

The ministry of John the Baptist put him at odds with many people who did not have an affinity for the Word of God. He preached about sin and called all people to repent of their sins and turn to God. Herod the king divorced his wife and took his half-brother Philip's wife to be his wife. John the Baptist confronted Herod about this; so much for being a politically-correct preacher. His new wife, Herodias, was outraged at the audacity of John the Baptist. She insisted that Herod arrest John and put him in prison. She wanted John killed but Herod had a respectful fear of John the Baptist because he knew he was a holy and just man. At Herod's birthday party Herodias' daughter danced for Herod and his attendees. Herod was delighted with her dance and told her he would give her whatever she requested up to half his kingdom. She asked her mother what she should ask for and Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod, with regret and sorrow, had John executed and had his head brought to the girl. The girl then took it to her mother.

John, like all Biblical people of faith, was ultimately saved by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. His blood covered all people who had faith in God's redemptive plan. Often we are faced with ridicule and harassment due to our obedience to God's Word. Like John we, too, will be delivered by the blood of Jesus. Are you taking a firm stand with people regarding the Word of God? If so you may not always be popular. In fact, some people will hate you and abuse you, but Jesus said to rejoice when you suffer for Him.

Give thanks to the Lord for John's faithfulness even unto death.

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 11:1-5

It is interesting that today's passage was written about 700 years before Jesus came to live on earth. In this passage, Isaiah linked Jesus not to David but to David's father, Jesse. Though this still links Jesus to the Davidic Covenant that the Messiah would rule on David's throne, but Isaiah linked Jesus to the poor farmer from Bethlehem. Like Jesse he was born to peasants. The geographical link was not to the City of David, which was Jerusalem, but to the little town of Bethlehem.

We have already looked at the passage in John 1:32 about the Spirit coming to rest on Jesus at His baptism. This was prophesied in today's passage. Look at what J. Vernon McGee says about this:

This is the sevenfold spirit which rested upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The plentitude of power is the sevenfold spirit: (1) of the LORD; (2) of wisdom; (3) of understanding; (4) of counsel; (5) of might; (6) of knowledge; and (7) of the fear of the LORD. The number seven in Scripture does not necessarily mean perfection. The primary thought is fullness, completeness. John 3:34 tells us, "*...for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*" In Ephesians 5:18 we are admonished, "*...be filled with the Spirit.*" Some of us just have a few drops at the bottom, others are one fourth filled, and some are half filled. Very few Christians you meet are really filled with the Spirit. A little girl once prayed, "Lord, fill me with the Spirit. I can't hold very much, but I can run over a whole lot." Very few Christians are just brimming full, running over on all sides. The Lord Jesus was the exception to that.³

There is a critical need today for God's people to be filled to overflowing with the Spirit. Are you spilling over with His Spirit? If not, ask the Lord to fill you in a mighty way.

³ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

WEEK 6 The Temptation of Jesus

Chris Watson

We are all tempted daily. We live in a sin-filled world where all manners of sin and the things of this world are at our fingertips. Jesus was tempted, just like you and I, but He never sinned. This should remind us that we can't do it on our own; if we desire victory over the enemy and temptation then we need to put our hope and trust in Jesus. This week we will see Jesus being tempted and overcoming that temptation, knowing ultimately He is in charge.

Day 1

FIRST READ Luke 4:1-4

Jesus had just been baptized. His Father had just told Him how much He took delight in Him. We might think that following His baptism, God through Jesus, would do some great miracle or that something incredible was about to happen. Yet, right after His baptism, He was tempted by the Devil. This often happens in our lives, too. Right after God does a great work or we have a wonderful victory, the enemy tries to get us off track.

In this account Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit (God) to fast and seek God; at the same time He was tempted by the Devil. Even this was a part of God's plan. Jesus would be tempted just like we are, and yet He would not give into the temptations. Hebrews 4:15 confirms that Jesus was tempted just like you and I but remained sinless.

For 40 days Jesus fasted and was tempted by the devil. During this time He was seeking God. It's interesting to note that Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden by the enemy as well, but they failed and gave in to the temptation. Jesus (the last Adam) was tempted out in the wilderness and succeeded in resisting temptation. Though Jesus was hungry he still overcame the temptation.

Notice verse 3 reads, "If you are the son of God." In the Greek, which is what the New Testament was written in, there are conditional clauses when it comes to the "if" statements. It could mean "if and it's not so," "if, maybe it's so and maybe it's not," and "if and it's so, thus...." In other words this "if you are the Son of God" statement by the Devil wasn't a question or a wondering but it was an, "if you are the Son of God, and you are," then tell the stones to become bread. For if He wasn't the Son of God it would have been meaningless. Satan knew He was the Son of God and he was seeking to tempt Him and hoping He would give in.

However, Jesus didn't; He fought the temptation with God's words from Deuteronomy 8:3. He told the devil that God's Word is greater than any physical food and that God's Word is the true source of our strength.

Jesus overcame this temptation by the very Words of God. We need the Word of God and we can know them by reading, studying, and memorizing. Then when you and I are tempted, God, through His Word, will be victorious in us. What are you tempted with right now? Whatever it may be, it is not greater than our Jesus. He has the words of life and nothing will satisfy other than Him. Call on Him to help you resist temptations and tell the devil you have the very words of God.

Day 2

First Read Luke 4:5-8

This passage is very significant. At first glance, especially for someone who is not familiar with it, it may seem like the devil is in control. If the devil can give Jesus anything, doesn't that mean he is in control or that God is not all powerful? The answer is no.

God is sovereign, meaning He is in control. We can trust God and His plans. Jesus told us "now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." (John 12:31) Three key words are "this world" and "ruler". Satan is "ruler" of this world only when it comes to evil and darkness. In other words, the devil has no power or rule over believers; we are under God's love and grace. In fact, Ephesians 2:1-2 speaks of those who used to have the mindset of the enemy in this world when it says, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience." In other words, we used to walk in the way of this world, before God saved us, but now we walk in the peace and grace of God.

God is ultimately in charge. Colossians 1:15-18 says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, which is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence". The enemy was trying to tempt Jesus with the "whole world" and fast track what was ultimately His anyway. Jesus knew that one day the evil of this world would be destroyed. If Jesus had fallen for the devil's plot, He would have received the darkness and evil of this world, which wasn't a deal at all, as God is light. So while Satan was seeking to tempt Jesus with a shortcut "to have this world," Jesus ultimately knew God's plan and knew who was really in charge. Satan made a "valid" offer but the terms were not acceptable. The Father had promised to give the Son all the kingdoms of the world (Psalms 2:7-8), but Jesus first had to suffer and die! Satan was trying to offer a shortcut and there are no shortcuts in God's plan.

Jesus' answer told the whole story when He responded, "you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Jesus knew the only one who deserved worship was the one true God. He is the only who deserves worship and praise. No person, sport, material thing, position or any other thing deserves to be worshipped. Only God deserves our worship; if He works through a circumstance or a person, they don't deserve the worship. God does, because it is God working through them.

Take time to thank God that He all knows, worthy and totally in control. The glory belongs to no one else. Commit to worship and serve only Him. Most of all, thank Him, that as a believer you are no longer under the 'authority' of the devil of this world but under the grace and mercy of God through Jesus.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

FIRST READ Hebrews 4:14-16

Our passage today reminds us that Jesus was tempted, yet He did not give into temptation. Scripture tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way just like we are and He knows what we face. He can understand our temptations because He has also been there.

James 1:14-15 says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." In other words, be assured that temptations will come. While there are often things we can do to avoid temptation sometimes they come even while we are trying to avoid them. It's what we do after being tempted that determines how we responded to that temptation, did we turn away and run to Jesus or did we give into the temptation?

Obviously, there have been at least one or two times we have given into temptation. Okay, probably more than that. If you are not sure, ask yourself, "Have I ever lied," "have I ever stolen anything," "have I ever cheated", or "Have I ever had a bad attitude?" I would think these would certainly cover all of us and if you are like me, unfortunately you are four for four, too! Without Jesus we have no hope. However, the end of today's passage (verse 16) tells us that we can boldly go before the throne of grace and receive mercy and find grace to help us in times of need. In other words, when we do give in to temptation there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. We can come to Jesus, acknowledge our sin, and receive His grace.

At the same time, God desires for us to come to Him and walk with Him so closely that when we are tempted we turn to Him, rather than giving in to temptation. It is His desire that we will seek to follow Him instead, wanting to love God with all that we are, including our actions. I am so thankful for the grace and love of God through Jesus Christ. I desire to walk with Jesus. Do you? Although I have shortcomings and I sin, each day it is my desire to walk closer with God than I did the day before. I want to be able to look back a year from now and say that because of Jesus, I am walking more in the light than I was a year ago. Are you walking with Jesus more this year than last? It's not pride, legalism, or our own righteousness that should compel us but Christ's love (Colossians 5:14-15). Does Christ's love compel you to righteousness, hope, truth, service, and a daily walk with God? Today, will you ask to be compelled by God's love?

Day 4

First Read Luke 4:9-13

Satan knew scripture but he didn't exactly use it in context. The verses he quoted are Psalm 91:11-12 which speaks of abiding in the presence of God as He gives His angels charge over you. Satan was tempting God as he was not properly using scripture. Sometimes the enemy tries to get us to take, read or use scripture out of context to make it say what we want to say. It's important when we read scripture, that we see it in light of the whole Bible, looking at what comes just before it and just after it. Obviously, Satan was using scripture for his own purposes, he was trying to further his plans, but it didn't work.

Satan was seeking to command or demand of Jesus what he wanted. However, Satan can't do that. Yes, he can ask or try commanding God to do this or that but God is in control, not Satan. This should come as a great reminder and a refuge for us. No matter what you and I face, God is in control. In the darkest of days, we can trust Him; He is in control. When things are going great, we can also trust Him because He is in control. Our responsibility is to remain in Him (John 15) and walk with Him. We walk with Him because we know Him, we have seen His faithfulness. Satan knew who Jesus was, he knew Jesus was in control, though he didn't like it and he tried to do things his own way. Satan didn't trust Jesus and he was trying to get Jesus to do he wanted him to do. Those of us who trust Jesus know that He is King. We know He loves us and that He is in control even though there are times we have to be reminded. Those who have walked with God have seen His faithfulness. Chuck Missler says, "trust never employs tricks to find out whether the one trusted is trustworthy." We don't have to use tricks to test God's trustworthiness; we know we can trust Him.

Do you trust God? Is your hope in Him? Are you walking with Him? If so, be encouraged; even in our worst days we can have peace. Let this sink in, "When a child of God is in the will of God, he can claim the Father's protection and provision; but if he willingly gets into trouble and expects God to rescue him, then he is tempting God" (Chuck Missler). Paul wrote that whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23) Today, let us walk willingly in the ways of God, trusting Him, not tempting Him. In other words, don't willfully walk into sin, for it is not from God. Thank God that He delivers you from sin and gives you victory over temptation.

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 61:1-3

After Satan left Him, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, and began to read from Isaiah the same passage we are reading today. We also read a portion of this passage in Luke 4:17-19, though our passage today includes, “and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.” Remember that Isaiah wrote this hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth and we see its fulfillment in the New Testament passages.

Let’s break down this passage and remember what Jesus has been doing and continues to do on our behalf.

“To preach the Gospel to the poor.” Jesus preached to all people, whether financially rich or poor, because we are all poor in spirit without Jesus. We know that God has called us to take Jesus to all the nations. Are you?

“He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted.” In the gospel accounts we read that Jesus healed the brokenhearted. Sometimes He physically healed someone; at other times He offered hope in a terrible situation. Many who read this are brokenhearted. Are you? The truth is we have all either been brokenhearted, are brokenhearted, or will be in the future, because we live in a fallen world. However, in our broken heartedness, God heals and comforts us. Psalms reminds us that God is near to the brokenhearted. Place your heart in God’s hands and trust Him with all of your heart.

“To proclaim liberty to the captives” and “to set liberty those who are oppressed.” God came to free those in bondage who were willing to follow and put their trust in Him. Notice the first part says to “proclaim,” meaning He came to tell and show people how they can be freed from their captivity and oppressions; the same is true today. Are you oppressed or held captive by something? God wants to free you, but first you must lay it down and walk in His ways and follow Him. Will you?

In addition, Luke 4:17-19 reads, “and recovery of sight to the blind.” Jesus did physically heal some people who were blind and He can still do it today. Often, however, he healed them of spiritual blindness. A good example of spiritual blindness would be to look at Paul. Before he was named Paul, Saul was killing Christians by the hundreds. When God opened his eyes, it was as though a light switch had been turned on and Paul’s thoughts and motivations changed, just like that! Has God showed you what Jesus can do for you? He can save you from your sins and He can give you spiritual sight. Have you received it? Are you walking in that light?

What a full passage of the truth about Jesus, both then and now. Take some time today to thank God for what He has done for you and just what an incredible Savior and King He is.

WEEK 7 THE WEDDING FEAST

Dennis Watson

The first recorded miracle of Jesus is at the wedding at Cana. J. Vernon McGee says, “The wedding is a picture of another wedding that is coming. Christ began His ministry on this earth at a wedding. He will conclude it, as far as the church is concerned, with a wedding. At the marriage supper of the Lamb the church will be presented to Him as a bride.” The turning of water into wine was the first of 35 recorded miracles Jesus performed. This week we will look at this miracle

Day 1

First Read John 2:1-5

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother, Mary, was there along with Jesus and His first six disciples Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip and Nathaniel (Bartholomew). It is very interesting to note that Jesus began His ministry at a wedding and the beginning of eternity will be the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her groom—a wedding! Marriage is extremely important, to the Lord God. One of the first things He did, in the beginning, was to make man and woman to fit together. He often used marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Himself and His followers.

So, Jesus’ first miracle took place at a wedding. A wedding, in those days and in that culture, was a seven day affair. It could have been that, with Jesus and His disciples, there were more guests than expected but, for whatever reason, they ran out of wine. Jesus’ mother Mary went to Him for His help. His initial response sounded rude and disrespectful. However, He was telling her that it was not time for people to know who He really was. Mary’s insistence that He do something may have risen from a need for justification on her part. People were probably still talking about her becoming pregnant before marrying Joseph. A miracle would prove that He was no ordinary man.

His response, “My time has not yet come” or similar words occur five times in John ([2:4](#); [7:6](#), [7:8](#), [7:30](#); [8:20](#)). (Later He would use similar terminology saying that His time had come ([12:23](#); [13:1](#); [17:1](#))). Jesus was telling her that the time of revealing who He was had not yet come. She then told the servants to do what He said—she trusted Him and left it up to Him to do what he deemed best.

Mary believed that she could take her problems to Jesus, her son. Two passages tell us to cast our cares on Him—Psalm 55:22 and 1 Peter 5:7. Mary was bold and unapologetic in approaching Jesus with the problem at hand. We should do the same. Cast your cares on Him. We can learn from Mary. She did not make the need known and then tell Him what to do; she simply pointed out the need and left it in His hands. This is true submission.

What about the needs you submit to Jesus? Can you leave them with Him? That is true trust.

Day 2

First Read John 2:6-10

Jesus went ahead and turned the water into wine, although His time had not come. I don't believe He felt pressured to do it. He told His mother a truth she would need to continue to understand. His time would come—for miracles, for suffering, and for death. Ultimately, the time of His resurrection and glorification would also come. In that event, she would truly be confirmed.

This miracle was known only by Mary, His disciples, and the servants. There were six pots which were used for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus told a group of servants to fill those water pots with water. They were ordinary, empty clay pots. They filled them with water and when a cup was dipped into one of the pots the cup was filled with top quality wine. Where there was no wine before, now there were at least 120 gallons. The others did not know the source of the wine. We were once empty useless pots and then Jesus filled us to overflowing with His Spirit. I cannot help but think of this when I read this account.

Turning water into wine was no real challenge for the Son of God. He did not need months or years of time for fermenting. He did not need the elaborate natural process. He was God in the flesh.

*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. **Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)***

How difficult would it be for Jesus to work such a miracle? No problem at all. There was suddenly enough wine for 2500 wine glasses to be filled. I can guarantee you that they would not run out of wine again at that wedding feast!

Empty pots; probably old and chipped pots filled with fine wine. Sounds familiar--We have this treasure in jars of clay. Consider Paul's words:

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. **2 Corinthians 4:7 (NKJV)***

Jesus is still in the business of filling worthless clay pots for His name's sake! Rejoice; again, I say rejoice.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read John 12:23-32

Jesus told His mother that His time had not yet come. It was not time for Him to show the world who He was by working miracles. However, He did perform his first miracle by turning water into wine at the wedding feast. Several other times in the gospels He said, "My time has come." In today's passage we see one of those times. He said, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." The time had come. Here Jesus made it clear why He had come. By referring to Himself as, "The Son of Man," He connected Himself to prophecy (Daniel 7:13). This is a Messianic title. Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah and predicts His death. He even identified the method of His death being that of crucifixion.

Jesus surrendered Himself to His Father's will although He was troubled. Jesus, The Son of God, was agitated and stirred because of the prospect of being made sin in His death (2 Cor. 5:21). However, He was all in with His Father's plan. This was no small thing. He was tempted just like us or it could not have been true. Yet His greatest desire, even more than preserving His own life, was doing His Father's will. The prayer was so real,

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." John 12:27 (NKJV)

He was totally on board with God's plan, so He would not and could not pray a prayer that did not fit—'save me from this hour.'

Jesus came to save us from our sin. His whole life had been a journey to the cross and now that journey had reached its final stretch. His hour had come. The Father's name would be glorified. Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and millions throughout history would be drawn to His death and resurrection for salvation.

I am moved as I write these words, being reminded once again of the power and the plan of God to deliver us from the grip and power of sin. The whole of the Bible is about this! His hour had come. He died for me—He died for you. Is He your Savior?

Day 4

First Read John 2:11-12

Today we return to the scene of the wedding. Jesus had turned water into wine and the master of the wedding feast was amazed. He was amazed that the best wine had been saved until the end of the feast. He simply thought they had been holding back. He did not know the Source.

Now it is very interesting to read what John wrote in verse 11, “And His disciples believed in Him.” Had they not previously believed in Him? In the previous chapter John told of Jesus calling these disciples to follow Him and they did. Obviously, there was an initial belief for them to have followed Him. Now that initial faith had grown. Healthy faith, like a tree, should always be growing. The rings of a tree reveal seasons of growth. That growth most often represents normal growth at the start and end of growing seasons. At other times, the rings reveal times of stress from drought or fire. The rings are what make the tree. We grow in our faith the same way. The six disciples saw the first miracle of Jesus and believed—more. Their lives would be characterized by more of the same. There would be struggle and suffering and more miracles. This would be the soil in which their faith would grow.

It is the same soil our faith grows in. We have good times and hard times; times of soaring high and times of hurt and disappointment. Give thanks for the growth of your faith!

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 62:11-12

After the water to wine miracle at the wedding, the first six disciples were probably feeling pretty good about following Jesus. Jesus had saved the wedding hosts the embarrassment of running out of wine. But He came for far more than to save us from embarrassment. The disciples were starting to connect the dots. They probably knew of Isaiah's prophecy and the prophecies of many other Old Testament prophets. They might have wanted to go out shouting what Isaiah wrote in today's passage, "Surely your salvation is coming." These verses were written as though the Lord was on His way so the people should be expecting Him. It is incredible that there were not more people expecting His coming since there were so many specific prophecies about His coming.

As this verse indicates, this announcement in Isaiah 62 is pertinent for the present hour. The salvation of Israel is part of God's overall plan of salvation. We ought to present the gospel to every Israelite and to every other person. The Messiah is their Savior today. He is our Savior. He is the Savior of all people who receive Him as Savior. And, the second coming of Christ will be the coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth for all of these people.

Isaiah called them "holy people." Israel cannot be called a holy people today. They are not redeemed today. Jerusalem is a forsaken city right now, but the day will come when things will be different. The experience of God's salvation will work a transformation in the nation Israel and also in the physical earth. The people will be called a holy people and the land will be greatly desired. The contrary is true today. What a glorious future we have!⁴

Jesus is coming again! Are you expecting His next coming? It could happen any day. Is He your Savior? If so, proclaim Him as the Savior who has come and is coming again.

⁴ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

WEEK 8 Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Chris Watson

Jesus is loving and patient, yet He spoke truth when it needed to be spoken. When things were not going in line with scripture, He acted accordingly, especially when it came to His Father's house. As believers we should do the same. We should be patient and loving, yet when we see things that are against God's plan, we should pray and wait for direction from the Lord. If so directed, we should speak up. We should do so with God's authority, but always with love and kindness.

Day 1

First Read John 2:13-17

We often think of Jesus as someone who was meek and mild and never "ruffled any feathers." However, as we have and will see in the Gospels, He spoke tough words to people like the Pharisees and the Sadducees and He made sure people understood what it meant to truly trust and follow God. In today's account, we don't see Jesus being meek and mild. In fact, He took a whip throughout the temple, poured out the money changers' coins, and overturned the tables.

At first glance, some might look at this and try to use this as an example that Jesus sinned. However, scripture tells us in our anger to "sin not" (Ephesians 4:26). So it is possible to become angry and not sin, however, we often allow our anger to turn into sin. Thankfully, Jesus did not.

These things should not have been happening in the temple. In this passage and in Matthew 21:13, we see that the money changers were cheating people. Worship and sacrifice should have been taking place in the outer court of the temple, when in fact selling and cheating were taking place. No wonder Jesus took the action that He did! Did you realize that the Passover was at hand? What was and is considered one of the holiest and greatest remembrances of God's deliverance of His people was being celebrated, yet people were oblivious and doing the exact opposite of what they should have been doing in the temple.

Jesus was zealous (verse 17) for the things of God. He couldn't stand by and watch ungodly things going on in His Father's house. He wanted only proper worship and sacrifice at the temple. We, too, should desire to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. Whether we are at home or at church, we should worship God with all of our hearts. Many times we may be at church and, while we may not be selling or cheating people, our hearts are not fully there; we are not zealous for God and the things of God. Are you zealous and in love with God? Do you want the things He wants? Are you content with the status quo? Ask God to help you love what He loves and hate what He hates. Ask Him to change your heart to be like His and see things the way He sees them. Then, maybe the trivial things won't matter to us; and the things that matter to God, will matter to us. Let us be in tune with God and His heart.

Day 2

First Read John 2:18-22

It's easy to second guess the Jews in the New Testament, knowing what we know now. Truth be told, had we been in their place we might have done the same thing. The Jews wanted a sign that Jesus cleansing the temple was right and that He had the authority to do so. However, we see in Matthew 12: 38-42 what Jesus Said about those who ask for a sign, "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'". Again they questioned Jesus. He was telling and showing them all that He was Jesus, the Son of God and that no sign demanded by humans would be given, aside from what had already been seen and would continue to be shown as a part of His ministry.

When Jesus told the Jews that the temple would be destroyed and in three days he would raise it, it was almost impossible for them to grasp. From His response they thought He was talking about the physical temple. In reality, He was talking about Himself. They could only see what was right in front of them. However, the disciples remembered these words when he was crucified and rose from the grave.

His whole point was that He was the temple. When Jesus died, the veil to the temple was torn in two, meaning we began to have direct access to God through Jesus. We don't have to go to a temple, church or any other special place to meet with Jesus. Though Jesus instructs us to be a part of His Church, we can talk and meet with Him anywhere. Jesus is the temple and if Jesus is in us, He is with us wherever we go.

Isn't that incredible? Even after knowing this most of my life and experiencing it myself, it's incredible to think the God of the universe lives in me. He is near me. He walks beside me, He comforts and guides me. That amazes me! Jesus is the temple. So, not only are we to take care of our earthly bodies (as the temple) as Jesus is in us, but we are to be good stewards of Jesus and His message. We often think of stewardship in terms of money, but how are we being good stewards of Jesus and His message? In other words, what are you doing through Christ living in you? Are you leaning on Him? Are you sharing Him? Are you living for Him? Are you going through the difficult parts of life with Him? Jesus is in us; we have His power. All praise and glory to Him! Thank Him for being Christ in us.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Matthew 27:39-43

Have you ever thought you were 110% right concerning a situation, so convinced of it that you shared it with others, announced it to the world, and then learned you were totally wrong? I have; you might have, too. The Jews, chief priests, scribes, elders, and others were mocking Jesus, hurling insults, laughing and questioning Him, saying if you are who you say you are then come off the cross. They even said, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself." They didn't know that they would soon be proven wrong; what they were so sure of would all come crashing down.

Be assured that Jesus is in control. There are many in our world, many in the media, and maybe many of our friends who think that what we believe in and Who we follow is crazy. They can't fathom the hope that we have and Who that hope it is in. Be encouraged that we don't have a false hope, but the ONE Hope, Jesus Christ. Don't question or laugh at those who disagree, pray for them. Share with them, and show love and kindness to them. We want them to see what we see, have what we have, and know Who we know. We don't want them to be wrong and find it out later; we want to show them the Truth, so they also can know the Truth. Who can you share the Truth with today?

Jesus is Lord over all. He was Lord over the money-changers, Lord over those who hurled insults, Lord over us, and Lord over life and death. Because Jesus hung on the cross, enduring such hurt, hatred, blasphemy, mocking, and pain, we have Hope. He not only died on the cross, but he rose again and is alive today. We have salvation and the promise of heaven. We know the "rest of the story." Not only do we know the rest of the death and resurrection account, but we know that God is in control and one day will take us to be with Him. One day He will create a new heaven and a new earth and we will walk and talk with Him with no more pain, sorrow, hurt, or loss. We will know Him and others who have gone before us. Because we know Jesus, we have hope on this earth and hope in the future. Do you have that hope? If not, call on Jesus now. If you do, thank God for it. Enjoy Him everyday and look forward to heaven.

If you have never read Heaven by Randy Alcorn, I highly recommend it. It is a great biblical view of heaven and answers many questions that we all have about heaven. However, until heaven comes, we have Jesus in our hearts.

Day 4

First Read John 2:23-25

At first glance, it appears this passage may seem to say that it's possible to put your total faith in Jesus, but that Jesus did not commit Himself to us. However, that is not what it says. Notice in verse 23 that many "believed" in His name when they saw the signs He was doing. These people, from what we know, were not necessarily ready to follow Jesus or to put their total trust or hope in Him. Rather they believed that He was definitely someone different and special, based solely on the miraculous signs He was doing.

We see the nature of their belief expressed in John 3:2 when Nicodemus, speaking to Jesus, says, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs unless God is with them." The people trusted in their signs and knew that this "man" was from God, but didn't trust in Him as Jesus, as God's Son, or as one who could offer salvation. For if they had trusted in Him, Jesus would have trusted Himself to them. He didn't because He knew there was still work to be done on their hearts. Their eyes needed to be opened to the truth and who Jesus really was/ is.

Many people believe in Jesus when times get tough and they have nowhere else to turn. Or they may believe when they have seen his miracles. All of these are good reasons. However, beyond any of these reasons, one must believe and trust that Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah. He is the One that God sent into the world to live, suffer, die, and rise again for our sins. When we place our faith and hope (belief) in Him for what He has done and trust Him to forgive us of our sins, we are saved. We can't just believe Jesus to be just a good man, a miracle worker, or even just acknowledge that He is God's Son. We must put our total trust and hope in Him to be saved. That is, to be saved not only from hell but to heaven. We also need to be saved from ourselves and to Jesus. We want to be saved not just to a future heaven but to a relationship with God through Jesus now.

Do you know Jesus? Have you just heard about Him? Have you casually believed because of the things you have heard that He has done? Or, have you put your total trust and hope in Him. If you have not, today is the day of salvation. Pray right now to God and put your total trust and hope in Jesus. If you have, taken some time to thank God that He has given you Himself, the best gift you could ever have.

Day 5

First Read Psalm 69:7-13

The beginning of verse 9 reads, "Because zeal for your house has eaten me up." In other words, David has zeal for God's house (temple) and the things of God. The word zeal means, "fervor for a person, cause, or object; eager desire or endeavor; enthusiastic diligence; ardor".⁵ David, Jesus, and others, that we know from scripture, had a zeal for God's House and the things of God. During the Old Testament time it would have been a zeal for the temple. Today, it could mean a zeal for God's Church as a building but this is not necessarily what it means. Rather, it means to have a zeal for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

In other words, believers or Christ followers are to have a zeal for Jesus and the things of Jesus. When you think about your relationship with Jesus does the word zeal come to mind? Do you have fervor and a love for Jesus and the things of Jesus? Do you desire to follow Jesus and the things that Jesus follows? Do you desire to go to the places where Jesus would go? Do you desire to love the things that Jesus loves and hate the things that He hates?

If we are truthful, sometimes our zeal may not be for Jesus or the things of Jesus. At times we may think we are zealous for the things of Jesus but may not show it in the right way. For instance, we should hate sin and all of its effects, but God desires us to love others. We don't have to hate the person that sins but we can despise the sin. If we love a person we will speak the truth to them with kindness and the love of Jesus about their sin. We would not be showing His love if we didn't speak truth to our brothers and sisters in Christ if we truly have zeal for Jesus. Again, our motives should not be selfish, derogatory, hateful, or spiteful, but should flow from our zeal and love for Jesus and the things of Jesus.

Are there things in your life, maybe actions, words, thoughts, and desires that speak the opposite of having a zeal for the things of Jesus? Do you need to lay those things down? Would you take some time today to do just that? Lay them down, those things that go against Jesus and against having a zeal for Jesus? And today let us speak truth for Jesus and let our zeal be a godly, loving, zeal, not hateful or mean-spirited.

⁵ Dictionary.com, Zeal

WEEK 9 NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS

Day 1

First Read John 3:1-8

Nicodemus was a religious man but he was clearly sensitive to spiritual truth. Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of night so that his Pharisee companions would not see him. He was drawn to Jesus and His teaching.

Three things are said about Nicodemus here. The first thing is that he was a man of the Pharisees. That means that he belonged to the best group in Israel. They believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament, they believed in the coming of the Messiah, they believed in miracles, and they believed in the Resurrection. He was a man of the Pharisees, and his name was Nicodemus -- we are given his name. And he was a ruler of the Jews. This tells us of the three masks that this man wore.⁶

Nicodemus was of a religious group who believed that you needed to be a good Israelite and avoid sin to be accepted by God. Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that coming to God was not something that you can accomplish on your own. What a shock it must have been when Jesus announced to him, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." After all what kind of religious activity can cause a person to be born again? Very early in Jesus' ministry He makes it clear that getting right with God is not something a person can do by merit. The command to be "born again" is something no one can do on their own. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born of water and the Spirit. No one had anything to do with their first birth. The new birth is a work of God!

"Water" would remind Nicodemus of John the Baptist's emphasis. Jesus was saying that Nicodemus, in order to enter the kingdom, needed to turn to Him (repent) in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. There are two distinct realms: one is of fallen man (the flesh) and the other is of God (the Spirit). A fallen person cannot regenerate himself; he needs a divine operation. Only God's Holy Spirit can regenerate a human spirit. People should not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus' words. They must be born from above. The necessity is absolute and is universally binding.⁷

If you are saved you add nothing to it and you take nothing away. It is a gift, not achieved but received. Give thanks to the Lord for His great accomplishment in you on your behalf.

⁶ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

⁷ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Day 2

First Read John 3:9-15

The writers and prophets of the Old Testament spoke of a time to come when there would be a new age with the working of God's Spirit. Nicodemus and the other religious leaders failed to connect the dots. Here is one example of prophecy regarding the work of the Spirit:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NKJV)

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying so he asked, "How can these things be?" Jesus then questioned how he could be a teacher and not understand these things. Nicodemus did not see himself as a sinner in need of being saved. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to a biblical, historical event in which the Israelites sinned and were suffering and dying and Moses put the bronze serpent on the pole and instructed the people to look at it and they would be healed. Jesus told Nicodemus that Jesus, the Son of Man, would also be lifted up and all who believe in Him would receive eternal life.

What a huge departure from the heavy-handed religion that Nicodemus and the Israelites were accustomed to. God had provided the solution to the problem of sin. He alone could deal with the problem of sin and making people acceptable. Religion is man's attempt to get to God. Christianity is God's plan to come to man. I often speak with people who are questioning their salvation. They wonder, "Did I do it right? Did I pray the right prayer?" Salvation is a gift. It is accomplished by God sending Jesus to die for our sins, and then for Him to be raised up victorious. He did it. You receive it. It is a gift received, not an award achieved.

Give thanks to the Lord that He has provided what we need in order to know Him. Jesus paid it all!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read John 3:16-18

Heaven and hell are real places. In Hebrews it is written, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after that the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27 NKJV) It is a very clear in biblical teaching that death is the result of sin. It is also clear that after death people will either spend eternity in heaven, with the Lord God, or in hell separated from God, with Satan and his demons. In John 3:16 Jesus summarizes the gospel. He tells Nicodemus those all too familiar words, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* **John 3:16 (NKJV)**

God is a good God! Because He is good, sin must be punished. That punishment for sin is death and hell. Jesus tells Nicodemus that God loved the people of the world so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son, into the world to die and that all those who believe in Him will receive not death and hell but eternal life with Him in heaven. Just like the historical account in the Old Testament we discussed yesterday, Jesus would be lifted up to take away the price of our sin.

It is clear for those who believe in God’s work through Jesus for salvation that they will spend eternity with the Lord God in heaven. However, those who do not believe will receive the full impact of sin—death and hell.

Is that mean or cruel on God’s part? Is it unfair? Think about it. If God were fair, we would all go to hell. He has chosen not to be fair but to give grace and mercy.

A long time ago (long before Moses and the serpent but before God created everything) He had already planned to save us, both you and me, from our sins. God is motivated by His love to send His Son to deal with our sin. Give thanks to the Lord God for His amazing grace and love. All of scripture points to Jesus, God’s only Son.

Day 4

First Read John 3:19-21

Light shines and exposes things that may not ordinarily be seen. I have put on a shirt before that looked fine under our home lighting, but then showed stains in the light of the sun. That is what Jesus did when He came to earth. He brought the light of true righteousness. When that light shines, the deeds of people are seen for what they really are. In ordinary light we seem okay, but when the light of the world shines, suddenly the stains are seen. One of the reasons people do not like Jesus is because He does expose sin. For that reason men love darkness rather than light. The darkness allows the sin stain to stay hidden.

Jesus came into the world to save us from sin, but to be saved we need to know that we are sinners. So, He also came to expose our sin as sin. How will anyone know they need a Savior if they are not aware of what they need to be saved from? Sin done in darkness is sin we want to hide or keep secret. You can hide sin from other people. You can pretend that you are good and that you are really okay. Compared to others, that may be true. But when Jesus comes to you, your sin is exposed so there is need to hide. The light shines. The goal is for you to realize that, compared to Jesus, you are a sinner. Don't compare yourself to other people. Stand by Jesus and know the truth. You are sinful and He has come to forgive you and to save you.

Make no mistake; we are all deserving of sin's death. However, Jesus came to shine the light to expose sin and He came to become sin for us so that we can live free of our failures. Because of Jesus I know that I am a sinful man and I will never measure up to God's standard. But Jesus measured up for me! Give thanks for His amazing work.

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 60:1-5

In John 3, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the light coming into the world. Many years before Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus, Isaiah prophesied that God would send His light into the world. The light would shine all over the world and people would be set free in the light. In January 2014, we had an ice storm that left us without power for a week. It was miserable! We had no TV, no radio, no lights and no heat. When our neighbor loaned us a portable generator, we experienced some relief, but each evening I looked forward to the sun coming up. The light just seemed to lift my spirit. That is what Isaiah was speaking about. He announced that God's light would come, the nations would come to the light, and people would be filled with joy.

Once, when I was on a mission trip to a very remote part of the world, our plane was making its final approach into a very small airport. I am accustomed to looking out the window of the plane and seeing the lights of the city around the airport. But not this time, there were very few dim lights; the airport was almost totally dark. Within fifteen minutes of arrival they closed the airport and turned out those few lights. Oh, how I longed to see light.

People of the world are longing for light. Not just the light that shines and gives physical light but the light that comes from the One True God. His light gives hope and security. It exposes danger and trouble. His light shows us the way. In fact, His light, Jesus, is the way the truth and the life.

There was a time when the Lord's light was shining in the tabernacle, but departed because of Israel's sin. His glory was in the temple, but departed when the nation turned to idols. Later, true light came into the world, that light was Jesus Christ. He said He was the light of the world; however, even the light of the world, which was the Son of God, was nailed to a cross. Today, God's glory is in His church and in His people, individually. The day will come when His light will dawn in the new heaven and the new earth and the darkness will be totally cast out.

Rejoice in the light of the world, which is Jesus.

WEEK 10 Good News

Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Luke 4:14-21

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

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

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

Have you received the good news? If you have, are you sharing it? Not just living it, but sharing it? Are you speaking it? 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." In other words, we are Christ's mouth, words, and love to others. God often uses us to share the hope of His Son. Who do you need to share this hope with today? Who do you need to show God's love with today? Do you need to spend some time with God and experience His love today? God's love is real and everlasting.

Day 2

First Read Luke 4:22-30

Jesus was trying to give God's chosen people a warning. After they heard Him preach and teach they were surprised and amazed at His words. Jesus didn't want them to be amazed; He wanted them to put their faith in Him, as He knew their hearts. In this passage, Jesus was preaching a hard but true sermon. He went on to say that a prophet is never accepted in his own town, alluding to Himself. He then gave examples of the work that God did in the lives of Newman the Syrian and the widow from Warpath. What was important about these two people? Neither were Israelites, God's chosen. When Elijah tried to speak to Israel to warn them, they ignored him, so God sent him to a widow and He worked in her life. When Elisha was rejected by Israel, God sent him to Newman, a Syrian.

Jesus was trying to warn them that His words were for them, but He knew that they would reject His warning, so He gave these two examples from Israel's past in an effort to further encourage them to heed His words. But instead of being encouraged to heed His words, they became so angry that they wanted to throw Him off the cliff.

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 4:31-37

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

In this account a man had been held captive by demons for some time. Jesus released him from the demons, so that the man was no longer held captive. Jesus has done the same for us. Before becoming believers, we were held captive by our sin and disobedience to God. When our eyes were opened and we saw the truth, how our sin and the enemy held us captive, Jesus freed us. When we put our trust in Jesus we are freed from the enemy. While we still live in a sinful and fallen world we may have temptations to return to our sinful ways, God will deliver us if we call on Him. Just as He delivered the man from the demon, God has delivered us from our sin.

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

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

Day 4

First Read Luke 4:38-44

In Luke 4:43, Jesus says, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also because for this purpose I have been sent." Not long ago we looked at 2 Corinthians 5:20 which instruct believers to be Christ's ambassadors, as though Christ is making His appeal through us, because He has and is. Jesus was leaving because He needed to go to other cities and preach the gospel to them as well.

God has called us to spread the gospel. Romans 10:1-15 says, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, which bring glad tidings of good things!'" Jesus was sharing the good news because others had not heard; He was doing His father's will. What about you?

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

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

Day 5

First Read Ezekiel 37:24-28

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

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

These verses remind us just how personal our God is. We don't serve a God that is unknowable or who doesn't care for and about us. A few weeks back we looked at how every other religion or belief in the world serves a god who is unknowable, dead, or both. Our God is neither. Just think about that for a minute. For those that serve any other God than Jesus, their god is either dead or unknowable. That is sad, and yet, also should be an encouragement for us to share the truth about the one true God. He is very alive and He is very knowable through Jesus.

Take some time today to thank God for both His eternal presence and His real, knowable, and peaceful presence. Thank God that He is very comprehensible and that He will be our God forever, that He has promised to never leave or forsake us. Also, take some time to pray for those who are following false gods. Pray for their eyes to be opened and for the one true God to reveal Himself to them. Then, consider how God might want to use you today to share Jesus with someone.

WEEK 11 THE MIRACULOUS CATCH

Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read John 1:40-51

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

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

These passages indicate that there is a two-step process. First, someone comes to Jesus and follows Him. Then, those who come and follow Him bring others to follow Him. This is the process the Lord God intended. This is His plan to take the good news to the whole world. It was never intended to be mass communication, one telling hundreds or thousands at a time. That is well and good and okay, but the original plan was for each person to tell family, and friends, and others. This is the process of multiplication. One tells one. Those each tell one and the globe is eventually covered.

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

Day 2

First Read Luke 5:1-9

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

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people from Peter's boat. Peter and the others had been fishing all night. Jesus told them to launch the boat out into deep water and throw in their fishing nets. Peter balked, saying, "We have fished all night and did not catch anything." If he had stopped there he would have missed a miracle. Instead of making excuses and disobeying, he said, "Nevertheless at your word I will let down my net." The result was such a huge catch that his nets began to break and he had to call his partners in another boat to come and help him. They filled both boats with so many fish that their boats began to sink. This confirmed to Peter that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. Although his brother Andrew had already told him, "We have found the Messiah," now he was convicted and convinced. He fell on his knees confessing his sin and asked Jesus to go away from him because he was a sinner.

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

Second, notice that there is often a thin line between obedience and disobedience. Obedience opens the way to experience God's power. Peter complained, but obeyed. Too often people complain and stop there. They miss out on seeing what only the Lord God can do. Sometimes, that complaining often becomes a way of life.

Live in the presence of Jesus. Regularly confess your sin and carry on trusting Him to show Himself great for His name's sake.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

First Read Luke 5:10

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

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Luke 5:11

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 43:8-13

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

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

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

WEEK 12 Jesus Heals the Paralyzed Man

Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Luke 5:17-20

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

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

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

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

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

Day 2

First Read Luke 5:21-23

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

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

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Luke 5:24-26

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 9:1-8

Today, we are reading Matthew's account of Jesus healing the paralytic man. Read verse 4 again, "but Jesus knowing their thoughts, said 'why do you think evil in your heart'?" Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking. Jesus knows what you and I are thinking right now, what we have thought in the past, and what we will think in the future.

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

In other words, Jesus knows everything about us, including our thoughts. He knew the thoughts of Adam and Eve and knew they would choose to sin and disobey Him rather than to obey. He knows all of our thoughts and actions, good and bad and yet He still chose to die for our sins. He wants to know us and be in a relationship with us.

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

Day 5

Psalm 119:97-104

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

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

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

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

WEEK 13 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT—THE BEATITUDES

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 5:1-12

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

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

The beginning of each beatitude contains high ethical standards and practices which are not contrary to Christian living; in fact, it expresses the mind of Christ which should be the mind of the Christian also. The great principles set down here are profitable for the Christian to study and learn, but he can never attain them in his own strength; he must go elsewhere to look for the power. What you have in the Sermon on the Mount is a marvelous electric light bulb, but you do not have the generator that produces the power that will make the light. And it is the light, not the bulb that is all important.⁸

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

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

⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Day 2

First Read Matthew 5:13-16

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

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

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

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

So, be salty and shine and give glory to Jesus!

Day 3 CONNECT TO THE GOSPEL

First Read Matthew 5:17-20

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 5:21-26

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 55:1-13

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

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

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

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

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