

WEEK 14 The Sermon on the Mount- Love Your Enemies-----

Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 5:38-42

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

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

Bill Bright says, "If a Roman soldier saw a Jewish man or boy, he could command them to carry his backpack or burden for a mile. The Jewish boy or man was required by law to carry the soldier's burden for a mile. However, most Jews would not carry this burden one inch or one foot further than the law required. This law caused terrible resentment among the Jews toward the Roman government. Can you imagine how the Jews felt when Jesus said, 'Go the second mile?' No doubt, the audience said, 'He must be jesting.' 'Does He really expect us to do more than the law requires us to do?'" In essence, Jesus was saying that His disciples need to do more than the legalists who do no more than what is required of them. What is the principle of the second mile? It is to do more than is required or expected

of us. Jesus is saying that any pagan or unsaved person can go one mile (5:46, 47). The first mile is to love those who love us. The second mile is to love those who do not love us. We must always remember that life is lived on three levels. The hellish level is to return evil for good. The human level is to return good for good and evil for evil. The heavenly level is to return good for evil. The second mile is to return good for evil.”

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

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

Day 2

First Read Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus is on a roll, so why stop now? In today's passage He told the multitudes, particularly the Jews, to love not only those who love you, but to love your enemies as well. Wait a minute! What, our enemies? I don't know about you, but that does not come natural for me. It is not natural to love those who are unkind, unloving, or simply impolite to me. I can't do it; God must do it through me.

Not only are we to love our enemies, but we are to bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. Jesus commands it. Jesus could have stopped here and the Jews He was speaking to may have gotten what He was trying to say, but just to be sure He gave them a good word picture. Jesus said that even tax collectors love those that love them (verse 46-47). The Jews would have understood this reference because the tax collectors were liked by no one. They cheated people out of money and yet Jesus was telling them that even the cheaters (tax collectors) are able to love those that love them. I imagine this was not what they wanted to hear and it might have gotten under their skin, but I guarantee they understood what Jesus was talking about.

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

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

Day 3

First Read Romans 5:8-10

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 5:48

We have been looking at Jesus' sermon to the multitude this week as He preached on loving our enemies. He told the crowd to love not only those like them, but to love those that were not like them, even their enemies. He got to the end of His thoughts on this and said, "*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" I imagine some of the crowd was confused. I imagine that people like the Pharisees were also angry, because they thought they were better than most of the others and they knew they couldn't "love" people who were not holy like them. Many in the crowd must have been confused about how they could possibly be perfect.

In fact, Jesus shared this with them to let them know they couldn't be perfect. Whether they got it or not, many of them probably thought, "I can't love everyone perfectly." Neither can we. We may want to or try hard to, but we can't. Some folks are easier to love than others. Jesus makes it very clear in this passage that it's the difficult ones that are hard to love, but we are to do it anyway. So how do we love these people? Through Jesus! How can we be patient with them? Through Jesus! How can we be "*perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect*"? Through Jesus!

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 50:5-6

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

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

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

WEEK 15 THE LORD'S PRAYER-----Dennis Watson

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

DAY 1

First Read Matthew 6:1-6

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

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

Prayer is not for show. It is not for public consumption. In fact, prayer is not seeking our will at all. We can tell the Lord what we want but our prayer, in the end, should be as it was with Jesus. When it was time for Him to go to the cross, He struggled. He begged His Father that if there was any other way to "*take this cup from me; nevertheless not my will but Yours, be done*" (**Luke 22:42**). Jesus' number one motivation was for His Father's will to be done. He prayed His desires, but surrendered to His Father's will. If it was true for Him, it must be true for us. That is why Jesus warned us against making prayer about us, but to keep it about His Father.

When you pray, seek God's will and God's best, always. It is a blessing to ask anything of Him, but it is most liberating to pray that above all else, "*Your kingdom come and Your will be done.*"

Day 2

First Read Matthew 6:7-13

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

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

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

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

He tells us to pray for our daily provisions. Note that this is not a prayer for twenty years of provisions but for what is needed this day. How often are we content for today but anxious about tomorrow? Is that really contentment? God gives us the provision for *“this day.”* He wants us to look to and depend on Him for our daily needs. *“Give us THIS DAY our daily bread.”* The next part does not refer to our salvation when we read, *“forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* J. Vernon McGee writes *“He is speaking here to those who are already saved, those who already have the nature of God. He does not wait for you to forgive before He forgives. This is not His method of settling the sin question. He gave His Son to die, and it is on this basis that God forgives.”*¹ Our desire should be to give others what we have already received—forgiveness.

“Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.” These are two

¹Through The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

sides of the same coin. We will be tempted but the prayer is—“Don’t leave us there, deliver us.” Don’t abide in temptation. Join God in seeking to flee the enemy.

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

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

Day 3

First Read Matthew 6:14-15

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 6:16-18

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

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

The Lord's rewards are not always immediate. Delayed gratification is not a very popular thing these days. The immediate is the praise of people. Trust the Lord for His reward. Allow your relationship with Jesus to be the motivation and the goal of your life. Paul said it this way:

*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. **Colossians 3:23-24 (NKJV)***

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 53:8

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

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

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

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

WEEK 16 Treasure in Heaven-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 6:19-24

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

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

Jesus reminded us that treasures on this earth will one day rot away or be gone, but our relationship with God and the things we do out of love and obedience for God, will not. (verses 19-21) In fact, He told us to lay up treasure in Heaven where they are not destroyed. (verse 20) Later in the New Testament it speaks of rewards in Heaven based on a pure love and service for God. In other words, know and follow God, obey Him, and let your heart and mind be pure in the process. If we are so focused on “treasures” on this earth that will one day be gone, we will not be storing up treasures in Heaven. Let us serve God today through the way we love our family, do our job, spend our money, and spend our time. After all, we can’t serve two masters; God wants all of our hearts and our minds. Who do you serve? Take some time to ask God to re-focus your priorities and even shift what you may spend your time and money on so that it will be focused on God.

Day 2

First Read Matthew 6:25-32

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Matthew 6:33

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

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

Yesterday we read that worrying causes us to be so fixed on a situation or problem that we can think of nothing else, all the while knowing that worrying won't really help. Compare that with trusting and seeking God, knowing He is ultimately in control. Looking at it this way, it is a no brainer. Though we struggle to die to our sin and fully trust God with all that is going on, we are commanded to lay everything down to Him and know He is in control.

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 6:34

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

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read 2 Samuel 22:1-4

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

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

What troubles are you facing today? What is the enemy trying to get you to worry about? Did it keep you up last night? Rest assured that God is your anchor, just as He was David's. He will hold us together in the storm. No matter what trouble I face today, my strength is in God. I have never run for my life like David, but maybe you have. Most likely though, none of us have had to run and hide like David did. Even in his troubles, David knew and thanked God for being his refuge, stronghold, rock and shield.

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

WEEK 17 THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 7:15-20

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

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

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

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

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

Day 2

First Read Matthew 7:21-23

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

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

Often the question asked is, “Do you know Jesus?” The question could mean do you know about Him, or do you know about salvation? Some even equate the question with church attendance or religious activity. But perhaps a better question is the focus of this passage of scripture—“Does Jesus know you?” The people described were apparently busy about religious activity. They were doing wonderful things. But Jesus said that the day would come when He would say to them, “*Depart from me, I never knew you.*” I have often said that I do not want people to doubt their salvation unless they can. I must say that I have tried. But I know Jesus has done a work in me and lives in me. There is no other explanation of the transformation that has happened and continues to happen.

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Matthew 7:24-27

In verses 13-14 (of this chapter) we have a picture of two ways. Then in verses 17-18 we see two trees. Jesus then closes this section with a vivid picture of two builders and their houses. The two ways illustrate the start of the life of faith; the two trees illustrate the growth and results of the life of faith here and now; and the two houses illustrate the end of this life of faith, when God shall call everything to judgment. There are false prophets at the gate that leads to the broad way, making it easy for people to enter. But at the end of the way, there is destruction. The final test is not what we think of ourselves, or what others may think. The final test is: What will God say?²

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

² TheBible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-New Testament - Volume 1

Day 4

First Read Matthew 7:28-29

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

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

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

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

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

Do you ever feel kind of ridiculous when you tell people what you believe and the reason you believe is because it is in the Bible? Well, at least we have the Bible. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the Old Testament prophets when they gave messages from God proclaiming “Here is what God says”? When people asked, “Where did you get that?” the prophets would say, “from God.” The response was probably very cynical. Again, when we speak what God says, at least we have the authority of the Bible!

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 51:5-8

In their past Israel had been delivered from their enemies on several occasions. The first was from Egypt in the event known as the Exodus. The Lord had saved them from foreign enemies and delivered them from captivity. But each time they disobeyed again. These verses look to Israel's future. The Lord tells them about a righteousness and salvation to come that will be eternal. Isaiah recorded that the earth will wear out like a garment and the heavens will disappear like smoke. He also said that people will die. The worm and the moth will devour, but different from all of these is God's righteousness and salvation, which will last forever.

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

WEEK 18 The Four Soils-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 13:1-9

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

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

“Jesus’ explanation of the Parable of the Sower highlights four different responses to the gospel. The seed is ‘the word of the kingdom.’ The hard ground represents someone who is hardened by sin; he hears but does not understand the Word, and Satan plucks the message away, keeping the heart dull and preventing the Word from making an impression. The stony ground pictures a man who professes delight with the Word; however, his heart is not changed, and when trouble arises, his so-called faith quickly disappears. The thorny ground depicts one who seems to receive the Word, but whose heart is full of riches, pleasures, and lusts; the things of this world take his time and attention away from the Word, and he ends up having no time for it. The good ground portrays the one who hears, understands, and receives the Word—and then allows the Word to accomplish its result in his life. The man represented by the ‘good ground’ is the only one of the four who is truly saved, because salvation’s proof is fruit (Matthew 3:7-8; 7:15-20).”³

³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/parable-sower.html>

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

Day 2

First Read Matthew 13:10-16

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Matthew 13:17

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

I think it would be incredible to have lived during Jesus' time. How exciting it would have been to have lived in Old Testament times. But our passage today says Old Testament figures desired to see the future (Jesus), yet they didn't. We have the "rest of the story." We have the beginning (before Jesus), Jesus' ministry, and after Jesus was taken into Heaven. We have the privilege of putting it all together. I have learned so much in scripture but I know there is still so much to learn. We have the one true account of the only God and Lord of the Universe. So, while it would be interesting to go back to a certain period of time, I have everything I need right now, including God's Word to help me grow and learn.

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 13:18-23

These verses help us clearly see what this parable means. The main thing that sticks out here is that only one soil, the last soil, bears fruit. The person represented by this soil hears the word, understands it, and then produces fruit.

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

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

Day 5

First Read Psalm 14:1-7

If you turn to Romans 3:10-12, you will read some of the same verses that are taken from our passage today. In the first five verses of our text today, we read the author's words about the foolishness of those who are ungodly, particularly those who say there is no God. The first five verses deal with the ungodly, and the last two with Jesus and His people.

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

This is where our country currently is and continues to go. People can say what they want, but if one really researches and studies they will find that this country was founded on God and His principles. We have been walking away from that for a while now. We are afraid to offend anyone but God, Himself.

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

WEEK 19 THE HIDDEN TREASURE-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 13:31-33

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

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

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

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

Day 2

First Read Matthew 13:34-35

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

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

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

Common sense tells us that God will reveal things to a person who really believes in Him and draws near Him—things that He cannot reveal to a person who ignores, neglects, and could not care less about God. Therefore, Christ puts it very simply: "*It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [unbelievers] it is not given.*" God does not reward unbelief; He rewards belief and trust.⁴

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

⁴ Preachers Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary Matthew 1

Day 3

First Read Matthew 13:44

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

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

There is, then, a future for Israel. Politically, the nation was reborn on May 14, 1948, but the nation is far from what it ought to be spiritually. God sees Israel as His treasure, and one day He will establish her in her glorious kingdom. (Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.)

This parable is a wonderful picture of the mystery of Israel and the next is a picture of the mystery of the church. I figured Warren Wiersbe could do the best job of explaining this. “Jesus is the One who purchased the world. God loved the world so much He bought the whole thing with His Son in order to get Israel!”

Jesus purchased the whole world to get the treasure, Israel, and He also got the pearl of great price, the Church. Thank God for His amazing love!

Day 4

First Read Matthew 13:45-46

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Amos 9:5-15

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

The second part is found in verses 11-15. Here we see that the Lord God was going to raise up the tabernacle of David. This assured the people that God would give to His people, the Israelites, a bright future. The dynasty of David was about to collapse. Here is how Warren Wiesrbe describes it: But one day, the Lord will restore, repair, and rebuild the dynasty of David and establish the kingdom He promised. When Jesus Christ comes again, the breach between Israel and Judah will be healed, and there will be one nation submitted to one king. God will bless the land and the people, and His people shall live in peace and security. It will be a time of peace and prosperity to the glory of the Lord.⁵

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

⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Prophets

WEEK 20 Jesus Calms the Storm-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Luke 8:22-25

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

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

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

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

Day 2

First Read Luke 8:26-33

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

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Luke 8:34-39

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

Understandably so, after the man was healed of his demon possession he wanted to stay with Jesus. In fact, he begged Jesus to stay with Him. (Verse 36) While it was noble that he wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus told him to return to his house and tell everyone what God had done for him. The man did just that. He began to tell anyone he could find just what Jesus had done.

This is exactly what God has told us to do, too. He has told us to be His witnesses everywhere. Whether we are at home, work, school, on vacation, or around the world, we are to tell God’s story. I admit that sometimes I do this and sometimes I don’t. I want to regularly tell what God has and continues to do for me, because it has changed my life.

We print on the front of our church bulletins each week that our mission is “To love Jesus and lead others to love Him, too.” We can’t keep it to ourselves. We should not hide behind a closed door to read the Bible and talk to Jesus. We should not cut ourselves off from society. We are to share what Jesus has done for us. While we may not be accepted and may be laughed at, ridiculed, or even persecuted; in light of what God has done for us, does it really doesn’t matter what others think or do to us?

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

Day 4

First Read Luke 8:40-56

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

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Psalm 23

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

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

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

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

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

WEEK 21 JESUS FEEDS THE MULTITUDE-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read John 6:1-4

Several years ago our family was vacationing at the beach. I was running and walking on the beach early in the morning, as is my habit. On that particular morning I spotted activity up the beach in the sand away from the waves. Sand was flying through the air as though someone were lying on the beach, throwing sand up into the air. I went to see what was happening and found a huge sea turtle digging a place in the sand to bury her eggs. All I could think of at that moment was getting my kids down to the beach to see this. This was before anyone had cell phones so I had to run all the way back to the condo, wake everyone up, and hurry them to see what I had seen. This year, two little sea turtles hatched and were making their way to the ocean. A large crowd gathered quickly because people pulled out their cell phones to let people know. Of course in Jesus' day there were no cell phones and little opportunity to tell people that Jesus was in a certain place. However, on this occasion the word traveled fast and a large crowd gathered to see and hear Him, and possibly be healed by Him. There were more than five thousand people!

It was also the season of Passover. At this time each year the Jews celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The blood of a lamb was placed on the doorpost of every Jewish home so the angel of death would pass them over. Little did this crowd know that the teacher, healer, and miracle worker would also be their Passover Lamb!

Jesus could get a crowd without mass communication. He was a healer, miracle worker, and wise teacher, so the people came out in droves. They were hoping to be healed. In the future, they would get much more!

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

Day 2

First Read John 6:5-13

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

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

You cannot explain that away! It was truly a miracle. Do you trust Jesus in those seemingly impossible situations? With Him there are no impossible situations!

Day 3

First Read John 6:14-27

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read John 6:28-40

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 29:18-20

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

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

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

WEEK 22 Jesus Walks on Water-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Matthew 14:22-23

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

In our passage today Jesus had just fed well over 5000 people. Before this He had traveled around healing various people and working in difficult situations. Now Jesus was fully God and fully man, therefore, He was human. He needed to spend time with the Father. Jesus had been working overtime, you might say, and He told his disciples He needed to go and pray.

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

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

Day 2

First Read Matthew 14:24-32

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

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Matthew 14:33

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Matthew 14:34-36

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 53:4

Jesus was sinless; that is, He never sinned. *“He became sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”* (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus became sin for us. That is why the beginning of this verse tells us that He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. The sins that Jesus died for were not His own but yours and mine.

However, many of the Jews thought He was being crucified justly. They thought He was a fake and that God was punishing Him for blasphemy. At least, that’s what the Jews were punishing Him for, although He was not guilty of it. Rather, Jesus willingly gave His life for us. The pain and agony was so bad that we recall Jesus saying, *“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”* God poured out His wrath and anger on Jesus for our sins and Jesus definitely felt that wrath and anger. Although it was nothing that He did, He died for our sins.

The Jews thought they were doing “service” to God by putting Jesus to death. After all, they didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah and they were taking care of Him. It’s interesting to note, that after Jesus’ death on the cross, *“When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’”* (Matthew 27:54) Oh how quickly things changed! Some of those who put Jesus to death soon realized who He really was. Jesus’ love was so great that He could save even them.

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

Jesus took what we deserved, although He knew no sin, so that we might know God and be saved. Thank Jesus for your salvation. Thank Him that He not only saved you once and for all but He daily saves you and me from walking away from Him and making ungodly choices. Jesus is all we need. Thank Him for His love and grace.

WEEK 23 TAKE UP YOUR CROSS-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Luke 9:18-20

As I write today we are in the beginning stages of the 2016 Presidential Election. One of the polling organizations has been polling people and asking for a one word description of the 20 plus people who are currently vying for the top job in the United States. Some of the single words were complimentary but many were negative.

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

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

Day 2

First Read Luke 9:21-22

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

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

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

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

Day 3

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

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

The cure is death to self. Jesus had made it known that His role as King and Savior would include rejection, death, and resurrection. Jesus then turned His attention to the larger crowd. He told them that there was a cross for all of his disciples. He told them that to follow Him they would need to deny themselves and take up their cross. He wasn’t telling them they had to die on a literal cross like He would. To be His disciple, we must die to our own desires and the things we love more than Him. Jesus rebuked Peter because he had in mind ‘man things’ rather than “God things.’ Those contrary to truth things are usually what Jesus called in today’s text, *“The things of men.”* To die to self is to give up the things of men and take on the things of God. This is about loving Jesus more than our money, stuff, toys, and our very lives. Our mission as Harp’s Crossing Baptist Church is *“To love Jesus and lead others to love Him too.”* Our lives and our own “stuff” should take a distant second place. This is the process of growing and maturing as a believer. Paul expressed it this way:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV)

None of us have arrived. We are growing and learning. Don’t be overly hard on yourself when you suffer this malady. Seek to do just as He said, *“Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.”*

Day 4

First Read Luke 9:26-27

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

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

J. Vernon McGee expresses it perfectly. "The words Jesus spoke in this setting must be understood in their historical context. Not long before this the disciples had been actively engaged in telling the nation about the Messiah and His kingdom program. No doubt many thought the disciples were throwing their lives away. They had given up their sources of income and were in danger because they associated with Jesus. Jesus assured His disciples that they were doing the right thing. They had chosen the proper values (9:24-25). People were to respond in faith and identify with that program (v. 4). Those who did not identify with the kingdom program would be rejected (v. 5). In the same manner Jesus noted that if one is ashamed of Him (i.e., will not identify with Him or believe on Him) and His words (i.e., His message), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him in the future. It was vital that the people of that generation side with Jesus and His disciples in order to escape future judgment. That judgment will occur when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels (cf. 2 Thes. 1:7-10)."

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 53:1-3

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

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

Read these words by Peter that he preached on the Day of Pentecost when the church was birthed:

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

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

WEEK 24 The Transfiguration-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Mark 9:2-4

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

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

From today's passage, though, we can ask "Have I been changed?" "Have I gone through a metamorphosis?" "Has God changed me?" Warren Wiersbe said, "the word transfigured describes a change on the outside that comes from the inside. It is the opposite of 'masquerade' which is an outward change that does not come from within." There is not a truer statement. If we have met Jesus and He has given us a new heart, scripture tells us we are a new creature. Sure, we are still the same person in body, but not necessarily in heart and mind, for God has brought change. Romans 12:2 tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds: God does this as He works in us. Has God changed you? Has He replaced your heart of stone with a heart of clay? Has He opened your eyes to the truth? Has He done a work like only He can do? Thank Him for changing you and for the life which He has given you.

Day 2

First Read Mark 9:5-8

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

God wanted to convey that Jesus was, in fact, who He said He was. For their own good and the good of others, they needed to listen and trust Jesus. It was almost a reminder and, at the same time, an opportunity to get them ready for what was to come. God knew what was to come and He knew the days would get harder and harder. He also knew that these men would doubt Jesus and what He would say. This was an opportunity for the experience to be burned in their minds, so they would know they could trust God because they had heard directly from Him.

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

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

Day 3

First Read Mark 9:9-13

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

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Mark 9:14-29

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

This is quite convicting. We have heard it said that when we work, we work, but when we pray, God works. God works how He sees fit, but He does use the prayer of His people. Many times we try, out of our own resources, to accomplish "great" and wonderful things. These things we try to accomplish may not be bad, in fact, they may even be noble, however, we may have neglected prayer and fasting. Prayer is communing with God; it is speaking your heart to Him in thankfulness, in awe, voicing your hopes and your requests. It is also listening to His heart. Sometimes it might come in the moment of prayer and it may come later. Fasting goes right along with prayer. Fasting allows us to put a more focused prayer on the situation at hand.

As a child you may have used a magnifying glass to burn a hole through a leaf. It happens when the sun is focused through the glass, therefore burning a hole in the leaf. Fasting provides for us the "focus" of what we are seeking God for. We may fast from food, TV, technology or anything important to us. For example, when we think it's time to eat lunch, instead of eating, we pray. What does your prayer life look like? Does it include fasting? I challenge all of us to ramp up our prayer and fasting life so that we may put all of who we are into all of who God is.

When fasting and praying, in accordance with God's will, we should believe. Mark 9:24 is one of my favorite verses. This father desperately wants his son to be healed. Jesus turns to him saying, "*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*" Verse 24 says, "*Immediately the father of the child cried out and with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.'*" What honesty from this father. He truly believed that God could heal his son, but the boy had been possessed by the spirit for such a long time that the father was probably at his wit's end and was losing hope. Therefore, he responds that he does believe but obviously there is a part of him that doesn't.

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

Day 5

First Read Psalm 72:11-13

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

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

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

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

WEEK 25 JESUS CLEANSSES TEN LEPERS-----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

First Read Luke 17:3-10

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

But, Jesus seems to say, when a brother does stumble and sin, here is what you do. First, there is to be a loving and gracious rebuke. I recently experienced this with someone. A young man had a very downcast attitude and disposition over his sin. Pity is not what a person needs when they sin. Not self-pity or the pity of others. They need a rebuke for the purpose of getting them back on track. The rebuke is never to belittle or embarrass, but to assist in repenting and obeying. The goal is to restore (Galatians 6:1). After the rebuke, if the offender repents then he is to be forgiven, and not begrudgingly. Then Jesus, seeking to drive home His point, says even if the person does it seven times in one day and each time repents, you are to forgive!

Now it seems like the disciples were blown away by these instructions. They did not ask Jesus to increase their love, but their faith. They needed trusting, obedient faith to practice such forgiveness. Think about how God has forgiven you so freely in Jesus Christ. He took the initiative to accomplish for us the very basis of our forgiveness. He sent Jesus to become sin for us and to die on the cross to bring about His forgiveness. The very basis of that forgiveness is the basis of the forgiveness that He has shown us! We may become exasperated with the situation Jesus described. How could the gracious, saving God, who sent His own Son to deal with our sin express exasperation over our sin? We are to give to others what God has, in Christ, so graciously given to us.

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

Day 2

First Read Luke 17:11-14

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read Luke 17:15-16

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

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

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

Day 4

First Read Luke 17:17-19

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

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Zechariah 13:1

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

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

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

WEEK 26 Jesus Claims to be God-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

First Read John 10:1-6

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

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

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

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

Day 2

First Read John 10:7-10

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

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

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

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

Day 3

First Read John 10:11-18

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

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

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

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

Our passage today ends when Jesus reiterates that He will give His life, no one will take it from Him. In other words, His death, burial and resurrection didn't just "happen" to Him, per se. Rather it was all part of God's plan. Jesus willingly went to the cross so that you and I might be saved from our sin. No one took Jesus' life, He willingly gave it. Not only did Jesus willingly give His life but He never leaves us. Verses 12 and 13 speak of a hireling that is not the shepherd. This is someone who watches over the sheep and when the wolves come to attack, the hireling will leave the sheep to fend for themselves. Jesus does not do this: He stays right with His sheep, He protects and guides them.

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

Day 4

First Read John 10:19-42

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

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

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

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

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

Chuck Missler describes it as:

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

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

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

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

Day 5

First Read Isaiah 45:17

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

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

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

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

In Volume 1 of “The Dots Connected,” we have seen the coming of the promised Messiah. His birth was prophesied in the Old Testament in Volume 1, we see His birth foretold to Mary and Joseph. We began our New Testament journey and have traveled through not only Jesus’ birth but also His baptism, temptation, first miracle, all the way through to the first part of His Sermon on the Mount. We will begin Volume 3 of our journey with the second half of the Sermon on the Mount. We will see more of His miracles and more of His teachings. We will end with His very clear claim to be God.

Please spend time, five days of your week, to read the scriptures and study the devotions. If you have children sixth grade and under use the “Old Story New” book with your children. Start and maintain the habit of time in God’s word. This is a great opportunity and on Sundays we will all be on the same page. Enjoy and pray for revival and spiritual awakening!

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