

Lent occurs forty days before Easter. It was originally developed for baptismal candidates to fast before their baptism. It later on became adopted by the entire ancient church as a practice prior to Easter. Although Lent is not traditionally celebrated as a part of the Evangelical tradition, the concepts of Lent such as fasting, abstinence, reflection and devotion.

This book takes the best practices from Lent, reflection and fasting, to help you prepare your heart as we approach the Easter season. There are five sections to this books. We will first look at the a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament: the promise of redemption. Secondly, we will explore the teachings of Jesus and how He understood the New Covenant. We will then explore the major stories that Jesus told in section three. In the forth section, we will discover how Jesus thought of Himself. Finally, we will explore the last week of Jesus' life which include his trial, death and resurrection.

Each section includes specially curated readings on each topic. We want you to STUDY each passage, OBSERVE what is happening in the reading, APPLY what you are learning through the word to your life, and finally, PRAY over the things read. This is a simple Bible study method known as S.O.A.P. Not only that, we have also included a passage pulled from the Lenten tradition for reflection and prayer. If you struggle with words to pray, we have included some of the most famous prayers ever written throughout church history as a guide.

This devotional was created to connect you to Christ and what He has done for you on the cross. We hope you experience His presence in a new way as you reflect upon Him, His word, and His resurrection.

Blessings,

The Catalyst Bible College Staff

## **The Promise**

Several years ago, I was sent to teach a course in Egypt to a group of students on a Biblical Theology of Missions. The textbook I was assigned really dealt with the idea that a singular promise runs throughout the Bible, redemption. The author emphatically stated that beginning in Genesis and running through the entire Old Testament, God kept this idea of redemption alive through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, renewed in King David and foretold by the prophets.

After teaching this concept to students many years ago, I am more convinced than ever that God's plan of salvation was set in motion in the beginning, and you see traces of it everywhere in the Old Testament. There is not one section of the Old Testament that does not hint or foreshadow God's desire to bring man back into right relationship with Him through the sacrifice of Jesus.

It is our desire to help you see parts of this redemption plan promised in the Old Testament through this first section of this devotional book.

## **Day 1**

**Reading: Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 17:1-8**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 91:1-2; 10-15**

God's promise of redemption runs through the Old Testament. Although Jesus is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, the concept of someone coming and restoring all things is a primary theme. In Genesis, we see that at the Fall of Man in Genesis 3, God immediately has a way of covering for the sins of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21), and we see the first hint of a Savior defeating the enemy (Genesis 3:15). As wickedness increases in the early stages of Genesis, we also see another plan develop, the promise plan of God.

This promise develops in Genesis through the line of Abraham. His offspring will be a blessing to the world. Abraham's offspring, the people of Israel, would initially be an example to the pagan world around them as a blessing to them. God would show the world that those who partner with Him would be truly blessed. This was just a foreshadow of God's ultimate plan.

While the writer of Genesis did not know all the specifics, we now know that the "blessing" to the world was the forgiveness of sins by Jesus through the cross and the resurrection. God had a plan from the very beginning to eradicate sin and destroy the darkness of sin. He was never going to leave humanity alone after the fall, but His plan always has and will always be about the restoration of the relationship caused by the Fall of Man.

**Reflection Question: What does plan reveal about God's character?**

### **Prayer**

I appeal to you, Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob and Israel, You the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Infinitely merciful as You are, it is Your will that we should learn to know You. You made heaven and earth, You rule supreme over all that is. You are the true, the only God; there is no other god above You.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ...and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, grant that all who read what I have written here may know You, because You alone are God; let them draw strength from You; keep them from all teaching that is heretical, irreligious or godless.

- St Irenaeus of Lyons, 130-202 AD<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://medium.com/@GrowInSpirit/10-powerful-prayers-by-the-early-church-fathers-98dbd439d06d>

## Day 2

### Reading: Isaiah 53

### Lenten Reading: Psalm 19:8-10, 15

The great preacher of the 1800s, Charles Spurgeon once said this about the cross:

There is one great event, which every day attracts more admiration than do the sun, and moon, and stars, when they march in their courses. That event is, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. To it the eyes of all the saints who lived before the Christian era were always directed; and backwards, through the thousand years of history, the eyes of all modern saints are looking.<sup>2</sup>

Spurgeon is right. That single moment of history fulfilled every promise of redemption made for two-thousand years.

The prophets of old, although they did not always know all the specifics, looked forward to an everlasting King and an everlasting Kingdom. This was the promise that they held onto through trials, tribulation and exiles. They saw it as the extension of the promise of Abraham.

While Isaiah prophecies an everlasting King and Kingdom, he also introduces us to the idea of God's suffering servant. Writing some 700 years before Christ's birth, Isaiah predicts with radical accuracy that the servant of God must suffer for our sake.

I have always been perplexed by one phrase in Isaiah 53 and it is this, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief (Isaiah 53:10a)." Why is God's desire to crush this servant? Well, it has to do with God's original promise to Abraham. To truly be a blessing to the nations, then redemption to all mankind must be offered. God's will was to put all the sin and guilt on Jesus for the sake of the entire world. It was His plan from the beginning. The Son of God ridiculed, mocked, beaten and crushed for us was promised in the very words of Isaiah and serve as a source of healing and hope for us today. God fulfills His promise to Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and to us in one single act on the cross.

### Reflection Question: When you read Isaiah 53, what stands out to you and why?

#### Prayer

Grant your servants, O God, to be set on fire with your Spirit, strengthened by your power, illuminated by your splendor, filled with your grace, and to go forward by your aid. Give us, O Lord, a right faith, perfect love, true humility. Grant, O Lord, that there may be in us simple affection, brave patience, persevering obedience, perpetual peace, a pure mind, a right and honest heart, a good will, a holy conscience, spiritual strength, a life unspotted and unblamable; and after having finished our course, may we be enabled happily to enter into your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Old Gallican Sacramentary (3rd Century).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "The Death of Christ," in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 4 (London; Glasgow: Passmore & Alabaster; James Paul; George John Stevenson; George Gallie, 1858), 65.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48247/48247-h/48247-h.htm>

### **Day 3**

**Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 145:8-9; 13-14; 17-18**

As we have seen, God's promise (covenant) of salvation developed throughout the Old Testament. Starting with Abraham, moving to Moses and the Children of Israel, and resting in King David's line, and foretold by the prophets of God, the Old Testament is moving us towards God's ultimate promise which is wrapped up in a new kind of covenant.

Jeremiah tells us that this covenant will be personal, gracious, and eternal. What Jeremiah is basically saying is that in this new covenant, our God will be knowable based on love not on law.

Author Warren Wiersbe states it this way, "The Old Covenant tried to control conduct, but the New Covenant changes character so that people can love the Lord and one another and want to obey God's will."<sup>4</sup>

This personal loving relationship with God gets back to the original intent that God had with man. Prior to God instituting the law, we see God telling Abraham that He will be His God. In other words, God was promising something personal.

Humanity was created to know God personally, and from the moment of the Fall in Genesis, the relationship has become fractured. Since that moment, God has been making a way for humanity to get back and know Him, His love, grace, mercy and kindness, and the path He chose for us to do that was through Christ (John 14:6).

**Reflection Question: what does a personal relationship with God look like to you and why?**

### **Prayer**

Do not think of the sins we have committed or of those we still commit. Put out of your mind the failings we give way to night and day. Do not impute our offenses to us, whether we did them on purpose or whether we could not help them. Remember, Lord, that men are apt to make slips; we are a spineless race, given to blundering; think of our build, our limitations. Our skins may be sound, but there are sores underneath.

O God, you are well disposed to us; give us the strength of your support. Give us encouragement, give the light that goes with it. Make us live by the dogmas of the faith preached by your holy apostles and the high teaching of the Gospels of our Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

- Ruins of a Fourth-century Church on the island of Cyprus overlook the Mediterranean Sea.

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<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Decisive, "Be" Commentary Series* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 134.

<sup>5</sup> <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/prayers-of-earliest-christians>

## **The Teachings of Jesus**

The New Covenant that was promised and prophesied by Jeremiah is displayed in Jesus' core message. Jesus preaches a new message that echoes the statement of Jeremiah in a radical new form. It would not be a kingdom of sacrifices and works. It would not be focused on action, but on radical transformation.

The Kingdom of God, Jesus teaches, is about the condition of the heart, and the starting place of true followership is not right actions, but a right heart. In short, Jesus' teaching on this New Covenant will lead people to repentance (heart change) which is what truly brings transformation. For Jesus, the first step of true discipleship is repentance. Before actions change, the heart must be changed because a person cannot truly be transformed without it happening inwardly.

The focus of Jesus' teaching will be about the internal not the external. It is demonstrated in Matthew 5 when He talks about the root issues of adultery and murder (Matthew 5:21-30), it is seen when He talks about giving (Matthew 6:19-21) and prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:5-18), and it is seen when Jesus talks about how we treat our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). This radical new message would be preached all over the hills of Galilee.

## **Day 4**

**Reading: Matthew 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 34:17-23**

The beginning of Matthew 5 is known as the Beatitudes. Now the Beatitudes can, at first glance, be difficult to understand. They seem like proverbs or just wise sayings, and without knowing the context, it is easy to come that conclusion. In a sermon I heard once by Tim Keller, he explains the context in which we find the Beatitudes. He says:

Now the kingdom of God can best be understood if we think about what happens when anybody comes into power. When a new president or a new king or a new governor or a new mayor or a new CEO ... when anyone comes into power ... that person's new power is expressed through a new administration. The new administration is a new set of priorities and a new set of policies and a new set of strategies, and if the policies and priorities and strategies are wise, if they meet the needs, what happens is there is (I guess the catchphrase today is) "improved quality of life," and that's good! Jesus Christ, though, is the supernatural and ultimate King; and when he comes into power, his power is expressed through a new administration called the kingdom. A new set of priorities, a new set of powers, and a new set of strategies. The effects are far greater than anything we might call "improved quality of life." The effects are more comprehensive and radical than we can imagine.<sup>6</sup>

With this in mind, when Jesus begins His famous sermon talking about the Kingdom's new priorities and characteristics, He starts with the Beatitudes which would define those in the Kingdom. We shouldn't see the beatitudes as different types of people, but we should view them as characteristics of the people of God.

Now, what is important to note in regards to these characteristics is their order. The first four Beatitudes really tells us how to enter into the kingdom. The "poor in Spirit," the "mourners," the "meek," and those who are hungering for righteousness all point to the fact that the way into the Kingdom is humble repentance. The rest of the beatitudes reflect the change of a repentant heart working outward. For instance, you cannot be merciful yourself unless you have humbly asked for mercy, you cannot be a person of peace unless you first experienced it yourself.

Jesus' point of the Beatitudes is this, the new Kingdom of God will be filled with people who have been transformed and in turn do their best to transform their world around them.

**Reflection Questions: Do the characteristics of your life line up with the characteristics seen in the Beatitudes? What must you change?**

## **Prayer**

Give us grace to endeavor a truly Christian spirit to seek to attain that temper of forbearance and patience of which our blessed Savior has set as the highest example; and which, while it prepares us for the spiritual happiness of the life to come, will secure to us the best enjoyment of what this world can give. Incline us, oh God, to think humbly of ourselves, to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow-creatures with kindness, and to

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy J. Keller, The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

judge of all they say and do with the charity which we would desire from them ourselves.  
Amen. - Jane Austen (1775-1817)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.withgoddaily.com/eternity-will-be-ruled-by-one-kingdom-not-two/>



**Day 5****Reading: Matthew 5:13-16****Lenten Reading: Psalm 40:7-11**

In the ancient world, there was nothing more valuable as salt. It is why the Greeks called salt divine, and it is why the Romans sang that there was nothing more useful in life than sun and salt. While we may take it for granted in our modern world, salt was a very important commodity. Salt was seen as pure, a preservative and flavorful. Jesus seizes upon the importance of this commodity and compares it to those who would be in the Kingdom who should also be pure, preservative and flavorful. Let me explain.

As a part of this new Kingdom, we should be examples of purity. This doesn't mean perfect, but there should be a difference in the believers' life. Author William Barclay says this of a Christian's purity, "One of the characteristics of the world in which we live is the lowering of standards. Standards of honesty, standards of diligence in work, standards of conscientiousness, moral standards, all tend to be lowered. The Christian must be the person who holds aloft the standard of absolute purity in speech, in conduct and even in thought."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, we should be a preservative. There is no doubt that this is what Jesus was thinking. After all, the reason salt was so important is because it kept things from getting rotten or decaying. This too is Jesus' point with the believer. We are to be in the world but not of it. In other words, we should be influencing the culture and not the other way around. We act like a preservative to the corruption around us. Barclay again would comment, "they (believers) must be the ones who by their presence defeat corruption and make it easier for others to be good."<sup>9</sup>

Salt was also flavorful. I believe this is Jesus' point as well. Wherever Jesus went, there were crowds of people of all ages. Jesus was someone people wanted to be around because He added flavor to their life. There was something about Him that drew people to Himself. The believer should be the same way.

The American judge Oliver Wendell Holmes once said: "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers." Author Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary, as if he was recording something surprising: "I have been to Church today, and am not depressed."<sup>10</sup>

As believers, we should be people full of joy and hope not a depressed and dower bunch. Because of our joy and hope, we should be the most "favorable" beings on the planet.

We need to hear Jesus' teaching well here. If salt loses its saltiness, then it might as well be tossed out because it is good for nothing. If we as believers lose our ability to bring purity, or preserve influence, or add flavor to a world depressed, then we are no longer useful in the Kingdom of God.

**Reflection Questions: Which characteristic of salt is difficult for you and why? What can you do to develop these characteristics?**

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<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, Third Ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 137.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 139.

**Prayer:**

Look on us, O Lord, and let all the darkness of our souls disappear before the beams of your brightness. Fill us with your holy love, and open to us the treasures of your wisdom. You know all our desires, so bring to perfection what you have started, and what your Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer. We seek your face, turn your face to us and show us your glory. Then our longing will be satisfied and our peace will be perfect.

Amen. - Augustine of Hippo (354-430)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.withgoddaily.com/the-churchs-true-foundation/>

**Day 6****Reading: Matthew 5:17-20****Lenten Reading: Psalm 130:1-8**

The law, God's law will never be abolished because God is perfect. Mankind never has a hope of accomplishing all of the law. It is an absolute impossibility because man is imperfect. Therefore, we have a dilemma. Two thousand plus years ago, the religious leaders of the day thought they could solve the dilemma by reinterpreting the law of God and added pieces to it so they could physically measure their law keeping. All they did was add to the dilemma.

Jesus steps on the scenes and in His New Covenant teaching He says something that catches people by surprise, "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." Many Jews of His day thought that Jesus was going to abolish something and establish something new, but that would nullify the law of God which again, is perfect. No, Jesus fulfilled the law, every aspect of it.

How did He do this? Well, traditionally the law dealt with three aspects, moral, civil (or judicial) and ceremonial. The moral laws are God's standard for His people. It is, traditionally, laws that pointed to people's perfect holiness. It defined people's morality. Jesus fulfilled this aspect of the law by living a life of perfect righteousness. He was without sin in everything He did. He did something that we could not accomplish by ourselves, and it is through His righteousness that we are saved through our belief and faith in Him.

The civil or judicial aspect of the law dealt with Israel's unique identity given to them by God. As a nation, he gave them certain laws on agriculture, diet, cleanliness and dress. These laws are what made Israel set apart from the rest of the world as God's chosen people. The cross opened up a pathway not just for the Jew but for the world. In other words, through the cross, God would not deal with nations as He had done in the past, but salvation was offered to every single human heart which is what Jeremiah means (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Because God deals with individuals in this new covenant, there would be no need for the civil law.

Worship and ceremony was a key aspect of the nation of Israel. It was a nation steeped in a temple, tabernacles, and sacrifice. All of these were shadows of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17), and since Christ was the perfect sacrifice which all these ceremonial moments in Israel's history pointed to, there would be no more purpose for the rules for ceremonial behavior. This is the reason why we see the veil of separation in the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) because Christ was now the way to God. The writer of Hebrews says it this way:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrew 10:19-22).

Jesus fulfilled the law for us, so does that mean we are no longer bound to walk in holiness or righteousness. Absolutely not. Our holiness is not about us earning our way into the Kingdom, rather, it is the fruit of the Kingdom of God in us transforming us into his image, and that transformation could only occur by Christ being the perfect, sinless sacrifice on our behalf.

**Reflection Question: Why do you think it is so hard for us to accept what Christ has done for us?**

**Prayer:**

Lord, because you have made me, I owe you the whole of my love; because you have redeemed me, I owe you the whole of myself; because you have promised so much, I owe you my whole being. I pray you, Lord, make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge; let me know by love what I know by understanding. I owe you more than my whole self, but I have no more, and by myself I cannot render the whole of it to you. Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of your love. I am wholly yours by creation; make me all yours, too, in love. Amen. -Anselm (1033-1109)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.withgoddaily.com/another-exodus/>

## **Day 7**

**Reading: Matthew 6:19-21**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 23**

Shortly before Dwight L. Moody died, he spoke these words: "Earth recedes; heaven opens before me." This statement has become famous around the world.

Moody's son, William who was with his father, testified that the evangelist continued: "No, this is no dream, Will. It is beautiful. It is like a trance. If this is death, it is sweet. There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go."

Soon the rest of the family was assembled. Only recently, the evangelist and the family had lost two of the grandchildren, Dwight and Irene. Moody's face suddenly lit up, and he exclaimed: "Dwight! Irene! I see the children's faces!" There is a blessedness of meeting our loved ones over there!<sup>13</sup>

The hope for every believer is that one day they will see what they have been living for, His Kingdom, and we know through scripture it is a Kingdom that is eternal. In Jesus' sermon about the new Kingdom, He encourages the believer to live for not an earthly realm but an eternal realm, and He does this by calling up three great pictures of wealth: fine clothes, a person's work and a person's home and compares it to those things that can destroy it: moth, rust, and the robber. Let's look at each.

The moth has a way of destroying material things especially in first century Palestine. Clothes and fine linens were a great sign wealth (2 Kings 5:22; Joshua 7:21). They were the material possessions of the day. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God is not about the material things but the eternal.

Rust was another thing that could rob a person. The word used here is unique. It is not the traditional word for rust. It literally meant eating away as in rats and other vermin eating away at the corn and grain in a barn. The wealth demonstrated here had to do with someone's work or what made them wealthy. Jesus is saying that you work or what you do in your life is temporal as well. It is important, but not eternal. Once again, this person should focus on the eternal thing.

There were very few possessions in the first century. A person's home was often times their only real possession of value. In Palestine, the walls of many of the houses were made of nothing stronger than baked clay.<sup>14</sup> In Jesus' illustration, he is using the image of someone storing something of great value in their home only to return to find the walls dug through and the valuable item stolen.

Jesus paints us a picture of people putting trust in their pleasures and their possession and how ultimately that could lead to ruin and bankruptcy. Instead, he says, Kingdom people think and invest in things that have eternal value. After all, our promise comes from my favorite scripture found in I Peter :

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus

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<sup>13</sup> G. Curtis Jones, 1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986), 148.

<sup>14</sup> William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, Third Ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 276.

Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Peter 1:3-5).

**Reflection Question: What are you living for the temporal or eternal? List ways you are living for the eternal.**

**Prayer**

Merciful Lord,  
Comforter and Teacher of your faithful people,  
increase in your Church the desires you have given.  
Strengthen the hearts of those who hope in you,  
and show them the depth of your promises.  
Lead all your adopted children to see with the eyes of faith,  
and help them wait patiently for the light that is now hidden;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - Ambrose of Milan (339-397)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Prayers of the Early Church, edited by J. Manning Potts, 1953.

**Day 8**

**Reading: John 3:16-18; Romans 5:1-10; Romans 8:1**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 102:2-3; 16-18; 19-21**

G. K. Chesterton was a writer, philosopher, Christian apologist and art critic in the early 1900s. Known in theological circles for his book entitled *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton was a journalist who authored biographies and detective fiction as well. One day Chesterton was asked if he would submit an article for a paper he was writing for focusing on the topic, "What is wrong with the world?" Chesterton ran to his desk sat down and wrote an article consisting of two words, "I am."

Chesterton wrote down words that we all feel when we truly understand our sin nature. When we recognize our sin nature, we realize how short we come from God's righteous standard and then guilt sets in. This was the case for Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:7;10). When they sinned, guilt set in and they hid themselves from God.

Guilt is a part of the curse of sin. It is what keeps us from coming to God in the first place. The enemy knows that if he can separate you from God with guilt, then you will never repent because you will always feel unworthy.

Here is what we have to realize. We are never worthy of God's love. This is why we needed a Redeemer. This is why we need Jesus. He makes us worthy through His perfect righteousness that covers us. The Apostle Paul tells us that through Jesus, we are not condemned, we are not guilty.

Jesus removed our guilt and shame from us through His cross. The Hebrew writer tells us that,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrew 12:1-2).

Because of this removal of guilt and shame, we can now confidently run our race with confidence. While we are all the problem with the world because of sin, through Christ we have been set from from all condemnation.

**Reflection Question: Why do you think it is difficult for you to accept God's forgiveness?**

**Prayer:**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen. - Attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/peace-prayer-of-saint-francis/>



## **Day 9**

**Reading: Matthew 16:24-28**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 105:4-9**

In his book on Christian leadership, Henri Nouwen describes what every person wants in life, relevance. Man has a great desire to be something or to have something that validates themselves. He says this about the Christian leader but I think it applies for everyone,

I am completely convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. This is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love. The great message that we have to carry as ministers of the Gospel and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us no matter what we accomplish...<sup>17</sup>

Nouwen echoes a prominent idea found in scripture. The way of the Kingdom is not through upward mobility, accomplishments or even righteousness. Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew that the way of the Kingdom is death. What does this mean?

In Palestine in the first century, the religious leaders of the day really felt that they could do acts of righteousness to get God to smile and shine upon them. In short, they believed that they could earn their way into the Kingdom. But, there is a fundamental problem with this notion. Whenever we think we can earn our way into the Kingdom, then we are not under God's authority, He really becomes subservient to us. This is what Jesus is attacking in Matthew 16.

True Kingdom membership comes by resisting the notion that we can earn our righteousness and humbly submitting to God. We do this by denying any notion that we are righteous or can be righteous on our own. Self-righteousness is not the way to deny ourselves rather repentance before God is how we deny and die daily. The more we do this the more our priorities begin to align with His priorities. This is the way of the Kingdom.

**Reflection Question: What do you need to deny to in your life?**

### **Prayer:**

O merciful and Compassionate One, forgive us our iniquities and offenses and transgressions and trespasses. Reckon not every sin of your servants, but you will purify us with the purification of your truth; and direct our steps that we may walk in holiness of heart and do what is good and well-pleasing in your sight and in the sight of our rulers. Lord, make your face to shine upon us for good in peace, that we may be shielded by your mighty hand and delivered from every sin by your uplifted arm, and deliver us from those who hate us wrongfully. Give concord and peace to us and all who dwell upon the earth, even as you gave to our fathers, when they called upon you in faith and truth, submissive as we are to the almighty and all-excellent Name. Amen - Clement of Rome (35-99 AD)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 30.

<sup>18</sup> Prayers of the Early Church, edited by J. Manning Potts, 1953.

## **The Stories Jesus Told**

A central feature of Jesus' teaching was His use of extended similes and short stories to express spiritual truths. These stories were known as parables. Now, a parable is a story or saying that illustrates a truth. Based off the Old Testament tradition, a parable could be a riddle, an allegory, a proverb or even a taunt. Over one third of Jesus' instruction was done by parables. Most of the studies on parables focus on Matthew, Mark, and Luke.<sup>19</sup> Jesus uses His parables to help communicate what the Kingdom of God to His audience. It was His way of capturing their imagination and helping them connect with what He was teaching. In this next section, we will look at a two of these parables, the Parable of the Tenant Farmers and the Parable of the Lost Son.

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<sup>19</sup> David Seal, "Parable," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

**Day 10****Reading: Matthew 21:33-45****Lenten Reading: Psalm 18:2-7**

There was an odd rabbinical rule during Jesus' day that said that if you could avoid paying rent for three years, then that property became yours.<sup>20</sup> Now, landowners always had power, socially and legally, to enforce their will on the tenants; a few reportedly even had squads of hired assassins to deal with troublesome tenants. Here the tenants act as if they are the ones with power, and they exploit it mercilessly.<sup>21</sup> They did this for the simple reason that they wanted the power and control. They wanted to dictate the terms of the agreement with the owner.

In this story, Jesus is clearly predicting His death and the emphasis on the tenants is a clear indication that Jesus understood that it would be done by the religious ruling class in Israel. In fact, Jesus does not just mention it in His parable, but He does it in a way that is confrontational. Jesus' main point is that Israel's ruling class has been running the show and they will not give up control even if the Son of God comes. The parable is about Israel's outright rejection of Jesus being their Messiah.

The parable also points to same idea but a different audience. In this parable, we see people who do not have legal ownership of the land, but do everything they can to take it and keep it even if force is necessary. This is an image of man in general. We have no legal claim over our life. We are actually not our own if there is something above us like a God or higher power. We are not owners, but stewards. And as stewards, we will have to give an account of our lives. Humanity hates this notion, so they rebel and try to resist and proverbially kill the Son wanting to rule and reign over our life.

We reject the Son just as much as Israel did because we want to rule our lives. We somehow think that if we rule, then things will be better, but that is not the case. In order for us to live in this Kingdom, then we must accept our place in it, not as rulers but as subjects or servants to a kind, loving, and generous owner.

**Reflection Question: What areas of your life have you tried to control and why?**

**Prayer:**

May God the Father, and the Eternal High Priest Jesus Christ, build us up in faith and truth and love, and grant to us our portion among the saints with all those who believe on our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for all saints, for kings and rulers, for the enemies of the Cross of Christ, and for ourselves we pray that our fruit may abound and we may be made perfect in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. - Polycarp (A disciple of Jonn, 69-155 AD)

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<sup>20</sup> Timothy J. Keller, The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 21:35-37.

**Day 11****Reading: Luke 15****Lenten Reading: Jeremiah 31:10-14**

Perhaps the most famous parable Jesus ever told was the story of the prodigal son. When most people read this story, they typically think about one thing, the son that runs away from home. While that is a core part of the story, there is so much more here that we can learn from. First, prodigal does not mean run away as much as it means wasteful and reckless, and we certainly see that in this story with the son, but he is not the main character. Actually, the story has three characters in it. The son, the father and the other brother. The father plays the primary role. After all, he is mentioned twelve times in the span of twenty verses.<sup>22</sup> It is the father that owns the wealth, the father that gives half away, the father who runs to the son and forgives him and redeems him, and it is the father that gives him a new inheritance out of his wealth.

This last part is where the older brother comes into the story which is where I want to focus. The older brother is incensed that his father would give his brother a second chance. Most of the time when we read the story, we miss this. The older brother does not want to come into the party for his reckless brother because he does not believe he deserves forgiveness. As a matter of fact, he believes that while he has been on the farm, he has been earning his inheritance. The implication from the older brother is that he saw everything as transactional and not in terms of relationship. He believed that if he worked hard and proved his worth by not being reckless like his other brother, then he would earn the right of the inheritance.

You see the older brother is just as lost as the prodigal. How do we know that? If you look at all of Luke 15 which contains the parables of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10) and the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32), the whole point is something is where it shouldn't be. The sheep is not where it ought to be. The coin is not where it ought to be. The younger son is not where he ought to be and the other brother is somewhere he should not be. In every single parable of Luke 15, you have someone going out to look for the lost thing. The shepherd goes out to find the lost sheep (vs. 4-5). The woman searches for the lost coin, (vs. 8) and the father goes out to meet the prodigal (vs. 20). But not only that, the father goes out and talks with his older brother to come in and join the celebration (vs 28). The pattern for the older brother is the same for everything that is lost in Luke 15.

Henri Nouwen says this in his book *The Return of the Prodigal*, "Not only did the younger son who left home ... get lost, but the one who stayed home also became a lost man. Exteriously he did all the things a good son is supposed to do, but, interiorly, he wandered away from his father."<sup>23</sup>

How did the other brother wander away from the father when he had been with him the entire time? This is where Jesus' parable becomes the most brilliant. The older brother is lost not because he tried to obey every rule, he did. The other brother is lost because he did not truly know the father. It never dawned on him that the father would always forgive the brother no matter what he did. The older brother was resting on rules and morality and failed to be in true relationship with the father.

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<sup>22</sup>J. D. Greear, "The Love of God for You: Luke 15:11-32," in J. D. Greear Sermon Archive (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), Lk 15:11-32.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

This is Jesus' point. There are sinners that we all know are sinners. They wear it externally much like the prodigal. Their lives are marked by recklessness and wastefulness. And then, there are sinners that no one would ever know. They are rule followers and steeped in morality. They are lost because they are trusting in their own righteousness.

Now, you have read this over and over again in this devotion, but it is part of Jesus' teaching. Your own righteousness and work will never put you in the right relationship with God. The only way to be in right relationship with God is to know Him and His heart of forgiveness (2 Peter 3:9).

One of my favorite preachers and theologians, Timothy Keller says this:

The gospel...takes you completely out of the elder brother religion and takes you completely out of this, doesn't say you're either good and valuable or sinful and worthless, but you are very sinful and absolutely valuable in Christ. Because you know you're sinful when bad things happen, you don't complain, but because you know you're valuable when bad things happen, you know it's not a punishment.<sup>24</sup>

Keller is right. The lessons from the prodigal son teaches us that both immorality and morality a part from God's heart destroys us. However, the father (who is the main character in the story) saves us both from our immorality (sinfulness) and morality (self-righteousness).

**Reflection Question: Re-Read the story of the Prodigal Son and determine which brother are you and how you need Christ's forgiveness in that area.**

**Prayer:**

O good shepherd, seek me out, and bring me home to thy fold again. Deal favorably with me according to your good pleasure, till I may dwell in thy house all the days of my life, and praise you for ever and ever with them that are there. Amen. Jerome (342 - 420)

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy J. Keller, The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

## Jesus, the Son of God

Jesus throughout the centuries has been given a number of names. Great teacher, moral philosopher, and a wise sage. Many believed that Jesus existed, but they stop short believing that He was God. From the modern fiction of Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code*, where he says this about Jesus, "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea," to Shabir Ally's (Muslim apologist) belief that, "There is nothing recorded in the Gospels showing that Jesus clearly affirmed his own divinity,<sup>25</sup> we are confronted with Jesus' divinity. Was he really the son of God?

C.S Lewis' famous quote about Jesus states:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."<sup>26</sup>

We either accept the claim that Jesus is the Son of God, or we reject Him as a lunatic and a liar. For Lewis, and all of Christianity, this is the singular choice.

Did He believe He was the son of God? Did He believe He would die and be raised to life again? Did the early believers worship Him as God? In this section, we will examine the claims of Jesus from Jesus' own words.

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<sup>25</sup> J. Ed Komoszewski; M. James Sawyer; Daniel Wallace. *Reinventing Jesus* (Kindle Location 1613). Kindle Edition.

<sup>26</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins: 1980), 52.

**Day 12****Reading: Matthew 16:13-20****Lenten reading: Isaiah 50:4-7**

The celebrated and much-read C. S. Lewis entitled his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. In characteristic brilliance and artistic attractiveness, he shared the intimacies of his life, his desire to discover faith, and his difficulties in finding it. He spoke frankly of his mother's death; study and snobbery at Oxford; World War I; his father's death; and his rediscovery of self. At last, in his room at Oxford in 1929, he wrote: "I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.... The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet."<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps this is the reason that Lewis was so stubborn in his insistence that Jesus is either Lord or a lunatic and a liar. There was no middle ground, and it seems like the Lord Himself gave no room for error on the choice either. This is the reason Jesus asks the question of his disciples in Matthew 16, and He does it in an unusual setting.

Caesarea Philippi is a twenty-five mile walk from Galilee. It was the northern most boundary of the "promised land." It seems that Jesus only travelled there once, and the visit was for this occasion. It seems like an awful long walk for the twelve for this simple question until you understand the context of this town.

The town was originally known as Paneas for the Greek god Pan who, according to the Greek myths was born in a cave outside the city. Now, history tells us that this cave was sacred to the pagan legends and sacrifices occurred there. It was against this backdrop that Jesus poses His question. Jesus is making a not so subtle statement. He is trying to allow His disciples to see His preeminence over the spirit of the age represented by the paganism in the city. After this, He will show the three (Peter, John and James) his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Peter makes the great confession. Jesus is the Messiah. In other words, Jesus is God. Notice, Jesus never corrects him, he actually blesses him for having his eyes opened.

We all must answer that question. Is Jesus really who He claims? If He is, then He becomes Lord over all, the culture, our thoughts and our lives. Everything comes under His Lordship. There is no middle ground.

**Reflection Questions: Is Jesus Lord in your life? How would you define his Lordship?**

**Prayer:**

O Lord, accept me in penitence. O Lord, leave me not. O Lord, lead me not into temptation. O Lord, grant me good thoughts. O Lord, grant me tears and remembrance of death and compunction. O Lord, grant me the thought of confessing my sins. O Lord, grant me humility, chastity and obedience. O Lord, grant me patience, courage and meekness. O Lord, plant in me the root of all blessings, the fear of You in my heart. O Lord, grant me to love You with all my mind and soul, and always to do Your will. O Lord, protect me from certain people, and demons, and passions, and from every other harmful thing. O Lord, You know that You act as

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<sup>27</sup> G. Curtis Jones, *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986), 143.

You will; may Your will be also in me, a sinner, for blessed art You forever. Amen. - John Chrysostom (344-407)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://medium.com/@GrowInSpirit/10-powerful-prayers-by-the-early-church-fathers-98dbd439d06d>



**Day 13****Reading: Matthew 17:22-23; Matthew 20:17-19; John 2:12-22****Lenten Reading: Psalm 27:1-3; 13-14**

There has been an attempt over the past forty to fifty years to categorize Jesus as a wise teacher, a moral example, or a prophet and not to categorize Him as God. Modern scholars have gone so far as to say that Jesus did not really believe He Himself was God, but this is foolish when you compare the mountain of evidence. For instance, it is clear that Jesus saw Himself as the Messiah when He pronounces the kingdom of God in Luke 4, or when He brings in the New Covenant through His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew or when He forgives someone's sins (Matthew 9:1-8; 2:1-22; Luke 5:20; 7:47-48).

The most profound evidence for Jesus' Messianic claims is found in His understanding His own death and resurrection. In today's reading, I provided you with three occurrences where Jesus foretold His death, but not just His death, His resurrection. This is the most central tenant of the Christian faith. Without the death and resurrection, our faith becomes worthless. Look at what the Apostle Paul says,

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (I Corinthians 15:12-20).

Jesus not only understood His mission on the cross, He willingly walked towards His death being fully confident in His resurrection. The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once opened a sermon with this:

Our Lord firmly resolved to go to Jerusalem, about a fortnight before the Passover, with the view of becoming himself the Lamb of God's Passover. He had frequently quitted Jerusalem when his life had been in danger there, because his time was not yet come, and he thus set us the example of not wilfully running into danger, or braving it with foolhardiness; but now that he felt that the hour of his sacrifice was near at hand, he did not hesitate, or seek to avoid it; but he resolutely set out to meet his sufferings and his death. When he was in the highway that led to Jerusalem, he marched in front of the little band of his disciples with so vigorous and bold a step, and with such a calm, determined air of heroism upon him, that his followers were filled with astonishment (Mark 10:32).<sup>29</sup>

You can take great confidence in the fact that Jesus is who He said He is, the risen Son of God.

**Reflection Question: What does it mean to say that Jesus "died for our sins?"**

**Prayer:**

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<sup>29</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "The Private Thoughts and Words of Jesus," in The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, vol. 37 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1891), 361.

O gracious God,  
I am fully aware that I am unworthy.  
I deserve to be a brother of Satan and not of Christ.  
But Christ, your dear Son died and rose for me.  
I am his brother.  
He earnestly desires that I should believe in him, without doubt and fear.  
I need no longer regard myself as unworthy and full of sin.  
For this I love and thank him from my heart.  
Praise be to the faithful Savior, for he is so gracious and merciful as are you and the Holy Spirit  
in eternity.  
Amen.  
- Martin Luther (1483-1546)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.withgoddaily.com/which-dictator/>

## **The Last Week**

The last week did not go as the disciples thought it would go. As Jesus entered Jerusalem to cheers and crowds, the disciples must have thought that the moment of their deliverance had finally arrived. Jesus would take His rightful place as the King of Israel. Within five quick days, all hope was gone from their minds. The one they had dedicated their life to had been arrested, tried, sentenced and crucified.

As the disciples scattered, God's plan was still working its way out on a much grander scale. Jesus would be sentenced to a vicious death, but all hope was not lost, all hope was gained by His victory on the cross.

In this section, we will explore some significant events in Jesus' last week and what the world gained by His sacrifice.

## **Day 14**

**Reading: Matthew 21:1-12**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 71:1-6; 15-17**

Jesus often came into Jerusalem through east after He would stop and visit His friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus in a town known as Bethany. He would descend down a large hill known as the Mount of Olives to enter the city. He had done this many times. This time was different. Because of the major religious holiday known as Passover, hundreds if not thousands of tents would be housing the spiritual pilgrims on the slopes of the Mount of Olives throughout the Kidron Valley.

As Jesus is descending literally towards His death, these pilgrims more than likely from the places Jesus ministered in the Galilee region began to treat Him like a king entering the city. Now, most of these pilgrims were not wealthy, but the Bible tells us that they spread their cloaks on the ground for Him. One of Israel's famous kings of old was proclaimed king in defiance of the existing one, and his followers spread their cloaks under his feet as a sign of loyalty (2 Kings 9:13).<sup>31</sup> The crowd was making a statement about what they anticipated Jesus was going to do.

Others went and cut palm branches and waived them in the air as He passed by them. This harkened back to a royal procession. When the famous Judas Maccabeus conquered the pagan armies that oppressed Israel 200 years prior to Jesus, he entered the city as a conqueror with palm branches waiving in the air. The crowd anticipated Jesus as a conquering king.

Finally, as the disciples and Jesus entered into this raucous crowd, they heard singing. Now, this was not just any singing. They were singing royal hymns and chants and saying that Jesus is the "son of David." There could not be any mistake as to what the crowd thought. The "son of David" would one day take the throne and reign forever according to their religion.

Jesus would replace the god of this age. He would conquer death, hell and the grave. And, He would reign on an eternal throne. He just did not do it according to the crowd's expectations of Him.

There was a gap between their expectations and God's answer and plan. This is often how it is with God, and Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday is an object lesson to this fact. But, just because our expectations are not always met, it does not mean that God's greater plan is not working.

God in His infinite wisdom had a plan of salvation that would not be thwarted. It did not happen the way many thought it would or should, but God's plan would not be stopped. The same can be said about our lives. We do not plan for tragedy or loss. We do not always anticipate discouragement and depression. But as believers, we should be confident that God's greater purpose will be accomplished.

When I look at this story through the eyes of the cross and God's fulfillment of His promise of salvation, I cannot help but be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul, "And I am sure of

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<sup>31</sup> Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, Part 2: Chapters 16-28 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 67.

this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).<sup>32</sup>

**Reflection Questions: Has there been a time in your life when your expectations did not match God's answer/plan? How did you process that? What were the results?**

**Prayer:**

O Lord my God, most merciful, most secret, most present, most constant, yet changing all things, never new, and never old, always in action, yet always quiet, creating, upholding, and perfecting all, who has anything but what you have given? or what can any man say when he speaks about you? Yet have mercy on us, O Lord, that we may speak to you, and praise your Name.

- Jeremy Taylor, 1613–67 (from St Augustine)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 1:6.

<sup>33</sup> <https://acollectionofprayers.com/category/prayers-of-the-early-church-potts/>

**Day 15****Reading: Mark 11:12-19****Lenten Reading: Psalm 69:8-10; 21-22; 33-34**

While Jesus is in Jerusalem during his last week, He entered the Temple and made a startling raucous. Upon arriving at the Temple, Jesus would have entered into a place where Gentiles were. The outer part of the temple was actually known as the court of the Gentiles. Now, the word we have for Gentiles here is *ethnae* which means nations, so it gives us a clue as to what Jesus is about to do.

The scene in that area was frenetic especially during Passover. There would be people buying and selling animals at hundreds of locations for the sacrifices and hundreds of money changers exchanging the foreign currency. It would make the New York Stock Exchange look passive. There would be thousands of people in the one location doing an immense amount of trade for Passover. The historian Josephus tells us that it was not uncommon for 25,000 lambs to be bought, sold and slaughtered during that Passover week.

When Jesus sees this, He goes into a holy rage. Throwing tables, money and everything else to disrupt this scene, He would have made quite a stir. A Jew watching the commotion would have initially approved. After all, the Jew believed that when the Messiah came He would remove the foreigners from the Temple. In their minds, the foreigner would have no access, but Jesus had something else entirely in mind.

Jesus is not angry because of the foreigners. He actually does something shocking. By disrupting the exchange, He is giving an illustrated sermon. He is saying that the ancient sacrificial system is being overturned. Foreigners would know longer have to go through rigid ritual to get to God, but they could have access to God whenever they want it. We know this by what he says, "My house will be a house of prayer for all nations." So, Jesus here is basically saying that the outsiders will no longer have a barrier between them and God. They are no longer outsiders, but because of what He will do on the cross, they will become insiders.

The Hebrew writer puts it this way:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23).

In the Temple, Jesus demonstrates what He will ultimately do in a few days. He will make access who call upon Him.

**Reflection Questions: What does free access to God look like to you? How do you access him daily, weekly, and monthly?**

**Prayer:**

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord, to know you, and love you, and rejoice in you. And, if I cannot do these perfectly in this life, let me at least advance to higher degrees every day, until I can come to do them in perfection. Let the knowledge of you increase in me here, that it may be full hereafter. Let the love of you grow every day more and more here, that it may be perfect hereafter; that my joy may be full in you.

I know, O God, that you are a God of truth, O make good your gracious promises to me, that my joy may be full; to your honor and glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

- Augustine of Hippo (354-430)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Prayers of the Early Church, edited by J. Manning Potts, 1953.

**Day 16****Reading: Matthew 24:1-31, Matthew 25:1-30****Lenten Reading: Psalm 89:21-22; 25-27**

As the week moved on and they moved throughout the city of Jerusalem with Jesus, the disciples had some pressing questions on their mind. When would the end of the world, the Messiah's reign, happen? After all for them when the Messiah arrives, everything promised about peace and security would be fulfilled. So, they really wanted to know when will all the things promised happen.

In Matthew 24, Jesus gives His disciples some clues about the end of the world. While Jesus in his teaching is not specific about times and events, He does let them know what they should prepare for when then end arrives. He then follows it up with some principles to live by while they wait by telling them two stories.

In the first story (Matthew 25:1-13), Jesus tells of ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom. The foolish ones were not prepared to endure because they took no extra oil. The wise were ready and even though the bridegroom took time to come (This is Jesus' way of saying to the disciples that His return would not be immediate), they took extra oil meaning they were ready to endure.

So the application to the question the disciples were asking about the fulfillment of the promise coming of the Messiah was to be ready to endure.

In the second story, a master leaves but gives each of his servants money (talents) to invest. He gives one servant five talents. He gives another two talents. And, he gives another one talent. The one who had five and two immediately put it to work. The one with the one simply hid it for safekeeping. The master comes back (after a long time the Bible emphasizes again) and expects a return. The one with the five doubles his money and he is rewarded. The one with the two, earns two and he is rewarded. The one with the one has nothing, not even interest and is punished...why? Because, he wasted what the master had given him.

What is the principle Jesus is trying to teach with this story? Well, He is saying don't waste or hide or hoard your resources but continue using what He has given you for His good.

So, as the disciples are wondering about the promises being fulfilled, Jesus is saying that it not up to us. We should not worry about the timing of His coming as much as it is to busy ourselves doing good and having endurance in doing good until He comes.

Jesus promises that His coming is imminent meaning that it will happen. We can have hope in that. In a book entitled *The Hope of the Early Church*, the author tells us that, "It is the hope of believing people that the incompleteness of their present experience of God will be resolved, their present thirst for God will be fulfilled, and their present need for salvation will be realized."<sup>35</sup>

This hope was sealed for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. He made a way for us to God and creation will one day be renewed. But as we are waiting and wondering much like the disciples, we are to continue to do good and do it often with endurance until He comes.

**Reflection Question: How do you continue to do "good" while you wait on his return?**

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<sup>35</sup> Brian e. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 1991), 1.



**Prayer:**

Lord, in union with your love, unite my work with your great work, and perfect it. As a drop of water, poured into a river, is taken up into the activity of the river, so may my labor become part of your work. So, may those among whom I live and work be drawn into your love.

Amen. - Gertrude the Great (1256-1302)

**Day 17****Reading: John 13:1-17****Lenten Reading: Psalm 31:1-25**

The Gospel of John is unique when you compare it to the other Gospel accounts. There are no parables, no birth narrative and no accounts of Jesus casting out demons. John takes an entirely different approach with his Gospel record. John wants the reader to know and understand Christ's identity and character as the Son of God. This is emphasized when John highlights Jesus' "I Am" statements (John 6:35,41, 48, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7,11,14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1,5). The "I Am" statements are a direct link to the name God reveals of himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14).

Furthermore, John himself tells us directly of his purpose of the entire Gospel when he says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31)." It is hard to read this Gospel without seeing time and time again this theme particularly in his account of the Last Supper.

When the disciples walked into the upper room that night to celebrate Passover, Jesus wanted to continue to reveal who He was and what His mission was to his disciples, but He did not want to just teach them who He was, but He wanted to show them. As they entered the room from the dusty and dirty streets of Jerusalem, Jesus met them with a towel and a basin to wash the dirt and grime on their feet from the days of travel. It was a dirty job meant for the lowliest servant.

John tells us that Jesus wraps the towel around Himself and begins to do the work of a servant. The picture is startling. Jesus is taking the dirt and filth off His disciples and putting it on Himself. In one single act, Jesus is demonstrating to His disciples what He is about to do on the cross. He is going to take their sin and shame and put it upon Himself. By the time Jesus is done with the foot washing, His garments would be covered in their filth. The filth would be seen during the entire meal. When they left the room, there is no doubt that the image of Him staining Himself with their own dirt would be sealed in their minds.

In this account, John reveals to us a picture of Christ as a servant to humanity. His actions point us to God. His service allows us see His heart. This is the case in the upper room. The great theologian Athanasius of Alexandria once said of Christ, "All these things the Savior thought fit to do, so that recognizing His bodily acts as works of God, men who were blind to his presence in creation might regain knowledge of the father...God the word revealed Himself to men through His works."<sup>36</sup> In other words, when we see Christ's actions, like his service, we see God, and this God is one who will take all our filth upon Himself so we can be sinless.

**Reflection Questions: How would you have responded to Jesus washing your feet? How does this image that John reveals as Jesus the servant shape your perspective of him?**

**Prayer:**

O Lord, let me not from this time forward desire health or life, except to spend them for you, with you, and in you. You alone know what is good for me; do, therefore, what seems to you best. Give to me, or take from me; conform my will to you; and grant that, with humble and perfect submission, and in holy confidence, I may receive the orders of your eternal Providence;

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<sup>36</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* (Originally translated in London, Pantianos: 1944), 37.

and may equally adore all that comes to me from Thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord—Amen.  
- Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Tileston, Mary Wilder . Prayers Ancient and Modern: Selected and Arranged for Daily Reading (p. 93). Ambleside Classics. Kindle Edition.

**Day 18****Reading: Mark 14:43-72****Lenten Reading: Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 13-14, 24, 35**

From the Garden of Gethsemane, you can see the Eastern gate of the temple complex. The trail from the temple snakes its way through stairs and trails down the Kidron Valley back up to the Garden. It would have taken some time for the arresting party to reach Jesus, perhaps thirty minutes or more. As the torches from the large party lit up the night sky, Jesus sat praying alone. His disciples were dozing off without knowing the agony of Jesus.

Judas arrives in the Garden with a small army. They all believed Jesus was a revolutionary ready to take Jerusalem by force, or they believed Jesus was a coward and would try to escape His fate. But, Jesus was neither a rebel nor a coward. He was ready for what lie ahead.

Both the Jewish trial and the Roman trial were in three stages. The Jewish trial was opened by Annas, the former high priest (John 18:13-24). It then moved to the to hear witnesses (Mark 14:53-65), and then to an early morning session for judgement (Mark 15:1). All the way through the night, Jesus was mocked, spat upon, beaten, and ridiculed.

Once condemned by the Jewish court, they passed Jesus to Pilate, a Roman official (Mark 15:1-5; John 18:28-38), who sent Him to Herod (Luke 23:6-12), who returned Him to Pilate (Mark 15:6-15; John 18:39-19:6). Pilate yielded to the cry of the mob and delivered Jesus to be crucified.<sup>38</sup> During the final hours before crucifixion, Jesus exhausted, beaten, bleeding, and humiliated, never raised His voice, never called down angels for rescue, and never shrank back from His misery. In the hours before his death, Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah which said, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7)."

The hellish nightmare of Jesus' trial was never meant for Him, but for us. We were the accused. We were the condemned, yet God replaced us. We would not stand trial, but He would. We would not suffer, but He would bear the brunt of punishment in order that we might be released from the prison of sin.

As Jesus saw the torch lights coming for Him, He did not run. He readied himself to take all of it for us that we might become covered in His perfect righteousness.

**Reflection Question: How do you view your sin in light of the punishment that Jesus took on the cross for it?**

**Prayer:**

I Offer up unto you my prayers and intercessions, for those especially who have in any matter hurt, grieved, or found fault with me, or who have done me any damage or displeasure. For all those also whom, at any time, I may have vexed, troubled, burdened, and scandalized, by words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance; that you would grant us all equally pardon for our sins, and for our offenses against each other. Take away from our hearts, O Lord, all suspiciousness, indignation, wrath, and contention, and whatsoever may hurt charity, and lessen brotherly love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those that crave your mercy, give

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<sup>38</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 162.

grace unto them that stand in need thereof, and make us such as that we may be worthy to enjoy your grace, and go forward to life eternal. Amen. - Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Tileston, Mary Wilder . Prayers Ancient and Modern: Selected and Arranged for Daily Reading (p. 134). Ambleside Classics. Kindle Edition.

**Day 19****Reading: John 18:28-19:16****Lenten Reading: Psalm 79:8-13**

Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, Israel could no longer decide matters of life and death. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Coponius, the first Roman governor over of Palestine, was sent as a leader who had 'the power of [life and] death put into his hands by Caesar.'<sup>40</sup> While it is true that the Jewish religious ruling class did take matters in their own hands as in the case of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), the only way they could legally execute someone was through the Roman system. Because of their hatred of Jesus, the Jewish leaders abandoned every principle they had. They even claimed that they had no king other than Caesar (John 19:15) which would have been something none of them believed and went against their religious customs (I Samuel 12:12; Judges 8:23).

It is for this reason that Jesus finds Himself standing before the Roman governor Pilate whose career was not wildly successful. While Pilate's career looked good from an outsiders perspective, the fact that he was placed in a dusty small province of Rome known for its rebellions meant that Pilate was not the most well respected leader in Rome. But with all pomp and circumstance, Pilate tried to rule and flex his Roman strength as he questioned Jesus about the truth.

It's an interesting picture. Pilate, a man with diminishing power, questioning the King of Kings with unlimited power. The Roman governor, never fully grasping truth (John 18:9), resisting Jesus the fountain of all truth (John 18:8). The cynical and anemic Pilate sitting in judgement of the One who would ultimately be the judge.

I have heard theologians and historians alike argue about who really killed Jesus. Was it the Jews with all their hatred of His so called blasphemy? Did Rome play the pivotal role since they were the ones who could issue the death sentence? Who was it that murdered our Lord?

No one. He willingly surrendered His life. All the drama surrounding the trial and judgement He willingly took on for our sake. Remember, redemption was God's idea. He set this plan in motion and hinted towards it in His scriptures. No one took Jesus' life. He freely gave it up for us so that we could once again gain fellowship with God. After all, this is His very words from John's Gospel:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father (John 10:17-18).

**Reflection Questions: What stands out to you in Jesus trial recorded in John 18 and 19? Why does it stand out?**

**Prayer:**

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.  
 Help me to pray  
 And to concentrate my thoughts on you;  
 I cannot do this alone.

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<sup>40</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 604.

In me there is darkness,  
But with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;

I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways,  
But you know the way for me.

O Heavenly Father,  
I praise and thank you  
For rest in the night;  
I praise and thank you for this new day;  
I praise and thank you for all your goodness  
and faithfulness throughout my life.

You have granted me many blessings;  
Now let me also accept what is hard from your hand.  
You will lay on me no more than I can bear.  
You make all things work together for good for your children.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
You were poor and in distress, a captive and forsaken as I am.

You know all man's troubles;  
You abide with me when all men fail me;  
You remember and seek me;  
It is your will that I should know you and turn to you.  
Lord, I hear your call and follow;  
Help me.

O Holy Spirit,  
Give me faith that will protect me  
from despair, from passions, and from vice;  
Give me such love for God and men  
as will blot out all hatred and bitterness;  
Give me the hope that will deliver me  
from fear and faint-heartedness.

Amen.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, Touchstone Books, 1953), 139.

**Day 20**

**Reading: Matthew 27**

**Lenten Reading: Psalm 103:1-12**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who was executed by the Nazis at the close of the war in 1945. During his short thirty-nine years on earth, he shaped theology for thousands worldwide. Perhaps his most important work is *The Cost of Discipleship*. Look at what he says:

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sum of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out his own eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the Gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.<sup>42</sup>

Bonhoeffer is talking about a great exchange. It was our life for His. When we view the horrors and ugliness on the cross, we are to be reminded again and again that it was meant for us. Crucifixion was universally recognized as the most horrible form of execution and only reserved for the worst criminals. It was torture of the worst kind. This is what the God of the universe did for us. He died a death we deserved so that we could live a life with Him and for Him. His death shows how expensive grace is. It is priceless, and yet He suffered through it to conquer the scourge of sin and death. Thank God for the cross.

**Reflection Question:** What does the cross mean to you?

**Prayer:**

O Lord, who has mercy upon all, take away from me my sins, and mercifully kindle in me the fire of your Holy Spirit. Take away from me the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh, a heart to love and adore you, a heart to delight in you, to follow and to enjoy you, for Christ's sake. Amen. - Ambrose (340-397).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, Touchstone Books: 1959), 45.

<sup>43</sup> Tileston, Mary Wilder . *Prayers Ancient and Modern: Selected and Arranged for Daily Reading* (p. 291). Ambleside Classics. Kindle Edition.



## **Day 21**

### **Reading: Luke 24**

### **Lenten reading: Psalm 118:1-2; 16-17; 22-23**

There was darkness that settled over Jerusalem. For the followers of Jesus, they really believed He was more than just an ordinary rebel. But, their leader is dead. He laid in a tomb. The Passover celebration ended in misery and heart break for many, but it would not stay that way.

C.S. Lewis said that the reason we are drawn to fantasy stories or fairy tales where the knights and kings slay the evil dragon is because it is modeled after the one true great story in Christ. The enemy thought he had won. At last, Satan really believed he bested God, but that evil dragon would be defeated on resurrection morning.

One of my favorite appearances Jesus makes after His resurrection occurs in Luke 27. Jesus appears to a couple of people on a road headed toward a town called Emmaus. The two walking along were in Jerusalem because of Passover. They seemed to be people that believed that Jesus could be the Messiah. As they are walking, Jesus shows up. He engages the two in conversation, and they begin to explain everything that happened in Jerusalem.

Now what is interesting about this story is that Luke was not an eyewitness. He was not a follower while Jesus walked the earth. Luke received his account of the events through other eyewitnesses like Mary and Peter. So, the two on Emmaus' must have reported what happened to them.

As they are talking with Jesus, He reveals who He was to the two. And Luke tells us that the two were given probably the best Sunday school lesson in the history of the world. Luke tells us that, "And beginning with Moses (meaning the books of Moses: Genesis and the law) and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

When Jesus was resurrected, He taught that the whole plan was orchestrated from the beginning. He taught that the entire Old Testament pointed to Him. He taught that He was the promise to Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and the prophets.

There was darkness in Jerusalem for a brief period of time, but it would not last forever because He was resurrected just as it was foretold and just as He promised.

**Reflection Question: What would you have asked Jesus if you were on the road to Emmaus and why?**

### **Prayer:**

Give us, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no selfish desires may drag downwards; give us an unconquered heart, which no troubles can wear out; give us an upright heart, which no unworthy ambitions may tempt aside. Give us also, O Lord our God, understanding to know you, perseverance to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. - Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.withgoddaily.com/the-idol-of-desire-not-by-bread-alone/>

## **A Charge to the Church**

After the resurrection of our Lord, we were given two commandments. Here they are:

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

These two scriptures lay the groundwork for the church. We are to take the message of Jesus to all the world. After all, the great Apostle Paul said that because we have experienced the grace of God, we are now to be agents distributing that grace to all the world (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

It is our hope that, as you went through this devotional, your faith in Christ has grown and you are inspired to share what He has done in your life.

Blessings!

The Catalyst Bible College Staff