

09 THE SON HAS TRUTH

COMMENTARY


the **GOSPEL**PROJECT.

ADULTS



FALL | 2026

GOD'S WORD FOR YOU

A SUMMARY OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. By God's grace in Christ, repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

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THE EDITOR

For some of us, the events of Jesus's life seem like stories in a children's book that we have gotten used to over the years. Yet if we truly shape our minds to visualize the complications, the confrontations, and the controversies surrounding all He did, we would be reminded of the truth and the power to which He spoke and lived.

Jesus spoke with precision in His parables. He wanted the crowds, the Pharisees, and His disciples to seek the truth of His words.

He revealed His authority over all—over this earthly domain, over disabilities, over diseases, over demons, over death. They all submit under His command and control.

He brought physical and spiritual healing with compassion and care like only God could and would. The way He lived is an example for us to follow.

Jesus's life of ministry was a picture of love and sacrifice even before His crucifixion. He endured temptation, opposition, hunger, fatigue, and grief as a human because of His desire to rescue us from sin.

As Paul stated in Philippians, Jesus “who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity” (Philippians 2:6-7).

In His humanity and deity, He is our King. He proved His authority and godhood through miracles only He could do. And as we shall see, He gave up His life for us and overcame the power of death for our salvation. That is the Jesus we worship and trust in truth.

Y Bonesteele

Team Leader

The Gospel Project for Adults

The Gospel Project®

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Y Bonesteele

Team Leader

Daniel Davis

Content Editor

Rachel Myrick

Content and Production Editor

Darin Clark

Design Team Leader

Chad Hunter

Graphic Designer

T. J. Norris

Contributing Illustrator

Dwayne McCrary

Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

John Paul Basham

Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments by email to TGP.adults@Lifeway.com or mail to Team Leader, *The Gospel Project: Adult Commentary*, 200 Powell Place, Suite 100, Brentwood, TN 37027-7707.

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THE WRITERS

Nathan Creitz

(Unit 25, Sessions 1-4)

Nathan serves as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Bay Shore, New York. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Religion from the University of Mobile and an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Nathan and his wife, Kim, have three children: Zoe, Zachary, and Caleb.



Greg Kilgore

(Unit 27, Sessions 1-5)

Greg is the associational missions strategist for the Mid-Valley Southern Baptist Association and an elder at Woodward Park Baptist Church in Fresno, California. He and his wife, Megan, have three children: Owen, Camille, and Judson Titus. Greg is a PhD student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also teaches as an adjunct professor.

Mike Leake

(Unit 26, Sessions 1-4)

Mike is husband to Nikki and father to Isaiah and Hannah. He is a freelance writer and researcher. He actively writes for *Church Initiative* (GriefShare and DivorceCare). His writing home is mikeleake.net.

HOW TO USE THE COMMENTARY

The Commentary is a vital tool in your personal and group experience with The Gospel Project for Adults. Here are different ways on how to make the most of your time with it:

1) AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE LEADER GUIDE



The Leader Guide takes you through the same Personal Preparation your group members will follow in their Personal Study Guide so you can experience that with them during the week. And then the Leader Guide provides you with step-by-step instructions for the weekly Group Experience, including the learning activity and application questions.

You can use the Commentary to supplement your learning and personal preparation. The context, key concept, and daily readings as well as the Scripture breakdowns and discussion questions in the Commentary will be the same as in the Personal Study Guide and the Leader Guide. But the bulk of the content is unique, so read through the Commentary to gain additional insight for your group's questions and discussions during the Group Experience.

2) AS A PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Your leader and your group may want to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for a more in-depth study of the Scripture passages in the sessions provided. Your group may be more knowledgeable and seasoned and may want to delve deeper into the nuances of Scripture as you explore how Scripture points to Christ throughout the Bible.

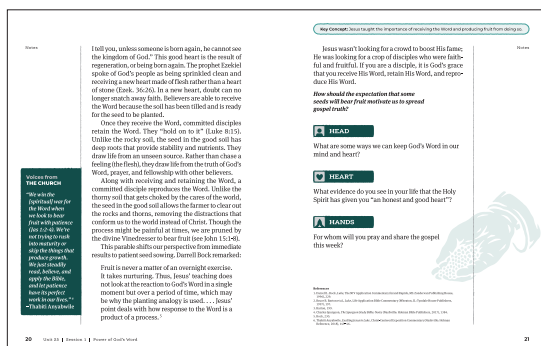
Leaders may also choose to use the Commentary as a personal study guide for their group because it is easier to read with a larger font than the Personal Study Guide.

If used in this way, the Commentary is designed to be used before the group time and then during the group time. Read through the session to be prepared for your group time. The context, key concept, and daily readings will give you the background and focus you need to study. The various headings and subheadings give you the bullet points that connect to the key concept. Answer the questions provided to prepare beforehand to discuss during the group time together. The Head, Heart, and Hands questions help you apply what you have learned. Use the margins for whatever notes you might need to jot down.

3) AS A LEADER GUIDE

the Commentary as a leader guide. For the best learning experience, having the Leader Guide along with the Commentary will be beneficial as the Leader Guide has a guided path to lead the group time, a group activity to foster discussion and group interaction, and further details about the Head, Heart, and Hands application section.

But if you choose not to use the Leader Guide, you can use the Commentary as a leader guide by following the pages in order with your group, highlighting important ideas and concepts along with the headings and subheadings to add further insight to the key concept. Ask your group what was interesting to them, and use the questions provided to further your group discussion. And as you wrap up with the Head, Heart, and Hands questions, allow the group to discuss how to apply what they've learned. End with prayer requests and praises that you can jot down in the margins.



If your group chooses to use the Commentary as their personal study guide, then you as the leader can also use

THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 25

THE TRUTH OF HIS POWER



MARK; LUKE

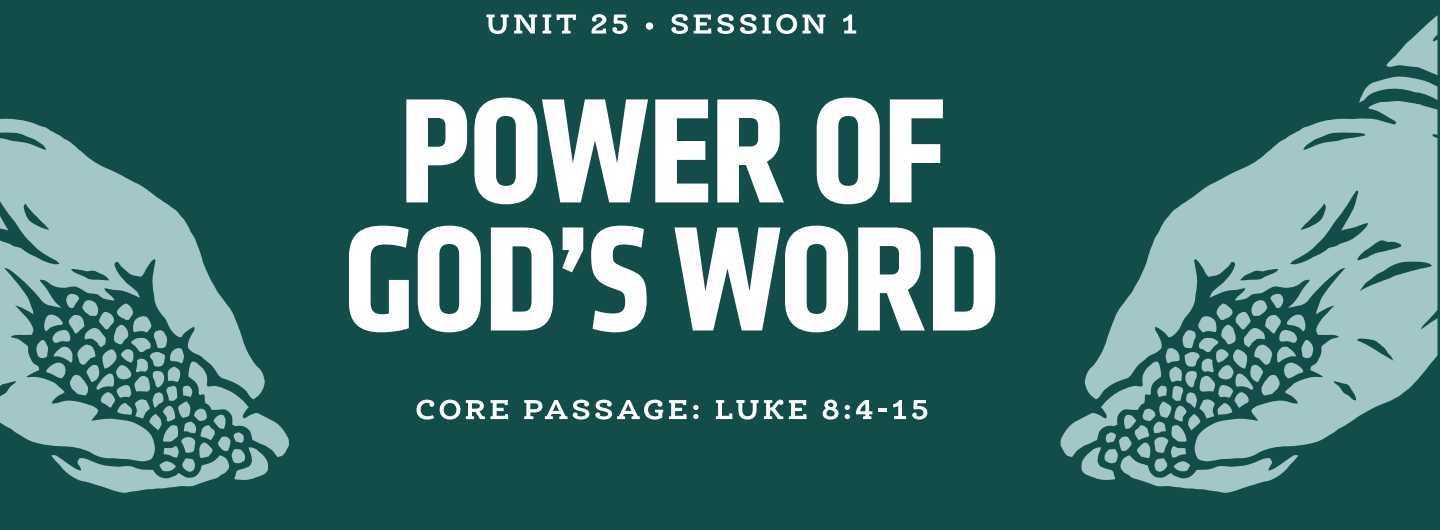


MEMORY VERSES

“He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Silence! Be still!’ The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Then he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ And they were terrified and asked one another, ‘Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!’”

—Mark 4:39-41





POWER OF GOD'S WORD

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 8:4-15

Context: Jesus traveled from town to town preaching the good news of the kingdom with His disciples. Jesus's preaching ministry was both the context and the subject of His parable of the sower. As Jesus traveled, He indiscriminately spread the seeds of the gospel far and wide. The four Gospels record a diversity of responses to Jesus's teaching: rejection, doubt, fear, joy, sadness, anger, and belief. In the parable of the sower, Jesus classified people's responses into four general categories as He illustrated the power of the Word and the danger of rejecting it.

Key Concept: Jesus taught the importance of receiving the Word and producing fruit from doing so.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Luke 8:1-8
- ☐ **Day 2:** Luke 8:9-15
- ☐ **Day 3:** Mark 4:1-9
- ☐ **Day 4:** Mark 4:10-12
- ☐ **Day 5:** Mark 4:13-20
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 81

If we truly seek God's wisdom, His truth will be revealed to us (Luke 8:4-10).

⁴ As a large crowd was gathering, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he said in a parable, ⁵ “A sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the sky devoured it. ⁶ Other seed fell on the rock; when it grew up, it withered away, since it lacked moisture. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns; the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good ground; when it grew up, it produced fruit: a hundred times what was sown.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.” ⁹ Then his disciples asked him, “What does this parable mean?” ¹⁰ So he said, “The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know, but to the rest it is in parables, so that ‘Looking they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”

Jesus Tested the Crowd

Large crowds are often viewed as evidence of a successful ministry, but Jesus recognized the gathering crowds as a teachable moment. While Matthew and Mark introduced this story with details of where Jesus was teaching (from a boat) and to whom (the very large crowd), the way Luke introduced the story emphasizes Jesus's motive: to test who was truly listening.

Luke opened the narrative by stating, “As a large crowd was gathering, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he said in a parable” (v. 4). In other accounts, the crowds were simply the audience, but in verse 4, Luke indicated that the crowd wasn't just listening to the parable, they prompted the parable.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

THEOLOGY Connection

ILLUMINATION OF SCRIPTURE:

Because of the vast difference between God's wisdom and ours and because of humanity's sinful state, human beings are incapable, on our own, of fully grasping spiritual truth without being aided by the Holy Spirit through illumination.

When it comes to understanding the meaning of God's Word, Christians do not rely ultimately upon human reason in interpretation, nor do we rely solely upon an institution or body of scholars. (cont.)

They were not merely the recipients of the story but the very subject that was being discussed.

The previous verses described Jesus's traveling through Galilee "preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of God" (v. 1). He was traveling with the Twelve and several women who had been healed from sickness and from evil spirits, namely, Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, Susanna, and others "who were supporting them from their possessions" (vv. 2-3). Having left their homes and livelihoods to travel around the countryside with Jesus, these devoted disciples must have been encouraged to see such large crowds following them. While the crowds certainly signaled Jesus's popularity, their arrival became the occasion for a test. Jesus received these crowds not as trophies of His success but as an opportunity to plant a seed.

As the crowd gathered, Jesus began by telling a parable of a sower who went out to sow seed for his crop, a common sight for an agrarian society. The soil of the region was predominately rocky, and many thorns could grow fairly tall.¹ But any perceptive farmer in the crowd would recognize that something was off about this story. Why would the sower scatter seed on the path? Why didn't he clear away the rocks and thorns from his field? If one wanted to learn how to farm, it would be better to listen to the prophet Jeremiah than Jesus: "This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: Break up the unplowed ground; do not sow among the thorns" (Jer. 4:3).

The sower in Jesus's story seemed careless. But Jesus wasn't teaching a lesson on how to be a farmer. He was describing how He sowed the truth of the gospel into the hearts of the very people who gathered

around Him. When you look at the seed and soils as the spreading of the gospel, it is actually a sign of God’s mercy that He “sows indiscriminately.” As Bruce Barton said:

The farmer knows that some of the soil is unproductive, but he willingly scatters the seed on it anyway. God is like this farmer, allowing his words and his love to fall on many who will not receive them. And yet he is still willing to pour out his mercies upon them. God knows the high potential of this seed. Christians sometimes tend to pull back from those who are uninterested or even just different—but God doesn’t.²

Like He did often in the Gospels, Jesus used a parable to make a point, but in this moment the crowd was enacting the parable. Even as Jesus opened His mouth to speak the truth, He knew that the enemy, like the birds eating the seeds on the path, was ready to pluck the seed from some of His listeners’ hearts. But He also knew that others would hear and seek the kingdom.

The seed Jesus plants requires more than superficial curiosity to survive, let alone thrive. While Jesus had a larger point to make, and plenty more parables to share about God’s kingdom, He purposely withheld the explanation here to sort out the curious from the committed. This story acted like a prescreening test for further teaching. Ultimately, Jesus wasn’t interested in the size of the crowd. He was looking at the condition of the people’s hearts. The parable of the sower wasn’t just a lesson about the kingdom of God; it was a test to see who really wanted to enter.

In verse 8, Jesus raised His voice to indicate the importance of the test: “Let anyone who has ears to

Notes

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Instead, a Christian’s ultimate reliance is upon the work of the Spirit of God, who illuminates the Scriptures in the heart and mind (John 14:15-18; 16:7-15).



hear listen.” The test was essentially multiple choice. The people in the crowd were already choosing their answers as they formed their opinions of Jesus’s words. Some likely would choose Option A: “This teaching makes no sense! This man doesn’t know the first thing about farming.” Others in the crowd would choose Option B: “This is so exciting! I like the story, but I’m really hear for the miracles.” Others would choose Option C: “I’d love to stay and ask what He is talking about, but I have too many pressing matters at home.” Their response to this one story would determine if they were curious spectators or committed disciples.

What does Jesus’s exhortation to listen tell us about Jesus’s desire for His audience?

Jesus Taught His Disciples Privately

Devoted disciples, who truly wanted to understand, would choose Option D: “What does this parable mean?” (v. 9). This simple question separated the committed from the curious. The people who sought out the truth had hearts that were receptive to God’s Word. Jesus rewarded His disciples by explaining His motive and His meaning when they asked for help understanding the parable.

The word “parable” refers to the act of placing one thing beside another in a comparison. Parables could come in the form of proverbial sayings or in stories. Jesus wasn’t the only one to use parables, but His were different from His contemporaries. Ancient rabbis would use parables as illustrations to moralize or to clarify a difficult concept in the Law, or Torah. Their parables often were self-explanatory. Jesus, on the other hand, often used parables to provoke interest



in the kingdom of God. He used familiar, everyday settings but frequently threw in a twist or a reversal of expectations. As with the parable of the sower, Jesus's parables often were left open-ended, forcing the listener to wrestle with the meaning.

Jesus drew a stark contrast between His disciples and the crowds who followed Him. He said, "The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know, but to the rest it is in parables" (v. 10). Remember that in Jesus's day, someone who wanted to be a disciple of a rabbi would seek out that rabbi. Yet Jesus had chosen—personally sought out—His followers (Luke 6:12-16). Just as discipleship was not something they sought on their own, the ability to understand the parables was also a gift from God. Barton said, "God had given this ability to understand to these disciples as a permanent possession, a distinguishing mark of discipleship."³ What a remarkable privilege to have Jesus as your Teacher and to have God's kingdom as the subject. The rest weren't in on the secret because they didn't care to ask nor had their hearts been readied to hear and believe. But anyone who really listened would know that Jesus wanted to share the mysteries of the kingdom with anyone who had ears to hear.

For churchgoers, it is easy to get distracted by the crowd size. Members of large, growing churches might be tempted to assume that large crowds equate to personal spiritual growth. Meanwhile, those in small or declining churches may despair, believing that low attendance means God is inactive. Both groups must realize that spiritual fruit is determined by the heart, not the headcount. Kingdom growth requires active rather than passive listening, wisdom that comes from pursuing a relationship with Jesus instead of church



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to see a comparative view of the parable of the sower in the Synoptic Gospels.

attendance. A wise, devoted disciple is one who has ears to hear and listens to the gospel, letting its roots sink deep into the heart, while listening to the One who is the source of all wisdom Himself—Jesus Christ.

How does the fact that wisdom must be sought in a Person change the way we approach Bible study?

God's Word needs to be heard and internalized for transformation (Luke 8:11-15).

¹¹ “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The seed along the path are those who have heard and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ And the seed on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and fall away in a time of testing. ¹⁴ As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit. ¹⁵ But the seed in the good ground—these are the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and by enduring, produce fruit.”

Jesus Explained the Parable

The meaning of Jesus's parable was different from His motive. Jesus spoke in parables to provoke further reflection and questions. Many of His parables screened out the skeptical or hard-headed. Once His disciples asked the meaning of the parable, Jesus provided the insight: “The seed is the word of God” (v. 11).

The Word of God is scattered with every sermon, every Scripture reading, and every gospel conversation. And here Jesus was proving Himself to be the master Sower as He spoke to the crowd. At this moment, He was doing something truly amazing. He was revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of God to anyone who actively listened. The Creator has always revealed Himself to His creation. But He also revealed to His disciples that the gospel doesn't go out into a welcoming world. Opposition to the gospel is real, and Jesus gave three situations to describe it. We can view these first three soils as three enemies of the soul.

According to Jesus, the soil of the path represents a hard heart. This person hears the word, but it stays surface-level knowledge, never sinking into the heart. The birds represent the devil, who snatches away the truth while it remains on the surface, keeping it from taking root. This dynamic goes all the way back to Eden. God spoke to Adam and Eve about their identity, their purpose, and their need to obey His commands. But an enemy—the serpent—appeared to snatch that word away with a single question to Eve: “Did God really say . . . ?” (Gen. 3:1). Had Adam and Eve understood what God said? Did God really mean they couldn't eat from the tree? Every sin and struggle in human history has flowed from this moment of hearing God's command but failing to listen to—to take to heart—God's Word. The path in Jesus's parable represents an unbelieving heart where the devil successfully steals the Word, leaving them unrepentant.

If the path represents those who hear and dismiss the truth, the rocky soil represents the shallow heart. These are people who initially receive the Word with joy. They get excited. They are like people who visit a

GOSPEL **Connection**

Scripture teaches us that Jesus is the way to salvation, and following Him by faith with the Holy Spirit will lead to true transformation.



church, sign up for three committees and a half-dozen events, and say, “This is just what I needed!” But a few weeks or months later, when the newness wears off, they are gone.

Notice that this seed withered away because it lacked moisture (Luke 8:6) due to shallow roots (v. 13). The time of testing mentioned in verse 13 could be anything, and Jesus doesn’t go into detail, but clearly such a person is one who yields to their own shallow desires. The fleeting emotion of joy quickly fades away to the passions and desires of the flesh.

The third soil represents a distracted heart. The seed here actually seems to grow up with the thorns. It survives the birds (the devil). It has more roots than the rocks (the flesh). But it never produces fruit. Why? Because it is choked out by the enticements of the world. Jesus defined the thorns as the “worries, riches, and pleasures of life” (v. 14). This person doesn’t necessarily reject Jesus. They just try to add Jesus to a life that is already too full. The life of the world grows faster than the life of the Spirit. The thorns draw all the nutrients out of the soil, leaving the spiritual life stunted and fruitless.

The apostle Paul summarizes these same spiritual conditions of the heart in Ephesians 2:1-3. Some have labeled these the three enemies of the soul: the world, the flesh, and the devil. Paul explained that before we were saved we were spiritually dead:

You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among

them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. (Eph. 2:1-3)

We all were children of wrath, opposed to Christ, before God in His mercy awakened our hearts to His goodness and mercy.

These forces are actively warring against the seed of the gospel (and have been ever since the beginning). Seemingly, a full three-quarters of the soils appear to be unviable. But the good news is the master Sower is also a master Gardener. He is able to “break up the unplowed ground” (Jer. 4:3). And believers have an opportunity to join Him in this work as we pray for those who are hard-hearted, have fallen away, or who are not producing fruit.

Which of these obstacles to receiving the gospel have you encountered in yourself or a loved one?

Disciples Endure and Produce Fruit

Finally, we come to the good soil. By God’s grace, this soil overcomes the three enemies of the soul. Notice the progression in a committed disciple’s life: they receive the Word (overcoming the devil), they retain the Word (overcoming the flesh), and they reproduce the Word (overcoming the world).

Unlike the path where the birds devour the seed, the one who has an honest and good heart receives the seed. This good heart is not based on being a good person or being more worthy than others based on good works. This good heart and good soil comes by the grace of God. In John 3:3, Jesus said, “Truly

Notes

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Will one in four of our hearers, with well-prepared hearts, receive the Word? The ground is described as ‘good’—not that it was good by nature, but it had been made good by grace. God had plowed it; he had stirred it up with the plow of conviction, and there it lay in ridge and furrow as it should lie. When the gospel was preached, the heart received it, for the man said, ‘That is just the blessing I need; mercy is what a needy sinner requires.’”⁴
—Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

**Voices from
THE CHURCH**

“We win the [spiritual] war for the Word when we look to bear fruit with patience (Jas 1:2-4). We’re not trying to rush into maturity or skip the things that produce growth. We just steadily read, believe, and apply the Bible, and let patience have its perfect work in our lives.”⁶
–Thabiti Anyabwile

I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This good heart is the result of regeneration, or being born again. The prophet Ezekiel spoke of God’s people as being sprinkled clean and receiving a new heart made of flesh rather than a heart of stone (Ezek. 36:26). In a new heart, doubt can no longer snatch away faith. Believers are able to receive the Word because the soil has been tilled and is ready for the seed to be planted.

Once they receive the Word, committed disciples retain the Word. They “hold on to it” (Luke 8:15). Unlike the rocky soil, the seed in the good soil has deep roots that provide stability and nutrients. They draw life from an unseen source. Rather than chase a feeling (the flesh), they draw life from the truth of God’s Word, prayer, and fellowship with other believers.

Along with receiving and retaining the Word, a committed disciple reproduces the Word. Unlike the thorny soil that gets choked by the cares of the world, the seed in the good soil allows the farmer to clear out the rocks and thorns, removing the distractions that conform us to the world instead of Christ. Though the process might be painful at times, we are pruned by the divine Vinedresser to bear fruit (see John 15:1-8).

This parable shifts our perspective from immediate results to patient seed sowing. Darrell Bock remarked:

Fruit is never a matter of an overnight exercise. It takes nurturing. Thus, Jesus’ teaching does not look at the reaction to God’s Word in a single moment but over a period of time, which may be why the planting analogy is used. . . . Jesus’ point deals with how response to the Word is a product of a process.⁵

Jesus wasn't looking for a crowd to boost His fame; He was looking for a crop of disciples who were faithful and fruitful. If you are a disciple, it is God's grace that you receive His Word, retain His Word, and reproduce His Word.

How should the expectation that some seeds will bear fruit motivate us to spread gospel truth?



HEAD

What are some ways we can keep God's Word in our mind and heart?



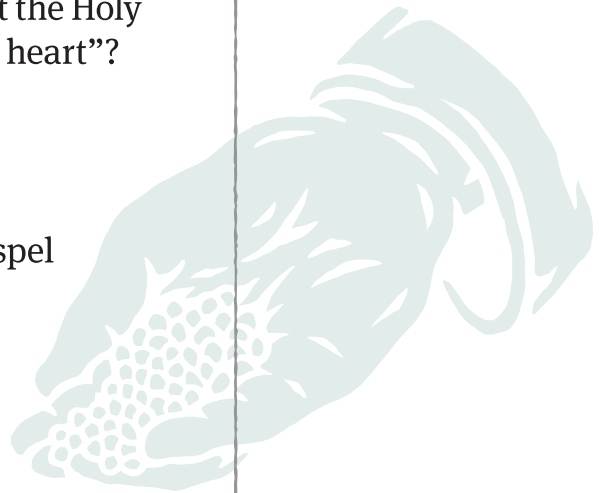
HEART

What evidence do you see in your life that the Holy Spirit has given you "an honest and good heart"?



HANDS

For whom will you pray and share the gospel this week?



References

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 229.
2. Bruce B. Barton et al., *Luke*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 197.
3. Barton, 199.
4. Charles Spurgeon, *The Spurgeon Study Bible: Notes* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1384.
5. Bock, 230.
6. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2018), 145–46.

POWER OF THE KINGDOM

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 4:21-34

Context: After Jesus taught and explained to His disciples the parable of the sower and the importance of letting the gospel sink deep roots into our lives, Jesus delivered several short parables about the kingdom of God. He again emphasized the importance of truly listening to His words and living out their powerful implications in the world. Jesus knew His kingdom would start off small in this world, but it also would grow and cover the whole earth.

Key Concept: The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: Mark 4:21-25 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 8:16-18 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 4:26-29 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 8:19-21 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 4:30-34 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 9 |

We are meant to reveal the message of the powerful kingdom of God (Mark 4:21-29).

²¹ He also said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed? Isn’t it to be put on a lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing concealed that will not be brought to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen.” ²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear. By the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and more will be added to you. ²⁵ For whoever has, more will be given to him, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” ²⁶ “The kingdom of God is like this,” he said. “A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day; the seed sprouts and grows, although he doesn’t know how. ²⁸ The soil produces a crop by itself—first the blade, then the head, and then the full grain on the head. ²⁹ As soon as the crop is ready, he sends for the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

The Gospel Illuminates

Today, if someone wants to start a movement or sell a product, they might buy ads or flood social media feeds. The marketing slogan “No news is bad news” confirms that most people want high visibility and exposure, even if it is negative. But Jesus is a King who operates differently in His kingdom. He didn’t seek validation from the crowds. He spent most of His time training a small group of disciples. But even those disciples wondered why Jesus would conceal His teachings with parables.

In Mark’s account of the telling of the parable of the sower, Jesus answered this question in verses 21-25.



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Notes

It is common sense that people typically don't put lamps under baskets or beds. Even to our modern ears in the age of electricity and LED lights, the idea is absurd. What would be the point of putting a light source beneath a basket or bed? The absurdity of Jesus's rhetorical question would've prompted the disciples to recognize their need to perk up and pay close attention (vv. 23-24).

Throughout the Bible, light is a metaphor for truth and revelation. John wrote that life was in the Word (Jesus) and that life "was the light of men" (John 1:4). But John also pointed out that darkness, a metaphor for sin, deception, and opposition to the truth, seeks to overcome the light (v. 5). According to John, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (v. 9). When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about His purpose for coming, He said that He did not come to condemn the world but to save it (3:16-17). Save it from what? From the sin that blinds us to the truth of Scripture. Jesus said, "This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (v. 19). Those who love the darkness seek to smother the light. But Jesus gave us hope: "There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing concealed that will not be brought to light" (Mark 4:22). Here, Jesus wrapped His teaching in parables in order to hide the truth from those who opposed it and to reveal it to whom it had been given. The lamp in verse 21 wasn't "brought in" with the intention of being put under a basket or a bed. The intention was to put it on a lampstand. But still, why would Jesus even temporarily wrap or conceal the light and the truth?

Think of a person walking across a room with a lit candle. They might cup their hand around the flame to temporarily cover the flame so that the movement across the room and the consequential air flow doesn't extinguish the flame. Once they get to the other side, however, they put the candle on a stand and allow it to provide light to the room.

Earlier we saw that one motivation for parables was to sift out the curious crowds from the devoted disciples. Here, another motivation for parables becomes clear. Jesus used the obscurity of His upbringing, the frequent commands to secrecy, and His puzzling parables to protect the light until it could be placed on the lampstand. Jesus strategically avoided trouble just long enough to remain out of the grasp of adoring crowds that wanted to enthrone Him and from jealous religious leaders who wanted to stone Him.

Jesus is the light of the world, but the goal of His incarnation was to get the light of the world to the lampstand. Ultimately, that lampstand was the cross. Once Jesus was “lifted up” (John 3:14-15), the “basket” was removed, and the light of His Person and purpose shined clear and bright for all to see who had eyes to see. Just as He said, once Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He would draw all people to Himself (12:32).

Before the cross and resurrection, the people with whom Jesus interacted had conflicting views of the Messiah. They wanted the Messiah to be a political revolutionary or to validate the place of the religious leadership. Jesus wisely kept His light flickering dimly until He could reach Golgotha, where He was crucified. For us today, this means we do not serve a God of secrets. The purpose of the light being “brought in” was so that it could be put on the lampstand. We serve

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“The point of Jesus’ analogy is clear: Those who have received the light of the gospel are not to conceal it; rather they are to let it shine for others to see.”¹

—John MacArthur
(1939–2025)



a God who has “brought to light” the mystery of the ages. We have the full revelation of God in Christ, and like the lamp in the parable, it would be foolish for us to cover it up. We are called to let this light shine in the darkness.

How are you putting the kingdom of God on a lampstand through your life?

The Gospel Compels Action

Once again, Jesus used the phrase “If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen” (Mark 4:23). In the Gospels, this phrase was always stated in the context of a parable. It was a way for Jesus to say things to the crowds in parables but also indicate to His disciples that what they were hearing needed further examination (Mark 4:9; Luke 14:35). Jesus said, “Pay attention to what you hear. By the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and more will be added to you” (Mark 4:24).

After providing His disciples with the illustration of the lamp, Jesus gave them further instructions on how to respond to His parables. They needed to listen up! In Luke’s parallel account, Jesus’s words were “Pay attention to how you hear” (Luke 8:18). Both “how” in Luke and “what” in Mark carried the same urgent weight. Jesus called His followers to actively listen. The crowds heard these parables and enjoyed the stories. But they stopped there. Jesus wanted His disciples to go beyond the surface-level understanding of the parable to the richness within it, to look at the parable like a gift to be unwrapped. The gift was available to anyone who would unwrap it, to anyone who would come to Jesus in humility for His insight. True disciples paid close attention to get the fuller explanation.

Imagine a child on Christmas morning who sees a pile of wrapped gifts. It would be tragic if the child looked at the pile and said, “Why did my parents wrap these boxes? I can’t see what’s inside, so I’m going back to bed.” Such a child would misunderstand the purpose of the wrapping paper. It isn’t a barrier meant to keep the child from the gift; it is an invitation to open the gift. It builds anticipation. It requires the excited child to come in close and start tearing and ripping the paper to get to the gift inside.

The parables of Jesus are the wrapping paper. The humanity of Jesus, His ordinary appearance, His carpenter’s hands, all of it, were like wrapping paper. Unfortunately, the crowds saw and heard the amazing miracles, the pointed teachings, and the interesting stories of Jesus, but they often walked away, either in confusion or disgust.

Jesus invited His disciples to tear into the wrapping paper. He wants us to look at the text and say, “There is truth here, and I am not giving up until I understand it.” Sadly, even as Christians, we sometimes hear Jesus speak, look at the text, and say, “Here’s what I want this to mean,” or, “It’s impossible to understand what this means.” If we barely get a distracted reading of God’s Word for five minutes every other Tuesday, then by that measure, that’s what will be added to our understanding. Our understanding of God, His will, His promises, His truth, and His power will be limited by what we “listen” to and how we hear it. We cannot blame God for our lack of spiritual understanding or spiritual power if we are bringing Him a tiny one-fourth cup measure to fill. “For whoever has, more will be given to him, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Mark 4:25).

The Gospel Grows the Kingdom

We now arrive at a parable that is unique to Mark's Gospel. It is a hidden gem, often overshadowed by the parable of the sower, but it also contains a profound comfort for anyone who seeks to serve God.

Here, Jesus shifted His metaphor slightly. In the parable of the sower, the focus is on the soil, which represents the condition of the hearer's heart when the gospel is presented—will he not receive it as it deserves, or will he receive it, hold on to it, and bear fruit with it? In this next parable of the agricultural process, the focus is on the power of the Word (the seed) and the sovereignty of God. In this parable, Jesus was not simply illustrating individual lives being transformed by kingdom truth but illustrating the fruitfulness of the gospel movement, which will result in a great spiritual harvest.

As in the parable of the sower, Jesus described a farmer who planted a seed, representing the work of witnessing, preaching, and even parenting as it relates to the spiritual nurture of our children. We believers are the sowers, following in the steps of the master Sower who first sowed the truth in our own lives. We share the gospel. But notice what happens next. With the seed sown, the farmer's role in the planting is over (Mark 4:27). The farmer cannot cause the growth. Jesus said: "The seed sprouts and grows, although he doesn't know how." He takes his hands off the process, yet he is confident that his planting will result in a harvest. Why? Because the power to produce life is in the seed.

The soil produces the crop "by itself" (v. 28). For a church planter, a weary pastor, or a parent praying

for a wayward child, this is one of the most reassuring words in the New Testament. The process of spiritual growth is spontaneous within the kingdom of God. We are responsible for the scattering. We are responsible for being faithful witnesses. But the miracle of regeneration is a work of the Spirit of God alone.

At times, all we might see is the “blade” or the “head,” but the results are not up to us. Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). The mention of sending for “the sickle” (Mark 4:29) is a prophecy of the coming kingdom and echoes the words of the prophet Joel: “Swing the sickle because the harvest is ripe” (Joel 3:13). Even now, the kingdom of God is growing, though it may be hard to see, or to wait. As disciples, we can take confidence and be patient, knowing that the harvest will come.

Jesus was teaching that the kingdom of God is moving toward a decisive conclusion. It may seem slow now. We may only see the “blade” (small beginnings) or the “head” (partial growth). We may get discouraged when we don’t see immediate fruit. But the kingdom is unstoppable. The seed is working underground. And one day, the harvest will come. The sickle will be sent for. God will gather His people and establish His rule fully and finally.

Our job is not to manufacture the harvest. Our job is to scatter the seed and trust the Lord of the harvest to do His supernatural spiritual work.

What role does the church play in the certainty of God’s coming kingdom?

THEOLOGY Connection

MISSION OF THE CHURCH: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

God's kingdom may have started small and humbly but will grow to be a blessing for all (Mark 4:30-34).

³⁰ And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it? ³¹ It’s like a mustard seed that, when sown upon the soil, is the smallest of all the seeds on the ground. ³² And when sown, it comes up and grows taller than all the garden plants, and produces large branches, so that the birds of the sky can nest in its shade.” ³³ He was speaking the word to them with many parables like these, as they were able to understand. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable. Privately, however, he explained everything to his own disciples.

The Gospel Spreads Beyond Expectation

The parable in verses 26-29, which we looked at previously, and the next one in verses 30-32 are both focused on the kingdom of God. If the previous parable focused on the secret nature of the growth, this final parable focuses on the shocking contrast between the beginning of the kingdom and its final fulfillment. This parable highlights the final, global impact of the kingdom of God.

A mustard seed is tiny. While it is not the smallest seed in the world, it was the smallest seed in the region of Judea during Jesus’s day.² Jesus’s use of the mustard seed for His parable emphasized the latent power contained by the seed—by the gospel. Jesus Himself was also like a mustard seed to some extent. He came out of relative obscurity. He was born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, a town of no reputation in Galilee and far from the centers of power. Jesus had no army,

no political office, and no wealth. He was followed by fishermen, zealots, a tax collector, and women. So, the mustard seed represented the obscurity of the kingdom of God, which was embodied in Jesus's life before He came into the public eye.

The mustard seed also represented the small band of followers, the Twelve, who would take the world by storm after Jesus's resurrection. The ragtag group of Jesus's followers ultimately "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) as they spread the gospel everywhere they went. From there, as people believed the gospel and spread it themselves, the seed would grow taller and broader, "taller than all the garden plants" (Mark 4:32).

Even today, the mustard plant can reach heights of 8 to 10 feet, becoming tree-like in its capacity. It produces branches large enough for "birds of the sky" to nest in its shade. These birds were almost certainly a deliberate Old Testament allusion. In Ezekiel 17:23, God promised to plant "a tender sprig" on a high mountain that would become a noble cedar, and "birds of every kind will nest under it." In Daniel 4:12, the Babylonian Empire was depicted as a tree in which the birds of the air find shelter. In these examples, the birds illustrated the various nations and kingdoms who would find refuge and support under the authority of another kingdom.

This is a massive promise. Jesus was saying that His kingdom, though it started small as a tiny Jewish sect in the shadow of the Roman Empire, would grow to become the shelter for people of all nations. The humble beginnings of the kingdom of God on earth will end with "a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could

PHRASE Study

KINGDOM OF GOD:

Jesus's miracles, preaching, forgiving sins, and resurrection ushered in God's sovereign rule. Jesus chose and sent out His followers with kingly authority (Matt. 28:18-20). Whether Jew or Gentile, those who trust in Jesus are transferred from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God (Col. 1:13).³

number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,” who is King Jesus (Rev. 7:9).

What are some blessings bestowed on those who find shelter in God’s kingdom?

Mark concluded this section of his Gospel by reinforcing the dynamic of curious crowds versus the devoted disciples (Mark 4:33-34). Barton stated:

Jesus spoke the *word* (that is, God’s message) to *them* (the crowds, including the disciples). In addition, this master teacher taught *as much as they could understand*. Jesus adapted his methods to his audience’s ability and desire to understand. He didn’t speak in parables to confuse people, but to challenge sincere seekers to discover the meaning of his words. Jesus knew that some of the “seed” he sowed would fall on good soil—i.e., people to whom God had given the ability to hear and believe.⁴

This is the final invitation of these parables. Jesus called His followers to dig deep into His words for the truth. Do not be satisfied with the crowd’s level of understanding. Eagerly seek to understand. Unwrap the gift. Bring a bigger measure. Consider it a great privilege that your Creator desires to reveal more of Himself, more of His truth, and more of His power to you!

How should our teaching model Jesus’s teaching, both in what we teach and in how we teach it?

CHURCH Connection

Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God, and we are blessed to have a part in revealing the message of His kingdom, seeing God’s glory grow.

Key Concept: The kingdom of God may start small but will be revealed and grow in power.



HEAD

What are some dangers of misinterpreting and misapplying God's Word?



HEART

What obstacles or distractions keep you from desiring God's kingdom and God's Word, and how will you address those?



HANDS

How will you point people to God's kingdom through your words and actions this week?

Notes

References

1. John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 213.
2. Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 117.
3. Peter Gentry and Stan Norman, "Kingdom of God," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 988.
4. Barton, 118.





POWER OVER NATURE

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 4:35-41

Context: Jesus taught in parables to a large crowd of people by the Sea of Galilee. Using the natural amphitheater-like acoustics of the lake, He sat on a boat near the shore while the crowd listened. That evening, Jesus decided that He and His disciples should cross to the other side of the sea in the boat, taking time to rest after a long day with the crowds. A powerful storm broke through the calm night, however, testing the disciples' faith in Jesus. Who indeed was this Man whom they had left everything to follow?

Key Concept: We can have faith in Jesus because He is God, sovereign over all things, including nature.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: Mark 4:35-41 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 8:22-25 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 5:1-13 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 8:26-39 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 5:9-20 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 44 |

Jesus is not anxious about what we are anxious about (Mark 4:35-38).

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he told them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.” ³⁶ So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great wind-storm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?”

Jesus Slept in the Storm

Storms disturb us, whether they are the kind made of wind and waves or of folly and fear. Storms may be self-inflicted through our own sinful or foolish decisions. Other storms arise because of doubts and distress. Still other storms seem to come with no rhyme or reason. These storms of life may come suddenly and unexpectedly, or there may be a slow churning underneath the surface of our lives.

The storms of life often produce fear in us. But if we truly discover the identity of the One who is present with us in the storm, these trials of life can also produce faith. Everyone wants a calm home and peaceful relationships free of conflict. We hope for a stable economy and sound business dealings. Death and disease and disaster are unwelcome visitors that we wish we didn’t have to endure, and yet, every trial we experience becomes an opportunity for us to see Jesus for who He truly is.

Several of the disciples were seasoned fishermen who spent much of their lives on the Sea of Galilee.



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Notes

PLACE Study

THE SEA OF GALILEE: At almost 700 feet below sea level, the Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. Surrounded by steep mountains and hills, it can encounter powerful wind events when the cool air from the higher regions rushes down upon it, producing violent winds and waves.

They knew how a fierce storm could whip down through the mountains and turn the bowl-shaped lake into a washing machine on the “heavy duty” cycle. If these fishermen panicked at the storm in Mark 4:37, then the tax collector and others among them probably panicked as well. The boating experts confirmed “we’re going to die” (v. 38), not “we might die.”

But as the waves battered the boat and the water began to swamp it, Jesus continued to sleep. After a long day of teaching and ministering to the crowds, Jesus was exhausted. He had done His work and told His disciples, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea” (v. 35). And then He snuggled up in the stern with a comfy pillow. But wouldn’t He have felt the violent rocking of the boat? As Bruce Barton said:

How Jesus could sleep during this storm indicates his complete exhaustion and reveals his human nature. That the noise, the violent rocking of the boat, and the cold spray of the water didn’t awaken him gives us a glimpse of the physical drain on Jesus throughout his earthly ministry.¹

Jesus felt all the exhaustion that we feel when we push ourselves beyond our physical limitations. He sympathizes with us when the ministry, career, household, or education that He has called us to overwhelms us. We can turn to Him for rest and renewed energy.

Yet Jesus wasn’t sleeping simply because He was tired or because He trusted the skill of His disciples. More importantly, Jesus trusted in His Father’s sovereign care. Jesus knew that His own work was in accordance with His Father’s will. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my

own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Daniel Akin said, while Jesus is human, “He has complete trust in the providential care of His Father. The veteran seamen may be terrified, but the Carpenter from Nazareth sleeps soundly.”² As long as Jesus was doing the Father’s will, He had nothing to fear.

In the storms we face as believers, fear often grows when we step out of God’s will or when our self-interest distracts us. In those instances, the storms could be of our own making—consequences of our sin—or they could be tools the Lord uses to guide us back to where we need to be. Serving God and others in whatever capacity we have been given doesn’t always prevent storms, however. While Jesus experienced the full gamut of human emotions, He never sinned in word, thought, or deed. Jesus clearly was not facing this storm due to any sin He had committed that needed correction. Jesus and His disciples had experienced a long, fruitful day of ministry, and now they were clear on the next step. Yet they still encountered a terrifying storm. Jesus was able to sleep knowing that God’s purpose would be accomplished in Him and through Him.

How can the fact that Jesus is fully man bring comfort to us during times of difficulty?

Jesus’s sleeping in the boat also alludes to the story of Jonah in the Old Testament as a greater illustration of the whole redemptive plan of God. Mark’s account strongly echoed the story of Jonah. Jonah was a prophet during the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the Lord had commanded him to go to Nineveh, the capital of an enemy nation, and preach a warning of their destruction so that they would repent. Jonah didn’t want to go because he didn’t want

the Ninevites to be shown mercy. Instead, he got onto a ship headed the opposite way, thinking he could run away from his calling. In Jonah 1:4-5, we read:

But the LORD threw a great wind onto the sea, and such a great storm arose on the sea that the ship threatened to break apart. The sailors were afraid, and each cried out to his god. They threw the ship's cargo into the sea to lighten the load. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down to the lowest part of the vessel and had stretched out and fallen into a deep sleep.

Jonah needed a wake-up call. Jonah actively resisted God's will, and God wanted to wake him up to that fact.

Jesus, on the other hand, was running with God. His sleep was an exhaustion from doing what was right. He was tired, but it was a good tired. He had a clear conscience and a calm soul (Pss. 3:5; 4:8). He slept because He trusted God completely. And He slept because in His humanity, Jesus is the newer and greater Jonah, who gladly brought the good news of salvation to His enemies, reconciling them to God (Rom. 5:6-10).

Sometimes storms are a gracious course correction, as in Jonah's case. At other times, Scripture simply shows us suffering as part of life in a fallen world. Every storm we face provides an opportunity for believers to look to Jesus for strength.

The Disciples Panicked

In the moment, the disciples were not comforted by Jesus's presence in the boat with them. In fact, they seemed to think He did not care that they were going

to die. They may have been frantically bailing water, trimming the sails, and doing everything they could to stay afloat. And Jesus was sleeping. Their failure to recognize who Jesus is caused them to panic.

By calling Jesus “Teacher” (Mark 4:38), they showed respect for Him as their rabbi and as the One they had left everything behind to follow. But they did not yet see Him as the Son of God. Instead, they saw His role. Jesus spent the day teaching. Several of the men in the boat were fishermen. The Teacher had said, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.” And then He entrusted Himself to their care.

But now there was a reversal. The fishermen in their panic asked the Teacher to be a specialist in their work. This expectation further shows us our frail human condition. Jesus is human. Of course, with respect to His deity, He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. In His humanity, Jesus accepted real limits—He would not be everywhere at once or do every task Himself. That reality modeled a healthy human dependence on others.

Throughout Scripture, other humans show their limitations in leadership, in work, and in relationships. Moses is a good example of someone who was trying to do everything. His father-in-law, Jethro, showed him how to let others handle some of the leadership load (see Ex. 18:13-26). Today, pastors often get overwhelmed because they feel like they should do all the ministry rather than equip others (Eph. 4:11-12). Husbands and wives struggle at home to set limits or to divide responsibilities. Parents run themselves ragged trying to get it all done for their kids. Then when a storm comes, we shift blame or expect someone else to handle our crises.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“The ship carried his humanity, but the power of his Godhead carried the ship and all that was in it.”³

—Ephrem the Syrian
(c. 306–373)

It was not wrong that the sailors turned to their Teacher. It was tragic that they expected from Him only what a mere man could offer. They didn't come to Him in recognition of His divine power. In addition to underestimating Jesus's identity, the disciples also did not recognize His love for them. This is the mistake we often make when the storms of life push us toward doubt. We believe God's silence and our suffering to be confirmation that He just doesn't care about us. We think He isn't speaking to us, but how often is it really us who have stopped listening to Him?

The truth is we don't know why we must go through trials. Looking back at the story of Job, we read of God's power to send the wind and the waves:

The windstorm comes from its chamber, and the cold from the driving north winds. Ice is formed by the breath of God, and watery expanses are frozen. He saturates clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. They swirl about, turning round and round at his direction, accomplishing everything he commands them over the surface of the inhabited world. He causes this to happen for punishment, for his land, or for his faithful love. (Job 37:9-13)

Job 37:13 describes several causes for the swirling wind and the crash of lightning. It could be for punishment, it could be for God's land, or it could be for God's faithful love. Or at times it could be for all of the above. The truth is we live in a fallen world, yet one still ruled over sovereignly by the Lord. And God has proven His love for us by sending His Son. Jesus, in His full humanity, being in the boat with the disciples physically was evidence of a God who cares.

The disciples misunderstood Jesus's identity, and they doubted His love. But they also envisioned their storm as the worst-case scenario (Mark 4:38). Many times we don't recognize what God is doing in the storm. He is leading us from point A to point B in His timing. He is providing the resources we need: a church family to fellowship with us in our sufferings and to help bear our burdens, the Spirit of God to illuminate the path and guide us by His Word, and our Savior who provided an eternal hope. When we have the Prince of Peace in our boat, then that "worst-case scenario" is never eternal.

This is not a suggestion to look at life through rose-colored glasses or to ignore trials. But it is a reminder to trust that even if it is the worst-case scenario, God is there and has already promised He will bring you to the other side.

How can you ensure that what you believe about God on sunny days does not unravel on stormy days?

Jesus controls all things, so we can trust Him in all things (Mark 4:39-41).

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" ⁴¹ And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

THEOLOGY Connection

JESUS'S DEITY:

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). (cont.)

The Creator Awoke

In verses 35-38, Mark emphasized Jesus's humanity. Jesus was tired. He slept. He shared in our limitations. Jesus knows what it's like to have human limitations. He knows what it is like to be worn down. But verses 39-40 reveal a deeper and even more comforting thought. The same Jesus who was sleeping, now got up. Jesus didn't get up to bail water or to teach the fishermen how to sail a vessel. He rose to reveal who He truly is.

Jesus got up the way God gets up when it's time to reveal Himself to His people. Recalling the story of the exodus, we read of the people being mistreated and suffering under Pharaoh's rule. God saw their misery, heard their cries, and recognized their suffering. The Lord said:

I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Ex. 3:7-8)

God sees our misery. He hears our cries. He knows about our sufferings. And He comes down to rescue us and bring us home. Later, the psalmist described God's coming to Israel's aid as God rousing from slumber, not because God Himself sleeps but as a metaphor for His decision to act according to His perfect will (Pss. 7:6; 44:23; 59:4; 78:65).

Jesus's sleep was a powerful confirmation of His humanity. Jesus's getting up was a powerful

confirmation of His deity. And as God, Jesus is sovereign over all things, including nature. So when Jesus got up, He got up as Creator and Lord. And Mark said that Jesus “rebuked the wind” (Mark 4:39).

By commanding the wind and the sea to be silent and still, Jesus commanded His own creation to obey. The chaos didn’t gradually settle. At Jesus’s rebuke, there was “a great calm.” All things were created “by him . . . through him and for him” (Col. 1:16). Jesus didn’t need to ask anyone for permission to calm the storm. He did it as a revelatory act of His person as the Second Person of the Trinity. So Jesus didn’t need permission to calm the storm. Jesus spoke, and the wind and the sea obeyed instantly.

Then Jesus turned from rebuking nature and rebuked unbelief. He said to His disciples: “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40). The storm exposed their weakness, their doubt, and their sin. Like the storms we face, we often miss the lessons that can come in the storm. We spiral out of control in our anxiety and doubt. But Jesus revealed that there is something we should learn from the storm. There is a deeper problem that the storms of life expose.

God has sovereign control over the storms of our lives. He sees the temporal circumstances and how, in our own efforts, we are barely able to stay afloat. But He recognizes a greater need in our lives. He sees our sinful misery and our rebellion. More than the storms, our lack of faith is the bigger problem that needs addressing.

Why does Jesus’s divine nature demand a response from each of us?

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

The Disciples Marveled

If the disciples feared a powerful storm, they were even more terrified by the One who had the power to command the storm. In the Gospels, Jesus's self-revelation to His disciples and to the world unfolded in stages. So the disciples asked one another, "Who then is this?" (v. 41). This is the right question. Mark invited the reader to answer it. The miracle was not merely calming a storm, it was about the disciples witnessing Christ's identity. When we see Jesus more clearly, even in the storms of life, everything changes. We don't need control over everything. We need to trust Jesus who controls all things.

Again, Jesus is truly human. God came "in the flesh" to accomplish something much greater than rescuing His disciples from temporary windstorms. Jesus demonstrated His love by going to the cross. Jesus was brutally executed, died, and was placed in a borrowed tomb. If anyone knew human suffering, it was Jesus! But even more, by dying on the cross, Jesus fully absorbed the furious storm of God's wrath that we deserve because of our sin. Our greatest need was satisfied in the suffering, death, and resurrection of the God-man, Christ Jesus (Heb. 4:15-16).

And then, after His death, Jesus got up! Jesus rose on the third day. He is the greater Jonah who did not run from the Father's will but willingly laid down His life on our behalf. Jesus, in His obedience, went to the cross and rose again. After providing rescue and hope, Christ Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father and continually intercedes for you and me. The sovereign God of the universe invites us to cast "all your cares on him, because he cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

CHRIST Connection

Jesus demonstrated His deity by calming the storm. As God, He is omnipotent and sovereign over all.

What is the relationship between faith in Jesus and fear regarding our circumstances in life?

Notes



HEAD

How would you answer the disciples' question about Jesus: "Who then is this?"



HEART

How would you answer Jesus's question to the disciples: "Why are you afraid?" What threatens your faith today?



HANDS

What are some ways you can provide comfort and support for those who are fearful of or suffering under the effects of this fallen world?

References

1. Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 121.
2. Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 99.
3. Ephrem the Syrian quoted in Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark* (Revised), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 61.





POWER OF HEALING

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 8:41-56



Context: Jesus and His disciples sailed across the Sea of Galilee to the predominantly Gentile region of the Gerasenes. After Jesus cast demons from a man into a herd of pigs, the people there asked Him to leave. Jesus and the disciples then returned to the Galilean side of the lake, where a crowd awaited His return. The crushing crowd's needs and expectations heightened the urgency of the moment as two people captured Jesus's attention. One was a respected leader of the local synagogue and the other was a woman who was ceremonially unclean—yet their stories intersected when they met Jesus.

Key Concept: Faith assures us that Jesus, as God, has the power to heal and resurrect.

DAILY READINGS

- ☐ **Day 1:** Luke 8:40-48
- ☐ **Day 2:** Luke 8:49-56
- ☐ **Day 3:** Mark 5:21-34
- ☐ **Day 4:** Mark 5:35-43
- ☐ **Day 5:** Mark 6:1-13
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 4

Faith assures us that Jesus can heal
(Luke 8:41-48).

⁴¹ Just then, a man named Jairus came. He was a leader of the synagogue. He fell down at Jesus's feet and pleaded with him to come to his house, ⁴² because he had an only daughter about twelve years old, and she was dying. While he was going, the crowds were nearly crushing him. ⁴³ A woman suffering from bleeding for twelve years, who had spent all she had on doctors and yet could not be healed by any, ⁴⁴ approached from behind and touched the end of his robe. Instantly her bleeding stopped. ⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you." ⁴⁶ "Someone did touch me," said Jesus. "I know that power has gone out from me." ⁴⁷ When the woman saw that she was discovered, she came trembling and fell down before him. In the presence of all the people, she declared the reason she had touched him and how she was instantly healed. ⁴⁸ "Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

A Woman Had an Urgent Need

Powerlessness is not something anyone volunteers to experience. In Luke 8:41-56, two people ran out of options: a respected synagogue leader and a nameless woman. Together, their stories offer insight into how fragile our sense of control really is. Their stories redirect our hope from quick fixes to eternal hope.

The first person Mark introduces is a man named Jairus, "a leader of the synagogue" (v. 41). His name and title immediately marked him as an important figure in town. He was undoubtedly a man of status,



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



religious influence, and financial means. Yet Jairus was powerless to help his own twelve-year-old daughter. She was dying, and his position and influence could not heal her. Desperate, he fell down at Jesus's feet and begged Him to help her.

Even as Jesus was walking with Jairus to his home, an unnamed woman made her way through the crowd. Unlike Jairus, we do not know this woman's name or her status in society. Instead, we learn about her chronic condition: She had been bleeding for twelve years and spent all of her money on doctors to no avail. Mark's account of the story indicated that all of her treatment only made the situation worse (Mark 5:26).

As a woman, she already was on the lower end of the social spectrum compared to Jairus. He was known and respected, whereas she was invisible and likely avoided. Jairus had a voice in the synagogue, the community's social and spiritual hub, but she would have been unwelcome as her bleeding made her ceremonially unclean. According to the laws of ceremonial purity, a woman with a discharge of blood was considered unclean as long as the bleeding continued (Lev. 15:19-27). She was not even supposed to be in the crowd in case she accidentally touched someone and made that person unclean too. Yet she dared to sneak behind Jesus to touch His garment, believing she would be healed (Mark 5:28). She was a picture of both helplessness and hopelessness as she endured twelve years of disappointment and isolation.

Yet this synagogue leader and the woman were linked. There's no indication they knew one another. But the text reveals that Jairus's daughter was twelve years old, and the woman had suffered for twelve years. The daughter's entire lifetime was the span of

the woman's suffering. Their stories intertwined, however, on this day in the presence of Jesus. In His presence, status is leveled. The man with everything and the woman with nothing stood on the same ground with desperate need, and Jesus was able and willing to meet both of them to demonstrate His compassion and His power.

There are individuals and families like this in our communities today. Some people seem to have it all together and are models of respectability and influence. Others keep to themselves and may even be quietly avoided. Yet chronic illness or mental health struggles can afflict both rich and poor. Sin, regret, abuse, and addiction can be found in any family. Regardless of what they are going through, some might find it too humiliating to open up and share. But many people, perhaps even you, are suffering silently and need help.

Jesus demonstrated kingdom power and compassionate authority that reaches every kind of sinner and sufferer equally. Like Jesus, we must see the inherent dignity in all image-bearers so that we can offer help in times of need.

How have you experienced hope in Christ in the midst of a hopeless situation?

Jesus Addressed the Greater Need

When the woman touched the edge of Jesus's robe, her bleeding stopped immediately (Luke 8:44). Jesus also stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" (v. 45). Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of people pressing in on every side. Many people had probably touched Him or bumped Him as He walked along. But Jesus

was drawing attention to something different. In the middle of all the casual contact and religious curiosity, there had been a deliberate act of hopeful desperation. Bruce Barton said of this:

What a difference there is between the crowds that are curious about Jesus and the few who reach out and touch him! Today, many people are vaguely familiar with Jesus, but nothing in their lives is changed or bettered by this passing acquaintance. It is only faith that releases God's healing power. Jesus must be more than a curiosity.¹

In this instance, Jesus was able to tell that power had “gone out” from Him (v. 46). Luke often emphasized power as a sign of Jesus's spiritual authority, using it more than a dozen times in relation to Jesus's ministry. For example, in Capernaum, the crowds said: “What is this message? For he commands the unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out!” (4:36). Whether it is casting out demons or healing the sick, Jesus's power was evidence of an in-breaking of the kingdom. This wasn't a random use of energy; it was the power of the King at work in His domain.

Yet this does not mean that divine power is at our disposal if only we generate faith. Scripture never presents God's power as something we can control by using the right technique or by believing hard enough. The focus is not on the perfection of the woman's faith but on the Person in whom she placed her faith.

With the crowds, the disciples, and desperate Jairus looking on, Jesus scanned the crowd for the one who touched Him with hopeful desperation. Verse 47 states that the woman “came trembling and fell down before

him. In the presence of all the people, she declared the reason she had touched him and how she was instantly healed.” She admitted to the touch and testified to being healed instantly.

By calling her out, Jesus was not intending to shame or embarrass the woman. And He didn’t do this to get a pat on the back or even a thank-you. Instead, He called her forward to restore her to society, to correct her superstitions, and to provide eternal salvation.

First, Jesus restored her publicly. He called her “Daughter” (v. 48). This is the only time in the Gospels that Jesus used this term directly to address an individual woman. In front of everyone, Jesus affirmed that a woman who had been pushed to the edge of society for a little over a decade now belonged. For twelve years her condition defined her. Now, a single word from Jesus reshaped her identity. There may be some in our church communities who have been labeled “divorced,” “an addict,” or “a failure” for past actions. They need to hear that they belong, that they matter.

The woman’s subsequent confession that she touched Jesus could easily have sounded like an admission of wrongdoing. Instead, Jesus turned her confession into a public declaration of cleansing. He removed her shame and reinstated her in society.

Next, Jesus helped the woman see the truth of what she had experienced. Touching Jesus’s garment did bring healing, and the woman surely would’ve been happy if that was all she received that day. But by calling her out, Jesus helped the woman separate superstition from faith. If Jesus hadn’t stopped her, she might have gone home thinking there was something magical about the hem of Jesus’s garment. By stopping the crowd and addressing her personally, Jesus redirected

THEOLOGY Connection

FAITH: Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one’s life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

her attention from His hem to Himself. It was her faith in Jesus that healed her. Jesus corrected any confusion she (or others) might have had about her healing.

But the grace of God extended more deeply than just correcting superstitions and reinstating in society. Jesus said: “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (v. 48). This was astonishing and not something she asked for, expected, or deserved. This was grace upon grace. Left to herself, she would’ve just slunk away into the crowd. She had already been made well physically, but Jesus took the initiative to offer her salvation.

The term translated “saved” can also mean “made well” or “delivered.” The term is used in Luke’s Gospel to describe the saving of life (6:9) or being delivered from demon possession (8:36). Most often, though, the word is paired with “faith” or “belief,” and in those instances, there is a clear spiritual dimension. Here, Jesus linked it directly to her trust: “Your faith has saved you” (v. 48). Then Jesus went a step further and told her to “go in peace.” As Barton said:

The words “go in peace” are more literally “go into peace.” With this healing, Jesus gave this woman her life. Her cure was permanent. Jesus wished her peace of both body and soul—renewed health for her body and eternal salvation for her soul.²

But how could this woman be “saved”? This “salvation” occurred before Jesus had died for sins and risen from the grave. Before the cross, people were still saved by faith in a promise. After the cross, salvation is by faith in a person. This woman experienced salvation as a bridge between the covenants, embodying old covenant faithfulness even as she touched the

WORD Study

SAVED: The Greek word “saved” means to save a suffering person from perishing or disease. The woman experienced more than physical healing as Jesus’s conversation with her reveals. Her faith in Jesus also resulted in her spiritual salvation.

garment of the One who would fulfill their promises. Her faith was credited to her as righteousness.

Now she lived a new life of faith in Jesus, the Son of God. Though she didn't yet know of His coming death and resurrection, when she went to the synagogue or the temple in Jerusalem, she would do so in faith in the Lord who had made her well both physically and spiritually. She came to Jesus with an urgent need, but Jesus met her deepest need: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

What things keep you from confessing publicly what Christ has done for you?

Faith assures us that Jesus can resurrect
(Luke 8:49-56).

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house and said, "Your daughter is dead. Don't bother the teacher anymore." ⁵⁰ When Jesus heard it, he answered him, "Don't be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved." ⁵¹ After he came to the house, he let no one enter with him except Peter, John, James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵² Everyone was crying and mourning for her. But he said, "Stop crying, because she is not dead but asleep." ⁵³ They laughed at him, because they knew she was dead. ⁵⁴ So he took her by the hand and called out, "Child, get up!" ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and she got up at once. Then he gave orders that she be given something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astounded, but he instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“If you have been praying long, and your case appears to be hopeless, despair will whisper, ‘Trouble not the Master.’

But Christ is never troubled by our prayer; it is our want of prayer that troubles him. Even after the worst has come to the worst, we shall never trouble him if we continue our prayers. But if, on any account, we cease from them, then indeed is his heart grieved.”³

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

Jesus Restored Dwindled Hope

While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, a messenger from Jairus’s household arrived with news that dashed Jairus’s hope: “Your daughter is dead. Don’t bother the teacher anymore” (v. 49). Though this would be the second time Jesus raised someone from the dead and the report of the first miracle had spread “throughout Judea and all the vicinity” (7:17), it’s possible that Jairus may not have known about it or he had thought all hope was lost now that his daughter died.

Imagine things from Jairus’s perspective. He was hurrying home, but Jesus stopped to help someone else. The miracle Jesus performed for her may have evoked even greater confidence for Jairus that Jesus could do the impossible, but then he got word that his daughter died. Could they have made it in time if Jesus had not stopped?

How should we re-evaluate our understanding of urgency and interruptions in light of these two accounts?

Sometimes in our greatest heartaches, another believer experiences joy. It’s hard to celebrate someone else’s pregnancy announcement if you’ve recently suffered a miscarriage. It’s hard to rejoice for someone whose cancer is in remission when you’ve just been diagnosed. It can even be hard to be happy when a member of your church leads someone to Christ when your loved one just told you they want nothing to do with Him.

Paul’s exhortation in Romans 12:15 to “rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep” is not an either/or but a both/and. We don’t have to suppress our emotions and put on our happy faces. A believer

suffering a terrible loss has no obligation to put on a smile and act like nothing happened. But that suffering believer needs a word from Jesus.

That's exactly what Jesus did next. Before Jairus walked away, Jesus offered these encouraging words: "Don't be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved" (Luke 8:50). Jesus caught the woman before she could slip away into the crowd, and He caught Jairus before he could slip into despair.

Here, yet again, "belief" is coupled with "saved." Jairus was desperate for his daughter to live, but Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus most certainly could raise the girl from the dead, but He was more interested in offering this family eternal life. And once this family encountered the resurrection power of Jesus, they would be changed forever.

When the group of Jesus, the disciples, and Jairus arrived at the house, they were confronted by the mourners. With all authority, Jesus put everyone out of the house. He entered this environment of despondency and finality and said, "Stop crying, because she is not dead but asleep" (v. 52). Jesus was not denying the reality of her condition; He reframed it from the perspective of the kingdom. Death looks final to human eyes, but to Jesus and His followers, it is a temporary sleep from which He will awaken His people.

That kind of perspective sounds like nonsense to unbelievers. The mourners present in the house responded to Jesus through their tears with derisive laughter. This is the only time in the Gospels when people laugh directly at Jesus. It was bitter, cynical laughter. They knew what death looked like. And according to them, all hope was lost.



**CHRIST
Connection**

Jesus demonstrated His divine power by healing and resurrecting others. His power to physically heal and resurrect points to His power to spiritually heal and resurrect souls.

Jesus Restored Life

Jesus used the metaphor of “sleep” intentionally. For the believer, death is not final, and that’s because with Jesus, in whom there is life (John 1:4), death is defeated. Death is a temporary state from which we will be awakened.

Jesus must have awakened some hope in the girl’s parents. His disciples had already seen Jesus raise one other person from the dead. Jesus knew that there is a time and place for grief, but it was not this time. So Jesus, the Creator of all, spoke. He said, “Child, get up!” (Luke 8:54). The same voice that spoke creation into existence. The same voice that brought order out of chaos. The same voice that had calmed the wind and the waves. Jesus has the power to speak and bring what was dead to life.

The next two things Jesus said in this text might seem insignificant next to a resurrection. First, Jesus “gave orders that she be given something to eat” and then “instructed them to tell no one what had happened” (vv. 55-56). The “tell no one” command occurred elsewhere in the Gospels for various reasons. Sometimes the crowds were getting out of control and Jesus needed to lay low. Other times the crowds misunderstood Him, and He wanted to withhold further information until after the resurrection. Here, though, it was different. The crowds outside and in the community would soon see the living girl anyway. The secret wasn’t going to last long.

Jesus’s real focus was the girl’s well-being and the immediate next steps for her parents. Giving orders that she be given something to eat showed practical compassion. She’d been through death and back, and

now she needed to resume normal human interactions before all the onlookers outside surrounded the family with questions and astonishment. Telling others could wait. Jesus was modeling true *shalom*, true peace, total well-being for body and soul. Faithful witness flows from renewed strength and peace.

Why is “sleep” a true and comforting metaphor for the death of a believer in Christ?



HEAD

What influences in your life lead you toward doubt?
What influences lead you toward faith?



HEART

How do fear and faith influence your approach to Jesus for the things you need and the relationship you desire with Him?



HANDS

Whom will you tell this week about what God has done for you through faith in Him?

References

1. Bruce B. Barton et al., *Luke*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 221.
2. Barton, 224.
3. C. H. Spurgeon, “A Welcome for Jesus,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 44 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1898), 516.

Notes



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 26

THE TRUTH OF HIS ACTIONS



MATTHEW; MARK; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.’”

—John 11:25-27





JESUS PROVIDES



CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 14:13-21

Context: Each Gospel writer told the story of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit inspired them to put their own unique emphasis on it. Mark focused on the action. Luke focused on detailed, eyewitness accounts. Matthew narrated Jesus's life by alternating between a specific event and teaching. Matthew 14 begins with John the Baptist's disciples informing Jesus of his execution at the command of King Herod. Jesus then withdrew to a desolate place, presumably to grieve, but the crowds followed Him. Instead of frustration, Jesus responded with compassion, and the people witnessed His power to provide.

Key Concept: Jesus is always able to provide for His people beyond what is needed.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: Matthew 14:1-12 | ☐ Day 4: Mark 6:30-44 |
| ☐ Day 2: Matthew 14:13-21 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 13:1-35 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 6:14-29 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 100 |

**Jesus acts with compassion and love
in healing and providing for His people**
(Matthew 14:13-17).

¹³ When Jesus heard about it, he withdrew from there by boat to a remote place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns.

¹⁴ When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd, had compassion on them, and healed their sick. ¹⁵ When evening came, the disciples approached him and said, “This place is deserted, and it is already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” ¹⁶ “They don’t need to go away,” Jesus told them. “You give them something to eat.” ¹⁷ “But we only have five loaves and two fish here,” they said to him.

Jesus’s Compassion Motivated His Actions

What Jesus heard about in verse 13 wasn’t only the death of John the Baptist but also that Herod had heard about Jesus’s ministry. Herod even feared that Jesus was a resurrected John the Baptist (vv. 1-2). The text doesn’t dwell on Jesus’s reaction, but His movement was telling. He departed from the populated areas and went to a remote place to be alone. Jesus clearly recognized the danger of the situation.

But we also should remember that John held an important place in Jesus’s life and ministry. John was a relative, forerunner, and friend. It’s not a stretch to think that grief may also have been part of Jesus’s desire to be alone with His disciples, which reveals that faithful obedience can make room for sorrow.

Their solitude was short-lived, however. Word spread quickly of Jesus’s location, and people hurried along the shoreline to the same destination. As Jesus



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Notes

WORD Study**HAD COMPASSION:**

The Greek verb used for “had compassion” in Matthew 14:14 means “to be moved in the inward parts.” More than pity, the feeling motivated Jesus to heal and feed the crowd (14:14; 15:32) and to heal the blind (20:34; cf. 18:27).¹

and the disciples approached land by boat, it became clear that rest would have to wait. A large crowd was already there.

Think about who made up the “crowd” in Matthew, which is different than the “crowd” in the Gospel of John. For John, the crowd was curious but shallow. The people who came to Jesus were consistently attracted to benefits more than the truth. They often were a test case for false belief. But Matthew portrayed them as sheep without a shepherd. They were deeply needy and easily influenced. They were reachable and teachable (Matt. 7:28-29; 9:36; 15:32).

Notice the combination here. These hungry, desperate, and curious people met Jesus at a place where He and the disciples were exhausted. Matthew didn’t press that point quite as sharply as Mark (Mark 6:31), but it was still there. Jesus and His disciples needed this alone time. Yet Jesus responded with compassion.

Jesus did not rebuke the crowd for being needy. He responded from a place deeper than physical exhaustion or sorrow. His compassion moved Him toward people when it would be reasonable for Him to pull away. The word Matthew used for “compassion” points to a visceral response (Matt. 14:14). Jesus was moved in the depths of His being.

This same word was used in Matthew 9:36: “When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.” In Matthew 9, Jesus’s compassion moved Him to encourage His followers to pray for more workers for the harvest, and then He empowered and commissioned the twelve disciples for ministry. In Matthew 15:32, Jesus said: “I have compassion on the crowd, because they’ve already stayed with me

three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, otherwise they might collapse on the way." The word appears in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:27 and then once more in Matthew 20:34: "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Him."

Time and again, whenever Jesus had compassion on the crowd, it was immediately followed by action on their behalf. Jesus was not begrudgingly serving the needy. His ministry was not driven by spectacle, public demand, or even obligation. It was driven by love. That is what true compassion does.

What challenges keep you from showing compassion like Jesus?

Jesus Called His Disciples to Serve

Have you ever heard the phrase "God will never give you more than you can handle"? What would the disciples think about that phrase when Jesus confronted them with the problem of feeding over five thousand desperately hungry people? The situation was absolutely more than they could handle.

This is an important lesson. Jesus's compassion is always going to be greater than our strength. And the needs of the people will always be greater than our resources. When we try to accomplish God-sized goals in our strength, that can be an exhausting formula and explains why many believers burn out.

To Jesus's compassion and instruction, the disciples put forward one solution to fix the problem in verse 15: "Send the crowds away." They were not trying to be cruel, just practical. They saw the sun going down,



and they did the math on what it would take to feed these people. From their perspective, it simply was not possible to feed these hungry people. The responsible thing to do would be to release the people while they still had time to find a meal for themselves.

Matthew didn't present this as panic or even frustration on their part. It was calm, orderly, and sensible. But you also may notice the disciples tried to direct Jesus. "Send the crowds away" wasn't a suggestion; they told Jesus what He should do.

On a handful of occasions in Scripture, others addressed Jesus with direct commands: Martha told Him to tell her sister to help (Luke 10:40); a man in the crowd told Him to settle an inheritance dispute (12:13); the mother of James and John told Him to grant her sons places of honor (Matt. 20:21).

If we look closer, we see a pattern emerge. In each situation, someone felt a loss of control in a meaningful area of their life, such as order, fairness, or security. And that's what happened here with the disciples. In an honor/shame culture, it would have induced shame to be a host without food for guests. In the disciples' minds, it was far better for Jesus not to put Himself in that position.

We also see in each of these situations that responsibility was transferred upward. None of these people were trying to solve the problem themselves. In Matthew 14, the disciples did not take it upon themselves to send the crowd away. They told Jesus to intervene decisively. It's the same with the other examples. But underneath these requests was the assumption that the speaker already knew what Jesus "should" do. Jesus was treated as a means to resolution and not the revealer of reality. Just like the disciples, when

anxiety rises and responsibility feels costly, we are prone to direct Jesus toward the outcome that feels safest, rather than trust Him.

It shouldn't be difficult to imagine this kind of pressure. Just picture your church hosting a community fish-fry. You anticipate five times the number of people that attend on a Sunday morning. Thankfully you've got a few deacons who are going to catch the fish for the event. An hour before the big event, they bring their "catch"—it's two meager fish and five loaves of bread from the local grocery store. People are already standing outside awaiting entry to your event. Do you feel anxious yet?

Jesus would not be directed by His disciples of the first century, nor will He be by those in the current century. He gave the disciples His own imperative: "You give them something to eat" (v. 16). If Jesus intended to feed the community, He would do it. And obedience demands we swing the doors open wide and invite the community. Even if, as the disciples informed Jesus, "we only have five loaves and two fish here" (v. 17).

In other words, Jesus gave the disciples way more than they could handle. His response to their problem didn't resolve it; it actually deepened it. The crowd was still there. The place was still remote. The disciples did not have what they needed to fulfill Jesus's command. What was Jesus doing here?

The disciples needed to learn the lesson of the loaves. This was the same lesson that Israel had to learn in the wilderness with the manna. In fact, this same lesson goes all the way back to the garden of Eden. And Jesus Himself faced this test in His own temptation (see Matt. 4:1-11). When we don't have what we need, will we trust God to provide?

Voices from THE CHURCH

"Jesus is preparing the disciples for his absence (Luke 9:37-43). The day is coming when he will give them—as he gives us—another impossible task: to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations (24:45-49). . . . The impossible task was not only completed, but was over completed! And those twelve disciples are now two billion disciples and counting."²

—Tim Chester

THEOLOGY Connection

STEWARDSHIP:

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matt. 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matt. 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). (cont.)

The disciples were looking inside themselves for the answer, and they came up empty. They didn't have what it took to fulfill Jesus's command to feed the people. But Jesus did.

What might having eyes of faith mean for your present reality?

Jesus can provide above and beyond what we need (Matthew 14:18-21).

¹⁸ “Bring them here to me,” he said. ¹⁹ Then he commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them. He broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ²⁰ Everyone ate and was satisfied. They picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces. ²¹ Now those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus Multiplied What Little They Had

In verse 18, Jesus took what the disciples had. He then commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass. He took the meager resources, blessed them to show that the provision came from God's hand, broke the loaves, and gave the pieces to the disciples. But then notice this: “The disciples gave them to the crowds” (v. 19).

Many people compare this event of Jesus providing bread “from heaven” with God's provision of manna while the Israelites wandered in the wilderness (see Ex. 16). While that comparison reveals Jesus's divine power, the people in the wilderness were responsible for collecting the manna themselves based on their faith in God to provide (vv. 17-20). In

Jesus's miracle in this passage, He provided the bread and the crowds were the recipients of His blessing, but they were not active participants.

Another Old Testament allusion that probably fits this event better would be Elisha's provision for the people in 2 Kings 4:42-44. During a famine (v. 38), a man came to Elisha with the firstfruits of his grain harvest (v. 42), which may have coincided with the Feast of the Harvest (Ex. 23:16) that later became known as Pentecost because it took place five weeks after Passover. Elisha told his servant to give the bread to the people, but the servant balked. Here's what happened:

But Elisha's attendant asked, "What? Am I to set this before a hundred men?" "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said, "for this is what the LORD says: 'They will eat, and they will have some left over.'" So he set it before them, and as the LORD had promised, they ate and had some left over." (2 Kings 4:43-44)

Jesus's miracle here was more than just a nice potluck for hungry people. It was a common belief among the Jews that the Messiah would repeat the miracles of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha on a larger scale.³ Later, Jesus rebuked those who wanted a repeat of this miracle as proof that Jesus is the Messiah (see Matt. 16:1-12; cf. John 6:28-36).

Why do you think Matthew wanted his readers to remember these stories from Israel's history?

Who fed the crowds? *Jesus* isn't a wrong answer because without Jesus's miraculous ability to multiply what they had, they'd only have five loaves and two fish. But who served the fish? Who served the bread?

Notes



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to view the details each of the Gospel writers gave to the feeding of the five thousand.

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Prov. 3:9), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), sacrificially (Matt. 12:41-44), humbly (Matt. 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.

It was the Twelve who went and distributed the meal to the people who were seated.

It's important not to miss this point. Jesus performed a miracle, but the disciples got to engage in the ministry. They got to go through family to family, passing out the food. You have to wonder what they were thinking each time they dipped their hand into the basket. At the beginning you can imagine they probably were fearful they'd hit the bottom and run out of resources. But somehow all of these people ate until they were satisfied.

You may feel the same way about reaching your community with the gospel. As you look at all the need around you, probably within your own family, you wonder how your "five loaves and two fish" is going to cut it. In our hands, it won't. But five loaves and two fish surrendered to Jesus, bowing to His compassion and given in mission, that can get you somewhere.

Be sure to notice the imperative in verse 18. The disciples displayed their meager rations, and Jesus commanded that they give those to Him. It's easy to pass over this little detail in the text. I suppose we could argue that the disciples could have been overwhelmed with the shame of their paltry contribution and refused to obey. Or they could have decided that they'd arm wrestle over the rations and divide it amongst themselves—forgetting the crowd.

Jesus, however, called the disciples to stewardship, and He calls us to stewardship too. Stewardship is giving whatever you have (no matter how meager) and placing it in Jesus's hands. Motivated by God's generosity to us, we give Him the best of our time, energy, and resources sacrificially, humbly, and cheerfully so God may be glorified in and through us.

Understanding this scene as a lesson in stewardship also keeps us from a significant misstep we could make with this story. The point isn't merely that anything in the hands of Jesus can do more than in our own hands. While true, that's also the kind of thinking that would lead someone to tell Jesus what to do. The lesson of the loaves isn't about us; it's about the identity and sufficiency of Jesus.

For those of us living in a culture that is saturated by consumerism, a message like this could be dangerous. We could think that this is teaching us that trust in Jesus will help us multiply our resources—how much money we have in the bank, the size of our house, or our returns on our investments. But that's not the main point of this passage. It's not about how to turn your five loaves into five thousand. And that's true whether we're talking about money or ministry.

Jesus was not positioning Himself as a strategy for growth or a mechanism for productivity. He was revealing Himself as sufficient in Himself. That's why the question that lingers over this passage is this: Will we trust God to accomplish His purposes with His resources or will we trust what we bring to the table? Do we trust our resources or His?

Jesus Satisfies Beyond Our Expectations

Psalms 78 recounts Israel's disobedience in the wilderness. Verse 19 highlights their skepticism about God's provision: "Is God able to provide food in the wilderness?" That same question was hanging over Jesus in this story. Could He set a table in the wilderness? It's interesting to think about the supplies of the disciples. John's Gospel states a young boy supplied the loaves and fishes (John 6:9). The disciples likely had

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus is a provider,
providing salvation
from sin and death.

**Voices from
CHURCH HISTORY**

“One basket for each apostle: . . . This was to manifest and magnify the miracle, and to show that the provision Christ makes for those who are his is not bare and scanty, but rich and plenteous.”⁴
—Matthew Henry
(1662–1714)

nothing, probably planning on fending for themselves or depending upon hospitality.

And what kind of meal did the Messiah set before the people? Was it just enough to scrounge by or was it enough to satisfy? Matthew gave us the answer: “Everyone ate and was satisfied” (Matt. 14:20). In Scripture, satisfaction is more than having basic needs met. It speaks of fullness and rest—something which God alone gives. God “fill[s] the hungry with good things” (Ps. 107:9) and satisfies His people “with [His] faithful love” (90:14). Jesus is the embodiment of this provision that leads to satisfaction.

Matthew noted that after everyone had eaten, the disciples “picked up twelve baskets full of leftover pieces” (Matt. 14:20). This was not accidental excess. Jesus provided abundance after satisfaction. The disciples started with nothing and ended with a basket each. That number was also intentional. Twelve was the number of tribes in Israel, and the twelve baskets signaled Jesus’s provision was enough for the whole people of God. The Messiah wasn’t just feeding a random crowd, He was feeding Israel in the wilderness, ultimately answering the question of Psalm 78.

Yet the deepest hunger on that hillside was never physical. The crowd could eat and be satisfied for the evening. Bread is able to quiet stomachs for a night, but it can’t address the deeper problem of sin. By feeding the crowd, Jesus was not only compassionately providing for their needs, He revealed the kind of Savior He is. He meets real, tangible needs, but He never stops there. Jesus would one day give His own body for us. He would be broken so that others might be made whole. Jesus provides peace with God and life everlasting.

The feeding of the five thousand, not counting the women and children present, invites us to look at our own hunger and whom we trust for satisfaction. This miracle of provision points us to Jesus, who offered Himself as the true bread of life, able to save completely all who come to Him in faith.

How have you experienced satisfaction in Christ?



HEAD

What are some needs that you should entrust to God's care?



HEART

What keeps you from trusting God to provide for all your needs?



HANDS

How will you make yourself available this week to be used by God to meet the needs around you?

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JESUS OVER CREATION

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 14:22-33

Context: Jesus's popularity surged when He miraculously fed over five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. Unsurprisingly, the crowds wanted more of Jesus. To experience some much needed silence and solitude in the wake of John the Baptist's death, Jesus dismissed the crowds and retreated to a mountain by Himself after having sent His disciples on a boat across the Sea of Galilee. What happened next led the disciples to fear and then worship Jesus as the Son of God.

Key Concept: Because Jesus can do all things, we don't need to be afraid when following in His steps by faith.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Matthew 14:22-36 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 14:15-24 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 6:45-56 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 14:25-35 |
| ☐ Day 3: Luke 14:1-14 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 46 |

With Jesus, we need not fear
(Matthew 14:22-27).

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone. ²⁴ Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. ²⁵ Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ Immediately Jesus spoke to them. “Have courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Jesus Was Anchored by Prayer

The feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21) ends with everyone satisfied in a peaceful scene. It’s jarring, then, when Matthew says that Jesus “immediately . . . made” the disciples get into a boat (v. 22). Mark was fond of using “immediately,” but Matthew used it sparingly. So when we see it in Matthew, it usually signals intentional decisiveness.

The word Matthew used for “made” also means to compel, to force, or to constrain by necessity. It’s the type of word you’d find when there’s some resistance or when obedience runs against natural instinct. Why would Jesus hurry the disciples along? Shouldn’t they bask in the victory of this miraculous feeding?

This would be like a coach sending his team to the locker room after a big win, instead of letting them celebrate the victory, while the same coach dismisses all the fans. It seems contrary to what you’d expect. We get



Scan this QR code
to access this session's
Scripture passages.

Notes

a clue, though, as to why Jesus did this in the Gospel of John. John stated the crowd intended “to come and take him by force to make him king” (John 6:15). The crowd understood that Jesus’s miracle meant He is the Messiah, but they misunderstood what that meant. Their enthusiasm actually was a threat to His mission. Jesus did not come to be crowned by popular demand. His crown would come through the cross.

Connecting this story with the details in John helps Matthew 14 make more sense. Jesus removed the disciples from the situation to protect them from the crowd’s misplaced fervor. Furthermore, this troublesome situation drove Jesus to prayer. Prayer was Jesus’s response to the pressure of misplaced expectations.

Place yourself in Jesus’s position for a moment. He just had a huge ministry success. As humans who are prone to enjoy the praise of men, we may not have been aware of the danger of the moment. We might simply have basked in the accolades and accepted the crown. But Jesus saw the danger. Spiritual victory one moment rocked into the reality of living in a broken world the next.

If you’ve ever been in a similar situation, you know that you need an anchor. Jesus had several options in this moment. He could have fed off the enthusiasm of the crowd. He could have kept the disciples with Him and drew strength from their companionship. Jesus could have shooed the crowds and the disciples away and gone to bed. But He didn’t do any of these things. Jesus understood that “man must not live on bread alone” (Matt. 4:4) and knew that His anchor is always the Father. Jesus was steadied by prayer.

This pattern appeared repeatedly in the Gospels. In moments of intensifying opposition, before decisive

turns in His ministry, or before suffering, Jesus turned to prayer (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 3:21-22; 5:15-16; 6:12-13; 9:18-22, 28-36; John 12:27-28). If this was true of the Lord Jesus, how much more should this be a pattern for our lives as His followers?

Matthew emphasized that Jesus spent time alone with the Father by stacking two expressions: “by himself” and “alone” (Matt. 14:23). Matthew wanted us to see that Jesus found solace in time with His Father. Prayer is the answer to trouble.

The Disciples Were Battered at Sea

While Jesus was on the mountain praying, the disciples once again faced a perilous storm. Matthew mentioned the disciples were “some distance from land” (v. 24). More specifically, John said that they’d gone 25 to 30 *stadia* (John 6:19), a *stadion* being about 600 feet, which would have put them roughly in the middle of the Sea of Galilee.

The disciples were being battered by the waves and facing a strong head wind. Many of the disciples were experienced fishermen, so they had faced storms before. But Matthew wanted us to note their strain and exhaustion. They were making progress but painfully so. Keep in mind that this was only a few hours after their exhausted plea to send the crowd home. They were already spent before they had gotten into the boat.

It’s also important to note that Matthew did not mention the disciples crying out to Jesus. In Matthew 8, they cried out for the Lord to save them. But Jesus wasn’t physically in the boat with them this time. In fact, they didn’t even anticipate Jesus’s arrival. Why would they? He was on the mountain. They were on

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Even when he was asleep in the boat in the previous situation, he was ready to give them relief from danger. But then he was present to them. Now he is leading them into a greater degree of challenge. . . . This was all for their training, that they might not look for some easy hope of preservation from any earthly source.”¹

—John Chrysostom
(c. 347–407)



the sea. From their perspective, Jesus was absent, and whatever help He might have offered surely seemed inaccessible to them.

But “very early in the morning,” Jesus came to them (Matt. 14:25). “Early in the morning” is literally the “fourth watch of the night,” placing this scene somewhere between three and six in the morning. The disciples had been rowing for quite some time now. But all of that difficult rowing took a back seat to how Jesus came to them.

Matthew, rather matter of fact, said that Jesus came to them “walking on the sea” (v. 25). He didn’t explain the mechanics, only that Jesus was walking on top of the water. When the disciples saw this, they were terrified. They believed Him to be a ghost. And then we read that the disciples were afraid, not of the wind and waves but of the One walking on the water.

What circumstances can cause you to experience fear?

Mark’s parallel account included an interesting phrase that said Jesus “wanted to pass by them” (Mark 6:48). In the Old Testament, “passing by” was often associated with a theophany (an appearance of God that revealed His majesty). Job used this language when he spoke of God’s unsearchable greatness: “If he passed by me, I wouldn’t see him; if he went by, I wouldn’t recognize him” (Job 9:11). In that same chapter, Job declared that God alone “treads on the waves of the sea” (9:8). Jesus, walking on the water, was doing what Job attributed to God Himself.

This story, then, isn’t only about a rescue; it’s fundamentally about revelation. Jesus was showing Himself to be God. The disciples were terrified because they

thought He was a ghost. Yet their fear shouldn't have been terror but holy reverence. The God who walks on water is not safe, manageable, or controllable.

Whether they knew it or not, this event displayed a great chasm between the disciples and their friend Jesus. The same chasm appears in Job 9. Job understood that God is too majestic, too holy, and too powerful for him, so he wished a mediator could “lay his hand on both of us” (v. 33). The disciples didn't quite understand all of this yet, but Jesus's next tender words to them show us that He is that Mediator whom Job longed for. Jesus would bridge the gap.

When Jesus said, “It is I” (Matt. 14:27), He used the same language of the Lord's divine disclosure in Exodus 3:14—“I AM.” But notice that Jesus connected His identity to words of comfort—“Have courage! . . . Don't be afraid” (Matt. 14:27). The “I AM” has become Immanuel, God with us. If He can solve our greatest problem—mending the separation between God and man because of our sin (Isa. 59:2)—then what can stand between us? Why should we fear anything (storms, ghosts, sickness, job loss, infertility, persecution, death) when the I AM is with us?

Why could Jesus tell the disciples to not be afraid?

With faith focused on Jesus, we can walk as He walked (Matthew 14:28-33).

²⁸ “Lord, if it's you,” Peter answered him, “command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the

THEOLOGY Connection

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT: God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me!”³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.³³ Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Jesus Called Peter out of the Boat

Matthew gave a detail here not found in the other Gospels—Peter walked on the water too. Special details should always cause us to pause and think about how they contribute to the story God uniquely told us through Matthew’s writing. How did this little vignette of Peter walking on water relate to Matthew’s overall purpose?

Throughout his Gospel, Matthew was deeply concerned with discipleship. He was concerned with not only identifying Jesus as Messiah but also showing us what it looked like to follow Him. Peter often served as a picture of what that looks like. Peter’s walking on water showed how Jesus’s calling results in and enables faithful obedience. Similarly, Matthew noted:

- Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Jesus when He called (4:19-20).
- Jesus commanded the paralytic to rise and take his stretcher, and go home, and he obeyed (9:6-7).
- Jesus told the man with the withered hand to stretch it out, and it was restored (12:13).

Peter had witnessed this pattern firsthand in his walk with Jesus. Jesus’s past miracles gave Peter confidence to say, “Command me to come to you on the water” (14:28). Peter knew that if Jesus commanded

him to come, then obedience—even walking on water—was possible.

Peter's actions fit how Matthew consistently portrayed him in the Gospel. Peter often acted first, spoke first, and stepped forward before grasping the full implications of a situation. He was a “first responder” disciple. He was quick to respond to Jesus, even when his faith was still forming. A few chapters after this incident, Peter would confess Jesus as the Christ but then follow it up by horribly misunderstanding the nature of Jesus's mission (16:13-23). That was Peter. He's the guy who stepped out of the boat, walked on the water, and then sank when he turned his eyes away from Jesus.

At this point, Peter likely wouldn't have been able to put together a well-formed theology of the person and work of Jesus. But he understood enough to know that if Jesus called him upon the water, he could do it because of Jesus's power. Peter also understood that Jesus was inviting him to live by faith in that power.

This is where Matthew's concern with discipleship comes into full view. To follow Jesus is not simply to admire His power from a safe distance, nor is it to attempt great things through personal resolve. We are called to respond to His commands as He enables. Peter's steps on the water, brief as they were, illustrate both the power of Jesus and the call to obey that power.

If you're united to Christ by grace through faith, that same power that enabled Peter to walk on water resides in you. When Jesus calls us, He doesn't abandon us to our own limitations. He gives us His power to follow in His steps.

What does faith in Jesus look like for you today?

CHRIST Connection

Jesus's divinity makes Him all-powerful, able to do all things. He invites us to live by faith in His power.



Faith in Jesus Holds Fast in Storms

John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is known today as one of the heroes of the faith. But he didn't always think that of himself. At one point in his life, Bunyan was plagued by doubts. These doubts held such weight that Bunyan wondered if he could ever be forgiven. When he went to the Scriptures for comfort, he'd read difficult passages like Mark 3:28-29 or Hebrews 6:1-8. Bunyan was certain that he was going to sink under the weight of his sin. Sinking is an appropriate metaphor when it comes to doubt.

In Matthew 14:29, Peter was walking on the water in obedience to Jesus. But in verse 30, Peter's eyes moved away from Jesus and onto the wind, and then his water-walking adventure was over as he began to sink beneath the waves.

What's interesting is that the wind had not calmed down when Jesus walked on the water. The wind was still howling, but the disciples were captivated by Jesus walking on the water. When Peter first stepped onto the water, his eyes were fixed upon the Savior. The wind had always been there. In verse 30, however, Peter noticed the wind once more.

When his eyes moved off of Jesus and onto the wind, Peter sank. Matthew didn't present Peter as having total unbelief. Even as he sank, Peter cried out to Jesus. His prayer, as you might expect, was short and desperate: "Lord, save me!" That is faith in its most basic form. Peter knew who alone could help him.

Jesus's response was immediate. He reached out His hand and grabbed Peter. He rescued Peter before any hint of rebuke. He didn't wait for stronger faith from Peter or clearer understanding. The simple "Help



me” was enough to provoke the Savior to act. Only after securing Peter did Jesus ask: “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31).

This question was not meant to scold Peter but to teach him. The problem wasn't that Peter had a lack of faith, it was that his faith was divided. Peter trusted Jesus enough to step out of the boat but not enough to keep his eyes fixed on Him. This is a microcosm of the picture we see throughout the Gospels of the faith of the disciples. They were not characterized by unwavering confidence but fragile faith that needed to be sustained by Jesus Himself.

This is good news for us. It shows us that the security of salvation doesn't rest on our ability to maintain perfect focus but on Jesus's willingness to save us even when we falter. The key part of Peter's faith wasn't its strength but rather its object—Jesus Himself.

This also was the lesson John Bunyan learned. He tells his story in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. One day he was walking in a field and this statement came upon his mind: “Your righteousness is in heaven.” He said:

But one day as I was passing into the field, . . . suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, “Your righteousness is in heaven.” I thought I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There was my righteousness. Wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me that I lacked His righteousness, for that was ever before Him. Moreover, I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse,

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“That faith and doubting may at the same time have their residence in the same soul. ‘O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’ (Matt 14:31). He saith not, O thou of no faith! but, O thou of little faith! because he had a little faith in the midst of his many doubts.”²

—John Bunyan
(1628–1688)

for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, “the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away. From that time those dreadful Scriptures of God quit troubling me; now I went home rejoicing for the grace and love of God. . . . It was glorious to me to see His exaltation and the worth and prevalence of all His benefits. Because now I could look from myself to Him, I would reckon that all those graces of God that now were newly on me were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their purses when their gold is in their trunks at home. Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home, in Christ my Lord and Savior. Now Christ was all—all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.”³

Finally Bunyan’s eyes were fixed on Jesus and His finished work. And with this, Bunyan gained security.

When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, then “the wind ceased” (Matt. 14:32), and the miracle was followed by worship. This was the first time the disciples collectively confessed Jesus as the Son of God. By ending this scene with worship, Matthew drew the reader into the proper response. Jesus is not merely a miracle worker who assists in a crisis. He is the Son of God, worthy of worship and trust. Faith, rightly understood, is not self-generated strength but a posture of dependence. True faith always leads to worship of God.

This again is great news for us today. Faith will waver. Fears will intrude, our focus will drift, and

doubts may come. But our salvation does not depend on the steadiness of our grip on Jesus; it depends on the certainty of Jesus's grip on us. Faith that is focused on Jesus will bring confident hope.

What are some ways we can grow in our faith in Jesus?



HEAD

How does this story help you grasp the deity and humanity of Jesus?



HEART

Looking at the trials in your life, what barriers to faith and obedience are keeping you from following Jesus more closely?



HANDS

What might God be calling you to do with your faith and focus on Jesus?

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1. John Chrysostom quoted in Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14–28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 11.
2. John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome, to Jesus Christ*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 288.
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Notes





JESUS HEALS



CORE PASSAGE: MARK 7:24-37

Context: In Mark 7, Jesus journeyed to locations most Jews would not step one toe in. The regions of Tyre and Sidon were Gentile territories. The Decapolis too was comprised of ten Greek cities. These places, and the people in them, would have been viewed as unclean and therefore avoided by Jews. Mark, however, highlighted Jesus's perspective that differed greatly from the traditions of mere humans. Even in this stage of His ministry, Jesus was revealing His fulfillment of the law, and that meant correcting people's understanding of what was clean and unclean.

Key Concept: Jesus's willingness to heal all people points to His desire to bring salvation to all people.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Mark 7:1-37 | ☐ Day 4: Matthew 16:1-28 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 8:1-38 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 15:1–16:31 |
| ☐ Day 3: Matthew 15:1-39 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 117 |

Jesus's message of salvation, hope, and healing is for both Jew and Gentile
(Mark 7:24-30).

²⁴ He got up and departed from there to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, but he could not escape notice. ²⁵ Instead, immediately after hearing about him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she was asking him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, because it isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she replied to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he told her, "Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ When she went back to her home, she found her child lying on the bed, and the demon was gone.

Jesus Went to Tyre

When we read that Jesus went into the region of Tyre, we shouldn't think of this as Jesus just traveling from one city to the next. Think of this more like a Yankees fan wearing their pinstripe jersey into a Boston sports lounge or wearing Tennessee orange to an Alabama game. Jesus was in "enemy" territory.

Tyre was a Gentile stronghold with a long history of hostility toward Israel. Tyre was connected to wicked Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31). Ezekiel 26-28 was dedicated to condemning Tyre. The prophet Joel indicated the people of Tyre sold Israelites into slavery (Joel 3:4-6), and the prophet Amos condemned them for violating "a treaty of brotherhood" and delivering



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

entire communities over to Edom (Amos 1:9). As you can see, even sports rivalries don't do justice to the depth of real animosity between Tyre and the Israelites.

Tyre was not the kind of place where one would expect Israel's Messiah to minister. In fact, Mark didn't even reveal what Jesus was doing there. It doesn't appear that He was intending to do ministry because we're told that He "entered a house and did not want anyone to know it" (Mark 7:24).

While Mark didn't tell us Jesus's intention for being there, we do get a clue as to why Mark included this story at this place in his Gospel. Just before this story, Jesus locked heads with the Pharisees and scribes over their understanding of purity and defilement. Jesus challenged their assumptions about what made someone clean or unclean before God. It was not by accident, then, that Jesus immediately left Jewish territory to enter the region of Tyre. Having just redefined what truly defiles a person, Jesus now stepped into a place that many Jews would consider unclean.

In this defiled location, an "outsider" woman came to Jesus with a desperate need. Her little girl was possessed by an unclean spirit (v. 26). Everything in this passage screams that she was an outsider, but she didn't care about any of that. Her daughter needed rescue, and she knew Jesus could cast out the demon.

Pause and think about how Jesus responded in similar situations. What would you expect next? You likely would expect something similar to what you read in Mark 5 with the demon-possessed man or even Jairus's daughter. You expect Jesus to provide help. You expect rescue. But that's not what happened at first. Jesus seemed, dare we say it, rude.

This might be one of the few times in the Gospels where what Jesus said would have received applause from the religious leaders of His day. His words to this pagan woman would have sounded reasonable and just to Jewish listeners. The Messiah's blessings were expected to belong to Israel, and Gentiles were viewed as being outside the circle. The Messiah wasn't expected to rescue them, He was expected to crush them, as Psalm 9 taught:

The nations have fallen into the pit they made;
their foot is caught in the net they have concealed.
The LORD has made himself known;
he has executed justice, snaring the wicked
by the work of their hands. . . . The wicked will
return to Sheol—all the nations that forget God.
(Ps. 9:15-17)

The Jews would have expected the Messiah to go to such a wicked place, call them all dogs, cast judgment upon them, and then leave. And that is, at first glance, what Jesus seemed to be doing here. Yet the larger point was that Jesus was communicating a living parable. By His words and actions, He was helping His audience understand something deeper.

The first step to understanding this parable is to acknowledge that what Jesus was saying about the good news coming first to Israel was true. Jesus's words reflected the established order of God's redemptive plan. Early in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to Abraham, entered into a covenant with him and his offspring, and promised that blessing would come to the whole world through them (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4), not because of their goodness but because of His (Deut. 7:6-8). When His people abandoned the

HISTORICAL Context

DOGS: In Jesus's day, dogs were half-wild scavengers. Yet domesticated dogs would sit under the table and eat what fell to the floor.¹ In using this term, Jesus was not insulting the Gentile woman but emphasizing His ministry priority for the lost children of Israel. After Jesus's death and resurrection, the gospel of salvation would be extended freely to all who believe, both Jew and Gentile (cf. Acts 13:46; 26:23; Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10).

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“In order to arm our minds with arguments for perseverance in prayer for others, let us often study the case of this woman. Let us remember how she prayed on and did not faint in the face of great discouragement. Let us note how at last she went home rejoicing, and let us resolve by God’s grace to follow her example.”²

–J. C. Ryle
(1816–1900)

covenant, God promised that the Messiah would come to redeem and save the lost people of Israel (Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:23-24; Mic. 5:4-5; Zech. 10:6). But this all begs a question—did first mean only? How would Israel’s Messiah position Himself in reference to Gentiles?

How do you think Gentiles might have felt around Jews in Jesus’s day?

The Woman Responded in Faith

Jesus was acting out a parable with the Syrophoenician woman. The whole passage was really about who gets to enjoy the “bread” of the Messiah. This woman picked up on what Jesus was doing. She didn’t challenge that the Messiah’s primary purpose was to redeem the people of Israel. She only commented that the dogs that sit under the master’s table get to eat the children’s crumbs (Mark 7:28).

It’s remarkable what this woman was saying here. She did not dispute Israel’s priority nor even demand equal standing. She accepted Jesus’s imagery and responded from within its framework. If salvation truly belonged to the children first, wasn’t it still possible that the bread (mercy) of the Messiah was limitless? Wasn’t it possible that, just like in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, there would be enough of the Messiah’s provision to go around and satisfy Jew and Gentile alike?

The woman believed that Jesus’s power and compassion were not diminished by sharing them with others. She understood that the blessings of the Messiah weren’t a finite resource that needed to be safeguarded but an abundance overflowing from His merciful character. Even a small portion—a little

crumb—of His power would be sufficient to bring deliverance for her daughter.

This woman poked a hole in the entire way of thinking of the religious leaders, and Jesus invited that response. He wanted the onlooking disciples to understand that there isn't a limit to the Messiah's bread. It would be foolish to assume that the kids would starve if the "puppy" ate a few crumbs.

Matthew and Mark included two miraculous feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand. One took place in Jewish territory (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-42) and the other in the Decapolis, Gentile territory (Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 7:31-8:9). It is no coincidence that this event occurred around that same time. The bread of the Messiah was for both Jew and Gentile. It should also be noted that "be fed" in Mark 7:27 appears only in this passage with the Gentile woman and in the miraculous feedings. Clearly these are tied together to show that Jesus is the bread of life for both Jew and Gentile.

What ultimately commended this woman was not her cleverness or even persistence. It was her faith. Jesus Himself said so. She understood that the Messiah's mission was not threatened by generosity nor His power weakened by blessing others. Unlike physical bread, what He brought could not be exhausted by being shared. Those on the margins, like this woman, were able to be fed by the Lord. Her hope rested on Jesus's sufficiency.

This points to the fuller unveiling of the gospel that will happen after Jesus's death and resurrection. Jesus did not deny Israel's place in God's saving plan. Salvation does come to the Jews first, but it does not end there. The bread given to Israel was always meant to



GOSPEL Connection

Jesus ushered in a kingdom that would fix what was broken by sin, including illnesses, diseases, and disabilities. He healed both Jew and Gentile in His earthly ministry, which pointed to His death and resurrection that brings salvation to all who believe.

overflow to the nations. The Syrophoenician woman's daughter was healed because the mercy of the Messiah cannot be contained. These crumbs that she begged for would spread to the nations. The Syrophoenician woman believed that even crumbs from Jesus would be sufficient. And she was not disappointed.

How has God revealed His care for the Gentiles throughout the Scriptures?

Jesus healed those who were deaf and mute, a sign of His messiahship (Mark 7:31-37).

³¹ Again, leaving the region of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had difficulty speaking and begged Jesus to lay his hand on him. ³³ So he took him away from the crowd in private. After putting his fingers in the man's ears and spitting, he touched his tongue. ³⁴ Looking up to heaven, he sighed deeply and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak clearly. ³⁶ He ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were extremely astonished and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Jesus's Miracles Showed His Anointing

Isaiah 35 is one of the most hope-filled passages in the Old Testament. The prophet announced that God would bring the scattered people of Israel back to the land and restore them. He said:

Strengthen the weak hands, steady the shaking knees! Say to the cowardly: "Be strong; do not fear! Here is your God; vengeance is coming. God's retribution is coming; he will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy, for water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. (Isa. 35:3-6)

Can there be any better news than this? The desert will bloom. The fearful will be strengthened. Bodies marked by brokenness and disease will be healed. As modern readers, we might not fully grasp the breathtaking nature of this promise, and we might question whether this promise could apply to us. But it was a promise that would have been front and center in the first century, especially if you were a deaf man with trouble speaking who just so happened to live in the Decapolis.

The book of Isaiah was a message given to the people of Judah. It was a prophecy given to a covenant people who knew God's name, His law, and His promises. As Jesus traveled through the region of the Decapolis, a predominately Gentile area, we're supposed to wonder whether Jesus would perform the same kind of miracles that He performed in Galilee and Judea.

Mark 7 gives us the answer. Jesus ushered in a kingdom that would fix what was broken by sin, including illnesses, diseases, and disabilities. He healed both Jew and Gentile in His earthly ministry, which pointed to His death and resurrection that brings salvation to all who believe.

We're introduced to a man who was doubly isolated. His deafness cut him off from conversation and instruction. And his inability to speak left him unable to express himself. In the time of Jesus, such a condition often carried social stigma. But he must have had at least a few friends because they did for him what he couldn't do for himself, namely, beg Jesus to heal the man.

This man was exactly the kind of person that Isaiah 35 said would be on the receiving end of the darkness-overturning work of the Messiah. In fact, the rare Greek word used to describe his difficulty speaking is found in only one other place in the Bible—Isaiah 35:6 (from the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament Scriptures). Mark intentionally tied these events together. What Isaiah promised was happening to this man, and it was happening in Gentile territory.

Jesus then took the man aside. This is a crucial detail that shows the heart of the Savior. When we read a verse like Isaiah 35:6, we can tend to depersonalize it. Which do you think is more effective: “God is calling me to help the poor” or “God is calling me to help my friend Eric, who lost his job”? When Jesus pulled the man away from the crowd, He humanized someone who had been an outcast. In the Gospel of Mark, we see Jesus healing people, not categories.

Once away from the crowd, the Lord did some strange things. He put His fingers in the man's ears, spat, then touched the man's tongue, looked up to heaven, and sighed. Then He spoke a single word that means “be opened.” Given that Jesus had healed people from a distance before, this was a rather strange way to heal this man. Why did He do it this way?

We do not know why Jesus healed the man in this particular way. Mark gave us no explanation. But we do know that Mark wanted us to see Jesus's personal engagement with this man and the authority of His word. The gestures did not function as a technique or a magic ritual that produced healing. It may be that Jesus was communicating with the man in a way that connected with him in his disabilities.

The power here wasn't in the method, it was in the One who did the healing. This healing revealed to the people in the Decapolis that Jesus is the Rescuer of Isaiah 35. It also showed that this Rescuer wasn't confined to Jewish territory.

What must the Gentiles have believed about Jesus to bring the deaf man to Him?

Jesus Did All Things Well

At Christmas time, many churches sing "Go Tell It on the Mountain." Throughout the rest of the year, we'll sing other songs that encourage believers to take the gospel to the nations. We take up offerings to spread the news of Jesus around the world. We offer classes on how to share the faith. Sharing the gospel is a big deal.

That's why Mark 7:36 seems so strange to us. After healing the man who was deaf and mute, Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone. Why did Jesus command them to be silent here? This secrecy was actually a theme in the Gospel of Mark:

- Jesus didn't permit demons to claim He is the Messiah (1:34; 3:12).
- Jesus told a man healed of leprosy to tell no one but to give the necessary offering to the priest (1:44).

THEOLOGY Connection

MIRACLES: A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

- Jesus told Jairus to tell no one of His raising Jairus's daughter from the dead (5:43).
- Jesus told a healed blind man not even to enter the village (8:26).
- Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ, but Jesus said to tell no one (8:30).
- Jesus told Peter, James, and John to tell no one of about His transfiguration event until after His resurrection (9:9).

Jesus wanted to control the rumors that spread about Him. Knowledge of Jesus that was based on power, spectacle, or even a partial confession was shut down—until Jesus's death on the cross. Then Mark recorded the centurion's confession at the cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). That confession did not come from a miracle, a healing, or a display of authority. It came after witnessing Jesus's suffering on the cross. Only after Jesus's work was complete did the risen Savior give His disciples, including us, the commission to proclaim the gospel to all nations.

But the miraculous is hard to stay quiet about, and the people did not obey Jesus's command. In fact, the more Jesus told them to be silent, the more they proclaimed it (7:36). Their response was framed as amazement. They said, "He has done everything well" (v. 37). The language echoes creation itself: God surveyed His work and declared the finished product was good. Jesus's works have the same quality. Everything He does is right. Everything He does restores. Everything He does leaves nothing lacking.

But even here, the Gentiles' confession lacked an understanding of suffering. They proclaimed Jesus because of His power, not His cross, and that is an

incomplete gospel. A miracle-centered faith is unstable if it's not anchored in the full identity of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is more than a miracle worker. He is the crucified and risen Son of God.

In Mark 7, the people could not stop talking about what Jesus had done. By the end of Mark's Gospel, we are invited to proclaim who Jesus truly is.

What will it mean for you to believe that Jesus "has done everything well"?



HEAD

How has Jesus crossed cultural, social, and physical boundaries to minister to you?



HEART

How do you need to grow in your persistence and humility in prayer and faith?



HANDS

How will you lead people to Jesus this week so they might find the healing and salvation only He can provide?

References

1. R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, First Edition, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011), 172.
2. J. C. Ryle, *Mark*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 108.



JESUS RESURRECTS

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 11:17-27,38-44

Context: The book of John is unique among the four Gospels. John's Gospel highlighted seven signs Jesus performed that pointed to His identity as not only the promised Messiah but God Himself. John also included seven "I am" statements that intentionally connected Jesus's identity to the God who revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM" at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). In John 11, Jesus performed both a miraculous sign and declared an "I am" statement to show His power over life and death.

Key Concept: Jesus has the power to resurrect the dead and give eternal life to those who believe.

DAILY READINGS

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| ☐ Day 1: John 11:1-16 | ☐ Day 4: John 11:38-57 |
| ☐ Day 2: John 11:17-27 | ☐ Day 5: John 12:1-11 |
| ☐ Day 3: John 11:28-37 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 21 |

Anyone who believes in Jesus will live forever with Him (John 11:17-27).

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles away). ¹⁹ Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. ²⁰ As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. ²² Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” ²³ “Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her. ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.”

Martha Believed Jesus Could Do Anything

John’s Gospel starts off chapter 11 with background information of the people involved in our passage: Lazarus from Bethany and his sisters, Mary and Martha. John further described Mary as “the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair” (v. 2). Naturally, since they were friends with Jesus, when Lazarus became sick, “the sisters sent a message to him: ‘Lord, the one you love is sick’” (v. 3). They knew Jesus could heal their brother, and as someone who loved Lazarus, they believed Jesus’s love for him would have compelled Him to act. But He didn’t get there “in time.” So Lazarus died (v. 13).



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

Sit with that for a moment, putting yourself in the sisters' situation. You pray, you reach out to the Son of the God of the universe, and you know that He can fix whatever problem you have. You wait. And wait. And wait. Silence. Illness for Lazarus turns to a final breath. And with his death, hope is gone. Keep in mind that Lazarus would have been for Mary and Martha their protection and daily stability. His death meant not only the loss of companionship but security.

When Jesus finally showed up, Lazarus had already been dead for four days (v. 17). That is a significant number. It confirmed the finality of Lazarus's death. In the ancient world, there was no confusion after that amount of time. This was no case of misdiagnosis, fainting, or delayed recovery. He was really and most sincerely dead.

Whatever Martha might have imagined that Jesus would do when she first sent Him the message had now been reshaped by time and loss. Jesus didn't come at the last second to heal her brother. No, in her mind He was long past arrival. Her first words to Jesus show this heartbreak: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died" (v. 21). This was not a rebuke so much as a statement of faith shaped by experience. Martha knew what Jesus could do for the sick. She believed He had authority over sickness.

The depth of her confidence in Jesus was great. We see this in the next verse. Her faith didn't collapse under this disappointment. She believed that nothing was beyond Jesus's reach because of His connection to God (v. 22). Martha revealed an understanding of Jesus's relationship with God that few seemed to recognize in the Gospels. She said plainly that God would give Jesus anything He asked for.

Did she think that Jesus would resurrect Lazarus? It's possible that she was thinking of Elijah and the widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24) or Elisha and the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37). Certainly the One greater than Elijah and Elisha was standing before her. Maybe she still had a vague hope rumbling in the background of her heart that it was possible for a great prophet like Jesus to raise the dead.

But her response to Jesus leads us to believe that she wasn't thinking of a resurrection at present. Jesus told Martha that her brother would rise again. She didn't immediately go to Elijah or Elisha. Her mind went to the future resurrection of the dead prophesied by Isaiah and Ezekiel, among others. Her answer was theologically sound. She affirmed that death would not have the final word for God's people. God would make things right in the end.

Her answer seemed to reveal the limits of her expectation. Resurrection, for Martha, belonged to the last day. It was real but distant. It was something that God would do someday but not something Jesus would do in the present. Sure, Jesus had brought to life the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17) and Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:35-43), but the son and daughter had died that same day. Lazarus had been in the grave for four days.

Her response helps us see what Martha did and did not yet understand about Jesus. She knew He was uniquely close to God. She believed God listened to Him. She was confident that nothing lay outside His reach. But she had not yet tied together the possibility that Jesus Himself is the decisive agent of resurrection life. Martha was faithful within the categories she knew, but Jesus was about to expand her theology.

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*"It is not the amount
of our faith but the
object of our faith
that saves us."¹*

—Timothy Keller
(1950–2023)

THEOLOGY Connection

RESURRECTION:

Both the Old and New Testaments teach that one day believers will experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. (cont.)

How are you prone to respond to Jesus when circumstances don't work out how you think they should?

Jesus Pointed Martha to a Deeper Truth

Jesus responded by fleshing out Martha's understanding of the resurrection. Up to this point, the conversation centered on when the resurrection will occur. It sounded like almost any funeral sermon we'd expect today. Funerals often point ahead to the hope of the future resurrection for those who trust in Jesus. And Martha believed firmly in that resurrection. The thought of seeing her brother again at the future resurrection likely provided comfort in her grief. But on this occasion, Jesus had something else in mind.

Jesus did not deny the future resurrection, nor was He intending to teach that all we have to do is believe in Him and our loved ones can be resurrected, no matter the prognosis. Many so-called faith healers cause deep harm to family members by claiming that they didn't have "enough faith" to prevent their loved one from dying, and Jesus definitely wasn't saying that. Jesus wanted to show Martha and Mary that the power of the resurrection is found in Himself.

When Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), He used language that appeared repeatedly through John's Gospel. This is another one of Jesus's "I am" statements. These statements weren't merely describing what Jesus provides; they reveal to us who He is. Each one identified Jesus as the decisive source of something God alone gives:

- "I am the bread of life" (6:35).
- "I am the light of the world" (8:12).

- “I am the gate” (10:7,9).
- “I am the good shepherd” (10:11).
- “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25).
- “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6).
- “I am the true vine” (15:1).

These statements reveal that Jesus didn’t just distribute God’s blessings at a distance; He embodied them personally. This is what Jesus was doing with Martha in John 11. She believed in the resurrection as a future act of God. Jesus declared that the resurrection and the life stood before her in human form. This was not about when the resurrection was going to happen, it was about who Jesus is. To believe in Jesus, then, is not merely to affirm doctrines about the future. It is to entrust oneself to the living presence of God’s life-giving power now.

That Jesus is the resurrection explains why He said, “The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live” (11:25). Jesus acknowledged here that human beings die, He did not deny that. Believers still die. Jesus wasn’t offering escape from mortality but victory over it. He was telling Martha that physical death cannot overcome the life that is grounded in Him. To die in Christ is to be truly alive.

Jesus continued, “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (v. 26). This was not a contradiction of the previous statement but an expansion of it. Those who believe in Jesus possess a life that death cannot extinguish. Death may interrupt bodily existence, but it cannot sever the life Jesus gives. Paul picked this up by insisting that believers already share in resurrection life through their union with Christ, even though their bodies remain subject to death:

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THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:22-23). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through his Spirit who lives in you. (Rom. 8:10-11)

Death still occurs, but it no longer has ultimate authority because the life given in Christ cannot be undone (see 1 Cor. 15).

Jesus then asked Martha if she believed this. Jesus wasn't asking whether she believed in a general resurrection. He knew that she did. He was asking whether she believed this new revelation. Did she believe that the resurrection and the life was present in Jesus, here and now?

Martha's response is a remarkable statement of faith: "Yes, Lord . . . I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world" (John 11:27). She affirmed Jesus's identity even before she fully understood all the implications. Her confession was an example of what John had set as the goal for His Gospel—that readers might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name (20:31).

Jesus hadn't even spoken of resurrecting Lazarus yet. He was just asking Martha if she trusted in Him. And she did. That is how one connects to the One who is the resurrection and the life.

What does it mean to be united with Christ and share in His resurrection?

By resurrecting the dead, Jesus pointed to His mission for the Father's glory
(John 11:38-44).

Notes

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ “Remove the stone,” Jesus said. Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴² I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.” ⁴³ After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”

Jesus Called Martha to Belief

If you’ve ever taught a child to memorize Bible verses, one of their favorites is John 11:35. “Jesus wept.” It’s easy to memorize, but it’s full of depth. When we hear that Jesus wept, we often imagine sympathy and a shared sorrow. Those were certainly present. But John didn’t allow the meaning of these words to stop at emotional expressions and shared sorrow.

The word used to describe Jesus’s tears is distinct from the word used for Mary, Martha, and the mourners’ sorrow. Their weeping was loud, public, and perhaps ritualized.² Theirs was the kind of lament you’d see at a funeral. Verse 33 says that when Jesus saw their weeping, He was deeply moved. The translation

for Jesus's crying doesn't mean sorrow but something akin to anger. As R. C. Sproul once said:

Sometimes when I go to a hospital and I see people suffering with cancer, I walk out and I say, "I hate cancer!" The affliction is so great and the pain is so enormous. I think this is the kind of visceral reaction Jesus had when He encountered the sorrow that death had provoked. Jesus entered into the affliction of His people so deeply that He was moved within Himself at the travesty of death.³

When Jesus wept, the mourners believed it was a sign of Jesus's affection for Lazarus. Yet even at a funeral, Jesus's critics said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37). They misunderstood, thinking that Jesus's grief meant He felt somewhat powerless to stop death. On the contrary, Lazarus's death was meant to give the Son of God glory (v. 4).

At Lazarus's tomb, we see more of Jesus's emotion in verse 38. Once again, John stated that Jesus was "deeply moved." Jesus wasn't just absorbing the grief of the moment; He was reacting to it. His weeping was entering into our sorrow. His being "deeply moved" was doing something about it. This was both compassion and power meeting perfectly in the Son of God.

When Jesus commanded that the stone be removed, Martha immediately objected, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days" (v. 39). Martha simply acknowledged reality. Decay had already begun. Even after her strong confession of faith, Martha still did not expect what Jesus was about to do. She believed that Jesus is the resurrection and

the life, but she could not imagine how that truth might be revealed at the grave.

Jesus's response to her exposed the deeper issue at hand: "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (v. 40). Jesus wasn't concerned with the stink of decay or what seemed like an impossibility. His concern was for Martha's faith. What stood between Martha and the glory of God was not the sealed tomb but the limits of her expectation.

Again, it's important to acknowledge that Jesus wasn't telling her that belief will prevent death or guarantee comfort. He was teaching her that belief is what enables sight. To believe is to have eyes to see what God is doing and to participate in God's activity within the world. The glory of God would be shown in Jesus's actions. In this event, it would mean the raising of her brother from the dead.

In John's Gospel, "the glory of God" was not primarily a display of divine power meant to impress observers; it was the revelation of who God truly is, made visible through the actions of Jesus. Glory was not abstract brilliance or distant majesty but God showing Himself in and through the Son. This is why Jesus connected belief and glory so closely. Martha did not need to believe *to cause* something to happen. She needed to believe so that she could rightly interpret what God was about to reveal. The miracle would occur whether she understood it or not. But without belief, she would miss its meaning. She would witness power without recognizing God's glory.

As Jesus called Martha back to belief, He also calls us to consider what faith means. It's not simply affirming that Jesus can do something. It is trusting in who He is. In John's Gospel, the point of the miracles was

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

*"Death reigns everywhere, for the death of the soul is alienation from God. So people who believe in Christ, although they had been once dead, begin to live; for faith is a spiritual resurrection of the soul and, as it were, brings the soul alive, that it may live for God."*⁴

—John Calvin
(1509–1564)

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's power to resurrect the dead means He was also able to resurrect Himself, through which He secured victory over sin, death, and the powers of darkness. He did this also to give eternal life to those who believe.

belief. Raising the dead revealed Jesus to be the resurrection and the life that He claimed to be. Jesus wasn't after spectators who were impressed by wonder but rather people who, in seeing the sign, came to believe in Him as the One sent by the Father.

What are some ways we can witness the glory of God today?

Jesus Received Glory

Most claims of supernatural power and authority are conveniently unverifiable. A fortune teller speaks in vague language that can be reinterpreted however things turn out. A prediction is made far enough in the future that it cannot be tested at the present. Ambiguity is their protection. But what Jesus claimed here would be immediately verifiable. Many witnesses watched and waited. Whatever happened next would be public and unmistakable.

Jesus prayed aloud, and His words were calm, deliberate, and confident. They held assurance in the outcome of His prayer. Then Jesus turned from prayer to command. We also should note that there was no ritual or invocation. Jesus overcame death with words, just as He had performed miracles at other times (see Matt. 8:13; Mark 1:25-26; 4:39; 5:41-42; Luke 7:14-15). Jesus exercised His authority. He spoke and creation obeyed His voice. Lazarus came out.

Compare Lazarus's resurrection with Jesus's resurrection. Lazarus emerged still bound by grave clothes, but Jesus left them behind. Lazarus depended on another (Jesus). But Jesus was raised by His own authority (John 10:17-18). Lazarus's resurrection pointed to the last day, but Jesus's death inaugurated it.

The raising of Lazarus marked a turning point in John's Gospel. It demonstrated Jesus's authority and also accelerated the opposition that led to the cross. A sign like this could not be denied. It had to be silenced. This was why the religious leaders plotted Jesus's death immediately after this sign (11:53). Death will not get the last word, though, Jesus will.

What hope do you find in Jesus's power to resurrect Lazarus from the dead?



HEAD

How can you grow in your knowledge of and faith in Jesus?



HEART

What doubts, fears, and sins might you need to confess to grow in your faith?



HANDS

How will your life look different because you believe Jesus will resurrect you?

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Notes



THE GOSPEL PROJECT

UNIT 27

THE TRUTH OF HIS KINGDOM



MARK; LUKE; JOHN



MEMORY VERSES

“Today salvation has come to this house,”
Jesus told him, “because he too is a son
of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come
to seek and to save the lost.”

—Luke 19:9-10



BLIND TO SEEING

CORE PASSAGE: JOHN 9:24-27,35-41

Context: John's Gospel contains seven "I am" statements in which Jesus assumes the divine name of God found in Exodus 3:14. The second of these appears in John 8:12 and 9:5, where Jesus proclaimed, "I am the light of the world." What comes next is a demonstration of His light breaking into the darkness. Christ's light healed and saved a man born blind while also revealing the blindness of those who refused Him. The conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities intensified as evidence of Jesus's divinity and messiahship grew.

Key Concept: Jesus opens people's eyes to the fact that He is the Messiah, but we can choose to believe or not.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Day 1: John 7:1-52 | ☐ Day 4: John 9:24-41 |
| ☐ Day 2: John 8:12-59 | ☐ Day 5: John 10:1-42 |
| ☐ Day 3: John 9:1-23 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 82 |

Jesus brings light to those in darkness (John 9:24-27).

²⁴ So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether or not he’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!” ²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ “I already told you,” he said, “and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don’t want to become his disciples too, do you?”

The Blind Man Revealed God’s Glory

At the beginning of John 9, Jesus and His disciples passed by a man who was born blind. Seeing the man, the disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (v. 2). The disciples thought wrongly about this man. They took one look at him and believed that his blindness was the result of sin.

The disciples were functioning with an unbiblical worldview and a wrong view of God. They believed someone could earn God’s favor—good health, physical blessings, prosperity—based off their works. Conversely, if they did something bad, then God would immediately punish them. They acted as if one’s relationship with God is merely a transaction. You do good, then you are blessed. You sin, then you receive immediate punishment. We must be clear that our choices do have consequences, and sometimes sin does bring immediate physical punishments. But Jesus pointed out that the disciples misunderstood what was happening in this man’s life.



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

PLACE Study**POOL OF SILOAM:**

The pool of Siloam was created by King Hezekiah, who blocked the upper Gihon springs to channel water into Jerusalem at the time of the Assyrian siege (see 2 Chron. 32). Water from the pool also was used in temple service. Jesus's command for the man to wash in the pool of Siloam also could allude to Elisha's command for Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times (see 2 Kings 5). Like Naaman, the man washed and returned healed.

Jesus replied that neither the man's nor his parents' sin caused his disability; rather, "this came about so that God's works might be displayed in him" (v. 3). After Jesus spoke, He spat on the ground to make mud, put it on the man's eyes, and told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Once the man did this, he received his sight (vv. 6-7). Jesus displayed His glory by healing this man. This man's disability was used to bring about praise and glory for the power of God. Sometimes God, in His mysterious and good wisdom, allows His children to go through hardship and suffering so that they can experience His mercy and deliverance.

We must beware of making assumptions about people's suffering. As we see from this man's life, not all suffering is a direct punishment for sin. It is easy to equate someone's outward circumstances with God's blessing or displeasure. However, that way of thinking is unbiblical.

After his neighbors recognized that the man who once was a blind beggar could see, they took him to the Pharisees for questioning. The Pharisees were upset that Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath, and some concluded that Jesus could not be from God "because he doesn't keep the Sabbath," but others wisely questioned, "How can a sinful man perform such signs?" (v. 16). Then there was division among the Pharisees about Jesus's identity.

The Jewish council questioned the man who was healed, asking his opinion of Jesus. The man said, "He's a prophet" (v. 17). However, the Jews did not like that answer. Instead of admitting what was irrefutable, they decided to believe instead that the man was not born blind. Isn't it interesting how those opposed to Jesus behaved here? They had seen this

man who was blind from birth; they had walked by him as a beggar. However, their sinful opposition to Jesus caused them to deny what their own eyes had seen. Sin and hardheartedness causes people to act and think irrationally.

Not only did their opposition to Jesus cause them to deny the truth about the once-blind-now-seeing man, they also blasphemed Jesus. They told the man: "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner" (v. 24). At first, their comment seems good, "Give glory to God," but they were not asking the man to praise God. The words here mirror Joshua's instructions to Achan, who had stolen what was devoted to the Lord and hidden it in his tent. Joshua instructed Achan to give glory to God by confessing the truth (Josh. 7:19), and that's what the Jews wanted the man to do. Yet he had told the truth and they rejected it. They even lied when they said Jesus was a sinner. The Jews were telling this man to do something they were not doing themselves. They refused to confess their own sins and give Christ the glory He deserved.

Jesus, through His divine power, healed this man. Yet Jesus's opponents were blind to His glory. They had "the light of the world" (v. 5) standing right in front of them, but their own sinful pride blinded them to their own spiritual standing. The religious leaders thought they were walking in the light and this seeing man was in sinful darkness. But Jesus would show them how spiritually blind they were.

Jesus brings true light to those in darkness. The spiritual blindness of the religious leaders was not limited to them. Spiritual blindness threatens all who focus on outward appearances but resist the transforming power of Jesus Christ.



How have you experienced the light of Christ exposing the darkness in your own heart?

The Seeing Man Revealed Spiritual Blindness

Seeing is often synonymous with understanding or comprehending. Despite the religious leaders clearly seeing how this man was healed by Jesus, they did not fully “see” Jesus’s true identity. Instead, they claimed that He was a sinner.

The healed man rebuffed their claim: “Whether or not he’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!” (v. 25). With these simple words, this man testified to the work that Jesus did in healing him. From his testimony before the council, we can see the significance of sharing with others how Christ has saved us and changed our lives. We, like this man, do not have to have all the answers. But like him, we can testify about what Jesus has done in our lives.

Every single Christian has a testimony about what Christ has done to save you. It doesn’t have to be a sermon or a legal argument. A believer’s testimony is an opportunity to declare what your life was like before and after Christ saved you and what He can do for every repentant sinner. Christian, you have received spiritual sight from Christ for a reason! You are able to help others know about the rescue that is found in Christ alone.

All who have trusted in Christ can say, “I was blind, and now I can see!” (v. 25). These words in John 9 helped form the lines of the hymn *Amazing Grace*: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / that saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost, but now am found; / was blind, but now I see.”¹

**GOSPEL
Connection**

Jesus opens people’s eyes to His messiahship, but they can choose to believe in Him or not. Those who recognize their sin and need for a Savior will believe; the hard-hearted will not.

The Pharisees pressed this man further to get him to deny that Jesus had healed him. They asked again: “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” (v. 26). The man had already explained what Jesus did to heal him, but they did not believe it. Now the Pharisees attempted to discourage this man. They had already intimidated the man’s parents because they had let it be known that anyone who admitted Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue (v. 22). In their hostility to Jesus, they also wanted others to doubt Jesus’s identity.

Not to be intimidated, the man stood his ground and said, “I already told you . . . and you didn’t listen” (v. 27). Not only were these Pharisees spiritual blind, but they also were spiritually deaf. They could not see or hear the truth about Jesus. The man went on to ask, perhaps tongue-in-cheek: “Why do you want to hear it again? You don’t want to become his disciples too, do you?” At this, the Pharisees ridiculed the man, claiming that they followed Moses but did not know where Jesus came from. But their reply pointed out the flaw in their argument. The man said: “You don’t know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, he listens to him” (vv. 30-31). This man explained the problem with their insistence that Jesus was a sinner, but still they refused to listen. This once-blind beggar clearly showed these spiritual elites that they were blind and deaf to the truth because they rejected Jesus.

The man’s response angered the Pharisees, who insulted the man, saying, “You were born entirely in sin . . . and are you trying to teach us?” (v. 34). Jesus had already corrected His disciples’ wrong thinking

Voices from THE CHURCH

“Believers don’t need to know all the answers before they can share Christ with others. All they must know is how Jesus changed their lives. . . . We should tell people what Jesus did for us, and trust God to help our words draw others to him.”³

—Bruce B. Barton

about the man’s blindness. The Jews’ insult that the man was utterly born in sin was another sign that they didn’t understand God. In the face of overwhelming evidence pointing to Jesus’s identity as being from God, they continued to reject Jesus as God’s Messiah and Son. Then, in their hostility, they threw the man out of the synagogue.

The man’s courage in the face of persecution shows us that we can stand strong in the midst of criticism or skepticism today. We don’t even have to have a doctorate in theology to tell the truth. Every Christian has the same task of testifying to Jesus’s transforming grace.

The danger of spiritual blindness is rarely a lack of evidence for who Jesus is. The Pharisees had witnessed Jesus’s miracles, and they had the personal testimony of the once-blind man who was standing in front of them. But instead of reckoning with the evidence, they had a stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus. May we have humble hearts and be receptive to Christ’s transforming grace so that we can know Jesus for who He is—the Son of God who opens the eyes of the blind.

If you were asked, “What did Jesus do to you?” how would you answer?

Jesus came to judge those who choose not to see that He is the Messiah (John 9:35-41).

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out, and when he found him, he asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ “Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?” he asked. ³⁷ Jesus answered, “You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸ “I believe, Lord!”

he said, and he worshiped him. ³⁹ **Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind.”** ⁴⁰ **Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things and asked him, “We aren’t blind too, are we?”** ⁴¹ **“If you were blind,” Jesus told them, “you wouldn’t have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”**

The Seeing Man Is Found

While the religious leaders threw the man out of the synagogue, Jesus sought him out so that he would have more than physical sight restored. Jesus sought out the man so that he could have eternal life by believing in Jesus. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus took the initiative to go to the blind man and give him physical sight; now Jesus took the initiative to seek after him to give him spiritual sight.

Jesus went to the man and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (v. 35). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man over eighty times. The Son of Man was an important messianic title that referred back to the figure in Daniel 7:13-14 who would rule over the earth forever.

In this passage, Jesus asked the man if he believed Scripture’s teaching about the Messiah. The man clearly believed that Jesus was a prophet because of the miracle, but as one commentator said, “Here believing did not mean the mere acceptance of signs (cf. 2:23-25) but the active commitment of himself to the Son of Man, who brought God’s hope and forgiveness to the world.” ² And here the man was humble enough to admit what he did not know. The man replied, “Who is he, Sir, that I may believe in him?” (v. 36). Jesus

Notes



THEOLOGY Connection

NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER:

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. (cont.)

then boldly and clearly identified Himself as the Son of Man, saying, "You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you" (v. 37). Earlier that day, this man was unable to see anything, but now he saw the Messiah, the only One who could save him. The eyes that once could only see darkness now beheld "the light of the world"!

While this man had a great need to see physically, his greatest need was to be forgiven of his sins. The Pharisees told this man that Jesus was a sinner; however, Jesus was the only One who could forgive this man's sins. This man needed spiritual sight more than he needed physical sight because his greatest need was to believe in the Son of Man.

Jesus revealed to this man His true identity as the Son of Man, and how did this man respond? The man responded, "I believe, Lord!" and then he worshiped Jesus (v. 38). This man confessed his belief in Jesus as his Savior. Also notice what this man did after his confession: he worshiped Jesus. It might be easy to skip over the significance of this act of worship, but remember that only God is worthy of worship. Jesus accepted this man's worship because Jesus is "God with us."

This man started his day off as a blind beggar; now he was a true worshiper of the Messiah. The man had received a new identity in Christ. He was not the same, and neither is anyone who comes to Jesus by faith.

How does Jesus's miracle and pursuit of the man relate to our gospel mission as believers in Christ?

The Spiritually Blind Are Lost

While the once-blind man saw and worshiped Jesus, the Pharisees again turned and rejected Jesus. The Pharisees started and ended the day with physical sight, but after their interaction with Jesus, it was clear that they were spiritually blind. The Pharisees chose to sin because they did not believe who Jesus is. Since the Pharisees chose to sin and not believe in Jesus, they would face His judgment.

Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind” (v. 39). Jesus was pronouncing judgment upon these religious leaders because they claimed they could “see.” They were blind to their own sin and need for a Savior. The religious leaders knew the law of God, which exposed their sinfulness. But instead of turning to Jesus, who could cleanse them of their sin, they sought external cleanliness through strict adherence to the law. Their outward appearance was a cover up for their sinful hearts.

Jesus’s words reveal that spiritual sight is not simply about how much knowledge one has of the holy but whether or not they see their need for Christ’s transforming grace. The Pharisees had great knowledge and confidence in themselves, but their self-confidence blinded them to their need for grace. They thought their knowledge of the Scriptures was proof of their standing before God, yet God in the flesh was standing before them, and they rejected Him. Their prideful arrogance blinded them to the mercy of God incarnate before them.

When the Pharisees overheard Jesus’s judgment, they said, “We aren’t blind too, are we?” (v. 40).

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a “new creation” in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

**Voices from
CHURCH HISTORY**

“It is not our littleness that hinders Christ; but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back his hand. It is easier to save us from our sins than from our righteousnesses.”⁴
—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

Though they claimed to see, they truly were spiritually blind. Instead of humbly turning to the Lord standing in their midst, their sinful pride would lead them to His judgment. We must repent of our sins and turn to Christ so that we will not receive the judgment of God upon our sin. The religious leaders chose judgment and darkness over Jesus.

One of the great promises of the Old Testament is that God would one day send a Messiah to redeem His people. The promise of Isaiah 9:2 was fulfilled in Jesus, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.” God’s people were in the darkness of sin and unbelief, but the Messiah had come to bring them into the light of forgiveness. Yet the religious leaders rejected Christ and remained in darkness.

If we want to know the forgiveness of sins that is found in Jesus, we must admit that we cannot save ourselves. We must admit that we need the perfect life of Christ, we need Christ’s death on the cross to take the punishment for our sins, and we need Christ’s resurrection power because He alone can defeat sin and death. The Pharisees had physical sight but were still blind spiritually because they would not believe who Jesus is. We must learn from the consequences of the Pharisees’ spiritual blindness. We must run from darkness and run to the light of Christ so that our eyes might be opened!

What do we need to “see” in order to be saved by faith?



HEAD

What are your sources of authority for your beliefs about Jesus?



HEART

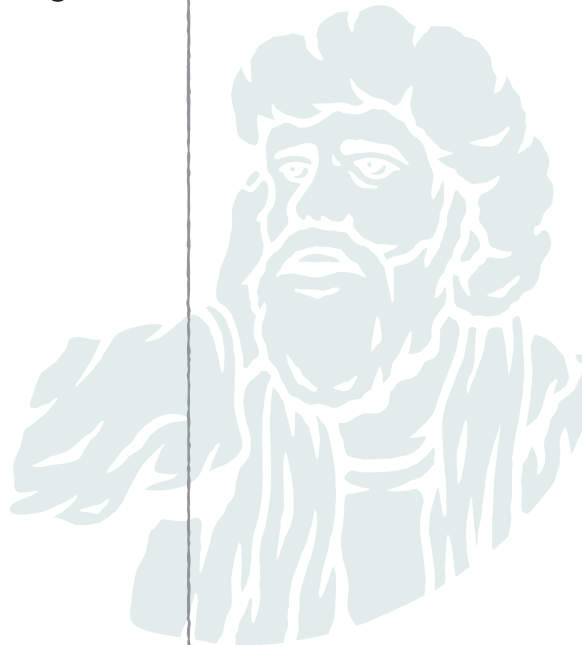
How does Jesus's pursuit of the man change the way you see the heart of Christ for you?



HANDS

Who will you pursue with the gospel of Jesus or follow up to see if they need more understanding?

Notes



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GETTING TO GIVING

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 19:1-10

Context: Luke's Gospel is broken into roughly three sections. Luke 1:1–9:50 is the initiation of Jesus's public ministry, including His teachings and miracles. Luke 9:51–19:10 tells of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem under the shadow of the cross. Luke 19:11–24:53 tells of Jesus's arrest, death, and resurrection. In today's passage, Jesus was making His way to Jerusalem for the joy set before Him, prepared to endure the cross (Heb. 12:2). But on His way, He needed to make a stop for the salvation of a sinner.

Key Concept: Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Matthew 17:1–18:35 | ☐ Day 4: Luke 17:1–18:43 |
| ☐ Day 2: Matthew 19:1–20:34 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 19:1-27 |
| ☐ Day 3: Mark 9:1–10:52 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 49 |

Jesus invites all who are eager to find Him
(Luke 19:1-5).

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. ⁴ So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house.”

Riches Don't Equal Treasure

What are you looking for today? All over the world, people are searching for something right now that will satisfy their deepest longings, and many of them believe they won't find it in a church. People are looking for something that will make them happy: a better job, more education, more money, or a new car. So what are you looking for? In Luke 19, we meet a very wealthy man who thought he was looking for Jesus, when the whole time Jesus was looking for him.

Long before this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus had begun His journey to Jerusalem, where He would suffer and die. In fact, in just about twenty verses, Jesus would enter Jerusalem on a donkey to celebrate Passover. At this point, Jesus was probably less than two weeks away from Good Friday, when He would die to redeem His people from their sins.

Think about what it's like when you have an important event coming up, whether it be a work or school deadline, a wedding, or a vacation. It's hard not to think about it. Now consider that Jesus had on



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

BIBLICAL Concept

WEALTH: In Luke 18:24, after the rich young ruler was unwilling to give up his wealth to follow Christ, Jesus noted how difficult it is for a rich man to enter heaven, though what is impossible with man is possible with God (v. 27). The story of Zacchaeus shows that the rich young ruler didn't have to walk away physically rich but spiritually empty. Zacchaeus showed that generosity is a result—not a condition—of a life changed by grace.

His mind a horrific death through which He would bear the wrath of God for sinners. While only a matter of days away from entering Jerusalem, Jesus went through Jericho, stopped, looked up into a tree, and invited Himself to eat with the short tax collector in the tree. In fact, as we will see, Jesus said it was “necessary” (v. 5).

But we can't discuss the story of Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus without backing up a bit. In Luke 18:18-30, Jesus met a rich young ruler. The ruler had approached Jesus, wanting to find out what he should do to inherit eternal life (v. 18). When Jesus brought up the commandments of “Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and mother” (v. 20), the ruler insisted that he had kept God's laws from his youth (v. 21). But then Jesus struck right to the heart of what the man worshiped when He said: “You still lack one thing: Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (v. 22). This the rich young ruler did not do.

Jesus saw what was going to keep this man from wholehearted obedience, and it was his wealth. Jesus told him to drop his earthly wealth to gain treasures in heaven, which caused the young ruler to go away “extremely sad” (v. 23). Seeing the young ruler's despair, Jesus lamented: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (vv. 24-25).

I am sure there were some in Jericho who would have liked to run Zacchaeus through the eye of a

needle for all his manipulative taxing ways. But Jesus also said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (v. 27).

Turning to our narrative, with the sorrowful saga of the rich young ruler still fresh in our minds, Luke’s readers are forced to wonder whether Zacchaeus would be a repeat, or would this tax collector become a new disciple like Matthew, whom Jesus had called while he was working in his tax booth (Matt. 9:9)? Luke intentionally highlighted the contrast here between Zacchaeus’s response to Jesus and that of the rich young ruler.

To set the scene, Luke said that Jesus entered Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Jericho of Jesus’s day was a very wealthy city, sort of a beautiful little oasis. Herod had built the city into quite a nice area with a palace, fortress, and aqueducts.¹ However, Jesus was not stopping there for a time of leisure; He was there for a specific purpose.

We are introduced to Zacchaeus in Luke 19:2. The literal reading of this verse is “And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus,” meaning that our attention should be placed on the man. He is described as “a chief tax collector.” He was not the bottom man in the tax-collecting world. He either owned or administered the tax collection in the wealthy city of Jericho. Business for Zacchaeus was lucrative.

Tax collectors show up throughout the Gospel of Luke. Culturally, tax collectors were viewed by the Jews as traitors and sinners because they collected taxes for the Roman Empire. They often collected additional money for themselves through extortion. The Roman government would have these collectors get taxes, but there was no set limit on the money they

could skim for themselves. Whatever price the tax collector charged above a certain amount was his to keep. So you can probably see why the insult “tax collectors and sinners” often went hand in hand.

Zacchaeus was incredibly rich since he was the chief tax collector in a very affluent area. He likely had big payoffs because Jericho was an important import and export post. Despite his great riches, though, he was hated by his own people. Even though he had all the earthly wealth anyone could want, he was bankrupt spiritually. He had a deeper need to know Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

What kinds of people might we be tempted to classify as the worst of sinners to despise and avoid today?

Obstacles Can't Hinder True Seekers

Even though Zacchaeus had all the wealth he could want, he was still empty. He knew something was missing and had a desire to see Jesus. Like many others, Zacchaeus had probably heard about Jesus's miracles and provocative teachings, and he wanted to lay eyes on this teacher. Yet he had two problems.

First, a large crowd followed Jesus everywhere He went. Other Gospel writers said that the crowds surrounding Jesus were so massive, He could not travel freely (Mark 1:45). At two separate times, Jesus dealt with crowds of over four to five thousand people (Matt. 14:21; 15:38). The crowd kept growing because people may have just heard how Jesus had restored the sight of blind Bartimaeus (Luke 18:35-43).

The second obstacle was that Zacchaeus was short, perhaps under five feet.² Those of us who are

height challenged have experienced the drawbacks of attending parades, concerts, or even church services in a crowd of people. Zacchaeus's size and the size of the crowd were real obstacles for him to see Jesus, yet he did not let those obstacles stand in his way.

Many people have a long list of excuses to put off following Jesus. What excuses prevent you from coming to Christ? What excuses prevent you from following Him faithfully? Are you too busy? Is it that you think you will have time later to come to Christ?

Certainly, Zacchaeus had excuses. He could have said, "I am too short," or, "There are too many people surrounding Jesus today," or, "People who don't like me aren't going to let me through." Instead of succumbing to the excuses, Zacchaeus let go of his pride and did what? He climbed a tree. Verse 4 says, "So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way." It takes both humility and courage to go to Jesus. How humiliating it would have been for people to look up at one of the wealthiest men in town and see him clinging to a sycamore tree. It took great courage to do that! Likewise, it takes courage to be a follower of Jesus.

Jesus was passing by, and what did He do? When Jesus came to the tree where Zacchaeus was perched, "he looked up" (v. 5). Was Jesus checking the sycamore to see if it were in bloom or to admire its branches? No, He looked up to speak to the man in the tree! Zacchaeus had never met Jesus before, but Jesus went right to him and called him by name. Zacchaeus was seeking Jesus, but Jesus was already seeking him.

Jesus said in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me." So who was looking for whom? Even if he didn't know it yet, Zacchaeus was

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"The door of hope which the Gospel reveals to sinners is open very wide. Let us leave it open, as we find it; let us not attempt, in narrow-minded ignorance, to shut it. We should never be afraid to maintain that Christ is able to save completely (Hebrews 7:25) and that the vilest sinners may be freely forgiven if they will only come to him."³

—J. C. Ryle
(1816–1900)

one Jesus came to save to follow Him. Next, Jesus told Zacchaeus to come out of the tree. Jesus had a divine appointment to go and stay at Zacchaeus's house (Luke 19:5).

Jesus saw the great length to which Zacchaeus went to see Him, so He invited Himself into Zacchaeus's house and his life. While Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, Jesus's desire to see Zacchaeus was greater. He would go and fellowship with Zacchaeus at his house. Jesus invites Himself to be with all who are eager to find Him.

How can we determine if we are experiencing a "necessary" encounter with someone for the sake of the gospel?

Jesus offers salvation to those who are lost and want to be found (Luke 19:6-10).

⁶ So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully. ⁷ All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to stay with a sinful man." ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much." ⁹ "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Salvation Comes to the Undeserving

After Jesus said He was going to the tax collector's house, Zacchaeus received Jesus with joy (v. 6). Many of Jesus's parables, especially those in Luke 15, portray the joy of those who find what they are looking for.

Here Zacchaeus's joy signified one who not only found what he was seeking, but even more so, the fact that he was found by Jesus.

Joy should be a chief characteristic of Christians because we realize that apart from God's grace given to us in Jesus Christ, we deserve punishment for our sins. The only punishment befitting the crime of sin against the holy, almighty God is death (Rom. 6:23). Christians should be the most joyful people in the world because we know what we have been saved from. We will face trials and hardships in our lives, but those trials and hardships can never take away the grace of God that we have in Jesus Christ. Zacchaeus was joyful because he knew what he had been saved from.

Contrasting with Zacchaeus's joy of receiving Jesus, we see the attitude of the crowd who resented Jesus extending fellowship to this tax collector. Luke 19:7 says, "All who saw it began to complain, 'He's gone to stay with a sinful man.'" While most of the complaints about Jesus in Luke came from the religious leaders, here the people complained about Jesus's actions.

Jesus had already shown multiple times that He was willing to reach out to those whom society deemed as "unreachable" (5:29-30; 15:1). The religious leaders and the people complained about Jesus reaching "sinners," but they missed why Jesus came to earth. The power of Christ's work is that no one is "unreachable."

How often have we encountered others whom we thought were too far gone only for the gospel to penetrate their hearts and bring them to salvation in Jesus? We must take this to heart. We should never look at someone and think they are beyond the saving reach of Jesus. If we look with disdain at people, we have forgotten that all people are valuable to God as they



Voices from THE CHURCH

“Zacchaeus is not buying his salvation. No amount of money can buy salvation. No, he’s showing by his giving the change of heart he’s had. When a person is truly repentant, it affects how they view and use money. At the very least, money is no longer their god—Jesus Christ is.”⁴

—Thabiti Anyabwile

are created in His image. Thus, we must pray for and seek to share the gospel with all whom Christ places in our path. May our hearts never be so hard that we judge for ourselves who Jesus can and cannot save!

Jesus’s ministry and mission was to bring salvation to those who are lost and looking to be found. One of the amazing characteristics of the Gospels is how often the sinners responded to Jesus while the religious elites rejected Him. Among the Jews, Zacchaeus was an outsider and someone to avoid, but for Jesus, that was not the case. The people here had not joyfully received Jesus themselves; therefore, their hearts were hardened by their own sin toward the only One who could give them true joy.

Do you find yourself identifying with the complainers or with Zacchaeus in this passage? Why?

Salvation Comes with Repentance

Zacchaeus said to Jesus: “Look, I’ll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I’ll pay back four times as much” (19:8). Zacchaeus was not taking these actions because he wanted to buy God’s favor. No, he did this because he had been transformed. True repentance follows true salvation. His faith in Jesus was genuine.

Notice that Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus to give away anything, unlike how Jesus interacted with the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler had been unwilling to loosen his grip on his “little-g” god. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, repented of his greed and thieving; he turned from his sins to Christ. Look at how his repentance changed the entire orientation of

his life. Instead of focusing on his wealth, he would now focus on others. When we repent of our sin, the focus of our lives shifts from what we desire to living for Christ.

Zacchaeus said he would give half of his possessions away to the poor, and with the other half, he would restore fourfold the money he had stolen. He didn't want to just give back what was wrongfully taken; he went above and beyond to make restitution.

In response to Zacchaeus's repentance, Jesus exclaimed, "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9). Salvation had arrived because Jesus was there. When someone comes to an awareness of the sin they have committed and turns away from it, that is repentance. Zacchaeus's actions flowed from his faith that Jesus had forgiven him. Christians say, "I come to You, Lord, not because of how great I am, nor because I am better than others, but because of what You did on my behalf." We only bring to the table our sinful selves and our desperation for salvation; Jesus handles the rest.

Jesus went further to say about Zacchaeus: "He too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (vv. 9-10). Though the Jews considered Zacchaeus a traitor to the Jewish people, to Jesus, Zacchaeus was one of the lost sheep of Israel that He had come to save. Jesus was on His way to the cross to accomplish that very task.

Jesus was sent to the earth for the purpose of seeking and saving the lost. His mission was not that we live a comfortable life but that we live a life centered on Him. Jesus's mission was not to serve as a mere example for us but to save us. If Jesus did not come to earth and live a perfect life, die on the cross for our

THEOLOGY **Connection**

REPENTANCE:
Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus's ministry and mission was to bring salvation to those who are lost and looking to be found.

sins, and rise from the dead, then we would have no way to be saved from our sins.

Salvation came to this rich man, but Jesus had just mentioned how difficult it is for the wealthy to come to faith (18:24-25). So what was the difference between Zacchaeus and the rich young ruler? Genuine salvation and repentance. Zacchaeus climbed up a tree to see Jesus, a sign of his humility and awareness of his greatest need. The rich ruler went to Jesus with trust in his own ability to follow God's laws (vv. 18-21). He wanted to know if there was something else he was missing. And there was. He lacked the willingness to set aside everything he thought was a benefit to him and humbly come to the Lord for mercy. The rich ruler went away physically wealthy but spiritually poor because he valued his wealth more than Christ.

Jesus knew Zacchaeus's heart and went looking for him. Today, some people resist coming to Jesus because they know their heart is wicked. They think they have to "get right" before they can approach God's throne. However, Jesus is the One who cleanses us and gives us a new heart by His grace. He knows who we are, even at our worst, and still He calls us to come and follow Him. Have you answered the call of Christ in your life?

So, who was seeking whom? It was no coincidence that Jesus stopped, looked up into that tree, and called Zacchaeus by name. Have you joyfully received Jesus? If you have not, then look to Him in childlike faith, learning that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. If you have trusted in Jesus, then continue to serve Him joyfully and look for ways to share with others the joy that is found in Christ alone.

How have you seen the grace of Jesus produce true change in your own life?

Notes



HEAD

What does Zacchaeus's story teach us about the transforming power of meeting Jesus?



HEART

What might joyful repentance look like in your own life as Jesus calls you into deeper intimacy with Him?



HANDS

What will it look like for you to lay aside self-focused desires and follow Jesus with joy wherever He leads?



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SERVANT TO KING

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 19:28-40

Context: Since Luke 9:51, the Gospel writer had been preparing his readers for Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. In Luke 19, the time had come. Jesus went to Jerusalem unafraid, knowing what would happen to Him. This was the moment for which He came into this world—to go to the cross to redeem His people from their sins. Everything was prepared, even down to the servants who would provide the donkey for His entry and the upper room for His last supper. Jesus was fully in control.

Key Concept: Jesus is the humble King as prophesied, bringing peace and glory to God.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Day 1: John 12:12-50 | ☐ Day 4: Matthew 23:1-39 |
| ☐ Day 2: Luke 19:28–21:4 | ☐ Day 5: Mark 11:1–12:44 |
| ☐ Day 3: Matthew 21:1–22:46 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 150 |

Jesus rode into town on a donkey, revealing His humility (Luke 19:28-35).

²⁸ When he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples ³⁰ and said, “Go into the village ahead of you. As you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say this: ‘The Lord needs it.’” ³² So those who were sent left and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴ “The Lord needs it,” they said. ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their clothes on the colt, they helped Jesus get on it.

Jesus Displayed Divine Foreknowledge

Can you picture the scene? The city of Jerusalem was full of excitement at the time of Jesus’s triumphal entry. It was Passover week, and this was an important festival in which every male had to appear. The population of Jerusalem would swell up five or six times its normal size. Scholars estimate that there were normally around 80,000 people living in Jerusalem, so the crowd during the festivals would number in the hundreds of thousands.¹ Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

The Passover was a celebration of how God had rescued the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. The Passover lamb was slaughtered and its blood was painted on the Israelites’ doorposts so that death would “pass over” their houses. This was an Old Testament foreshadow



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



of the salvation found in Christ. In Luke 19, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, entered the city of Jerusalem to bring about a “greater exodus,” delivering God’s people by His own blood, which would atone for our sins.

Luke 19:28 says, “When he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.” What happened in the text prior to this? In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus told the parable of the ten minas because the disciples “thought the kingdom of God was going to appear right away” (v. 11). Jesus narrated a story about a nobleman who went off to receive the right to rule with the expectation that he would return as king. Before he left, the nobleman entrusted ten servants with one mina each to put to good use before his return. When the king returned, two of his servants had made money with their diligent investments, but one servant simply hid the mina he had been given.

In the parable, Jesus revealed three types of people: (1) true followers of the king, (2) false followers of the king, and (3) those who rejected the king completely. In Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we see the same three types of people.

This last section of Luke’s Gospel, beginning with Jesus’s triumphal entry, is called the Passion narrative, referring to the last week of Jesus’s ministry before His death on the cross, with “passion” meaning suffering. Jesus’s three-year ministry on earth came to its climax in His last week. What is interesting is that in all four Gospels, when they come to Jesus’s final week, they slow down the narrative. Back in Luke 9:51, the Gospel writer recorded, “When the days were coming to a close for him to be taken up, he determined to journey to Jerusalem.” Some translations read, “He set

his face to go to Jerusalem.” There Jesus would suffer and die on the cross and rise from the dead on the third day. So here Jesus was, having finally arrived at His destination, about to enter the city of Jerusalem, where the most important events in the history of the world would take place.

Jesus—the divine, humble, and peace-bringing King—entered Jerusalem according to the divine foreknowledge and plan of God. It wasn’t a coincidence that this Passover festival would end with His sacrificial death on the cross, nor did it take Him by surprise. In fact, we see a glimpse of Jesus’s divinity in what He told His disciples as they approached the city. In verses 29-31, He instructed two of His disciples to go into the nearby village and find a colt tied up that no one had ever ridden before. He commanded them to get that colt for Him to use, and if anyone questioned them, they were to explain that the Lord needed it.

How would Jesus know these details about the colt tied up in the village ahead of Him? Some have tried to explain away Jesus’s divine foreknowledge here by saying that Jesus likely made prior arrangements. However, Jesus also displayed His ability to know what would happen in the future in verse 43, where He spoke of the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Also in Luke 22:7-13, Jesus told a couple of His disciples how they would find the upper room where they would prepare and eat the Passover meal together. In Luke 19:32-34, the disciples found the colt just as Jesus had described the situation to them. The owners of the colt allowed the disciples to take the colt to Jesus for His use.

Another important element of this text is found in how Jesus described Himself in verse 31. Jesus did not

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“Our Redeemer is the sovereign Lord and King of all the universe. He did not come to Jerusalem to be made a king. He came into Jerusalem triumphantly as the King. He was going, by way of the cross, to receive his kingdom.”²

—Don Fortner
(1950–2020)

identify Himself as a teacher or rabbi but as the Lord. Luke highlighted Jesus's claim as the divine King.

How does seeing Jesus in full control even as He walked toward suffering and death strengthen your trust in His control over your own life?

Jesus Displayed Divine Humility

Another glimpse of Jesus's divinity is seen in the power to ride this colt. Look at how the colt is described in verse 30: "on which no one has ever sat." Animals on which no one had ever sat implied a kind of purity for a sacred task, but there was more going on here. This was another hint that pointed to the divinity of Jesus.

Normally, if you were to climb on the back of a donkey or horse that had never been ridden, the young animal would jump, kick, buck, and crow-hop in all sorts of ways you do not want an animal you are sitting on to do. You have to break a donkey or a horse before you can ride them. These animals have to be trained to submit their will to a rider before any human being can ride on them safely, and such training is not an easy or instantaneous process. Yet Jesus climbed on the back of a colt that had never been ridden and rode the animal down the valley and then back up again to the temple mount, all while a crowd was pressing in on either side, singing, shouting, laying down their cloaks, and waving palm branches.

If you have any experience with horses, you know that donkeys and horses can spook easily at loud noises. It takes thousands of hours for military or police horses to become comfortable around the chaos of parades or battles. However, Jesus rode this green colt into a crowd that was singing and shouting. Yet

the Person riding on this colt was the One whom the apostle Paul described as the One who created everything “in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17). Jesus’s riding on the back of this colt points us to the great power that He possesses as the Lord of all creation.

Yet the Lord of all creation was also a humble king. Jesus did not enter into the city of Jerusalem on a warhorse but as a humble king who came in peace. Jesus’s riding on a donkey was actually a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9 spoke about the coming of the King who would deliver God’s people and bring peace to the nations.

Before the time of Zechariah’s writing in the Old Testament, Israel and Judah had been conquered by foreign nations and taken into exile. After the exile, the remnant of Judah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and temple. This was a time of struggle, but there was also hope. The people had witnessed how kings tragically led the nation into sin only to be conquered and exiled by foreign nations because they refused to repent and turn to God. Zechariah’s message was that one day the perfect, righteous King will come. God promised through the prophet Zechariah

CHRIST Connection

Jesus was prophesied to come as the Messiah on a donkey (Zech. 9:9), revealing His humility and His sovereignty as Lord.

that a donkey would bear the promised King into Zion, the city of Jerusalem.

As followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, what weapons do we have for our fight against sin and our gospel mission in the world?

Jesus is King and was worshiped as the Messiah (Luke 19:36-40).

³⁶ As he was going along, they were spreading their clothes on the road. ³⁷ Now he came near the path down the Mount of Olives, and the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen: ³⁸ Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven! ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees from the crowd told him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out.”

Jesus Received a Kingly Welcome

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people spread their clothes on the ground for Jesus and the colt. This was an act of homage that symbolized their recognition of Jesus as king, as it called to mind the royal processions of King Solomon over the combined kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 1:38-39) and King Jehu over the divided kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 9:13).

This celebratory procession for Jesus caused the whole crowd of Jesus’s disciples to praise God for everything they had seen Jesus do (Luke 19:37). As we mentioned earlier, Luke began Jesus’s path toward Jerusalem in Luke 9. In Luke 10, Jesus commissioned

seventy-two additional disciples to prepare the way by healing the sick and proclaiming the kingdom of God. The disciples returned amazed, claiming, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” (10:17). These seventy-two disciples then joined with the twelve disciples as they headed to Jerusalem.

All the disciples sang: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” (19:38). The disciples praised Jesus by quoting Psalm 118:26. Psalm 118:1 begins, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever.” The phrase “His faithful love endures forever” is mentioned five times in this psalm, and numerous times in other psalms, calling to mind God’s covenant love for His people. Then in verse 5, the psalmist described how the Lord delivers His people, “I called to the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and put me in a spacious place.” The psalm also describes a holy procession into Jerusalem after some great act of deliverance by the Lord:

Open the gates of righteousness for me; I will enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the LORD’s gate; the righteous will enter through it. I will give thanks to you because you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from the LORD; it is wondrous in our sight. This is the day the LORD has made; let’s rejoice and be glad in it. LORD, save us! LORD, please grant us success! He who comes in the name of the LORD is blessed. From the house of the LORD we bless you. (Ps. 118:19-26)

The disciples recognized that Jesus is the One on whom God's favor rests. Jesus is the One who came to deliver His people from sin and death.

The crowd and disciples recognized that Jesus is the blessed King, and they worshiped Him. Jesus accepted their worship because He is the King whom God promised. Jesus has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Have you recognized Jesus's blessedness and worshiped Him as your king? Since Jesus is your king, you must submit your life to His rule and reign in your life instead of seeking your own interests. To worship King Jesus means we live our lives for Him, even taking up our cross to follow Him, since He is the ruler of all.

What are some ways you have seen God and His gospel defy worldly wisdom?

Jesus Rebuked the Pharisees

This blessed King came to bring peace. Jesus's riding on a donkey was not only a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, it was also a sign of peace. The people crying out, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven" (Luke 19:38; cf. Ps. 148:1) echoed what the angels declared at Jesus's birth, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!" (Luke 2:14). Peace was declared at Jesus's arrival on earth, and peace was declared at His arrival in Jerusalem.

Not everyone rejoiced to see this procession, however. The Pharisees objected to Jesus's receiving this glory. The Pharisees butted heads with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. They rejected His teachings and despised His miracles, especially those He

performed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees claimed that the crowd's praise went too far, but really, "they didn't want someone challenging their power and authority, and they didn't want a revolt that would bring the Roman army down on them."³ They demanded, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples" (19:39). The Pharisees wanted to silence the joyful praise of the people that was not in their favor.

What are some ways we might be guilty of stifling praise for God and His Son?

But Jesus had no intention of doing that. In fact, Jesus told His critics, those who had already plotted to kill Him (Luke 6:11; John 11:53), that if the people stopped, His praise would not cease. Jesus said, "I tell you, if they were to keep silent, the stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). All of creation was made to magnify the greatness of the Lord Christ.

Jesus, the divine, humble, and blessed King came to earth the first time to bring true and eternal peace with God to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. In Jesus's day, many thought that the Messiah would overthrow Rome and bring peace to Israel. The crowd likely thought, *Finally, our king is here!* But Jesus was not there to overthrow Rome nor to sit on the throne as the Son of David. No, Jesus was bringing far more than world peace. Jesus brought freedom from oppressive sin in order that we might have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Peace with God is what every single person needs because everyone is a sinner.

Only in seeing Jesus's true identity as the divine King and knowing Him by faith will you be able to truly find this peace with God. Have you seen who this King riding on a donkey is? Jesus is the King unlike

**Voices from
CHURCH HISTORY**

*"The broken stones of the law cry out against us, but Christ himself, who has rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, speaks for us. Stones might well cry out, but we will not let them: we will hush their noise with ours, we will break forth into sacred song, and bless the majesty of the Most High all our days."*⁴

—Charles Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

THEOLOGY Connection

CHRIST AS KING:

God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

any other king. Jesus is the divine Son of God; He is God in flesh. Jesus is the humble King who laid down His life to save His people from their sins. Jesus is the blessed King who is chosen by God. Jesus is the peaceful King who came to bring us peace with God.

We must see Jesus, know Him, and delight in Him because one day He is coming back as the conquering King. When Jesus comes back, He will not be riding on a donkey declaring peace. No, as Revelation 19 shows, He will be coming back as the conquering King to declare war on His enemies (Rev. 19:11-21). John wrote of the return of Christ as the conquering King:

Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Rev. 19:11-16)

When Jesus returns as the triumphant King, all will bow before Him (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10). Those of us who have trusted in Him for salvation will enjoy eternity with Him, but those who rejected the King of heaven will be cast out of His presence (Rev. 21:6-7).

Key Concept: Jesus is the humble King as prophesied, bringing peace and glory to God.



HEAD

What practices could help you read the Bible in a way that sees its bigness and leads your heart to burn with worship for Christ?



HEART

How does seeing Jesus's humility change the way you see yourself and others?



HANDS

How will you praise Jesus as your King with your words and actions this week?

Notes



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PERSECUTION TO GATHERING

CORE PASSAGE: MARK 13:5-11, 14-16, 24-27, 32-33

Context: In the final days before His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples what to expect upon His return at the end of the age. His looming death on the cross would not be the end of the story. There would be much more to come for His followers: The gospel must be preached, people must be saved, and Jesus will return in glory. Though Jesus's message can be difficult to understand, it is a gift of grace to us all. He told us what to expect in the future. He assured us that, come what may, He is in control, He is coming back, and He will make all things right.

Key Concept: We stay alert, knowing Jesus will one day return, though we don't know when.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Mark 13:1-13 | ☐ Day 4: Matthew 25:1-46 |
| ☐ Day 2: Mark 13:14-37 | ☐ Day 5: Luke 21:5-38 |
| ☐ Day 3: Matthew 24:1-51 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 10 |

The end times will bring false rumors and persecution (Mark 13:5-11).

⁵ Jesus told them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, don’t be alarmed; these things must take place, but it is not yet the end. ⁸ For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to local courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them. ¹⁰ And it is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations. ¹¹ So when they arrest you and hand you over, don’t worry beforehand what you will say, but say whatever is given to you at that time, for it isn’t you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”

Watch Out

What is it about the study of the end times that fascinates so many people? Think about the great number of apocalyptic movies and books (even for teens) that are coming out today. Even the secular world is fascinated with the end of the world as we know it.

Some people claim Jesus will return on a certain day, and their followers sell everything they have to watch the sunset in the hopes that their prediction is right. Others build doomsday havens with bomb-proof shelters, stockpiled with an endless amount of supplies vacuum sealed to last decades.

Amidst all this chaotic thinking about the end times, how should Christians live? Should Christians



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes

THEOLOGY Connection

THE SECOND COMING OF

CHRIST: The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in bodily form (Matt. 24–25) to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur (Acts 1:7), only assuring that it will be unexpected (Matt. 25:8–10) and glorious (Matt. 24:30). Because of the mystery of these events, several views have emerged in the attempt to understand everything the Bible teaches about His coming reign. (cont.)

live in fear? Should we build bunkers? Should we sell everything and wait for a particular date? In Mark 13, Jesus spoke about shocking events that would happen at the end of the age. These teachings could be summed up this way: (1) trust Him and (2) do not live in fear. Jesus called His followers to be vigilant and to live faithfully for Him.

Jesus’s speech here on the Mount of Olives is often called “the Olivet Discourse,” and here He described what will happen in the days and years after He ascended to heaven but before His second coming. The Olivet discourse is the longest of Jesus’s discourses in Mark’s Gospel.

In Mark 13:1, Jesus had just left the temple for the final time. There, the Pharisees and Sadducees had attempted to bait Him into an altercation (11:27–12:40). As Jesus and His disciples left, the disciples marveled at the impressive building. But Jesus told them: “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another—all will be thrown down” (13:2). He then went to the Mount of Olives, where Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus to tell them when those things would happen (vv. 3–4).

The disciples’ question was twofold. First, they wanted to know when the temple would be destroyed. The disciples likely thought that the destruction of the temple would happen at the end of time, when God would start a new age in His kingdom. Second, the disciples wanted an “insider’s view” for what to look for. They wanted a sign to show them that the end of the age was happening. However, Jesus did not focus on signs in this discourse. Instead, He warned them of the dangers and persecution they would face. While the disciples wanted a sign, Jesus exhorted them to

live faithfully for Him during the hardships that they would face. Jesus's disciples needed to be alert because many would attempt to deceive them.

Jesus warned His disciples to watch out that they were not deceived by anyone falsely claiming to be the Christ. He said, "Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and they will deceive many" (v. 6). False messiahs would come and feed upon the people's hopes. These deceivers would claim to possess divine authority. So Jesus's disciples had to be prepared to see through their deception.

Christians today must also heed Jesus's warnings so we are not deceived. False teachers have come and will come. Jesus and other New Testament writers often warned of false teachers. Yet Jesus warned of those who would claim to be the Messiah. Even into the present, there are a number of people throughout history who have claimed falsely to be the promised Messiah.¹ How can we discern the truth between the Christ and the charlatans claiming to be Him? The truth is that at His second coming, Jesus's return will be certain. It will not be hidden or secretive; no one could miss it. In Luke's account of the Olivet discourse, Jesus said, "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). So far, none of these false messiahs have come on the clouds of glory. Instead of being caught up in deceitful teachings by deceitful teachers, we believers must commit ourselves to knowing and studying the Scriptures. We confront false doctrine with the truth from the Bible, the Word of God.

Not only did Jesus tell His followers to watch out for false messiahs, but He warned of wars and natural disasters that will happen in the future. These are not

THEOLOGY Connection

(cont.) One view holds that upon His return, Jesus will begin a literal 1000-year reign on earth. Another holds that this millennium occurs in this church age, to be followed by His return. Another still holds that the millennium symbolizes Christ's reign in heaven and in the hearts of Christians while we wait for His return. Despite differences, all views agree that the imminent return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when He returns, all things will be made new.

signs of the end and should not cause excessive concern for His followers (Mark 13:7), beyond the responsibility of all believers to pray for peace and to seek justice in the world. Jesus was giving these warnings to His disciples before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. There was a relatively peaceful time for the Roman Empire as a whole; however, the Jews would hear of distant wars and rumors of wars happening around the empire.

Sadly, war has always been a part of human history. Jesus's warning about wars was meant to remind Mark's hearers of the fallout of living in a world broken by sin. Yet Jesus wanted His followers to know that God is sovereign over all the events of history.

Along with wars, the disciples also would hear of natural disasters such as earthquakes and famines. Jesus described these events as “the beginning of birth pains” (v. 8). The metaphor of birth pains carried with it the idea of intense suffering that would be redeemed by the fruit of the labor, namely, a child. Labor and childbirth are used throughout the Bible as a picture of suffering that will eventually lead to joy (Gen. 35:17; 1 Sam. 4:19-20; Isa. 42:13-15; 66:7-8; Mic. 4:10; John 16:21; Gal. 4:19).

How does Jesus's warning strengthen your confidence to remain faithful when trials come?

Be On Your Guard

Believers will face persecution. The general hardships and conflicts faced in the previous verses now become personal as Jesus warned: “Be on your guard! They will hand you over to local courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues” (Mark 13:9). While the

thought of persecution is discouraging, Jesus told the disciples plainly that the persecution would come for the gospel to spread: “You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them.” These persecutions are not meaningless; they are opportunities to be a witness for Christ! But Jesus’s followers do not experience any form of suffering that Jesus Himself did not already suffer. Days after Jesus told His disciples these things, He stood before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod before heading to the cross.

Not long after Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension, many of His disciples would be arrested and persecuted. Yet they were joyful over the fact that they were able to suffer for Jesus. In Acts 5, the apostles were arrested for preaching about Jesus. After they were beaten in prison, they were let go, and “they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name” (Acts 5:41).

When you pray for an opportunity to share the gospel, do you understand that opportunity might come through persecution? Believers in the West typically share the gospel without threat of public flogging, arrest, or execution. Yet church history is full of incredible accounts of believers who risked their lives for the sake of the gospel. In fact, persecution often leads to churches scattering and the gospel expanding into new horizons. Jesus said, “It is necessary that the gospel be preached to all nations” (Mark 13:10), and persecution cannot stop the advance of the gospel.

Jesus’s statement about the gospel being preached to all nations was a precursor to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Given that Mark 13:10 has the sense of “first” in its necessity

Voices from THE CHURCH

“In our broken and fallen world we can expect trials, tribulations, and troubles until Jesus returns. While we wait, should we be working out a prophetic schedule of events? Not at all. Instead, listen to what Jesus says and not to others who wish to lead you astray. . . . And as you watch and pray, be on your guard and don’t worry. Jesus already told you all about what to expect!”²

–Daniel Akin

(Greek *proton*; see also other translations), some skeptics say that Jesus's prophecy is faulty because the gospel did not go out to the entire world before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. But Jesus's statement of the gospel being proclaimed internationally was fulfilled in the first century:

Paul said in one of his later letters that “the word of the truth of the gospel . . . has come to you, as it has also in all the world” (Col. 1:5b–6). Certainly the gospel was not preached to every corner of the globe in the first century. The gospel did not go to southern Africa, East Asia, Australia, or the Americas. . . . He was speaking about the Mediterranean world, the known world of that time, and the gospel was preached across that world in the first century.³

Jesus went on to comfort His disciples by telling them not to worry about what they would say in the midst of their persecution because the Holy Spirit would be with them to guide them. This would have been a big comfort to them. Many of the disciples were Galilean fishermen, who would have been intimidated by standing in front of councils, governors, and kings. Yet not long after Jesus's ascension, when their persecutors “realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). May we remain bold for the Lord and proclaim the good news of the Savior who came to earth to save us from our sins!

Does the promise of the Holy Spirit with you in persecution give you comfort or raise questions? Why?

Though we know not when, Jesus will return (Mark 13:14-16,24-27,32-33).

Notes

¹⁴ “When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be” (let the reader understand), “then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.” ¹⁵ A man on the housetop must not come down or go in to get anything out of his house, ¹⁶ and a man in the field must not go back to get his coat. . . . ²⁴ But in those days, after that tribulation: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; ²⁵ the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ He will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. . . . ³² Now concerning that day or hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son—but only the Father. ³³ Watch! Be alert! For you don’t know when the time is coming.”

Watch

Jesus warned His disciples of a great tragedy that was going to happen and is going to happen: “When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be . . . then those in Judea must flee to the mountains” (v. 14). What was this “abomination of desolation” that Jesus referred to?

In Daniel 9, the Lord responded to Daniel’s prayer of corporate repentance and praying for the fulfillment of God’s word to Jeremiah regarding the seventy years of exile. God sent His angel, Gabriel, to expand upon Jeremiah’s prophecy for His people, which concluded with giving Daniel some insight regarding the coming ruler whom we understand to be the antichrist:

He will make a firm covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and offering. And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple until the decreed destruction is poured out on the desolator. (Dan. 9:27)

This abomination of desolation was thought to have been fulfilled or partially fulfilled several times throughout Jewish history. In the period between the Old and New Testaments, Antiochus IV Epiphanes set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem, and pigs were sacrificed there. Yet Jesus stated the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy would come about at a point in the future.

After Jesus warned about the coming abomination of desolation, He issued a number of imperatives for the people of Judea to flee into the mountains. In times of war, the people of Judea would usually flee to the city of Jerusalem for protection within the fortified walls. Jesus warned, though, that the city would be destroyed, and they would have to flee the city.

Jesus declared that the people should not hesitate to flee. He told them not to go back into their houses to take anything because their situation would be dire (Mark 13:15-16). The coming judgment would be immediate, so they would need to flee quickly. These instructions showed the urgency of the moment.

The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was meant to fulfill prophecy. In Luke's expanded account of this discourse, Jesus said that these events would happen "because these are days of vengeance to fulfill all the things that are written" (Luke 21:22). This is what was communicated by the apocalyptic language

regarding the sun, moon, and stars no longer giving their light. Even “the powers in the heavens” will be affected—“shaken”—by the outworking of God’s judgment upon the earth (Mark 13:24-25; cf. v. 31).

All throughout the Old Testament, God warned the people that He would punish sin and rebellion. In 1 Kings 9:8-9, God said this about the temple:

Though this temple is now exalted, everyone who passes by will be appalled and will scoff. They will say, “Why did the LORD do this to this land and this temple?” Then they will say, “Because they abandoned the LORD their God who brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt. They held on to other gods and bowed in worship to them and served them. Because of this, the LORD brought all this ruin on them.”

The destruction and judgment that fell upon Jerusalem fulfilled God’s words in 586 BC and would again in AD 70. In Jesus’s day, the people of Israel completely rejected their Messiah; they would crucify Him just days after His Olivet discourse. Everything God promised in the Old Testament would come to pass.

God’s Word is certain, a sure foundation for our lives. God’s Word, like God Himself, cannot be shaken. So do not take the warnings in Scripture lightly. Do not take your sin lightly. Instead, repent and trust God. His Word is true and will stand firmly, even if it seems like the entire world is falling apart. As believers, we can trust God and take Him at His Word, because it is true.

What “shakable” things are you tempted to cling to, and how might Jesus be inviting you to rest more deeply in what cannot be shaken?

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

“The Son of Man is coming in the midst of both calamities and promises, both the grief of nations and the longing of the saints. He is the common element in both. He who is common to both will end the one by inflicting judgment on the nations, and will commence the other by fulfilling the longings of the saints.”⁴

—Tertullian
(c. 155–220)

CHURCH Connection

Jesus spoke of the end times when He will return, gathering His people after a time of hardship and persecution. No one knows when He will come, so in the meantime, we stay alert and preach the gospel.

Be Ready

Jesus then shifted to the time of His second coming. He promised that after a time of hardship, He will return: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26). This will not be a secret arrival; everyone will witness the return of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus also said He will “send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (v. 27). Notice that Jesus’s followers will live in the east, west, north, and south—all over the face of the earth. This shows us that the good news will have spread across the world. When Jesus returns, He will gather all of God’s people to Himself.

No one knows when Jesus will return, so we must stay alert. Even Jesus Himself, who is God in flesh, said He did not know the day or hour of His return. This is not to say Jesus gave up His divinity or that He is somehow less than fully God. In His incarnation, the fully divine Son of God remained fully God as He took on a human body and nature, so this “limitation” must be a function of His humanity. If Jesus declared His own ignorance on this pivotal detail, then we should never think mere humans could discover or calculate it; instead, we are to take Jesus’s counsel and be ready.

So, are you ready for Christ’s return? If you are not a Christian, then you are not ready, and not because you do not have enough food stored up or an emergency rucksack. Those who do not believe in Jesus are not ready for the day of the Lord because they are still dead in their sins. If this is you, surrender your life to Jesus, put your trust in Him, and He will save you from the punishment of death and hell for your sins.

Hopefully you have already trusted in Christ. If so, then part of being ready for Jesus's return is serving as His witness in the world. Jesus has called all believers to tell others the gospel so they can be redeemed just as we have been. For those who trust in Christ, we must labor for Him so that the gospel will be "preached to all nations" (v. 10). So, are you ready? One day Jesus is coming back. May we be ready for His glorious return!

When you imagine Christ appearing in glory to gather His people, what stirs in your heart?



HEAD

How can you be sure that no one will deceive you about Christ's return?



HEART

How does the promise of Christ's return fill you with hope today?

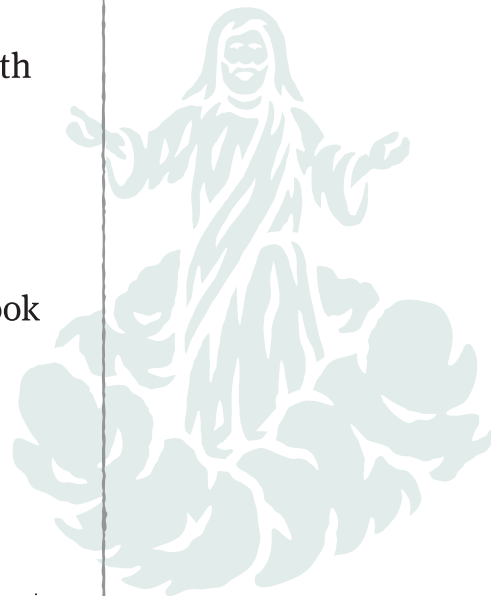


HANDS

In the ordinary rhythms of your life, what will it look like to watch and wait for Jesus's return?

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BETRAYAL TO BLESSING



CORE PASSAGE: MARK 14:17-26

Context: Jesus “triumphantly” entered Jerusalem, humbly riding on a donkey. Over the next week, He cleansed the temple of thieves, denounced the Jewish authorities, and taught about the future destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Near the end of the week, in the upper room, before Jesus celebrated and transformed the Passover meal, He had a startling message for His disciples: one of them would betray Him. This betrayal was not a surprise to Jesus. He knew it all along, and as He neared the day of His death, it was time for the traitor to do what he had been appointed to do.

Key Concept: Jesus endured betrayal, remaining faithful to the mission of establishing a new covenant.

DAILY READINGS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Day 1: Mark 14:1-26 | ☐ Day 4: John 13:1–14:31 |
| ☐ Day 2: Matthew 26:1-30 | ☐ Day 5: John 15:1–17:26 |
| ☐ Day 3: Luke 22:1-30 | ☐ Day 6: Psalm 55 |

Jesus endured the suffering of betrayal
(Mark 14:17-21).

¹⁷ When evening came, he arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining and eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” ¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one by one, “Surely not I?” ²⁰ He said to them, “It is one of the Twelve—the one who is dipping bread in the bowl with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.”

The Table Was Set for Betrayal

The event recounted in this passage took place on the Thursday before Good Friday. This was Jesus’s last night with His disciples before He would be arrested and crucified. That very night, He would be betrayed by Judas, one of His original twelve disciples. Judas had already made prior arrangements with the chief priests to betray Jesus after his disillusionment with Jesus’s anointing in Bethany (14:10-11). Some of the disciples had grumbled about the seeming waste of money by the woman who anointed Jesus’s head with expensive perfume, but Jesus rebuked the disciples. John, in his Gospel, identified Judas as one of the disciples who complained, not because he cared about the poor but because he helped himself to the money bag (John 12:4-6). While Mark did not describe Judas’s motivations for betraying Jesus, Judas’s preemptive actions made it clear that he fit in among the disciples with the access needed to betray Jesus, but he wasn’t really one of them in his heart.



Scan this QR code
to access this session's
Scripture passages.

Notes

Mark mentioned that it was “the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrifice the Passover lamb” (Mark 14:12). Jesus’s disciples prepared the meal, and they sat together in the upper room to celebrate the Passover.

Passover was one of the most important feasts of all the holy days in the Old Testament. The Passover commemorated God’s deliverance of the people of Israel from the oppressive nation of Egypt. In Exodus 12, the battle between Pharaoh and the Lord, with its ten plagues, reached its climax. The final plague, the death of the firstborn, would come, but the Lord provided atonement and rescue for the people of Israel. God told Moses that the people must sacrifice a lamb without blemish, roast and eat the meat, and spread its blood over their doorposts (Ex. 12:7-8). The people of Israel obeyed, and the households that had the blood on their doorposts were “passed over” by the Lord. God commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover meal every year as a memorial “because on this very day I brought your military divisions out of the land of Egypt. You must observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent statute” (v. 17). The Passover meal was a reminder of how God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and from the death of the firstborn. In order to celebrate the Passover, the people traveled to Jerusalem, where the sacrificial lambs would be slain in the temple (Deut. 12:11; 16:2; 1 Kings 6:11-13; 11:36).

As the people were preparing to celebrate the Passover in this passage, what were the religious leaders doing? Were they planning on getting their hearts right in order to celebrate God’s deliverance? No, they planned Jesus’s death through Judas’s betrayal.

As Jesus and His twelve disciples reclined at the table together, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me” (Mark 14:18). Two times already in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus had mentioned His betrayal (9:31-32; 10:33-34), yet His disciples did not understand what He was talking about. Jesus, on the other hand, knew full well what awaited Him, but until this point, He had not let it be known that it would be one of His closest friends who would betray Him.

Mark set up the scene for Jesus’s betrayal in verse 17 by describing how Jesus and His disciples were together, reclining at the same table. The image evokes a sense of intimacy and fellowship. This betrayal would come at the hand of one within Jesus’s inner circle of disciples, from “one who is eating with me” (v. 18). Being betrayed by a close friend, one who ate at the table, was certainly one of the worst kinds of betrayal.¹ While the eleven other disciples did not know who would do it, Judas had already set in motion his plan to betray Jesus.

Jesus’s prediction of betrayal deeply troubled the disciples. “They began to be distressed and to say to him one by one, ‘Surely not I?’” (v. 19). Some translations say that the disciples were “saddened” or “sorrowful” to hear of this betrayal of Jesus. The disciples’ question, “Surely not I?” expected a negative response. Each of the disciples asked this question one by one. In Mark’s account of this event, there is no specific focus on Judas, as compared to Matthew’s and John’s Gospels (Matt. 26:25; John 13:23-30).

What are some ways you might have the potential to betray Jesus?

Notes



Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to see the Old Testament prophecies of Judas’s betrayal and its fulfillment in the New Testament.

GOSPEL Connection

Jesus suffered more than just the cross. He suffered humiliation and betrayal. Yet He endured because of His love and commitment to His mission to bring salvation and establish a new covenant with God’s people.

Voices from THE CHURCH

“Jesus is indeed this Passover Lamb, and He is in complete control of the events leading to His death. The cross did not catch Him off guard. No, it was a divine appointment scheduled, as Peter would write, ‘before the foundation of the world’ (1 Pet 1:20).”²
—Daniel Akin

Betrayal Was Part of God’s Plan

Jesus responded to the disciples’ searching question by restating that His betrayer would be one of the Twelve, and more specifically, “the one who is dipping bread in the bowl with me” (Mark 14:20). Dipping bread in a bowl was a typical feature of the meals in their day and was part of the Passover feast as a piece of unleavened bread would be dipped in sauce. This clarification from Jesus meant the betrayer sat close to Him.

While the disciples were distressed, Jesus assured them that “the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him” (v. 21). Judas’s act of betrayal was not a random act. It was specifically prophesied in the Scriptures concerning the Messiah. Jesus’s betrayal was part of God’s divine plan to save and redeem His people. In this act of Judas, the Scriptures were fulfilled. Various Scriptures foretold facets of this betrayal, but certainly Psalm 41:9: “Even my friend in whom I trusted, one who ate my bread, has raised his heel against me,” as Jesus quoted this in John 13:18. This person would have witnessed every miracle and listened to every teaching. The psalmist also said:

Now it is not an enemy who insults me—otherwise I could bear it; it is not a foe who rises up against me—otherwise I could hide from him. But it is you, a man who is my peer, my companion and good friend! We used to have close fellowship; we walked with the crowd into the house of God. (Ps. 55:12-14)

Jesus pronounced a woe upon His betrayer. It was God’s sovereign will that Jesus be betrayed, but “woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It

would have been better for him if he had not been born” (Mark 14:21). The betrayer would face God’s severe judgment upon him for his sin. Even though Jesus’s betrayal and death were part of God’s plan, Judas was personally responsible for his sinful actions. Therefore, God would judge him severely (Matt. 27:1-10).

While the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility is often debated in theology, we must not miss that we are responsible for our sins. We also learn that unrepentant sin will be judged. As followers of Christ, we must understand what Jesus went through on our behalf and repent of our sins, which deserve death and hell, in order to receive God’s mercy and grace freely given through faith in Christ.

How does Judas’s fulfillment of prophecy challenge your understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture?

Jesus endured to the cross because of His faithfulness to the new covenant
(Mark 14:22-26).

²² As they were eating, he took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.”
²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Set a New Table

Despite the pain of betrayal and the pain of what was to come, Jesus remained focused on sacrificing His life for all who believe in Him. After speaking of His coming death, Jesus took His disciples through the Passover meal. The disciples would have been expecting a normal Passover meal, but this one would be different. Jesus picked up the bread and blessed it, as Jews had done for centuries. But then Jesus said of the bread, “Take it; this is my body” (v. 22). This would have been a shocking statement for His disciples, because instead of remembering the covenant of the past, Jesus was ushering in a new covenant.

During a typical Passover meal, the host would serve the bread of affliction, which was meant to be a reminder of the suffering Israel faced in their slavery in Egypt:

Do not eat leavened bread with it. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread with it, the bread of hardship—because you left the land of Egypt in a hurry—so that you may remember for the rest of your life the day you left the land of Egypt. (Deut. 16:3)

Instead of calling His disciples to remember the affliction of the Israelites in the exodus, Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body” (Mark 14:22).

Do you see what Jesus did here? The bread was meant to be a reminder of the peoples’ affliction in Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness. Now Jesus was saying the bread was meant to be a reminder of the affliction His body would go through for our salvation. We deserve the punishment and wrath of God



for our sins. But our perfectly sinless Savior took the punishment for our sins upon Himself. Jesus would lay down His life so that we could receive eternal life. Do you see what Jesus has done for you? Jesus's body bore our affliction so that we might be spared. How else should we respond but with repentance and faith in Him? And let us continually search ourselves for sin so we don't follow the steps of Judas to judgment but the path of our Savior to everlasting life.

Jesus knew what this new meal pointed to and how horrific His suffering would be on the cross. Yet Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross." And Romans 5:8-9 says:

God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath.

What weaknesses and sins are revealed through your own self-examination right now?

Jesus Enacted a New Covenant

After giving the bread a new meaning, Jesus took the cup and gave it new meaning as well. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Jesus's blood shed on the cross is the seal of the new covenant. Jesus said that His blood would be "poured out." This is an allusion to the way Moses poured out the blood of the covenant in Exodus 24:6: "Moses took half the blood and set it in basins; the other half of the blood he splattered on the altar." Why was blood necessary? God explained: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have

Voices from CHURCH HISTORY

"There is a reality in the celebration of the Lord's Supper beyond a memorial. Yes, Jesus in His humanity is in heaven, but in His deity, He is not restricted by time and space. So, we can have full assurance when we come to the Lord's Table that we come into His real presence. He is there."³

—R. C. Sproul
(1939–2017)

appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the lifeblood that makes atonement” (Lev. 17:11).

Jesus’s blood would be poured out to establish the new covenant. The blood of bulls and goats offered over and over again year after year was no longer needed. Jesus’s perfect blood, shed once for the forgiveness of sin, fully and finally accomplished salvation for all time (Heb. 9:12,25-26).

The old covenant was inaugurated with blood, but the people could not uphold their end. Though they promised to do all that God commanded them (Ex. 19:8), they failed to keep God’s laws (Jer. 31:32). Their sacrifices could cleanse them temporarily from their sin but could not change their hearts. So the prophet Jeremiah foretold about the new covenant in Jesus:

“Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days”—the LORD’s declaration. “I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will one teach his neighbor or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them”—this is the LORD’s declaration. “For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin.” (Jer. 31:33-34)

Jesus’s new covenant provided the internal change that the old covenant could not.

The Passover meal was meant to be a perpetual reminder of how God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt and drew them to Himself. Jesus now proclaimed a new memorial to remind us of the

redemption He paid to rescue us from sin and death. Jesus was saying all the sacrifices, all the blood of lambs and bulls spilled out since the first Passover, pointed to Him. This new supper that Jesus instituted is what we call the Lord's Supper. It is meant to look back on what Jesus has done and also point us to what He will do in the future.

In a traditional Passover meal, there would be four cups of wine that would be drunk to symbolize the redemption of God's people. Many scholars believe Jesus drank the third cup but not the fourth:

Jesus' vow to abstain from wine was made before the fourth cup, which was drunk with the words, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7 nrsv). Jesus reserved the drinking of this cup for the future restoration. This powerful scene is accented by Jesus' taking the third cup, saying "I will redeem you," sharing it with the disciples, and then pledging that he would finish this celebration in the kingdom of God.⁴

When Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25), He referred to the future marriage banquet described in Revelation 19:6-9. There is a greater meal yet to come! We could say that the Lord's Supper is an appetizer for the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

Jesus mentioned the reality of the future kingdom. In a matter of hours from the time He left the supper table, He would be arrested and crucified. Christ spoke with certainty that no matter what was about to happen though dark hours ahead, God's kingdom

THEOLOGY
Connection

THE LORD'S SUPPER: The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

would come! We should take great courage from this as well.

On the night before Jesus died, He gave His disciples the explanation and the meaning of his death. After these events took place and Christ was resurrected, they remembered what Jesus said, and it changed them.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, He showed His disciples how the Passover meal pointed to Him. The Passover meal was fulfilled and meant to be understood in light of His death. All Passover meals had bread and the cup. But what about the main course of the Passover meal—what about the lamb? Like Mark, none of the Gospel writers mention the lamb as part of this last supper, though Peter and John take care of the sacrifice (Luke 22:7-8). They would have eaten the lamb as part of the sacrifice since it was forbidden to leave any of it until morning, but with Jesus, the roasted meat was no longer the center of the meal. Jesus is the center of this meal. John the Baptist correctly declared of Jesus, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Jesus is the Lamb, the sacrifice that was prepared to take away our sin! Jesus took our sins upon Himself; He received the punishment we deserved. Jesus did this so that we might receive what we do not deserve—salvation and eternal life. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of this sacrifice and the blessing of spiritual nourishment that is life in Jesus Christ. This meal was no longer meant to be a reminder about God's deliverance from the tyranny of Egypt, but now it is meant to be a reminder of deliverance from sin and death. Have you beheld the glory of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

How should Jesus's sacrifice of His own body and blood shape the way we come to the Lord's Supper?

Notes



HEAD

Why was it important for Jesus to institute the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of both His death and the new covenant?



HEART

How does Jesus's sacrifice for your sins encourage you to repent and come to Him for grace and forgiveness?



HANDS

What would you say to a fellow believer who thinks they need to skip the Lord's Supper until they are "worthy"?

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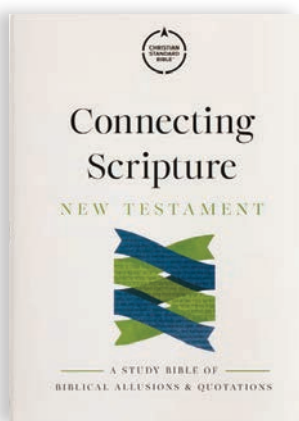
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Jesus's ministry on earth was grounded in the truth and His divine identity and power. He spoke in truth and He lived in truth. Through parables and other teachings, Jesus taught us to seek truth, hear it, and grow because of it. His miracles over creation, over sickness, and over death prove the truth of His authority. And as more and more people took the step of faith to trust in Him, we see the truth of the growth of His kingdom. The events surrounding Jesus are not just stories, they're truth—evidence for the One who is God's Son, the Savior of the world.

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