

A wooden cross is the central element, surrounded by vibrant autumn leaves in shades of orange, red, and yellow. The background is a deep blue with subtle white starbursts. A vertical teal line and a horizontal pink line intersect at the center of the cross.

GRACE
RIVER

2022

HOLY
MONTH
DAILY DEVOTIONS

Holy Month 2022

Daily Devotions

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We don't want to just happen upon Easter. Rather, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus is so magnificent, world-changing, and life-changing that we believe it deserves a lot more heart space than a single Sunday or even a single week. So we're preparing by knowing more of the amazingly good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for 30 special days.

United together, let us *all* slow down and focus on the Christ this season with these biblical devotions. These devotions and prayers/meditations were written by the body of GRACE RIVER to help us focus our hearts on God's word, come to know our Savior and His kingdom all the more, and lead us into prayer, worship, and action in response to who Jesus is.

We encourage you to prepare your heart with daily devotions to make the most of this precious season of Christ's death and resurrection. Use these in your personal time with the Lord and as a family or small group devotional.

Please plan to join us for each of these special times of Holy Month worship

March 30 Wednesday Worship at 630pm

April 3 Sunday Worship at 930am

April 6 Wednesday Worship at 630pm

April 10 Palm Sunday at 930am

April 14 Maundy Thursday at 630pm

April 15 Good Friday at 630pm on

April 17 Easter Sunday at 930am with Baptisms and Brunch

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DAY 1 - MARCH 19

The Son Has Come to Seek the Lost

Luke 19:1-10

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

DEVOTION

This fascinating encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, in front of a skeptical and grumbling crowd, reveals much about the mission of Jesus, the method of Jesus, salvation, repentance, and restitution. Zacchaeus was an unsaved Jewish tax collector. He was despised and scorned by other Jews because tax collectors typically cheated money from others, and because they collaborated with the Roman occupiers. His well-deserved reputation for wickedness and oppression permeated the crowd. He was socially isolated and ostracized. Jesus knew all of this as well. And yet, Jesus reached out directly and publicly to Zacchaeus. The crowd was troubled and disconcerted - *"Why on earth would Jesus interact with this guy? Why would our new political King have anything to do with a guy who collaborated with the Romans?"*

"When Jesus reached the spot, he stopped, looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today'" (verse 5). Jesus was not "supposed" to consort with the likes of Zacchaeus. Here are lessons from Jesus about gospel relationships: He connected personally with the rejected. He stopped and looked directly at Zacchaeus and connected personally with him. The context is important. What we call Holy Week was imminent. Jesus had just taught about the difficulty of entering the Kingdom of God as He spoke to the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18-30). Now He is about to usher a despised sinner into that same Kingdom. He purposely sought out and formed a relationship with Zacchaeus as a person. Then He extended a compelling and loving invitation: "Come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." Jesus was not asking permission to come to dinner. "I must" is a strong affirmation by our Lord that His mission required a visit to the house of Zacchaeus. God proactively seeks out lost sinners in order to save them.

In this case, Jesus gracefully sought out Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus responded in faith, and Jesus pronounced that he was saved (verses 4-9). The Son of God was declaring and demonstrating that citizenship in the Kingdom of God is open to anyone who faithfully believes. No intermediary class of elites was necessary. Religiosity was irrelevant. The priestly Pharisees were aghast. And then, as if to prove the point, Zacchaeus immediately exhibited the reality of his conversion: half of his wealth to the needy,

restitution to those he had cheated. The Mosaic law on restitution required that the perpetrator pay a multiplier of the original amount to the victim and, simultaneously, make a guilt offering to God. The horizontal relationship with people must be restored and the vertical relationship with God must be rehabilitated. Misconduct toward others that requires restitution necessarily includes broken relationship with God. The horizontal and the vertical of restitution are “joined at the hip,” as it were.

Who deserves restitution from us? Certainly we must repay any sort of monetary wrong we have committed. However, the biblical concept of restitution goes beyond the financial. We must do all we possibly can to “make right” any wrong. Have we caused harm with ill-spoken words? Restitution takes the form of apology and retraction. Have we failed to speak up when we should have? If still possible, we should say what needs to be said. Have we done things we have every right to do but which disadvantage or even harm others? Restitution instructs us to reverse those actions if possible. Have we caused harm to others by failing to act? Jesus says we ought to do the right thing. Whenever restitution is required of us, we must recognize that the situation has also damaged our relationship with God. We must do the necessary spiritual work to restore that broken relationship. If not, the task of restitution is not complete.

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Four marks of true repentance are: acknowledgement of wrong, willingness to confess it, willingness to abandon it, and willingness to make restitution. Corrie Ten Boom

DAY 2 - MARCH 20

The King Has Come to Reign Over All

Luke 19:11-27

‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’

DEVOTION

The parable of the 10 minas presents teaching by Jesus in which He seeks to clarify the timing of His Millennial Kingdom and the expectations for believers until that Kingdom is established. The former was particularly relevant to the people with Him on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, and the latter has particular relevance to us. The crowd accompanying Jesus was excitedly convinced that His arrival in Jerusalem would mark the culmination of a political movement, led by Jesus, that would overthrow Roman domination. Jesus took this occasion to explain, by parable, that a period of time of unknown duration would pass before His Kingdom was established. The restive crowd did not want to hear this message. The rest of the Holy Week narrative is, as they say, history: triumphal entry, arrest, trial, execution, resurrection.

There are powerful lessons for us in this parable regarding how we live out our discipleship as we await His return. This parable is sometimes thought to be the same as the parable of the 10 talents in Matthew 25, but careful reading of each shows significant differences that lead to the conclusion that they are distinct. The symbolism of the actors in the 10 minas is very clear: The nobleman is Jesus; the 10 servants are believers; and the subjects who hated the nobleman are rebellious sinners. Each servant is given a mina (approximately three months of a laborer's wages) and told to "put it to work." The nobleman's absence is lengthy and the timing of his return unclear: he has to go to "a distant country" (verse 12). Upon his return, the servants who made use of what they had been given were rewarded, and the one who failed to put his mina to work was punished and called "wicked."

The actions of the wicked servant are instructive. He took his mina and wrapped it in a cloth and left it. He failed to even deposit the mina so it would at least earn interest. The resulting judgment by the nobleman, now King, is that the wicked servant's mina should be taken from him and given to the servant who had been the most prosperous with his mina. That servant had already been rewarded with control of ten cities. The bystanders question the nobleman's decision regarding the mina (they apparently do not care about the cities): "He already has ten!" (verse 25). A mina is infinitesimal compared to 10 cities, so it seems odd that the bystanders would focus on the awarding of a mina to the servant with 10 cities. Jesus is teaching that the minas originally given to the servants are the gracious, free gift of faith in Him. Every believer has been given a mina by God. How we live out that faith (how we invest our mina) is of incalculable worth to God.

We cannot wrap our mina in a cloth and let it sit. We are called by Jesus to bear fruit. *"We must do the work of Him who sent me"* (John 9:4). Our faith must be active. This does not mean that we all have to be "successful" with our faith. It just means that we have to try. The wicked servant failed to try. He refused to apply his mina (i.e. his faith) to the task of fruit bearing. The real question is whether a fruitless Christian was ever a Christian at all. *"So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God"* (Romans 14:12). Woe to those who find themselves on the wrong side of that accounting ledger.

"As disciples of Christ, we must stay firmly connected to Him to remain spiritually productive. A branch draws strength, nourishment, protection, and energy from the vine. If it is broken off, it quickly dies and becomes unfruitful. When we neglect our spiritual life, ignore the Word of God, skimp on prayer, and withhold areas of our lives from the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit, we are like a branch broken off the vine. Our lives become fruitless. We need daily surrender, daily communication, and daily—sometimes hourly—repentance and connection with the Holy Spirit...One counterfeit to bearing good fruit is pretense. We can become experts at the routines, the lingo, and "acting Christian," while experiencing no real power and bearing no eternal fruit. Our hearts remain self-centered, angry, and joyless even while we go through the motions of serving God" (www.GotQuestions.org).

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

"This parable is about God giving us resources to steward. Stewardship is not about protecting the resource given to us but rather actively putting it to work and multiplying it. We are co-partners with God and we all have something to bring with the resources he has blessed us with. Whatever God gives us we are not meant to hide it away in a safe place. We need to diligently invest it with faith and wisdom."

DAY 3 - MARCH 21

Tears and Peace, Cleansing and True Worship

Luke 19:41-48

And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

DEVOTION

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer," but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" Matthew 21:12-13

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. Mark 11:15-16

When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer' but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" Luke 19:45-46

In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" John 2:14-16

The cleansing of the Temple by Jesus occurred on the Monday of Holy week. His triumphal entry had been the day before. It may be that the account of this event in John actually depicts a separate cleansing earlier in His ministry. The commercial traders "were apparently plying their trade in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place in the temple where a non-Jew could go to pray and to meditate. If the temple system was to carry on it was necessary that such facilities be provided. But it was not necessary that they should be in the temple precincts, and it is this to which Jesus took exception" (Morris, Tyndale). The economics of the situation are corrupt. Those journeying to Jerusalem bought their sacrificial animals upon arrival as it was impractical to bring live

animals on an extended journey. Those selling animals in the Temple were able to charge exorbitant prices. The money carried by the incoming worshippers had to be exchanged for money that was deemed acceptable for use in the Temple. High fees and punishing exchange rates were the norm.

The language chosen by Jesus is telling. *“Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD”* (Jeremiah 7:11). The Israelites in Jeremiah's time were committing all sorts of sin and immorality and then appearing in the temple as if it were a place of refuge or safety for them. Their attitude was that anything done outside the Temple did not matter. God's plan for the temple was that it be a house of prayer. *“And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”* (Isaiah 56:6-7).

What are we to make of the Temple cleansing by Jesus? How does it inform our discipleship? “Our Redeemer's cleansing of the temple at the very least illustrates how concerned He is with the purity of worship” (Ligonier). **The only worship that is acceptable to God is that which emerges from a cleansing of the temple of our heart.** Our sinful hearts and minds contain the same corruption that Jesus found in His Temple. We must continually examine our hearts and drive out everything that is not of God. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2).

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

“Our corporate praise and prayer is something that is always in need of reformation, for it is easy for anti-Christian practices to slip in unnoticed. Consider the importance of pure worship from a devoted heart and make it your aim to show reverence and awe when you praise the Lord alongside His people.” Ligonier

DAY 4 - MARCH 22
Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit
Matthew 5:1-3

Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to him. And He opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

DEVOTION

Followed by a throng of curious onlookers who were likely shocked and enthralled by His teaching, Jesus removes himself to a height on a ridge of hills with a magnificent view of the Sea of Galilee. It is there that Jesus sat down to teach the learners who had made a more earnest commitment to follow Him. And what a message they heard that day in what has been collectively termed the Sermon on the Mount. What Jesus says here drives us to our knees as we see God's moral perfection and our own sinfulness which leads us to trust in the imputed righteousness of Jesus. Yet, though what Jesus says is greatly challenging and revealing, it is not only for the life to come but what Jesus calls and enables His followers to live by in this present age. It is the life of a disciple in the presence and power of God's kingdom lived out in everyday life.

The opening portion called the Beatitudes gets its name from the repeated word *blessed*, which means much more than *happy* and is more of a holistic spiritual well-being when someone has the approval of God and thus a joyous destiny. Jesus declares that such people are found approved by God and then list the rewards of this *blessed* condition.

He starts right away with the heart issue of spiritual poverty. These are not necessarily materially poor people. They are not people who have low self-esteem or are doormats in this life. Rather, they are people who by God's grace have perceived their great moral bankruptcy and righteous debt before the Lord and thus know more intimately their personal need for His redemption. Such people do not depend on their own abilities, works, intelligence, or goodness to save them for they realize that in themselves they are spiritually destitute.

Those who know their spiritual poverty call upon the rich graces of Jesus Christ. That is why their reward is the kingdom of heaven. If asked at the gates of heaven, "*Why should Jesus let you in?*" such people would remark, "*Certainly not for anything I am or have done, but only because I am now clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. For He alone has paid my debts, forgiving my sins, and giving me His Spirit. I am terribly poor in myself but my Jesus has made me rich by lavishing His mercy and love upon me. He has made me blessed.*"

As we walk to the cross with Jesus this month, meditate on your spiritual condition in Christ. Repent of attitudes and orientations of the heart and mind that are arrogant and self-reliant. Cling to Jesus for His righteousness, salvation, and mercy. Think upon *the*

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich in His salvation (2 Corinthians 8:9)

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dearest Jesus, would you keep reminding me of how spiritually poor I am without You? Would you keep reminding me how worthy of You are of all of my worship and praise? Would you help me to humble myself before You so that I might love You more and more? Thank You for giving me a glimpse of Your Kingdom.

DAY 5 - MARCH 23

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

DEVOTION

We can mourn many different things throughout our life as we grow, things like leaving our family that we grew up with to start a family of our own, kids growing up and going through all stages that they go through and then going on their own and starting families as well. We can mourn job changes, moving to a new location and most of all the death and loss of a loved one. In the beatitudes it says, "*Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.*" Jesus said this in Matthew 5:4 and I have lived this and have been comforted many times throughout my life.

One time was after my dad's passing in February 2010. Prior to this my uncle would sing the song, "*His Eye is on the Sparrow*", at many of the Bascom funerals and he was not able to do this for my dad because he had passed away some time before him. On the Sunday after my dad's passing I was at 1st Baptist Church (now Grace River) for the service and it came time for special music and a woman got up and sang, "*His Eye is on the Sparrow and I know He watches me*" and I cried all the way through her singing that song. God knew that was what I needed and He was bringing me through the pain of my dad's passing. I talked to the woman after the service and thanked her for following God's prompting her to sing that song.

Isaiah 61:3 talks about giving a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise, instead of a spirit of despair. Both my parents and many other loved ones are now with the Lord and it is such a comfort and blessing to know that they put their faith and trust in Jesus and are now with Him in paradise. Thank you, Lord, that I too will one day be with you and be reunited with them. Amen. KEVIN BASCOM

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Thank You, Holy Spirit, that You are my comforter (John 14:26) Thank You, Jesus, that You are my Redeemer and Friend. I am a true son/daughter of the good Father. I am accepted, secure, and significant in Christ Jesus. Thank You for giving me the oil of gladness and a garment of praise in trade for mourning and despair. I bless Your Holy Name.

DAY 6 - MARCH 24

Blessed Are The Meek

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

DEVOTION

These first Beatitudes build on each other. The poor in spirit know that they do not have righteousness of their own, they are spiritually destitute. The awareness of their own spiritual bankruptcy, and the overwhelming presence of sin leads to mourning over this sin nature that until now has defined their lives. This brings us to “*blessed are the meek.*”

Meekness is not a term we use very much anymore. Meekness refers to a person who is quiet, gentle, righteous, and obedient. These qualities are not ones that come easily, they cut against the grain of our sin nature. However, they were defining characteristics of our Lord Jesus. He submitted Himself to the Father, and was obedient even to death on the cross. If we desire to grow as disciples, then meekness will grow in us as well. The promise in this Beatitude is that the meek “*shall inherit the earth.*”

In this Beatitude Jesus is quoting Psalm 37:11. To get the whole context though you need to read verse 10 as well.

*In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;
Though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land
And delight themselves in abundant peace.*

This inheritance is not describing a season of temporal ease, but rather is speaking to the coming Kingdom. For true disciples of Jesus, ones who follow in His footsteps, Romans 8:17 describes us as co-heirs with Christ. If our Savior and Master was described as meek and mild, how much more so should we, who have nothing of our own worthy of boasting, cultivate a lifestyle of intentional meekness?

ZACHARY MCNEIL

Extra Reading: [Psalm 37; Matthew 11:28-30; James 3:13](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please help me to be more and more like You. Help me to choose gentleness, meekness, Your righteousness, and obedience to You when my flesh cries out for its own way. Thank you that Philippians 1:6 says, “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” I put my hope in You and in the truth of Your word.

DAY 7 - MARCH 25

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

DEVOTION

Jesus is calling us to holy living, to lead lives that are upright and morally responsible. The principle here is to make righteousness our #1 priority. We spend a good deal of our time finding comfort in food and drink (and other necessities of life). Seeking righteousness is a calling much deeper than physical hunger and thirst. Jesus tells us not to worry about those needs. *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (food, drink, clothes) will be given to you as well”* (Matt 6:33). In this Easter season as we contemplate the death and resurrection of the one truly righteous man, Jesus, we look forward to his return and his setting all things right.

So, what does it mean to *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”*? It means becoming mature disciples of Jesus as we read, study, and apply God’s word. (For) *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man (woman) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16).

ERIC PEIRCE

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Lord, forgive me for when I’ve hungered after materials, thirsted after the loves of this world, and when my desire for You has waned. As I open Your word today and tomorrow, would you increase my appetite for Your truth, my longing for Your love, and my preoccupation with You. I pray you fill me with more of what You want for me this day – true food and true drink – Your Son Jesus. Thank you Jesus, Amen.

DAY 8 - MARCH 26

Blessed Are The Merciful

Matthew 5:7

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

DEVOTION

I've often heard it said that it is better to ask for God's mercy than God's justice. If justice means getting what you deserve, then mercy means not getting what you deserve. In a court of law, a judge can only show mercy to someone already declared guilty. We have all violated God's perfect standard and have been declared guilty. We are at the mercy of the Judge of Heaven. We deserve the death penalty. But the Father showed his great mercy by sending His Son to die in our place.

God's mercy to us is an example for us to follow by showing mercy to others. The next time you feel like "getting even" with someone who has offended you, remember the mercy God has extended to you, and likewise show mercy to the offender.

*"This is a trustworthy saying and everyone should accept it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and I am the worst of them all. But God had **mercy** on me for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16).*

ERIC PEIRCE

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Father, blessed be Your name. Thank you for your patient, ongoing, and gracious mercy poured out on my life. Though I was guilty, you have forgiven me! I see so many places in my life where I have not shown mercy to people I felt did not deserve it and people with whom I wanted to get even. May the radiance of Your mercy overwhelm me, change me, and lead me to be merciful to others as You have are to me. I pray this in the name of our Hope, Jesus Christ, Amen.

DAY 9 - MARCH 27

Blessed Are The Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

DEVOTION

Just as only those who show mercy will receive mercy, only those with a pure heart will see God. The heart is so much more than the seat of our emotions. It is the center of our inward lives, the source of our thoughts and understanding.

When Moses spoke to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land, he gave them this command, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your mind. And these words that I command you today shall be on your **hearts**” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-6). It’s obvious that God wants to dwell in the very center of our hearts. This is the home of the Holy Spirit!

We know that we cannot make our hearts pure through our own effort. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. We would do well to pray as David did: “Create in me a **clean heart**, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

ERIC PEIRCE

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Indeed Lord, You surely know I cannot purify my own heart. Lead me this day to co-work with the Holy Spirit to resist evil, avoid temptation, and walk in the Spirit. Forgive me Jesus for all the ways my heart has recently been impure. Create in me a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Throughout this season, I want to glorify You who are so pure and look upon the radiance of You who are so perfect. Blessed be Your name Jesus.

DAY 10 - MARCH 28

Blessed Are The Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons*¹ of God.*

DEVOTION

How shocking these words must have been to colonized Israelites living under Rome’s often cruel occupation. We can imagine that some in the crowds and perhaps even among the larger group of disciples there were quite a few Zealots who were hoping to overthrow Rome by force and return independence to Israel by the sword. Many looked forward to the day when the coming Messiah would vanquish their enemies to reestablish the kingdom of Israel to the glory and domination it had under King David. How aghast they must have been at hearing these words!

These disciples of Jesus who are *peacemakers* do much more than broker national treaties, break up fights between neighbors, seek the end to fighting or even quell social injustices. Rather, they promote the *shalom* of God which is His holistic Gospel peace that is a total flourishing of human life - both personally and socially - when people are

¹ *For the believer, becoming a son of God begins with being reborn (adopted) by the heavenly Father – through Christ. This word of sonship speaks to both men and women in Christ.*

made whole by God. This *shalom* is life as it should be. Life as it was designed to be. Life as there was before sin and life as it will ultimately be again when all sin is eradicated and we worship God with all of our bodies, minds and hearts.

The fundamental reason for the hostility in the world is that humankind has been locked into a hostile war with God. We have no peace because we do have peace with the Lord. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, came to earth to bring that peace to all whom God graces. That is the very good news announced at His birth in Bethlehem and the fruit of His sacrificial death on Calvary. His death reconciled us to God, *For in Him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.* (Colossians 1:19-20).

When Jesus suffered all of the unspeakable violence and bore the Father's just, overwhelming wrath on the cross, He brought us peace with God. He became *unpeace* to give us His peace.

For those who now have peace with God and share this peace, Christ can call *sons and daughters of God* because they have been reborn and adopted by our Father. Our great effort to make peace is in sharing this very good news about Jesus Christ in whom men and women can have everlasting peace with God.

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

Extra Reading: [Isaiah 53:1-16](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

What a dark, unpeaceful world that surrounds me. What restlessness and violence is sometimes within me. Lord, lead me to not throw my hands up in the air today in hopelessness, but to share You with a world desperate for peace. You alone are the Peace our world needs right now because You are the Peace we've always needed. Thank you Christ for bringing peace between me and You and giving me everlasting peace. Fix my eyes upon You and steady my gaze to look forward to the day when Your shalom will come in fullness.

DAY 11 - MARCH 29

Blessed Are Those Persecuted for Righteousness

Matthew 5:10-12

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

DEVOTION

In the Beatitudes we find some of the most profound literature ever recorded regarding the fundamental qualities of those who truly follow Jesus. A surface, and incorrect, reading of the “Blesseds” suggests that Christians are to be defined as weak, poor, sad and mild. Dallas Willard reminds us that Christ's *“teaching in the Beatitudes is a clarification or development of his primary theme in this talk and in his life: the availability of the kingdom of the heavens.”* Life in the Kingdom of God is available here and now even to those society regards as hopeless failures and outcasts.

Our Lord spoke the longest on this in the last of the beatitudes. The word translated “persecuted” carries the idea of wild animals being pursued by hunters. It can range from death, violence or imprisonment on one hand to ridicule, harassment, marginalization, mocking, slander, alienation or exclusion on the other. The key is that the believer suffers because of righteousness - that is, suffers for living out his or her believing faith in, and allegiance to, Jesus Christ. This is the cost of discipleship Bonhoeffer proclaimed. While we are not called to seek out such treatment, we ought to be concerned if we are universally thought well of. *“All who live a godly life will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 2:12). *We are to be wary of ourselves when the world has only good to say about us* (Luke 6:26). *Absence of persecution may be because we are fitting in too well with the world. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, it may mean that we have exchanged discipleship for citizenship.”*²

A life of faithful endurance in the face of persecution is rewarded with a place for eternity in His Kingdom. This should not be a dour, woe is me, making the best of it kind of life. Jesus instructs us to *“rejoice and be glad”* in the midst of persecution. He models the kind of endurance the Father expects. Jesus suffered every possible kind of persecution, up to and including His substitutionary death on the cross, and now sits in authority in heaven. As followers of Jesus we have been granted a tremendous privilege and we should react with a glorious, irrepressible and exulting joy. *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”* (James 1.2)

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven, You know that in many ways it seems harder than ever for us to live as Christians in our country. But let not my heart turn to discontent, ‘woe is me’, or to hate for those that hate You. May the persecution purify Your church and may You lead me to rejoice and be glad as I face today’s trials. No matter what comes my way today, I know you are in control and Your love for me is greater than any trouble that comes against me.

² Ligonier Ministries

DAY 12 - MARCH 30
Salt And Light
Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

DEVOTION

Immediately after His Beatitudes, Jesus delivers a powerfully clear description of disciples in these two rich metaphors. Here salt's major benefit is not as seasoning but as a preservative. Disciples of Jesus *are the salt of the earth* as their lives of worship and evangelism slow or reduce the decay of the world rotting in sin by salting the corruption with Jesus' truth, the putridness with His life, and the evil with calls to His righteousness. The preserving power of Christ works through us when we call upon Christ in prayer to set free people dying in their sins, when our lifestyles display Christ's character in opposition to the damning ways of this world, and when our gospelizing brings Jesus' faith, hope, and love to a faithless, hopeless, and loveless world.

Jesus goes on to say that His people are *the light of the world*. Light's great effect is as Ephesians 5:13 says, *when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible*. Light makes what was once hidden now obvious and directs us in the way to go. Filled with Jesus Christ's truth, disciples expose the world for what it is - evil, sinful, and corrupt - and expose people to the truth of Jesus. Christ sends out His disciples with His gospel to enlighten and reform a world immersed in sin and languishing in ignorance by directing and illuminating them to the path that leads to salvation and eternal life - Jesus.

Let us take heart that Jesus has already overcome the world (John 16:33), so no matter what happens no one can extinguish the light of the Gospel that burst forth from your life. No corrupting influence can overpower the salt of the Gospel. Do not despair these days to live for Christ in the good works He has prepared for you and do not shy away from spreading the good news of our Savior.

The darker the world gets, the brighter our lives should shine like brilliant stars in an inky black sky. The more rancid the world becomes, the more powerfully our salty lives work to preserve a little more.

Let not our lives or ministries be Christian in name only. For such is salt that is not salty - it is useless with value to no one. A disciple's light is lit by the Light of the world just as a disciple's saltiness comes from the preserving work of Christ in us. Jesus' light shines through us as living, breathing luminaries and His saving Gospel goes out through us as walking salt dispensers.

Praise be to God that Christ did not come to merely help dying people live a little longer or enlighten us to some helpful truths. Rather, the Light shines into the darkness to expose sin and the Resurrection gives brand new life to the dead!

Send us as Your people dear Jesus to be Your *salt* in a rotting world and shine Your *light* into dark lives. **PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN**

Extra Reading: [Isaiah 60:1-3; John 8:12; Colossians 4:6; Hebrews 6:1-8](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank You for bringing me out of the darkness and into Your light by Your grace and mercy. Thank you for the truth that I am salt and light now because of Your work on the Cross. Would you help me to decrease so that You will increase in my life? Will you show Yourself through me, my actions, and my words to others? Those times when my flesh gets in the way, help me to remember that it's time to pray for Your work in that situation, and would you help me to remember that it is the Holy Spirit that enables me to be more like You. I humble myself before You, dear Jesus. I want to be salt and light to honor and glorify You.

DAY 13 - MARCH 31

Jesus Came to Fulfill the Law

Matthew 5:17-20

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

DEVOTION

Here we see Jesus explaining that He did not come to change or abolish the Law of God. Rather, He came and lived a sinless life, thereby fulfilling the moral law. He was

the perfect embodiment of the ceremonial laws; all of the types and symbols in the ceremonial law pointed to Him. The multitude sitting listening to Him preach did not know that the sins of God's people would be placed on Jesus, or that His blood would be shed so that God's perfect justice could be satisfied.

By confirming that *"not an iota, not a dot, pass from the Law until all is accomplished,"* Jesus was affirming the inerrancy and absolute authority of the Old Testament (The Law and the Prophets). The New Testament does not replace the Old Testament, rather it contains the record of God's fulfillment of the Old Testament in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The mysteries behind the ceremonies and the Mosaic law can be more fully understood in the light of the gospel.

The Pharisees tended to "soften" the Law by focusing on only external obedience, while Jesus goes on in the coming verses to explain how the Law reveals the heart condition. The absolute best that any sinner can hope to attain by observance of the law is a very flawed external righteousness. This falls far short of the standard of God, which is total perfect righteousness ([I Peter 1:15-16; Lev 11:44-45; I Thess 4:7](#)).

Our only hope of ever being justified is by the perfect righteousness of Jesus being imputed (placed upon) to those who repent and believe ([Rom 4:5](#)). That is the good news of the gospel message. Those who are incapable of meeting the righteous demands of the perfectly just God can be brought into fellowship with God – all because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

ZACH MCNEIL

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Father, will you show me any areas in my life where I am still clinging to external obedience, and not to the heart transformation of new life in you? Thank you Jesus for walking among sinners, for living the perfect sinless life. Thank you for laying your life down to be the substitute for me and for my sins. Please Lord, help me to boldly proclaim the truth of your Word, and may I be a faithful witness for you to those you place in my path. Thank You for Your great grace and Your patience and gentleness toward me, Your son/daughter.

DAY 14 - APRIL 1

Anger

Matthew 5:21-26

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser

while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

DEVOTION

In Romans 3:19-20, the apostle Paul writes that the purpose of the law is *"that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."* He then goes on to explain that the law does not justify anyone, but rather gives knowledge of sin.

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing faulty interpretations, applications, and even justifications that were and still are used around God's Law. The Command *"Thou shalt not murder"* is very simple. Mankind was made in the image of God, and to take a life in a premeditated manner (murder as opposed to manslaughter) carried the death penalty. Were a person, seeking to justify themselves, to read the 10 Commandments they could conceivably make the argument, "But I have never killed anyone." Remember though, the purpose of the law is to stop every mouth, and who better to define the intent of this law, than the second person of the Trinity, Jesus.

*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment;
Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;
And whoever says "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.*

Jesus is explaining that the central issue is not only the act of murder, but the deeper heart issue. Anger seeks to harm another person, and calling someone a fool, or other slanderous insult, is an attack on that person's character and identity. How quickly does anger spring up in our emotions? When someone cuts us off in traffic, or takes too long in the line at the grocery store, or maybe has a different political view, anger can flare quickly in our spirit if not in our actions. By this standard, as explained by Christ Himself, who among us can claim to be innocent?

Charles Spurgeon said this, *"There is the spirit, the essence of that which leads to murder in the passion that breeds malice and revenge. The law of God is spiritual; it touches the emotions, the thoughts, the desires, as well as the words and actions of men. If I desire ill for someone, I have within me what would desire his death. And what is that, after all, but murder in the heart?"*

ZACHARY MCNEIL

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Oh Father, Your word convicts me to see the anger in my heart and the way I've mistreated people made in Your image. Search my heart and purify anything that is displeasing to You. If there are people in my life - especially those in Your church - with whom I need to seek reconciliation, will You reveal to me and give me your

boldness to act to make things right. I know it will not be easy (I'd rather just keep avoiding them) but I know You Lord can give me the strength. May Your church be blessed with unity and peace! In the name of our Reconciler, Jesus Christ.

DAY 15 - APRIL 2

Lust

Matthew 5:27-30

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

DEVOTION

Sex sells. Every advertiser in the business knows this, and most use it. Does seeing it written out that bluntly make you uncomfortable? It should. We should always be uncomfortable around sin. Every sultry image put into print, or on the screen, is after the same thing, to corrupt something God created for good, the human sex drive, and perverting it into evil, using lust as a tool to drive their profits.

*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent
Has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

By using the powerful visual images of sex appeal, advertising actually acknowledges the truth of God's Word. Jesus says that the look of lust is the same as the physical act in the heart, and the advertiser is counting on that. They want to turn lust into action, a very simple logical progression. Even though this is written from the lens of a man lusting after a woman, women are just as capable of lust as are men. Looking with lust is adultery in the heart in either case.

*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.
For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.
For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

The right side was representative of the most important, the place of honor. The eye is the window by which lust enters, and the hand is representing turning the desire into action. Jesus here is emphasizing the importance of maintaining faithfulness to one's spouse. Marriage represents the covenant relationship of God with His people, and our marriages must be protected, even if that means giving up something of great value.

Love and lust are not the same. In fact, they are opposites. Lust seeks to consume or possess for one's own pleasure, while love seeks to protect, preserve, to value and esteem another more than one's self. Love sacrifices self for others, while lust sacrifices others to feed one's own desires.

We must guard ourselves against lust. Sometimes it is fairly simple, like don't watch that show, throw out that magazine, or cleaning up your social media feeds. However other times, it is much more complicated. If you are struggling with lust for a coworker for example, you may need to sacrifice that job (tear out the eye). Maybe it is a friend's spouse, and every time you see them you struggle with lusting after them, so you may need to remove yourself from that friendship (cut off the hand). You may need to get other Christians in your life involved to help you.

Lust is serious. This is not the time to deal with ourselves gently. This is time to take no prisoners, extend no quarter, the stakes are high. However, this is also Christ showing us that the law stops the mouth of all men. It might be easy to say you have never committed physical adultery, but when you bring the issues of the heart into it, like Jesus explains here, that changes everything.

ZACHARY MCNEIL

Extra Reading: [Malachi 2:13-15; Psalm 19:14; Psalm 24; Romans 3:19-20](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

In Psalm 54:1 King David said, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge." Dear Father, I know my sin affects other people whether it is in thought or deed. But the greatest damage it does is to create distance between You and me. Lord Jesus, would you help me to focus my eyes on You? Would You help me to love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Would You create in me a pure heart and help me to take every thought captive in obedience to Christ? (2 Cor. 10:5) I love You, Jesus and I want to know how much You love me.

DAY 16 - APRIL 3

Commitment & Fidelity

Matthew 5:31-32

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

DEVOTION

Malachi 2:16 gives us God's clear feelings on fidelity - *"I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "because the man who divorces his wife covers his garment with violence," So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.* In the days of Moses, God had instituted a regulation that was intended to curb the sinful, widespread divorce, protect women from being divorced for wrong reasons, and to uphold the sanctity of His plans for marriage. The certificate Jesus speaks of had been abused, resulting in divorce and remarriage being common, accepted, and practiced in the first century world.

Speaking with the authority of God, the Son declares that the only justified divorce in His eyes is one in which the fidelity has been severed by *sexual immorality* (Greek *porneia*) which is a catchall for any deviation from God's desire for sex to be only within the confines of a covenant marriage between a man and a woman. Jesus blasts back against this divorce culture by implicating the men, for they *make her commit adultery* and *commit adultery* themselves because they are still bound in marriage since their divorce was no divorce at all in God's eyes.

In Matthew 19:3-10, Jesus answers this same issue directly by going back to God's plans for marriage at creation, for *at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.*

Jesus' comments here in Matthew 5 come in part of His message which could be called the Six Antithesis of the Kingdom - anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, hate - which are all upside down of the life Jesus' disciples should live. Instead of being faithless, selfish, and convenient, we are to be people marked by faithfulness, selflessness, and covenant obedience till death parts our relationship.

Think about the covenant faithfulness of our Lord who stayed committed to His people even when we committed spiritual adultery against Him - dismissing God as we chased after idols and tried to replace His love with people, places, and things. As He stays committed to Israel, the Lord God stays faithful to His church who He will not abandon, replace, or divorce. Jesus walked to the cross to die for you and me out of His obedient commitment to His own covenant faithfulness. Our great testimony is that when we are faithless, Jesus is faithful. What very good news that is each day.

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

Further Reading: [Matthew 19:3-10: Hebrews 13:4](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Lord, will you renew a faithfulness in my heart towards You -- to desire You and You alone, no longer looking to other people or other things to give me the love I can only get from You. I also pray Father that you give me an obedient and persevering faithfulness for my spouse to love through thick and thin and stay married to Your glory. We cannot stay loving one another without Your empowering, oh Lord.

(If divorced) Lord, if there was anything about my divorce that was displeasing to You, will you reconcile that in my life? I want to be right with You and my former spouse. Please comfort me with Your truth regarding my marriage and Your forgiveness. Thank You so much Jesus for ever being faithful to me even when I've been unfaithful to You.

DAY 17 - APRIL 4
My Yes is Yes
Matthew 5:8

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

DEVOTION

This passage is contained in the moral ethics dissertation of Jesus known as the Sermon on the Mount. On the issue of swearing oaths, Jewish teaching had "advanced to the rear" so to speak. Oaths sworn in the name of Yahweh were sacred and binding. Oaths sworn on anything else were not necessarily binding. *"Jesus was not outlawing all oaths and vows. Instead, He was correcting a common Jewish belief that if you swear an oath by anything other than God's name, you are not obliged to fulfill the oath."*³ These second tier oaths were nothing more than lying. The swearer of such an oath could perform his promise or not and incur no liability. Jesus would have none of it.

The third commandment ("*You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God*") is the foundation of these instructions of Jesus. Swearing an oath on something other than God (heaven, earth, Jerusalem, one's head) and then expecting to freely violate the promise is idolatry. God created these items. Our own needs and desires become paramount as we abuse His creation. Beyond that, we worship a covenant making and covenant keeping God. His covenants are oaths. How dare we twist promise making and keeping to fit our own needs.

Jesus tells us this is really not about the legalities of swearing oaths at all. The issue is everything we say. How trustworthy is my speech? Can people believe what I say? Do I see no harm in telling "little white lies?" Am I a person who does what I say I will do, when I say I will do it and does it well? The answers ought to be clear for those who claim membership in the Kingdom of God. Honest scrutiny of our actual performance reveals how often we fall short. As in all things, our discipleship mentor is Jesus who

³ Ligonier Ministries

was fully and perfectly trustworthy in all things. *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.*" (1 Peter 2.21-22)

Human life is a continuous stream of verbal interchanges and promises of one sort or another. Those we interact with very quickly form an opinion regarding the value of what we say or promise. If we are honest with ourselves, these opinions are accurate. Our discipleship should include a commitment to speaking truthfully every time and fulfilling our obligations without exception. This begins with our relationship with Jesus. *"Every worship service is itself an oath or vow. Every Lord's Day, we come before God with praise, confessing our sin, testifying that we are His people, and recommitting ourselves to serving Him in the week ahead of us."*⁴

Let us daily regard complete trustworthiness in all aspects of life as our solemn responsibility to our God and to others.

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Lord, my God, today's devotion has certainly made me think. Exactly how trustworthy is my speech? Can people believe what I say? Do I find no harm in blurring the truth and am I really a person who does what I say I will do, when I say I will do it? You are the Truth and Your people are to be truth-tellers. Reform my mouth God by cleansing my heart. I praise You Lord that You always keep Your word and You will always do exactly what You declared. How great is Your faithfulness and what wonderful security I have because Your Son said "Yes" to saving me from my sins!

DAY 18 - APRIL 5

Let the Lord Retaliate by His Justice

Matthew 5:38-41

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."

DEVOTION

What astounding words Jesus gives us here. In laying out the Kingdom, Jesus continually goes deeper to the heart to avoid legalism and get at the root issue - a transformed life from the inside out rather than external behavior modifications. Deeper than adultery, Jesus is concerned with the lust of the heart. Deeper than physical violence, Jesus says the root issue is the hatred in our hearts. Here, Jesus widens and deepens the view of retaliation and rights to get at the heart of justice and love.

⁴ Ligonier Ministries

The Lord gave the law of retaliation (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21) as a way of maintaining justice and purging evil by making sure the punishment fit the crime so as to curb mankind's sinful desire for personal vengeance and to make sure the law was equitable across all social classes with no preferential treatment. In calling His followers to *not resist the one who is evil* Jesus is not permitting us to be abused, taken advantage of or to simply do nothing in the face of evil. As a Christian you can defend yourself and to love an attacker will often mean taking action to prevent more further abuse.

What Jesus seems concerned about is the universal human issue of seeking revenge when we are wronged. When we are hurt - physically, emotionally, relationally, financially - we so often want to repay evil with more evil and to cut down our attacker in a way that humiliates, belittles, and overwhelms them. We want to *put people in their place* which is often a sinful reaction. If a right-handed person slaps your right cheek, this is a backhanded move which is not meant for physical harm but insult. Jesus' wisdom is that we turn not return insult for insult and escalate a violent encounter. Rather when we *turn the other cheek* we are not ignoring the insult but exposing it for what it is. Our response is not to attack their character but show it to them. This is not passivity or weakness but strength which holds my tongue in an effort to show them how their words have been sinful, hurtful, and ungodly.

Likewise when someone takes from us or compels us by force to do something (in this context it likely meant a Roman soldier coercing a Jew into serving him), we can demonstrate our freedom in Christ by volunteering more than was even demanded. This is not being a doormat but *gives* freely what others try to take. Hopefully in this, an abuser's heart is shocked, opened, and moved to repentance. So often we are concerned with our *rights* but miss out on the chance to show grace by living out the Gospel in front of others.

Isn't that exactly what Jesus did? When attacked and slandered, Jesus told the truth, showed kindness, remained patient, and did not retaliate but died for His enemies. Aren't you thankful that the Lord did not get us what we deserve and did not retaliate against us but loved us in such grace that He took the just wrath of God so that we could be forgiven. Jesus turned the other cheek and went the extra mile to save sinners like you and me.

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Jesus, Your words are a spotlight that shines on my own heart. How unlike You I am. Would you help me to seek You in the moment so I don't automatically retaliate with my words, facial expressions or body language, or actions? I need the Holy Spirit's help to trust You to take care of the situation and any injustice. Help me to choose Your way in these instances and seek peace with enemies by loving them, just as You do.

DAY 19 - APRIL 6
Loving My Enemies
Matthew 5:42-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

DEVOTION

The call to *hate your enemy* is not actually in the Old Testament, but was a false conclusion made in Jewish teaching when they defined *neighbor* so narrowly to only include Jewish people. Everyone else, they surmised, was an enemy unworthy of love. In His widening and deepening, Jesus says a neighbor is *everyone*, and so everyone is deserving of our selfless love (a truth He so famously displayed in the story of the good Samaritan).

To be a *son of your Father who is in heaven* is to respond to His will in accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and thus being adopted. These adopted children are to think, act, desire, and cherish as God does - like father, like son (and daughter). Jesus shows us how our Father is - He shows common grace (*sun rise, sends rain*) on all people, good and evil. There is a real sense in which God hates those who are resolutely wicked and He will not tolerate evil, but God blesses even His enemies and shows care to all of His creatures.

This is very good news for us. When we were slaves to sin, apart from Christ, we were God's enemies and yet He showed us such unmerited grace by loving us. *For God so loved the (evil) world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.* What transforming love and regenerating grace!

Our flesh calls us to take the easy road - lash back, cut people down, or simply ignore them and stay with people who like us and are like us. There is no gospel reward in that and it is what our Father does. When we show such love and grace to people who despise us, persecute us, and abuse us, our *reward* is glorifying the Father and can even be the means by which He leads unbelievers to repentance (Acts 14:17; Romans 2:4) **PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN**

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Father, to love my enemies takes the Holy Spirit to be in charge instead of my flesh. Lord, would you increase in me so that my flesh decreases? Please remind me that I was once the enemy every time I am tempted to not love people around me who are acting like an enemy. Thank You for your patience, kindness, grace, and mercy towards me before I met Jesus and during my walk with Him. Thank You that You will never leave or forsake me.

DAY 20 - APRIL 7

Jesus IS the Christ

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

DEVOTION

There are very few people in our immediate community who haven't heard the name of Jesus Christ. Some may have sadly heard His precious name used only as a "by-word" in swearing. Many others know bits and pieces of Jesus' story. But we see in this passage how the Father had been revealing to Jesus' disciples for the very first time Who Jesus is . . . THE Christ, THE Son of THE Living God.

The weight of this statement, not fully understood by Peter or the other disciples, is none-the-less a revelation of power and authority. Though Peter undoubtedly didn't fully understand the magnitude of his own confession, Jesus revealed that it is upon this statement that the foundation of His Church would stand. After all, Peter will lose faith and deny the Lord of glory after this confession of Who Jesus is and after seeing Him transfigured/transformed on a mountain and joined by two dead prophets.

Just verses before in this same chapter the Pharisees and Sadducees, in their blindness, not recognizing Who Jesus is, were questioning Him as if they were His

authorities. These were the elite, the learned, the “righteous.” Yet, they did not know Him. Jesus cautions His simple, “unlearned” disciples to not publicize this wonderful knowledge of Who He is that was shown to them. What joy and what hope in knowing it is not my own intellect or savvy that somehow ascends me to the God of the universe.

For me and you, just as it was for Peter, it is God Who has come near and helped us to see who we are not, and lifts us up in the glorious knowledge of Who He is! This Christ, a stranger to me, has come and revealed Himself to ME? How humbling, how exciting, what love! **CHAD PERRON**

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Thank you, Father in Heaven, for opening my eyes to see Your Son. Please give those in my community eyes to see and hearts to receive Jesus so that they might be saved.

DAY 21 - APRIL 8

The Son Must Die

Matthew 16:21-23

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

DEVOTION

Don’t we all love good news? We all want the happy “Hallmark” ending to every situation. “*Buy this lottery ticket and you’ll be set for life...*” We are constantly bombarded by “feel good” stuff to try and shortcuts to take. The problem is it is all connected to our short-sightedness. That was Peter’s issue here.

Peter could not envision a dying Messiah. Peter did not understand why his friend and leader would suffer and die and frankly he stood against these plans and promises of the Lord. That is why Jesus calls his friend Satan, for he stands rebuking the plans of God. Peter saw salvation and redemption with the frail, sinful, and worldly eyes of mankind. Jesus’ heart and mind clearly see and accept the plans of the Father. Jesus knew the Father’s will for Him was the sacrificial death which would bring atonement for sinful humanity. This was the cost for our sin. There was no shortcut or easy way out. Jesus knew that the Son must suffer and die.

Our desire to get what we want at our cost is usually unrealistic. The Bible is full of promises for us. The problem is we balk at the cost. We look at the short-term cost of obedience and take our eyes off what God has planned for us. The book of Deuteronomy is full of promises, but it is clearly based on our obedience to God’s

commands. Deut, 7:12 says, *"If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them then the Lord your God will keep His covenant of love with you as He swore to your forefathers."* Scripture then goes on to list the rewards, a very impressive list. The problem arises with the cost or the obedience of Israel and the fear they bought into. Are we any different?

Jesus needs to be our example of obedience. His perfect obedience to the Father, even to death, has made salvation available to all who heed the call and are obedient. Jesus not only calls us to accept that He, the perfect God-man, went to the cross to bring us peace with God but He also calls us to deny ourselves and take up our own cross as we die to self and live to Christ. (Luke 9:23).

As life tempts us with shortcuts and lures us to follow our hearts, let us keep our eyes on Jesus and remember His words, *"Get behind me Satan."*

KEN YOUNG

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Good Father, I need help setting my mind on the things of God. Help me to count the cost, but to always choose You and Your ways. Help me to always remember how good you are and how deeply You love me so I will choose to be obedient. I want to be more and more like You, Jesus.

DAY 22 - APRIL 9

I Will Take Up My Cross and Follow

Matthew 16:24-28

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

DEVOTION

In John 15 Jesus told the disciples that they were not servants, but rather friends. They were friends because *"I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father."* Sometimes part of being a friend is speaking a hard truth. Jesus loved His disciples enough to do that here.

These Jewish men would have had a very strong image of what it means to "take up his cross". In Roman crucifixion the condemned frequently had to carry either the whole

cross, or at least the horizontal part of it from where he was sentenced to the site of the execution. There the condemned man would be stripped naked, have a plaque explaining his sentence either hung around his neck, or in some cases nailed to him. This was a violent degrading death. Add to this the Law stated in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 “...*anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.*”

*Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after me,
let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*

There is a cost to following Jesus. Salvation is a free gift, make no mistake you can not earn it, you can not buy it, you can’t catch it by simply coming to church. However, there is a cost to becoming a disciple of Jesus. The cost is taking up your cross and following Jesus. This is not to say that you will carry timber on your shoulders from your home to the nearest hilltop. It does mean that you must be removed from the throne of your life. No longer are you free to wallow in sin and vice. Every part of your life, all of it, must be subject to the rule of Jesus. This may mean that family will disown you, friends will cut you out, people will think you are strange. As you grow in godliness you may suffer loss of possessions, prestige, employment. Certainly in today’s culture in America if you say that God alone is righteous and has the sole right to determine what is good and what is evil, you will be hated.

*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
But whoever loses his life because of me will find it.
For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?
Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

The cost, the denying himself, the taking up of the cross, is living humbly before God. Living every day as a gift, a chance to go and be an ambassador for Christ. There is a tension here, that if we desire to save our life, if we want to live a life of safely fitting in, that will actually cost us our lives because it will prove that we were not disciples. This is not a call to sell everything and become a homeless street preacher. This is a call to live a life of total submission to God’s will. We do this by daily following in the steps of Jesus. This may not look like anything spectacular to the casual observer. A disciple does not live for the acclaim of men or women, a disciple follows his master. We each have a path that Jesus sets before us, and each of us has places where things of the world can pull on our heart strings. We live by conviction of what God tells us in His Word of how we should live.

A little later on Jesus was asked by Pharisees what command in the law was greatest. He replied:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and most important command.
The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.
All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.*

Today ask the Lord where in your life you are not following these two commands, ask Him to show you where you need to take up your cross and follow Him.

ZACH MCNEIL

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Dear Lord, as life comes at me today in pressures, preoccupations, and personal desires, lead me to die to myself, lay down my life, and pick up my cross daily. This is Your way. What areas of my old sinful life am I still clinging to? What am I reluctant to give up for You? Search me. Cleanse me. And renew my commitment to Christ. Crossbearing is going to hurt today. But fix my eyes on You as I follow.

DAY 23 - APRIL 10

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:12-17

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.' This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

DEVOTION

What became known as Palm Sunday marks the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The most important person in history was arriving at what was then the most important city in the world during what will become the most important week in history.

It was Passover celebration season. Some estimates are that the normal population of Jerusalem, about 90,000, swelled to 3 million during this week. The atmosphere was carnival like. Imagine a sort of religious Mardi Gras. Huge numbers of these people came out of the city to meet Him. They joined the large crowd accompanying Him. Matthew reports that the *"whole city was stirred,"* just as it was when the Magi came there some 33 years earlier (Matthew 2.3). The Messianic symbols and fulfillment that were plainly visible and obvious to all in the manner of His arrival, are now so at the conclusion of His ministry.

Until now, Jesus had discouraged, almost forbidden, others to disclose or publicize that He was the Savior King. Now was the appointed moment to acknowledge and accept the role. The crowds witnessing the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem waved palm branches and shouted *“Hosanna”* (John 12.13). The branches were symbolic of joy and victory. For them, Jesus was at the victorious political culmination of His ministry and the crowds were enthusiastic, joyful and celebratory. They believed that He was about to seize secular power.

Their joy was genuine but misguided in that they thought Jesus was to be a political ruler. They would soon realize that He was not to be a conquering political leader and they would turn on Him in hatred. And yet, the will of the Father was being effectuated by the Son voluntarily proceeding in humility to the shame and ugliness of the death He will endure. The sole focus, from which He never wavered, was the will and glory of the Father. Such a sacrifice was the only way to conquer the real enemy: sin and death. Ironically, the kingdom Jesus inaugurated for the crowds (and us) was infinitely and eternally better than the kingdom the crowds (and us) desired. As CS Lewis observed, *“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.”*

*“Hosanna is often thought of as a declaration of praise, similar to hallelujah, but it is actually a plea for salvation. Literally, hosanna means “I beg you to save!” or “please deliver us!””*⁵ This is joyful acknowledgement of the glory that is rightfully His. Here is the joy we ought to display. It is based on recognition that we have been saved for glory. It results from recognizing and fully appreciating *“the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* (Colossians 1.27)

*“We are all so identified with Christ that it is impossible for any Christian to be a second-class citizen. And we can add to this grace the fact that our hope of glory in Jesus has present and future aspects. In the present, we are assured that we belong to Him and will persevere so that in the future we will enjoy the full benefits of redemption — life in a resurrected body before the presence of God in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21).”*⁶

The incredible mystery of our faith is that what the world perceived to be the weakness and failure of Jesus was in fact power and success. *“This crowd, in the end, did not want Jesus to rule over them in the way He designed, hence their praises were hollow. Sometimes we act the same way, holding onto sin or not sacrificing for the kingdom even while praising Jesus with our mouths. What must you lay at our Lord’s feet this day?”*⁷

The events of the Passion week really and truly occurred in Jerusalem as reported in the Bible. They are just as real as the NASA rover landing on Mars. How would I have behaved if I was there watching Jesus? What would I have done? What would I have

⁵ GotQuestions.org

⁶ Ligonier Ministries

⁷ Ligonier Ministries

said? What would I have believed? Just like the crowds then, we proclaim our faith in Jesus but it is a Jesus designed to comply with our wants and needs. Our two-faced and insincere devotion must be confronted daily.

JIM FELEEN

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Today, imagine if you were in the crowd of palm wavers. What would you be thinking and doing? How enthusiastic would your praising be? And why exactly would you be cheering Jesus? Would you be praising Jesus for what He can give you or for who He is?

Take another moment to think: Do I have a realistic picture of Jesus? Are my thoughts about Him and expectations for Him biblical? How am I tempted to create a Messiah of my own making, as some did in Jesus' day?

DAY 24 - APRIL 11

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Luke 23:34

DEVOTION

These amazing words do not absolve either the crowds or the leaders, the Romans or the Jews, of their responsibility in Jesus' death or their guilt in killing the world's only innocent man. But it shines forth the truth that they did not fully understand the horrific evil they were committing against the Holy and Righteous One. They saw a problem - a religious leader who threatened their security, a potential troublemaker upsetting the apple cart - but they did not see the very problem eating through their own hearts, the evil of sin which was killing them as it separated them from the very One who made them, who came for them in love, to die for them right before their very eyes.

They did not know who was before them. They could not recognize the hour of their visitation. God had come. Not to punish but to set free. Not to shame them but to remove their guilt. Not to guilt them but to forgive them. The only One who *needed no* saving Himself, laying down His life for sinners precisely because they could not save themselves.

But such people did not not know the grace that was being offered even at this hour. They did not know the freedom being held out to them. They did not know Jesus. Therefore, they would not know His peace which comes in the absolving acquittal which He gasped forth, *"Father, forgive them."*

Even as they ridicule and abuse Him, there is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world forgiving them. Even as they accuse this precious Lord, there He is asking for forgiveness for His enemies. The Sanhedrin is taunting Him. The soldiers are mocking Him. One of the criminals is railing against Him. Yet, Jesus is hanging, forgiving them - providing the very way by which those who crucified Him could be forgiven.

*because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

Isaiah 53:12

They did not know what they were doing in crucifying Jesus. They did not know what He was doing in dying for His enemies.

But we know. By God's grace we have come to know exactly who we are - sinners. And what we have done - shouting "*Let us save ourselves,*" as we too once rejected the only Salvation the world has ever known. By God's grace we can see ourselves there at the cross, right there among the scoffers and the mockers, the haters and the sinners, the guilty in desperate need of Jesus' forgiveness.

And by God's grace we now *do* know Jesus and His freeing compassion.

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

Further Reading: [Matt. 21:33-46](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Blessed Father, our prayer today and tomorrow and all of the next tomorrows is to know Christ crucified more and more. To know His suffering, majesty, pain, and His glory. We want to know the shame He took on so that our shame could forever be covered.

We need to know the scoffing His precious ears heard so that we could today hear His precious words to us: Beloved. Saint. Accepted. Blessed. Called home. Made whole. Made new. Child of God. My people. Friends. Loved. Set Free Forever. Thank you Father for accepting the Son's plea to forgive us.

DAY 25 - APRIL 12

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Luke 23:29-43

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

DEVOTION

On a bloody hillside, the sound of hammers on nails has ceased. It has been replaced by the sound of soldiers gambling and the groaning cries of the condemned. Three trees, crosses really, rose horrifically over the soldiers in a gruesome display. Not at all resembling the beauty of living trees, such as the ones down in the garden below this cursed hill. On these trees were three men, with three very different stories.

The coppery smell of blood hangs heavy in the air, as the mocking voices of soldiers and the gathered crowd all dial in on one of the men. Eventually, even one of the other men nailed and hung up there joined in the mocking of this one man. Using his dying breaths, he mocks this other dying man on the center cross, the one with a sign nailed over His head "King of the Jews".

*Aren't you the Messiah?
Save yourself and us!*

Was that mocking, was it desperately grasping trying to save his own life? There is one thing that it wasn't though, and that is faith. This question has nothing in common with the request the third man is about to make.

This third man, on the other side of the one called King of the Jews, had been sentenced to death as well. A common criminal who had finally run out of chances. Then this dying man answers the first mocking man:

*Don't you even fear God, since we are undergoing the same punishment?
We are punished justly, getting back what we deserve for the things we did,
But this man has done nothing wrong.
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

This man saw through his pain, he saw through his rapidly approaching death. He saw Jesus, the Messiah. In that moment, he was given the greatest gift that anyone can ever

receive. He was given faith to believe. He believed in spite of what his eyes saw, Jesus the giver of life, dying on a cross; rather this man's new eyes of faith saw Jesus, the Savior and King. With no time left in his life and nothing to offer the King, he did the only thing he could, he pleaded for mercy. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Then this dying thief heard the most wonderful words from the tortured lips of Jesus.

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Jesus is so tender even in the final moments before His death. He even uses the same phrasing as when He taught gathered crowds, "*Truly I tell you.*"

Three men, three crosses, three stories. Two of the men were criminals, but one died in his sins. The other thief confessed his sin, and called on Jesus for mercy; he entered paradise that very day.

The third man, Jesus, Messiah, not just King of the Jews, but King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He had committed no sin, He had done nothing to deserve the death He was dying. He chose to be there, He chose the nails. He chose the cross. He chose to die as a sacrifice, the only sacrifice that could satisfy the justice of God the Father. Even in His final moments of death, He was tender to one who deserved no tenderness. Just as you and I deserve no tenderness. If we confess our sin, and call on Jesus for mercy, He will answer. Just as surely as He answered that thief on the hill called Golgotha.

ZACHARY MCNEIL

Further Reading: [Matthew 26:6-16](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

What assurance we have Father that we have been accepted into Your kingdom. For Your blessed Son said He has done it all. It's not because of our behavior or our moral record but we are admitted into Paradise solely because of who He is and all He has done! Praise be Your name Jesus forever and ever for Your unmatched grace in satisfying the Father's justice and being the way we enter into the eternal life we never deserved - life by You and with You. Glory to Your Name, Amen.

DAY 26 - APRIL 13

Behold your Son, Behold your mother!

John 19:25-27 att. 5:8

but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

DEVOTION

Family. This word can trigger all kinds of emotions and feelings. For some the word brings inexpressible joy, to others unimaginable horror and disappointment. Nowhere is the term family given higher esteem than in Scripture. God is our heavenly *Father*. He sends His *Son* to atone for our sins. Our fellow Christians are called our *brothers* and *sisters*; we are joint heirs.

Now at the end of his earthly journey, Jesus has concern for his mother. His final effort before going to his Father is the care of his mother. Even though sometimes Mary may have overstepped or pushed Jesus, as at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), when she told the servants to *“do whatever he tells you”* and Jesus responded to her, *“My time has not yet come”*, she was still His mother and He there performed His first miracle. Jesus was obedient to the command in Exodus 20:12, where we are told, *“Honor your father and your mother.”* His love for her brings him to choose the one who is apparently the most devoted to Him and is the one to whom He wanted to entrust the care of Mary after He was gone.

What love is this that even as He was dying our Lord Jesus had such compassion for both John and Mary. Even as He suffered the death of all deaths, there He hung caring for others. The one who was caring for John and Mary was also there dying for the salvation of Mary and John so that they could not only be an earthly family but would become part of His family - adopted sons and daughters of the living God.

As we move forward and have crosses to bear ourselves, sometimes those who walk the closest to us through our journey with Christ will be those brothers and sisters who are our joint heirs with him. We have to remember that we have responsibilities to our earthly families as well and they are a priority immediately behind God himself even though sometimes those relationships are very trying. As Paul said in 1 Tim. 5:8, *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* Let us love our biological family and our church family with the agape love of Jesus Christ. **KEN YOUNG**

Further Reading: [Matthew 26:1-5](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

What a Savior! Even in dying, You had such compassion for others. Even in suffering, You were caring for others. What astounding news that in Your Son's death, we have become Your children, oh God! Continue to make us into children worthy of Your name and shape us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with the agape love of Jesus.

DAY 27 - APRIL 14

I Thirst! - My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

John 19:28-30

Matthew 27:45-46

"Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." **John 19:28-30**

"From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")." **Matthew 27:45-46**

DEVOTION

Alistair Begg has said, *"The death of Jesus is the pivotal event of human history and everything needs to be understood in light of that."* Study of the theological concepts involved here leaves one astonished. Substitution, atonement, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, justification, adoption, sanctification. Our triune God implemented His plan for His creation on His timing and in the manner He chose. And He did it for me!

The moment in time when Jesus died marked the completion of the earthly portion of the plan. Access to a restored, personal relationship with God became ours for the accepting. The mission of the man Jesus in this world was accomplished perfectly. He did not just "run out the clock" so to speak. He did exactly what the Father wanted - nothing more, nothing less, and He did it perfectly and voluntarily.

The unimaginable aspect of all this is that in order to complete His task, Jesus chose to go to a place of total separation and alienation from God. Everywhere else in the gospels, Jesus addressed God as Father. Here alone He cries out *"My God."* Something mysterious to our faith occurs here as the relationship between the Father and the Son changes for a time. The words used here invoke strong emotional appeal as He confronts the alienation. *"It is difficult to understand in what sense Jesus was "forsaken" by God. It is certain that God approved His work. It is certain that Jesus was innocent. He had done nothing to forfeit the favor of God. As God's own Son—holy, harmless, undefiled, and obedient—God still loved Him. In none of these senses could God have forsaken Him....God placed the sins of the world on His Son, and Jesus for a time felt the desolation of being unconscious of His Father's presence. It was at this time that "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21)."*⁸

⁸ (Got Questions.org)

The two scripture passages for today differ but complement each other. The awful horror and glory of what Jesus did for me emerges as all of the Bible is employed. John specifically mentions the hyssop plant. This is likely an allusion to the original Passover when the blood was applied to the doorposts with this same plant (Exodus 12.22). The same plant now delivers the cheap wine to the Passover Lamb. Matthew reports the heart wrenching cry of abandonment, though not of despair. The two passages, read as a whole, detail the sequential moments of Jesus's death: the cry of the forsaken, the human agony of thirst, delivery of the wine, the voluntary giving up of His spirit. He was finally able to lay His head somewhere: on the cross (Luke 9.58).

Thanks be to God that we have assurance that He will never leave or forsake us because of what Jesus did for us (Hebrews 13.5; Deuteronomy 31.6). Regarding this, John Piper has noted, *"The best news of the Christian gospel is that the supremely glorious Creator of the universe has acted in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to remove every obstacle between us and himself so that we may find everlasting joy in seeing and savoring his infinite beauty."*

JIM FELEEN

Further Reading: [Matthew 26:6-29](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Oh precious Jesus, how I love thee. You were forsaken so that I could be accepted. You thirsted so that I could be filled. You were cast out so that I could be brought in. You died so that I could live! Hallelujah and praise forever to You - the Lamb slain for my sins.

DAY 28 - APRIL 15

"It is finished!"

John 19:30

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

DEVOTION

"It is finished!" This is usually an exciting announcement for us. Maybe it was a crucial test in school, maybe we'd just cleaned our room as a child, or it could be as an adult, a major milestone at work or within our family. In Scripture, this announces the completion of the greatest assignment, the toughest and most sacrificial assignment in all the universe since the beginning of time. Jesus Christ brought the reconciling salvation which the world had needed since Genesis 3. Jesus' perfect life and death were the full payment for our spiritual death. *It is finished*. We do not need to add our works to His work. We do not need to add our morality to His perfection. We need not

question if enough has been done. Jesus paid it all, did it all, and so He perfectly finished it all.

Jesus had been completely obedient to His father knowing that God always finishes what He begins (Philippians 1:6). He had led a sinless life for over three decades here on earth. How many sins have we committed just today, and that's before lunch! Jesus knew the horrendous death He would have to endure yet because of His love for the Father and us, He remained true to the mission He'd been given. It had to have been unbelievably difficult to live in a world of sin when *"He who knew no sin became sin."*

So what now? The task is complete. He's dead. What about us? We look forward to Sunday when He will rise. Well, a sneak preview into the future...Salvation was accomplished but in a way God was not finished. For just as He said He would, soon our Savior will rise!

KEN YOUNG

Further Reading: [Matthew 26:36-46; 27:32-44](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Walk this day in full assurance that when you put your faith in Jesus Christ all enmity between you and God is finished. All striving to save yourself is finished. All worry over doing enough to earn God's love is finished. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith and He has accomplished all we need. Pray for someone you know by name that Jesus will also save them and rejoice!

DAY 29 - APRIL 16

"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Luke 23:46

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this He breathed His last.

DEVOTION

As we stand at the foot of the cross and hear this final saying, we realize this is not any ordinary death. Jesus had earlier told us that He would not die at the hands of men but by His own obedient volition (John 10:17-18). For Jesus, death is no out-of-control enemy. No matter how bleak the moment, He knows His Father is present with Him and there to accept, protect, and will soon resurrect Him and so into the Father's loving hands our Lord, the Christ, entrusts His spirit. Jesus both trusts His redemption and glorification into the Father's everlasting arms as well as knowing that the Father accepts and approves of Jesus' whole earthly life.

These words have been called Jesus' entrance-greeting to Heaven. Jesus, who had been with the Father in glory from eternity past, is going to step back into His full glory (John 17:5) in honor, power, and authority at the Father's right hand. This amazing

turning point in the earthly life of Christ and the pinnacle of all human history was actually visible: the sky turned an ominous black in the middle of the day and the heavy, thick temple curtain was torn in two (the new reality in the heavens and on earth that the sacrificial system of the temple was at a close). A whole new era had begun.

It is here through Jesus' cross-work that we are both drawn to Christ and redeemed before our Father. At this moment our Lord Jesus is restored to His full glory and we are given the chance to enter into that glory, into the very presence of God. As the temple curtain that had separated mankind from the holy of holies is removed, so too is the separation between our lives and God's presence through Jesus Christ's final sacrifice and imparted righteousness. We have the confidence to enter the holy presence of God by the blood of Jesus.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, *"I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me."* Meditate on the absolute security you have in Christ's salvation and imparted righteousness. Think too on the fact that you can now confidently enter into the holiest of holies, standing before the Lord with no condemnation -- all because Christ has opened this access (Hebrews 10:19-23)! This news is not too good to be true but the wondrous gospel that now you have no obstacle stopping you from coming to the Father. Nothing can tear you away from God's love, nothing can forfeit Christ's redemption, and nothing can ever steal away the Spirit's presence in your life. If this is true, think about the spectacular security, intimacy, and fellowship with God that is yours today and for eternity.

PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN

Further Reading: [Matthew 26:47-56; 27:45-61; Psalm 31:1-8; John 10:17-18; Hebrews 10:19-23](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

Draw near to God knowing Jesus' blood has paid it all. No guilt or shame should keep you from the sweet fellowship of the Father as most assuredly Jesus cleansed you from sin in His death on the cross. Today is anything disturbing your faith, any sin hindering you from drawing near to God, or any evil troubling your conscience? Christ is faithful to forgive you today, washing you clean, so that you might draw near with a pure heart.

DAY 30 - APRIL 17

He Has Risen!

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.
1 Corinthians 15:21

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

DEVOTION

On Resurrection Sunday, or Easter, we reach the culmination of Holy Week. **The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of the Christian faith.** The very foundation of all Christian doctrine hinges on the truth of this account for it not only says that our Savior is alive, but in Him being alive we have proof that the Lamb's sacrifice was found sufficient. In Christ's resurrection, we find the proof then of His atoning sacrifice for our forgiveness, our acceptance by God, and the firstfruits of the resurrection life which all believers receive.

Early Sunday morning, several women (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and Mary the mother of James) went to the tomb and discovered that the large stone covering the entrance had been rolled away. An angel announced:

"But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where He lay." (Matthew 28:5-6)

On the day of His resurrection, Jesus Christ made at least five appearances. Mark's Gospel says the first person to see him was Mary Magdalene. Jesus also appeared to Peter, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later that day to all of the disciples except Thomas, while they were gathered in a house for prayer.

The eyewitness accounts in the Gospels provide what Christians believe to be undeniable evidence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did indeed happen. Two millennia after his death, followers of Christ still believe this in faith based on the truth of God's word, the Spirit's leading, and these eyewitness accounts. **PASTOR KYLE R. ALLEN**

Further Reading: [Matthew 28:5-10](#)

MEDITATION/PRAYER

You now live a resurrected life in Jesus Christ if He is your Savior and Lord. You have died with Christ and been raised with Christ so therefore you are a new creation, dead to sin and alive to Christ. What glorious news we have today that we have real life in Jesus, eternal life, life set free from sin and life now united to God through Jesus Christ!

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May our risen and glorified Lord Jesus be pleased with our devotion to Him this month and may He mature us by His truth, sanctify us by His purity, and unite us by His love.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead when Jesus comes again in power and truth.

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These devotionals are also available online at mygraceriver.life

Join us in worship Sundays at 930am