



BE
GOD'S

Family

VOLUME 2
READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS

Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

Over the previous three years, we have taken a sweeping overview of the entire Bible with studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”), the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”), and the Old Testament (“Be God’s Light”).

Now we slow down and go deeper. Our focus in 2025 will be on the New Testament books that focus on Jewish people who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Throughout the Bible, the Hebrew people are considered children of God, that is, His family. Through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, believers in Him are grafted in. Hence, this year’s study: “Be God’s Family.”

First, we look at the Gospel of Matthew, written for a Jewish audience who had become Christian. It draws on many Old Testament and Jewish traditions, texts, concepts, customs, and more. Matthew clearly points to Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah for the Jews and the entire world.

Second, we will spend several weeks exploring the book of Hebrews, which by its title alone is very Hebrew. This New Testament book examines the person and work of Jesus through the lens of numerous Old Testament people, practices, sacrifices, holy days, and more.

Finally, we will close out the ten-month study by examining two shorter New Testament books: Galatians and James. In Galatians, Paul addresses whether Jewish circumcision and the law of Moses are prerequisites to faith in Jesus Christ. In James, the brother of Jesus discusses whether works or faith are most essential to Christian living.

One of the great bonuses this year is that a number of people from our church are joining me in writing the devotionals for this study. They will bring fresh insights and perspectives to our devotion time. Each of them is engaged in training by me, a small cohort with one another, and personal prayer as they produce what you will read and reflect on. Make sure to thank them throughout the year as you are impacted by their words.

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by others and me, and correlate with the daily Scripture to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Daily Poems** – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine the Scripture through poetry. This year, the poems will be based on a portion of a Psalm or other literature from the Old Testament that connects with the theme of that day’s New Testament reading.
4. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, visit fishersumc.org/begodsfamily for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
6. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, visit fishersumc.org/begodsfamily for easy access or your favorite podcast platform.

The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to embrace the fact that you are a child of God, called by Him to “Be God’s Family” in the world.

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor

Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church



3/3/2025 - WEEK 10 DAY 1

The Disciples Argue About Who is the Greatest

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 18:1-9

Devotional By: Dave Rizk

The Lord warned his disciples and us about causing others to sin. As parents, churchgoers, and leaders, we can lead our children, new believers, and parishioners to sin.

Two points stood out in this scripture concerning behaviors, faith, and sin: Temptation and Neglect.

A) Temptation: We can fall into traps where we tempt children and new believers to sin by making excuses, accepting wrong social norms, failing to correct them, and preventing Godly change. Moreover, we also have the power to encourage them to resist tempting ideas and not sin. The righteous path is challenging, but the results are not just rewarding; they are life-changing and eternal.

B) Neglect: As parents and churchgoers, we are commissioned to protect our children and new believers from the negative influence of media and peers. Marketers pressure our children to engage in gaming and social trends that could sway them away from God. The Lord commanded us to protect them from temptations and guide them into the right path. Moreover, we are responsible for those youngsters who depend on us for guidance and protection. Similarly, we are accountable for supporting the new believers and demonstrating the right path for them.

What can we do to be stewards of the Lord's blessings (as parents or saved believers) and help others avoid sinning?

Be a good example: As hard-working adults, we have earned the right to enjoy our time gaming, watching sports, and watching movies. All are acceptable, but if we limit the time we engage in such activities and devote some time to serving the Lord, we indirectly teach our children and new believers the value of serving the Lord. By the same token, when we choose appropriate games and movies, we teach our children and new believers how to determine what is good for us as believers and how to resist peer pressure.

Can you reflect on how you can be a good example to others?

Poem

What Greatness

Matthew 18:1-9, Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes
are not haughty; I do not concern
myself with great matters or things
too wonderful for me. But I have
calmed and quieted myself, I am like
a weaned child with its mother; like a
weaned child I am content.
Psalm 131: 1-2

*A fellow pilgrim, walking,
Once posed a ponderous phrase
"Within God's kingdom glorious
What greatness do you crave?"
I thought this a trick question
As in my heart I knew
That worldly pomp and greatness
Do not Faithful accrue
When I consider who I am
Amidst God's glory bright
I am but nothing—simple, small—
No greater than a mite
To claim a higher station
Than fellow pilgrims' place
I am but humbled, realize
Against them, I not race
Instead, my goal—contentment
Within my Father's will
And thus the station of my heart
"To know," and soul "be still"
For what lies in my future
Is only what God holds
My one request, dear Father Lord,
To Christ, my being mold
This, then, is Kingdom's greatness
To walk the Way Christ trod
To live a life obedient
Submitted full to God*



3/4/2025 - WEEK 10 DAY 2

Other People Matter to Christians

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 18:10-20

Devotional By: Patti Napier

Perhaps best known of these verses is the Parable of the Lost Sheep. A sheep may look out over the fields and think "Oh there's some green grass over there," and wanders off. Eventually he looks up to see that he is lost and vulnerable. The sun begins to set and the wolves begin to howl. The lost sheep is defenseless. Will there be a committed shepherd to rescue him back with the flock or will there be a careless shepherd letting him go?

The shepherd's responsibility is to keep his herd close together for their protection from outside predators and to account for every one of his sheep because Our Great Shepherd tells us that every single one matters. Our Great Shepherd will never fail to love each and every sheep and always bring the lost back into the fold. God disapproves when no one will bother to go and search for the lost one and bring him home.

Sheep symbolically refer to God's people who are easily influenced and misled.
The flock symbolically refers to the church or ecclesia.

One of your church community has wandered off and is on the horizon now. You recall not seeing him/her for some time. You may know of a lifestyle change your fellow brother/sister in Christ has made leading to a path of sin and destruction. If he/she goes behind that next bush, you won't see him/her any longer. Is that person of any value to restore? What do you do? Who is responsible to act?

If we choose to look the other way, not confronting a lost or sinning member, we ignore the command of Jesus. If we allow sin to continually go unchallenged, we have despised our brother/sister in Christ. Pursuing and confronting someone can feel very uncomfortable, but whoever said that being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ is the easy way?

Did you know that all believers in the church community are called to understand themselves as shepherds like our Great Shepherd? Is there someone you need to reach out to who has wandered off and needs to be loved and embraced as God does us?

Poem

Nothing Worse And Nothing Better
Matthew 18: 10-20, Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when
God's people live together in unity!
Psalm 133:1

*There's nothing worse than mean
discord
When dialogue does stop
When family cancelations reign
When peace, goodwill is swapped
For gossip, slander, lies be told
When truth is twisted, slain
For ego's pride and stubbornness
The sin of ancient Cain
Each nighttime brings a restless time
With pillows soak with tears
As anger haunts each dreaming dark
And bitterness appears*

*There's nothing better than when
love
Is served up at the table
When unity is the main course
And families are stable
When wrongs are done, approach is
norm
Restoring separation
As truth, confession, peace
embraced
Its balm, conciliation
Then bedtime prayers, full blessings
pour
And kiss on foreheads sweet
Allow great dreams of visions bright
As bitterness retreats*



3/5/2025 - WEEK 10 DAY 3

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 18:21-35

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

When Peter asks, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" he may have imagined himself to be very generous. In the Jewish tradition, forgiveness was only to be asked 3 times, as based on the scripture of God's forgiveness in the book of Amos (see 1:3,6,9,11,13 & 2:1,4 & 6).

Imagine Peter's astonishment when Jesus answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." While the exact number varies from seventy-seven times in the NIV Bible to seventy times seven (490!) in the RSV Bible, the meaning does not. When Peter asks if he should be twice as forgiving as expected, Jesus says Peter should instead be *endlessly* forgiving. Jesus calls on us to forgive without limit, as God forgives us without limit. No matter how many times we sin against him, God never withholds his offer of absolution.

Jesus continues with the parable of the King who listens to his servant and forgives the servant's enormous debt. Research estimates that each bag would have been worth 20 years' work! However, the servant refuses to forgive another man's debt to him, even though the amount is just a hundred silver coins, about a single day's wages. The discrepancy is easy to see, and the cruelty of the servant is exposed.

It's easy to despise the servant for his hypocrisy, or think he deserves to be punished for not showing mercy after being forgiven himself. But where might we see ourselves in this message? Do we forgive both small and large "debts"? Do we grant forgiveness as readily as we ask for it?

My middle daughter amazes me; she is always ready to forgive, sometimes when I don't think she should. But Jesus says that there is never a time when we *shouldn't* forgive—not even when the offense is great, or someone has hurt us many times.

The Lord's prayer says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Whoa! We are to be forgiven *as* we forgive others. God loved us so much that he gave his only son for our sins; are you prepared to forgive others to the same extent, in response to God's gift? Jesus understood the price he was to pay. He understood the gift God was giving us. If we truly believe that Jesus died for our sins, we must strive to willingly give this gift of forgiveness to others.

Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there something you need to be forgiven for? Pray the Lord's Prayer and mean it. As you forgive, so will you be forgiven. In Matthew 5:7 we hear, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Poem

What Is The Cost?
Matthew 18:21-35, Psalm 32

*Blessed is the one whose
transgressions are forgiven, whose sins
are covered. Blessed is the one whose
sin the Lord does not count against
them and in whose spirit is no deceit.
Psalm 32:1-2*

*What is the cost?
How much the withdrawal
From Ego's bank account
To set aside
A great debt owed to one
To balance the bottom line?
A seven-pound note?
A pound of flesh?
A kneeling, begging debtor?
A beating chest?
A tear stained cheek?
Holding the keys to another's prison
cell?*

*What is the cost?
How much love must be realized
From God's storehouse
To come in faith
A great confession offered to the One
To balance the weights of justice?
A spirit undeceitful?
A moan deep to the bone?
A nakedness then covered?
A hiding cloak of righteousness?
A reining in, a penance?
Blood-stained hands holding the keys to
heaven?*



3/6/2025 - WEEK 10 DAY 4

Jesus Teaches on Divorce

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 19:1-12

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

When some Pharisees tried to trip up Jesus by drawing Him into their own debate about what makes for a lawful divorce, Jesus goes all the way back to creation. In Genesis 1, the very first chapter of the Bible, God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit create people:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:26-28)

Then in Genesis 2, the creation of people is told in a more narrative fashion:

⁷ Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

¹⁸ The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:7, 18-25)

What do the passages from Genesis and Matthew, the first books of the Old and New Testament, teach us about humanity, sexuality, marriage, and divorce?

Poem

Do Not Harden Your Heart Matthew 19: 1-12, Psalm 95

*Today, if only you would hear his voice, "Do not harden your hearts..."
Psalm 95: 7b-8a*

*Do not harden your heart o'er a word
or two said
When the other is hungry or longing
for bed
Do not store up resentments in heart's
cellar deep
But instead settle grievances 'fore you
go to sleep
When annoyed, try this discipline—
before others raise
An attribute, action by which you can
praise
The one whom by you are especially
annoyed
And thus roots of bitterness you can
avoid
Praise God, know that iron and iron
bring sharp'ning
Instead of the nagging or secretive
harp'ning
For when in your heart you give God
all the praise
Your own heart will soften and love in
you raise
Remember your blindness to faults
others might see
And be gracious, forgiveness is truly
the key
May your home be all peaceful, your
sleep truly sweet
As you tend to your heart, not
allowing deceit*



3/7/2025 - WEEK 10 DAY 5

Poor Children and Rich Rulers

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 19:13-30

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

So often, I have read these parables as two distinctly separate stories. Jesus and the Little Children and the Rich Young Ruler. Two different events, two different times and two different sets of people.

However, we have to remember that the verse numbering and the "titles" were added later by fallible humans and that these two stories are really one story, told as a contrast.

We begin with the innocent young children who love Jesus "just because." Jesus welcomes them with the phrase that titles our food pantry, "Come to Me," and He blesses them.

By contrast, the young man who asks what he must do to get eternal life does so with conditions. He begins by justifying himself as if he could earn eternal life from God.

Jesus quickly cuts through the man's justifications by getting to his idol. When Jesus said, "sell your possessions and give to the poor," it cut this man to the core because it attacked the real love of his life, his wealth. He had been willing to follow Jesus, but only "if."

Last Spring, I was blessed to join Pastor Ben's "Counterfeit Gods" study where we examined the idols of our hearts. We are so fortunate to have a church that prioritizes Bible study and faithful pastors like Ben. The study made me so much more aware of my own idols and where I fall short in my full surrender to God.

What is Jesus calling you to surrender so that you can really follow Him?

Poem

How Big Is Your Basket Matthew 19: 13-30, Psalm 112

*Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,
for those who are gracious and
compassionate and righteous. Good will
come to those who are generous and lend
freely, who conduct their affairs with justice.
Psalm 112: 4-5*

*How big is your basket? How open your
hands?
How gracious, compassionate, gen'rous your
plans?
How righteous your actions? How noble your
thoughts?
How often by you is great fruit always
wrought?*

*How stingy your pocketbook held tight in
hand?
How boastful your claim to your property,
land?
How rich are your garments? Is your closet full
While others stand begging for bread in the
cold?*

*How deep is your joy when you see others
win?
How often do you see past color of skin?
How eager are you to lend others a hand?
Will you find a place where the righteous do
stand?*

*How true are your thoughts to the words you
do speak?
How deep do you let bitter roots in heart
creep?
Just how much resentment, rebellion allow
Before spewing its poison, accusations aloud?*

*What life do your children see when you're at
home?
E'en when you are with them, do they feel
alone?
Are words filled with blessing falling on their
ears
Or when you come home do they huddle in
fear?*

*My friend, how you answer these questions
does count
As you ponder your life, bring your thoughts to
account
But even if you ignore actions all rife
One day, God will stand and will then judge
your life*



3/10/2025 - WEEK 11 DAY 1

It's Not Fair!

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 20:1-16

Devotional By: Dan Henke

"It's not Fair!" Any parent with two or more children has heard this. Usually, it involves an older child having a later bedtime, and you get to deal with a tired (and therefore more irrational than usual) four-year-old. Any perceived showing of partiality toward one child will bring the allegation of fundamental unfairness.

Because we all have a sense of fairness, we are also sensitive to perceived unfairness. One of the largest places this happens is in the workplace. Most of us have experienced the situation where there is a co-worker who is a slacker, who gets paid just the same as you. That is exactly what this passage seems to portray; workers who show up for the last two hours of work get paid the same as the ones who toiled in the heat all day.

It's not fair.

That's why it took a long time for me to really understand this passage. First, we must understand that God does not think as we do. While He does have a sense of humor (that's for another devotional), the idea of "fairness" as we know it is based upon perceptions of distribution of finite resources. The Kingdom of Heaven is not finite. God is infinite. The Kingdom of Heaven is infinite.

Dante wrote that there are nine "Circles" or levels to Hell. One of them must be for people at the gym who just sit at the exercise machine I'm waiting to use, looking at their cell phone! There are no "levels" to Heaven. It's the same glorious place for all of us who believe in Jesus. Even disciples James & John struggled with this, as in Mark 10:37 they asked Jesus: "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Secondly, we must understand that we don't "earn" our way into Heaven by our own toil and effort. This is a very easy trap for suburban Americans (and typical Fishers residents) to fall into. We expect that hard work yields great rewards. It's not an inherently bad attitude for life on earth. Heaven is different. We get there only through God's grace, and God's capacity for grace and forgiveness is infinite.

Regardless of when someone comes to Christ in life, whether as a teenager or as a senior citizen, rejoice for them. For they will enjoy the infinite Glory of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Poem

The Life-Field Matthew 20:1-16, Psalm 80

You transplanted a vine from Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. Psalm 80:8-9

*The LORD saw a life-field
Strewn, covered in thorns
Great boulders of heartache
Deep ruts scarred its form
This land others passed by
"It's wasteland," they claimed,
And then they proceeded
Its owner to blame*

*The LORD bought the life-field
For more than its worth
And slowly and lovingly
Cared for its earth
He cleared all the rubble
Brought streams flowing clear
Transplanted His vineyard
Blew winds gentle, clear*

*The tears which had salted
The unfertile ground
Were wiped away gently--
Soon joy did abound
A shoot from the Jesse
Stump grew strong and wide
With life giving myst'ry
Deep pulsing inside*

*Soon bud turned to flower
Then flower to fruit
All nurtured abiding
In Love's deep'ning root
With harvest a-plenty
The LORD called for teams
To reap all the ripe grapes
A marvelous scene!*

*The crop was so plentiful
God's grace was revealed
More teams were now needed
The LORD then appealed:
"Call forth, pray for reapers
Let nothing be lost
Each cluster so valued
No matter the cost!"*

*So into the byways
The manager went
To call forth the workers
Who were vineyard sent
With great harvest finished
Great praises were voiced
The harvest meal glorious
The reapers rejoiced*

*The LORD saw his life-field
Now fertile and grown
With next season's planting
All planted and sown
And now when all passed by
Each one did proclaim,
"Since bought by the Great LORD
Just look at the gain!"*



3/11/2025 - WEEK 11 DAY 2

Jesus Teaches about Servant Leadership

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 20:17-28

Devotional By: Charlie Hart

Jesus' closing commentary in yesterday's passage served as a prelude to today's scripture reading. "So the last will be first, and the first will be last," He concluded the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:16).

Jesus spoke frequently about putting others ahead of oneself and the willingness to take care of others first. We get bombarded by examples of businesspeople, politicians, and athletes, amongst others, who are constantly looking out for number one and ignoring the demand Jesus made.

While these headline-grabbing personas sometimes dominate the airwaves, I am regularly blessed by examples I see from people in my own circles (many from our congregation) who give of their time, talent, and treasure to put others' interests ahead of their own in the business world, the classroom, and the playing field. I've seen compensation reduced to make sure employees get more, sleep lost so that volunteer projects are completed, and anonymous acts of kindness completed so that smiles appear on the faces of the unsuspecting recipients.

One of our great examples of servant leadership recently passed away. Jimmy Carter left political office 44 years ago and then spent the remainder of his days teaching Sunday School, overseeing third-world elections, leading Habitat for Humanity projects, and performing countless other acts of selfless service. Many claim he will be remembered far more for what he did after being president than while in office. He could have passed his days seeking financial riches and personal recognition but chose otherwise.

In today's passage Jesus admonished James and John who, by way of their mother, pleaded to sit on each side of Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who want to be first must be willing to be humble, to serve, and to sacrifice. Jesus lived a perfect, sin-free life, suffered tremendous physical and emotional pain, and then died a horrific death to save the souls of those who have fallen and will continue to fall short. How about this as an example that epitomizes the definition of servant leadership?

While we can't match Jesus' magnitude of sacrifice, we can all seek to put others first and be servant leaders. If we spend our days doing all we can to help others to achieve their dreams, we can't help but achieve our own.

What are you doing to put others' interests ahead of your own? In what ways do you sacrifice your own ambitions for the sake of others?

Poem

Wanted: Servant Leader
Matthew 20:17-28, Psalm 72

*For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
He will take pity on the weak
and the needy and save the needy
from death. He will rescue them from
oppression and violence, for
precious is their blood in his sight.
Psalm 72:12-14*

*A classified ad
"Servant leader required
A righteous, pro-justice one
Only apply
We're looking for one
Who will stand with the weak
Defend the afflicted
Stoop to serve the meek*

*"Endurance is needed
In times which are lean
Integrity flawless
By others be seen
A 24/7
Reply to the cries
Whose leadership brightens
Like the sun in the sky*

*"Providing encouragement
To those struggling along
Who joins in the labor
Who joins in the song
Of laborers chanting
To change toil into cheer
A servant who leads well
From year unto year"*

*To God be all praise now
For giving Your best
A great Servant Leader
Whom by all are blessed
O LORD make us able
To mimic Your Son
And be servant leaders
'Til Your work is done*



3/12/2025 - WEEK 11 DAY 3

Jesus Heals the Blind

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 20:29-34

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

“What do you want me to do for you?”

This simple question by Jesus has profound implications.

“I want to see.”

Then you will no longer be able to beg for a living.

“I want to find love.”

You will be expected to be pure in your pursuit of passion.

“I want more money.”

Can you steward it as the Lord directs?

“I want a purpose.”

Will you go wherever God sends and do whatever God commands?

“I want independence.”

That comes with responsibility.

“I want children.”

So much for independence.

“I want retirement.”

Will you use your newfound time for Jesus, or just yourself?

“I want better friends.”

Be a better friend.

Jesus is asking the question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

How will you answer?

Poem

Kyrie Eleison

Matthew 20:29-34, Psalm 57

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who vindicates me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me— God sends forth his love and his faithfulness. Psalm 57: 1-3

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*

*Behold my sin
Its parasitic cling
Behold my transgressions
Their biting, their sting*

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*

*Behold my trouble
The croucher at my door
Behold my devourer
Save me, I implore*

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*

*Behold my entrapment
The snare at my feet
Behold my darkness
Give light, I entreat*

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*

*Behold my blindness
My stumbling along
Behold my mockers
Help me to stay strong*

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*

*Behold my longing
To sing forth your praise
Untie my tongue
That my voice I may raise*

*Kyrie eleison
LORD have mercy upon me*



3/13/2025 - WEEK 11 DAY 4

Triumphal Entry

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:1-11

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

One of the most meaningful experiences of my recent trip to the Holy Land was our "Palm Sunday Walk". We began at the top of the Mount of Olives, just as Jesus did, and descended the hill until we reached the Garden of Gethsemane. We walked along the same narrow road that Jesus may have travelled, now walled on both sides. As we walked, we listened to the song "The Holy City" that includes these lyrics:

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Lift up your gates and sing,
Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna to your King!"*

I could not help but imagine what Jesus must have been thinking and feeling before he made that same journey down that narrow road. As Jesus walked over the ridge of the Mount of Olives, the entire city of Jerusalem lay in front of him. From that vantage point, he could see the sites of every event that would happen over his final week - the Temple, Upper Room, Garden of Gethsemane, house of Caiaphas, Pilates headquarters, Herod's palace, Golgotha, the tomb. His journey to the cross was almost complete. But his humanity must have left him feeling emotional about the coming days - fearful, anxious, sorrowful. But he was determined to complete his mission.

Jesus walked everywhere but, on this occasion, he chose a different mode of transportation. He chose a donkey - the image of humility and peace. This event is sometimes called the "Triumphal Entry", but the scene hardly seems like a royal parade. Contrast this with how Herod and Pilate were entering the city at the same time - two very different men who would figure prominently in Jesus' story over the next few days. The arrival of royalty into a city for festivals was a public affair, with people lining the main streets, cheering wildly. Herod Antipas would have arrived from the north on a stately horse or being carried by a golden chariot, accompanied by his entourage of royal soldiers. Pilate would have entered from the west and his home in Caesarea Maritima, attended by 1000 or more Roman troops and weapons as a show of force.

The contrast of these "Triumphal Entries" is not coincidental. Jesus was demonstrating the kind of King he was - so very different from what was expected.

What kind of King do you want Jesus to be?

As I walked that "Palm Sunday Walk", I also wondered what it would have been like to be one of those in the crowd. Would I have been one of those throwing down my cloak and waving palm branches? Would I have been one of those praising Jesus on Sunday but calling for his crucifixion on Friday?

What would you have been doing on that Palm Sunday?

Poem

Jubilant Cry!

Matthew 21:1-11, Psalm 118:19-29

*Open for me the gates of the
righteous; I will enter and give thanks
to the Lord. This is the gate of
the Lord through which the
righteous may enter. I will give you
thanks, for you answered me; you
have become my salvation.
Psalm 118:19-29*

*Fling open the gates and unlock the
door*

*O enter, O enter You whom I adore
All is prepared now, the table is set
O come now, O come now and be
the Great Guest*

*Shine glory around me, Your glory I
see*

*Open wide, open wide Your love
unto me*

*The gift of salvation You hold in your
hand*

*Receive soul, receive soul this gift, O,
so grand*

*My praise I lift heavenward, clapping
with joy*

*Most blessed, most blessed my
tongue now employ*

*With loud jubilation my palm branch
I raise*

*Hosanna! Hosanna! Give God highest
praise!*



3/14/2025 - WEEK 11 DAY 5

Jesus Clears the Temple

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:12-17

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

This is a well-known passage and one that many reference to show the humanness of Jesus, sometimes to justify their own anger. A bit of history is needed here, however, and we must never think that this passage is permission to give in to anger, even to righteous anger.

The Temple Jesus visited comprised four courts and the Holy Place. The first court was the Court of the Gentiles, where anyone could visit. The second court was the Court of Women, where any Israelite could visit. The third court was the Court of Israelites where temple services were held, and the fourth court was the Court of Priests, where only the Priests could visit to make offerings and sacrifices. Lastly there was the Most Holy Place, where only the High Priest could visit, and only once a year.

The events in this passage take place in the Court of the Israelites. Every Jew was required to pay a temple tax, so it's not entirely unusual that moneychangers and merchants would be present. What Jesus is railing against is the abuse of these practices. Price-gouging and fraudulent vendors kept some of the poorest away from the Temple, away from the services, and away from God. Jesus is always working against anything that keeps anyone away from true worship.

But the point of this passage is not merely that Jesus gets angry. Note what follows: He begins to heal those around him, and he excites the children there. Jesus' anger is always followed by his love. These events are often cited as the beginning of the collaboration between the Roman and Israelite authorities against Jesus—not because of his outburst, but because of how Jesus's actions encouraged others to act the same. This inspiration was seen as a threat to the status quo.

There are many injustices in this world to be angry about: poverty, hunger, disease, disasters and more. The question is: What do we do with this anger? Do we just strike out or yell about our frustrations? Or, do we find a way to heal? Do we look for ways to change what we cannot accept? Do we do the little that we can to make a difference? Jesus did. He let people know what made him angry, what was not acceptable, and the guilty fled. But those who understood the cause of his anger hung around because they knew the good was coming. This passage is a challenge for all of us to make a difference, no matter how small that might be, not through anger but through action. Together we can change the world!

Poem

Lament

Matthew 21:12-17, Psalm 69:9-36

*For zeal for your house consumes
me, and the insults of those who
insult you fall on me. When I weep
and fast, I must endure scorn; when
I put on sackcloth, people make
sport of me. Those who sit at the
gate mock me, and I am the song of
the drunkards.
Psalm 69: 9-12*

*Such sorrow have I never felt
Than when the church betrayed
The holy writings of my LORD
Idolatry displayed
The anger whipping through my
core
The table turning zeal
The grief from the audacity
Which lies the truth conceal
My soul in sackcloth languishes
My eyes are red from weeping
How did this evil get its hold
Into Your temple creeping?
O, Fiery Spirit, cleanse Your church
Sift out the souls in judgment
Renew, restore her purity
With pure white righteous raiment*



3/17/2025 - WEEK 12 DAY 1

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree & Defends His Authority

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:18-27

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

In today's Scripture reading, Jesus leaves Jerusalem and travels to Bethany with His disciples. In the morning, they return to Jerusalem. En route, Jesus sees a fig tree. Being hungry, He checks the tree but finds only leaves and no fruit. Jesus curses the fig tree. He declares, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever" (v. 19, KJV). When the disciples see that the tree immediately withers, they are amazed and ask Jesus how the tree withers so quickly. "How could the fig tree wither away so fast?" and "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7, KJV). Jesus says, "If you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

Jesus teaches His followers to be fruitful and not pretend to have fruit. He tells them to be fruitful because that is why they are put on Earth. He said, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:1-5).

In her hymn about the parable of the figs, Mrs. H.S. Lehman writes: "The Master is seeking a harvest/ In lives He's redeemed by His blood;/ He seeks for the fruit of the Spirit, / And works that will glorify God." And she writes in the refrain: "Nothing but leaves for the Master, / Oh, how His loving heart grieves, / When instead of the fruit He is seeking, / We offer Him nothing but leaves." She continues her hymn with our lives' purpose: "He looks for His likeness reflected...that are yielded and true;/ He's looking for zeal in the winning /Of souls He's entrusted to you."

In this parable, Jesus denounces our fruitless worship of God and those who profess to be Christ followers but have no evidence of a relationship with Christ. "Christ's ...withering of the fig tree is a symbol of God's sentence on all that is fruitless" (C. S. Lewis). Jesus wants His followers to sow and bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God. "He is yearning for someone to carry/ The life-giving word far and near;/ He is waiting for hearts that are willing, / For ears that are open to hear" (Lehman).

How are you bearing fruit for God's kingdom today?

Poem

Creation's Response
Matthew 21:18-27, Psalm 47

*For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.
Psalm 47: 7*

*Just as the dog obeys its master
And sits or stays at his command
So all the trees and beasts on earth
Respond to God's almighty hand*

*With praise they clap their limbs and
leaves
With song they bellow loud and low
According to Authority
Obedience their Master show*

*God's is the voice whose sound
declares
The fruit to swell and full ripen
God's is the pow'r o'er all the earth
His people's ways thus enlighten*

*So bow before this Holy One
Clap hands, applaud His righteous
name
For no one else sits on the throne
Allegiance from you thus to claim*



3/18/2025 - WEEK 12 DAY 2

The Parable of the Two Sons

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:28-32

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I wonder how many times my parents asked me to do something when I was growing up, and I said I would and then didn't do it. I wonder how many times I've volunteered to do a project for business or for church and "never got around to it?"

I believe it is more important to complete a task than to give it lip service. There is an adage "put your money where your mouth is," meaning follow through or don't say you will and then you don't.

One of my children was in college and kept changing majors. She'd acquired lots of class hours but wasn't close to receiving a major in the field she thought she wanted. Her counselor called her in and told her "If you will take this one class you will have a major in a subject." She didn't want to pursue a career in that subject, BUT taking that class got her a degree, and then she then pursued the career she wanted. College goal completed!

There are times we feel called to befriend someone, or help someone, or to witness our faith and we think "I'll do it" but it never comes to fruition. My thought is, when we recognize our shortfall let's call that "practice" and when the next opportunity comes along let's make it happen.

We can commit our time, talent and treasure to God and then get distracted. Let's call it "practice" and then change our direction to accomplish the task that God has chosen for us.

Poem

Unless The Lord
Matthew 21:28-32, Psalm 127

*Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain. Unless
the Lord watches over the city, the
guards stand watch in vain.
Psalm 127:1*

*Unless the LORD attends my soul
'Tis darkness, sad and lone
Unless the LORD awakens me
I am but dry dead bones
Unless the LORD stirs Spirit's wind
I shall rebellious be
Unless the LORD guards well His
lamb
Devoured prey be me
Unless the LORD opens the womb
The quiver, barren, empty
Unless the LORD vows prism bow
Arrows fly piercing me
Unless the LORD transforms my
heart
My answer will be "No!"
Unless the LORD illumines path
A-stumbling I will go
Unless the LORD covers my sin
My rags shall reek with shame
Unless the LORD lays claim to me
I'm child without a name
Unless the LORD builds up my house
When storms come, I will crumble
Unless the LORD does die for me
To hell, I'll quickly tumble
Unless the LORD reveals His truth
My life will be a lie
Unless the LORD redeems my life
All that is me will die*



3/19/2025 - WEEK 12 DAY 3

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 21:33-46

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

Jesus was a pro at making sharp points with parables. He was a masterful storyteller, drawing people in until they saw themselves in the story. Here, He is addressing the religious leaders of the day. They were familiar with how Israel had treated the faithful priests and prophets in the past.

They knew the teachings from their tradition that Isaiah was killed by being sawn in half by the king. Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern, and later stoned to death. Others were beaten, threatened, imprisoned, and martyred. And they were personally aware that, just recently, John the Baptist was beheaded.

Certainly, they wouldn't do the same to God's very own Son!

Rather than being convicted by Jesus' parable, they were hardened. This made them want to arrest and execute Him even more.

What about you? Is Jesus your cornerstone or your stumbling stone? Do His ways and words make you repent of your sin and seek alignment with His truth, or do they make you reject His teachings as out of touch with modern sensibility?

After Jesus was crucified, raised, and ascended to heaven, His followers continued His ministry. In Acts 4, Peter got in hot water for healing a man who was unable to walk. He responded to his critics with these words:

⁹ *If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed,* ¹⁰ *then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.* ¹¹ *Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected,*

which has become the cornerstone."

¹² *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:9-12).*

Later, in the epistle written by Peter, he declared:

⁷ *Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

⁸ *and,*

"A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (1 Peter 2:7-8).

So, be honest. In what ways is Jesus your cornerstone? In what ways is Jesus your stumbling stone?

Poem

Nothing But Good Matthew 21:33-46, Psalm 147

Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! Psalm 147:1ff

*Who is the One who brings
Nothing but good
Into His great creation?
My LORD, my God
In whom I praise
The LORD above all nations!*

*Who made my soul
And placed me in
His world that He created
With every goodness
One can see
With blessing dedicated*

*God builds us up
God heals our wounds
God calls the stars by name
God's pow'r and wisdom
Lift the meek
While casting out defamed*

*God shades His world
With gentle clouds
And rains refreshing dew
And young and old
On eagle's wings
Know strength which is renewed*

*My good, good God
He pleasures not
In chariots and horses
But in the meek one
On her knees
Who cries out, moans, rejoices*

*O, sing with me
You angel choir
Our holy, holy, holies
O, may our praise
Be full, complete
And lifted to God solely*

*O, Word of God
Spin now the earth
'Til every soul has heard
The blessed message
Of Your love
Your truth, their belt, their gird*

*Melt now the frozen
Hearts of stone
The hardened, trampled ground
And in the soil
Of humble hearts
May gospel seed be found*

*Who is the One who brings
Nothing but good
Into His great creation?
My LORD, my God
In whom I praise
The LORD above all nations!*



3/20/2025 - WEEK 12 DAY 4

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:1-14

Devotional

By: Lisa Ellcessor

The Five BUTS

Do little things in life matter? Do short words in a sentence hold weight? Have you considered the small word “but” and its effect? I have a habit of circling the word “but” in my Bible because it connects sentences that lead to opposing thoughts and new directions. In today’s scripture, written by the Jewish disciple Matthew, we see Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven. In this parable called The Wedding Banquet, the word “but” appears five times and beckons consideration.

22:3 “BUT they refused to come.” The King (God) prepares to honor His son (Jesus) with a wedding banquet. Servants (prophets, priests, judges) are sent to those invited. God’s chosen people receive God’s covenantal invitation. Sadly, in the parable, they refuse to come. However, King God offers second chances by inviting them again and even bids them to “come.” The table is prepared.

22:5 “BUT they paid no attention and went off.” Work, busyness, fields, jealousy and pride distract the invitees. Excuses speak “I cannot come.” Some even mistreat and kill the servants who bring the invitational message. This enrages the King. Declining the King’s invitation leads to decline; sin runs wild causing destructive harm. Saying “no” to God’s invitation grieves me.

22:8 “BUT those I invited did not deserve to come.” The King doesn’t cancel the covenant, He creates a New Covenant by extending a wedding invite to all: “the bad as well as the good.” Everyone is invited to the Great Banquet. It’s time to honor the Lamb of God. Many arrive to honor Jesus Christ.

Rev.19:6-8 Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb (Jesus) has come, and His bride (us) has made herself ready...Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.

22:11 “BUT when the king came to see the guests, he noticed someone was not wearing the wedding clothes.” What are the required wedding clothes? The clothes are the robes of righteousness we receive only by accepting the blood of Jesus Christ. No one is allowed to meet God without wearing the white robes of righteousness washed by the blood of Jesus. *Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, BUT the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

22:14 “For many are invited, BUT few are chosen.” Life matters! Short words in a sentence do hold weight! “The bad as well as the good,” do have importance in God’s Kingdom. The invite to Heaven’s Wedding Banquet is extended, **BUT** you must come dressed with a solid, YES to Jesus Christ! No excuses, please.

Poem

Maskil—A Hymn Of Honor
Matthew 22:1-14, Psalm 45

Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house. Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. Psalm 45:10-11

*Prepare your heart, O daughter, love
Your Prince of Peace is nigh
With sword of truth He splits the air
On snow white horse He rides*

*Wash full your heart, perfume your love
With prayer, prepare to welcome
Your Bridegroom, Victor, Honored One
Clothed rich in royal splendor*

*Christ’s throne forever will endure
With majesty and power
His kingdom shine all glorious
His name a mighty tower*

*O, do not sleep, fair virgin church
Your lamps keep trimmed and ready
And when the invitation comes
Proclaim your “Yes,” strong, steady*

*Ascend into His banquet hall
And take your Bridegroom’s hand
Rejoice, and boldly enter then
Within His throne room grand*



3/21/2025 - WEEK 12 DAY 5

Jesus on Paying Taxes & the Resurrection

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:15-33

Devotional By: Nancy Foust

Jesus said in verse 21 from Mathew 22, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's". This statement seems very simple but there is much more to it than meets the eye. Think of walking down the street in a really bad mood and a young man smiles and says hi. Do you ignore this gesture or return the greeting? God would want you to return the gesture, no matter what your mood feels. We must continue to find ways to treat people just as we want to be treated ourselves, but also because God created us to be that way in every part of our lives.

Recently, I was at a meeting where we were all asked to help set up and take down tables and chairs for an event that many of us planned to attend for our enjoyment. I was not wanting to help do these things-just being lazy. However, something made me realize that if I want to be part of the program, I should be willing to help out. The selfish us comes out very often in situations like this and we think of all sorts of reasons not to help. I had just read the above verse and realized, If I want to give back to God what is His, I must help get ready for the program.

Daily we should all remember to respect others as we like to be respected, honor others as they should honor us and generally, treat everyone as God created us to live.

Today-what can you do for your neighbor to show your love for God?

Poem

Gittith—Played Upon Heart Strings
Matthew 22:15-33, Psalm 84

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even
faints, for the courts of the Lord; my
heart and my flesh cry out for the
living God. Better is one day in your
courts than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the
house of my God than dwell in the
tents of the wicked.
Psalm 84:1-2,10*

*Who is in charge?
To whom do I owe my allegiance?
To the One who calls me to His
courts
My King!
Who for me has provided
Sanctuary, safety
A nest, a refuge
Great gladness*

*E'en when I'm far off
How I long and pant in my soul
To know fullness of life
Resurrection!
E'en in times of drought
My King rains within me
Filling the springs of
My heart*

*Listen all to this wisdom true
Far better is one day
One moment, one prayer within
God's court
Than thousands of years
In the most entertaining
Arena, stadium, or even a
Human heart love*



3/24/2025 - WEEK 13 DAY 1

Jesus Speaks about the Greatest Commandment

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:34-40

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

The Greatest Commandment is one of the most important teachings of Jesus. He taught that we should “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). As Christians, we need to remember this teaching and focus diligently every day to keep our Lord and God central to our lives. The second commandment that Jesus taught flows from this Greatest Commandment and was to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:38). Jesus combined the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses into two commandments.

In the Old Testament, God instructed Moses to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). God said we must keep this Love of the Lord on our hearts (Deut. 6:6) and “Impress them [the Ten Commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7). Moses taught us to not seek revenge against others, but “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

The beautiful song “They’ll Know We are Christians By Our Love” by Peter Scholtes reflects the two commandments that Jesus taught us. The first verse is

“We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;
And we pray that all unity may one day be
restored.
And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by
our love, yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our
love.”

Take a few minutes to pray about the Greatest Commandment. How you are keeping it on your heart?

Are there ways you want to strengthen your love of God?

Are you teaching the Greatest Commandment to younger family members and friends?

Poem

Looking Upon My Love
Matthew 22:34-40, Psalm 18

*I love you, Lord, my strength.
Psalm 18:1*

*Looking upon my Love
All is purity and faithfulness
Strength and tenderness
Filling my heart
With a concert of joy
Filling my mind
With a plethora of wisdom
Filling my soul
With an ocean of peace
Filling my weaknesses
With a fortress of sustenance*

*How can this Love
Not spill over
Onto my surroundings
Drenching the hearts
With the rains of refreshment
Splashing the minds
With droplets of imagination
Washing the souls
With pourings of balm
Flooding the impoverished
With crystalline bounty*



3/25/2025 - WEEK 13 DAY 2

Jesus Teaches about the Messiah

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 22:41-46

Devotional By: Mary Martin

Keenly aware of my own shortcomings and lack of a broad education, I have often found myself intimidated by experts and those who are very outspoken with their opinions and knowledge in a particular topic of conversation. Frequently, I have not had the courage to ask questions, fearing I would sound ignorant.

In Jesus's day, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were so firmly in authority over the Israelites, the average citizen would have likely felt the same way as I, and unquestioningly accepted their knowledge as law, even if most people did not fully understand. Examples abound in the Bible showing those scholars arrogantly abused their high position.

After at least temporarily silencing the Sadducees (see Matthew 22:23-32), Jesus effectively puts the Pharisees in an equally awkward situation. They are "experts" in the law of Moses, so they challenge Jesus, asking Him which is the greatest commandment that was given to the people of Israel. He accurately cites the first and second commandments, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself." Then Jesus further emphasizes His answer, saying, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

While the Pharisees are mulling over His correct reply, He turns the tables on them asking them to clarify their knowledge of the Christ, their view of what they believe about the future Messiah. They state that the Christ is the son of David. Jesus quotes Psalm 110, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" Jesus asks the Pharisees, "If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" They are stumped and left speechless. Other writers of the Gospels indicate that the crowds who overheard the conversation were delighted that He had confounded the Pharisees (see Mark 12:37b & Luke 20:45). Jesus later instructs his followers to be cautious and discerning when listening to the teachers of the law (see Matthew 23).

As I am "aging gracefully," I find my filters are much thinner, and I am eager to ask questions, regardless of appearances and being the possible recipient of derision. I am learning and growing, questioning and listening. To quote an elderly friend when she was asked about her diligence in studying the Bible, she laughed and said, "I'm cramming for my finals!"

Questions:

What is my belief about Jesus? Is He the Messiah?

Am I diligent in my search for both head and heart knowledge of Jesus?

Am I a gracious listener when others have questions about my/their Faith?

Poem

Coronation

Matthew 22:41-46, Psalm 110

*The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!" Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.
Psalm 110: 1-3a*

*Come, My Beloved, My Begotten One
It is finished
It is accomplished
It is victory*

*Come, My Beloved, My Begotten One
Return to the throne room
Sit at My right hand
Rest Your feet upon the crushed enemy*

*Come, My Beloved, My Begotten One
I return the scepter of power to You
I return the scepter of authority to You
I return the scepter of the Kingdom to You*

*Come, My Beloved, My Begotten One
Receive the white linen of Your station
Receive the ephod of Your people
Receive the blessing of Your Father*

*Come, My Beloved, My Begotten One
Crush all evil which divides You from your creation
Judge all nations in righteousness and mercy
Drink all the cup of wrath and turn darkness into a new day*



3/26/2025 - WEEK 13 DAY 3

A Warning to Us All

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 23:1-39

Devotional By: Dan Henke

This is the passage that got Jesus crucified. Previously, Jesus had confounded the religious leaders with his teaching and his compassion, such as healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 3). He spoke against them in parables such as the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22). This was more direct. He named them in a seven-count indictment. And he did so in the temple courts, on their home court. He was the Michigan Wolverines planting their flag on the "O" of Ohio Stadium, in front of the religious leader's home crowd during Passover Week.

For that, they believed they had to kill him.

It is impossible to justify the Sanhedrin for crucifying Jesus, but it is easy to understand their motivation. Nobody likes to be called out like that, particularly when it's all true. Everyone wants to be comfortable in their hypocrisy rather than be confronted by it.

When I read this passage several years ago, my thought was that if Jesus came today to deliver Matthew 23, he wouldn't go to a church, he'd go to a Courthouse. As an attorney and Judge, it was uncomfortable to be confronted by that. Other than updating some cultural references, He wouldn't have to change a word. It's humbling to realize that.

While Jesus attacked a powerful profession, and the threat to power was motivation to kill Him, denigrating an entire profession creates a universal reaction. Even though we may not be powerful, we tend to put a good deal of our self-worth into our professional work and are sensitive when someone denigrates what we do for a living. It is one thing to attack a profession as being economically unproductive or superfluous. It is quite another to attack it as a "whitewashed tomb."

As uncomfortable as it may be, think about Jesus coming to your workplace. What do you think He would say?

Poem

I Am Tired, Lord
Matthew 23:1-39, Psalm 5

For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest. Psalm 5: 4-6

I am tired, Lord

*I come to you for rest
I lie down upon the bed of Your refreshing
I close my eyes in sleep*

I am restless, Lord

*I dream of the wicked who abuse
Your little lambs
I wrestle with the arrogant whose lives are hypocrisy
I sweat as I battle deceit in my own heart*

I am crying, Lord

*Listen to my lament, O King
Calm the nightmares of my storms,
O God
Draw me into Your arms, O my Love*

I am resting, Lord

*Your heartbeat steady resets my soul
Your shushing breath calms my hiccoughing gasps
Your steady arms enfold me to Your breast*

I am safe, Lord



3/27/2025 - WEEK 13 DAY 4

Jesus Speaks about the Future

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 24:1-25

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

The temple in Jerusalem was an impressive structure. The massive stones were 12 feet high, 18 feet wide, and over 37 feet long. These 400-ton white limestone blocks were stacked and interlocked on top of one another to a height of 150 feet. Jesus' statement that it would be destroyed had to shock His disciples. Yet that is exactly what happened forty years later, when the Romans flattened the pinnacle of Jewish worship.

His statement led to the follow-up question by the disciples, asking if this would be a sign of the end times. Jesus' words to them are so useful for us:

Watch out for false messiahs.

Beware of false prophets.

Don't get drawn in by false teachings.

Be leery of false signs and wonders.

Resist false promises.

We live between the times. The Christian era is after the first coming of Christ and before His second coming. Rather than wondering and worrying about when the end will be, Christ calls us to live faithfully for the number of days we have.

James 4:14 says, "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

And if the Lord does return before your days are up, Jesus asked a penetrating question: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

We don't know the future.

But we do know who holds the future.

How is Jesus calling you to live in the present?

Poem

If Not For The Lord
Matthew 24:1-25, Psalm 124

*If the Lord had not been on our side—
let Israel say—if the Lord had not
been on our side when people
attacked us, they would have
swallowed us alive when their anger
flared against us; the flood would
have engulfed us, the torrent would
have swept over us, the raging
waters would have swept us away.
Psalm 124: 1-5*

If not for the Lord

*My attackers would have entrapped
me
With their deceit
My enemies would have burned me
With their ire
My foes would have swept me away
With their torrents
My adversaries would have toppled
me
With their rammings*

If not for the Lord

My temple would be destroyed

Yet

Because My Lord

*Cut off their binding strength
Closed their devouring jaws
Set me free to soar
Calmed the waves of my fear
Silenced my accuser
Quenched hell's fires
Held back the flood waters
Resurrected my dead body*

Because My Lord

My temple is rebuilt, restored



3/28/2025 - WEEK 13 DAY 5

Jesus Teaches about His Return

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 24:26-51

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

Some people obsess about the timeline for Christ's second coming. They weave together verses from all over Scripture, wedging in the misfit puzzle pieces until a forced mosaic appears. They then proclaim, "Ah! I know when Jesus will return!"

Some people almost never think about Christ's return. They reason that it has been two millennia since He ascended, and it will probably be a few more before He descends again. His return is a fuzzy future. They say, "Eh. Live for the moment!"

Some people live between these two extremes. Their mantra: "Oh! Live as if Jesus is returning tonight and serve as if you have the rest of your life to do so!"

I like this third way. It calls us to both morality and ministry, godliness and giftedness, holiness and helpfulness. With the third way, we keep watching and waiting, and we keep serving and sharing.

Here's the truth. Jesus will return. Like the first flash of lightning on an otherwise cloudless day, Christ will appear from heaven. There won't be time to get your house in order, or make amends with people, or get right with God. Too late. Too bad.

So why not do those things now? Why not commit yourself to Christ completely? Invite Him into your life as your Savior. Offer Him your life as your Lord.

Live as if Jesus is returning tonight and serve as if you have the rest of your life to do so!

Poem

Do Not Listen
Matthew 24:26-51, Psalm 3

Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

Psalm 3 :1-2

*Do not listen
To those who would say
"The Lord will not deliver you"*

*On the day
The sun becomes dark
The moon's light is hidden
The stars tumble from the sky
The heavens shake and tremble*

*Do not listen
To those who say
"The Lord will not deliver you"*

*Listen
To the trumpet blast declaring
"Salvation belongs to our God"*

*On that day
The Lord will shield His beloved
The glory of the Lord will lift your head
The Lord will answer your cries from His holy mount
The Lord will strike down all who fight against you*

*Listen
To the trumpet blast declaring
"Salvation belongs to our God"*



3/31/2025 - WEEK 14 DAY 1

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25:1-13

Devotional By: Patti Napier

Two brothers who lived in the US learned that their father in Madrid, Spain was on his deathbed. So they needed to hurry if they were to see their father one more time. One brother from Texas flew to Chicago to meet the other brother. Both drove to NYC to board a plane for Spain,

They went to the ticketing area, and the brother from Chicago presented his ticket first explaining their need to travel swiftly. The airline representative said to him "You may be in a hurry but you will not be flying to Spain today." Confused, the brother asked why. "Your passport is expired". The brother was devastated as he heard in his mind multiple reminders in months past from his wife to get his passport renewed. He always thought he would have plenty of time. His unfinished business almost made him miss the opportunity of a lifetime...seeing his father one last time.

In Matthew 25:1-13, we read about the difference in being prepared and not being prepared, for we may never know when. The virgins who had spare oil with them would be prepared no matter how long they needed to wait. All that mattered to them was that they would be ready. But the other five virgins did not plan. And the door was shut.

This may seem harsh in some ways for God to say, "I am sorry, but you were not prepared." But it is because God wants all of us to live starting today as if this were our last day. Why wait, for we do not know the time of our last day.

Is your heart ready and prepared at this very moment to meet your Savior Jesus? Do you know someone who is not ready? Do you need to reach out to them?

Poem

Prepare For The Advent Of Your Love
Matthew 25:1-13, Psalm 33

*We wait in hope for the Lord; he is
our help and our shield. In him our
hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy
name. May your unfailing love be
with us, Lord, even as we put our
hope in you.*

Psalm 33: 20-22

Prepare for the advent of Your Love

*Clear your voice, O you choirs
Tune your lyres, O you strings
Trim your lamps, O you watchers*

Prepare for the advent of Your Love

*Sing praise, O you choirs
Soar harmony, O you strings
Shine brightly, O you watchers*

Prepare for the advent of Your Love

*Lo, Christ comes, straight and true
Lo, Christ comes, right and just
Lo, Christ comes, faithful and good*

Prepare for the advent of Your Love

*Your Love brings counsel which
silences the nations
Your Love brings the abundance of
His heavenly storehouse
Your Love brings victory and
inheritance*

Prepare for the advent of Your Love



4/1/2025 - WEEK 14 DAY 2

The Parable of the Trusted Money

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25:14-30

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

At first, this parable appears to be about the gifts with which we have each been entrusted--and that message is surely here. But why does the servant who has the most get even more? And wasn't the third servant just being trustworthy? Sure, he didn't increase his master's fortune—but he didn't risk any of it, either.

But this parable answers: If you don't use your gift, you lose it. Another, deeper message is here, too. A point that Jesus repeatedly made: You are being given the gift of salvation. If you hear it, understand it and share it, more will be asked of you. If you hide it or don't share it, then you will lose it because you don't truly understand it.

This parable is not just about our talents and the unique ways in which we are each called to serve God. It's also about who God is and what he wants from us. The servant who hides and protects his money represents the Pharisees and Scribes of Jesus's time. They wanted to keep the faith for themselves, believing it was theirs and theirs alone. Jesus references this earlier in the book of Matthew:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matthew 23:13)

Luke emphasizes this message further in Acts:

The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

Go to this people and say,
"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

"Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (Acts 28:26-28)

Jesus makes it clear that God's intention was for all of us to know him, and for all of us to share the message of His love for us. The first two servants understood this, they took the risk and invested their money with great rewards. We are being asked to do the same. We have heard the Good News! Do we risk living like it? Do we risk sharing it? If we do, then we will be asked to do it more. Are you ready?

Poem

You Have Given Me
Matthew 25:14-30, Psalm 90

*May the favor of the Lord our God
rest on us; establish the work of
our hands for us—yes, establish the
work of our hands.
Psalm 90:17*

You have given me...

*A weight from Your possession
A measure from Your storehouse
A gift from Your Spirit*

*Shall I let it be destroyed by mocking
Shall I let it be swept away by scoffing
Shall I let it become dead by neglect*

*Temples crumble
Sheep wander
Flowers fade*

*Return, O heart, confess your secret
sins
Return, O man, remember your days
are numbered
Return, O God, call us to account*

*Shall the weight from Your possession
be doubled?
Shall the measure from Your store-
house be increased?
Shall the gift from Your Spirit be fruit-
ful?*

*Return, O Lord, in Your mercy!
Return, O Lord, in rejoicing!
Return, O Lord, in glory to Your chil-
dren!*

You have given me...



4/2/2025 - WEEK 14 DAY 3

The Parable of the Sheep & the Goats

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25:31-46

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Here, we learn about the final judgement when Jesus takes his place on the throne. It's interesting that ALL nations will come before Him, but it's the INDIVIDUALS who will be judged. We will all be judged on our own response to Jesus' message. He compares himself to a very familiar image of the first century - a shepherd who tends a flock of sheep and goats in the same pasture. Sheep and goats looked the same if viewed from a distance, but the animals needed to be separated at some point. To shepherds, sheep were obedient and more valuable than were the goats, who tended to stray and find themselves in danger. And in ancient culture, the right hand was the place of honor and the left less so, even considered shameful.

If you read closely, both the "sheep" and the "goats" were surprised at what Jesus told them. The sheep were surprised to find that it was Jesus they were ministering to all along. And the goats were surprised to find that it was Jesus that they ignored. We learn that people will be judged and separated NOT based on how they followed the law but on how they treated the less fortunate - "the least of these." Judgement will be based on character.

What we do matters. But more importantly, do we really accept and live out the Gospel message? Have we fully accepted Jesus or are we Christians in name only? If we have truly accepted the message of Jesus Christ, it will be clear in the way we treat the vulnerable and helpless. We will feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, comfort the sick, visit the prisoner - NOT because we are required to, but because we delight in it, because we are compelled to do it out of our love for Jesus. We tend to the less fortunate as a response to our salvation, not to earn it.

In reading this passage, my mind continued to return to a praise song entitled *What If Jesus Comes Back Like That* by Colin Raye. Here are some of the lyrics:

He came to town on an old freight train. He jumped off in the pouring rain. Everybody says he's insane. Just a low-down no-account hobo.

She was born into drug abuse. She couldn't help what her mama used. It wasn't like she got to choose. Now she's layin' there all alone.

What if Jesus comes back like that? Where will he find out hearts are at? Will he let us in or turn his back? What if Jesus comes back like that?

How do we respond to the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned?

Poem

My Hidden Intent
Matthew 25:31-46, Psalm 139

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. Psalm 139:1-4

*My hidden intents are not secret to You
My motives to You, full displayed
Despite how I clean up my outward effect
My heart's motivation, portrayed*

*So search me and know me,
illumine my flaws
Cleanse me so Your Son may be seen
Like Him, may I see each one along my path
As my Loved One to serve in their need*

*For I've been created, Your image to show
Knit perfectly to do Your will
My soul in this garment, this fleshy made tent
Your purpose in me to fulfill*

*To tend to Your lambs and the sheep of Your flock
To speak and teach forgiveness news
To minister daily with pureness of heart
Until what is now hid comes in view*



4/3/2025 - WEEK 14 DAY 4

The Plot to Kill Jesus

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:1-5

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

It is interesting that those who had the most religious training were so against Jesus. What had he done so far to threaten them? He had taught the Sermon on the Mount, spoken in parables, healed the sick, loved the outcast, and challenged halfhearted religion. But He had also ministered on the Sabbath, challenged the authority of the religious establishment, and presented Himself as the Son of God and the Son of Man. That was a bridge too far.

So, they gathered in the palace of the priest to plot the crucifixion of the Christ. But they wanted to do it secretly. There was no use in stirring up the Passover crowds and ruining their religious festival. They were nothing if not pragmatic.

Jesus, though, knew exactly what was coming, predicting His own crucifixion yet again. In fact, He had known this day was coming for a very long time. Over two thousand years earlier, God made a blood covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. At God's command, Abraham cut in half a heifer, a goat and a ram, arranging the halves opposite each other, their blood spilling out to form a blood path. This practice was used as a means of two people walking the blood path, promising with their life to fulfill the covenant being made.

But in this instance, God walked the path for both Himself and for Abraham. In essence, He said, "Abraham, if you or your descendants fail to live up to my covenant, I will pay for it with my life." In that moment the Son of God knew that He would one day be crucified for sinful humanity. Of course, Jesus knew this truth long before even that moment, such as when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6), or when Satan rebelled and fell like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18-20).

What the High Priest thought he could plot secretly from his palatial palace, Jesus knew from eternity He would suffer publicly on a criminal's cross. Paul puts it plainly in 1 Timothy 1:15: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." That includes me... and you.

Give thanks to Jesus for knowingly offering Himself as the sacrifice to save sinners.

Poem

Vile Deceitful Schemes Matthew 26:1-5, Psalm 10

*In his arrogance the wicked man
hunts down the weak, who are
caught in the schemes he devises.
He boasts about the cravings of his
heart; he blesses the greedy and
reviles the Lord. In his pride the
wicked man does not seek him; in
all his thoughts there is no room for
God.*

Psalm 10: 2-4

*Vile deceitful schemes behind
veiled smiling faces
Dark plotting enshrouded by night
False witnesses gathered, gilded
testimony
Great lies now on stage, full
limelight*

*O, arrogant ones, who in greed line
your pockets
Beware, for soon judgment will
come
Do not be deceived thinking God's
not aware
Of your filthy, lewd, dark alley scum*

*Arise, now, O Lord, when Your
timing is perfect
Arise, refine our sinful dross
Arise, O my Savior, who knows all
our falsehoods
And nail deceit's schemes to Your
cross*

*Destroy all our lying, hush every
false tongue
False witnesses bring to their knees
In sovereignty govern Your people
in truth
And heal us from falsehood's
disease*



4/4/2025 - WEEK 14 DAY 5

A Woman Anoints Jesus

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:6-13

Devotional By: Judith Gibson

In today's Scripture passage, Jesus is in a house in Bethany where He and His disciples are eating a meal. A woman enters the house and sees Jesus. Moved with compassion and adoration for her Savior, she takes her alabaster box of very precious and expensive ointment, opens it, and pours all of it on Jesus' head.

When the disciples see this, they are indignant. They ask Jesus, "To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor" (v. 8-9, KJV).

But Jesus knows this woman's heart. He knows of her ardent love for Him. He knows that she believes Jesus is the Messiah and has appeared on earth to forgive sins; she rests on Him for the forgiveness of her sins... and she longs to serve Him (C. H. Spurgeon).

Jesus responds to the disciples, "Why trouble ye this woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily, I say unto you, whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (v 10-13, KJV).

I am always intrigued by this story. Why would a poor woman anoint Jesus with this costly oil that is probably the only expensive possession she has? Perhaps it shows how personal and fervent her love is for Jesus. After all, she is saved and Heaven-bound. Similarly, why would any of us hold back anything from our Lord, who loves us and has saved us for eternal life with Him in Heaven?

Anne Graham Lotz writes in her one of her blogs that we, too, "should pour out upon Jesus our 'perfume of adoration' as we serve Him." Spurgeon writes of this woman's anointing of Jesus as "the deed of a soul all on fire — the deed of a woman filled with deep devotion and reverent love."

Content to have the lowest standing-place in the room, this poor woman willingly gives all she has. May we, like this woman, pour out all of who we are and have to the One who has redeemed us and is preparing our eternal home in Heaven with Him.

Are you serving God today from an intense love and gratitude towards Him?
What are you willing to give up in your service to Him?

Poem

At Your Footstool
Matthew 26:6-13, Psalm 132

"Let us go to his dwelling place, let us worship at his footstool, saying, 'Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.'"
Psalm 132: 7-8

*At Your footstool, O Lord, may I find my small place
With only Your essence in view
At Your footstool, O Lord, may I pour out my love
The perfume of my prayers just for You*

*At Your footstool, O Lord, my abiding place be
The chosen best seat in Your house
Not the head of the table or honor's great seat
Let me sit at the feet of my Spouse*

*At Your footstool, O Lord, may I eat daily bread
Each word from Your mouth be my feeding
At Your footstool, O Lord, may I learn all Your truth
And from thence, may I follow Your leading*

*At Your footstool, O Lord, may I anoint Your body
A holy worship preparation
At Your footstool, O Lord, turn my ashes to beauty
With love as my sole motivation*



4/7/2025 - WEEK 15 DAY 1

Judas' Plots to Betray Jesus

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:14-16

Devotional

By: Mark Ellcessor

Judas.

Judas, called by Jesus to be one of His twelve disciples.

Judas, trusted to be the keeper of the ministry money bag (John 12:6).

Judas, referenced by Jesus earlier in His ministry when He said, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (John 6:7).

Judas, rebuked by Jesus when he objected to a woman wasting expensive perfume to anoint Jesus (John 12:4-5).

Judas, recognized as a thief who helped himself to money for the ministry of Jesus (John 12:6).

Judas, conspired with the chief priests and Pharisees for a fee to have Jesus delivered to them (Matthew 26:14-15).

Judas, watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to the angry authorities (Matthew 26:16).

Judas, called out at the Last Supper by Jesus who said His betrayer is the one to whom He gives His piece of bread (Matthew 26:25; John 13:26).

Judas, leader of a detachment of soldiers to the garden where Jesus was praying for His arrest and capture (John 18:3).

Judas, entered by Satan in order to carry out his evil plan (Luke 22:3).

Judas, betrayed His master with a kiss (Matthew 26:49).

Judas, seized with remorse, then returned the money he had made for betraying Jesus (Matthew 27:3).

Judas, overcome with grief so deep that he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5).

Judas, called by Jesus to be one of His twelve disciples.

Poem

My King's Desire

Matthew 26:14-16, Psalm 21

You have granted him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath, and his fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth, their posterity from mankind. Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed.

Psalm 21: 2, 9b-11

The LORD grants now my King's desire:

Life salvaged for His children

His glory great

His vict'ry sure

O'er Death's most violent villain

Despite the evil plotting rude

The wicked schemes devising

Unfailing love

Eternal bless

Stained future be revising

For though the day seems dark and lost

And earth quakes in its mourning

The battle turns

The Son will rise

Life's resurrection dawning



4/8/2025 - WEEK 15 DAY 2

The Last Supper

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:17-30

Devotional By: Susan Pressler

The verses of Matthew 26:17-30 describing the Last Supper are some of the most holy words of the Bible. In these words, Jesus gave His disciples and all Christians the sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover meal for them to eat together one last time. It is likely Jesus was in anguish about the pain and suffering He would experience on the cross to forgive us our sins. During the meal, Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him. The disciples denied this statement, including Judas. "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9). In asking who would betray Him, Jesus was possibly giving Judas a last chance for repentance (Spurgeon; Blue Letter Bible).

In the Old Testament, the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants were made between God and the people in which He promised that a new king would be born from their descendants. In the New Testament, Jesus made the New Covenant when He said, ²⁶"Take and eat; this is my body" and ²⁷"Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The preparations and words of the traditional Passover meal were handed down from the time of Moses (Exodus 12:17-20 and 24:6-8), but Jesus' words of "This is my body" and "This is my blood" were new. The disciples were knowledgeable of the words used in the traditional Passover meal and likely recognized that Jesus had given them a New Covenant (Blue Letter Bible). In Luke 22:19-20, Jesus said, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Only God could give us a New Covenant.

Jesus' use of the word "many" is important in the verse of Matthew 26:28. Spurgeon notes that we should rejoice in the use of the word "many" because the blood of Jesus was shed for all of us who seek and find Him. The significance of the word "many" is found in the hymn "One Bread, One Body" (by John Michael Talbot) which we sing during Holy Communion.

"One bread, one body, one Lord of all,
One cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many throughout the Earth,
We are one body in this one Lord."

Next week is Holy Week. The Last Supper was held on Maundy Thursday, the evening before Jesus' crucifixion.

What actions do you need to take to abide in the New Covenant?

How will you be blessing to many during Holy Week?

Poem

Celebrate Unleaven Bread
Matthew 26:17-30, Exodus 12:17-20

*"Celebrate the Festival of
Unleavened Bread, because it was on
this very day that I brought your
divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this
day as a lasting ordinance for the
generations to come..."*
Exodus 12:20

*Celebrate unleaven bread
How quickly it is ready
To feed your hungry, groaning gut
To give you strength, thus steady*

*Celebrate Unleaven Bread
The Body sinless given
To feed your hungry, groaning soul
The Bread of Life from Heaven*

*Celebrate unleaven bread
Remember now your freedom
Bought with a price, God's sacrifice
Restoring you to Eden*

*Celebrate unleaven bread
This feast by prophets spoken
Given for you, your manna true
Take, eat—Christ's body broken*



4/9/2025 - WEEK 15 DAY 3

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial & Grieves Alone

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:31-46

Devotional By: Wilbur Sutton

I think there were times when I had opportunities to recognize Jesus in front of others and I chose silence. There may be a time that I can share an important life story that may help the person I am with to move closer to God in their faith journey. I don't want to choose silence. That may mean I might have to make myself vulnerable, but Christ will guide me through that opportunity.

There were times I thought that I didn't want to be recognized as a Holy Roller, or I didn't want to be known as a Jesus Freak. Wow! Thinking that thought is most likely the same thing as denying Jesus. I don't want to be that person. I have Good News to share and I want to share it.

I read about Peter's denial. He denied Jesus three times and was mortified when the cock crowed and he remembered that Jesus told him that he would deny him. I get strength from that passage because I recognize that Jesus later used Peter to be the cornerstone of the Church. Jesus uses us in spite of our human weaknesses. God and the Holy Spirit can guide us past our self-diagnosed shortfalls. God can use the Holy Spirit to empower us and give us the strength and words to bring glory to Him.

I pray for God's discernment for each of us reading this devotional. May God use us for his glory. May His will be done.

Poem

How Long
Matthew 26:31-46, Psalm 6

*I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I flood my bed with
weeping and drench my couch with
tears. Away from me, all you who do
evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping.
The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;
the Lord accepts my prayer. All my
enemies will be overwhelmed with
shame and anguish; they will turn back
and suddenly be put to shame.
Psalm 6: 6, 8-10*

*How long, O Father, will they stray
Despite my call of comfort
My tears fall, best friends will betray
Alone I am, 'cept You*

*Though all creation has their home
There is no bed to rest me
A prophet king, I am alone
My mighty men desert me*

*Though evil voices in the night
Assail my dreams and taunt me
Receive my prayer in heaven's heights
And wrap me in your mercy*

*'Though shame, anguish rap at my door
I'll not receive their taunting
Instead, I'll face both death and gore—
With You, I am not wanting*



4/10/2025 - WEEK 15 DAY 4

Jesus Was Never More Alone

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:47-68

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

Jesus was never more alone.

He could have gone to a new hiding place, where even Judas couldn't find Him. But He didn't.

He could have allowed Peter to keep fighting with the sword. But He didn't.

He could have summoned 72,000 of the angels He had created to come to His defense. But He didn't.

He could have stopped His fleeing disciples in their tracks. But He didn't.

He could have called down lightning from heaven to destroy His enemies. But He didn't.

He could have spoken up and proven to His captors that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. But He didn't.

He could have broken free and fought back against those who spit in His face and struck Him with their fists. But He didn't.

He could have abandoned His mission of surrendering His life for our sins. But He didn't.

He could have walked away from His Father. But He didn't.

Jesus was never less alone.

Poem

A Kiss

Matthew 26:47-68, Psalm 55

*If an enemy were insulting me, I
could endure it; if a foe were rising
against me, I could hide. But it is you,
a man like myself, my companion, my
close friend, with whom I once
enjoyed sweet fellowship at the
house of God, as we walked about
among the worshipers.
Psalm 55:12-14*

*A holy kiss once greeted me
As in her arms I laid
The sweet kiss of my mother true
A nest of comfort made*

*An oil drenched kiss was giv'n me
At eight-day dedication
A welcome to my cov'nant tribe
The first step preparation*

*A Jordan river kissed my skin
As dove from heav'n descended
A righteous claiming of my life
Identity intended*

*A daily kiss of greeting now
From those who'd journey with me
Companions full in ministry
Fulfilling Kingdom's myst'ry*

*A tear-filled kiss anointed me
Perfumed hair served in wiping
A gift so beautiful to me
Causation now providing*

*A Judas kiss, the worst, O, grief
Betrayal of a friend
Insulting all grace that was shared
A farewell kiss, an end*



4/11/2025 - WEEK 15 DAY 5

Peter's Denial

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 26:69-75

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

Imagine you are standing in the courtyard of Caiaphas' palace. Imagine that you see a familiar face sitting with a small group of bystanders. He looks familiar. Just a few hours earlier, this man had sworn his devotion to the man, Jesus, who was now standing trial just a few yards away inside the palace. He had even defended Jesus by wielding a sword against the servants of the priests. It took a lot of nerve to follow Jesus here!

Peter – bless his heart! Because of his brashness, he will be experiencing his own trial in the courtyard just as Jesus is facing his trial inside the palace. And the contrast between the two “trials” is shocking. While Jesus is boldly declaring his identity, Peter is claiming to not even know him. While Jesus is standing firm in front of the high priest who holds his life in his hands, Peter is denying Christ in front of two servant girls and some random spectators. Jesus is self-assured in his convictions and his mission. Peter is cowardly and renouncing his previous loyalty.

Peter's denials grow more intense with each inquiry. First, Peter simply changes the subject. The next time, surrounded by a small crowd, Peter “denied it again with an oath”, stating he does not know “the man” (he can't even speak Jesus' name!). The third time, feeling more threatened by the crowd, he swears an oath again but this time with a curse upon himself.

At that very instant, the rooster crows, breaking the silence of the courtyard. In one of the most gut-wrenching scenes in scripture, Luke recalls that at that very moment, Jesus turns and looks directly at Peter, reacting to what Peter has just done and reminding Peter of his words (“The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.”). The emotions that must have overtaken Peter at that very moment were unquestionably strong and agonizing. Realization of what he had just done. Shame that he had rejected the one he loved. Anger that he could not stand up against such minor adversity. Failure in his promise never to desert Jesus. Peter immediately left the courtyard. Was this so that Jesus could no longer see him and his shame? We are told he “Wept bitterly”. The word used here means more than just cry – it means to wail or mourn. He was utterly broken and in deep anguish.

But this is not the end. From the depth of his shame and despair, Peter will rise, eventually being restored and becoming the foundation – the “Rock” – upon which Jesus will build his church.

How do we deny Jesus in our lives today and does Peter's ultimate restoration give us hope?

Poem

No Good

Matthew 26:69-75, Psalm 14

*All have turned away, all have
become corrupt; there is no one who
does good, not even one.
Psalm 14: 3*

*In my mind my
Loyalty is strong
Truth is pure
Intentions good
Yet when mirror light
Reflects my heart
Flaws, scars
Infected pores
Wrinkled corruption
Are all evident
It does no good
To claim faithfulness
Truly
There is no one good
But God*

*This thought
Scares me
Shames me
Horripies me
As I realize the darkness
Hidden in my heart
Fear, pride
Haunting sin
Crumbling integrity
All is evident
It does no good
To claim faithfulness
Truly
I have no good deed
To save me*



4/14/2025 - WEEK 16 DAY 1

Blood Money

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:1-10

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

Blood money. Noun.
(Dictionary.com)

1. a fee paid to a hired murderer.
2. compensation paid to the next of kin of a slain person.
3. money obtained ruthlessly and at a cost of suffering to others.
4. money paid to an informer in order to cause somebody to be arrested, convicted, or especially executed.

Judas, overcome with grief, returned the money and said, "I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood."

The chief priests, filled with self-righteousness, proclaimed, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." It wasn't against their moral judgement to pay Judas blood money out of the treasury, but for some reason it was to put it back in.

The prophets, speaking hundreds of years earlier, prophesied that thirty pieces of silver would be thrown into the house of the Lord (Zechariah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 17-19, 32).

Peter, the apostle to the Jews, said, "you were redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, proclaimed, "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith (Romans 3:25).

John, writing down his apocalyptic vision from Jesus, exclaims, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Revelation 1:5).

Blood Money. "You were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Poem

Will I?

Matthew 27:1-10, Psalm 20

*Now this I know: The Lord gives
victory to his anointed. He answers
him from his heavenly sanctuary with
the victorious power of his right
hand. Some trust in chariots and
some in horses, but we trust in the
name of the Lord our God. They are
brought to their knees and fall, but
we rise up and stand firm. Lord, give
victory to the king! Answer us when
we call!*

Psalm 20:6-9

*When scoffers rage
When mockers sneer
When liars seem unreined
In faith will I
Stand at my post
My King's vict'ry to gain?*

*While char'ots thunder
Horses charge
While arrows fly around me
In worship will I
Kneel in prayer
Know God's Right Hand and still be?*

*Despite the noise
Accusing jibes
The insane all be raging
In silence will I
Trust my LORD
My stance upon God waiting?*



4/15/2025 - WEEK 16 DAY 2

A Bad Governor and a Worse Judge

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:11-26

Devotional By: Dan Henke

The religious leaders couldn't just kill Jesus; they wanted to publicly execute Jesus. It could not be a quick stoning; it had to be a legal sentence of death as a criminal and traitor. But there was a problem. While the Romans allowed the Jews to keep their customs, the imposition of death by crucifixion for criminals and traitors they kept to themselves. The religious leaders needed approval of the Roman governor to legally kill Jesus.

Enter Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. I wonder how Pilate felt when he got the call from Emperor Tiberius. "I know you've always wanted to be a provincial governor. I've got good news and bad news. The good news is you are being appointed governor. The bad news is it's Judea." Ugh. Those unruly Jews, they are always rioting, and they hate Romans.

Who was Pontius Pilate, whose name is forever remembered in the Apostle's Creed? The scriptural, anecdotal and historical record of Pilate is complicated. According to Scripture, Pilate was a weak, vacillating judge who let Jesus be crucified knowing He was innocent. According to anecdotal and historical sources, Pilate was a culturally insensitive governor who resorted to cruelty and brutality to maintain Roman authority. While sparing Jesus might seem contrary to that reputation, there is evidence that Pilate's insensitivity and cruelty (and the death of his main political sponsor) put him on shaky ground with the Emperor. There was also a continuing uneasy power struggle between Pilate and the Jewish religious leaders, who might send unfavorable reports of their own to the Emperor.

Pilate had already dealt with uprisings, riots, and local revolutionaries like Barabbas. Now they bring this religious leader to him, accused of crimes of Jewish heresy. Jesus seems like a nice guy, not some dangerous criminal. Jesus wasn't accused of Roman crimes meriting the death penalty. But when the religious leaders worked the crowd into a frenzy, and threatened another riot, it became a Roman problem. More specifically, it became Pilate's problem.

To avoid a riot, an innocent man had to die. And yet, God's plan was so much bigger than Pilate and his responsibility as governor and his decision as judge. God's plan was for His Son to die for all the sins of mankind; the sins of everyone alive in 33 A.D, and who would live ever since.

Pilate was a bad governor and a worse judge. I'm actually grateful for that.

Poem

I Stand Alone
Matthew 27:11-26, Psalm 109

*I fade away like an evening shadow; I
am shaken off like a locust. My knees
give way from fasting; my body is
thin and gaunt. I am an object of
scorn to my accusers; when they see
me, they shake their heads. Help
me, Lord my God; save me
according to your unfailing love. Let
them know that it is your hand, that
you, Lord, have done it. While they
curse, may you bless;..
Psalm 109:23-28a*

*I stand alone
Frail
Thin
Fading
Beaten
Scarred
Buckling
Gaunt*

*I stand alone
Scorned
Fading
Accused
Cursed
Wounded
Stripped
Hated*

*I stand alone
Silent
Trusting
Praying
Loving
Forgiving
Blessing
Sacrificing*



4/16/2025 - WEEK 16 DAY 3

Undying Love Transcended

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:27-31

Devotional By: Lisa Ellcessor

The day my son suffered and died, My world turned dark and the curtain of My heart was torn in two. Experiencing the loss of an only son, is the depth of sorrow no one can understand. Watching him suffer, crushed me. Every beating, whipping, stripping, spitting, striking blow to his head made me want to shout to the world, "Why won't you stop this behavior?" "Quit doing this again and again!" "You are hurting Me!" "You people deserve death, not my kind and loving son." "How can you not understand that We love you?"

Time seemed to stop and heaven hushed. I halted, but My world carried on with mocking tones, crowds rioting, and shouts of uproar. Injustice ran wildly unleashed like a herd of demonic pigs. I wanted everything to come to pause and humankind to take notice of what was occurring. The burden on my shoulders was heavy. His suffering was an insult to Me.

But, the abuse continued and the unfair sentence of His death didn't alter. Do you think I turned My back? You know, He could have defended himself. We could have used all might and power to call down angels from heaven to obliterate earth. But, He didn't and I didn't. My son took the scorn and abuse like a suffering servant. My heart was torn in two.

In all of this commotion, there was one thing noted. It was a quiet knowing and understanding that He was not alone. He is Me and I am Him. We both suffered.

As He looked down on humanity and up at Me, He said to Me, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." A sweet surrender hushed the earth as He submitted his soul to death with an undying love for you. In His dying, undying love transcended.

Poem

Love Enduring

Matthew 27:27-31, Psalm 118:1-18

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. Psalm 18: 1, 17

*The last hymn sung forth from my lips
Declaring Love Enduring
Find refuge in Your spacious grace
You hear me, Love Enduring
From upper room to judgment's steps
Your steadfast love enduring
Betrayal and denial grief
Still steadfast love enduring
Surrounded by great snarling wolves
Secured safe love enduring
I cut off all who wish me ill
With faithful Love Enduring
Though swarming stings berate me fierce
I stand in love enduring
I shall not die, but I shall live
Because Your love enduring*

Note: Psalms 113-118 were traditionally sung after the Passover meal. Thus, Psalm 118 was the last hymn Jesus sang on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. What comfort and strength this must have stored in his soul!



4/17/2025 - WEEK 16 DAY 4

Jesus is Crucified

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:32-44

Devotional By: Mark Ellcessor

Here is a compilation of the crucifixion from the four gospels (Matthew 26, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19). Reflect on what Jesus did for you.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out. They met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. They divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.

Above his head they placed the written charge against him: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Poem

Fear, Trust, Praise
Matthew 27:32-44, Psalm 56

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in
you. In God, whose word I praise—
in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
Psalm 56: 3-4*

*Change fear to trust, then trust to
praise
Despite all that surrounds me
You lift my head, my eyes do raise
For You are there above me*

*Despite the twists and tears of grief
Despite how all assail me
Turn fear to trust, trust to belief
For You are there beside me*

*And when sin crouches at my door
Its lion's jaws devouring
My fear must trust, my lips must
praise
Instead of hidden cowering*

*Collect my tears, record my cries
Receive this humble measure
Of fear, then trust; of trust, then
praise
For You alone, my Treasure*



4/18/2025 - WEEK 16 DAY 5

Jesus Dies on the Cross

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:45-56

Devotional By: Elyce Meador

It is easy to focus on the anguish Jesus must have felt in these moments. Research suggests that Jesus was crucified at 9am and died about 3pm, after six long hours. But then why is it called "Good Friday" if all we can focus on is the pain? What is Good about it?

Before he died, Jesus cried, *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthan?*, which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Jesus knew what God asked of him; he knew that his fate would be unbearable and he chose to bear it anyway. In this moment, Jesus is perhaps at his most human, experiencing the full weight of all the sins of the world. This suffering is so great that it makes Jesus feel separated from God, even though he is God himself.

Do you recognize this feeling? When all is dark, when the pain is too much, when we feel alone, don't we all look for God? Does He not seem far from us? Don't we cry out, why am I alone? Jesus needed to feel this uniquely human place to completely understand us, so that he could be with us in those moments. He is the pathway to God and in our darkest moments he understands exactly how we feel and is ready to stand in our pain with us.

Jesus's cry of anguish is quickly followed by this line of scripture:

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

In English, Jesus's final comment is 3 words, but in Greek it is just one: *Tetelestai*. This is not a concession, but a victor's cry! This is a cry of a job finished! This is a cry of triumph! The suffering is over, and so is the separation. Jesus goes through the dark into the light, and he brings us with him. And in doing so the veil is split in two, God is no longer hidden from us.

We have a way to see God even when we feel most separated from Him, and that way is Jesus. This is the Good in Good Friday! Jesus became the bridge to our God. He is the light in our darkness. He paid the price we never could, so that we could know God the way He does. In our darkest hours we can cry out to him—Why? —and he will hear us and understand us. Then we can shout in victory "*Tetelestai*!" We are saved, God is with us. It is a Good Friday after all.

Poem

Deathbed Agony
Matthew 27:45-56, Psalm 22

*My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me? Why are you so
far from saving me, so far from my
cries of anguish? My God, I cry out
by day, but you do not answer, by
night, but I find no rest. But I am a
worm and not a man, scorned by
everyone, despised by the people.
Psalm 22:1-2, 6*

*My deathbed reeks with rotting flesh
The worms 'round table gather
Forsaken, I am all alone
To no one do I matter*

*My nightmares swirl, surrounding me
Engulfing me, I'm drowning
Paid mourners lend their open palms
Requiring coins, palls donning*

*There's no one list'ning to my cry
For just a sip of water
To quench my parched throat, mollify
Their own schemes only matter*

*Despised, afflicted, suff'ring, I
Now offer up my life's breath
With none to soothe or comfort me
I yield myself to this death*



4/21/2025 - WEEK 17 DAY 1

Jesus is Buried in the Tomb

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:57-61

Devotional By: Carlye Frye

Have you taken up or been given a task, goal, or project that you knew would be over your head? Once you had gone through all the peaks and valleys, you knew you would be a different person from it. I can't help but think that is what Joseph of Arimathea had to be feeling. Joseph, a Christ follower, disciple, learner, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Let's think about that, Jesus' body. Beaten, bruised, nailed, pierced, mutilated flesh, and Joseph demanded his body. That is a love that only our Lord can provide and a task not anyone takes on. Only someone who has courageous faith.

Joseph then takes his body and wraps it in clean linen cloth. If we visualize this, Joseph had to be so careful, patient, kind, with Jesus' battered body. I'm sure this process was lengthy and tedious as Joseph cared for his body. What do you think Joseph is thinking in those moments? What is on his heart? What is he praying to God during this time?

Joseph then placed Jesus' body in his own new tomb that he cut out of rock. Now, for a rich man, this could be seen as manual labor or work not of the rich. For Joseph to have this courageous faith, he wanted to honor Jesus through that faith, it didn't matter if he was rich or poor. He was wealthy in his discipline, discipleship, and love for God. Then, he just left. That's it. Why did he go away right after? What was that walk away from the tomb like? What was Joseph thinking? Praying? What was heavy on his heart?

There may be moments in our lives where we face darkness or uncertainty, but through the grace of God, we are reminded that God can bring hope from despair and sadness.

This week, what task, goal, or project are you working on or helping someone else work on, that you are showing courage in your faith?

Poem

Bedtime Prayer
Matthew 27:57-61, Psalm 86

*I will praise you, Lord my God, with
all my heart; I will glorify your name
forever. For great is your love
toward me; you have delivered
me from the depths, from the realm
of the dead.
Psalm 66: 12-13*

*Now, I lay me down to sleep
My Sabbath rest receiving
My work is finished, day is done
This gentle sleep relieving*

*Now, I lay me down to rest
Let nothing wake my dreaming
In trust, my pillow holds my head
Guard me from evil's scheming*

*Now I lay me down to die
In You, I'm solely trusting
When trumpet sounds, awaken me
My body new constructing*



4/22/2025 - WEEK 17 DAY 2

Guards Are Posted at the Tomb

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 27:62-66

Devotional By: Peggy Cooke

According to our scripture for today the chief priests sought out Pontius Pilate to request guards to watch over the tomb where Jesus was to be buried and have it sealed. Their fear was that friends of Jesus would steal the body to give the appearance of a resurrection.

Who were the guards at the tomb? Were they Roman Guards? Were they Temple Guards? These were the two types of guards known at this time. The Roman Guard consisted of 4 men that rotated throughout the night. Two "guards" would be 8 men. One guard, 4 men, would stand watch and the others rested beside him to be easily awakened, (Johnny Ova, the Roman guard/ Evidence for the Resurrection).

However, according to Josh McDowell in "Evidence for the Resurrection," this was a 16-man unit made up of "special guards", much like our Green Berets or Navy Seals. A unit of 4 guards would stand in front of the tomb. The other 12 would lay down with their feet in and heads out resting in a semi-circle. Every 6 hours another 4 would stand guard while those guarding would rest. Each guard would have 3-5 weapons. They had black and purple feathers under their massive helmets that went up 2 ¹/₂ feet that made them look like giants at a distance, using what we now call psychological warfare.

The Guards were placed in 24 stations by the gates and courts. Of these, 21 were occupied by Levites alone. The 240 Levites and 30 priests were on duty every night. During the night the captain of the Temple made his rounds. On his approach the guard had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten or his garments were set on fire. These guards were not allowed to sit down, much less sleep.

How tight do you think the security was the night Jesus was put in the tomb? It is most likely that the Roman Guards were on duty that night. Everything was done that was humanly possible to prevent a resurrection. No matter if it was twelve, sixteen, a thousand or ten thousand guards, the grave could not hold Jesus. As Christians, we know God is faithful and true to His word. God's plan was for Jesus to rise on the 3rd day, as Jesus predicted in Matthew 16:21.

The miracle of God continues to happen in our lives today. The fact that my husband, Mike, has had kidney cancer and now does not is nothing short of a miracle. Are you looking for God's miracles in your life?

Poem

Despite

Matthew 27:62-66, Psalm 115

Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind. It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to the place of silence; it is we who extol the Lord, both now and forevermore. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 115: 1, 16-18

*Glory, glory to Your name
Despite the nation's raging
Your love, your faithfulness ne're change
Despite earth's powers plotting
All earth and heav'n belong to You
To crumble or to open
You blind the eyes of those who rage
Against Your sole Anointed
We wait upon deliverance
From all that would entrap us
The only seal strong holding true
Is Spirit's oil of baptism
And so, we rest in childlike trust
As we await Your planning
O, praise the LORD with me, you hosts
Extol Him now and always*



4/23/2025 - WEEK 17 DAY 3

The Women at the Tomb

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:1-10

Devotional By: Kim Arnott

The Resurrection – cornerstone of our faith. *“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”* (1 Corinthians 15:14). Our faith is nothing without the resurrection.

All four Gospels share the events of that morning. And all four Gospels agree on one point – the women followers of Jesus were first to arrive at the tomb. As Matthew tells it, Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary were the first to arrive. Mark and Luke tell us the women came to anoint Jesus’ body. But Matthew and John relate a different story. Matthew says the women came “to look at the tomb”. No mention of spices or oils or anointing. Could it be that they were going to the tomb at first light in *expectation* – expectation of seeing the risen Lord? Could it be that they, not the disciples, remembered and believed Jesus’ promise to be raised on the third day and they were returning to the tomb to see Jesus in his glory? What might the women have been thinking and feeling as they made their way to the tomb?

Validating the importance of women in his life and ministry, Jesus chose these women to be the first to see and experience him after his resurrection. They were also the first to worship him and be appointed to tell the story. This in and of itself is startling. That women figure so prominently in the story of the resurrection – arguably the most important story in scripture – adds credibility to the accuracy of events.

If the gospel writers wanted to “create” a believable story, they would have had men arrive first to the tomb and to attest to Jesus’ resurrection – not women. At the time, women could not give testimony in legal proceedings or be called as witnesses in Jewish courts of law. Their statements were considered “unreliable”. So, no one would have made up a story with women at the center if they wanted it to be believed. Why did Jesus appear to the women first, even before his disciples? Maybe because they were faithful. Because they believed him. Because they didn’t desert him. They were there at the foot of the cross at his darkest hour and they believed in him enough to be there when he came into his glory.

The women were told to “come and see” the empty tomb. Take note that the stone was not rolled away so that Jesus could come out. It was rolled away so that the women, and ultimately, we, could go in – to see his promise fulfilled. Do we believe in the empty tomb? How will we respond to the challenge to “Come and See” the risen Lord for ourselves?

Poem

I Have One
Matthew 28:1-10, Psalm 116

*The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over
me; I was overcome by distress and
sorrow. Then I called on the name of
the Lord: “Lord, save me!” For
you, Lord, have delivered me from
death, my eyes from tears, my feet
from stumbling that I may walk
before the Lord in the land of the
living.
Psalm 116: 3-4, 8-9*

*Death
Though you would
Swirl around me
Haunt me
Taunt me
Entangle and anguish me
I have One
Who hears my cries
Who sees my distress and sorrow
Who knows my name*

*My Deliverer
Wipes my tears
Awakens me from death’s slumber
Considers me precious
I have One
Who remembers me
Who know this earthly temple
Who will never leave me in the tomb*



4/24/2025 - WEEK 17 DAY 4

Religious Leaders Bribe the Guards

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:11-15

Devotional By: Mark Elcessor

This time of year magazine racks are filled with cover stories about the “Real Jesus.” They ponder the meaning of the Christian doctrine of resurrection.

Here’s the truth. The entire Christian faith finds its power in the resurrection of Jesus.

At the birth of the Christian Church, Peter boldly stated, “you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:23-24).

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul proclaimed, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

And reminding his readers that death is not the final chapter for believers, Paul said, “For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and “if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

It is no wonder the religious authorities, who had conspired to kill Jesus, bribed the guards to cover up His resurrection. A dead Jesus was just another crucified criminal. But a resurrected Jesus gave His followers the power to change the world.

Ephesians 1:19-20 tells us that God gives “his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”

Indeed, the entire Christian faith finds its power in the resurrection of Jesus! Give praise to Jesus that He is alive!

Poem

O You Silly Ones!
Matthew 28:11-15, Psalm 101

*I hate what faithless people do; I will
have no part in it. The perverse of
heart shall be far from me; I will have
nothing to do with what is evil. No
one who practices deceit will dwell in
my house; no one who speaks falsely
will stand in my presence.
Psalm 101:3b-4, 7*

*O you silly ones
Who think you can
Stop the waves of the ocean
Rein in the wind
Seal in the Life
You really are ignorant
And do not know the
Power of God*

*I laugh at you
I have no time for you
I will have nothing to do with you
I will not be stopped by your
foolishness*



4/25/2025 - WEEK 17 DAY 5

Jesus Gives the Great Commission

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:16-20

Devotional By: Doug Bromm

One of my favorite memories from grade school is flashcards. Times tables, vocabulary words, states and capitals: if they made it onto a flashcard, I considered the test aces!

When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, he left his disciples a flashcard of sorts. If you look at the verbs of the Great Commission in verses 19 and 20, you see: Go, Baptize and Teach.

Many years later, I find myself teaching Sr. High Sunday School classes and I can't stop myself from sharing "flashcards" with my students. There are several, but the Gospel in four words: (Jesus in my place) and, of course, the Great Commission are the ones I return to again and again.

"Go" is the action we "comfortable Christians" too easily ignore. It is so easy to sit in church and listen to an uplifting sermon and then go home unaffected, unchanged and spiritually inactive. Jesus' commands us to get out there and share His message.

In the early church, the first thing new believers did was to get baptized. I teach my Sr. High Sunday School students that they should NOT read "baptize" here as a dunking in water, so much as introducing someone who does not know Jesus to Him. Inviting friends to Youth Group or asking a National Honor Society friend to earn their volunteer hours by playing Bingo with you with Hamilton Trace residents qualifies.

"Teach" is the most loaded word for my students. They've spent all week in school and they are not looking for more. I tell them to view "teach," in this context, as reinforcing fellow believers. Your church family may know Jesus, but we tend to get rusty. You can help others understand God's Word, serve together and just be there for your Christian friends when they are down.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus called his disciples into His mission by giving them the Great Commission. Today, He extends that call you. How will you go, baptize and teach?

Poem

Get Yourself Up!

Matthew 28:16-20, Psalm 99

*Great is the Lord in Zion; he is
exalted over all the nations. Let them
praise your great and awesome
name— he is holy. He spoke to them
from the pillar of cloud; they kept his
statutes and the decrees he gave
them. Lord our God, you answered
them; you were to Israel a forgiving
God, though you punished their
misdeeds. Exalt the Lord our God
and worship at his holy mountain, for
the Lord our God is holy.
Psalm 99: 2-3, 7-9*

*Get yourself up
High on the mountain
See the nations
Lift your hands
Be engulfed in the clouds
Receive God's word
Stand with the Holy
Ascend to your task*



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