

Read Luke 1

For nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37

The Golden State Warriors were practically unbeatable at home, winning 94 of their previous 100 games at home. So their 24 point lead over my beloved Memphis Grizzlies in the 3rd quarter seemed hopeless. I told my youngest daughter, and only NBA fan, we probably didn't need to watch the rest of the game. In shock, she responded, "Dad, you've just gotta believe!" Sure enough the Grizzlies fought back to win the game and lead headlines everywhere on their not-so-impossible comeback.

The upcoming arrival of the Messiah brought seemingly impossible changes into many lives. Zechariah and his elderly wife would conceive a child in their old age to serve as a herald of the Messiah. The young virgin Mary was told she would not only conceive a child supernaturally, but that the rescue of the world would come by that child. This may have seemed impossible, but God has never swapped out one task for another due to fear of commitment. In fact, when I typed in the verse above, I initially gave it an exclamation point. But the angel didn't. Even while declaring that the impossible is possible with God, he never raised his voice! **Just like me, I know you have some seemingly impossible requests. You've forgotten the past situations that one seemed impossible, but now are simply remembered as accomplished. It's a matter of perspective as we draw closer to God. There is nothing you can bring before God that He cannot accomplish, and nothing He can bring before you that He cannot accomplish through you!**

Read Luke 2

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10

Multicultural churches have been rare in my experience. For the most part, people tend to associate and even worship with others that are like them. So when our church combines with the Karen church, a people group from Burma, it's a great experience. We work diligently to incorporate singing, prayer, and preaching in both languages for each service. As their pastor spoke one morning, I heard the translator mention John 14:6 where Jesus references being the way, truth, and life. Hearing scripture in a foreign language reminded me Christianity isn't an America or English religion, but the message of God's salvation to all people.

Luke 2 is filled with a great variety of people. Caesar Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, desperately trying to prove he could rule an empire. Mary and Joseph, the young couple relegated to sleeping in a barn. Shepherds, the lowly manual laborers who would have appreciated a barn! Even servants of the temple who had been awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. We see the famous, the anonymous, and even those who expected Jesus' arrival. Regardless of their station in life, the good news of Jesus was for them. It didn't matter if they even knew it or not. Salvation in Jesus is not just a necessity for those who know it, but for all people. **As Christians, we must be concerned with the spread of the gospel across economic, cultural, and language boundaries. Everyone needs the good news of Jesus, and if we truly believe that, we must look for our opportunities to be part of it. Are you helping to take the good news to the people of your community? Are you supporting those who go worldwide,**

or even considering it yourself? Jesus didn't come for America, or English-speakers. He came for all people. How can you be part of honoring that intention of the gospel?

Read Luke 3

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Luke 3:5-6

My first day at college looked like a party! As I walked through the student union, there were tables giving away t-shirts, stereos, and gift cards. Upon further examination, you could get any of these items if you simply filled out a credit card application. The companies made the paperwork very simple and easy, and there was a constant stream of students going to the tables, filling out the form, and walking away with freebies and a financial landmine. Eventually, our school banned these easy credit applications due to a high number of students being crippled by this new debt. It was simply too easy for kids to get credit cards.

John the Baptist came to make the way of the gospel easy, sent out as the opening act before the arrival of Jesus' "official" ministry kickoff. He was there to start new conversations and overcome old misconceptions. He told people that Jewish heritage wasn't an easy downhill run to Heaven, and being born a Gentile didn't promise an impossible uphill climb. Jesus came to allow everyone access to the forgiveness and eternal life God offers. No one can say it's too hard to become a Christian. The path has been made plain and available, but believers must be as diligent as John to help people find that path so they may choose. **Are you serving as a missionary for Jesus, everyday and everywhere, making the path easy to pursue? Do you speak of Jesus to others? Do you hold off in sharing with certain people that you don't think would be interested? John came to make the message of the gospel clear and easy, putting the responsibility in the lap of the lost. Jesus did the hard work, so let us share the availability of the gospel for everyone.**

Read Luke 4

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. Luke 4:13

Any child understands the importance of making requests at the right time. If you've just been grounded for disobedience, don't ask to spend the night at your friend's house. When you've forgotten to put gas in the car, don't immediately ask to use it again. You have to wait until your parents' guard is down and they might become forgetful of your offense. Maybe right after the Girl Scout Cookies have been delivered, or after you brought home an "A" on that latest test. It's all about finding the right moment.

Beating back temptation and winning a spiritual victory is a high point of faith. It's also a reminder...temptation doesn't quit. Satan doesn't give up, but instead waits for that right moment when we're not expecting it. I've been shocked by sinful temptations coming back up years after I thought I had them mastered. My confidence in what I had accomplished set me up for a future fall. Jesus withstood every temptation Satan threw at Him. But Satan didn't surrender. He retreated for an opportune moment to strike again. And when he couldn't get

anywhere with Jesus, he worked in those around Him. **Where do you feel confident spiritually? Celebrate the change Jesus has brought into you, but don't ever presume you're above temptation. Satan may take a moment to change tactics and timing, but the opportunity for sin will strike again. Are you praying daily for awareness of the temptations and sins that crouch at your door? I realize that when temptation appears to have taken a break, I cannot!**

Read Luke 5

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Luke 5:8

During my childhood, summertime reruns were a staple of my TV viewing ("Mama's Family remains highly underrated). So imagine my surprise to find there are ministry reruns! Despite 17 years of serving different people in different areas, several issues keep getting their own reruns. One of the most common is helping believers who fear they've out-sinned the grace of God. Recognizing our sinfulness is important, but we cannot allow it be crippling. Those feelings of unworthiness should lead us to call again on the grace of Christ. Don't be as one man said to me, "As soon as I get my life cleaned up, I'll talk to God again about it." The shameful rerun of sin can lead us to believe we deserve abandonment by God.

Peter could relate. We don't really know his background, but clearly he understood his unworthiness to be with Jesus. In fact, he wants to prevent Jesus from wasting any time on him. "I'm a sinful man Jesus. Go call on someone who's righteous and got it more figured out!" Peter failed to realize we all suffer from the exact same spiritual condition: we are all sinful men and women. Once Peter recognized that Jesus' worthiness could cover his unworthiness, he left everything to follow Him! **Do you feel unworthy in the presence of Jesus? To an extent, that's exactly how we should feel. But we must never allow those feelings of unworthiness to drive us from closeness. Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation or judgment upon the Christian. We have been covered from all sin through Jesus, in order that we can remain close to Him for His service. Yes, I am a sinful man, but Jesus doesn't have to depart from me. He calls on me to depart out into the world and let people know there is a Savior who knows them, loves them, and wants them just as they are.**

Read Luke 6

And after looking around at them all he said to him, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored. Luke 6:10

My freshman year of college seemed like a new opportunity. I had never been popular in high school, often very reserved around new people. So I decided this was a great opportunity for a new me! We were all in the same situation, starting fresh in a new place. When Monday's first hour class came, I showed up with a smile on my face, and by the end of class I had made a couple of friends and was really excited for this new chapter. It required me to put myself out there more than I was comfortable, but the rewards were worth it!

My heart goes out to this crippled man. His hand was worthless and probably a source of embarrassment. He likely kept it close and concealed, hiding it in his pocket when he could. Yet

we see Jesus calling this man to put himself out there. How many times had he hidden that hand fearing ridicule or pity, and now Jesus was asking him to do something really uncomfortable! But the man obediently stretches forth his hand he finds it now healed and useful! Try using only one of your hands for an hour and see how difficult it is! God is willing to work in a variety of ways in your life. Like this man, it may require some momentary discomfort, but the result is always for our good! **Where is God calling you to put yourself out there? To be a more willing witness of your faith? To give more generously to your church? To show kindness to your least favorite co-worker? The Christian life isn't always comfortable, but if God's called us to it, the effort will be for our good!**

Read Luke 7

And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:50

If you've never taught a child how to ride a bike, you are missing a tremendous picture of faith in action! The pivotal moment is that first time you tell them you're letting go as you'll be running right alongside them. Each of my kids had near wipeouts, not because they couldn't balance, but because they kept looking back to see if I was there! Despite my promise to be there, the task of riding without the training wheels felt so daunting. Though I had taught and prepared them for this moment, they still had moments of doubt and fear. But as they gained speed and confidence, they could hardly remember those old days of wobbly fear.

Faith struggles are real, which this chapter certainly attests. Even John the Baptist, once bold in sharing Jesus as the Messiah of all people, found his circumstances of persecution causing doubts. The Pharisees struggled to place their faith in Christ, rejecting God's purposes in place of their own. And then we see this woman who comes to Jesus. She's been rejected by "faithful" people much of her life. Before she visits Jesus that night, I wonder how many times she tried to talk herself out of it? Knowing what the other people in the room thought of her, perhaps she saw little chance that someone like Jesus could ever accept her. **And yet Jesus was willing to run alongside! Jesus didn't condemn the doubts of John, but instead sought to encourage him! Jesus challenged the Pharisees to come to repentance and cease their rebellion. And this woman, whose sins seemed too great to ever be expunged, finds that Jesus isn't calling her to greater self-effort. Instead, He calls us all to greater faith in the effort of Christ on our behalf. Jesus has compassion in our moments of doubt. If you lack peace, talk to Jesus about your fears. It's faith that saves us and brings us peace we can never produce ourselves.**

Read Luke 8

And the twelve were with him, and also some of the women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities Luke 1:1-2

A woman who was new to our church, asked why we were so down on women? She heard that women couldn't serve as pastors or deacons, and felt we were degrading them. On the contrary, I assured her, Christianity is the best thing to ever happen to women! Before Jesus, no rabbi or prophet would have allowed these women to follow along. Jesus allowed them to feel accepted and useful, perhaps for the first time, and while there are two roles in the church women cannot

serve (as is the case men who are divorced, poor managers of their home, etc) that doesn't limit the vast number of places they can!

This entire chapter is about the acceptance that is available to everyone through Jesus. Women had little social standing, leading many of these women to become true disciples of Jesus. Consider the pitiful woman dealing with constant menstrual bleeding. For 12 years she had been told of her uncleanness, prevented from coming to the temple or participating with family and friends. **Jesus came in order to allow anyone and everyone the opportunity to draw close to the Father through faith in the Son. When we see these individuals treated like second-class citizens, it makes me cheer to see how Jesus' declaration, "You are loved! You have value!" So how are you doing with that? Who are the second-class citizens that you keep in check? The impoverished, or the high school dropout, or any number of classifications that speak about the person's circumstances and not the person! Let's look for our opportunity to knock someone's socks off today and let them know Jesus loves them...and so do we!**

Read Luke 9

And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

One journal just isn't enough. Since coming to FBC 4 years ago, I have kept a secondary journal that only covers issues and situations dealing directly with the life of our church. The entries are usually just a few sentences, and it's encouraging to read it from the beginning on occasion. Looking again at the overwhelming issues that have since been solved and forgotten is my reminder to keep praying big prayers! Reading this journal reminds me of what God has done and that He is willing to work for the future.

This chapter shows Jesus as the great "doer". All throughout we see the tremendous acts of Jesus, just as His disciples saw on a regular basis. Here Jesus performs a miracle that's as much for them as for those who were served. It's easy to emphasize the 5000+ that Jesus fed, but notice He there were enough leftovers to fill twelve baskets. And who do you suppose had to carry them? I can picture each disciple picking up his basket of leftovers, literally carrying his doubts as a reminder of what Jesus is capable of doing. **What are you asking Jesus to do? What aren't you asking Him to do? There is nothing Jesus is incapable of doing! So let's pray, not doubting, but trusting that Jesus is able and willing to act in our lives and the lives of those around us. Identify the "impossible" prayers you've refused to voice.**

Read Luke 10

But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." Luke 10:40

My to-do list is kind of a joke. Monday is spent writing down the things I need to do for the week and then I attempt to systematically get them done. But then I remember that email I never answered. Or the person in the hospital I forgot to visit. Pretty soon, I've got about half a dozen partially finished projects, and loads of stress, and very little time. Now all the things I'm doing

need to be done, but what I'm learning is how easily good or even important things can become unnecessary distractions.

These two sisters just seem like polar opposites. Martha made lists. Mary went with the flow. I'll bet Mary was the one who often said, "I'll get to it eventually. Stop worrying!" And instead of waiting for her sister, Martha probably ended up doing the task for her. So as Jesus is teaching, Mary puts aside everything else to just sit and listen. Meanwhile, Martha is busy preparing to serve her guests and can't believe Mary is so lazy! But when Martha brings Jesus into it, she's shocked to discover he doesn't take her side. No one told Martha to stress herself out. I don't think Jesus could have cared less what he ate that afternoon. Instead he warns Martha against being distracted by serving. **Where are you getting distracted from Jesus? It might even be some service around the church, but you do it without joy and can't believe more people don't help you! Distractions cause us often to settle for good when we could have had great. What distractions are preventing you from hearing Jesus?**

Read Luke 11

And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." Luke 11:39

As a 5th grader, my mom added vacuuming the house to my chore list. I blew it off at first, but every time I lied about it, my mom could tell somehow. One day she unwisely exposed her secret...vacuum marks. If there were no marks from the vacuum in our deep living room carpets, she knew I was lying. I suppose you can guess what happened next? Mom would come home and compliment me for a job well done. She saw vacuum tracks, not realizing I had merely run the vacuum across the floor with the cord still wrapped. I picked up the big pieces of dirt and trash and moved on with my day. I gave the appearance of clean, with no actual cleanliness accomplished.

The Pharisees made my little vacuum stunt look like amateur hour. They actually followed all the religious rules of the day, even giving valuable donations. People who watched the Pharisees perform their very public acts were impressed, but Jesus was not. Jesus likens them to washing the outside of a cup, while leaving the inside full of dirt and filth. They performed outward acts, with no inward faith. Faith isn't represented by the stuff you do in front of people. Faith is the internal decision that allows the Lord Jesus to rule and redirect you in all areas. **Where are you operating on the surface level? Are you careful to watch your outer language, while allowing unchecked words and thoughts to fester in your heart? Do you give your offering, but fail to let go of greed and covetousness towards others' possessions? Pray today asking God where your heart and actions need to match up better.**

Read Luke 12

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also Luke 12:34

So many of the surveys I take ask about my personal investments, and I'm not sure if it's the question or the sad answer that hurts more. At this point in my 30's, it would be nice to have a few more long-term efforts running, but my treasure is needed elsewhere right now. My children,

my wife, and my life all have important areas that I can and should invest in. So while socking money away for tomorrow is wise, is tomorrow more important than today? Should I divest in today so I can invest in tomorrow?

Jesus gives several hard challenges in this chapter, which all in some way pertain to treasure and hearts. He warns that secret sins of the heart rarely stay secret. He warns about those who become so focused on tomorrow, they become unable to enjoy today. He warns that following Him can present us tough decisions towards unbelieving family members. In all of this, Jesus is warning: watch your heart. If your heart isn't pursuing Jesus first, then it isn't pursuing eternal things. Instead, your soul is on a trajectory for eternity with Christ, but your heart is becoming distracted by the temporary things. It's an easy trap to fall into, but still it's a trap. **Where is your heart? Too focused on tomorrow and missing today's opportunities with family or for ministry? Are you holding onto those very actions and attitudes you repented of in coming to Christ? What you love most is revealed by the focus of your heart. Pray today and ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas your heart is being misled by treasure that lacks eternal worth.**

Read Luke 13

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Luke 13:24

After years of wishing, I finally was able to attend my first NFL game at Soldier Field in Chicago. I've attended many sporting events, but the size and sound of this crowd was like nothing I had ever experienced before, and as a result, so were the lines! During my walk around the stadium I noticed lines, and people giving up on them! People who seemed to genuinely need to use the restroom gave up and returned to their seats. Others standing in food lines gave up and returned to the game as well. These were people, I assume, who genuinely were in need of a restroom or an overpriced cheeseburger, but they ultimately chose to move on.

This chapter reveals times of conflict and confusion. Jesus speaks of national tragedies, fruitless living, and ungodly attitudes. In the midst of it, we find today's verse that people will seek to enter the Kingdom of God and will not be able. The reason is because the way is narrow. Like a restroom at Soldier field, it's not always easy to enter and require some patience. The inability of some to enter isn't based on their spiritual ability or Jesus' love, but the fact that some people don't like the way salvation's been offered. The way is narrow because Jesus is the only way to the Father. Some people have a problem with that and so they step out of the line of discovering more about Him. They way narrow because salvation through Jesus affects not only our eternities, but our lives here on earth. Suddenly, we're challenged to live different with our money, our families, and even our enemies. **Do you know someone who is rejecting the narrow way? Perhaps they don't like the thought of giving up control to Jesus. Or they may feel they're not bad enough to actually need saved. The narrow path is not designed to keep people out of Heaven. Without Jesus, we wouldn't even have the narrow way to walk! So pray for the person who you know is struggling with the idea of salvation in Jesus, and pray for yourself to be willing to walk the path with Jesus, knowing that patience is going to bring reward.**

Read Luke 14

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brother and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:26

The little country church I was saved in used to sing some unique songs that I've never heard in other churches. One of their favorites was called "Excuses", and indulge me to share just a few lines of this somewhat comical song: "Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day. Now the devil he'll supply them if from church you'll stay away. When people come to know the Lord, the devil always loses. So to keep those folks away from church he offers them excuses." Even as a 12 year-old, baby Christian, the significance of the song was not lost on me: What excuses would I give to explain times of distance I create with Jesus?

This is a great example of reading a passage in context. To be told to hate your parents, kids or wife, when scripture clearly says otherwise in various passages, should cause us to think deeply. Jesus here has been talking about excuses. The parables of the banquet are parables that relate to people being called into the Kingdom of God, but they decline by making excuse ranging from buying a new piece of land to having a new wife at home. So Jesus' statement could also read this way: "If anyone wants to be my disciple, I must be their first love, and everything else comes second." The longer I walk with Jesus, the more I realize how true this is. If I love my wife in first place, I lack spiritual character and depth and ultimately my relationship to her and all these people Jesus mentioned, suffers. Loving my wife in second place, loves her better than anyone else could in first place because I have learned to love as I have been loved in Christ. **Are you using your family as an excuse to be distant from Christ? Having time together with your wife, kids, siblings, or parents is certainly important and great. But, if you're trading in your opportunities for corporate and personal worship to essentially "worship" these human relationships, you cannot grow as a disciple of Christ. Are your relationships in proper priority?**

Read Luke 15

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. Luke 15:20

It's hard to speak intelligently about parenting until you've done it. Watching parents embrace distant, disappointing, adult children often felt like they were enabling their kids. As a father myself, I now realize the first concern of these parents isn't what their child has done, or even the possibility they may disappoint them again. Instead, the parent is thankful to see their distant child return.

Is the father in this passage an idiot? Is he a throw rug allowing others to walk all over him? From the passage, I don't think so. His youngest son was set on a course of action, but was old enough that his father didn't feel he could stop him. Later, the parable says this young man, "came to himself." He woke up to the reality of what he had done: he had sinned against the Lord and his own father. But there is no talk of this from his dad. The young man returns to find his father has been watching the roads for him every day. Once the father sees his son's outline in the distance, he runs to him before the boy has a chance to change his mind and turn away. **As believers, we receive the compassion of mercy of God for eternity. There are times you've**

experienced it directly from God, or even from His people. Do you show the same compassion to others that you wish for them to show to you? I know compassion can be a weak spot for me at times, and the great remedy is to remember the forgiveness you desire and allow it to motivate your forgiveness and compassion towards those difficult relationships in your own life.

Read Luke 16

One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in very little is also dishonest in much. Luke 16:10

Plagiarism is frowned upon in college, but there seems to be a double standard in parenting! For years, my Dad repeated the mantra, “You can’t be trusted with big things until you can be trusted with the little things.” So while I always wanted a better car, more allowance, and a thousand other things, my Dad continued emphasizing that my current circumstances were a tryout. As I proved myself trustworthy with that rusty old truck, I had more opportunities to drive Dad’s cool 4x4. Years later during a Bible study I came across this passage and thought, “Hey! Dad totally stole that!”

God is always refining us, and preparing us for what’s next. Jesus’ statement is huge because it forces us to examine our prayers and God’s response. Is the delay because of better timing, or perhaps because I haven’t proven myself to be ready for more? Scripture challenges us to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), which means we emulate God’s character. So when Jesus uses the word faithful, He’s reminding us to live in a way that imitates and demonstrates God’s faithfulness to others. **How faithfully are you living in what you have now? Are you so anxious for more that you haven’t considered how well you’re managing what God has given you? If you have a need, praying for God to meet that need is completely appropriate. But, be sure you examine how well you’re doing with what you have now. You may realize your need is a result of poor management, and if so, repent and seek God’s wisdom to be a wise manager of His gifts to you!**

Read Luke 17

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. Luke 17:15

Autographed sports memorabilia is one of the coolest office decorations I’ve seen. The cost to buy these footballs or baseballs signed by the stars can get pretty pricey. I know there are ways to try and get autographs from athletes by arriving really early to games or attending practices, but I’m just not that forthright. A football player mentioned in an article one time that he doesn’t like to sign items, especially for adults. He knows the kids are pretty into it, but he eyes every adult with suspicion who asks him to sign 2-3 random items. If he refuses, people berate him as if the player has an obligation to provide these valuable items that will likely just go up for sale.

These lepers were 10 real guys, but they are also us. Lepers not only had a major health problem, but they were forced into complete isolation from their homes, jobs, friends, and family. So when Jesus healed these guys, He was giving them their lives back! And yet, only 1 returned to say “thank you.” We might read that this morning and condemn the other 9, but we are probably

condemning ourselves a bit in the process. The truth is this: we simply don't thank God enough. In my life, it's common that I move onto the next prayer instead of taking the time to praise God for the persistent and sometimes desperate prayer request He recently met. **When's the last time you asked God to do something? When's the last time you thanked Him for doing it? This isn't just about the recent request, but living in continuous thankfulness for your own salvation. The old hymn "Amazing Grace" talks of us being in Heaven 10,000 years. Do you realize that after that long you'll still only be able to remain there by the blood of Jesus? You will not have built up any righteousness of your own, but will remain held by what He's done for you. Let's live thankfully, as an act of praise to our Lord, recognition in our own hearts, and a witness to the world.**

Read Luke 18

But the tax collector, standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Luke 18:13

Resumes are an art form. When an employer is searching through loads of paper, you need to do something that stands out. However, as I applied to a church in my 30's, I feared one item might stand out negatively. My first pastorate lasted just 9 months when the church rejected my efforts with a particularly unrepentant member. As I applied to my next position I argued with myself the position had been too short and unproductive to deserve mention in my resume. Ultimately, I chose to be honest about the incident and was hired anyway. When talking to the new church, that 9 month stint was repeatedly pointed to as a major reason my resume caught their eye. I saw failure in that bullet point, but they saw a minister who endured a tough time for emphasizing the truth of God's Word.

When we come before God, it's tempting to emphasize our good points in a "spiritual resume". Today's passage reveals that God isn't interested in hearing about our righteousness. He wants to see continual recognition of your need for His righteousness. This Pharisee wasn't calling on God for any change or improvement. Certainly he was aware of his failings, but chose to ignore them in favor of his good points. The tax collector was already an outcast of Jewish society because of his service to the Romans and their tendency to extort more than was owed from people. Perhaps after many years of sinful failure, the tax collector finally recognized the depth of his sin. He didn't come before the Lord to talk about any of the good he might have done, but to simply acknowledge his spiritual unworthiness. **How do you approach the Lord? Do you pray in constant request, failing to get to the spiritual issues of temptation and sin? Is your time of corporate church worship the first chance you've taken to talk to God that day? I'm not denying you do some good things for the Lord, but always keep those good works in the greater context: you are a sinner and apart from God there is no good in you. Tough to admit, tougher to say, but absolutely vital to your relationship to the Lord. Operate in His goodness instead of your own.**

Read Luke 19

He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Luke 19:40

My opinion of cheerleaders has grown since my son started playing football. Watching them perform during his games has led me to appreciate the athleticism and practice they clearly put

into their sport. But it was actually during a recent blowout that I became very aware of their role. While most of us in the stands had stopped clapping for the few positive things that were happening, those girls didn't stop! They continued cheering, flipping, and urging us to make some noise. Even when the crowd had gone silent, the cheerleaders kept it going and slowly even got me back into supporting the team once again.

I hadn't really noticed before that the parade for Jesus started well before the "Hosannas" at the gate of Jerusalem. All of Jesus' disciples, the 12 along with many others, were praising God for the specific miracles they had seen through Jesus. The Pharisees had been trying to blunt Jesus' impact for a long time, but now He was coming into their center of power: Jerusalem. They called for Jesus to silence His followers, but this was news that couldn't stay hidden: the King is coming! Jesus declares that if the people were to stop shouting, the rocks would cry out! All of Creation testifies to the greatness of our God, so that when Christians are silent, the message still remains available. **We live in a day where sharing our faith can be intimidating. We're not just looked at as odd, but often told to silence our message of "intolerance". Let us refuse to allow rocks to do our job! Let's wake up each day asking God to use us as a witness today! Who are you waiting to share the good news of Jesus with? What are you waiting for? Don't be quiet and keep the great salvation of Jesus hidden!**

Read Luke 20

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?'" Luke 20:17

Reclaiming is a big idea today. Businesses are reclaiming old buildings and turning them into apartments or offices that bring new life into historical and beautiful buildings. DIYers don't seem scrap, but "reclaimed wood". What one person saw as trash, another sees value in and creates a table or bookcase with great character and function. A friend of mine even went to an old bowling alley to take all the wood from the bowling lanes and create seating areas in his coffee shop that are incredibly cool. Same materials, but a different attitude reveals the value.

Jesus faces a series of difficult questions in this passage from the main teaching bodies of the Jews, the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The intent of the questions isn't to find an answer, but to smugly offer an "unanswerable question". The problem is Jesus keeps knocking these difficulty discussions out of the park! Jesus is a stone, but that doesn't play out the same for everyone. For some, he's the cornerstone that supports both our eternity and the new foundations for a life of holiness. But for those who reject him, He's a stone of stumbling where people trip up over the idea of needing a Savior or any change in their lives at all. **Jesus didn't come to be part of our lives, but to be the foundation of who we are as a new creation in Christ. We cannot choose to accept His forgiveness while refusing His holiness, or we find ourselves tripping over his expectations for our life. Where have you been giving Jesus full authority in your life? Where are you holding back areas from Him? Take an honest look at yourself through prayer to see the areas Jesus wants to reclaim to bring holiness and blessing into your life.**

Read Luke 21

Settle it therefore in your minds not to mediate beforehand on how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. Luke 21:14-15

Ravi Zacharias is a very motivational figure for me in Christian life. He is perhaps the greatest Christian apologist of our time, and I find his intellect in dealing with difficult questions to be fascinating. I know that he is well read and has heard many of the questions he answers at some point before, even if they were worded differently. Over time he has learned to deal with these objections in two ways. First, Ravi seeks to destroy poor arguments that simply ignore the truth. But secondly, he always seeks to draw his questioners to Christ, often inviting them to remain after the event for a more personal conversation. He's attempting to win both the argument and the soul!

Jesus tells his disciples here that in the final days they will be brought before authorities to defend the faith they so willingly, publicly and often illegally share with others. Perhaps you've wondered, "What would I say in a moment like that?" People often pray asking for God to give them words as they prepare to share the gospel, which is certainly wise. Jesus wouldn't tell you not to pray, but He would challenge you not to try and approach these witnessing moments as a mere intellectual. We can try to line up our arguments and illustrations, but the work of salvation is a work of God. Jesus says that in those moments souls are on the line, He will give you words of life that cannot be withstood. **Are you prayerfully preparing to be a daily witness? It's not about getting your witnessing note cards in order, though there's nothing wrong with having tools for witnessing. Just be careful that you don't trust your words and efforts as the power that will save, which can bring either pride or frustration. Trust God in these moments to empower your witness. Your message never changes, but allow God to change your words so that they speak to each individual in a powerful way.**

Read Luke 22

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. Luke 22:31-32

Perimeter watch is no joke. When our artillery unit was involved in combat trainings, keeping a strong perimeter was emphasized as much as accuracy of our guns. All night long, a training force would attempt to silently penetrate the perimeter. Though there might be 20 armed soldiers patrolling that boundary, just one inattentive or sleepy guard put everyone at risk. When the training force made it in and pepper sprayed us in our sleep, we all suffered because of the failing of just one guy.

Jesus' team of disciples was also in danger of being overrun by weak and inattentive faith. Judas had already become a tool of the devil, due to his greed. Now Satan was looking for his chance to take down Peter. Peter wouldn't be so easily swayed from the faith, so it would have to be some action that should shame him from staying close to Christ and His mission. But Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail, and I have to ask, "How does this work? Isn't that simply on Peter himself?" It seems Jesus' was praying both against the power of the devil, and for the

spiritual mindfulness of Peter. There's no doubt that Jesus invested spiritually in Peter, but He didn't fail to invest in Him through prayer. **Who are you trying to grow in spiritual maturity? How much are you praying for it? We can wish they would make better choices, and we can even take time to show them relevant scriptures, but the greatest work happens in the soul. While we can influence that to a degree, it's ultimately a majority work of God Himself. So consider that person who's disappointing you with their spiritual choices. Have you spent more time shaking your head at them in frustration, or bowing your head in prayer for them?**

Read Luke 23

And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43

I believe this interaction between Jesus and the thief may be the most important conversation recorded in any of the gospels. This thief was mocking Jesus right along with everyone else according to Matthew and Mark's accounts. But as the hours pass, the repentant thief comes to see Jesus for who He really is: the Messiah, sacrificing Himself for the sins of the world. Why else would one condemned man ask another for entrance in a kingdom? Jesus' statement of acceptance is hugely important because it confirms that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, in Jesus alone.

This chapter confirms several important points about salvation. First, it's all about Jesus! This thief had no opportunity to do any service for Jesus before he died, and yet Jesus promised him eternity based on his confession! Second, some teach that baptism is required for salvation, yet Jesus granted this man eternal life without it. In doing so, Jesus confirms baptism as a symbol, and not a requirement for Heaven. Adrian Rogers also taught this passage should bring peace to the families of those whose loved one made a deathbed confession. While that may seem cheap, did the thief not accept on his own "deathbed"? Here's the point: salvation is all about faith in Jesus. We are simply bringing our lives in harmony with the truth of the gospel: I'm a sinner who needs a Savior. **Do you sometimes worry about your salvation? Do you wonder if you've done enough to deserve it, or sinned too much to keep it? This thief who died next to Jesus was just like you, a sinner deserving judgment. But his faith in Jesus, even as his life was ebbing away, placed his soul safely and securely in the hands of God. Take some time today thanking Jesus for His work on your behalf. Also take some time to consider that person in your life who may seem beyond the reach of the gospel and realize like the thief, everyone can be saved.**

Read Luke 24

And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem Luke 24:47

Andrew Jackson is my favorite President. Despite his "anger management issues", no one could question Jackson's bravery or military prowess, perhaps most demonstrated at the Battle of New Orleans that lasted from Dec 14, 1814 until Jan 8, 1815. Jackson's troops held the high ground throughout numerous British onslaughts with the American forces taking a small proportion of casualties in comparison to the high loss of life and limb suffered amongst the British soldiers.

The victory eventually propelled Jackson all the way to the White House, and the Battle of New Orleans still remains a great demonstration of military strategy. However, it was completely unnecessary. After months of negotiation the representatives between the two countries signed a peace treaty on December 24, but the slow travel of news across the Atlantic caused many to die for a war that was already over. While the truth was slow to travel, it was no less true.

Jesus commanded His disciples to take the news of the gospel out from Jerusalem to all the nations. But in the meantime, what about those who have never heard? Are they responsible for news they don't know? The Bible is clear that we all have a responsibility to God, and that people don't get to Hell because they don't know Jesus; people go to Hell because they are sinners. Billy Graham once said that if ignorance of the gospel were enough to send people to Heaven, then we should close all the churches, burn all the bibles, and silence every Christian. Such a belief ignores all God wants to do for us in this life. It ignores many who came to discover Jesus for themselves despite living far off from the center of the Gospel (an Ethiopian in Acts 8, a Roman in Acts 10). **If we believe the gospel is necessary to rescue everyone from sin, what are you doing about it? When's the last time you shared the good news of Jesus with someone? There's as much need in your "Jerusalem" as there is to the ends of the earth. Likely you're even aware of some opportunities you've missed. Pray today and every day, "God prepare me to be a witness in my day, to share with others the hope that someone shared with me."**