

DEVOTED TO JESUS PROLOGUE

WHY READ ABOUT JESUS?

That is probably the \$10,000 question. Of what value is it to today's person to read about someone who lived so long ago? Isn't anything that happened in the 1st century absolutely irrelevant in today's fast paced world? The common thinking is that the church has become almost an obstacle given the way we live today. So each person reading these devotions has to come to grips with this central question. Why should I read about Jesus?

The answer to that central question lies in the fact that people in today's society have even less ability to cope with life than those say 50 years ago. I suppose that is because the world we live in continually depersonalizes us as individuals. It's all about information and efficiency. While it is true that we have more information, you have to ask yourself the question, "So what?" There has never been a correlation between happiness and knowing more. With the Earth's population surpassing 6 billion people, each person has much less significance than those who lived in the 19th century.

It is also true that we've become more efficient. We can beam out thoughts over the internet and have it half-way around the world in a matter of seconds, but does that make us happier? I'm reminded of a line in the movie, "Sabrina," where the main character says, "More isn't always better, sometimes it's just more."

So how is Jesus relevant? The truth is people haven't become any more adept at coping with life than they ever were. One only has to look at the increases in suicides, divorce and crime to understand that this flood of knowledge doesn't automatically give us a successful life. One has only to look at our failures at human relations, our inability to get along with others or even ourselves, to understand the need for the answers that Jesus gives us. As I write this I find that today's social media has made us less polite and less able to find the good in others. Because the internet is largely anonymous, our society has found that we can tear each other down and not have to bear any consequences.

So what can we find when we approach Jesus Christ? I suppose the bottom line is that we find answers. We find the answer to our guilt when Jesus said, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'" We find peace of mind when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." As the population of planet earth grows, we find a new way to live with other people in the examples that He set in his daily life.

Each day that you read this devotion, you are going to be challenged to apply what you read about Jesus into your daily life. After all, that is really where it counts isn't it? If you just read about Jesus, what good does it do? It isn't good readers that Jesus desires, it is disciples. I just have the feeling that God is not going to be that impressed with what I know when I stand before Him on the last day. If that were true, God would be really impressed with the Scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day, yet Jesus had a lot to say about people who talk about the truth, but don't live it. I would challenge you to read a

portion of this book each day with an open mind and an open Bible. Each day there will be scripture for you to read and then we will talk about what you are reading. At the end of the day as you meditate on what you have learned, you will be asked to write down the answers to a couple of questions. The first is to write down the things you learned about God that day. The second asks you to write down the changes you sense that God is telling you to make with what you learned that day. It is my prayer that you will not only learn something about the life and times of Jesus Christ, but also that you will allow God to change you in the process. You cannot come into the presence of Jesus Christ without being changed. That's the work He did the few short years He was here. That's the work He continues to do today. So I invite you to take this journey with me. I have always believed it to be a journey worth taking. I believe you will also benefit from this year long journey in ways you cannot now imagine.

Ray Tuttle

WHAT WILL WE BE READING ABOUT THIS MONTH?

We are going to be spending the entire month talking about something that only took a few hours to actually happen. The vast majority of the month will be spent in the upper room at the Last Supper. Since this is the final teaching the disciples will get from God in His human form, these words are important for us to read and meditate on. It's kind of like hearing a person's last words. We tend to place great importance on them. How much more should we value the last words of God in human form?

As we close the month, we are going to begin our journey through Jesus' arrest. We will be taking a rather unusual look at the events leading up to His arrest. The view we will take is like the proverbial fly on the wall. It is important for us to understand what was going on behind the scenes in order to make sense out of the activities of the characters in our story. For example, what information did Judas Iscariot supply that caused Jesus to be arrested that night? The Jewish leadership had already decided not to arrest Jesus during the Passover Feast for fear that the increased crowds that attended the feast would start a riot. The Bible only says that Judas was tasked to bring the Jewish leadership word of when Jesus would be alone and away from the crowds. Yet if that was all there was to it, Jesus was not in hiding. Each evening that week He traveled the lonely road from Jerusalem to Bethany. He could have been taken without any fuss and bother during any of those journeys. All this and more will be answered this month as we journey through this time together.

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Clean Feet
John 13: 4-11

As the disciples gathered in that upper room, you can almost imagine Peter giving his brother Andrew one of those “older brother” glances as if to say, “Andrew you know that someone has to take care of the task of washing our feet. Surely you don’t expect me to do it, do you Andrew? I’m one of the leaders of this band. It’s not my spiritual gift.” In the same manner, John would have been giving the “look” to his brother James and so on down to Judas who was probably looking for someone he could pay to do the job. Everyone in that room knew what had to be done, but no one wanted to stoop that low in order to do it. For those of you who want to know where we are heading with all of this, you might want to read John 13: 4-11. We talked yesterday about what motivated Jesus to do the job of a slave. Today we want to take a look at the actual event in the upper room that began the last night of Jesus’ life.

Can you imagine the feelings of those in that room as their Master began to undress and wash their feet? They would have felt the indignity of it all as one by one Jesus approached them and began the task. The tension builds as each disciple gets their turn. If you know anything about Jesus’ disciples, you know where the tension is going to burst out into the open. That’s right, when Jesus gets to Peter. It was just in Peter’s character to bring out into the open the kinds of things that others were thinking in their hearts. He halts the proceedings with his refusal to allow Jesus to do such a lowly thing. Jesus asks Peter to use a little faith and allow Him to continue. When Peter again voices

his refusal, we see an added firmness in Jesus' reply. The action that Jesus took here was symbolic in nature. To refuse the symbolic cleansing would place Peter outside the Kingdom of God. When Jesus points out that fact to Peter, he found himself suddenly in need of a whole bath.

There are quite a number of lessons that can be drawn from this scene. I want to draw just a couple for our consideration today. The first lesson that I see is in the value of forgiveness. Most of the men in that room didn't need a spiritual bath. They were already mostly clean. It's just that the dusty roads of Jerusalem had been deposited on their feet. Christians are like that most of the time. We have accepted Jesus' gift of salvation and the fact that His blood has cleansed us from all of the rebellion and disobedience that separates us from a loving God. It's just that in wading through life, we get our feet a little dirty. As we look down at our soiled feet, we see a little white lie wedged between two toes and a little gossip stuck to our big toe. We need a good foot washing. That's where 1 John 1: 9 comes in. As we confess our shortcomings to God, He cleans our feet and we can walk once again in the kind of relationship with a Holy God that our creator wishes for us.

The second lesson in today's story would be that of the nature of humility. When was the last time you did the work of a servant for someone else? Author H. G. Bosch writes, "After Booker T. Washington took charge of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in town when he was stopped by a wealthy, white woman. She asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. As he had no pressing

business on hand, Professor Washington smiled and proceeded to do the humble chore. Recognizing him, a servant girl revealed to her mistress his true identity. The next morning the embarrassed woman went to his office and apologized profusely, saying, ‘I didn't know it was you I put to work.’ ‘It's perfectly all right, Madam,’ the renowned black educator replied. ‘Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend.’” What stops you from doing things for other people, especially those less fortunate? Sometimes when we look deep down inside at the real reason we fail to serve, it usually involves our pride. Pride gets in the way of a lot of good things that we could be doing with our life. So what we have to ask ourselves at this point is if the God who spoke and the world became real would take off His clothes to wash someone’s feet, why won’t we do the same?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Whose feet have you washed lately?

THE FINAL DAY
November 2nd

How to Change the World
John 13: 12-17

One of the things that I enjoy about the profession that I have chosen is when I have the opportunity to do a career fair at our local college campus. I find it refreshing to dialogue with young people about to be unleashed from college on to an unsuspecting

world. These kids are so idealistic. They actually believe that it is possible that they will change the world. I suppose that one of the things that come with age is a cynicism that anything will alter the course of human events. As a Christian, I suppose our cynicism has to come with a Biblical perspective. It was Solomon in Ecclesiastes who wrote that there is nothing new under the sun and that human behavior remains relatively constant over time. So I suppose that if you look at it, nothing much has changed about human behavior in the centuries that have transpired since King Solomon lived. Yet in the Bible verses we will be looking at today, we find that Jesus disagreed with Solomon. Jesus taught that there is a way for a group that started with twelve men to forever alter the course of human events. Yet the way that change will occur is probably something that you would never think of.

As Jesus finishes washing the disciple's feet, He now gives the lesson that He wanted them to catch and to emulate. We are in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John and will be looking at verses 12 to 17. The washing of feet was done by Jesus as an example of the way in which His church was to operate in the world. If you think about it, there isn't a lot in the way of humble servitude in corporate America today. Most executives are too busy climbing over each other to worry about such an unimportant thing as dirty feet. Yet Jesus' charge to His disciples means to ignore the conventional wisdom of the day and do the things that God wants done. That is especially true when it comes to how we minister to those who are within the church of Jesus Christ.

First off, notice that the servant of Jesus must act as if He is Lord of their lives. He calls His disciples to do more than merely acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. He actually wants us to do something that will demonstrate to the entire world the reality of that relationship. As you look back upon your life in the last week, would someone looking from the outside see Jesus in your attitudes and actions? Servants in those days had no rights. There was only one thing that was allowed to occupy their time and that was serving their master. You can't even say that all else was secondary because there wasn't anything else.

Second, the servant of Jesus must find their time is continually occupied with promoting the interests of the master. Imagine a world with no corporate ladders to climb, no agendas to service and no individual mountains to conquer. It sounds rather unimaginative doesn't it? Yet that is exactly the life that Jesus was calling these men into. Their ladder was His ladder. Their agenda was only His agenda. Their mountains were put there by God, Himself. Why would someone do that? If you think about it, changing the world is a full time job. It is not a task that can be done on a part-time basis.

Third, a servant of Jesus spends his time looking out for the interests of other people. As Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all (Mark 10: 43, 44.) Think about all of the great people that have lived in the past. The truly great ones are those who spent their lives in service of others. It is their selflessness that made us admire

them. Why do we spend so much time admiring others who do what we don't seem to have the time or the inclination to do?

People who truly change the world are the exception and not the rule. The men of our story sold out to Jesus Christ and the world has never been the same. They were used by God to affect millions of people who lived even beyond the span of their lives. That's because their efforts were multiplied and blessed by God. So what about you? Do you want to merely talk about changing the world or do you want to do it? Perhaps something that Jesus says here might just give you some direction on how to go about it.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

In what ways are you changing the world?

THE FINAL DAY
November 3rd

The Lord's Supper
Luke 22: 14-20

If you have been a Christian for long, you have participated in what we now know as communion. Actually the word, communion, comes from one of the English translations of the Greek word, Koinonia. According to Strong's Greek Dictionary, Koinonia can be translated as fellowship, community or communion. The idea that the Lord's Supper is a communion comes from Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians 10: 16. In

fact, if you read that verse in the King James Version, you will see the word used.

Though Paul talked about the ceremony as it was used in the first century church, the event was originated by Jesus on His last evening alive and can be found in Luke 22: 14-20. Why not take a moment to read this passage again so that it is fresh in your mind.

Did you notice that Luke describes two incidents where the disciples shared a cup of wine? We tend to think of there being only the bread and then the wine. The answer to that question is that which we now call “The Lord’s Supper” actually begins on verse 19. The first drink of wine comes at the beginning of the meal where the host rises and speaks over it the “thanksgiving” as Jesus passed the cup to each of His disciples. Yet instead of the traditional words that had always been used, Jesus added the words of verses 15 and 16. He then began the normal prayer of thanksgiving and concluded His words with a pronouncement that He will not eat of the Passover until it finds its complete fulfillment at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

One can only imagine the tenderness as Jesus picked up the loaf of unleavened bread and broke it. I imagine the words of Isaiah came immediately to His mind where the prophet said, “He was pierced for our transgressions and He was crushed for our iniquities.” Anyone who has seen a whole piece of unleavened bread can see that there are lines of holes that are pressed into the bread before it is baked. The next time you gaze at the piece remember that it is by His stripes that we are healed and that He was pierced for our iniquities.

The cup as Jesus described it represented His blood that was about to be shed for us. God has said that the shedding of blood is an absolute necessity before our rebellion against Him can be forgiven. Up to that point in history, a lamb was used. In a few hours, it will be the blood of the Son of God that will be shed once and for all. The next time you have the cup sitting in your hand, try to imagine it is filled with the blood as it dripped from the cross. Try to imagine what it cost the Son of God to put it there.

Jesus said that we are to participate in this ceremony often as a remembrance of His death for us. It seems a simple thing for us to do, but there is a lot of power in remembering such an important event in time. For one, Paul warns us to prepare our hearts before we participate so that our lives are clean before the Lord. Second, remember that it is God's way of always keeping Jesus in our lives. You should never participate in the Lord's Supper without drawing close to Him. Jesus kept this ordinance even in the face of His death. Do we value The Lord's Supper enough? Do we really give it the importance that it deserves? Only you can answer that question as God is now at work in your heart.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How do you prepare yourself for taking communion?

THE FINAL DAY
November 4th

Is it I?

John 13: 18-30

As the disciples gathered around for what would be their final time as a unit, I have always felt that they all sensed that a great change was in the wind. Each disciple would be dealing with a troubled spirit. Something that they couldn't quite put their finger on, nor could they determine its source, but it was unsettling none the less. For some unexplained reason, their brother Judas had been allowed to sit a Jesus' left. If these men could have seen beyond the physical, they would have been witness to a great battle that was taking place in the spiritual realm. Judas had spent quite a bit of time following Jesus. He knew more about Jesus than you or I will ever know. A week ago, we dealt with the possible reasons for Judas to make his ultimate rejection of Jesus yet I can't help get the feeling that even now Jesus was making one final attempt to reach out to Judas before it was too late. Jesus was giving one final, "Are you sure you want to do this" appeal. Though the event we will be talking about today is found in each of the gospels, I have chosen to use what the Apostle John wrote in John 13: 18-30.

Jesus' announcement that there was a betrayer in their midst caused each of the men in that room to do some introspection. They each looked deep into their hearts to determine if they could possibly be the one who would be the source of that betrayal. I suppose that is because there is a bit of the betrayer in all of us. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we understand that we betray Jesus all of the time. There is no one who has ever perfectly followed Him every moment. What was passing through the mind of each person in that room were memories and thoughts that each of them had when they

had rebelled against the Master's leadership or had recoiled at something He had said. Could Jesus have possibly read their minds and understood that they had not completely followed Him at that moment? Are they the betrayer Jesus is talking about?

For Jesus, it was necessary that the room be cleared of its evil. What He had to say for the rest of the evening was not for the ears of someone in open rebellion against God. Judas had to be sifted once and for all. Either he would fall to his knees in repentance or he would be prodded into doing his deed and would leave the room. As the question of the identity of the betrayer reached Jesus' ears, He still would not publicly and openly reveal that name. Instead he dipped a piece of bread into one of the dishes of sauce and pronounced that the one to whom he gave that bread was the one. As Jesus handed that dripping bread to Judas, He looked him right in the eyes and uttered those famous words, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

John records two events that probably happened at the same time. Judas experiences the entrance of Satan into his heart and promptly leaves. The second event is when the rest of the troop shakes their collective heads in puzzlement at what had just transpired. John even records his own thoughts when he writes that the disciples thought that Jesus had directed their old friend Judas to go out and buy the requirements for the feast that would occur the next day at Passover. It's hard for some to believe that a close friend could ever do something like that. His mind just couldn't accept that such an occurrence could happen. As Judas leaves the room, John records that, "It was night." The time was shortly coming when darkness would rule over the light. Yet it was only to

be for a short time. The light was going to come back stronger than it had ever been before as if a new day dawned. For now, however, this was a time of great darkness.

If Hollywood were telling this story, Judas would have taken his one final opportunity to confess the evil that had been festering in his heart and would have fallen at the feet of Jesus weeping at his own failures and the temptation into which he had fallen victim. Yet this is not Hollywood, this is what God wants you to know about the reality that temptation is to all of us. The very next time you are tempted to do something you know Jesus does not want you to do, try to imagine Jesus looking you right in the eyes. At that moment try to imagine the dripping bread as He hands it to you. That vision may give you the strength to reject what you know is wrong and to drop to your knees at the feet of your Master as Judas Iscariot should have done.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Does the vision of Jesus looking at you help in overcoming temptation?

THE FINAL DAY
November 5th

Pride Bursts Forth
John 13: 30-38

You can probably think about someone whom you know who is just like the Apostle Peter. You know the kind of person whose tendency is to burst forth with

something before they have had a chance to really think about it. In fact, that person may be you. As you picture the person that I have described here, you can gain a little insight into Peter, the man who followed Jesus. Now, there are some who think that I am about to be real hard on poor Peter today. Actually, I greatly admire the man. I suppose that is because he is the exact opposite of my own personality. I have always admired those who leap first without a lot of thinking. While it is true they sometimes sink, it is also that is the type of person who gets to walk on water.

So we now rejoin our story in John 13 and we will be taking a look at verses 30 to 38. We are still sitting amongst the disciples in the upper room on the final night of Jesus' life. Judas has left the building. Jesus begins to talk about His upcoming glory. While it is true there is a lot of pain for Him to endure before the glory comes, His thoughts are fixed upon the final outcome, not the road He must travel. He talks about the place where He is about to embark and the fact that the disciples will not be able to immediately follow Him. Then He gives them a tool that will be the key to changing the world. Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Think about the importance of what Jesus just said and how this powerful truth can enter into your own life. One can almost imagine the silence that now hung in the room. It is not hard to think that Jesus sat there waiting for some indication that the importance of what He just said had struck home with the men in that room.

It is at that point that Peter bursts forth, “Lord, where are you going?” The secret to winning the world for Jesus Christ went right over Peter’s head. I mean, it’s bad enough that he missed Jesus’ point, but He had just told them and had been telling them what was going to happen for the last six months. Jesus, showing the patience that He always exhibited as once more He explains that where He is going they cannot yet come. Now if you have children in your home, you know what is coming next. You don’t even have to read the next verse. For Peter now says, “Why?” It is that point in a show of bravado, Peter makes one of his more infamous statements, “I will lay down my life for you.”

I have always admired Jesus for His restraint here in His response to Peter’s pride. One can almost imagine the calm and even tone with which Jesus predicts that before the rooster crows Peter will disown Him three times. Luke, in his account of this incident, adds something different when he says, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” With these words, we see the total purpose that was intended for Peter in the next few hours. We also see the source that was behind what was about to happen to Peter. As we see more of Peter in the Bible than the other men in that room, we notice that the events of this evening helped to change him. That’s what trials and sifting do to a person. They either shipwreck your faith or make you stronger.

The first time I had to face unemployment, it was an extremely scary time for me. Since I had never had a day in my life where I had not worked, the prospect of having no

job and no income was a hard thing for me. I even began to look at homeless people in an entirely different light. That was a time of sifting for me. You may be going through a time of sifting yourself right now. The thing that I had to do is the same thing that you have to do. It was imperative for me just as it is imperative for you right now to make a decision about whether or not you trust in God’s provision for your life. It is easy to say “I trust you, Lord” when everything is going well, but can you truly say it when your future becomes unknown? Take comfort in the fact that Jesus knows exactly what your circumstances are and He is praying that your faith may not fail. With that assurance, you can be at peace with your circumstances and wait upon the Lord for your deliverance and His provision for your well-being. Just remember that when God brings you through your valley; it is now your job to strengthen your brothers and sisters who are going through similar trying times.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How did you change the last time you went through a time of sifting?

THE FINAL DAY
November 6th

Comfort for a Troubled Heart
John 14: 1-4

We are now entering into a time where we are seeing Jesus at his finest and most selfless. The Jesus we are about to witness stands in stark contrast at times to the person

who we are most of the time. As such we can use the Jesus that we will be taking a look at as a role model for the kind of person that we would like to become and we will discover some secrets along our journey that might just help us to become more like the Master. That should be our goal anyway. As we read John 14: 1-4, we see a Jesus who is busy about the task of comforting His disciples. Now given that Jesus knew that He was only hours from His own painful execution, there is a tremendous example here for us to follow. Yet there is more than that in these particular verses. They also speak volumes to our own future if we have accepted His free gift of eternal life.

There were a lot of troubled hearts in the upper room that night. These men were troubled over the divisiveness that was present in the group. Luke 22: 24 tells us that they were still debating the exact pecking order they would occupy in the upcoming Kingdom. If you will remember that very same argument began right after the events surrounding the Mount of Transfiguration and it had continued right up to The Last Supper. We don't yet see the kind of unity among the disciples that I am sure Jesus had hoped to see in His last hours. If it were allowed to continue, such arguing was sure to wound some of the men sitting at that table, and would have harmed the birth of Jesus' church.

The disciples were troubled over the fact that Jesus had just accused them of betrayal. One of them had already left the room and another was brought down by the realization that he would betray the Master before the sun rose again. I know if I had

been in that room, my heart would have been in search mode trying to find out if I would also be added to that list of betrayers.

The disciples were also troubled by all of this talk about their Master leaving. No one likes change and to be told that change is on the horizon always causes a troubled heart. The relationship that these men had with Jesus had grown strong. They had depended upon Him for everything that they held dear in this life and now He was openly talking about his eminent departure.

What amazes me is that Jesus' mind was not on His own immediate future, but He cared enough about His disciples to comfort them at this particular moment in time. He says, "Do not be troubled, just believe." That is always the answer to a troubled heart, isn't it? Don't hold too tightly to the events that occur in this transient world. Always remind yourself to look at the events in your life with eternal eyes. Notice how Jesus opens their eyes to the future glory that will mark each of their lives for the rest of eternity. It's almost as if He is saying, "Look to the future" as a way of putting present struggles and heartache in their proper perspectives.

The Greek word that Jesus uses in verse 2 for our future dwelling place is the root word for our English word, mansion. As such, we get the idea that our future dwelling place is going to look like one of those great houses that we find ourselves driving by and drooling over. Actually I think we might be selling God a little short. That great house

we drove by last week might look like a slum dwelling compared to the splendor that awaits you in eternity.

So let's say that as you read this today, you are finding yourself more than a bit troubled. What I want you to do is to first make sure that Jesus is a part of your life and that you know you are part of the Kingdom of God. To do that, I want you to read 1 John 5: 10-13. How do the words that John writes describe you? Are you in the Kingdom or out? First you need to take care of that. So if you are part of God's Kingdom and you still are troubled, I want you to now turn in your Bible and read the 21st chapter of John's Revelation and that should rid you of your troubled heart. Every time I read that chapter, I can't help but to picture myself as I walk through those gates and into that city and realize that's where I am going to call home in the not too distant future.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Was today a day of confession and forgiveness for you?

THE FINAL DAY
November 7th

One Way
John 14: 5, 6

I happen to own a house. Well, truth be known, I guess I am not the only owner of this dwelling I call a home. The holder of the loan has a stake and my wife owns an

equal share to mine, but it's an awesome thing to dig out the deed and see my name written right there as the owner. Now let's say I had invited you over to my house for a sumptuous dinner. I tell you that I am throwing out all of the stops and spending whatever it takes to see that the meal you are being invited to will be something to be remembered. Since you are really looking forward to this evening, you are more than a little disturbed to discover that you don't have a clue as to where my house is located. So there are now several avenues where you can gain directions to my house. Your first attempt is with the telephone company, but what if I don't have a listed number? You could start driving and hope that if you drove long enough, you would eventually arrive at my particular house. You could stop people along the way to try to get directions hoping that they know me and where I live. Another possibility would be for you to call a mutual friend and hope that they have visited my house and can remember how to get there. Of course the obvious choice would be to call me and get directions. While others may know where I live and how to get there, there's nothing like going directly to the source in order to gain accurate information. That's what we will be doing today. Take a look at John 14: 4-7 and you will see what we will be talking about.

There are times when Christians are seen as extremely arrogant creatures. We have the audacity to believe that ours is the only way into heaven. That is seen by some people as being extremely narrow minded. "What about all of the other religions? Are you saying they are wrong?" they exclaim. It seems that human thought over the last few hundred years has developed to such a point where it is widely believed that the only absolute truth that is left is that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Most people

believe that it is all right for me to believe something so long as they are free to believe something else. I agree that God has given us all a free will that allows such a mode of thinking; that does not extend, however, to entrance into the Kingdom of God. In that case, it does not matter what I believe about how to gain entrance. The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven is controlled by the one who created it. Just as I control the entrance into my house, so God controls who enters into the Kingdom of Heaven.

If you have already read our section of the Bible today, you will see that Jesus sets Himself up as the only pathway that one can use to gain entrance into heaven. I didn't say that, He did. Right there in the 6th verse, Jesus is telling you that He is three very different things. First off, He is the way. In the example that I gave earlier, there is one other way for you to absolutely get to my dinner. That would be if I drove over to your house and took you back to my house myself. That's what Jesus was doing in the upper room that night. The journey He would take over the next few hours would pave the way into the Kingdom of God so that all who came after would know where to go. Then He will return again to make sure we all get to our destination.

Second, Jesus tells us that He is truth. I say that because the word, "the" is not in the original Greek. I agree with Henry Blackaby in his book, "Experiencing God," that truth is not an abstract idea, but is a person. In other words, when you want to know the truth about anything, you look to Jesus Christ as the source for that truth. That's also

why Jesus could say, “And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”
Jesus, as truth itself, is the only pathway to true freedom.

Finally, Jesus tells us that He is life. Jesus didn’t just tell us about life. He actually showed us how a life that is lived to please God can be accomplished. In His life, we see what it means to follow God completely and at all times. There is no one else that I can say that about. God came to the earth in order to give us an object lesson as to how to live an abundant life.

I have said often that truth operates independently from belief. If something is true, then it is true regardless of whether or not anyone believes it. Jesus’ statement in today’s Bible reading stands on its own merit. If His life didn’t match up to His words, then this statement could easily be dismissed as just another crackpot scheme. Unfortunately His life perfectly matched up with His words and that puts us in a bit of a dilemma. While truth does operate independently from belief, it still matters what we believe. That’s because our belief has eternal consequences.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What has changed in your beliefs during this study?

THE FINAL DAY
November 8th

When is it Enough?

John 14: 8-11

What is it that drives the world economic system? If you boil that question down to its most basic of ideas, it is the idea that humans always want a bit more. Economists call it the theory of unlimited wants. If every person on the planet were to become suddenly content, the economy of the world would collapse. Now before you get yourself in a panic, it's not going to happen this side of heaven. I suppose that is because we are built to always strive for more. It was present in the Garden of Eden. It is present in my own life today. Take a look at Philip's question in John 14: 8 and compare it to Jesus' answer in verses 9-11 and see if it was present in the hearts of the disciples who sat in that upper room on the last night of Jesus' life.

What was it that Philip wanted? Perhaps it still gnawed at him that he was not chosen to ascend the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus so many months ago. The Old Testament tells of many of the heroes of old who had caught a glimpse of the heavenly glory. Perhaps Philip wanted to hide in the cleft of a rock as Elijah had done and sample the whisper of God? Perhaps Philip ached for a chance to wrestle with God as Jacob had? One thing is for sure, Philip did not think he would be satisfied with anything as ordinary as sharing a meal with Jesus that night. "Show us the Father, Jesus, and that will be enough for me," Phillip demanded.

Jesus' responds as if to say, "Will that be enough for you or will you always want a bit more of the spectacular?" As Jesus patiently points out, Philip was sitting in the

presence of God right at that moment and it wasn't enough for him. People have always wanted to know about the God who created them. Jesus is saying you need only take a close look at Him in order to have that need satisfied. For in the face of Jesus, you will find yourself looking directly into the eyes of the God who spoke and the world was created. As Jesus told Philip that night, He is saying to us. The words, the works and the miracles that we read in the gospels point us directly to God, Himself. If we were suddenly ushered into the throne room of Heaven to fall at the feet of our Holy God, the words, the works and the miracles we would witness would be the same as we have witnessed in the life of Jesus Christ.

What Philip was battling at that moment in time was a lack of contentment. He wasn't happy with his current state and was after Jesus to change his world into one that better suited his needs right at that moment. "Show me the God that I want to see and I will be content," was essentially what Philip was asking. Yet I believe that contentment can never be found in gaining something more. It is found in the acknowledgment that God has already provided you everything you need. Look around you right at this moment and realize that everything that you truly need has already been provided by God. The rest is not important. That is how the Apostle Paul could say, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil. 4: 11-13)

Right now I am currently in a battle for contentment. It is not that I have an overwhelming desire for a new car or a larger house. As I get older, I find myself becoming impatient with anyone or anything that I feel is wasting my precious time. “After all”, I tell myself, “I don’t have a lot of time left on this earth.” I have poured quite a number of years into building up my local church. It has always been my desire to be a part of some great work where God is blessing and I can sit back and have a great impact on my community. I watch other people have a part in building a mega-church and I can’t help but wish that it were me, but I am running out of time. There have been times when I have been tempted lately to hang it all up and go back to just being a pew sitter. Right now, I am just like Philip. I am forgetting that everything isn’t always about me. It’s about Him. As I write this, I am realizing that I must live in the presence of Jesus. I need to be doing the things He wants me to do and to allow myself to be content with that. My contentment must lie in the reality that I can be everything He wants me to be and do anything He wants me to do because I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. What is it that you are facing right now that is robbing you of contentment? Perhaps you also need to stare into the face of Jesus. Perhaps you should also realize that He is all you need.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Can you honestly say Jesus is all you need?

Greater Works
John 14: 12-14

At the conclusion of the movie, *Overboard*, starring Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn, the two stars swim to each other and embrace with such an embrace that you know that it will last forever. The four sons of the character played by Kurt Russell in the next scene are busy writing. When Goldie Hawn asks what the boys are doing, Kurt responds that they are busy compiling their Christmas lists. It seems that they just found out that their “new mom” is richer than their wildest dreams. In fact as the oldest boy is writing, he asks his dad how you spell Porsche. Christians are often caught doing much the same thing after they read John 14: 13, 14. In this verse Jesus promises to give whatever you ask for in His name. Given the fact that we serve a God who created all things, this verse seems at first to be a better thing than Santa Claus. Yet if you look closely at the verse in its context, there are a few things that you should be aware of before you begin your Christmas list.

If you begin your search in verse 12, you will notice that the subject matter that Jesus is addressing lay in the idea that the eleven men remaining in that room were going to do much greater works in their lifetimes than their Master had done. While I will admit such an idea is not hard to believe given the fact that these men would live longer and there would be more of them. Yet Jesus states the reason they will do more is because He is going to the Father. That idea will be explained more fully in our time

tomorrow. For now I will just say that in just days from that very night, these men would see the arrival of God's Holy Spirit. It would be the job of the Holy Spirit to equip and empower His people to do those greater works that Jesus talked about.

So what does it mean to pray for something in Jesus' name? That really lies at the crux of our discussion. There is a twofold meaning to that idea. The first is the truth that those who reside within the Kingdom of God have a greater access to God than those who reside outside that Kingdom. That's because Jesus is right now sitting at the right hand of God, the Father giving our side of the story. As the Apostle Paul said, "There is only one Mediator between man and God, and that's the Lord, Jesus Christ." (1 Timothy 2: 5)

Given the exalted position that Christians now find themselves in, the second meaning to the idea of praying in Jesus' name is that they ought to have an attitude of awe and live a life of gratitude for all that God has given them. Those are the people who understand that they have been given a truly incredible gift when they entered the Kingdom of God. With that idea there is but one response; to do all they can to see that the name of Jesus is praised and glorified. So when their prayers are answered by God, they are quick to give Him all of the credit and glory. They don't seek their own wants and desires any longer. They understand that only seeking that which is eternal is truly important. Their loyalty to God runs far deeper than their desire for immediate gratification.

Let's go back to our movie example. Let's say I decide to use these verses as a kind of leverage to get God to give me a Porsche. Now I have to admit such a car would be fun to drive on a twisty mountain road with the top down and the wind flying through my hair. There is no doubt about it. Yet that car will only last for around ten years, especially at the rate of speed I intend to drive it. It may last longer if my grandmother owned it, but for me ten years max. Now given the fact ten years in heaven will probably seem like ten minutes to us here on earth, it just won't be that big a deal at that point. I think Jesus had a much bigger agenda on His mind that night than my ten minutes of joy in the front seat of a Porsche. The entire theme in the upper room has been the spreading of the Kingdom of God after He is gone from this earth. That is an idea that has eternal consequences, not just ten minutes.

What Jesus is promising here is that we will have His help when it comes to spreading the good news. Whatever we ask for to help us in that endeavor is ours in order that we may do all we can to ensure that His Kingdom is well populated in the end. So what do you need in order to help you spread the good news? Whatever it is, Jesus promised that it is there for the asking. So, what's stopping you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What's stopping you?

The Spirit of Truth
John 14: 15-21

Whenever someone desires to do a study on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, one of the places they begin their search is right here in the 14th chapter and then they usually travel to the 16th chapter of John. That's because up to this point the only time the Holy Spirit visited earth was in a few very brief instances. For example in the 15th chapter of the Book of Judges, the writer says that the spirit of the Lord came upon Samson in power and he killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. After God had finished using Samson that day, the Spirit left him. It wasn't until after Jesus had returned to the heavenly realm that the Holy Spirit came to earth to stay. Right now He dwells in the hearts of those whose personal relationship with Jesus has allowed them to enter into the Kingdom of God. For most of my life, I have lived with the ability to have access to God through the Holy Spirit. That wasn't the case with the men in the upper room that night. They will have to wait another fifty days until the events of the 2nd chapter of Acts will unfold before their eyes.

So since the entire idea of the Holy Spirit was relatively new to these men, what Jesus now teaches them about the Holy Spirit is important. It is also important for us to understand as well. Take a moment to read John 14: 15-21 and we'll get started. The first thing I notice about the Holy Spirit is that He is called a counselor or comforter in some Bible translations. The reason for the different words is that there is really no English equivalent to the Greek word Jesus used here. The Greek word is actually a

combination of two other Greek words that literally mean a calling to one's side. It has the idea of a person being called to the side of another in order to give him comfort, consolation or encouragement. It just like having a personal spiritual assistant with you at all times. When you are reading the Bible and a spiritual "light" comes on as if you are reading that particular passage for the first time, that's the Holy Spirit doing His job. When you have a sense that God is right there in your midst, you are sensing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The second thing I notice in Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit is that He is called the Spirit of Truth. We remember that it was 11 verses ago in our study that Jesus claimed to be truth. That would give us the idea that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are inseparably intertwined. That's because both are referred to in the same teaching by Jesus as being the source of truth.

Third, notice that the world system is in a state of constant rebellion with its creator. It refuses to know or recognize that the Holy Spirit even exists here in this world. That is because the Holy Spirit can never be perceived by a person's five senses. The world only believes in things that it can touch, taste or feel in some way. Those are the only experiences that the world will acknowledge as existing. Those within the Kingdom of God understand that there is a spiritual realm that exists outside of our physical world. To the true born again Christian, the spiritual world is just as real as the physical world. That is one of the many things that make a Christian different from the world.

Fourth, Jesus teaches us that because the Holy Spirit comes to permanently reside within us means that Jesus will also permanently reside within us. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the personal presence of Jesus within us at all times. That idea is what gives verse 18 and 19 its real meaning. He is telling His disciples that while it is true that He will be leaving them for a short period of time, it is a good thing because it will mean that He will return with a more personal and permanent presence than He could ever have in human form.

A long time ago a group called the Navigators put out a set of cards called the Topical Memory System. It was a systematic method of memorizing Bible verses that were printed on little cards. There was a time when I had each of them memorized and most of them still reside in my brain to this day. One of those verses can be found in John 14: 21 and I can still quote that verse from my memory. I brought that subject up because though I memorized the verse, the meaning of the verse has since become clearer in the context in which Jesus spoke its words. When this verse is seen in light of Jesus' initial teaching about the Holy Spirit, we get a picture of how God is going to work in the world after the resurrection of Jesus. The relationship between belief, love and obedience when it comes to God has to be as close as the relationship that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each one cannot exist separate from the other and have the same effect on mankind. It's now time to take a moment and let that thought seep through your brain.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How do belief, love and obedience work together in your life?

THE FINAL DAY
November 11th

The Spirit Teacher
John 14: 22-27

A number of years ago, a Johns-Hopkins University professor asked his graduate students to locate 200 boys, ages 12-16, and research their backgrounds. The assignment then was to predict the future of these boys. The students were sent to the slum area of the city to find the boys. The conclusion reached by the graduate students was that 90% of those researched would spend time in jail. Some 25 years later, Johns-Hopkins University sent the researchers into the slum area again. They were able to locate 180 of the original 200. What they found amazed them. Only four had ever been in jail! When the researchers began to ask this question, they found that they were getting the same answer, "Well, there was this teacher..." The graduate students tracked down the teacher, now living in a retirement home, and inquired about her remarkable influence over a group of boys who were headed for a life of crime. She really could not think of any reason why she would have had that kind of influence. She did mention that "...she truly loved her students." What is the difference between a good teacher and great teacher? One word: Love! (from the magazine, The Mediator)

This teacher understood one of the great truths in life; that the human animal responds best to love. All you have to do is to research our media to understand that great fact. There is another fact about love that shows up in today's Bible reading. That is the fact that one has to be able to give out love in order to gain it. Love is never a one-way street. In John 14: 22-27, Jesus gives us another couple of truths concerning our relationship with God and His manifestation on earth, the Holy Spirit. The first of those truths is just what we have been talking about. If you want God to love you, you need to love Jesus. As we talked about yesterday, God, the Father and Jesus are so closely intertwined that they cannot be separated. There is no way that you can say you love Jesus and not love God, the Father. So it would not take a great leap to believe that if you did love Jesus, then that love would be returned to you from God, the Father.

It's almost as if Jesus here created two different classes of people. Yet these two classes of people are not based upon where they were born or who their parents were. These two classes have nothing to do with what religion they belong to or what country they were born in. Jesus separated people simply by how they feel about God. Where you sit in that equation will all boil down to that one reality. Do you love Him? If you can answer that question in the affirmative, then the rest of what Jesus had to say becomes true in your life. For if you truly love God, you will, as a natural course of that love, only wish to obey Him and that will manifest itself in a changed life.

If you love God, then you free up the Holy Spirit to do the job that Jesus describes here, that of teaching you the things that God believes you need to know. You will also

notice that the things that the Holy Spirit is going to teach you are the things that Jesus said and did while He was here on earth. One of the things that I have always noticed when I have sat under a truly great teacher is that I only can remember the tiniest bit of what that teacher taught me. What I remember more is the feeling of wonderment that I had when I sat in their class. Here Jesus is telling these men that they will have the best of both worlds, they will remember the feelings they had in listening to Him and everything that He taught them. That is what the Holy Spirit also does for us. If you have ever had the experience of talking to someone about Jesus and having these wonderful Bible verses pop in your head, you know exactly what Jesus was saying here.

If you love God, then another great truth will be a reality in your life: you will receive from God a peace that is absolutely indescribable. So, how does that happen? If you think about it, your future is already decided. Jesus says you will live forever. Your life will be guided by a God who loves you and has only your best as His goal for you. You will never be lonely or lost without Him. He has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. Of course, all of that is kind of dependent on your staying in that love relationship with Him. Even the best of us, at times, everyone wanders a bit from that relationship. Yet He is always there for us when we return to Him.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

When is the last time the Holy Spirit taught you something?

How to Grow Spiritual Grapes
John 14: 31

As we pause now in our look at Jesus in the upper room on His final night, He has taken the entire 14th chapter of John to do something that desperately needed to be done. In taking a look at the entire chapter, we need to look at Jesus as the Master Teacher who understands us even better than we understand ourselves. When we started our journey to the upper room, I made a statement that I want now to go back and take another look at. That statement was, “You do the things you do because you think the way you think.” In other words, you will never act differently than you think deeply. If you want to correct wrong actions, it is first necessary to correct wrong thinking. That is exactly what Jesus was doing here with His disciples. Each of these men had begun their evening dealing with the shame of their Master taking on the role of a slave and washing their feet. Then during the meal, Jesus announced to the group that there was a betrayer in their midst. Each man there asked himself if he were that betrayer. I believe that each of them saw a bit of the betrayer in their own lives. I think if I had been in the room that night, I would have thought of things in my own life where I had betrayed Jesus. Then we have Peter’s prideful boast of being willing to lay down his life for Jesus, and Jesus’ subsequent prediction that Peter would disown Him three times before dawn.

If Jesus had left things as they were at that moment, it is doubtful that the church would have ever gotten off the ground. Instead of leaving these men in their own pit of

despair, Jesus begins the process in chapter 14 of lifting them into the realms of heaven. If you take that chapter as a whole, Jesus' whole idea was to say, "Let me tell you about the Father and His many mansions, let me tell you about who I am, let me tell you about the Holy Spirit." He did that for the simple purpose that the more you know and believe about the Holy Trinity, the more it affects your actions. Remember, you do the things you do because you think the way you think.

So much of how you behave is wrapped up in how you view God. As the atheist philosopher Voltaire said, "God made man in His image and now man has returned the favor." By that he meant that the world has humanized God to such an extent that their view of God is that He is not that much different than man. The problem with that view is that I can't worship a God who is like me. How can such a God inspire me to any different level than the one I am currently on? The most important decision you can ever make is to determine your view of God, and that view changes constantly. What Jesus did here for His disciples is to elevate their thinking about God, the Father, God, the Son and God, the Holy Spirit. When you take the time to elevate your view of God, you will find that your attitudes and behavior change with that elevated view. You become what you admire. You do the things you do because you think the way you think.

One of the things that a Master Teacher does is that when he gets done with an important lesson, he brings it all into focus with a great illustration. As we move into the 15th chapter of John, we see Jesus' illustration to bring home the solid teaching in chapter 14. In reading the very last words of the 14th chapter, we see that the group gets up to

leave the upper room. Now some say that on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, they passed a wall carving of a grapevine, others say they were looking at a vineyard growing in the Kidron Valley just outside the Dung Gate. In either case, Jesus points to the scene they were all witnessing and uses it to illustrate the points that He had just made in the upper room. The reason I say that is to caution you against getting your doctrines about God from an illustration. The doctrines you build your life around must come from the unadulterated teaching within the Word of God. In other words, be careful that any beliefs that you carry away from the vine illustration are consistent with what Jesus taught in the 14th chapter, as one is merely an illustration of the other.

As we close today, let me one more time challenge you to spend your life getting to know your creator in new and better ways. We need to always be learning more about God as we allow His word to teach us. Never be content that you know all that you need to know about God. As we strive to gain more insight into the nature and character of God, the side benefit will be that we will become more like Him. That's because you do the things you do because you think the way you think.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How big is your God?

THE FINAL DAY
November 13th

The Gardener Lifts John 15: 1-8

In reviewing what we talked about yesterday, Jesus and His remaining disciples are now walking out of the City of Jerusalem and have come upon a vineyard. Jesus uses that vineyard to illustrate what He had just been teaching these men about the triune God. For most of us this is a very familiar passage in the Bible. Your temptation might be to just stay on its surface. Yet I may be pointing out some of the things that God does for us as we daily live out His plan for our lives that might be a bit different from what you have heard before. In Jesus' illustration at the beginning of the 15th chapter of John, God, the Father, is described as a gardener, husbandman, or farmer, depending on what translation you are using. Do you notice that there are two things that the gardener does to the vine in order to promote the growing of fruit? We will talk about one of those actions today and the other one will have to wait for tomorrow.

The first action of the gardener, according to the New International Version is to cut off every branch that bears no fruit. Now there has been many a pastor who has done all kinds of handstands in order to get this part of the verse to mean that Jesus is talking about someone who is not part of the Kingdom of God. That's because one can't find another section in the Bible where God cuts off someone who is saved and then casts Jesus out of his life. That idea is just inconsistent with who God is and the fact that the Bible teaches that salvation is a permanent thing. The problem here is not in trying to make this verse say something else; the problem is that we don't understand what Jesus was saying in the first place. Now those of you who have been reading these devotions

know that I rarely refer to the Greek directly, but this time I have to do it in order for those Greek students out there to check me out. The Greek word that Jesus uses here is AIRO. It is pronounced eye-ro. If you look up that word in any Greek lexicon you want, the first definition you will see is that this Greek word means to lift or to hoist up.

Now I grew up and still live in California. We have more than a few grapevines growing in our fair state, so I know what a grapevine looks like. The problem I have is that I have no idea what these disciples were looking at. Dr. Earl Radmacher, former President of Western Theological Seminary, tells a story about a tour he was on through the nation of Israel. While riding on the bus, he noticed that they were passing through a vineyard and immediately stood up and shouted out, “Stop the bus.” As the tour bus stopped, the leader of the tour went back to find out what was wrong. Dr. Radmacher could only point outside and exclaim, “Look! It’s John 15!” Later, he did some research and found that vineyards in Israel are tended to in a much different way than anywhere else in the world and that they were still being cared for in the same manner as in Jesus’ day. What he saw were vines that were laying flat on the ground as it was winter at the time and they were in their dormant season. As spring approaches, the farmer goes to each vine and lifts it a little bit towards the sun and places a stone under the main vertical branch to prevent it from returning to the ground. A little later he will repeat the process and lift the main branch a little higher. He does that because he knows that the lifting will prevent the main bulb, which will soon spout new branches and later large clusters of grapes, from developing thousands of small roots that will grow only a short distance into the ground. These tiny roots will only be able to draw small amounts of moisture and the

plant will only produce small, very sour grapes. What the farmer wants is for that vine to draw its water from the plant's main root system that has grown deep in the ground. As a result of his efforts, the farmer will harvest the plump, juicy grapes that Israel is known for.

That is what God does for His children. He patiently lifts each of us up towards the sun so that we may gain more of its energy and allow our developed spiritual root system to do its job in providing water and nutrients to better allow a better quality fruit to grow. Now I am not a farmer, but one thing I know is there is not a fruit tree in God's creation that has fruit the moment it starts to grow. I have an orange tree in my backyard that I planted last year. I know that it is an orange tree because that's what the label said when I bought it. It's not because I have ever seen a single orange growing on it. If you had been a "fruit inspector" that night, you would have not seen a lot of fruit on any of those disciples. It's not that God cuts those branches off; He lifts them into the sunlight so that they will bear much fruit. Jesus is illustrating His earlier idea that "I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." The illustration that Jesus brings us is of a God who does whatever it takes in order to make us fruitful for His kingdom. That's the God whom we serve.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What has God done in your past to lift you up?

The Gardener Prunes
John 14: 2

We are still taking a long look at Jesus' illustration of the vineyard as found in John 15: 1-8. Yesterday, we took a close look at the way that God takes whatever action is necessary for His people to produce fruit for Him. We saw how God lifts His children off of the ground so that large, juicy fruit can appear. Today, we want to take a look at the second action that God does for His children that can be found in verse 2. The New International version says that "every branch that does bear fruit He prunes."

The first problem with that translation is that it doesn't square with the normal principles of farming and the growing of fruit trees. No farmer cuts off a major branch while there is fruit on the tree. That's because he realizes that the tree has a good chance of bleeding to death. At the very least, he realizes the fruit that is present will be seriously affected by the bleeding of moisture from the tree's system. Instead the farmer will always wait until the tree enters its dormant season before he does any major pruning of branches.

The second problem I have with that translation is that it doesn't square with how the Greek word Jesus used is normally translated. The Greek word Jesus used here is KATHAIRO, from which we get the English word, catharsis. The idea here is to cleanse or to purify the fruit. So what, then, is Jesus referring to in His illustration? Well once

again, I am no farmer, but I do have fruit trees in my backyard. What I have found is that it is hard enough to get my fruit trees to bear significant amounts of fruit, but I always seem to be in competition with the various birds and bugs that also exist out my back door. They just seem to think that I grow all of that fruit for their own nourishment and enjoyment. The idea Jesus is giving us here is that the farmer cleanses the fruit in that he removes the pests that seek to infest and steal his crop.

So what does that have to do with my relationship with Jesus? Well I have a lot of bugs that want to infest my life and ruin my fruitfulness for God. Some of those bugs could be things like bad thoughts, attitudes, relationships, times when I am not as committed as I should be, or motives that tend to get in my way as I live my life in service of God. Those of us who have followed Jesus for any length of time have felt the pain of His cleansing. Yet it is those times of cleansing that have made us what we are today. What is the agent that God uses in order to purge us? Jesus gives it to us in verse 3 when He says, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” In fact, the Greek word for “clean” is the same word Jesus used in verse 2 that is translated “prune.” It’s the Bible that God uses to purify us and remove bugs that will threaten the testimony He wants out of us. You have seen God work in this manner every time you have found yourself reading in the Bible and had the Holy Spirit convict you of some bug in your life.

Every time I venture into this chapter of John, I am always impressed at the work involved by God in developing me into a vine that can bear a lot of great fruit. It’s not

that this process works perfectly every time. Even Jesus didn't have immediate results that night. A few hours later after He gave them this lesson, there was Peter whipping out his sword. Just like the time of testing Peter went through that night, the work God does in me is not pleasant at the time, but the ultimate end of it all is well worth it. For in the end, after I have spent a thousand years looking at it, I will see that what God produced in my life has had real staying power. For the fruit that He has worked so hard to produce in me has lasted for eternity. That's what Jesus was trying to convey to His disciples that night. Within the next few hours, they would have to go through a time of testing that would have caused most of us to retire from active ministry. Yet in His final hours on earth, Jesus was busy telling them about God in order to get their thought processes where they needed to be. To be sure that it was indeed dark that night and would soon be getting much darker, but Sunday morning would soon come.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

When was the last time God did some pruning on you?

THE FINAL DAY
November 15th

So, who are the Branches?
John 15: 3-5

For the last couple of days, we have been looking at an illustration that Jesus gave to His disciples about a vineyard and the processes that occur there in order to produce

and get to market some really great fruit for the farmer. Jesus illustrates and brings home some of the truths that He had given them in the 14th chapter of John, so we always want to return back to chapter 14 to get the original teaching and not get too hung up in the illustration. Yet there are some amazing applications for us as we take a look at all that the Father does in order to ensure that His children are productive in promoting His Kingdom throughout the earth. As we get to verse 3-5 in John 15, the first thing that we notice is that there is a change in the pronoun that Jesus uses. It is at that point that He stops referring to the farmer and begins using the pronoun “you,” meaning He was now talking to the men who were following Him to the Garden of Gethsemane as well as everyone who are busy about following Jesus as these men had been doing.

So in answer to the title of our reading today, who are the branches? You are the branches if you have taken that first step to enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the vine and you are its branches. Makes sense so far doesn't it? So what is the main job of a branch? It is to remain attached to the vine. At my house there are several rose bushes that line the driveway between my house and my next door neighbor. I can always tell when someone has parked too close to these roses. In a few days a branch will turn brown and die. As I look more closely, I can see that this branch has been knocked free of the main stem. Such branches will die very quickly because they can no longer gain the things they need for life from the main branch. The same thing is true of us.

So what does Jesus say in this illustration that I need to hear. In verse 4, He tells me that I need to abide in Him. The idea here is simply to believe. Remember Jesus

started at that point in the first part of John 14, when He said, “Believe in the Father, believe also in Me. In my house are many mansions...” It’s always the same starting point isn’t it? It’s always believe, believe, believe. We try to make the Christian life so much more complicated than it has to be. Jesus tries to keep it simple, but we tend to mess it up by overcomplicating. Remember, you will never act differently than you think deeply. Jesus understands this reality so He is telling us to settle down in Him and believe. We need to keep on believing what God is like and we will keep on receiving God’s help in order for me to bear fruit. It’s like the old hymn that says, “Jesus I am resting, resting in the joy of who you are.” That’s what Jesus is trying to tell us in this illustration.

In verse 5, we see one of the greatest truths that can be found in the entire Bible. There are some people who are reading this today who have committed this verse to memory. It is that vital to the kind of person the Christian is striving to become. It is the pathway to becoming more like Jesus. As you take a closer look at that verse, you will see that word, “abide,” once again. If I remain attached to Jesus, I will be in a position to bear much fruit. If you will look over the last 5 verses, you will see a progression present in Jesus’ illustration. We have gone from producing fruit, to producing more fruit, to producing much fruit. Do you see it? That’s the way it is in the Christian life as we grow in Him. He causes us to bear fruit in ever increasing quantities. So we always live with the understanding that the best that a life in Christ has to offer is always ahead of us. That is because tomorrow we will always be bearing more fruit for Him than we did

today. All we need to do is rest in Him and allow Him to give us the water and nourishment that we need in order to bear that fruit. That doesn't sound too hard, does it?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you believe following Jesus is easy or a hard thing to do? Why?

THE FINAL DAY
November 16th

Burning Branches
John 15: 6

As we wind down our time looking at Jesus' illustration of the vine, it has been a wonderful journey. It is my hope that it has been a journey that has allowed you to think a little bit differently about the God whom you serve. Every time I revisit Jesus' teaching in the upper room that night, it always spurs within me a deep desire to get to know God better. This teaching always rekindles within me a sense of the invincible because I serve the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and there is nothing that can stand against that kind of power and authority. As Paul said to the church in Rome, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8: 37-39) There is tremendous security that resides within those words, yet this is something that can muddy

the waters a bit and Jesus is about to talk about that in John 15: 6 as He describes burning branches.

Now before we get too far along in our discussion, it is important to notice that Jesus gives us, once more, a change in pronouns. We see this in both the New American Standard versions and the King James versions of our Bible. He started by talking in the second person when He spoke about all of the things that God, the Father, will do to bring us to a place where we will bear fruit. He talked in the first person when He told us of our need to continually abide in Him. Now Jesus switches over to the third person as He begins to describe the fate of those who fail to stay connected to the branch and so wither and die.

Now the idea of burning in the Bible usually is a symbol of the judgment of God. The problem is that I am not all that convinced that is what Jesus is talking about right here. In order for you to understand what I am talking about, let's go back to the whole idea of fruit. What is the overall purpose of the Christian bearing a lot of fruit? Do we do it because it looks pretty sitting there on the vine? Do we do it because God is a great fan of wine? No, the fruit exists in our lives for the sole purpose of attracting those who are on the outside of the Kingdom to join us and gain a fuller purpose for their lives. We are to bear much fruit so that we may gain many more eternal friends, as Jesus described in the Parable of the Shrewd Manager.

So what happens when a Christian detaches himself from the vine and begins to lose that fresh blush of God in their life? Without the constant infusing of life from Jesus, he begins to wither in his faith and wither in his testimony. There are those in the world who are actively looking for answers. They see the total futility in what the world has to offer and wonder if there might be a better way to live. He runs into a Christian on the street or already in his life and he immediately begins the process of looking for fruit. The true seeker wants to know if there is any reality to the words he hears coming out of the Christian's mouth. Now if the true seeker sees a lot of fruit on that vine because his friend has continued to abide in the source of his life, he will be attracted. A seeker is looking for reality, not empty words.

What will happen if the seeker finds only dead branches when he looks at you? Jesus tells us in verse 6 that he will pick up that branch and burn it, while he mutters the word, "hypocrite," under his breath. He will take the secrets of eternal life and think that their only real use is to be burned. I believe that is what Jesus is warning His disciples of that evening. Most people in the world are not stupid. They can't be faked out for too long before they will come to the understanding that what you are offering is empty and dead. It is at that point that they will walk away from the faith you offer and may never return.

So our challenge is clear. If we are to be productive for God, He will do most of the work. We just have to spend our time abiding in Him and getting to know Him better.

The more we understand the awesomeness of God, the more fruit will be present when anyone wishes to take a look. What is the condition of your branches right now?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What is the condition of your branches today?

THE FINAL DAY
November 17th

Abide in His Love
John 15: 9-17

Earlier in our time with Jesus in the upper room that night, He gave us the key to making a difference in the world for Him. Do you remember what that key was? It can be found in John 13: 34, 35 where Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." It was probably because that great truth went right over the heads of the disciples that Jesus repeats the command in John 15: 9-17. Of course Jesus in this section goes into the subject in much greater detail than He did earlier that evening. It is at this point that Jesus teaches us that we are to abide in His love.

On first glance, abiding in Jesus' love must be the central point from which everything else in our relationship with God and with each other emanates. When God

gave Moses directions on how the nation of Israel was to behave in the world, He started with ten rules and then Moses took the rest of the book of Exodus, all of Leviticus and most of Numbers to explain and enlarge on those ten rules. Moses then wrote the book of Deuteronomy to review all of the rules with the people. Here Jesus gives us but one rule. Are we talking about an oversimplification here or is there something to this idea that is more than meets the eye.

It was not a surprise to me to find that the kind of love that Jesus was talking about here is what Christians refer to as agape love. W. E. Vine defines agape love as, “Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son. But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellence found in the object of that love. It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself.” Did you get that? The kind of love that we are to abide in is not a feeling or a fancy, but a deliberate choice of the will. To abide in Jesus’ love means to make the choice to love Him every moment of every day. Jesus gives us a most excellent of example in what He is talking about when He points to the continual relationship that He had exhibited towards God, the Father.

The love relationship shows up when we obey God. We can talk a lot about love, but it’s only when we put ourselves in a position of subjection to another that our talk becomes reality. The more we set our path towards obeying God, the more we abide in the love that we are talking about here. I stated a few days ago that there are three things

that intertwine in order to make our relationship with a Holy God all that it should be. The three were belief, love and obedience. All of them must be there in substantial quantities if we are to live the life that Jesus is talking about here. All three of them are so interconnected that we cannot separate one out without having the entire relationship fall apart. The other point that needs to be stated about the relationship between belief, love and obedience is that they are the cornerstone that will lead to the existence of the kind of fruit that we have been talking about all week.

There is a really old saying that goes something like this, “Oh to dwell with the saints above; that will be the glory. To dwell with the saints below, well, that’s another story.” We smile at that saying because we see that it is all too true. Another old saying says, “The Christian army is the only army in the world that shoots its own wounded.” If you become a part of any organization in the world, you are going to experience favoritism, politics and a healthy dose of backstabbing. What Jesus says here is that behavior should not be found in the family of God.

Can you imagine what it would be like for a seeker to come out of the world and join a group of people where he is loved and accepted just for who he is? If a church could continually do what Jesus says here, the attraction that would be caused would be like a giant vacuum cleaner that would continually suck the seeker into the Kingdom. The problem is that most churches are filled with people who are not that different from the world. They are like the Church at Ephesus that John describes in Revelation 2: 4, they have lost the original love for Jesus Christ that so marked their beginning. I believe

this is Jesus' call for His church to wake up and get back to their original charge. Yet churches only go as far as their people. The church cannot be anything more than who you are. So if you are going to change the church, you have to begin with yourself. Perhaps it's time for you to take a good long look at how well you are abiding in the love of God.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What can you do to attract a seeker to the Kingdom of God?

THE FINAL DAY
November 18th

The Love Hate Dilemma
John 15: 18-27

In my current business it is impossible to grow that business unless I can recruit other people to go into business with me. I have always thought it was important in my recruiting to present both the positive and negative aspects of the opportunity that I was presenting before another person. It does me no good to present only the positive side of things as people will find out the negative soon after they begin their new career. That's because anytime you start a new business, it is extremely difficult at the beginning. Most people starting a new business work their fingers to the bone and see very little in the way of money for the first year. While Jesus wasn't recruiting a bunch of entrepreneurs, I find it interesting that He believed in the very same thing. Yesterday we talked about

the way that they would win the world, by simply loving each other. By that simple law of attraction, their love for each other would be like a light to a moth in that it would attract great multitudes. The other side of the dice, however, is the fact that once someone crosses into the Kingdom of God, they now find themselves dealing with a very dangerous enemy.

Today we find ourselves still walking through the dark streets of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley over to a garden located on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. If you will take a moment of your day and read John 15: 18 to the end of the chapter, it would help you to understand what we will be talking about today. As you read, notice that Jesus has taken a sharp right turn and has stopped talking about the warm fuzzy that is love and is now taking a look at the sharp stick that is hate. That's because love and hate occupy both sides of the same coin.

It is almost as if the world sees it as its duty to marginalize the true Christian. That is because it must do so if it is to continue to maintain its status quo. The reality of God gets in the way of what the world is all about. Before I go too far, let me remind you that when we talk about the world we are not talking about the planet that we currently occupy. When the Bible talks about the world in the negative sense, it is referring to a hostile, rebellious nature that exists among people who walk on the same ground as you walk. That world is out there and it is not your friend. You just read where Jesus gives you but a few examples of why that is true.

First we see that the world hates you because you are different. The world hates anything that is different. Especially when you are busy telling people that those very things the world purports as important and worthy of our attention are wrong and not worthy of all of our effort and strength. The world hates it when you point out that what it strives for is, at best, only temporary and will not bring lasting joy. There are times when the Christian feels like a salmon in summer. Swimming against a strong current is never easy.

Second, we see that the world hates you because you have the audacity to point out that they have a wrong view of God. When they tell me that God is some cosmic force or that He exists within the rocks and trees, it is hard for me not to burst out in laughter. Where is the proof to back up what they believe? Where is the evidence? The world would like us to believe that God is some kind of heavenly grandfather who looks down on us with a benign smile as if to say, "Children will be children." And they think I have blind faith. At least my belief in Jesus is backed up by the evidence of a number of eye-witnesses.

Third, we see the world hates you when you point out that their hatred of Jesus makes no rational sense. It is not rational to listen to the words He said and the miracles that He did and come to the conclusion that Jesus is the personal embodiment of Satan. The reality is that most times, it is easier for the world to simply ignore Jesus in the false belief that perhaps He will go away.

I have always felt that the amount of opposition in the world you experience is a true reflector of how much of a disciple of Jesus you are. In other words, the closer you walk to Jesus, the more opposition you will see in the world. So your challenge this week is to use the worldly opposition you encounter as a spiritual barometer to measure how close you are to Jesus. I know it sounds the opposite of what you would normally do, but if you are not encountering any opposition to the way you are living, a look around you will probably reveal that Jesus is nowhere in sight.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Are you experiencing any worldly opposition right now?

THE FINAL DAY
November 19th

To Convict and Convince
John 16: 5-15

If you really want to know about someone, the best way is to ask others who know that person intimately. For example, if you want to know all of the good things about someone, you ask their mother. If you want to know about the bad, you ask their siblings. For the really ugly stuff, you go to their “ex.” In our case today, we are finding out about the third person of the triune God directly from the second person in that same trinity. We are taking another look at the Holy Spirit as He is revealed to us by Jesus Christ. The reason I said that we are taking another look is because we were looking and

talking about much the same thing nine days ago when we were talking about the things that Jesus said that are recorded in the 14th chapter of John. Now we are in John 16: 5-15 and Jesus once more brings up the subject. It's almost as if He waited a bit for His first teaching to sink in before giving us some more information. So let's take a look at what other truths we can find out about the Holy Spirit today. Essentially, Jesus is going to give us four activities that the Holy Spirit engages in that affect the lives of a Christian.

The first activity we find the Holy Spirit engaged in is in helping and comforting the believer. If we begin to think like the men who were walking with Jesus that last night, we can see that Jesus is trying to console them with the idea that it will be all right that He goes away. That is because the Holy Spirit is going to come and take His place. It will be just an exchange of one person of the trinity for another. Notice in verse 7, uses the "truly, truly I say to you." He does that when He wants to put particular emphasis on a point. He wants them to get the fact that they will be better off if He leaves and the Holy Spirit comes. They didn't want to believe it and we sometimes wonder if that is true, but if you think about it, having Jesus sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for us is a pretty good thing. Jesus, as we see Him in the gospels, could not be in Capernaum and Jerusalem at the same moment in time. He was limited by time and space. That is not true of the Holy Spirit. Today we have the Holy Spirit constantly ministering individually to many millions of Christians throughout the world today, which is something Jesus as He appeared in the first century could never do.

The second activity we find the Holy Spirit doing is convicting and convincing people every time they fall short of all that God wants for them. The Greek word Jesus uses there has both ideas within it. It's the idea that we need to hear about where we fail and that point needs to be hammered home so that we pay attention. I don't know about you but there are times when I need to be whacked over the head with a board in order to get it. That's the job of the Holy Spirit; to do the whacking. It's the Holy Spirit who convinces us that Jesus is the answer to all that is life. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces us that we will never be righteous enough to get into the kingdom by our own efforts. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces us that there will come a time when we will have to give an account for our time here on earth.

The third activity we find the Holy Spirit doing is in guiding us so that we can even find the truth. It was the Holy Spirit's job to inspire God's chosen men to write what we call the Bible. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to draw us to the words He caused them to write and to use those words to guide us to the truth they contain. Think about the last time you were reading the Bible and you felt a burning sensation deep within your soul and understood that you needed to internalize what you were reading. It was almost as if the Bible were talking right to you. That was the Holy Spirit doing His job.

The final activity that we find the Holy Spirit doing is that He is actively giving all of the glory to Jesus Christ. The Spirit of truth leads us to Jesus, the source of that truth. Since God, the Father has given all things to His Son; we see completeness in these words. All the parts of God, as He has revealed Himself, are represented in one package

here. We get the idea of wholeness. We see all aspects of God's glory work together for our benefit.

One can't grasp the reality of God that is revealed in this tiny section of the Bible without shaking his head in wonderment. Who am I that God would take such time and effort to see that I am able to maintain a close relationship with the creator of the universe? Sometimes I wonder why God would care so much about me. Yet the Bible clearly states that He does love me that much. Such knowledge about God only directs me to a position of being as close to Him as I can get. What about you?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you want to get closer to God as a result of what you have just read?

THE FINAL DAY
November 20th

Irrepressible Joy
John 16: 16-24

Sometime ago, a poor, nervous wreck called on a famous London doctor. Said the doctor: "You need to laugh. Go down and hear Grimaldi, the famous clown. All London is holding its sides laughing at him. "But the visitor straightened himself and said, "Doctor, I am Grimaldi." (From the Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations) It seems that every time you watch an interview with a famous comedian on the television, the comedy

that you can't stop laughing over comes out of a life that is filled with pain and sadness. There are times when, as a defense mechanism, a person will turn to comedy as a means of release from the pain they feel in real life. What happens to a person on the outside can have differing effects on the kind of person they allow us to see. Some will react to pain by withdrawing from society altogether, clamping a tight lid on their emotions until one day it blows up from all of the pressure. Others go in completely the opposite direction and will turn to comedy to mask the inner hurt they feel. Imagine if you will another scenario for those who have gone through some kind of pain in life. Imagine a way of not only turning from that pain to a place of great joy, but of getting to a point where the joy completely replaces all of the pain that life can cause. That is what Jesus is talking about in our time today. He is talking about a joy that cannot be extinguished. He is talking about irrepressible joy. We have now come to John 16: 16-24.

We are still walking with the disciples along the road that lead to the Garden of Gethsemane outside Jerusalem. The disciples were still puzzled over what Jesus was trying to tell them. They could tell from His demeanor that something big was about to happen, but they just couldn't understand how much their world was about to be turned upside down. In looking back with hindsight, we understand the events that would happen over the next day, but they didn't have that luxury. We understand that Jesus was speaking about His own death and resurrection. Yet in looking at Jesus' words, we see a much deeper meaning than just a single event in time. In fact, most who are reading this today can think back to a time in their lives when they made the very same transition that

these disciples would soon be making. It happened the moment you finally said “yes” to Jesus and you’re life has never been the same since.

I have heard it said that there are two events in life that cause the most intense physical pain that humans endure. One is child birth; the other is a kidney stone. If you have any experience with either of these events, then you can relate. The real difference between the two is in the end result. With child birth, you normally end up with a beautiful, helpless child in your arms that make you forget all about the pain that was present only a few moments ago. With a kidney stone, there is no reward at the end, except that you no longer have to endure the pain. Jesus chooses to use the illustration of child birth for that very reason. There is something so wonderful at the end of all of the pain and uncertainty that these men will have to endure, that they will completely forget and concentrate on the wonderment of Jesus’ resurrection. I suppose if you were to ask Peter about that time, he would only tell you about walking into the tomb and seeing it empty. He would not tell you about the hours of personal anguish he went through the day before.

Irrepressible joy is defined as that kind of joy that cannot be restrained, repressed or controlled. The only way irrepressible joy can happen is when it comes from a source that cannot be restrained, repressed or controlled. That means that the only source for irrepressible joy is from God, Himself. All other sources can be controlled and manipulated. As we have seen so many times before, Jesus spent His entire ministry describing a relationship between a creator God and His people that is a transforming

experience for His creation. He replaces life as we know it with His peace and His joy. He gives us new direction in life and a new sense of purpose. As we read in verse 24, He even gives us all of the tools to accomplish what He asks of us so that our joy might be complete.

Think back on the last time that you were privileged to be used by God. Do you remember the joy that you felt afterward as you were used to accomplish something so wonderful, it was beyond words? That is what Jesus is talking about here. Now extend that thought to what it will be like throughout eternity and you will have a glimpse of your future. So, hold your head up high, be willing to be used as a tool for the Master, and you will be in for a steady diet of irrepressible joy.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How long has it been since you experienced this irrepressible joy?

THE FINAL DAY
November 21st

I Still Love You
John 16: 25-33

In the Old Testament, there was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel by the name of Hosea. God had Hosea marry a prostitute by the name of Gomer and had three children. After Gomer leaves Hosea and moves in with another guy, Hosea is

commanded by God to go to Gomer and show his love for his wife and to bring her back home. All of this was done in order to show Israel something about the God they were rejecting at the time. If you know anything about the history of the northern kingdom of Israel, they quickly abandoned the worship of the one true God and took up the worship of the false gods that the former occupants of the land, the Canaanites, had worshipped. God's message to Israel was, "Even though you have left me, I still love you." The same thing can be said, in a somewhat lesser sense, about what Jesus now tells His disciples as they near the Garden of Gethsemane. We now pick up our story in the 16th chapter of John, reading verses 25-33.

As Jesus nears the end of His time on earth, these verses give us the idea that the relationship between the Master and His disciples was changing. It had to. If these men were to establish the church, Jesus had to complete the task of cutting the apron strings. In these verses we see that Jesus has stopped talking in figures of speech and now tells them in the plainest language possible that He came from God, the Father, and would now be returning back to the throne room of heaven. Something must have pricked the disciples' conscience because what follows is a two-fold statement of faith. The disciples now believe that 1) Jesus possesses knowledge about all things, and 2) that He did, in fact, come from the God of Israel. I suppose the disciples were expecting a pat on the back and a "well done" from Jesus, but Jesus didn't always live up to their expectations. Instead of a pat on the back, Jesus predicts their abandonment of Him in the coming hours. It is at that point that Jesus gives them two truths that I want to spend the rest of our time together taking a look at.

The first truth He gives is that even though the disciples are going to scatter and abandon Him, He will not be alone. Even in His darkest hour, God is right there with Him. Even though His closest friends in the world walked out on Him, His Father never did and never will. What Jesus gives here is a reiteration of words He said earlier in the upper room when He said, “Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work.” It is impossible to separate Jesus from God, the Father. We talked earlier about how intertwined the triune God is. That is never more important than when Jesus faced His ultimate trial. He drew all of the strength and power He needed from that relationship so that when things got really bad, Jesus could stay the course and complete His task. The same thing is true of the relationship that you can have with God. It's the same idea as that old cartoon showing a husband driving and his wife in the passenger seat of their car. The wife says, “Remember when we were first married and we used to sit close to each other when we rode in the car?” To which the husband replies, “I haven't moved.” When we sense a distance from God, it is never God who moved. It's always us. It doesn't have to be that way. God is there anytime we care to call on Him. It's just that He doesn't go where He is not wanted. The question you have to ask is do you really want Him close to you at all times?

The second truth Jesus gave His disciples that night is that the peace He gives them overcomes anything that this world can throw against them. What they are about to witness is going to transform their lives. They are going to witness the world throw

everything it had against their Master, and they were going to see that it wasn't going to be good enough. In three days they are going to be witness to the greatest miracle of all time. The world is going to do its worst and in the end, Jesus will be victorious. The truth is He will always be victorious over anything the world can muster. Sometimes we can get the idea that this world is on the fast track to destruction. Sometimes we get the idea that there is no answer to the awful scourge of religious extremism. The reality is that the Christian can find peace in the pages of their Bible. We can read the last page and can know who wins. When the dust finally settles and the last chapter in the history of planet earth is written, we know who will still be standing and who will fall. I don't know about you, but that truth gives me a tremendous peace.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Are you experiencing His peace right now?

THE FINAL DAY
November 22nd

The Other Lord's Prayer
John 17: 1-5

When you ask about the Lord's Prayer to the average man on the street, he will begin reciting that which is tradition, "Heavenly Father, hallowed be thy name..." To be sure that the words that can be found in the 6th chapter of Matthew are well known as "The Lord's Prayer." Yet as we talked about when we took a look at that section of the

Bible earlier, Jesus intended that prayer to be a model of how we are to communicate with God. When we get to the 17th chapter of John, we see what some Bible scholars regard was the true Lord's Prayer. I suppose that is because what we read in this chapter was the only time we are told the actual things that Jesus prayed about that night. There are many times in the gospels where we are told that Jesus withdrew to pray, but we are never made privy to what was being said between two parts of the trinity, Father and Son. Here it is much different. So I want to know what was said here, so over the next three days, we will be taking a closer look at the kinds of things that were on Jesus' mind in His last hours on earth.

Actually the prayer in John 17 is another way Jesus summarized what He had just taught the disciples in the upper room. Foremost in His mind was that He was leaving with these men the future of God's work here on earth. It would be a daunting task even under the best of circumstances, but Jesus wasn't about to leave this world under the best of circumstances. These men were about to go through a time of severe testing where all of the powers of evil and darkness were to be in complete charge of the events that happened around them. Their newfound faith was about to be tested almost to the breaking point. Jesus understood that and this prayer, along with all of His teaching that night, were as a direct result of what Jesus understood to be the real danger present that evening. In the end, He loved these men and His desire was that they remain as close to Him during the next week as they had been for the last few years.

With that in mind, let's begin by taking a look at John 17: 1-5. We see immediately that Jesus understood that the time had come for Him to leave the earth. He has two requests of His Father. The first request was that the Father would glorify the Son in order that the Son could glorify the Father. How is that possible? It seems on first glance to almost be self serving. Yet when you think about it, how are both the Father and the Son glorified? What was the point of God sending His son into the world in the first place? It was to provide a path so that man could find his way back to God. Jesus says as much when He refers to the subject of Eternal Life, but His definition of Eternal Life makes us shake our heads in wonderment. We are used to the idea that Eternal Life is sometime in the future. Here Jesus says that eternal life is that man may know God, the Father and God, the Son. Let your mind wander back to the first words that Jesus spoke in the 14th chapter of John, "You believe in God, believe also in Me." It's the same idea. The foundation of Eternal Life is always belief. It's the narrow door that Jesus talked about in His Sermon on the Mount. Eternal life begins and ends with Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Your answer to that question determines whether or not you will enter through the narrow door or continue on the highway to destruction.

Jesus' second request of the Father is that the Son be allowed to return to the former glory that He had known since before the earth was even created. Once again we are reminded of all that Jesus had said that evening. He had taught that it was vital that He leave this earth because He had a much more important job to do, that of sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for His people still on earth. Jesus' second request shows that He is most anxious to begin that work on our behalf.

So what can you take out of our time together today? What I get out of today is that things are not always about me. That is hard for people to say much less believe. Jesus gives us a tremendous example in this prayer. To be sure, there will be time for Jesus to pray about what was about to happen to Him in the next hours, but that is not where His heart was at that moment in time. Paul said that we are to think of other people and their needs before we've even had a chance to think about our own. (Phil 2: 1-4) Jesus gives us an excellent example of that principle right here. He thought of others before He thought of Himself. Perhaps if we could get a little better at that, our relationships with others and with God would be all the better?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you normally think of others before you think of yourself?

THE FINAL DAY
November 23rd

Prayer for the Disciples
John 17: 6-19

We talked yesterday of Jesus' unselfishness as He prayed and took care of the needs of His disciples on His final night. We see no greater example of that unselfishness than the portion of the final Lord's Prayer where He openly prayed for these men and the trials that they would go through for His sake. I believe that Jesus not only prayed for their

strength over the next few hours, but also for their future ministry. The reason I say that can be seen in what Jesus prayed for that night. In John 17: 6-19, we will be taking a look at four separate requests that Jesus makes for these men and how each of them also applies to us today.

The first request can be found in verses 11 and 12 where Jesus prays for their unity. As we have talked about before, the disciples were anything but unified during the last few months. Most of the time, they could be seen squabbling over who was going to be the greatest in the upcoming Kingdom of God. From the vantage point of history, their dispute ended that very night. I suppose you can assume that Jesus' prayer was quickly answered or the disciples were so scared of losing their lives, that the dispute seemed trivial. Jesus prayed that night that these men may be as united as He was with His Father. He knew there is strength in numbers and a unified front is a great testimony in a world full of divisiveness. That fact is never better demonstrated than in the area of professional team sports. It doesn't matter what sport you choose, it is not the most talented who win championships, it's always the team that plays together as one. The same thing is true when you are doing God's work.

The second thing Jesus prayed for that night was joy. We talked a few days ago about irrepressible joy. Jesus repeats that lesson in His request of His Father in verse 13. Irrepressible joy can only come from a source outside of your self that cannot be suppressed or controlled. That's what Jesus was praying for here. Given the fact that Jesus goes right into mentioning the opposition that these men will have to face, it seems

on the surface to be utterly impossible to have joy in the midst of intense persecution; yet Jesus prays for exactly that. The only way irrepressible joy can happen is if we take on a new citizenship that is not of this world. As Peter later said, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2: 9) Irrepressible joy happens to you when you finally realize that this world has absolutely no bearing on your eternal future.

The third thing Jesus prayed for that night was that these men would receive protection from God against the world and Satan. The world desperately needed these men. Again from the vantage point of history, the world has never been the same since these men came on the scene and began to minister to their generation. The impact of their lives is still being felt today. The same thing can be said for you. A tool in the hands of the Master has an effect that will last for eternity. Sometimes we don't think of ourselves in that light, but it is true none the less. It might not be until we stand within the Kingdom of God when we will be made aware of all of the impacts that our lives have made in our short time here.

The fourth thing Jesus prayed for was that the disciples be sanctified. Sanctification is that process where someone is made holy as evidenced by a changed lifestyle. Jesus points to the truth, as revealed in God's word, which operates as the sanctifying agent. Now you have to remember the term, “God's Word,” has multiple meanings. All they had at that time that could be seen as God's Word was what we refer to as the Old

Testament. Yet if we go back to the very first verses of John’s gospel, we read that God’s Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory. Jesus had just gotten finished telling them that one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit would be to bring to their remembrance all of the things Jesus had taught them at the very moment that they needed those truths. It’s the working of the Holy Spirit that still causes us to maintain a lifestyle that makes a difference in the world. All you have to do is to recall the last time the Holy Spirit revealed something in your life that was not pleasing to God. You’ll know that the Holy Spirit does the job well.

Well that’s the list. I hope that you noticed that all of these prayer requests are just as much applicable to your life today as they were on that evening. It is my hope that these prayer requests of Jesus have been a great help to you in your daily life as you walk with Jesus. I know they have made a great difference in mine.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How has this changed what you pray for on a regular basis?

THE FINAL DAY
November 24th

Jesus Prayed for Me
John 17: 20-26

The Coca-Cola Co. in 1996 announced a basic shift in its world view, eliminating the very concept of a "domestic" and "international" Coca-Cola beverage business in the administrative structure of its worldwide operations. In a move that analysts said was the first for any major consumer products company, but that could be imitated, Coca-Cola downgraded its U.S. business to just part of one of six international business units in the company's global geographic regions. "It's quite a clever announcement to investors," said Roy D. Burry of Oppenheimer & Co. "Coca-Cola is saying, 'Don't buy a program of international portfolios, but buy our stock, because we are the world.'" It seems that business has discovered a principle that Jesus taught a couple of millennia ago, that there is great strength in unity. We have been taking an extended look at Jesus' great prayer in John 17 and are now ready to finish our task. In verses 20 to 26, Jesus now turns His attentions on all of those people who would believe as a result of the ministry of His disciples. That means you and me. As you read these verses, you get the idea that the overriding request that is found in them is the idea of unity.

Church unity is a great idea to talk about, but a really hard one to implement. That's because in order to achieve it, we have to subjugate ourselves to the wants and desires of someone else, and that is something humans are reluctant to do. According to the Bible there are at least two main causes of disunity. We see the first right off the bat in the Book of Acts. Our own sin nature leads us to split off from each other. The church at the end of the second chapter of Acts is absolutely united. Like no other time in its history, the church acted as one body. Then there came a couple of by name of Ananias and Sapphira who wanted to look out for only themselves. By the 6th chapter, we have

the Greek speaking Jews complaining about the Hebrew speaking Jews. And don't get me started about the whole Gentile controversy that began in chapter 10. Throughout the New Testament we see examples of people who want to use religion to further their own ambitions. They gather a group of unsuspecting people and lead them astray as a means of gaining some kind of power.

The other great cause of church splits is spiritual immaturity. In the 4th chapter of Ephesians, Paul gives us this charge, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." It is the role of a pastor to equip and to train God's people so that there are no divisions within the Body of Christ.

In John 17, Jesus prays, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." So was Jesus being a bit naïve thinking that He could actually pray and the church would suddenly stay united until He came again? If so, I'm afraid that we have greatly disappointed Him. No, I believe the point of this prayer is to show us how important our unity is to God. Of all of the things Jesus could have prayed for me, this is the one thing He chose. He could have prayed for my witness, for me to attain a state of holiness, or even that I might stay true to Him all my life. Instead He chose to pray for unity. Yet if you think about it, all those other things Jesus could have

prayed for are all bound up in the idea of unity. United churches have a powerful witness. United churches hold each other accountable and encourage each other to maintain a state of holiness. United churches help me to maintain a close fellowship with God that I can't hope to attain by staying home on Sunday.

So here we have something that Jesus desired above all else and a world filled with divided churches. What do we do now? Well my feeling has always been that unity begins with me. I can't affect Christians all over the globe. I can affect me. If I will spend my life doing what I can to promote unity within the Body of Christ that I am closest to, and you do the same, perhaps the whole idea of unity is not such a pipe dream after all.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you sense a spirit of unity in your church? What can you do about it?

THE FINAL DAY
November 25th

Behind the Scenes
Luke 22: 4-6, Matt. 26: 3-5

In 1930, an English lawyer published a book that was never supposed to be written. In the first chapter of that book, Who Moved the Stone, author Frank Morison describes how he began his journey by attempting to legally prove that Jesus' history rested upon a

very tenuous foundation. As a lawyer, he felt he could use his expertise to debunk the historical Jesus and thereby expose Him for the fraud Mr. Morison felt He was. That was the original outline with which Morison began his research. The book that was the end result of all his legal research is regarded by many as one of the foremost proofs for the historical Jesus that has ever been written. Not only did Mr. Morison become convinced that Jesus actually existed from the evidence he found, but he eventually gave his life to this one who he originally intended to cast aside. That book has meant more than that to me in my life time. While I am glad Mr. Morison found Jesus in his research, his book has been a major force in shaped my thinking about what happened to Jesus during his arrest and trial. For those of you who have read *Who Moved the Stone*, you will see a lot of Frank Morison in what I am about to write. For those of you who haven't read this amazing book, you need to get yourself a copy and read it.

Whenever one takes a look at the end of Jesus' existence here on earth, there has to be more than casual attention paid to the role that time plays in what transpired. Normally we skip over that aspect of things and concentrate only on what happened and never question the role time played in our drama. The other thing one needs to pay careful attention to are the principal characters and what each of them contributed to the overall events of the day that is now called Good Friday. We will be taking a look at the role the Jewish Leaders, Judas, Pontius Pilate and Jesus, Himself played.

So let's begin by taking a look at Judas Iscariot. One wonders why the Jewish leadership even needed Judas at all? Luke 22: 6 tells us that Judas had agreed with the

Jewish Leadership to hand Jesus over when there was no crowd present. Yet as you take a careful look at what happened that last week, that can't be all there was to it. Jesus was not hiding. Every day He and His band took the walk around the Mount of Olives over to nearby Bethany. If all the Jewish Leadership needed was a time when He was alone, any decent ambush could have done the trick. An ambush could have easily been set up anywhere along that lonely stretch of road that week. Yet that ambush never happened. Why not? The answer can be found in Matthew 26: 3-5. Matthew tells us that the Caiaphus had held a meeting where Jesus demise was plotted, but it was decided at that point not to do the deed at Passover because of the extreme risk that there would be a riot among the people.

What the average person living today needs to understand is that during Passover, which began Friday at sundown, Jewish Law required that no work be done for the seven holy days of the feast as well as the three half-holy days immediately following. That meant that if Jesus were arrested during the week before Passover, He would have to be executed by sundown Friday or held in jail for the ten days that Passover was celebrated. Given that Passover was a pilgrimage feast drawing Jews from all over the world, this would have been an extremely dangerous thing to do. Psychologists will tell you that when you swell a population beyond a certain point, the situation becomes very volatile and unstable. In the population that was present in Jerusalem that week would have been hundreds who had been healed by Jesus and who would not take kindly to their Master languishing in jail. The Jewish Leadership was conscious of that fact and had already

decided not to arrest Jesus until after everyone had gone home from Passover. So what could possibly have changed their minds? I will answer that question tomorrow.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

This might a new thought for you, how do you feel about it?

THE FINAL DAY
November 26th

The Roll of Fear

Yesterday I asked a question as to why the Jewish leadership even considered arresting Jesus during Passover when everything went against such a move on their part. To answer that question, you have to analyze the role fear plays in the events of that week. We already talked about the fear that the Jewish Leadership had over the extreme consequences that would come about if they failed to get Jesus executed by sundown on Friday of that same week. No one could foretell the political consequences of the forcible seizure of one whom a great number of the population believed to be Israel's Messiah. In those days riots were not looked upon with great enthusiasm by the Sanhedrin. The only reason they maintained their power base in Roman-held Israel was because they were able to control the population and keep the peace. A good riot would ruin everything.

Another fear that warrants our attention is the fear of Jesus, Himself. Jesus' reputation for miracles was well known and as such, that made Him an incalculable quantity. If Jesus were to elude their grasp by supernatural means, the damage to their reputation among the people could have been catastrophic. In other words, these men would be the butt of many a party joke in their day. There is no way they could know if Jesus would use His power to evade arrest as He had done in His hometown of Nazareth. With all of this going against them, why did the Sanhedrin wait until almost the last moment, the day before Passover began, to arrest Jesus? To do so at this late hour meant that everything would have to be timed precisely and the task would be much harder than if they had merely waited until after the feast.

Enter on the scene our villain, Judas Iscariot. While part of the answer to our question was the fact that Judas knew Jesus would be in the Garden of Gethsemane later that evening, I don't believe that to be the entire answer. Another piece of the puzzle that Judas provided was the fact that Jesus' heart was bending to the cross. He had talked about it often enough. Judas knew that Jesus was expecting it, knew it was coming and was walking inexorably towards it. To me the most important piece of this puzzle was that fact that Judas knew that if Jesus were arrested that night, He would offer no resistance.

Yet Jesus was not arrested as He left the upper room. Remember Judas had left the scene at the beginning of the meal, so at least a couple of hours had gone by until the band left the house. He was not arrested as He passed through the guarded gates of

Jerusalem. There was no crowd waiting for Him at the garden. In fact, Jesus and His party had to wait a considerable time in the garden for the mob to show up. At least some of the men who followed Jesus were seasoned fishermen, who were used to long vigils at night; yet these men fell fast asleep not once but three times waiting for the mob to arrive. Conservatively estimating that the Passover meal began right at six, we must be talking about 11:30 PM at the earliest. So what could possibly have been occupying the Sanhedrin that could have taken so long?

Before we go too long in our saga, let me address what is probably on your minds about now. If these events happened why are they not in the Bible? The answer is simple; the writers of the gospels were in the room with Jesus, or in the case of Luke in interviewing those in the room. How could they know what was happening outside of their view? When you study the Bible, you always have to take into account the history and the culture of the times in which the Bible was written. One of the things that I have taken a great deal of time to do is to give you the cultural and historical background that surrounded the Biblical events we have looked at. To me, the Bible doesn't make sense without such a look. The Bible was not written in a vacuum. These are real stories, set in real times about real people and the Bible must always be interpreted in that light.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Does fear rule your life or does Jesus?

The Roll of Pontius Pilate
Luke 13: 1-3

We are now going to continue our examination of what occurred behind the scenes that led up to the arrest of Jesus Christ. If you were a fly on the wall in the still lit Palace of the High Priest that night, what would you have witnessed? You would have seen an absolute flurry of activity. As Judas arrived and told his tale, the decision would have been made to take advantage of this most extraordinary opportunity. As they paid Judas off and dismissed him, runners would have been sent to round up the seventy members that would soon be called upon to verify and add their approval of the verdict that would be reached by the court that would be assembled that night. The rounding up of seventy people in crowded Jerusalem would have taken a bit of time. In addition there would have been a trial to organize and witnesses to procure. The leadership would have had to overcome immense legal complications to ensure a guilty verdict. As we have discussed before, failure here was not an option for these men. Their futures and their positions were hanging in the balance.

The final cog in the wheel is never stated, but is implied in the Bible; the Jewish leadership must have been in contact with Pontius Pilate that night. There is only one man in all of Jerusalem who would have dared interrupt Pilate at such a late hour, and that would have been the High Priest, himself. It was a risky move, but the leadership had to know if Pilate would be willing to hear the case on his balcony. The Jewish

leadership could not enter his secular palace and still be ceremonially clean to eat of the coming Passover. The High Priest had to have assurances that Pilate would not only ratify the Sanhedrin's verdict but also would grant them the death penalty. For Pontius Pilate to insist on holding his own examination of Jesus would throw the outcome in doubt and the High Priest just couldn't have risked that possibility.

So what do we know about this Pontius Pilate? We know he was born in Seville, Spain and that he came from a fighting family. We know he served under the Roman general Germanicus in what is now called Germany. We also know that during a prolonged stay in Rome, he caught the eye of one Claudia Procula and later married her. Claudia Procula was the illegitimate daughter of Claudia, the third wife of Augustus Caesar. Upon recommendation from the Roman senator, Sejanus, Pilate was appointed procurator of Judea in 26AD and was given the rare privilege of taking his wife along.

The historic impression of Pontius Pilate was that he was a coarse and tactless man who enjoyed using his power to enforce his will on others. One wonders why he appeased the Jews by allowing the crucifixion of Jesus, when at other times he went out of his way to vex them. One episode comes to my mind that will illustrate what I am talking about. Under cover of darkness, Pilate had a Roman insignia smuggled into Jerusalem and erected in the temple in order to promote the Roman effort to worship Caesar. The Jews protested for six straight days. Finally Pilate had had enough so he sent soldiers into the temple area to order the crowd to disperse or die. The Jews that

were present bared their necks and prepared themselves for the Roman short sword that they knew was coming. Fortunately Pilate relented and had the insignia removed.

Another time Pontius Pilate robbed the temple in order to acquire enough funds to build an aqueduct into the city. During the resulting riot, Pilate ordered soldiers into the crowd to do a little indiscriminate slaughtering. This was the episode that Jesus talked about in Luke 13: 1-3.

The final chapter of Pontius Pilate occurred in Samaria where the local residents had uncovered some artifacts supposedly buried by Moses. At Pilate's order, Roman soldiers moved to disburse the crowd, killing thousands. For that episode, Pontius Pilate was recalled to Rome in 36AD.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Is a comfort to you to know that God controls even a Pontus Pilate?

THE FINAL DAY
November 28th

A Quiet Evening at Home
Mark 14: 67, Matt. 27: 19, John 18: 3

So to sum up what we know so far about the behind the scenes activity that would have taken place Thursday evening within the Palace of the High Priest in Jerusalem, we

have been describing a chaotic scene as it unfolded that evening. After all, this was seen by the Jewish leadership as an opportunity that was just too good to pass up. Jesus of Nazareth had been a thorn in their side for too long. Now it was time for a little pay back. One can only imagine the smiles on their faces as their careful planning proceeded. All of the cogs were fitting quite nicely, but the final and most important cog had yet to be secured. Without the backing of Pontius Pilate, they might as well all go home. At least they would live to fight another day by going to their original plan to wait until the Passover was done and over.

Pilate was in Jerusalem for the holidays staying in the palace that Herod the Great had built at great expense. It was not his usual home as he preferred the gentle breezes along the coast at Caesarea. This was Passover and he also understood the potential for danger at this time of year. He couldn't risk something happening and not being right there to control the situation for Rome. His Roman masters wouldn't understand that he would rather be sunning himself on the beaches of Caesarea when all hell broke loose in Jerusalem. He was sitting with his wife before a warm fire as the night, according to John Mark (Mark 14: 67), was cold. There was no one else in the room as a man of his position has few friends and fewer still that he could trust.

His quiet evening alone would have been interrupted by a servant informing the ruler that the High Priest had just arrived and was requesting a few moments of his time. He excused himself from his wife and went to meet this "Jew" in another room. Caiaphus informed him that an important political offender was going to be arrested that

night. Pilate would have been told that a trial was to take place immediately and if the offender were found guilty, the punishment would involve the death penalty. Caiaphus would have wanted to know if Pilate would consent to hear the case on his balcony and to simply ratify the verdict of the Sanhedrin so that this offender could be executed by sundown Friday night to avoid any unpleasantness that might, otherwise, ruin a lovely holiday.

As Pilate returned to the quietness of his evening, a curious Claudia, no doubt, wanted to know what had disturbed their quiet evening. That her husband told her what had transpired is implied in a curious event that only Matthew records. Matthew 27: 19 says that as Pilate was sitting on the seat of judgment, there came a note from his wife warning him to have nothing to do with this innocent man as she had suffered much in a dream because of him. It should be noted that Claudia was not a disciple of Jesus. Her thoughts were for her husband alone. It was her note that inspired a renewed sense of justice within Pontius Pilate, but we will deal with that later.

With the assurance that Pilate, no doubt, gave the High Priest, orders were given to have Jesus arrested that evening and brought to the house of Annas and then to the Palace of the High Priest for His trial, These would be Jesus' first steps on His journey to Calvary. The events that were foreseen at the beginning of time were now set in motion.

So how does one know that Pontius Pilate was consulted that evening? I mean the probability is obvious, but how do you know. Take a moment and look up John 18: 3.

Do you notice who John says was in the mob of people sent out to arrest Jesus? A detachment of soldiers could have been ordered by only one man in Jerusalem. That man would have been none other than Pontius Pilate.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

Do you agree that these events actually happened?

THE FINAL DAY
November 29th

In the Garden
Matt. 26: 36-46

There was a great contrast that evening. While chaos reigned at the Palace of the High Priest as the Jewish leadership busied itself with the business of making the final arrangement to rid themselves once and for all of this trouble maker from Galilee, quiet and solitude greeted Jesus and His disciples as they entered through a gate into the Garden of Gethsemane. The Bible tells us that Jesus was a frequent visitor to this peaceful setting. It was there that He found the solitude He sought for some much needed prayer. While Jesus did go there that night to pray, it is not unrealistic to assume that His spirit was anything but peaceful. We will mostly be in Matthew 26: 36-46, though I will be referring to Luke 22: 39, 40 for a brief moment.

As you read Matthew's account, we are told that soon after their arrival, the group broke up into three distinct smaller groups. If you had been there that night you would have seen eight men gathered in one group. You would have seen a second group consisting of Peter, James and John in a place some distance from the first. Finally you would have seen Jesus off in a place by Himself. Jesus gave His disciples a charge to spend some time in prayer. The Luke verses I referred to above says that Jesus gave His disciples the specific charge that they were to pray that they would not fall into temptation. The original language Jesus used here means literally to continually keep on praying that you may not even once fall into temptation. What these men were about to experience would try even the most steadfast of followers. Their only hope to withstand such an assault comes only through the power of prayer to an almighty God.

Why did Jesus separate out Peter, James and John? We see here that Jesus had a dual need in His life at that moment. He needed the comfort of His closest friends to be near Him and to provide Him courage in His hour of trial. He also needed to be alone with the Father to gain strength from Him. So what did Jesus pray for that evening? Mark 14: 36 tells us that Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father," he said, "Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." The human side of Jesus was praying that God would possibly find another way in order to redeem the human race. Yet with almost the same thought, Jesus knew there was no other way. From the beginning of man's rebellion, the only thing that was acceptable to pay the penalty for all of that rebellion was the shedding of blood. In this case, it had to be the blood of the Lamb of God, the only Son of God. Nothing else would provide a

permanent solution to the sin dilemma. In the end, Jesus knew the die was cast and all of the pain and suffering that He would have to endure over the next several hours had to be.

Jesus returned on three separate occasions and found His disciples fast asleep. Matthew records that they fell asleep because their eyes were heavy. They tried to fight against sleeping, but lost the battle three different times. Obviously they were also unaware of what was about to happen. For if they had been aware of the imminent danger they were in, there is no way they could ever have fallen asleep. The third time Jesus had to awaken His followers, the end was near and it appears that Jesus had received the peace from God that He so desperately sought. As the disciples rose, they were greeted by the sound of a large crowd of people approaching and with the sight of many torches to light their way.

So what do we take away from all of this? I find it interesting that God did not grant Jesus' request by taking the cup from Him and finding another way to redeem mankind. God did, however, give His son the strength to get through the sufferings so that the greater good of advancing the Kingdom of God could take place. Sometimes God does not answer a prayer even when we believe that the ultimate good will be served. There was a time in my life when I was looking to take a job on the staff of a church. I prayed about it, but the job offer never came. I always wondered why God didn't answer my prayer. After all, my motive for wanting this job was to serve Him with the rest of my life. It wasn't until some time later that I learned that a few months after my interview, that particular church had gone through a church split and that all of

the staff had resigned. There are times when God’s “no” might seem a bit harsh or unfair, but when you look at it from the perspective of hindsight, the answer seems almost too wonderful for words. In the case of God’s answer to Jesus’ garden prayer, I have always been grateful that He answered that prayer in the way He did.

What did God teach you about Himself today?

How does this even help you to obey even in the most difficult of circumstances?

THE FINAL DAY
November 30th

The Arrest

Matt. 26: 47-56, Mark 14: 43-52, Luke 22: 47-52, John 18: 1-11

The arrest of Jesus Christ is one of those things where you have to read all of the gospel accounts in order to get a clear picture of what actually took place that evening. That is because each writer views the events of that night through their own set of glasses. So to gain a clearer understanding of the events, why not read Matthew 26: 47-56, Mark 14: 43-52, Luke 22: 47-53 and John 18: 1-11? I know that’s a lot of reading, but trust me, it will be well worth it.

So as Jesus was finishing up with His final lesson to His disciples, Judas arrives with a large, armed crowd and plants a kiss on Jesus. That was Judas’ prearranged signal to the mob as to who was to be arrested that night. As we talked about before, the Gospel

of John says there was a detachment of soldiers that accompanied the crowd that was sent by Pilate to supervise that night's activities. John also tells us that as Jesus identified Himself, the crowd drew back and fell to the ground. There has been a lot of conjecture as to why they did that. Some say that the crowd was reacting to Jesus' majesty. I have always felt a bit dissatisfied with that theory because they never reacted that way to Jesus before and their mission that night was the complete opposite of worship. I tend to agree with Frank Morison who believes that it was out of abject terror that the crowd reacted that way. Remember we had said that there had to be a certain level of fear when laying hand on someone who had demonstrated a great deal of power over the last few years. For all they knew, Jesus could have turned them all into a herd of pigs or something equally distasteful. Anyway, Jesus didn't do that, He just identified Himself and requested that His disciples be let go.

It is at this point that Peter draws his sword and lops off the ear of Caiaphus' servant. That is at least what Matthew and John report. Jesus stops the battle even before it has a chance to really begin by commanding His disciples to stand back and let God's will be done. As Matthew tells us, Jesus could have easily commanded twelve legions of angels that would have immediately leaped to His defense had He so chosen. Then Luke, ever the doctor, adds that Jesus restored the ear of the servant whom John identified as Malchus.

As Jesus is bound, Matthew records that Jesus uttered, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the

temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." And at that Matthew records that all of the disciples fled the scene. Mark does record one interesting bit of information about the first recorded streaker in the Bible in Mark 14: 51, 52. Tradition holds that the young man last seen running naked into the night was none other than the book's author, John Mark. Why else would such an event be noted? Mark was indicating by that account that he was an eye-witness to all that he had just described. It's just that if I were writing this, I don't know that I would have included the naked part.

As we draw our drama to a close, I want to put the focus back on Peter for just a moment. Why would he do such a thing? Surely he didn't think he was much of a match for a whole cohort of Roman soldiers. Perhaps his ego still stung from Jesus' words in the upper room. After all, the Master had the audacity to announce to his friends that his devotion was in question. He had boasted that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Now was his chance to prove it. How often do we let pride come even before God working in our lives? Is it more important for us to look good in the eyes of our friends or to follow God? How often do we show off our piety so that others will think we are the truly spiritual when inwardly we are far from God? How often do we attend church just because we don't want our friends to think less of us? I believe if we are truly honest with ourselves, we would have to answer "yes" to those questions more often than we would like.

Peter was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, but in this instance he was in direct conflict with the will of God. Perhaps the next time you find your self in similar situations, it might be a good idea to pray first and then act. Perhaps if you involve God in the situation, the outcome might be a bit different?

What did God teach you about Himself today?

What motivates you to attend your church?
