

# When Christ Went to Calvary

Lent Devotions for 2019



John 1:51, “...you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

# Acknowledgements

*These devotions were written, edited, and compiled by the pastors and teachers of the South Atlantic District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.*

Pastor John Boggs, Divine Savior Church, West Palm Beach, FL  
Pastor Craig Born, Risen Savior Lutheran Church, Navarre, FL  
Pastor Kyle Burmeister, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Summerville, SC  
Pastor Isaac Crass, Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN  
Pastor Caleb Free, Risen Savior Lutheran Church, Lakewood Ranch, FL  
Pastor Patrick Freese, Trinity Lutheran Church, Abita Springs, LA  
Pastor Kent Holz, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Clarksville, TN  
Pastor Erik Janke, Risen Savior Lutheran Church, Pooler, GA  
Commander Bob Kaylor, Saving Grace Lutheran Church, Mobile, AL  
Pastor Jonathan Kehl, Crown of Life Lutheran Church, New Orleans, LA  
Mr. Ryan Kirchoff, Divine Savior Academy, Doral, FL  
Pastor Michael Kober, Sola Fide Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA  
Pastor Benjamin Kratz, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Birmingham, AL  
Pastor Caleb Kurbis, Living Savior Lutheran Church, Asheville, NC  
Mr. Erik Landwehr, Divine Savior Academy, Doral, FL  
Pastor Harmon Lewis, Messiah Lutheran Church, Johns Creek, GA  
Pastor Joseph Lindloff, Hope Lutheran Church, Irmo, SC  
Pastor Erik Melso, Living Hope Lutheran Church, Chattanooga, TN  
Pastor David Olson, Rock of Ages Lutheran Church, Madison, TN  
Pastor Jonathan Quinn, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Moncks Corner, SC  
Pastor Joel Russow, Faith Lutheran Church, Tallahassee, FL  
Mr. Zach Seeger, Abiding Peace Academy, Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Newlin Schafer, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, FL  
Pastor Keith Schleis, Abiding Faith Lutheran Church, Smyrna, TN  
Pastor Duane Schmeichel, Lamb of God Lutheran Church, Madison, AL  
Mr. Jeremiah Schmeige, Sola Fide Lutheran School, Lawrenceville, GA  
Pastor Joel Schwartz, Peace Lutheran Church, Trinity, FL  
Pastor Joel Seifert, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Marietta, GA  
Pastor Thomas Spiegelberg, Saving Grace Lutheran Church, Mobile, AL  
Pastor Andrew Stuebs, Living Word Lutheran Church, Johnson City, TN  
Mr. Mark Thiesfeldt, Risen Savior Christian Academy, Pooler, GA  
Pastor Charlie Vannieuwenhoven, Northdale Lutheran Church, Tampa, FL  
Pastor Matthew Westra, Living Promise Lutheran Church, Morristown, TN  
Pastor Brian Wrobel, Zion Lutheran Church, Gainesville, FL  
Pastor Ben Zahn, Amazing Grace Lutheran Church, Myrtle Beach, SC  
Pastor Jason Zahn, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Palm Coast, FL  
Pastor Paul Zell, Living Savior Lutheran Church, Asheville, NC



## WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY

Week 1

## Psalm 51

In June 2018, twelve youth soccer players and one of their coaches ventured into a cave in Thailand. As they were exploring, a rainstorm flooded the exit, making escape impossible. For over two weeks they remained trapped, with over two miles of flooded passageway between them and freedom. Imagine how they felt. Stranded. Scared. Helpless.

When a rescue team finally made contact with the group, many thought this nightmare was over. But it wasn't. The passage remained dangerous and virtually impassable. As the rescuers continued to work, one man paid the ultimate price. Saman Gunan was attempting to bring more oxygen to the trapped soccer team, and in the process ran out of oxygen himself.

Saman Gunan was willing to volunteer his time – even his life – in order to rescue others. He did not have to enter that cave. But it was only because of him and his fellow volunteers that any of those boys are alive.

King David was trapped in his sin. The most famous of David's sins was the reason behind this penitential Psalm – our reading for today. In a series of events that included adultery, lying, and finally murder, David had cut himself off from God. Burdened by guilt, he considered rescue from spiritual death to be impossible.

God sent outside help. He sent the prophet Nathan to call King David to repent. David was directed to the same God we have. In repentance, David made an appeal to God's compassion and love. These are the characteristics of God that caused Jesus to give his life in the place of sinners like David.

While we can easily say that Jesus did not have to come to earth, we can just as readily say that he did. Because God is love and compassion, he was compelled to send Jesus as our substitute. Jesus is the perfect substitute. It is only because of Jesus that David lived. On the basis of God's love and compassion, David's attitude shifted from downtrodden guilt to joyful praise.

Those 13 boys were rescued from a cave in Thailand in July of 2018 and they all made a full recovery. Certain death was avoided because they had outside help.

We, too, have been saved from sin and certain death. We have been cleansed by the forgiving love and compassion of our God. This cleansing came when we were completely helpless. God sent outside help. Because he did, we have been given life to sing God's praises. This life continues from now to eternity. May we continue to praise the God who saved us and forever rejoice in our God who helps us in his love and compassion.

PRAYER: I love your law and would walk well within it. Knowing I've not leaves me sighing. This is the struggle I face every minute. Who can relieve me? I'm dying! Lord, I am ruined. I have left you; I need rescue. Lord, I am pleading: show your favor, be my Savior. Amen.

## Genesis 22:6-14

Imagine that it is your greatest desire to have children. Imagine having to wait until you are almost 100 years old to have your first child. Imagine being so happy to have your first child that you laugh out loud. Imagine naming that child based on your joyful laughter. Imagine, then, as that child grows up, being told by God to take your child and sacrifice him on an altar.

It is the kind of story that a new Christian might read and think, “What have I gotten myself into? God wanted Abraham to do what? This is the God I worship?”

God had promised to Abraham that his son, Isaac, would be his heir. But now God is telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. So which is it? Would Abraham’s line continue through Isaac as God had promised? Or would Abraham kill Isaac as God had commanded?

Being a Christian might sometimes feel like we live lives of contradiction. God promises that he will bless us. But who among us has not experienced heartache? How many of us have never faced uncertainty at work or at school?

The truth is that we face uncertainty every day. We live in a world steeped in sin, the result of which is discord between humanity and a holy God.

But God knows this about us. He knows our weaknesses and struggles. And he provides for us. In the case of Abraham, God demonstrated that he would always keep his promise. God would always provide for Abraham and his descendants.

To us God demonstrates the same commitment. In fact, through Abraham and Isaac God proves his love and provision for us. From the line of Abraham God sent us a substitute. He sent us a Savior who would die in our place. In other words, God did the very thing he had commanded Abraham to do.

What amazing love our God has for us. He never demands anything of us that he does not give us in Christ. He tells us to love our neighbor. What more perfect love toward neighbor could there be than to give up one’s life as Jesus did for us? He tells us to love him. What more perfect love toward God could there be than to submit completely to his Father’s will as Jesus did in sacrificing himself for us?

Jesus is your perfect substitute. Everything that God asks of you, he has given you in Christ.

PRAYER: Christ, what you weren’t, you became – foul and filthy; Cursed, people found you appalling. What I was not, I’ve become – found “Not guilty!” I need you now; hear me calling! Lord, I am ruined. I have left you; I need rescue. Lord, I am pleading: show your favor, be my Savior. Amen.

## Isaiah 53:4-5

First pity, then relief. They seem to be natural reactions to the sight of suffering. We hear of the family who lost their home in a fire, see the bald head of a child fighting cancer, or the disabled vet forced to navigate a world built for those with all their limbs and we hurt for them. This is right.

It is a healthy thing to feel this sympathy for those in pain. But many times what follows is an unhealthy feeling of relief. We see the suffering of another and are glad that the bad luck thunderbolt has missed us, or even worse, that we have wisely managed to avoid whatever it was that brought this on another. You see the latter in the way we shake our head at the homeless man or the addict thinking we would never find ourselves in that position.

Pity, then relief. Do you hear that in the way that Isaiah speaks about the Lord's suffering servant? He says-We considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. What awful thing must that poor man have done to bring this on himself? His guilt must be deep and powerful. God has struck him with such anger and afflicted him with such punishment because his sin was so great. God did this to him and I am relieved that I have managed to avoid doing whatever it was of which he is guilty.

But wait, he doesn't need your pity, and you shouldn't be feeling the relief of the righteous. He is the one stepping into your place. I am the one who deserves to be struck and cut down and destroyed and yet he is pierced, crushed, punished, and wounded for all my actions and words, for my wicked heart. This great truth gives us true and lasting relief -- when Christ goes to Calvary, he goes in my place.

You and I haven't avoided suffering and punishment for sin, we have caused it. The Son of God became the Son of Man so that he could go into suffering and die instead of me, instead of you. With his death, we were forgiven, healed, and made heirs of eternal life.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You became what you were not, and made me to be what I was not. Let me never tire of remembering and rejoicing in this gracious truth. Amen.

## Isaiah 53:6

Though it seems that many long-held principles and values in our culture are disintegrating before our eyes, we remain a people passionate about justice. Many of us remember being part of a classroom or a sports team that “suffered” group consequences for an individual’s infraction. “That’s not fair” is the cry that rises up, but what we really mean is, “That’s not just.” Punish only the rule breaker with the loss of recess time or extra sprints. Not us who have done nothing wrong. Do the crime, do the time.

In movies, we love seeing bad guys lose and be destroyed at the end. We desire revenge where the great wrong is finally righted and the guilty get what they deserve. We aren’t satisfied anymore with the Scooby-Doo ending where the criminal is simply led away in handcuffs, we want to see the villain suffer pain and regret what he has done. We love when our idea of justice falls upon the guilty and crushes them. Movie makers know this so they create as much tension and mystery for as long as possible. Leaving us frightened that the bad guy will get away and we won’t get the satisfaction of justice.

In real life, like the Psalmist, we grit our teeth when the wicked prosper (Psalm 73) because that goes against our concept of justice. Evil should be punished and good should be rewarded. That is the justice we have always been passionate about.

Yet that innate understanding of justice causes us to shiver with fear considering our status before a holy God. I can try hard to excuse and rationalize my thoughts, words, and actions, but I know the truth of the words -- I am by nature sinful. I deserve punishment. There is no real argument. Crime receives punishment, evil merits destruction, sin deserves death. We might be terrified instead of passionate about it, but it is still justice.

How strange then are the words of Isaiah! He speaks of the most unjust thing imaginable. What he says should make us cry out- Unfair! This cannot be! But it is. Instead of gnashing our teeth, we have every reason to weep with joy over this injustice.

We are the sheep who have gone astray. We all have turned away and the Lord has unfairly laid our punishment on Jesus. We have foolishly, arrogantly, and recklessly chosen evil. We are the villain to be destroyed. But a gracious God has chosen to place all guilt and evil and sin on his own Son. The innocent one suffered the punishment that the wicked deserve. When Christ goes to Calvary he goes in my place, in your place. There he pays the price and bears the guilt for me, for you, for all.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You became what you were not, and made me to be what I was not. Let me never tire of remembering and rejoicing in this gracious truth. Amen.



## WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE TRAMPLED MY TEMPTATIONS

Week 1

## Luke 4:1-4

As a child, I remember questioning the significance of this first temptation that Luke records for us. If Jesus was weak and hungry (probably closer to starving), what's the big deal with providing a little food to nourish his body? He turned water into wine; why can't he turn stone into bread?

The section of Scripture Jesus chose for his response is the key to unlocking this answer. Jesus recites the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3. Moses is reminding the children of Israel about God's guidance during their years of wandering in the desert and how they were totally reliant on God to provide for all of their needs, including food. Jesus came to this earth to be fully human and to experience the same suffering and temptations that you and I face. Never once did he selfishly use his divine powers as true God to make his earthly life easier; rather, he used those powers to physically and spiritually help others. Jesus was fully reliant on his Heavenly Father as his source of strength.

There are two important truths that this account helps us apply to our own temptations. The first is that our strongest temptations appear when we are weak and vulnerable. For some, those moments of weakness might be when you are with a certain group of friends. For others, those moments of weakness might be when you are alone. The devil will always try to exploit those times of weakness to lure you into sin.

Another important truth to remember is that God pines for us to rely solely on him. In the Bible passage above, the word "bread" implies anything besides God that captures our trust: our intellect, our intuition, our social status, our friends, and the list goes on. Our Heavenly Father wants us to fully trust him.

Despite your weakness and regardless of your "breads," Jesus endured the humiliation, suffering, and temptations of this world all the way to Calvary. Because he took care of your biggest problem (sin), you can be assured that he will give you the strength to trample the devil's strongest temptations in your life. Rely solely on Him!

**PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, Thank you for conquering the temptations of the devil. Forgive me for the times of my weakness and when I put my trust in the ideas, things, and people of this world. Help me to rely solely on you as my guide, protector, and provider. In your name, I pray. Amen.

# Misdirected Worship?

Monday, March 11, 2019

## Luke 4:5-8

Think about some of the most prevalent sins in your life. It is likely that the catalyst of these is a lie. “It will make you feel good and happy!” “Nobody can tell you what to do!” “Everybody is doing it!”

The word “devil” means slanderer or liar, which is a perfect description of Satan, the Father of Lies. Once he realized that lying caused Adam and Eve to fall into sin, he has employed the same tactic to this very day.

Satan used this strategy to tempt Jesus a second time. When Satan said that the “kingdoms,” “authority,” and “splendor” had been given to him, he was hoping Jesus would see the allure of earthly fame and power....fame and power that was not real nor was his to give. Did Satan create the heavens and earth, separate the skies and the seas, give life to all plants, animals, and people? Nope! That was our Heavenly Father!

Once again, Jesus uses Scripture to perfectly put Satan in his place. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” Essentially, Jesus reminds Satan of the First Commandment and the importance of not making a god out of anything earthly.

The temptations of this world are vast and varied. The devil tries to convince us that these allures are the keys to a life of contentment, pleasure, and substance, which is a giant lie. In fact, Satan doesn’t even have the authority to give us these gifts; they come to us through the power of the Holy Spirit (faith).

What are the allures that tempt you to worship and serve something of this world? Whatever your answer, be assured that as true man, Jesus faced that same temptation, so he really does know and understand your struggle. As true God, he sees the weight of guilt you carry in your heart after you realize you have (once again) been duped by one of the devil’s lying schemes. Also, be assured that because Jesus trampled Satan’s temptations and crushed him on Calvary’s cross, he gives you a daily reminder of the most important truth that you can know and trust: Your sins are forgiven!

**PRAYER:** Dear Jesus, Today I praise you for the assurance of forgiveness that you give me every single day. Forgive me for times when I blatantly disobey you and worship and serve something of this world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to work in my heart and allow me to see the difference between Satan’s lies and your good, pleasing, perfect will for my life. Amen.

# Mistrust?

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

## Luke 4:9-13

This week, we have seen the crafty and cunning ways that Satan works. He will stop at nothing to get us to fall into sin. He was just as relentless with Jesus. For his third temptation, Satan tried to beat Jesus at his own game and use words of Scripture (Psalm 91) to trick Jesus. His argument was that if Jesus did not jump from the top of the temple to the depths of Kidron Valley (approximately 450 feet down), he was showing a lack of trust in God to protect him.

Of course, Jesus saw through this foolishness and used the words of Deuteronomy 6:16 to remind the devil about the difference between testing and trusting God. What about you? Do you always see this difference in your own life?

In his novel The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis emphasizes how he believed Satan works more through subtle distrust than he does blatant disobedience. God said he will be with me always, so why do I feel so alone? God said that I can do all things through him who gives me strength, so why is school such a challenge? God said to ask and it shall be given, so why hasn't he answered my prayer yet?

Recognize that thoughts like these are, first and foremost, misinterpretations of Scripture. Understanding the power of God's promises and the entire context of Bible passages is important. Additionally, they are temptations designed to lead you to distrust God, his promises, and his providence in your life.

God does not have to prove anything to you, his creation, but he does. Despite your lack of trust, he time and time again reminds you of His presence in your life; he helps you through all of your challenges; he answers your prayers. But if you want to see the ultimate proof of God's love in your life, look at Christ's cross. Through his perfect life, innocent death, and glorious victory, you can trust that Jesus trampled Satan! God gives you the strength to trample all of your disobedient and distrusting temptations, as well!

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, I praise you for the lessons you taught me this week about the various kinds of temptations I face. Forgive me for doubting and not trusting completely in you and your will for me. Remind me to always pray "Thy will be done," not "my will be done." If it be your will, continue to shower me with reminders of your love in my life. In your name I pray. Amen.

# Intentions

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

## Genesis 3:1-7

Cunning, mischievous, devious -- words that describe... My daughter. Now please understand that I love her to death, but she has learned the art of side-stepping authority. Recently, she asked me for a sugary snack. She quickly followed up with, "Mommy said it's ok." I went to confirm with my wife, and my suspicions were right - - my daughter was trying to play us to get what she wanted! Satan tried the same thing on Adam and Eve, questioning God's authority -- the same God that had just given them life, breath, and authority on earth. His intentions are obvious -- He was twisting the words of God in order to get them to slip. He knew it was a package deal. If Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, all their descendants would be stained with sin too. Sadly, Adam and Eve did -- and sadly we are.

Satan hasn't changed his tactics. He still fills our minds with questions and lies. "Did God really say to only follow him? Did God really say his Word is the only basis of truth? Does God really love you? Are you really forgiven for what you've done?" He dangles the juicy fruit of sin before us every single day. His intentions are obvious -- he wants us to doubt, question, and forsake God. Sadly, we often take the bait and fall victim to Satan's cunning attacks. At the end of the day, we wonder, "Why did I listen to Satan and give into temptation.... Again?"

Christian, the remedy for our failures rests in the life, death, and resurrection of another that Satan tried to tempt. He tempted the very Son of God to stray from the path that the Father had set for him. His intentions were obvious -- if he got Jesus to slip, just once... If he could convince Jesus to not go to the cross... then he would claim your soul and mine for eternity. But for the first time in the history of the world, we see one who didn't fall victim to Satan's temptations. Jesus not only didn't sin, but he conquered sin, death and the devil on the cross of Calvary. His intentions are obvious -- to buy us back from our temptations, sin, and failures. Miraculously, through the perfect life, sacrificial death, and incredible resurrection of Christ your Savior, your failures and your sins are completely gone, and you belong only to one -- God Most High! Christian, as you continually face the temptations of the tempter, remember who your God is. He not only had good intentions to perfectly march to the cross and save you. He did, and you are, by God's grace alone!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, As Satan pummels me with temptations again today, help me to flee into your loving arms. When I fail, help me to seek forgiveness in you alone, for you have trampled my temptation. God, give me hope, life, and joy -- now and eternally. Amen.

## Genesis 3:15

Have you ever played the "blame game?" It goes like this... Someone confronts you for something you've done, but instead of saying "I'm sorry", you tag someone else with being at fault. Step into most marriage counseling sessions and one thing becomes very obvious -- husbands and wives are very good at pointing at each other rather than themselves. It's not just husbands and wives, though, is it? We live in a world where no one wants to own up to their own actions. It's always someone else's fault or problem, and accountability is a fleeting concept at best.

Adam and Eve are a prime example, aren't they? Today's passage rises from an interview in the garden of Eden between God, Adam and Eve, and the treacherous serpent. When confronted with his sin, Adam blamed Eve. Ultimately, he put the responsibility upon God himself stating, "the woman you gave me..." Eve similarly rationalized, charging, "the serpent deceived me." Adam and Eve were guilty. They had eaten from the tree God commanded them not to. They had listened to the master of lies rather than the God of truth. Then they had the gumption to blame someone else for their sins! They deserved to be punished for their actions!

The truth is, someone needed to be punished for the sins of the first man and woman. Instead of crushing them with eternal punishment, God, in our text, punished the serpent, Satan. He proclaimed a promise for all mankind -- I myself will see to it Satan, that you are held accountable and are crushed by my very own Son, Jesus.

My friend, isn't this the promise that Old Testament believers clung to day after day, year after year? The Savior would one day come. The God of all grace and truth kept his promise! In what looked like a failure to the world, the perfect Christ dying on the cross was nothing short of a crushing blow to Satan. It was the fulfillment of his Genesis 3:15 promise. Isn't the death and resurrection of Christ what we cling to day after day, year after year? You and I should be held accountable for our sins. But instead, God cast them on Christ, and he became sin for us. Your sins and mine were nailed to the cross, and Jesus was crushed in death for us. My Christian friend, cling to the cross of Calvary this Lenten season, for in the death and resurrection of Christ, you and I find our victory!

PRAYER: Dear Savior, Help me cling to the cross every day of my life. I deserve the punishment for my sin, but instead, your promise of old came true in Christ, crushing Satan and forgiving me. Give me the courage to say no to Satan, the trust to lean on you alone, and the faith to know I'm forgiven and loved by you. Amen.

## Hebrews 4:15

I don't know if you have ever had this happen to you: you share a deep personal struggle with a friend and he or she responds, "I know exactly what you're going through." After hearing a friend say this, my mouth might say, "Thanks," but my thought response is probably something like this: "Really? Can YOU really KNOW exactly what I am going through?"

We doubt our friends when they say it. We doubt the politicians when they say it. ("I am an average Joe, just like you. I know what you're going through.") It just sounds so patronizing to a struggling soul. Can anyone really know what exactly what we are going through?

The answer is yes. Believe it or not, God knows. God does not just know this because He is omniscient. He knows it in a very personal way. Take a look at the verse again. Our high priest, Jesus, empathizes with us. He personally knows our human weaknesses and the temptations we face. God is not some distant deity, who sits enthroned in a galaxy far, far away, watching us from a distance and shaking his head at our foolishness. Instead, He is a God who entered His own creation to take His peoples' place in all things, including facing temptation.

Think of all of the sins Jesus was tempted with as he grew up... disrespecting parents? Hurtful words? Pride? Cynicism? Apathy? Lust? Laziness? Procrastination? He faced it all! Just like we do. Therefore, he can empathize with us. He really knows what it's like. This is an amazing thing.

However, what is even more amazing is that, unlike us, Jesus passed all of the tests! All of them! He did not sin. No pride. No laziness. No lust. Not even once. So his "I know" and "I understand" mean that much more to us. He is not merely empathizing; he is also forgiving. After we fall into temptation, He does not say, "Well, you will just have to try harder next time." He says, "I have taken care of this. I faced this. I passed the test. Here is your grade: you are forgiven. Your grade is the same as my grade: perfect in God's sight."

Let that soak in for minute... And now, surrounded by God's love and forgiveness, you might find that those temptations that we struggle with start to look at bit different. They are just not as tempting. Why not? Because Jesus has already faced them for us. He knows. He empathizes. He forgives.

PRAYER: Dear God who knows, we thank you that you are our perfect high priest. Help us to trust in you as we live our lives for you. Amen.

## Matthew 6:13

They just don't stop coming, do they? Temptations, that is.

Our daily lives are spent wandering in a spiritual wasteland. Our society spews out lie after lie ("You can decide your own truth!" "Your pleasure is most important!") and seems intent on numbing us into a spiritually vegetative state through the constant stream of flashy and addictive entertainment. Culture's current can feel like a raging river that is intent on dragging us down to our peril.

Temptations also well up from inside of us, even during our most "spiritual" moments. I am taking the Lord's Supper with my brothers and sisters in Christ. I see a person with whom I am having a disagreement and immediately my heart is filled with resentment. I am in the process of praying with my family while my mind is overflowing with worries about finances and my unending to-do list. I am reading the scriptures with my eyes, but my heart is wandering far away, more concerned about banal sports events than the eternal and enduring Word of God.

Then the Devil comes, shooting his fiery arrows at our souls, whispering deceitful inquiries into our ears and intending to take us and those whom we love straight to hell. "Are you sure that's what God says?" "Are you sure God cares?" "Are you sure God even exists?"

So we fall into temptation, over and over. I am forced to scream like Paul, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24)

This is why Jesus instructed us to pray: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Temptations do come. But, we pray that the Lord would hold us close to His side and keep us from falling to the myriad of temptations that hit us every day. We pray that God would deliver us from the one who wants our souls!

Deliver us God does. Over and over he points us to Jesus, our deliverer, who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Over and over he presents a way out of temptation so that we can stand when society's current would sweep us away (1 Corinthians 10:13). Over and over he surrounds us with Christian brothers and sisters who are loving and brave enough to rebuke us, correct us, forgive us, and guide us. Over and over he directs us to His word, where we hear the gospel message and are built up so that we can take our stand against the devils flaming arrows (Ephesians 6:11).

So, like Paul, we shout out "Who will rescue me?" But, also like Paul, we conclude... "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25)

PRAYER: O God, our deliverer, we thank you for rescuing us from sin and death. Lead us not into temptation, but continually deliver us from evil. Amen.



## WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE DISPELLED MY DOUBTS

Week 2

# He Dispels My Doubts in the Known

Sunday, March 17, 2019

## Luke 8:22-25

The new student was nervous. She didn't know what to expect on the first day at a new school. Across the street, a returning student was also nervous, but for a very different reason. He knew what to expect at the school. He could expect lots of homework.

Sometimes, we fear what we don't know. Other times, we fear what we do know. And Jesus can overcome them both!

The disciples knew these waters. Some of them fished for living on those waters. They knew their way around a boat and likely had been through stormy seas before. But they also knew their limits and weaknesses. They knew powerful storms could sink them in a hurry.

That day the wind was howling. The waves were splashing. The disciples knew this powerful storm was going to sink them in a hurry. And so, they cried out in fear to Jesus. "Master! We are going to drown!"

Jesus knew what to do. He got up from sleeping and quickly calmed the storm with his powerful Word. At that moment, Jesus made known who he really was. He is the One who commands wind and waves. He is the One whose word brings peace. He is the One who calms powerful storms outside of us and inside of us.

When new circumstances have you worrying with fear, let Jesus' powerful word bring you peace. When familiar circumstances overwhelm you with doubt, turn to the power of your Savior and his known love. He, who lived, died, and rose for you will give the confidence and peace you need.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, there is so much that challenges what I believe and know to be true. Sometimes what I am most afraid of is the change in the world around me. Life is not the same as it used to be. Give me faith in your unchanging power. Let me never question your resurrection. And may that one simple fact strengthen me through an ever-changing world. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.

# He Dispels My Doubts in the Unknown

Monday, March 18, 2019

## Matthew 14:22-36

Have you ever been on a long car trip during bad weather? Have you ever been on a flight with lots of turbulence? You might understand then what that night was like on the Sea of Galilee for the disciples.

Another storm had brewed on the water. Only this time, Jesus wasn't with them. He had remained on shore while the disciples went ahead of him to the other side. The constant buffering of the wind and the splashing of the waves left them weary and restless. What would happen? How would this turn out?

To make matters worse, the disciples thought they saw "a ghost" walking towards them. They were tired, weary, afraid, and that's what they concluded about this strange sight. But it wasn't a ghost coming to them, it was Jesus.

He knew what to do. He quickly made his voice, his presence, and his love known. He spoke words of comfort. "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid."

Peter wanted to be sure it was the Savior, so he asked to come out on the water toward Jesus. Jesus told him to come. For a moment, Peter was walking on the water toward Jesus. But then he caught sight of the wind. Old fears returned. What would happen? How would this turn out? He began to sink.

Again, Jesus knew what to do. Immediately he reached out his hand and rescued Peter.

Yesterday's devotion focused on the fear we have in known situations. Today we focus on the fear we have in unknown situations. But the comfort and solution in either situation remain the same. It's Jesus. He came to save. His word brings peace. His promises can be trusted in known and unknown times.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, there is so much that I do not know. The things that I have never experienced before, the things that I have never gone through before, these things cause me to doubt and become fearful. Fill me with your confidence. Let me step forward in faith knowing you came to save and your Word brings me peace. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

## Luke 5:17-26

While living overseas, it was interesting to see how other people viewed Americans. The regular stories of Americans' lives were quite amusing to others. When the story broke about the airlines not allowing a pet ostrich onto a flight as an emotional support animal, many could not believe this was even an issue. A common tag line developed to describe such stories: "That sounds like a first world problem."

There is no shame living where we do and enjoying the blessings God has given. But it doesn't take long for shame or worry or regret to show up wherever you live. For Americans, this can happen with the many decisions we face.

We face decisions about careers, houses, spouse, cars, and so much more. The many choices can quickly give way to doubt. "Did I make the right decision?" In fact, decision-making can become so crippling, there's even have a term for it - decidophobia.

It's comforting to know that wherever we live, we have a God who deals with our worst problem and lovingly concerns himself with all of our problems.

A group of good friends brought their paralyzed friend to the place where Jesus was teaching. They had hoped he would heal their hurting friend. But Jesus started with the real problem and the bigger issue. He was not addressing first world problems or third world problems. He was tackling that man's and all humanity's problem. The first thing he said was, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

This enraged those who were there. Jesus knew it and called them on it. "I just fixed the biggest problem this man had. But so, there would no doubt, I am going to fix his physical, earthly problem too. Get up and walk."

Doubts and regrets are crippling. Looking back, who knows if we made the right career choices, the right car choices, the right whatever it happens to be choices. What we do know is that the Lord has taken care of humanity's problem. He has taken care of your problem. He will work all things out for your good, both here and for eternity. Enjoy the physical, earthly blessings God provides. But keep your eye on the big picture which lies ahead. Live at peace, for you are forgiven.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, I strive to do all things to your glory. When a choice is given, let me consider how this will give you glory and show love to my fellow man. And in the end, when doubt comes, remind me that I am forgiven in your sight. The greatest problem that I face you have already taken care of through your death and resurrection. In Jesus name, I pray, Amen.

# We Have an Ever-Present God

Wednesday, March 20, 2019

## Psalm 46:1-3

There are times in the life of the believer when it feels like the ground is crumbling beneath your feet. You had solid plans. You had a clear vision of who you were going to be and how your life would look. But often those plans don't feel so solid and that vision is not so clear. Things happen in life which you do not anticipate. The struggles in a sinful world and with a sinful heart leave you feeling vulnerable and exposed.

There are times in the life of the believer when it feels like waves are crashing down upon your head. You can barely keep your head above water. If one more conflict arises, if one more bill comes due, if one more demand is placed upon your time, you are sure to sink. With each wave of worry, your strength fades and you are unsure how much longer you can endure.

There are times in the life of a believer when it feels as though the earth is giving way as waters roar and foam. But even in those times, we need not fear or doubt our God. We need not fear or doubt because God is an ever-present help in trouble. That means God is not just a God who is present on happy trails and for smooth sailing, but he is with us on rocky roads and amidst surging seas. We need not doubt, for our God is the defender of the vulnerable and the protector of the exposed. He lifts up the weak, carries the weary, forgives the sinful, and bolsters the burdened.

There are times in the believer's life when the path is uncertain, and the future is unsure. If today is one of those times, take refuge in your God and his promises shared in Psalm 46. Your God promises to be your refuge and strength, your ever-present help in trouble.

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, You are my refuge and strength, my ever-present help in trouble. Forgive me for the times I allow my uncertain and unsure life to fill me with anxiety and worry. Defend me when I am vulnerable, protect me when I am exposed, lift me up when I am weak, carry me when I am weary, bolster me when I am burdened. Help me to trust in you as my ever-present God. Amen

# The Biggest Guy in the Room

Thursday, March 21, 2019

## Romans 8:31

When I was in high school, I wanted to be big and strong. Unfortunately, genetics were against me. My freshmen year I might have tipped the scales at 130 pounds soaking wet. I didn't have noticeable stomach muscles you could count, but my ribcage was easily tallied. Sometimes when I turned sideways people forgot I was in the room.

Being a wee little man was not a problem during wrestling season. Everyone in my weight class was as puny as I was. Football season, however, was a different story. In football, there is no such thing as a weight class. There are simply those who do the tackling and those who get tackled. I often found myself in the latter group. I quickly realized that the only way I was going to survive the season was for me to get bigger. So, I hit the weights; bench press, leg press, curls, squats, you name it, I lifted it.

After a few weeks in the weight room there were some minor improvements to my physique, but still, I was not what anyone would call big. That is when my father gave me some of the best advice of my teenage years. He said, "Son, you don't have to be the biggest guy in the room. All you have to do is make sure the biggest guy in the room is your friend."

30 years later, that's still good advice. Though very few of us need to worry about a 250-pound linebacker chasing us down, every one of us has reason to listen to a father's advice. In the spiritual arena, there is no such thing as a weight class. There are wolves and sheep; those who do the devouring and those who are to be devoured. On our own, we are pitifully puny compared to the devil who seeks to devour us. But the devil who wants to devour us is not the biggest guy in the room.

Jesus stood toe-to-toe with the devourer in the wilderness, Jesus stood face-to-face with him atop Calvary, and Jesus (as God promised Adam and Eve in Genesis 3) crushed his head. A blood-stained cross proves the greatness of Jesus' love for us as he laid down his life for his friends. His empty tomb proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the biggest guy in the room.

The devil may try to frighten you and intimidate you. He will point out that he is bigger than you. But you have nothing to worry about. The devil is not the biggest guy in the room. Jesus is. And the biggest guy in the room is your friend.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, Beyond a shadow of a doubt, you are the biggest guy in the room. The devil works hard to frighten and intimidate me. On my own, I know that I am no match for him. But because of your mercy and grace, I am not on my own. Help me to remember that because you are with me, nothing can stand against me. Amen.

# An Unshakeable Covenant

Friday, March 22, 2019

## Isaiah 54:10

Not too long ago, Alaskans experienced the earth shaking underneath them. Roads caved in and buildings crumbled. Even if one lives in an area prone to earthquakes, I would imagine you never really get used to the earth trembling below your feet. Each time it happens there is the fright that accompanies the quake.

Have you ever felt the ground quake under your spiritual life? It can happen if we focus on the problems of the moment. Fear creeps into our life. It can happen when we step away from regular contact with God's Word and promises. Faith begins to fade.

We long for unshakeable foundations. Even the strong and lofty terrain around us cannot provide the refuge we seek. Mountains totter. Hills crumble. Nothing can stand in the way of God's surging anger. But in the midst of mountains shaking and crumbling there is a something that cannot be removed, there is something that will never teeter or totter – the covenant of peace from God.

“The punishment that brought us peace was on him” (Isaiah 53:5). God's surge of punishment over our sin landed on Jesus. All who trust in this Suffering Servant have a covenant from God that cannot be shaken. They will never suffer the surge of God's anger over sin. Instead, they find a surge of unfailing love and compassion in God's Word and Sacraments that lasts forever.

PRAYER: Lord, in your Word I find a flood of your compassion and love. When doubts arise and faith fades, graciously lead me back to your unshakeable covenant of peace in Jesus Christ my Savior. Amen.

# Things Are Not Always As They Seem

Saturday, March 23, 2019

## 2 Kings 6:15-17

The army from Aram was after Elisha. Elisha had been providing intelligence to the king of Israel about the movements of the Aramean army. Now the Aramean army was going to eliminate this problem of Elisha and his cohorts. They surrounded the city of Dothan where Elisha and his servant were staying.

How could this be? They were servants of the true God of Israel. This should not be happening. Why wasn't there any special intelligence from the Lord to let them know the Aramean army was advancing? They were servants of the Lord Almighty after all, they should have the upper hand. This was not supposed to happen to them.

But Elisha knew that in God's kingdom things are not always the way they seem. Elisha had already learned what the Apostle Paul would write for Christians hundreds of years later, "If God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31). Even though the situation looked bleak, God gave eyes of faith to Elisha and his servant. They got to see the reality. God's forces far outnumber the forces of the world. If there was any doubt that God was working on their behalf, it was wiped away when Elisha's servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

There are times in life when it seems like God leaves us in a difficult spot. We might doubt his care and protection. Today God opens our eyes of faith to see that his angels are doing battle with the forces of evil on our behalf. Things were not as they seem when God conquered our greatest enemy on a cross. Ponder it every day: "If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31,32).

PRAYER: Lord Almighty, give me confidence that you are watching over me and protecting me even when I can't see all you are doing. Amen.



**WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE FIXED MY FAILURES**

Week 3

# The Real You is Found in Christ

Sunday, March 24, 2019

## Romans 7:18-19, 21-25

Can you relate with Paul? Some say with the words of Romans 7 Paul is speaking about the time before he became a Christian. They believe that once you become a Christian, once you have been given that new life, you no longer struggle with sin the way Paul describes here. Does that ring true for you? Has that been your experience? I bet not.

The truth is the Christian life is marked by struggle. How could it be any other way? We are born into this world completely controlled by the sinful nature inside of us. We are God's spiritual enemies who can't do God's will and don't really want to anyway. Through the good news of Jesus, we find out that God has chosen to forgive and befriend us. Through that good news, the Holy Spirit brings us to trust in our Savior and creates a new spirit inside of us that delights in living according to God's will in thanksgiving for the gift of his Son.

Unfortunately, on this side of heaven, the sinful nature remains. That's why Paul describes the Christian life as a struggle. Actually, it's more serious. It's a war. The sinful nature inside of us continues to hate God's word and will and wages war against our new person, that part of us who delights in God's word and will. In a very real sense, the Christian is the battleground on which these two opposing forces do battle every day. And the outcome of this war is a matter of life and death. What's at stake is the eternal destination of our souls.

What a tremendous struggle we are involved in daily! It's frustrating. It's agonizing. We hate it. As we look at our lives we sometimes wonder if we are even Christians. We keep doing things we'd rather not. We fall and fail. We feel the burden of our guilt. We know that we deserve death. Our hearts cry out, "I can't do it! I'm miserable! Help!"

The truth is you have more than help. You have a Savior. The Christian life is not about getting the help that sets you on the trajectory to eventually be perfect on your own. It's about our sinful nature dying over and over again on that battlefield and the new person in us being raised up continually by the One who has saved you through his life, death, and resurrection in your place. It's in Christ that we are made new. It's his work in our place that fixes all our failures. It is Christ who makes the new you (what Paul calls the "inner being") the real you. The real you knows that as you experience the struggle...when you fall and fail...when you feel like a wretch, you have a Savior who has rescued you. Thanks be to God!

PRAYER: Lord, in my agonizing daily struggles with my old self, teach me today to look to Christ, who has delivered me eternally. Amen.

# The Righteous One Suffered For You

Monday, March 25, 2019

## 1 Peter 3:18

Yesterday's devotion described how the Christian life is marked by struggle. The Apostle Paul explained there is a war that rages inside the Christian as the sinful nature and the new self do battle over whether we will do what God wills or what the devil, world, and our sinful flesh desire. Today we hear from the Apostle Peter that the Christian life is marked by another "s" word – not struggle, but suffering.

Suffering comes into our lives for any number of reasons. Sometimes, it comes just because the world is broken and that brokenness touches our life. Other times, suffering comes into our lives by our own doing. Our own sins often have harmful consequences – broken relationships, the scorn of others, even the loss of physical health.

In the previous verses, Peter encourages Christians to live lives of love, lives of service to others as a result of the faith we have in the One who came to serve and save us. Certainly, we will avoid suffering if we live good lives like that, right? Who would ever want to do us harm for doing good? It seems like no one would, but Peter tells us something different. He says in this world suffering often comes into our lives precisely because we are doing what is right. So whether what we do is good, bad, or neutral, in this life we will suffer. Suffering in this life is unavoidable.

But then Peter tells us this: "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). Suffering is never pleasant. It's never enjoyable. But it is better for Christians to suffer for being Christians than for any other reason. Why? Because it teaches us to appreciate our Savior's suffering, which is the only thing that gets us through this life of suffering to the place where we will never suffer again. That's because Jesus' suffering was done in our place.

In his life, Jesus Christ suffered. He lived in a broken world just as we do. Yet, unlike you and me, Christ never suffered for the evil he had done because he is righteous. He is absolutely good in God's eyes. He is perfect. Nevertheless, Christ suffered and died. Peter tells us Christ did that for the unrighteous, for sinners like you and me, to bring us to God. Jesus Christ went through the ultimate suffering that our failures deserve so that we might never face that kind of suffering ever.

Here is the ultimate comfort. After Christ's suffering and death in our place, he rose again. Christ now lives in exalted glory, never to suffer again. No matter the reason for your suffering here, now you look forward to your own resurrection when you will no longer suffer for anything at all for the sake of Christ.

**PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, when I must suffer teach me that you once suffered, too, and that by your suffering you have guaranteed for me a life to come where I will never suffer again. Amen.

# The Great Exchange

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

## 2 Corinthians 5:21

Whenever a professional sports team trades a player, fans like to discuss whether or not the trade was fair. Sportswriters often weigh in with a “trade grade” for each team involved. They debate which team “won” the trade. Who got the better end of the deal? Who came out worse? Professional sports leagues often put stipulations into place – like players’ salaries matching – to help make sure that trades are not lopsided, but balanced for each team. No matter what the context, when it comes to trading, we want the trade to be fair. In general, we like our exchanges to be equal. In God’s Word for today, the Apostle Paul describes a trade that is far from fair. It’s an exchange that is anything but equal. But for you and me, it’s the best trade there could ever be.

You and I know sin. We know it because we have experienced in our thoughts, words, actions, and attitudes. Those things we do that we never should...those things we don’t do that we always should...they make us feel the burden of guilt. Guilt is the realization that I have failed to hit God’s mark and there’s a price to pay for my failure. Somebody has to pay and that somebody should be me. And the price that I owe can never be paid, except by an eternity separated from God and everything good in hell.

But then God proposed a trade. It’s the kind of trade no owner or general manager of any professional sports franchise would ever even think about making. God offered the absolute best player on his team – one who was flawless in every respect – for a bunch of scrubs, for people who have no trade value whatsoever. To be precise, he traded the righteousness of his one and only Son for each and every one of our sins. Jesus Christ never knew sin from experience like you and I do. Yet, God treated him like he was the greatest sinner in the world like every sin belonged to him. That’s because he put our sins on Jesus at the cross and, in exchange, God gave us Jesus’ perfect righteousness. That means since he treated Jesus according to our sins, he now treats us according to Christ’s righteousness. He calls us perfect.

My friends, that’s not fair. Thank God! You and I get to trade everything that is bad about us for everything that is perfect about Jesus – our worst for his best. There is no other trade like that in the world. Through it, our Savior fixes our failures forever. He makes us winners for all eternity. A great exchange, indeed.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, may I always marvel at the great exchange you have made for me.

# He Revealed His Righteousness

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

## Romans 1:16-17

Our God is a mighty God! He has plenty of power. He spoke and the world came into existence. He condemned, and fire rained down from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He parted the Red Sea and Israel crossed on dry land. He brought the sea back together and the entire Egyptian army was defeated. Of course, God is powerful! He proves it on the pages of his word.

So, what is God's greatest power? His power lies not in destroying but saving. The gospel, the good news of Jesus' death on Calvary and real resurrection is the ultimate power of God that brings salvation. The Lord describes his power for what it truly is: the good news of Jesus is his power that breaks through hearts that are ignorant, hearts that fail, hearts that don't believe. It powerfully changes them into hearts that do believe, trust and cling to the One who never failed. It is the good news that he has removed the guilt of those who have failed.

In the gospel, God reveals his righteousness – his holiness and perfection – and gives it to us free of charge through Jesus. Jesus is the one who provides everything we need for salvation, the perfection God demands, and the payment for our failures. It's all found in the gospel, God's 100% reliable message of love, forgiveness, and righteousness.

Since it is so reliable, there is no hesitation to share, no doubt that would cause us to keep it to ourselves. It's God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes. This is what God uses to change people's hearts and create the gift of faith. Through faith, we possess the righteousness of God, won for us by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit gave these words to the apostle Paul. The gospel was the reason he was eager to visit the people in Rome. He was not ashamed to share the gospel with them, or with anyone. Neither are we. We also have the privilege to share the gospel, knowing that the power lies in the good news of Jesus, and not in the person who is sharing the good news.

We've seen the power in our lives. We live as God's righteous people by faith in Jesus. Don't be ashamed to share it.

**PRAYER:** Dear Savior, thank you for the complete reliability of your gospel message. Continue to use your powerful good news in my heart, so I can be bold to share your righteousness with others. Amen.

# One Act!

Thursday, March 28, 2019

## Romans 5:18

“I only did it once!” We try to downplay our failures, don’t we? It only happened one time. Don’t get so bent out of shape over it! But once is enough, isn’t it?! The angry person who pulls a gun and shoots may only fire one shot one time, but the person who dies is no less dead. The spouse who only cheats once still destroys the trust in the marriage. The first man who lived only needed to sin once in the Garden of Eden to make this world a world of sin. And because of that one sin, that one failure, we are all failures!

It affects every part of our life from the moment we are conceived. Complications during pregnancy, miscarriages, stillbirths, tense moments during delivery – all are a result of Eden’s tragedy. The sinful traits we see in our children are like looking in a mirror. The guilt we have over the sins we commit is an admission and agreement: God was correct when he called these things sinful. And all it took was one trespass, one step over the line of what God said: “don’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.” Ever since that moment, everything in this world – people, animals, the world itself – is condemned. As the apostle Paul says a few chapters after these words, “What a wretched man I am! Who will save me from this body of death?” One act condemned the entire world - guilty as charged!

Just as ... so also. One act made us failures. One act removes our failures. One was a trespass, a step in the wrong direction. The other was a righteous act, the one right action that undid everything sinful mankind has committed and ever will commit. Adam messed up the world. Jesus saved the world. Because of the one act of salvation the Son of God accomplished, all offenses and failures of every human being are paid in full. God’s declaration of ‘NOT GUILTY’ is recorded and signed in Jesus’ blood. Adam brought death; Jesus brings life, or as he says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

That means that for every single one of my failures, Jesus paid the price. He removed the guilt and set me free from the death-grip sin wants to have on us. All are condemned by their failures; all have the guilt of their failures paid by Jesus. That’s a message that brings life. That’s a message that brings joy. That’s a message all need to hear.

PRAYER: Dear Jesus, Thank you for your one righteous act that brings life to the world, and to me. Help me to live a joy-filled life in you and reflect that love to others. Amen.

## Isaiah 61:10

What bride and groom would show up at their wedding wearing their dirtiest clothes? Just finished working on the car or in the yard and head straight for the wedding? Most people getting married treat their wedding like it's the most special day of their lives. They show up wearing a beautiful wedding dress, a debonair tuxedo, something that everyone will notice. A sparkling gown, a colorful bow tie, and no one notices if the flowers aren't exactly right on the tables or if the band doesn't start playing at exactly the right time. Those minor failures all get fixed by the bride and groom, dressed in their best, getting married.

In life, it was your failures that were all noticeable to you. Every little one stood out because of how ugly it seemed. You may have tried to avoid making mistakes, failing to live up to God's standards. But you made them anyway. That time going overboard drinking and making the fateful decision to get behind the wheel of the car. The actions taken in the darkness to try and hide the websites no one should see. Letting eyes wander in a crowd or taking advantage of a traveling spouse's trust. Whatever they may be, whether big moral failings or a whole bunch of hopefully little failings, these sins all add up to burden our hearts and souls. It's not a beautiful dress or handsome looking tuxedo you're wearing. It's the dirtiest clothes, caked in guilt, and covered in the filth of sin.

So how is it that your soul can rejoice? You can delight in the Lord because Jesus clothes you in garments of salvation and gives you a robe of righteousness. Clothes that weren't yours naturally become yours as a gift from Christ. He has them to give because he wore them first. Jesus took your place with all your guilt and failures before the judgment of God. Jesus followed the plan of the Lord and won forgiveness for all your failings. He fixed them in his life and death. Wearing a perfect robe of righteousness he achieved by living perfectly and dying sacrificially, he has this robe to give. He gives it to his bride, the church. You. You adorn yourself with Christ's righteousness. You dress up in the best Christ Jesus gives you to wear. The garments of salvation are yours. Delight in them.

What Jesus has done means you won't have to show up to the wedding wearing dirty sinful clothes. You'll be able to arrive at the gates of heaven, for the wedding feast of the Lamb, wearing the best. Dressed and adorned like a bride or groom on their wedding day. All your sinful failings will be fixed in Christ, and you'll be dressed in the best: the garments of salvation won for you by Christ.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you once wore my failings as though they were your own. My sins and guilt are forgiven in your life and death. Now I wear your robe of righteousness as though it were mine because in your victory it is. Thank you for my new clothes, let me rejoice in them always. Amen.

## Lamentations 3:22

I recently had to do some repair work on our refrigerator. Well, at least I tried. The water line wasn't putting out any water. Since I'm not a refrigerator repairman, I did what everyone does these days. I Googled it. The easiest diagnostic test suggested was to check if the water line was frozen. So lying at the bottom of the fridge I found the water line and connection to pop open. But with only an inch of clearance and possibly quite a bit of water in the line waiting to come flowing out if it wasn't frozen, I was concerned about leaking water all over my floor and me. As suggested, I pulled the connection back only slightly. Water immediately started to leak out and I pushed it back together. Then I pushed harder. But there was no click. I had tried one little thing, and now if I failed to get that part back together I would know it with water all over my floor. But since there wasn't a puddle I figured I must have got it back together okay.

Often times when we do something sinful we get immediate feedback about our failure. When we say something back to a teacher with disrespect we get disciplined. If we say something insensitive to our spouse they give us the cold shoulder. Sinful failures bring about actions from other people that often let us know we've done something sinful. As often as that happens it would seem that we're always in trouble. Even when we're being careful we can be sinning in our minds. We might not say what we really want to, but that doesn't make it less sinful.

Beyond the immediate feedback we get from others, God could give us his feedback. He has every right to punish us for every sin we commit. Failure should lead to total destruction. We deserve to be consumed for the sins we commit. That kind of immediate feedback would get our attention and cause us to not last long.

Except, that's not what you face. You are not consumed for your failures. There's only one reason why. The Lord's great love. His love is more than just a good feeling towards you. His love means action. You are not consumed because Jesus was consumed. Hanging on the cross, Jesus was facing the wrath of God. Sin was being punished. Jesus faced it instead of you. He faced the wrath of God. He died. That was God's great love for you. His Son dying in your place. The innocent one for the guilty. Fixing your failures.

You don't have to wonder, were those failures really fixed? You have immediate feedback. Listening to the Word of God, remembering your baptism, participating in the Lord's Supper. God's grace is given to you. The Lord's great love doesn't fail. His compassion for you in Christ doesn't fail. Your failures are all fixed.

PRAYER: Jesus, you are God's great love in action. Thank you for not failing. Thank you for fixing my failures and forgiving my sins. Because of you, I can be confident that the Lord's great love is for me. Lord, help me live in the reality of my failures being fixed in Christ. Amen.



## WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE ELIMINATED MY ENEMIES

Week 4

# He Eliminated My Enemies

Sunday, March 31, 2019

## Psalm 27:1

Are you a fan of scary movies? Do you cover your eyes when the music gets ominous? Do you bury your head in a pillow anticipating what's around the corner or what might happen next? It's easy to live life that way, isn't it?! Instead of cherishing the freedom that is ours in Christ alone and celebrating the gift of life he gives us to live in praise of his holy name, we cower in fear of what might be waiting around the next corner or fret about things over which we have no control.

Here's an important lesson King David teaches us with the words of Psalm 27:1. Seeing who the Lord is and what the Lord does helped him understand these big questions, "whom shall I fear," and, "of whom shall I be afraid." Without God, even King David could only respond, "anyone and everyone!" Without our God as "my light and my salvation" we are in the dark and on our own. Without the Lord as "the stronghold of my life" we are not protected from the devil's schemes or even our sinful self. David understood that. He knew that he needed his God in all things... or else. Whether running for his life from King Saul or heading into battle with Israel's army or fleeing from his own son, Absalom, who sought to take over the kingdom, David needed his God to lead him, to guide him, to protect him... or all would be lost.

David, though, was never alone. Neither are we - in this life or in eternity. God is always with us. He never ever leaves us to fend for ourselves. Rather, he guides us by the power of his Holy Word and leads us forward in glory to his holy name. Our devotions this week build off the theme, "When Christ Went to Calvary... He Eliminated My Enemies." He really did. He conquered death. He crushed Satan's head. He made it so that we - his precious blood-bought children - never need to fear anything- or anyone- again. Why? Because the same One who sent his one and only Son to die for us does not abandon us in our daily struggles of life. Because he loves us. Because he cares for us. That truth alone is what allows us this Lenten season to join with David and proclaim "The Lord is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid."

PRAYER: Thank you, Lord God, for reminding me through your Word that you are with me always. Continue to keep me in your tender care and protect me from Satan, this world, and even my own sinful flesh. Embolden me to live for you, confident that you lead me where you want me to go. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## 1 Samuel 17:45-47

Michael Buffer is an announcer known for one phrase, “Let’s Get Ready to Rumble.” Wow, are those words fitting as we peak into the Valley of Elah and watch David make his way to battle Goliath. The story is well known- Israel and Philistia are encamped on either side of the valley. Philistia’s giant champion, Goliath, taunts Israel for someone to come out and fight him. David hears the taunts and is disgusted that this heathen would dare defy Israel’s God. With Saul’s blessing, the shepherd boy, there only to bring his brothers some food and supplies, enters the ‘ring’ for a battle to the death in which all odds were stacked against him.

David, though, knew something that neither Goliath nor the Philistines did. “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” Philistia’s champion didn’t stand a chance. God would defeat Goliath just like he had done for his people since the beginning of time. Philistia’s champion didn’t stand a chance because he had set himself up in opposition to God Almighty.

We sometimes forget that in the battles of life, don’t we?! We forget who fights on our side. Rather, we look at how we measure up and cower at the sight of God’s enemies. We determine there is no chance of withstanding their attacks. How short-sighted we so often are when temptations come alluring, or when push comes to shove, or when Satan rears his ugly head to give us grief.

Satan, like Goliath, is no match for the God who fights for us. While our battles do not take place against a real-life giant in a valley, the same God who brought David victory that day is the One who fights for us and assures us that victory is ours. And this God knows something about victory. His sent his own Son to battle Satan on our behalf. The victory won on Calvary’s cross and triumph declared by an empty tomb is a battle won, once and for all. This same God arms and equips us to fight day after day. More than that, he announces to all our enemies the same battle cry as did an Israelite shepherd boy, “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” What a victory we see in 1 Samuel 17. What a victory we have in Christ alone.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as the world, death, and the devil stand over me as Goliath did over David, I cry to you for mercy. There are so many things that I am not equipped to handle on my own. And yet, in your mercy, you sent your son, Jesus, descended from David, who has won us victory by your mighty name and with your endless power. Strengthen me by the power of your Word, dear God, to boldly face the challenges of this life, confident that you are always with me. Build in me the faith to know that you will keep me close to you and be joyful that my home is with you for eternity in heaven. Amen.

## Zephaniah 3:14-17

Show of hands- who knows more than a handful of things specific to the Prophet Zephaniah and the occasion for his Old Testament book? While most are more familiar with prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and maybe even Ezekiel, our glimpse into Zephaniah's book today is worthwhile because it helps us see how the Savior who came into the world both eliminated our enemies and gives us the confidence to live for him.

While much of Zephaniah's prophecy is God speaking directly through him, the verses before us are Zephaniah's response to God's goodness and mercy. He speaks for us all when he proclaims, "Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!" We don't have to wait long to understand why there is reason to rejoice, "The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm." What an amazing God we have! Even before the promise of a Messiah was fulfilled in Bethlehem, Zephaniah speaks of God's promise as if it had already been fulfilled in Christ alone. Zephaniah writes knowing that sin's eternal consequences have been washed away. He writes knowing the fear of death has been erased. Oh, how true. The Lord is victorious. Christ has conquered death. His victory is our victory.

Because of this, we are renewed in our faith. We know that "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love, he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." Think about that. God Almighty rejoices because we are his and he is ours. The Lord of all is on our side. What could be better?! What could remind us more that victory is ours in him alone?!

Dear friends, this Lenten season is one of solemnity and repentance. We travel to the cross, reminded of our sins and need for a Savior. We also travel there, though, knowing that when Christ went to Calvary, he eliminated all our enemies. The price he paid has taken away our punishment. Never again do we have to fear any harm because he's got us. He's with us. He continues to fight on our behalf. Hold on to the words of Zephaniah that "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves." They are words which drive away fear. They are words which remind us our enemies have no power over us. They are words which assure us of a victory earned by the blood of the One who went to Calvary on our behalf. All praise his holy name.

PRAYER: Lord God, you use a little-known Old Testament prophet today to remind us of who we are in Christ and we can rejoice in him as our Savior. Build us up in this timeless truth, O Lord, and take away the temptation to be fearful in this life and woeful when things don't go our way. Remind us of your love. Fill us with your mercy. In Jesus' name. Amen.

# Nothing to Fear

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

## Hebrews 2:14

I admit it. I am a coward. When it comes to scary movies, I want no part of them. Give me sports, give me drama, action, romantic comedy, I would rather watch a documentary on a quilting convention than a horror film. And I think at least part of the reason that I dislike them is that I realize that there are truly horrible things in this world. And there is also a horrible cause.

As scary as a horror movie may be, the writer to the Hebrews talks about some of the most frightening things that we can ever imagine. He is talking about death and sin, and the power of the devil. These are not things to dismiss or laugh off. The devil is real and he holds the power of death. The chances that you and I will die one day is still 100%. Unless the Lord returns before that day, you and I will one day breathe our last breath.

But I believe the author here is talking about more than the eventual end of our heartbeats. He is talking about the ultimate horror—spiritual death in hell. The devil is all about death—he wants us to experience hell. He wants our souls to die. There can be no greater enemy of humanity and no greater horror than being eternally separated from God.

But even in the scariest of movies, someone has to have the courage to take on the enemy. Jesus had that courage. But in order to defeat the devil, Jesus also had to take on something else first. “He shared in their humanity,” the writer to the Hebrews says. We have a Savior who did not look at our plight from on high and sadly shake his head at our condition. We have a Savior who got dirty and bloody and fierce in his fight against the devil. But for every temptation that the devil threw at him, Jesus never failed, Jesus never gave in. And then in one great act of sacrifice at Calvary’s cross, Jesus set us free from the devil’s power. He can’t touch us. He can’t have us. We are safe.

Sometimes scary things still happen in life. And I guess sometimes people still like to scare themselves too. But you and I have Jesus. He took on flesh and blood to save us. And he has defeated our greatest enemy. Through Jesus, we have nothing to fear.

PRAYER: He sent no angel to our race, Of higher or of nobler place, But wore the robe of human frame, And to this world himself he came. For us baptized, for us he bore His holy fast and hungered sore; For us temptation sharp he knew, For us the tempter overthrew. Amen. (*Christian Worship, 371, v.2,3*)

## Romans 6:5-7

In 1633, the Dutch artist Rembrandt painted “The Raising of the Cross.” The painting shows many hands pushing and pulling a large wooden cross to raise it into its place. The body of Jesus is already attached to that cross with spikes through his hands and his feet. Jesus is being raised so that he may undergo his punishment of death by crucifixion. But as you look at the painting, something stands out very clearly. At the base of the cross is a strange looking man wearing a blue hat and a blue shirt who definitely does not look like anyone else in the painting. The colors alone stand out in contrast to the rest of the painting. As he was famous for, Rembrandt had painted himself into “The Raising of the Cross.” By placing himself at the base of the cross and the middle of the painting, Rembrandt was obviously saying something very clearly: “I was there too. I am as responsible as anyone for Jesus going to the cross.”

The Bible tells us the same. Our sins led Jesus to the cross. If God has given us that skill, we could all paint ourselves into our own portrait of the crucifixion. Each one of us would have to say, “I was there too. I put Jesus on the cross.”

But the Apostle Paul makes a different application of that truth in Romans chapter six. Yes, it was our sins that led to the cross, but also understand what Jesus did to our sins through that cross. “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—” Paul says not only were we there at the cross of Jesus but in his crucifixion, we have undergone a crucifixion too—our sin has been put to death.

And it gets even better! “If we have been united like this with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” Not only are united with Jesus in his crucifixion, but we are also united with Jesus in his resurrection! As Jesus died on Calvary’s cross, so did our slavery to sin. As Jesus was raised on Easter, so we were raised from everlasting death to eternal life.

I don’t know if Rembrandt painted a scene of the resurrection with his figure curiously added, but God tells us here in Romans that is exactly the case. We are united with Jesus. His death means the death of our sin. His resurrection is our resurrection. We don’t have a painting, but we have the very Word of God which comforts us: “I was there too. I have been raised with Jesus!”

PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, you set us free—Accept our thanks eternally! Forgiven through your precious blood, We now are reconciled to God. For thus the certainty we gain That you will always true remain And not forsake us in our strife But lead us out of death to life. Amen. (*Christian Worship, 123, v. 1,4*)

# Finding Courage in Trouble

Friday, April 5, 2019

## John 16:33

Put yourself in the sandals of the disciples during holy week. What emotions would you have felt? What feelings would have reigned in your heart? Would it have been growing anxiety as the glory of Palm Sunday turned into tension and trouble by Thursday? Perhaps you would have felt the grip of fear as Jesus is arrested and everyone flees. Perhaps you would've tumbled into the deep despair of a world that seemed to have lost its Light. Fear, despair, anxiety, desperation—you or I might have felt any of these. But peace? Serenity? Courage? They seem entirely inappropriate.

So often, the most realistic or relatable part of John 16:33 is the part about trouble: “In this world you will have trouble...” That much we can verify on a daily basis. Far from feeling like we have “overcome the world,” we often feel as though we have lost. Family aspirations can be crushed by accidents or disease. Professional aspirations can lead us to self-destruct (not to mention destroying others). Health can slowly deteriorate or outright abandon us. As we walk this world's hall of mirrors or stare at our neighbor's social media highlights, our troubles can just about crush us. You can imagine the emotions that go along with those misfortunes.

As Christians, we know that in this world we will have trouble. And yet, in the most troubling scene of all, we find our victory. We find God in human flesh, troubled before his death. He would, to every human eye, suffer a humiliating defeat. The slander against him would go unchallenged. The death sentence would be handed down. Even on the cross, his enemies would gloat. And yet, on the eve of his suffering, he gave a message of peace to his disciples

Trouble they had and trouble they would continue to have but make no mistake, those same disciples would have peace. They would understand what it meant that Jesus was the sacrifice that brought them peace. They would understand what it meant to take courage in troubled times.

And they would understand victory as well. John would ponder and repeat that phrase elsewhere in his epistles. The world and all its daggers and arrows had been overcome. Whatever disease or terror or suffering you or I go through, Jesus' message is clear—this world has been defeated.

So take heart. Find your courage in Jesus' victory. Find peace in his sacrifice. In this world, you will have trouble, but in Jesus you have peace.

**PRAYER:** Holy Spirit, giver of peace, come into our hearts, strengthen our faith, and increase our hope so that, even in trial and trouble, we might take heart in the Jesus' victory. Amen.

# Praise God, Who Saves Us from Death

Saturday, April 6, 2019

## Psalm 68:20

“I’m not really sure what to say.” So many of us struggle to find appropriate words for funerals. Expressing one’s condolences can indeed be a frustrating, helpless kind of experience. There are no magic words to cheer people up—funerals are not for cheer. They’re for mourning and reflection, for closure and hope.

“I wasn’t sure what to tell them.” Speaking to the terminally ill can also be uncomfortable. Do I reuse the cliché I’ve heard before? Or would it be better to just sit with them? Do I try to remind them of the good times or talk about heaven?

We face many enemies in this world, and few have been defeated. The human race continues to struggle against itself. We struggle against ourselves—our own sinful flesh. The dark, supernatural powers of this world work beyond our reach. On top of that, diseases, hurt, and suffering surround us daily.

And then there’s death, an enemy that makes the powerful feel helpless, an enemy that punches vast holes in the fabric of our lives—holes that may never fully heal this side of heaven. Our enemy, death, has fought against us since the fall into sin. And as long as death has haunted man, man has struggled against it. He’s struggled to defend himself from others, struggled to keep himself healthy, struggled to protect loved ones, and struggled against disease. And death has always won. Sure, death can be delayed. Hospitals can restore us; hospices can lend some comfort and dignity to the dying, but death will always take its due.

Except. Except when God steps in. When God steps in, his enemies melt like wax, they are blown away like smoke (Psalm 68:2). When God steps in, he saves. He took the unyielding force of death and made it submit. Almighty God wrestled death and turned it into the steps to heaven. He created hope where there was none.

He did so with his own death. To save sinners from death, he had to find a sacrifice. And, when no other sacrifice would do, Jesus himself went. He went to surrender himself to death at the hands of wicked men. But instead of lying helpless in the grave, he rose again to crush death, to snap off its sting. His death led to a resurrection, and so will ours. And until we taste our new life, he continues to be the God who also bears our burdens (Psalm 68:19).

And now, knowing how death died, we don’t have to stay silent in the face of death. Grief can’t silence our praise and death can’t strangle our hope. Although our celebration is somewhat muted in the season of Lent, treasure the joy and the victory we find in Christ’s sacrifice.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, conqueror of death, you surrendered yourself to death yet rose again to proclaim your victory. Comfort us with the news of your power and resurrection, that we might find peace in this broken world. Amen.



**WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE FORGAVE MY SINS**

Week 5

## Psalm 103:1-3

My sister-in-law is undergoing treatments for a malignant brain tumor. My daughter has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis since she was eleven years old. My aunt has completely lost her eyesight. I'm currently battling a nasty cold. So how are things in your family? Oh, my! I'm so sorry to hear that!

Ever find yourself swapping accounts of family illnesses? Some folks do that merely to wallow in self-pity. For others, though, such conversations prompt expressions of sympathy, medical advice, words of encouragement, prayers for healing and recovery, and, yes, even heartfelt praise to the Lord. Let me explain:

Every sickness arrives as an uncomfortable reminder that you are a fallen creature. Mankind's first parents sinned against God; so have you. The consequences of sin include a litany of aches, pains, sicknesses, and seemingly countless diseases. And that's not going to change, is it? You've noticed that for every triumphant announcement that a deadly disease has been pushed off the world's stage, another deadly disease comes onto the scene.

Jesus came to drive out fevers, to cure leprosy, to put the paralyzed on their feet, to give sight to the blind, and to bring hearing to the deaf. People came to the Great Physician from all over the region, and why not? He was "healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23), again and again showing his compassion and proving his identity as the Son of God.

But Jesus didn't eradicate every illness from the face of the earth, did he? He had a much higher priority. My greatest problem is not my sniffles. My aunt's worst ailment is not her blindness. Your most dangerous disorder is not what most recently had you sitting in your doctor's office. It's rather that we have offended our holy God in our thoughts, words, and actions. Those sins should lead to more than a trip to the emergency room or a frightening diagnosis at the hospital. They should result in eternal suffering in hell.

Remarkably, the Son of God was willing to suffer in my place for all my offenses against God. Praise the Lord! On the cross, he shed his blood to set you free from guilt. Praise the Lord! For his Son's sake, our heavenly Father forgives all our sins. Praise the Lord! In this life, the Great Physician is going to heal all our diseases whenever such healing is in keeping with his good and gracious plan for our eternity. Praise the Lord! In the life to come there will be no more sickness, sorrow, suffering, or pain. "Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits — who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases."

**PRAYER:** Whenever we petition you on behalf of those who are suffering from an illness of the body, merciful Lord, accept our prayers. Whenever we hear that you have forgiven all our sins, gracious Lord, accept our praises. Amen.

# No Payback!

Monday, April 8, 2019

## Psalm 103:9-10

After they've threatened his father, the war hero shoots a corrupt policeman and the head of a crime family. After they've kidnapped his daughter, an ex-CIA agent finds the perpetrators and kills them. Al Pacino, Liam Neeson, John Wayne – it doesn't much matter who the star of the film is. If someone's been seriously wronged, moviegoers flock to see what sort of vengeance is in store for the bad guys. The more brutal the payback, it seems, the more pleased the audience. Of course, art is merely imitating real life. More than once you or I have been pleased when a criminal got what was coming to him, whether the payback was legal or not.

Yet what if the LORD should feel that way or act that way toward us? You've ignored the giver of every perfect gift. Shouldn't the LORD pay you back by ignoring you? I've harbored bitter thoughts toward someone who wronged me years ago. Shouldn't the LORD turn the tables and harbor bitterness toward me? At times, we've withheld forgiveness from someone who has wronged us. Doesn't the LORD have the right to withhold forgiveness from us? Payback says the LORD should do those very things in this life and then top it off by casting us away from his presence forever. Indeed, justice says he has every right to do that.

During the season of Lent, we observe that God is different. He accuses with his holy law, and our many crimes against his name certainly anger him. But there's no vengeance. There's no payback. Rather, as the psalmist puts it, "he will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." Indeed, the LORD directs his Servant Jesus to pay for our iniquities with his holy precious blood. He subjects his willing Son to the punishment our sins have deserved. He unleashes his angry justice against our Substitute, accusing Jesus in our place.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul puts you in God's courtroom. If God desired payback, the future would be terrifying. If God had vengeance in mind, we would be destroyed. But God promises mercy: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" He announces what has actually happened. "It is God who justifies" (Romans 8:33). No payback. No vengeance. No accusations. No anger. Just a "not guilty" verdict and everlasting freedom. All for Jesus' sake.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, continue to be merciful. Be mindful of the verdict paid for by your Son at the cross and confirmed at his resurrection from the grave. For his sake grant us your peace. Amen.

## Psalm 103:11-12

From the point where you're currently sitting, how far would you have to travel before you could say, "I believe I've reached the east?" Hmm. Wouldn't the east still be beyond the horizon? Or if you headed the other direction, how far would you have to go before you could say, "I've actually reached the west"? Hmm. Wouldn't the west stretch still further west? And as for the distance between those two unlimited distances, is anyone actually capable of arriving at a fixed number of miles for it?

With the Spirit of the Lord on his tongue, King David compels us to imagine a limitless distance that's beyond our imagination. "As far as the east is from the west," he says, "so far has (the Lord) removed our transgressions from us." Have you failed to love him as you must? Or misused his holy name? Or despised his word? Have you always honored the government he's put in place over you? If you're married, are you content with the spouse God's given you? If you are single, have you struggled against lust? Have you been stingy? Have you been greedy? Do you protect other people's reputations even if they aren't always so kind to you?

Turn to your God and take heart! Your God has removed all those sins so far away and he will never to reinsert them into your record. He's cast them away from his mind. He will never bring them back up. For now and forever, your transgressions are "as far as the east is from the west."

NASA launched Voyager 1 back in 1977. Traveling at a speed of 38,610 miles per hour, the space probe is currently more than 13.5 billion miles from earth. Hmm. Is that how high the heavens are above the earth? The most distant galaxy, scientists speculate, is billions of lightyears away. Not miles. Lightyears. Hmm. Is that how high the heavens are above the earth?

Once again the psalmist has us trying to imagine an unimaginable distance. "As high as the heavens are above the earth," he sings, "so great is (the Lord's) love for those who fear him." It's so great that he came from his heavenly throne to be conceived of a woman, cradled in poverty, raised in obscurity, rejected by his own people, despised by earthly authorities, arrested, accused, condemned, and "pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). It's so great that was willing to be "pierced for our transgressions, ... numbered with the transgressors." It's so great that he "bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

As you go through the day today, try to imagine once again how far your transgressions have been removed. The distance from the east to the west. Ponder the height of his love. Like the heavens are above the earth. Impossible to fully grasp? Of course it is. Nevertheless, its comfort is without scope or limit. His glory is beyond measure.

**PRAYER:** Oh, the height of Jesus' love, Higher than the heavens above, Deeper than the depths of sea, Lasting as eternity, Love that found me—wondrous thought!—Found me when I sought him not. Amen.

# Your Sins are Covered

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

## Psalm 32:1-2

Have you ever tried to cover up something wrong that you have done? As a person with a sinful nature, the answer is yes. When we follow the desires of our sinful nature, we take steps to cover up our sinful actions. Our sinful nature may even convince us that such a cover-up might work and no one will discover our sinfulness. We may even succeed in fooling family members, friends, co-workers, and so on, but ultimately we are just fooling ourselves. No matter how hard people try, none can ever succeed in covering up their sins. God knows each and every one. It doesn't matter how elaborate the cover-up or how tiny the sin may seem. God knows what you have done. You can't cover up your sins.

Sinful human beings cannot fool the almighty, all-knowing God. We sin, and there is nothing that we can do to remove those sins from our lives. We cannot cover them up. Hiding sin doesn't bring relief. It brings guilt and shame. The devil would love nothing more than to use that guilt and shame to suffocate faith. The psalm writer, King David, also felt the guilt and shame of his sins as he tried to cover them up. It nearly suffocated his faith. Though he tried, David could not cover up his sins.

Only God can cover up your sins. No, God does not help you carry out some elaborate scheme to fool the world into thinking you are a good person. God knows your sins, but he loves you anyway. God covers up your sins in a way that only he could accomplish. God's son, Jesus, gives to you the robe of righteousness that he won for you on the cross. Jesus wraps you in that robe of righteousness so that when God looks at you he does not see your sin, guilt, and shame. These have been covered by the blood of His son, Jesus. Your sins have been removed. Your sins have been covered.

Next time you feel the temptation to try to cover up a sinful act, remember that Jesus loved you so much that he sacrificed himself to cover up your sins. Then, filled with the Holy Spirit, turn away from the temptations of the devil, the world, and your sinful nature. Repent of your sins and leave them behind. Jesus has blessed you with the forgiveness of sins and taken away your guilt and shame.

**PRAYER:** Passover Lamb, the blood that you shed on the cross has covered my sins. Thank you for this sacrificial gift. Give me the strength to turn away from temptation and trust in you for forgiveness when I fall. In your name I pray, Amen.

## Psalm 32:5

The expression “instant gratification” has become associated with people who expect to get what they want when they want it. Instant gratification is viewed negatively because it takes the easy way out. The opposite of instant gratification is delayed gratification. Psychologists say that people who are willing to delay gratification will generally be more successful in achieving their goals because they have the ability to wait for something better.

In most areas of life, it is probably better to practice delayed gratification, but when we talk about the forgiveness of sins, isn't instant gratification a better model to follow? How often do we unnecessarily persist in carrying heavy burdens of sin, guilt, and shame without going to God with a repentant heart? How often do we unnecessarily hold grudges against other people because we are unwilling to say those three simple words, “I forgive you.” Spiritually speaking, isn't it true that when we cover up our sins instead of confessing them or withhold forgiveness instead of offering it, we are delaying the gratification of forgiveness for which God paid so dearly?

The psalm writer, King David, says, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” When David finally was willing to own up to what he had done and confessed his sin, God forgave him instantly. There was no delayed forgiveness. There was no trial period where David had to prove he was really sorry. There was no additional work that needed to be done. David confessed his sins. He trusted in God for that forgiveness. His sins were forgiven instantly.

Don't delay the gratification of the forgiveness of sins. Whatever reason you have for holding on to your sin, it's not worth it. In fact, holding onto your sin could be deadly to your faith. Whatever reason you have for holding onto a grudge, it's not worth it. In fact, holding onto that grudge could also be deadly to your faith. Your Savior is waiting eagerly to welcome you back into his loving arms. The forgiveness he won for you is yours without conditions. So when it comes to forgiveness, don't delay gratification by holding on to sins or grudges. Experience the instant gratification that comes through the forgiveness of sins and be comforted as David was. “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

PRAYER: Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, That they may trouble us no more; We, too, will gladly those forgive Who hurt us by the way they live. Help us in our community To serve each other willingly. Amen.  
*(Christian Worship, 410, v. 6)*

## Hebrews 8:12

It is fascinating what our minds can remember! Without a second thought, you could probably punch in the digits of your childhood phone number or recall exactly how much you paid for your first home. We play trivia games where we impress each other by reciting the lyrics to old pop songs or obscure advertising slogans. And there are certain moments so fixed in our minds that we can recall decades-old details as if they were happening right now.

It is just as fascinating (and frustrating) what our minds can't remember! Despite sticky notes and cell phone alerts, we are bound to forget one item on the grocery list, an important event on the calendar, or where we left our keys. We might long to relive a family vacation or hear the voice of a loved one now gone, but we can't quite conjure up the memory.

On the other hand, there are some things we'd love to forget, but just can't. The hurtful comment that you overheard still stings. The biting words that you blurted at your spouse are used as ammunition the next time around. The sins of your youth enter uninvited into your mind, where they feel as real as the sins of yesterday. It's our sin - our own wickedness - that is ever present and unforgettable.

Yet there is one who is all-knowing, that remembers our sins no more. Your God, who knows you better than you know yourself, has forgotten all your sins. It's not that he chooses to ignore them, or has them on a decades-old list to deal with later. It's not that he is saving our sins to dredge out as ammunition for next time around. Those sins are forgiven. Gone. Removed as far as the east is from the west. Jesus took every ounce of our wickedness on himself. Christ hung with those sins upon the cross, accomplishing what we could not, remembering not what we could never escape.

Because of what Christ has accomplished, we now stand forgiven. This life of sin-forgotten forgiveness is our eternal reality. We are freed from the sins of our youth and the sins of yesterday.

Yes, it is fascinating what our minds can remember and what they can't. But be fascinated by and rejoice in God who has powerfully, mercifully, and eternally forgiven all of our sins and remembers them no more. Rejoice in what Christ has accomplished.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, you know I am unworthy of all the goodness you show me. I am unworthy of your love and forgiveness. By grace, you sent Jesus to forgive all my sins, and you now remember him when you look at me. Help me never forget this forgiveness. Amen.

## Hebrews 9:22

What are some things you enjoy about being in church on a Sunday morning? Sermons that touch your heart and teach you God's truths? Music that lifts you up and leaves you inspired? Bible studies where you grow in knowledge and understanding? The water, wafer, and wine, through which the Spirit works? The encouragement and fellowship of a Christian church community? And all that blood. Wait...what? Blood?!

We would be more than a little shocked to have the sight and stench of blood welcoming us to church some Sunday. For Old Testament believers, though, blood was an essential part of worship. As animals were slaughtered in sacrifice each day, there was no escaping the blood – flowing from the animal's side, sprinkled on the altar, or dripping from the hands of the priest. By including sacrifice for sin as a part of worship, God reminded his people over and over again “The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is blood that makes atonement for one's life” (Leviticus 17:11). Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Yet it wasn't the blood of those animals that forgave sins “because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). Those thousands of bloody sacrifices were but a shadow of the one bloody sacrifice on the altar of Calvary's cross. The blood of Jesus – flowing from his side, dripping from his head and hands and feet – purifies us from all sin. This once-for-all sacrifice for sins is an act of amazing love that only God could initiate and only Christ could accomplish. Sin's burden has been lifted forever.

Now freely forgiven, once and for all by the blood of Jesus, we dedicate our lives to him in praise and worship. Part of that worship includes being in church on Sunday morning. Hearing sermons that touch your heart and teach you God's truths. Listening to music that lifts you up and leaves you inspired. Growing in knowledge and understanding as you study the Bible. Experiencing the blessing of fellowship with a Christian church community. Witnessing the work of the Spirit through wafer and wine, body and blood. And in it all, looking to the cross where all that blood was shed to forgive your sins.

PRAYER: Dearest Lord, forgive me for my sins which put your Son on the cross. Thank you for his perfect sacrifice of blood by which all my sins were forgiven forever. Let me never stop looking to the blood of Jesus in my life of worship. Amen.



**WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE ACCOMPLISHED MY SALVATION**

Week 6

# The King of Peace Enters

Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019

## Luke 19:38

The Palm Sunday scene must have been something to behold! A street filled with crowds. Cloaks and palm branches laid in the road ahead of the approaching donkey. Shouts of acclamation. All for a man dressed remarkably like a teacher rather than a mighty king and followed by commoners rather than nobles. Yet the scene could not have been more fitting.

Jesus may not have looked the part on the outside but he is the eternal king. Humbly clothed in human flesh, Jesus entered Jerusalem with the greatest purpose imaginable. He came to bring peace better than the peace provided by any king or ruler before or since. Why? Because rather than bringing peace with some foreign nation, Jesus brought peace with the just and holy God.

Jesus rode into Jerusalem proclaiming a peace that human beings could never claim or broker for ourselves. And he brought peace for us? Scripture describes us as people who have gratified the sinful nature and who deserve God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3). It seems impossible that he would do this for us when we know how we fail. In the mirror, we see a person who said, "Never again." But we have. And Jesus came to bring us peace?

It seems impossible, but Jesus entered Jerusalem to accomplish the impossible. He came to accomplish our salvation. YOUR salvation. Even as he entered he proclaimed peace because with Jesus the king, the battle was as good as won already. He declared peace for us because he turned his power against those enemies that kept peace from us. The crowds were right as they shouted, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem on the path to Calvary's cross. On that cross, he would fight the ultimate, final battle to break the hold of sin, death, and Satan over our souls.

Jesus your king, entered Jerusalem to bring you peace! Remember that when you look in the mirror. Jesus won the battle against your sin and took it away forever. Even when Satan, the great accuser, points out the guilt of your past, you have great peace. Jesus has accomplished it. Jesus came to accomplish your peace. You are at peace with God.

PRAYER: Dear Savior King, Thank you for accomplishing what I could not. Thank you for bringing peace to me. When guilt and fear try again to overtake me, remind me that you entered Jerusalem to bring me peace. Quiet my doubts and fears and lead me to trust you. Amen.

## Mark 11:9-10

He sat, trying to catch his breath. He was exhausted. He had barely managed to escape the jaws of the massive dogs chasing him. But his ordeal was not over. There he sat on a branch that was holding him, for now, while those massive dogs paced below him. How long could he stay out of reach? How long before the branch snapped or he lost his grip? Then darkness falls. He can hear the dogs, still stalking, refusing to let him go. Suddenly he sees a flashlight beam and shouts, 'Help!' The stranger arrives and drives away the dogs. He's rescued.

If you were the man, how would you greet your rescuer? Hopefully, you have never had the opportunity to be in a situation like this one. Yet, you can probably imagine the kind of gratitude and appreciation you would feel for someone who rescued you from danger. You would not hesitate to speak his or her praise to whoever would listen.

That's the situation in Mark 11. Whether the crowds really understood exactly what they were shouting or not, they were shouting the praise of a rescuer. They shouted "Hosanna!" which means "Save us!". It was spot on! Jesus had come to save!

Worse than dogs, the jaws of death had already closed around each and every one of us. Worse than dangling over danger we were stuck in the nightmare of spiritual death, doomed to hell. So we shout, "Hosanna!" "Save us!" Jesus came and freed us from the jaws of death. Jesus has brought us to safety with him forever.

Of all that the people may or may not have known, we do know that they almost only shouted "Hosanna!" to those powerful enough to save. Jesus is our king. In fact, he is the son of David that God promised to send who would reign on the eternal throne of God. That throne is one of grace – love for people who do not deserve it, like us. That throne is one of power – power over sin. That throne is one of life – life over death. That throne is eternal – eternity over hell. And all of this from the one who left heaven's throne in order to take his seat on a donkey. But he chose that donkey and the pathway that eventually led to the cross because he would not abandon us. So, it is right that we would join the crowd in shouting "Hosanna!" because Jesus has saved us!

PRAYER: Hosanna, Lord Jesus. Thank you for coming to save me! Your sacrifice in my place has rescued me from sin, death, and hell. Help me to live my life always giving you praise. Give me many opportunities to shout your praise because you have saved me. Hosanna. Amen.

## Isaiah 12:1-6

Isaiah wrote, “Make known among the nations what he has done.” That can appear to be a daunting task in this world as we know it. There is opposition to just about any side. What is more, how many people feel that Christianity is the wrong side to be on? But you notice in Isaiah’s words, what is commonly referred to as his “First Song,” the Spirit didn’t inspire him to consider whether or not the world would always listen. In fact, from what we know about Isaiah, few if any of God’s own people listened to his message. Even still, that doesn’t diminish the truth of this message. “Surely God is my salvation. I will trust in him and not be afraid.”

We have a lot in common with Isaiah. It seemed like it wasn’t that long ago when people would be a little more receptive when we shared our faith and the glorious things he has done. It can be easy to become more silent and give in, just a little, to the opposing voices that seem to dominate the landscape. But what do we have to be afraid of? We can say with Isaiah, “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust in him and not be afraid... make known among the nations what he has done.”

And we can be so bold because we know that God accomplishes great things under the guise of humility and defeat. Look again at the Savior riding into the city of his death on a donkey? It would seem that all the praises and proclamations would be in vain. More than that! Such voices are foolish. But here we see God do his glorious things. Under the appearance of a normal looking man is the Son of God. Behind the sight of a man on a donkey is our Champion who would conquer our greatest foes. In between the lines of the shouts was the truth behind every word. He saves because he is our God. He is our salvation.

So, we do have something to say in our world today. Just as is true in every age, we have a message that is powerful enough to change eternity and transform hearts and lives regardless of the contentious landscape today. We can sing those Palm Sunday truths in Isaiah’s words, “Surely God is my salvation... make known among the nations what he has done!”

**PRAYER:** Dear Holy Spirit, through the message of salvation in Jesus, changes hearts and lives. Help me to grow more and more in understanding the grace I have been given. Move me to speak of Christ and his saving work whenever possible. Make me bold to speak of his salvation and give me opportunities to share with others, through Christ my Lord. Amen.

## Jonah 2:9

Getting thrown off a boat into the sea would put a damper on your day. Getting swallowed by a fish after getting thrown overboard would make your day even worse. You might not feel like singing praises to God at that moment. However, the prophet Jonah thanked and praised God as he lay in the cramped, slimy, smelly stomach of a fish. He realized that God had saved him from drowning at sea. More than that, Jonah realized that God had decided to spare him even after he ran away from his calling.

As Jonah lay inside the nasty stomach of that fish, he was he was already making plans for the future. In verse 4 he says, "I will look again toward your holy temple." In verse 9 he says, "I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good." What made Jonah so optimistic? What made him already start planning for the future?

Jonah trusted that God saved him from the sea because God is gracious. He trusted in the God who saves him from when God wasn't first in his own heart. And the God who saved him from sin, death, and despair saved him to serve in his original calling. And now the rebellious prophet was motivated to take up his calling and bring God's message to the city of Nineveh.

The salvation that comes from our Lord allows us to have an optimism no matter what situation we find ourselves in. We know the Lord has already saved us from the worst threats we face. He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, knowing that he would face hatred, unfairness, murder, and, worse yet, hell. Our sin has been buried in the tomb with Christ. Death has been swallowed up in victory. A heavenly mansion is waiting for us in God's presence in heaven. We get to plan for a future with the Lord who saved us.

Like Jonah, we are also motivated into action by the Lord's salvation. We take up our individual callings in life to serve our Lord and love our neighbor. We take up our most important calling as we share the good news of Jesus with those walking in darkness. We join Jonah in shouting our grateful praise. Salvation comes from the Lord!

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, our salvation comes from you. You give us optimism for this life and hope for a future life with you. Allow your salvation to motivate us in living our callings to your glory. Amen.

# Salvation Belongs to Our God

Holy Thursday, April 18, 2019

## Revelation 7:10

We usually don't like it when someone tells us the ending of a good book or movie. We might feel like it's not even worth reading the book or watching the movie if someone spoils the ending. But people really want to know the ending when it comes to their life. People want to know what's going to happen when their days on the earth are over. The book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the end of our story - all of history. And this small glimpse of the ending is amazing for us as believers!

The scene in heaven involves multitudes of believers from every nation standing before the throne of God. They're wearing white robes. They're holding palm branches. They're crying out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." We look forward to the day when we get to join that multitude in singing that song.

In the meantime, while we wait to be part of that scene in heaven, we need to focus on what those saints are singing about. They're singing about the Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb of God. He gave himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. That sacrifice paid and paved our way to the eternal throne of God in heaven. Yes, salvation belongs to us! Not that we could claim it for ourselves. Rather, because of his sacrifice and substitute, Jesus is our Savior.

How fitting that the saints in heaven are depicted as holding palm branches. Salvation was as good as done when he entered under the branches that Palm Sunday. We have the comfort of knowing the end of our story this week and every other. And since that is the end of our eternal story, nothing can change it. Salvation belongs to our God and he delights to share it with us.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we long to be gathered around your throne in heaven, singing songs of praise with all believers. We thank you for sharing your salvation with us in your Son. We rejoice that salvation belongs to us and we look forward to enjoying salvation with you in eternity. Amen.

### Matthew 27:46

Lillie was entranced with all the varieties of sweet treats in the candy aisle. Her palate salivating over the different varieties of sugary goodness on display, she didn't even notice that her mom had continued onto the next aisle. Little Lillie's delight turned to horror when she looked away from the candy to find mom, and mom was nowhere in sight! Tears formed in her eyes as she cried out, "Mom! Mom! Where are you?" Separation can wrack the soul with anxiety.

What anxiety did Jesus feel? "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

This separation anxiety wasn't temporary like a child distanced from her parent. This separation was eternal. It was purposeful. It was awful. And it was exactly what was needed.

Sin separates. It breaks trust. Betrays confidences. Violates standards and destroys protective boundaries. It's hard to be around someone who continually and intentionally sins against you. Sin isolates the sinner.

On the cross, Jesus experienced the ultimate outcome of sin - utter isolation from God. The Father purposefully hid His face from His Son on the cross. Not because Jesus had sinned. But because we have. On Good Friday afternoon Jesus experienced all that our sins deserve: to be completely separated from God, absolutely isolated from Him and all of His blessings.

Separated and alone, Christ cried out for his Father. And for the first time (and only time) in all eternity, the Father didn't answer. There was no reply. Just pain-filled silence. Anxiety's ultimate fear - utter isolation! How awful!

And yet how awesome for you and me! Not because we like to see Jesus suffer. But because Jesus willingly suffered the separation of God. He was left alone so that we never would be.

God treated Jesus as our sins deserve so that he wouldn't have to treat us that way! When we cry out to God through Christ, God always hears us and answers us. Whenever you feel alone, abandoned by God, remember what Christ suffered for you. Remember why he did it: to accomplish your salvation. Jesus did it so that through Him you can find what you truly long for: real, deep, genuine connection with God!

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, how can I thank you for what you have suffered for me? Not even eternity is enough to fully express just how grateful I am for what you have accomplished for me! With each new day you give me, Lord, lead me to live it in praise to you, because through you I am truly connected to God, the source of life and the reason for living! Amen.

# When Finished Means More than Done

Saturday, April 20, 2019

## John 19:30

“Finished!” the young boy yells to his mom as he slams his math notebook closed and heads outside to play with his friends! “Finished!” says the couple as they send in their tax returns and breathe a sigh of relief. There is something really satisfying about being finished, whether that’s with homework or taxes. There is relief and release when you reach that moment that you can say, “Finished!”

From his cross and with his dying breath Jesus said, “It is finished!” That three-word phrase is actually just a single word in the Greek text of John 19:30, the Greek word: ‘tetelestai’ (pronounced ‘te-tel-e-sty’). When Jesus utters, “tetelestai,” he is expressing more than just relief and release.

To deepen your appreciation for the full significance of what Jesus said with his dying breath, consider these examples of several different ways that the word “tetelestai” could have been used in Greco-Roman culture during Jesus’ days. <sup>[1]</sup>

- A servant who completed an assigned task might notify his master, saying, “Tetelestai!” “I have completed what you told me to do!”
- When presiding over a case and rendering a ruling, a judge could have said “Tetelestai!” The point? “Justice has been served!”
- A priest might say to a person offering a sacrifice before God that their sacrifice is Tetelestai! What the priest means is that the sacrifice met the requirements of the laws of God.
- When a customer paid off their invoice, a merchant might have stamped the bill with the word Tetelestai! The purpose? The word verifies: “the debt has been paid.”
- When routing an enemy, a soldier might have said “Tetelestai!” announcing to his adversary, “You are finished!”

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, cried, “Tetelestai!” announcing to all that He has finished the work of salvation assigned to him by the Father. Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, cried, “Tetelestai!” to proclaim that God’s wrath against all human sin has been justly satisfied. Jesus, our Great High Priest, uttered, “Tetelestai!” affirming his sacrifice for us has met the requirements of divine law and is acceptable to Heavenly Father. Jesus, our Gracious Benefactor, paid our debt in full. Jesus, God’s Army of One, cried, “Tetelestai!” It is his victory cry, announcing Satan’s defeat! Thank God for Christ’s “Tetelestai!” It is Jesus’ cry that our salvation... “It is finished!”

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, You finished for me what I could never have accomplished. You paid for me what I could never afford. You satisfied for me what I could never have made right. You met the standard which I so often fall so far short of. And you conquered the enemy that I have been so powerless against. For your finished work for me, Lord Jesus, I offer my life, my heart, my all in praise and thankful service to you! Amen.

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://carm.org/devotion-it-is-finished>



## WHEN CHRIST WENT TO CALVARY: HE WON MY VICTORY

Week 7

# Jesus Is Alive!

Easter Sunday, April 21, 2019

## Matthew 28:1-7

Jesus was dead. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary knew that quite well because they had been there and watched as he took his final breath upon the cross. They knew that Jesus was dead and so they had gotten up early to walk through the still cool and dark air to go and prepare Jesus' lifeless body as it lay in its final resting place. Jesus was dead and so they were going to the tomb where he lay.

As they drew near to the tomb that dark air turned bright, brighter than any dawn, as an angel announced that the women had no reason to fear because Jesus was alive. This angel invited them to look into the tomb and see the place where Jesus used to lay. The angel invites those women to come forward and look at where they expected Jesus to be and see nothing was there. Jesus had risen and the tomb was forever empty.

Jesus is alive. He conquered sin and death and so there was no reason for him to be in the tomb. The angel told the women that Jesus had gone ahead into Galilee and that they should go there too with his disciples. In Galilee, they would see him with their own eyes. They would see him walking and talking and eating because Jesus is alive.

If Jesus does not come back first, there will be a day for each of us when, like Jesus, we will take our final breath. Like Jesus, though, death will not be our final place. Our tombs also will be empty because Jesus will make us alive. And then we, like Jesus' disciples, will see him. Not in Galilee but around the throne of God forever and ever.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went looking for Jesus among the dead but he was not there. Jesus had risen and was alive and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary would see him. Jesus is alive and we also will see him.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, you raised your Son Jesus from the dead. As certainly as Jesus lives, give us faith in you to believe that we also will live. Amen.

# A Finished Project

Monday, April 22, 2019

## Luke 24:1-8

“You have to eat all your vegetables before you get dessert,” says the exasperated parent. “We can’t leave until this project is finished,” the manager tells employees eyeing the clock. “We aren’t going out to recess until everyone is done with their work,” the teacher tells impatient students. It may be difficult but the expectations are clear: complete the work and then the reward will certainly come.

On Easter morning the women go to the tomb with work to do. When they arrive they are perplexed as there is no sign of Jesus’ body. An angel appears and asks the women what they were doing there. The angel tells the women that the tomb was a place for dead people. They would not see Jesus there because he had finished his work of dying and now he was alive, just as he said he would be.

Jesus came to this world with work to do. God had set forth a plan in eternity to save his people. He had to be born into this world and live a perfect life in our place. Never once did he sin or disobey a single commandment. He needed to be handed over to wicked men where he was crucified and he died, offered as an innocent sacrifice for guilty people. Three days later he had to rise from the dead showing that his saving work was over.

Since Jesus was not in the tomb that Easter morning we can have confidence that God’s saving work is completed. He had finished what his Father had sent him to do. With suffering and death behind him, Jesus would put the final stamp on our salvation by rising from the grave. He had done what he had set out to accomplish. He had finished what he told the disciples he would do.

Some days I feel like a pretty incomplete project. I look at my life and see the mistakes I continue to make. I am confronted by sin that habitually plagues me. I suffer the effects of living in a fallen world. All of these things can make me wonder if there is something more I have to do to. Easter assures me and reminds me that my salvation is complete. Nothing more can be done to save me because Jesus has completed it all. Jesus has finished the task of redeeming me and he has done everything he said he would do. He is not at the tomb because he has finished his work of defeating death. The work of my salvation is done and Jesus is alive.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, you sent Jesus to accomplish the work of my salvation. He has done everything well for me. Give me faith and peace to trust in Jesus’ completed work. Amen.

## 1 Corinthians 15:52-57

We love stories about transformation. Flip on the TV and someone is taking an old, out-of-date home and turning it into a person's dream home. Wallpaper is replaced by shiplap, new flooring is installed, and new lighting and fixtures brighten up the space. Suddenly what was old is new again. In just half an hour we saw something ugly transformed into something beautiful.

Easter promises a transformation that is instant. TV shows can take a complicated project that might take weeks or months and edit it down to just half an hour. However, even that is too slow as compared to the instantaneous transformation that God promises. No commercial breaks and no filler shots. Instead, it will happen in the blink of an eye and you and I will be new again.

Easter promises a transformation that is complete. This transformation is more than just shiplap, flooring, and fixtures. This transformation means that our bodies, however imperfect they may be now, will be perfect like they were meant to be. There won't be any more sickness, disability, or death. The aches and pains, the stress and heartache, the death and sadness will all be gone. Instead, you and I will enjoy living as we were meant to live in a perfect eternity.

Easter promises a spiritual transformation. Our entire being and souls will be made perfect. We will live and serve without sin. No longer will jealousy, selfishness or anger harm even the best of our intentions but we will know love and obedience like God knows love and obedience. Sin with its temptation and guilt will not afflict us any longer. We will be holy and perfect and truly at one with God.

When you watch some of those remodeling shows you sometimes wonder why the previous owner did what they did. What were they thinking with that shag carpeting and all that paneling on the walls? When the remodelers get done it seems like the home is finally the way it was meant to be. The transformation that you and I will experience will be the same. More than any questionable design decisions from the seventies, you and I were never meant to experience things like death, heartbreak or disobedience. We brought these terrible things onto ourselves but we were never meant to experience them. And so in the ultimate transformation, you and I will experience life as it was meant to be. With the power of sin, death, and the law broken, we will be transformed and will be as we were always meant to be.

**PRAYER:** Father, you will transform our lowly bodies to be like your heavenly body. Keep our hearts and minds set on that day that we may look forward with perfect confidence and eager expectation. Amen.

## 1 Timothy 1:15

Is there someone in the Bible with whom you can really relate? Maybe someone whose experiences in life sound a bit similar to your own? Maybe you identify with Moses, who wasn't sure of himself when God gave him a really important calling. Or maybe Martha, who wanted to serve Jesus, but sometimes needed a reminder that she just needed to stop working and spend some time in God's Word. Maybe your struggle is more like that of Elijah, who was prone to bouts of depression. Maybe you relate well to John the Baptist, who slept outdoors and ate insects. Maybe not.

But how about the writer of today's verse, the Apostle Paul. Can you relate to him? He wrote 13 books in the New Testament, went on three different and difficult missionary journeys, raised people from the dead, gave birth to brand new churches, restored life to dying people, served as traveling pastor to countless different congregations, defended Jesus in front of powerful governments and hostile crowds who wanted to kill him, and, in his spare time, he made tents. Can you relate to Paul?

Probably not. Paul was one of the greatest missionaries, church starters, letter writers, all while being one of the greatest theologians the world has ever seen. Maybe you can't relate to God's Apostle in those ways, but you do relate to him in another way.

God looks at you in the same way he looked at the Apostle Paul. In Paul's letter to a young pastor named Timothy, Paul describes the two ways we can relate to Paul and every Christian for that matter. He says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

We know Paul sinned. In his early life, Paul sinned against God and His Church in very open and public ways, which is why so many people in the early church didn't want to accept him. So Paul openly admitted it. He says, "I am the worst." Notice he didn't say, "I was the worst," as if after the Holy Spirit brought him to faith, his sin was now gone. "I am the worst."

What Paul said was true. That title belonged to him. Just as it belongs to you and to me. Paul called himself the worst of sinners because he knew that any little sin, no matter how it compares to the sins of anyone else, separates you from God.

But Paul also knew something else. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst." Are you a sinner? Then you can relate to Paul in that Jesus Christ went to Calvary to save you. Do you think you're unworthy of your callings? Paul was too. Do you think you've done some terrible things in your life? Paul did too. And he wasn't shy about talking about it. He didn't hesitate to tell others about his sin because it only emphasized all the more the grace, mercy, and power of God, in the resurrected Christ.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we praise you for your forgiveness in Jesus. Like you did with Paul, tell us the truth about our lives. Convict us of our sins so that we might repent and, in Jesus, see the forgiveness that is freely ours. Amen.

# Jesus Loves Me This I Know

Thursday, April 25, 2019

## John 3:16

“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so...” Maybe you grew up singing that song. Maybe you still sing it with your family. Whatever that song is to you, its words are full of meaning. “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so...” Jesus loves me! We know that without a doubt in our minds. And how? Because God himself tells us right here in today’s passage.

Some call it “the Gospel in a nutshell.” John 3:16 is likely the most famous passage in the entire Bible, one of the few that’s recognizable just by its numbers. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

You still sometimes see someone at sporting events holding signs that say very simply John 3:16 because it summarizes the message of the bible so beautifully. Jesus died for the whole world, and everyone who believes lives eternally. Jesus loves me, this I know....

But here’s the test of perspective: Do you know John 3:14? Can you recite 3:15? How about 3:17 or 3:18? Those verses tell us a little more about the world Jesus loves. It’s a world where God’s own people, the Israelites, grumbled and complained against him. It’s a world where people willingly reject the name of their Savior. It’s a world unto which a Savior shone the light of his love, but its people still continued to give their love to darkness.

God loved a world like that. When his own people rejected Him, God had Moses lift up a bronze snake to save them from poisonous venom. But God’s purpose was greater than that. He was pointing his people to a Savior who would release them from a far deadlier bite.

As the snake was lifted up in the desert, so Jesus was lifted up on a cross. God so loved a world that rejected and hated him, that he gave it His most prized possession, His one and only son.

Jesus spoke today’s famous passage about the whole world to only one person. Nicodemus was his name, and he was initially attracted to Jesus because of his miracles, but he wanted to know more. So Jesus told him; told him how God loved the world; told him how God so loved him.

On the cross, we see exactly the extent of that love. And that’s why we can confidently sing, with Christians all over this world, “Yes Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so!”

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son into this world to release us from our sins. Lead us to share your love with this world more and more each day, that all people might come to know the love of their savior. Amen.

## Psalm 60:12

We cannot win this fight alone. As David looked at the enemies that surrounded Israel, he knew that they couldn't do it – at least not alone. Israel's strength had never been the sum of her armies, chariots, and commanders. It had always rested in the promises of God. There, and there alone, was their only hope of victory. They could not win this fight alone.

Nor can we. We may not face off against the Edomites in the Valley of Salt – as Israel is noted to have done in the introductory notes of this Psalm. Nor do we find ourselves engaged in a struggle against Aram Naharium and Aram Zobah – as David was. The names and places of our struggles may change, but struggles they remain as we daily face off against our own enemies. Perhaps there is a specific situation that comes to mind – an illness, a situation at work, a fractured relationship. Perhaps it is just the daily grind of battling sin within and sin without. Perhaps it is the daily battles we fight as we face off against temptation and battle a sinful nature that is all too willing to rush into sin. Or perhaps, it is that one great battle we all face – the battle against the death that is always pursuing us from the shadows. In any case, we cannot win this fight alone. We don't stand a chance.

But this past Holy Week, we didn't celebrate a God who stayed at a distance to watch us do battle with our enemies. No, we celebrated a God who stood shoulder to shoulder with us in battle. A God who stood shoulder to shoulder with us beneath the sway of tyrants as Pontius Pilate beat and condemned Jesus to death. A God who stood shoulder to shoulder with us against the devil, who incited Judas to betray Jesus and whose voice can be heard in the shouts of the crowd that day. A God who not only stood shoulder to shoulder with us in this sinful world but who bore the weight of our guilt. A God who stood shoulder to shoulder with us even unto death – as he died on that cross and was buried in that tomb. He came to this world to stand shoulder to shoulder with us, and finally to take our place in this battle.

And in him, we win. We celebrated on Easter with shouts of “Christ is Risen!” The God who stood shoulder to shoulder with us even unto death, walked out of his tomb victorious. The only thing left buried in that tomb was your sin, your guilt, and even your death. He won. And through faith, that victory is yours. With God, we win.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank you for winning the victory over sin and death for me. I thank you for offering that victory to me in the promises of your Word, the waters of my Baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Continue to work in those means to keep me in that victory all the days of my life. Amen.

### Isaiah 25:9

The first Easter Sunday wasn't the bright and sunny affair that it is today – at least, not at first. The women walk to the tomb that Easter morning in the haze of Friday's darkness, faced with the grim task of finishing Jesus' burial. The disciples are confused and afraid. Judas is dead. The attitude of the disciples on the way to Emmaus sums it up, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (Lk. 23:21) Jesus had made some grand promises. He seemed to be the culmination of God's promises to all of Israel! They were so sure that they lived in the day of which Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 25:9. But a seemingly dead Jesus only made fools of them.

However, for as gloomy as that day started it, turned out to be the day of God's salvation. You remember the rest of the story. The women would find an empty tomb and later a risen Jesus! The disciples would gather in fear but find peace in a Jesus who appeared to them! The disciples on the way to Emmaus would find that the man they talked to on the road was none other than Jesus himself! Jesus had risen just as he said, and that changed everything. As Isaiah wrote, "Surely this is our God, we trusted in him, and he saved us." The gloom of that first Easter morning gave way to gladness as they saw that they lived in that day – the day of God's salvation. God had kept his promise.

We live our lives on the promises of God. We drive to work in the security of God's promises to send his angels to protect and to be with us Himself. We comfort our consciences in the peace of the cross and the payment made for our sins there. We face death with the confidence that just as Jesus rose, so will we. But our sinful nature makes cowards of us. Wherever there is a promise of God, there our sinful nature finds a way to work doubt. To work in us a fear that we'll see the day when we regret putting our trust in him.

But in those times remember – we live in THAT day. The day Isaiah spoke about. The day of the empty tomb and a risen Jesus. The day marked by the fact that God does what he promises. He lived, died, and rose for us. All to keep the promises he made. And He lives to continue to keep those promises to us for the rest of time.

PRAYER: Risen Savior, you came in fulfillment of your promise. You lived, died, and rose in fulfillment of your promise. And you will come again in fulfillment of your promise. Lead us to live our lives in the shelter of your promises. Amen.

