

# EASTER

## CHANGES EVERYTHING

### Following Jesus to the Cross

A Daily Devotional through  
John's Gospel



March 3 – Resurrection Sunday, March 31, 2024

# Preface

Welcome to Following Jesus to Easter Sunday!

This little devotional was written by the members of the McKnight Crossings Church and is self-published. The devotional is the product of faithful people convinced that reflecting on the Word of God continues to yield great gifts for us today. Specifically, thank you to Betty Vaughn and Jeff McGlawn for their encouragement, organization, and editing.

Our conviction is that reading the Word of God is one of the most important things a follower of Christ can do. Reading John's Gospel provides food for everyone. John writes on multiple levels, allowing those new to the faith access to the story of Jesus Christ, and beauty, theology, and nuance for those who have spent years in Scripture.

Each day to Easter, you are invited to first read the section of Scripture outlined in the booklet, and then ponder the devotional thought. Our prayer is that this approach will produce what John promised in John 20:31, *<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

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For the Christian Formation Team  
McKnight Crossings Church  
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## The Logos

Patrina West

Logos is an ancient Greek word meaning the “Word.” It is also called utterance, message, rational thinking, or speech. Jesus pre-existed with God, and He is God. In the Bible, the Logos is known as the eternal Word, Jesus. This Logos is the rational reason and intelligent design behind everything in creation. John, who was sent as a witness, is telling us who this Word is, and what He means to His creation. He wants us to believe in Him and accept the light that is in Him. Jesus, The Word, is the true light and the source of life for us. If we do not receive Jesus, we remain in darkness. Because of our sin, we were separated from God and headed for eternal death. The light shines into our lives to dispel the darkness. In a sinful life, we did not understand the light, so we rejected Him. But the Word is patient, kind, and longsuffering. He redeemed us through His life. Jesus is the source of all light, internally and externally. Jesus put on flesh and came down to the world He created, to save us.

How would you feel if your own children, who you gave birth to did not recognize you, rejected you, ignored you, and wanted to kill you? Not everyone rejected the Word. Some believed in His name and accepted the light He offered. He gave those who received Him the right to become His children. He did not accept them because of human birth, achievement, or effort of themselves, but by His will. We experience God in Jesus the Word. Moses gave the Law to the people, but God has come close to us in the person of Jesus Christ giving us grace and truth. Jesus Christ is the great revelation of who God is. God's will for us is life and light through Jesus Christ, His only begotten son. When we put our faith in God by consciously and wholeheartedly receiving Him, He gives us the promise of being a child of God. Will you receive the Word of God in your life today?

***Our father God in heaven, we thank you for your faithful Word. You sent your only begotten son Jesus, to redeem us from this fallen world and give us life through His light. May your Word fill us, teach us, and cleanse us, so we may be presented before you as pure and holy children. Help us also to choose our own words wisely, so we may serve each other in love and unity. Thank you for the light and grace we received through Jesus Christ. Amen***

## The Lamb of God

Betty Vaughn

Waiting is something many of us do not like to do. We live in a technological world where tasks that used to take hours or days or more can now be completed in minutes. Yet, the Jewish people waited and watched for a prophet like Moses since they entered the Promised Land after fleeing Egypt (Dt 18:15).

When John the Baptist (or Baptizer) was baptizing Jewish people for the remission of their sins, the Jewish leaders were not pleased. Who was this man? What or who gave him the authority to baptize Jews? Priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem to question John. He did not claim to be the Christ (or anointed one) when questioned. Was he Elijah? (Elijah did not die and was expected to return.) No! Was he the Prophet? No! Then, Who? John replies in the words of Isaiah, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert. 'Make straight the way for the Lord'."

John does not try to steal the limelight and boldly proclaims that one greater than he is among them. In John 1:29, John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

Did John's disciples connect any dots when they heard his statement? What thoughts ran through their minds? Did they think of the first Passover lamb in Egypt? Perhaps they thought of all the lambs sacrificed on the Day of Atonement when their sins were rolled forward for a year.

Whatever their thoughts, none would have imagined that this man walking toward John would die on a cross as the ultimate and last sacrificial lamb. His blood would cleanse all who called on His name and obeyed His commands.

God did send the people of Israel a prophet like Moses. But this prophet was so much more. Not only was He the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. He was the Son of God. He IS the Son of God. HE IS GOD!

Amazing!

## The Messiah is Found

Olivia Walton

In this passage, we witness a series of encounters that transformed the lives of those who met Jesus. Consider Philip and Nathanael. Philip, having been called by Jesus, seeks out Nathanael and shares the Good News. Nathanael, initially skeptical, is surprised by Jesus' knowledge of him, even before they meet. Jesus reveals His divine insight, and Nathanael is convinced that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and the King of Israel.

These encounters remind me of the power and authority of Jesus. He sees us, knows us intimately, and invites us to follow Him. He calls us to leave behind our doubts and skepticism, to recognize Him as the Messiah, and to surrender our lives to Him completely. How amazing it must have been to walk alongside Jesus, to hear His words and witness His miracles!

In Verse 41, we see Andrew's response as he finds his brother Simon and declares, "We have found the Messiah." This declaration showcases the joy and excitement that filled Andrew's heart. It reminds me of the joy that overflows within me when I encounter Jesus in my own life.

Reflecting on these verses, we are reminded of the invitation to encounter Jesus, to experience His transformative power, and to declare Him as our Savior and King. Let us respond to His call with joy and conviction, sharing the Good News and inviting others to encounter Him. May our hearts be open to the transformative work of Jesus in our lives and may we find the courage to follow Him faithfully.

## The Bridegroom Provides

Alec Hill

Before you read these verses, first look back at John 1:28 which tells us that John was baptizing “at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan.” Verses 29-34 describe John’s baptism of Jesus and Verse 43 says, “The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.” It is easy to read this and miss the fact that Galilee is about ninety miles from Bethany. It is like saying Jesus decided to walk from St. Louis to Rolla!

And why did Jesus go to Galilee? Because He and His disciples had been invited to a wedding. Whose wedding? We are not told but we can infer that it was a close friend or family member because Jesus’ mother Mary was there, and she was involved with the meal and refreshments. Because of Mary’s close connection, she became aware when there was no more wine. She goes to Jesus, who protests saying, “Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.” But He relents, and Mary uses her authority to tell the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” Jesus performs His first public miracle by changing six stone jars of water into wine. And not just some cheap wine but the best.

What can we take away from this story? Consider Jesus’ compassion and humility. Two times Jesus places other people above Himself. First, He walks about ninety miles to be present at the wedding. Second, He performs a miracle even though it is not His time. By His actions He is saying, “Mother, not my will, but thine be done.” Jesus is obeying the command to honor His mother and father when He honors His mother’s request above His own agenda. By performing His first public miracle at the wedding, Jesus is opening His ministry based on Her need and not on His own timing.

This is the God we worship. A God who walks ninety miles to be at a wedding. A God who shows compassion, humility, and obedience when He places the need of His mother above His own timing.



## The Rabbi Baffles Nicodemus

Jayson Vincent

In this passage, Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, goes to Jesus at night and calls Jesus “Rabbi” and “a teacher who has come from God” based on the miraculous signs Jesus has done. Jesus baffles Nicodemus (and all of us) by saying “no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Nicodemus asks the logical question “how can this be?”

Jesus says that even “Israel’s teacher” doesn’t understand these things and then reveals what Nicodemus (and all of us) depend on God’s amazing grace to see, and He shares some of the most famous words to ever be heard on this earth, but more importantly some of the most important words to our souls and to all souls.

Jesus says “No one has ever gone into heaven except the One who came from heaven - the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. 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.” That’s amazing teaching (or revelation) about what it means to be born again and why it’s important. We are invited to believe in Jesus so as to not perish but to have eternal life. Jesus’ Spirit guides this birth.

I’m sure glad Nicodemus asked his question. And I’m glad for the opportunity to believe in Jesus, the Son of God, who came, lived, died on a cross, and rose for the forgiveness of my sins and for the sins of the world. Through Him is the gift of eternal life, eternal closeness, with God. I believe Him, that He is who He says He is, that He will do what He says He will do, and that I am who He says I am!

Jesus continues this conversation with another guiding message, “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

***Father, please bear abundant fruit through us so that we and many more would have eternal life with You, eternal closeness with You, born again through Jesus, amen.***

## Samaria Receives the Messiah

Cari Merrick

Jesus said to the Samaritan women “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. “

Thirst is a physical indicator our bodies need water. Our bodies are 60-80% water. As a nurse I have seen the signs of dehydration: sunken eyes, dry mouth, weakness, shrinking of vital organs, injury to our kidneys, and incoherent thoughts. Treatment is direct and effective. Give fluids!

Our greater need is living water that Jesus gives. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). What are the spiritual indicators of a dry heart and soul? For me, some of those thirsty signs are irritability, missed connections with people, harsh words, or judgement of others. But the encouraging news is living water lubricates our dry hearts, even flowing into those narrow crevices.

We all have off days, responsibilities to deal with, and disappointments; life is just so daily. But take note of your inner current. Are there dry, crusty, or parched areas in your heart? Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Drink up and receive the gift of Living Water.

The Samaritan woman was an outcast on all accounts. It was God’s plan to have this encounter with her without the disciples. I see Jesus being tender with her, giving her a spiritual update like she never ever expected, and she met the Messiah! We do not know what happened to her after meeting Jesus other than running off to Sychar to tell the town of she met the Messiah. But like Psalm 42:1-2, her soul thirsted for the Living God. I would like to believe her whole life began to change with streams of Living Water saturating her heart.

## The Messiah Heals on the Sabbath

Don Fitzgerald

This event takes place early in Jesus' ministry, following the turning of water to wine, the encounters with Nicodemus the Samaritan woman at the well, and the healing of the official's son. As far as we know, this is Jesus' first public healing. It takes place in Jerusalem at a very prominent location called the Pool at Bethesda, a place where many who were afflicted in some manner came to be healed. Jesus, very quietly, encounters this man and quickly heals him. Only when the man is questioned about carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he realizes he does not even know who healed him!

He encounters Jesus again and learns His name and then reports back to the Jewish leaders. They confront Jesus immediately and "persecute" Him for healing on the Sabbath. Isn't it amazing that they are more concerned about Him healing on the Sabbath than being joyous that a man who had been crippled for 38 years now walks!

Jesus proclaims to these pious religious leaders His authority is from God, that He is the Son of God and is equal to God and brings salvation to those who believe in Him! Imagine how this stirred the religious leaders' emotions! Were they going to believe what they saw and heard from Jesus or were they going to hang on to their traditions and the letter of the Law, not even listening to Moses and the Prophets (John 5:45-47)? Well, we know the answer to that question!

What will we do?

***Heavenly Father,***

***We are grateful for your plan that you have had in place since the beginning of time! Help us to see your will for us in our lives...to strive to live as Jesus did and serve others and love You above all else!***

## The Bread of Life

Katie Benyo

In this passage, we read about Jesus performing miracles – feeding over five thousand people with just five loaves and two fish; walking on water during a windstorm to bring His disciples to shore. He had already performed other miracles of healing the sick (the four Gospels record 37 miracles of Jesus). He then goes on to call himself the Bread of Life, the Living Bread that came down from Heaven. He says that people came looking for Him not because they saw His miracles, but because He fed them. He tells them not to work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which Jesus gives.

We get so distracted by the earthly part of the story, don't we? People in Jesus' time got to see His miracles with their own eyes, and yet they were hung up on the food rather than the sovereignty and control of Jesus. "You have seen me and still you do not believe." We on earth today do not get to see Jesus' miracles in the same way; how much more today do we forget the authority of Jesus? We do see miracles in other ways – a baby is born; a loved one survives cancer. When you see that, do you focus on the physical? Or does it remind you of the power of God?

***Heavenly Father, help us to feed on you. Help us to believe in the One you sent, to come to Him, and to do Your will, so that we may be raised up to eternal life at the last day. Amen.***

## The Followers Fall Off

Jeff Kryder

While there are many hard teachings of Jesus, Jesus gives reason for the disciples to grumble! He insists that if you want to be a part of Him, you must eat His flesh and drink His blood. More than a little morbid. No wonder the Romans accused the early Christians of being cannibals. Ironic that we often recommend John's gospel as the easiest of the gospels to understand!

Jesus says, "I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven." Of course, He is not literally bread, but He is very "bread-like." When the use of Jesus' "I am" metaphor becomes too controversial, He doubles down! Saying, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Why does He press the point so far?

First, just as manna from heaven was essential for the Israelites to survive, Jesus is manna, essential for our survival. The Israelites died in the desert. Meanwhile, eating the "Bread Jesus" promises life eternal, breaking the hold of death. At the last supper, and the church's Lord's Supper, bread and wine become the means to partake of His life-giving body and blood, ultimately poured out at the cross. Jesus everywhere compresses the gap between figurative and literal, opening us to see, even more, to consume Christ to satisfy our deepest needs.

Too much? Many walked away then, as now. While the whole scene remains strange and disconcerting even for His followers, those of us, including myself, who have tasted the Bread, also ask in our times of disillusionment, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Following Jesus is uncomfortable, peculiar, and mysterious, yet it remains the only consequential option, particularly for those of us who have tasted that the Lord is good. How can we possibly make it through life's barren terrain without the Nutrient-Filled Manna that sustains us even now?

## Who Is This Man?

Jeff Fogarty

When reading the Gospels, we're immediately faced with a pivotal question, one that can pierce our hearts, if we let it: What are we to make of this Jesus of Nazareth?

H. G. Wells once wrote "I am a historian. I am not a believer. But ... this penniless preacher from Galilee is irresistibly the center of history." Who is this man?

This question, "Who is He?" might have elicited different responses from the disciples throughout their three-year journey with Jesus. Each day's events, each miracle, each teaching shaping their understanding of Him.

In John 7, Jesus' identity is not just a topic of discussion; it's a central theme, interwoven through every verse. It begins with Jesus' brothers Verse 4. "Show yourself to the world" His brothers' tell Him. If You are who You say You are Jesus, half-brother, let it be known. It plainly says that His brothers did not believe in Him (vs 5) i.e. did not believe that Jesus is the Christ.

The below verses show the vast opinions on who Jesus is:

He's a good man, He deceives the people (vs 12)

You are demon-possessed (vs 20)

Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? (vs 25)

Why did John include these thoughts?

We need to remember why John wrote his gospel. John 20:30-31 "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name."

Could John be saying, you are going to have many thoughts on who Jesus is, believe me I've heard them all, I've had them all. But I want you to know, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

In John's later work, 1 John 1, he writes "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life."

John is saying, I've heard Him, I've seen Him with my own eyes, I've held Him with my own hands, taking Him off the cross and now I'm proclaiming this to you that Jesus is the Christ.

So, who is this Jesus of Nazareth?

## Judgment for Judges & Mercy for Sinners

Patty Lacoss-Arnold

This is a well know story of a woman brought to Jesus by a group of men who say they have proof she committed a crime. On the surface it seems very straightforward, but it does not hold up well to scrutiny. To start with, the crime of adultery requires two participants, but only one is brought. Then there is the issue of unequal status of women and men in that society. We have no idea if she was a willing participant and, indeed, she is not asked anything about the incident. These men who brought her to Jesus are focused on her sin and how it should be punished. Jesus instead focuses on the men who accuse her and their right to sit as judge. He is seeing into their hearts and showing them that He knows their motivations are not pure or Godly. In fact, these men are only there to try to trap Jesus with His words (v.6). After the men have left and it is just Jesus and the woman, He could then denounce her behavior as sin but instead He shows compassion and tells her what He told many others, “From now on, don’t sin.” (v. 11). He shows no such compassion for the hypocritical men who accused her.

How often do we see the behavior of others and call it sin while justifying our own behavior as mistakes that matter little?

Have you seen people in authority use others to score points or justify themselves? How should we as Christ followers respond to this behavior?

***Lord, help me to show compassion to the people I encounter. Let me be able to show them love without judgement as You did. Also, confront me with my own sins and give me the strength to stop sinning. Let me live a life that can be a light in the world pointing toward You. ~Amen***

## The Pharisees Challenge the Messiah's Testimony

Brad Stevens

A woman partially clothed stands trembling before a mob of people. The Scribes and the Pharisees have brought her to Jesus to see what Jesus has to say. She is a pawn in a trap set by those who are not following the law of Moses correctly. This woman was caught in the act of adultery. Of course, it takes two people to commit adultery. Where is the other party? Never mind that problem of evidence. This is a theological issue. "Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" The trap was sprung!

You see, the Pharisees were not bothered with justice. This was a power play. They wanted Jesus to say something by which they could charge Him with blasphemy. So, what does Jesus do? He bends down and begins writing with his finger on the ground. Scholars have argued over what He was writing for the last two millennia. We do not know. When Jesus finally stands up, He quotes Deut. 17:7, which requires the witnesses to throw the first stone. But He adds an additional admonishment: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." BOOM! The well-oiled trap that was going to catch Jesus just blew up in the faces of his accusers.

Jesus calmly sits on the ground continuing His writing. The eldest and wisest Pharisees turn away, one at a time, recognizing that Jesus had said nothing by which they could charge Him. As the mob began to melt away, one can hear the dropping of rocks from the hands of those who wanted to shed blood of "such women." While we know nothing about this woman, she was some man's daughter. She was some man's wife. Jesus's relationship with women was scandalous in His time. Meanwhile, Jesus finds Himself left alone with the woman. He straightens up and asks, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she answers "No one, sir." His reply is immediate and non-judgmental. The words of Jesus in this passage show his power to forgive sins. "Neither do I condemn you. Now go your way, and from now on do not sin again." This story of Grace is what the world now needs.



## The Sign of Jesus' Disciples

Dale Simpson

Family history, or genealogy, can be a fascinating pastime, tracing our ancestry through the branches on our family tree. However, how *true* is it sometimes? Especially oral tradition. How often have families proudly claimed to trace their ancestry back to native American tribes, building up a family legacy based on wrong assumptions? “Why, Aunt Carol discovered that we are related to the Cherokee tribe through Grandpa Jones’ mother’s side.” Oral tradition often carries false assumptions down from generation to generation, but when a genealogist proves them wrong—tells them the truth—some families can be offended.

In the same way, Jesus contradicts the ancestry of the Jews of His time, particularly the religious leaders. They proudly claimed their ancestry from Abraham, but Jesus tears this assumption apart piece by piece, by first saying that they cannot be descended from Abraham because they do not follow God as Abraham did. They should follow Jesus’ teaching, and they would be set free. And why? Because He is the Son of God.

Well, says Jesus, if Abraham is not your father, then who is? The Devil! You do not follow God, you do not follow Jesus’ teaching; therefore, you are the children of the Devil. You are slaves to sin.

Finally, Jesus says that before Abraham was born, He is! Meaning Jesus was there from the beginning of time. He was with God long before Abraham was born. This is too much for His hearers, so they pick up stones to stone Him. He escapes, to teach another day.

Well, who is **our** spiritual father? Are we the children of the Devil, or are we the Children of God? If we think we are the Children of God, do we behave the way He wants us to behave? Or do we behave like the children of the Devil? To show our true lineage, we must follow the teachings of Christ as the Way to God. If His teachings offend us, do we want to stone Him? Do we want it another way? Have our cake and eat it too? God forbid! Simply follow Him!

Jesus says elsewhere in John’s gospel, “I am the vine; you are the branches,” John 15: 5.

Isn’t this the family tree we want to be in?

## The Light of the World Restores Sight

Nathan Strickland

“Why do bad things happen to good people?” “If God is good, then why does He allow bad things to happen?” If you have been a Christian for 5 seconds, you have heard these questions.

There are deeper theological ideas that we could note, but we will stay surface level for today. Back then, it was a traditional view of Jewish people to believe that people were sick because of their sin. That is why Jesus’ disciples asked, “Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” (John 9:2). We don’t believe that people are sick because of their sin, or at least we shouldn’t. How did Jesus respond? “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins. This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.” (John 9:3).

So how would the disciples ask that question today? Possibly, “If God is good, then why was this man born blind?” Jesus might have said, “This has nothing to do with whether God is good or not. This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.” It has nothing to do with sin or the validity of God’s goodness. What if this is how the blind man and many others would come to know Christ? (John 9:38). What if he went through challenges that developed his character and made him who God called him to be?

As we near Easter, we remember the crucifixion of Jesus – a man who was good and perfect. “Why did a bad thing happen to a good person?” The works of God are displayed in Jesus’ death and resurrection ... the salvation of humanity. Instead of asking “Why am I going through this?” you can ask, “What is God doing through this?” Your trial is not the end of the story. The way that God works through your trial, the way that you leaned into God during your trial, the way that you bounce back from your trial, and the way you develop and grow from your trial... that is the end of the story. Don’t believe me? Just ask the blind man

## The Good Shepherd

Linda Mueller/Judy Miller

*“Every detail of the shepherd’s life lights up the picture of the Good Shepherd whose sheep bear His voice and whose constant care is the flock.”* (William Barclay)

Christ’s parable of the Good Shepherd reminds us He is the way to eternal life. As with sheep, the shepherd is the door where sheep can seek safety. With Christ, He is the “door,” the only way to whom God and His love are accessible. Because we know the Shepherd’s voice, His words, and His life, we have the entrance door available to His Father where we find peace and security.

There is the thought that there is only one flock, or denomination, in Christianity. Christ is not exclusive! The Good Shepherd is the head of the all-inclusive “flock” which is united by a common loyalty to Christ.

We, as sheep, have the charge to seek the lost as the Shepherd seeks and rescues His loving flock. It is an ongoing, ever abiding responsibility for us to seek, find, teach, and continue to mentor those who we find in need of our Good Shepherd’s loving familiar call.

*“We must keep our eyes on The Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for us, forever as sheep of His pasture.”* (R.C. Sproul)

## The Passing of Lazarus

Suzanne Kaelble

The story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is a familiar story and, in this passage, we read about the moments leading up to this miracle. There is a large cast of characters in this section of John: Mary and Martha, Jesus, the disciples, and some people that we never learn who they are.

In this passage, there are three questions that are asked that reflect both Jesus' concerns and the attitudes of the crowds around Jesus. In John 11:8, the disciples ask, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?" The disciples are questioning Jesus seeming lack of judgement to be going back to what had earlier been a very dangerous incident in Jesus' life.

In John 11:37, we read that some of them (the crowd around Jesus) asked, "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" There is a tone of judgement in the people asking this question.

In John 11:25-26, Jesus says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." And then Jesus asks the question, "Do you believe this?"

As we approach this Easter season, what will your questions be? Will they be questions of doubt or judgement towards Jesus? Or will you hear Jesus' question: Do you believe this? And answer with a loud YES!

## **The Resurrection and The Life**

Eli Parkinson

If you had been here...

Like Mary, Martha, and the Jews we all have struggled with our faith in Christ. We limit the all-powerful and ever-present love of God. Think of the “What if” and “If only” we dwell on in our day-to-day life. Lift them up to the Lord and remember His omnipresence.

### **Jeremiah 32:27**

Even though they die...

Jesus experiences loss, sheds tears, and shows the truth about death. Jesus demonstrates power over death not through the promise of prevention, rather through the encouragement that there is something beyond. Think of losses in your life and lift them up to the Lord, knowing He has won the victory.

### **1 Corinthians 15:54**

If you believe...

Jesus tells us we need to live by believing in Him. He reminds us that if we believe, we will see the glory of God. Through His actions, Christ shows the way to eternal life. He is, as He said, the Resurrection and the Life. Think of your beliefs. Lift them to the Lord and rejoice.

### **John 14:6**

### **Romans 6:4**

### **Galatians 2:20**

## The King Enters Jerusalem

Jeremiah Haywood

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a big destiny; one that is so important that lives depend upon it? Well, we see this play out in John 12:12-19. Before this moment, Jesus had healed His friend Lazarus and received expensive ointment from Mary to anoint Him.

As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, the crowd heard of this. The people were so excited that they began crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13.) It would have been easy for Jesus to have a “big head” regarding the praises He was receiving. But what Jesus did next probably shocked everyone. Instead of asking for a horse to ride into town as most kings would have, He takes a donkey’s colt. I am sure that this confused those who were not as familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

In Zechariah 9:8-9, God makes it known how the people’s king would return. In Verse 8, God gives the people a promise. He promised that they would never again be oppressed and that He would keep watch. God then declares that He would present Himself as king to His people again.

You may ask what the significance of the donkey is, and the response would be simply this: a donkey symbolizes humbleness. With Jesus choosing a donkey, it showed His ability of humility and selflessness.

As we celebrate this Lenten season, may we join the ancient Christians singing the same song: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

## The Messiah Takes Up the Basin

Steve and Susan Awtrey

This story of Jesus washing His disciple's feet is one of the most stunning acts of humility in the gospels. The Savior of the world, God incarnate, came to live among us and serve. No task was too menial. After being with the disciples for 3 years, He was in His last hours with them before He was going to submit to His greatest act of love and die on the cross for our sins. Consistent with Jesus's ministry, in His last hours with the disciples, He chose this incredibly humble act of washing the disciple's feet. They still wanted Him to conquer His enemies, but He continued to love and serve. He wanted His last acts of service and sacrifice, washing their feet and dying on the cross, to be a memory that defined who He was. He wanted his followers to emulate and build His new Kingdom.

Read verses 3 and 4 again. Those verses tell us that Jesus knew where He had come from and where He was going. He got a towel and a basin and served His disciples in the way that they needed most at that time. He washed their feet. Verse 14 says, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." Then in Verse 17, Jesus says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

As a follower of Jesus, may we realize the kingdom Jesus brought to us is one filled with love, kindness, grace, and mercy. May we understand that we came from God, and we are returning to God. With our lives, may we respond as Jesus did, by loving and serving God and people.

***Dear God, Thank You for Your love. Thank You for the example You showed us of love and service through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for our pride and lack of faith. As we enter the Easter season, may we continue to remember the forgiveness we receive from Your love in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we remember this, may we also remember, as Jesus did, that we have come from You, that by grace we will return to You. May we see the "towels and basins" in our lives and use them to serve those around us. May we serve, forgive, and respond with love and kindness today. May we strive to be more like Jesus! It is through Your Son, Jesus, that we pray, Amen.***

## Betrayal at the Table

Jeff McGlawn

We love sitting at a table with friends and family enjoying a meal, playing a game, or just talking. That is where we find Jesus today. He is celebrating the Passover meal with his close friends. They are dipping food in the bowl together. They are sharing bread. They are enjoying their history of being wanderers freed from slavery.

Suddenly, Jesus' mood turns a bit sullen. He mentions that someone who has dipped bread with Him will soon betray Him. They all have been sitting there with Him and dipping food with Him in the bowl. And now they know one of them will be the one who will betray Him to His enemies. You could hear a pin drop. Peter motions to John to ask Him who it is. He reveals it is Judas. What??? The one who sits right next to Jesus. He held the money for the group and was trusted by all. Matthew also reveals that Judas asked Jesus and finds out he is the culprit (Matthew 26:25).

What would go through your mind to have Jesus tell you that you are going to betray Him? How many times do we fall into the betrayer's spot? How many times do we look away from Jesus to another lord? When was the last time you were not trusting His will?

We all go through times when we stand far from Jesus, whether we are ashamed of Him or whether we want something other than what He wants.

But as we draw closer to Easter, and we journey towards the cross, the day He took our place, let us draw near to Him. Let us abide in His presence. Let us walk according to His will.



## **The Way, The Truth, The Life**

Shannon Miller

Jesus said, “I am the Father, all His work is being done through me”. The disciples witnessed this work with their own eyes and yet still said, “Show us the Father!”. Jesus is the way to our final destiny. Believing is one thing, but showing you are a believer is another. “Whoever believes in Me, will do the work I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these.” Jesus is preparing a spot for us to come. Let’s embrace the opportunity we have been giving, do the work we have been called to do and live a life according to the Lord spreading His word.

## The Comforter is Promised

Sara Matheny

Did you catch that promise in Verse 23? The very idea that you and I can become a home for the Father and the Son is blasphemous to some other religions. We have a God who says we live in Him and Him in us. That is breathtaking! Notice, though, it is not a blanket promise. The promise is conditional upon our love for Jesus overflowing into obedience to His teaching. The stakes are high.

Do you ever forget the commands of Jesus? Notice with me that the Father does not pull out a red pen to grade us when we fall short. This life with God is not a test. *He never imagined we could do it on our own.* From the moment Jesus made this promise, He also promised the way: a Counselor, a Reminder, a Spirit of Truth to nudge us back to our first love, to remind us of the ways of Jesus. The stakes of love and obedience ARE high AND we do not do it alone.

## The Vine & The Branches

Leslie Simpson

I just love the “Red Letter” passages of John! One of my favorite sections is when Jesus uses the engaging metaphor of a vine (Him) and the branches (us). He says that we will bear fruit if we remain in Him. Of course, the bit about cutting off the branches that do not bear fruit and throwing them into the fire is downright scary. I would rather dwell on the positive aspect of making sure my branch is strongly connected to the vine.

I do a lot of gardening, so I really dig (see what I did there!) the imagery. I have a blackberry bush that I particularly enjoy. In the spring, I carefully prune out the dead wood, making sure I do not cut last year’s new growth that will bear fruit this year. If I do not take this step, the bush is grossly misshapen. The plant’s energy must work harder to reach the bearing branches, resulting in fewer berries. I get excited when I see the first buds emerge and turn into lovely pink blossoms. I can practically taste the luscious berries that will arrive soon!

This passage goes much further than the joy of picking fruit. It focuses on Jesus’ love for us, His joy in us, and His friendship with us. He reminds us that He chose us, not the other way around. But it is not just one way. It is reciprocal. If we just receive His joy, love, and friendship and do not pass it on, we are not bearing fruit, and we know what happens next!

Jesus mentions love nine times in eight verses, so it is obviously a big deal. In fact, He concludes by saying that it is a command—Love each other. It is not optional. “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (v.13) And that’s exactly what Jesus did for us, His friends.

## The Passion Prayer

Betty Vaughn

Scripture tells us that Jesus always intercedes for us (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34). This is amazing! Jesus is still loving and protecting us. Through Him, we can boldly approach the throne of God. In Chapter 17, John has recorded the longest intercessory prayer of Jesus, our High Priest.

Imagine the crescendo of emotions felt by Jesus and the disciples as they share in the last hours of Jesus' life. They had eaten the last Passover Meal with him. Judas left to complete his betrayal of Jesus. Now Jesus comforts his disciples and tells them of what is about to happen in His life and in theirs. They declare they now understand what Jesus has been teaching them. Of course, they do not have all the pieces. But Jesus gives them all they need to know at that moment.

Then Jesus prays. It is not unusual for Jesus to pray, but this prayer is in the presence of the disciples. It is an all-encompassing prayer and is in three parts. Jesus prays for Himself, His disciples, and for all who believe in Him through the words of the disciples.

We often pray for ourselves, but Jesus' prayer for Himself is not like our prayers. This part of the prayer is all about the Father and the Father being glorified through Him (Jesus) being glorified and restored to His previous glory before coming to earth.

Secondly, Jesus prays for His disciples. He tells of his obedience to the Father in teaching them and protecting them. He now asks the Father to protect them since they are no longer of the world but are still in the world. He wants them protected from the evil one.

Lastly, Jesus prays for all who believe in Him through the words of the disciples. This includes you and me! All those years ago, Jesus prayed for you and for me. In this prayer, we see the heart of Jesus and the nature of God. Jesus prays for unity for His followers so that we may be one as He and the Father are one. As Jesus prayed for us then, He continues to intercede for us today.

Read Jesus' prayer again. Can you feel His love?

Amazing!

## Peter Disowns His Lord

Colleen Murphy

As Jesus and the disciples celebrate the Passover, He tells them He is leaving them. Peter wants to know why he cannot go with the Lord and says he would give his life for Him. Jesus replies that Peter would deny knowing Him three times before the cock crows. Of course, Peter finds this unfathomable.

Later, when they are in the garden, Judas leads a contingent and Jesus is arrested. Peter tries to defend Jesus and cuts off the high priest's servant Malchus' ear. He could have been arrested right then. Jesus performing the last miracle by reattaching the ear may have prevented Peter's arrest. That miracle saved Peter. (Of note, John's account is the only one identifying Peter as the one who cut off the ear. John was the only Apostle who lived a long life so by the time he wrote his account, it was highly likely Peter was dead and could no longer possibly be punished by being identified.)

Peter appears to be a coward and a hypocrite when he denies knowing and being a follower of Jesus. The first time, he is warming himself around a fire with the high priest Caiaphas' servants and other officials. A servant girl tells him she knows he is a follower, and he denies it. It does not occur to him that he has just said what Jesus said he would. Then some of the people around the fire also asked if he was a follower, and he again said that he was not. Lastly, one of Malchus' relatives says he saw him in the garden. Peter denies it, the cock crows and he weeps bitterly, ashamed that Jesus' words were true.

Peter and another unnamed disciple follow Jesus as He was led away, putting himself in danger. Peter may have been trying to protect Jesus, maybe looking for an opportunity to grab Him and take Him to safety. He thought he would die for Jesus until faced with the real possibility that he could also be arrested and die.

How would we respond under the same circumstances? Would we stand boldly for Christ? Are we ready to die for Him or would we fold under the threat of imprisonment or death like Peter?

## The Messiah is Condemned

Kaylynn Myers

I instantly recognize myself in every person in this passage except Jesus. The Jewish leaders with their religiously self-protective boundaries. Governor Pilate with his equivocating and passing off responsibility. Barabbas, the lucky dog, narrowly avoiding the natural outcome of his choices. And the crowds stupidly caught up in a furor, calling for blood. In John's account of Jesus's trial everyone is fearful, panicked, and thrown into a state of confusion except for the one who is facing death by crucifixion.

Jesus is the lamb being led to slaughter, yet Jesus is calm, self-possessed, authoritative, and dignified. The one who was arrested becomes so arresting by his demeanor and response that over the course of Pilate's interactions with him, by the end, I think Jesus has won Pilate over. While politically Pilate cannot do much other than what he does, ultimately to hand Jesus over to be crucified by his own people, it seems from this exchange that Pilate likes Jesus, or is at least impressed by him. Though Jesus was mocked and derided by the soldiers, He had only silent forbearance in the face of humiliation. In spite of pain and dread, Jesus had only the savviest comebacks for Pilate's questions meant to daunt Jesus into self-incrimination. Regardless of the grief of the desertion and denial of Jesus's disciples, Jesus knows who He is and what He has been sent for, and He is ready.

***Our Father who sends us in the glory of Jesus, sanctify us in the truth of your Word. It is far too easy for us to align ourselves with spiritual haughtiness, worldly scheming, and violent power-grabbing, but these things do not bring us purpose or peace. Forgive us when we forget your will for us, to know Jesus Christ, and through him, eternal life. Amen.***

## Behold, the Lamb of God

Matthew Bardowell

In this passage, John goes to great lengths to show us all the ways Jesus's death aligns with earlier prophecies. Surely many people were crucified by the Roman Empire, but how many under these strange circumstances? There are the garments that were not torn, and the lots cast to try to win them. There is the deviation from the typical Roman practice of breaking the condemned person's legs to hasten death. There is the pierced side from which flowed both blood and water. Jesus stands out, and people take notice.

Even if these prophetic details were only observed in hindsight, people still take notice, and they are not the people we would expect. Pilate, who hands Jesus over to be crucified at the beginning of the passage, declares the truth even against his will as he has "JESUS OF NAZERETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" placed near the cross. Did Pilate realize something to elicit this admission, or is he speaking truth in spite of himself? Who can say? But he refuses to change the words, even after he is pressed to do so by the chief priests. Someone notes the remarkable outflow of water and blood when Jesus's side is pierced and relates the story as an eyewitness. Jesus stands out. He is extraordinary. Through His death, He makes an indelible mark upon those who witnessed it, even as His death makes a mark on us today.

***Lord, as we remember Jesus's death on the cross, move our hearts to love and devotion. Let us remember His work to complete the task set before Him for love of us. Let all the world look to the cross of Jesus and recognize how special He is. Amen.***

## The Risen Savior

Tim Nicholson

It was early on Sunday morning that Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb where Jesus had been laid on Friday after His crucifixion.

Just one week earlier, a great crowd had welcomed Jesus as He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They shouted “Hosanna!” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” and they carpeted the road with palm branches and cloaks. But in the days that followed, He was betrayed by one of His twelve, arrested, disowned by Peter, tried by a kangaroo court, sentenced to death, tortured, humiliated, and crucified.

When Mary arrived at the tomb, she saw that the large stone that had covered the entrance had been rolled away. She rushed back to tell Peter and John, who ran to the tomb. Going inside, first Peter and then John, they found it empty. John testifies that he “saw and believed.” That likely means John believed that Jesus had been resurrected, but it may also have meant that he believed everything that had ever been promised about the Messiah. Perhaps these thoughts echoed through his mind: “Through your (Abraham) offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” “By His wounds we are healed.”

Peter and John did not actually see Jesus at the tomb – they returned home. But Mary Magdalene lingered there and spoke to a man she did not recognize. Then a touching and miraculous moment occurred – a miracle for the ages. “Mary,” the man said. Now recognizing the man to be Jesus, she cried out “Rabboni!”

This Jesus, who had been crucified for all to see, pronounced dead by Roman soldiers and Jewish chief priests, and entombed by Joseph of Arimathea, lives!

Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

**John 12:13; Matthew 21:8; Genesis 22:18; John 2:19; Isaiah 53:5**



## The Messiah Restores Peter

Brett Ferguson

In Chapter 21, the apostles are overwhelmed and confused by Jesus' abduction, trial, death, burial, and resurrection. They sought refuge where they were most familiar, fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Because this is where Jesus first called them to be apostles, thus "fishers of men," it reasons this is a place of safety and security.

Jesus arrives and asks if any fish have been caught. Since the answer was "no", He told them to place the net on the right side of the boat and they instantly caught more fish than they knew what to do with. Upon returning to land, Jesus welcomed them to a warm fire, a hot breakfast, and simple fellowship.

There is no berating, judgment, penance, or punishment, only simple fellowship.

Then the Risen Jesus then asks "Peter, do you love me?" Peter answers, "Yes!". Then Jesus says, "Feed my sheep." Jesus puts him to work.

He wants us to do the same. Even after our worst. After making a complete mess of our lives. The Risen Jesus welcomes us to fellowship with him and puts us to work.

***Lord, we are thankful for a Risen Savior that welcomes us to fellowship even at our lowest. We humbly bring our messed-up life to you and ask only for fellowship with you. We answer "Yes!" when you ask, "Do you love me?" and we ask that you use us in the way that you see fit.***



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