

SALVATION IS FOR
Everyone
A LENTEN READER THROUGH LUKE



Christ Community
— CHURCH —

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Welcome and Notes on Luke

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Welcome to Christ Community's Lent Devotional reader

Lent is a season that has long been observed by Christians over the centuries. It is an intentional 40-day season that leads up to Easter. Many Christians take this time to focus on Jesus as they prepare to remember his crucifixion and celebrate his resurrection Easter morning. Often prayer, fasting, and time in God's Word are common elements used to help focus and lean into God's presence and focus on Jesus. My hope and prayer is that this reader will help us as a body enjoy the presence of God through His Word and prayer and be encouraged by the voices of other believers.

How to use this reader

We will be reading through the Gospel of Luke over a 40-day period. Each day has an assigned passage, a written reflection, and a prayer for the day.

First, spend time reading through the passage for the day. Before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to clear your heart and mind and to be your teacher.

Second, read the reflection written by someone from our church. Spend time thinking about their insights and meditations. Allow their words to encourage you and affirm what God showed you in the passage. Feel free to journal alongside the written reflections.

Third, close your time in prayer. Each entry has a daily prayer. Incorporate that prayer throughout your day.

To everyone who contributed to this reader, thank you! I am grateful for your partnership in this ministry endeavor and investment into the kingdom.

To everyone who is reading through and enjoying this reader, please know I am praying for God's presence to be near to you at this time. Enjoy God's Word and be encouraged by the meditations of fellow believers.

Blessings,

Pastor Kyle

Luke and his Gospel

Who is Luke? Why did he write his Gospel? Why should we read it?

In my years at Trinity International University (Deerfield, IL), a phrase that was drilled into our heads was, “A text without a context is a pretext, for a proof-text.” That’s a mouth full, huh? While it might feel like a tongue twister, it offers us a helpful exegetical principle. That is, every book of the Bible had a specific context and audience that it was written to. With that, the more we can know about its context, the better we are able to read and understand the book. The danger of not paying attention to the context of a book in the Bible is that we can twist (often unintentionally) a meaning of a verse or passage and make it mean something that it doesn’t. Luke’s Gospel is a powerful capturing of Jesus’ life and ministry, and so we don’t want to miss what he has to say by ignoring his audience and motives for writing it.

Who is Luke?

Early evidence, including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome, states that Luke, the traveling companion of the apostle Paul, was the author of this two-volume work (Luke and Acts). So, who was Luke? The only reliable information comes from the New Testament itself. Luke was a well-educated gentile, a doctor, and a close friend of Paul (Col. 4:14), one who traveled with Paul extensively and was with him near the end of his life, when Paul was apparently otherwise alone (2 Tim. 4:11).

Being well educated, Greek was obviously his native tongue, and his grammar was flawless. From circumstantial evidence, we can venture to guess he belonged to upper-class society in the Roman world and grew up in Philippi. It is also quite possible that as a physician, Luke was attached to the Roman army. Most good physicians spent at least some time in their training as army doctors or as surgeons to the gladiators. Luke is not one of the original 12 disciples, and there is no evidence that he ever met Jesus. Thus, he was never considered an apostle. He was highly regarded by Paul as an evangelist. Also, his knowledge of many details of Jesus' birth and childhood support the ancient tradition that he was a close friend of Mary, who shared these stories with him. His account of the crucifixion also indicates that, while he probably did not witness it, he was particularly interested in the physiological aspects of it. One would expect this of a physician. If he had been associated with the Roman army, he would have seen many crucifixions.

Who is he writing to?

In the opening of his Gospel, we learn that he is writing a detailed and orderly account of Jesus' life and ministry to Theophilus. "Seeing is believing." It's a common saying, and we are sometimes tempted to think that our modern scientific age is the most demanding when it comes to asking for evidence to back up beliefs. So it might surprise us to find out that the ancient world was just as demanding. Every reasonable person wants to know what was really being asked of them when a new teaching appeared. Luke spent a great deal of time and effort digging up just such evidence to present to Theophilus, the Roman official who wanted to know what Christianity was all about. Rather than being upset with Theophilus for wanting to know the facts, Luke did the research work necessary to assure him of his certainty, the reliability, of the things that he had been taught. And not only did he do this for the life of Jesus, but he continued his work in his second volume dealing with the early church that we know as the book of Acts.

What is the main storyline of Luke's Gospel?

Salvation is for all! As a Gentile and writing to a Roman official (a Gentile), Luke traces a clear melodic line that salvation is truly for all people through Jesus. Luke is concerned to write about the story of salvation, and he sees this in three stages:

- The period of Israel (16:16).
- The period of Jesus' ministry (4:16ff.; Acts 10:38).
- The period since the ascension, i.e., the period of the church.

Luke also traces a specific theological theme, God's action to restore God's people, Jesus' coming to announce and make plain God's royal rule, and the concomitant appeal to God's people to welcome and align themselves with God's saving agenda. All peoples and all nations: These are important connections in Luke. Salvation is for all. (Lk. 24:47, Acts 1:8)

Week 1

Day 1 - Luke 1:1-38

God's Silence is Broken (Ash Wednesday)

Kyle Bartholic

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. For many Christians around the world, today is a day when they are marked with ashes as a reminder of our finiteness and need for salvation. And, as we read today the first 38 verses in Luke's Gospel, that is the very truth that stands out to us. Humanity has a great need, and only God can meet that need. Good news, though: God is eager to do that and make good on his long-spoken promise.

It has been 400 years since the last prophet spoke a word from God. Four hundred years where only a faithful remnant of God's people remained. Four hundred years where God seemed to be silent. And, if silence means that God had not sent a prophet, a judge, or a king to rescue his people, then yes, he was silent. But he was never disconnected or still. God had been working behind the scenes steering nations and preparing for the arrival of his Son to rescue humanity. In those 400 years, Rome would come into power, establish peace, and a system of roads that would allow the gospel to be carried to every corner of the vast Roman empire. The known world would get to hear this good news because God sovereignly orchestrated this moment. No, God had not been still; instead, he had been preparing the world for just the right moment for the Messiah's arrival.

As Luke begins his recording of the life and ministry of Jesus for his friend, Theophilus, we are introduced to a few of the folks who belonged to the faithful remnant, those who loved God and held onto his promises of salvation through the Messiah. And now, the Messiah is about to arrive. This is the greatest news ever. God breaks his silence through these few,

humble, and unexalted faithful people. Through this unexpected and ordinary cast of characters, God will bring the Messiah into the world. This story is so important that Luke tells Theophilus that he has taken time to get every detail right (v.3).

Like you and me, Theophilus had a need; we are broken, fragile, and finite. We need a savior. The good news is that God made good on his promise to send one. He sent his very own Son. Why? Because he is compassionate and loving, and desires to draw all people back into his family (24:47). Through a faithful remnant, God breaks his silence, and hope for all people springs forth.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, you do extraordinary things through the faithful and humble. Would you humble and spur me on towards faithfulness so that your Son would be exalted in and through my life?

Day 2 - Luke 1:39-80

Enter the Story

Danielle Bartholic

It seems like being a parent is one of the toughest jobs in the world, but it does have its perks. For example, when newborns are not crying, their snuggles are one of the most warming and delicious parts of life! Then, there are the moments of growth in a child, like when they walk for the first time and you cheer as if you've never seen anyone do that. Or when they say that they love you for the first time: heart melting.

Luke 1 describes two tender and joyful moments, one of a mother and one of a father. They are the incredible prelude to the birth of Jesus. I try to picture it. I imagine Mary touching her belly in humble gratitude as she responds to Elizabeth in song, "He noticed me! Me, this young and lowly servant girl, and now generations will call me blessed." I can almost hear her say, "Can you even believe it??"

Then the tender words of a father over his infant son, who I imagine cuddled in the crook of Zechariah's arm: "And you, my son, will be called the prophet of the Most High." I can practically hear the emotion in his voice. The combination of a long, awaited son born with the revelation that hope is coming in another soon-to-be born child. His heart must have felt like it would burst! Instead, he was moved to prophesize: "Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide us to the path of peace."

As you enter the story of Christ this Lenten season, begin by feeling the anticipation of his birth anew. Sit at his feet as his disciple, allowing him to guide you in the path of peace.

Mourn at the cross and rejoice at the resurrection because he brings light to those of us who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Let us fall on our knees to worship this beautiful Savior who is about to change our lives forever.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, you are our long-awaited King over all. You chose the lowly to redeem the world and you became lowly to do it. Forgive us, Lord, for putting anything else before you. Thank you for seeing in advance that we could not save ourselves and sending Jesus to rescue us in the most beautiful way. Help us to worship only you. Fill our hearts with the hope and peace that only you can bring. Amen.

Day 3 - Luke 2:1-20

Let's Start at the Beginning

Wayne Stewart

Before the empty tomb, there was a cross.

Before that a season of declaration, healing, and preparation.

Before that a perfectly God-pleasing life of something around 30 years.

But here we get to start at the beginning.

A young couple and a baby. Shepherds. Angels. A birth like no other in the history of the world, signaling the fullness of time and God's good promises. This moment is not as rimmed with frosty edges as we've often depicted. There was most certainly pain. There was a stable and all it entails. Yet without it, Lent – or something like it – would be a season of reflection without hope. An awareness of our sin without a savior.

Setting ourselves toward the cross, we must start here. God making good on His rescue plan. While shame-filled, painful payment of our debt is yet to come, this moment is overflowing in joy.

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:14

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, while we take time this season to reset our hearts and consider our earthly toil, there would be nothing more than that had you not made the first move. Hallelujah. Immanuel.

Day 4 - Luke 2:21-52

*“...my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”*

What Child Is This?

Christopher Akers

“**W**ho do you say that I am?” In Matthew 16, Jesus posed this question to his disciples. Then, as now, it was the central question to his entire ministry – the one about which the whole community debated and the one that still pierces our world today. Who is Jesus? Son of a carpenter, born under unusual circumstances, humble in appearance, raised in a town so small it barely merited mention. Even for those who knew Him most, this question baffled. The gospel accounts suggest that, for most of his earthly, day-to-day life, Jesus seemed ordinary.

Yet, even from the beginning, moments occurred when the veil pulled back and His glory was revealed. Righteous Simeon took the eight-day-old infant into his arms and declared that Jesus was God’s salvation: “A light for revelation... the glory of [God’s] people...”. Ancient Anna prophesied the same. Luke says Jesus’ parents marveled at these things. What wonder must have filled their minds! “God’s salvation? Our son? Who is this child?”

Twelve years later Jesus would affirm the truth with his own words. Seeking to calm his frantic parent’s hearts (they had lost him in Jerusalem for three days), He said, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” They did not understand what he was saying to them (Luke 2:49-50), but we can forgive their lack of understanding. Even then, Jesus

was claiming to be the Son of God, but he never shouted it. He was gentle and his heart was humble (Matt. 11:29).

This passage invites us of our own need for forgiveness. Like those who saw Him face-to-face, you will forget. You will doubt. You will need reminding. Though He gave countless proofs of His divinity, his closest family and friends still wrestled with who he was and so will you. But take heart! He is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Psalm. 86:15).

This season, hear the voice of the sovereign, gentle Lord as he invites you to ponder the question again: What child is this? Why did He come? As you ask, as you seek him, He reveals his heart to you. He blesses and fills you. As the carol says, “This, THIS is Christ the King. . . Haste, haste to bring Him praise, the babe, the Son of Mary.”

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, I come to you to quiet my spirit and help me ascribe to you the honor, praise, and glory that you are due. I come to remember who you are and treasure this good news in my heart. I confess that I often forget. Please prepare opportunities and ready my lips to offer others the reason for the hope that I have. What hope is this? Jesus Christ, the light of revelation, the glory of his people, the redeemer of my heart, and the salvation of the world.

Week 2

Day 5 - Luke 3:1-38

BAD NEWS Followed by GOOD NEWS

Allison Greenwald

John the Baptist's story is so unique. Born to an aged couple related to Jesus' mother. Then an adult life as a recluse in the desert. Now God has called him to come to the Jordan to preach "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

I'm struck by how John's message was such a mix of judgment and mercy. His words were harsh, calling some a "brood of vipers!" and warning that "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Yet his words also offered hope for repentance and forgiveness. He both exhorted them to stop cheating and start sharing AND proclaimed the good news that God had provided a way of mercy. Bad news followed by good news!

John's words remind me of the Bible's repeated message that God is both judgment and mercy. In his perfection, He judges our sin and lets us suffer sin's consequences; yet when we ask, He shows great compassion and generously forgives. God's mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13).

John's message must have carried a strong punch because it made his audience wonder if he was the long-awaited Messiah. John insisted that a Messiah – "more powerful than I" whose "sandals I am not worthy to untie" – was coming soon to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Imagine the scene, then, when out of the crowd stepped this very Messiah, asking John to baptize him. Picture the baptism and hear the voice from Heaven say: "You are my

Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Are you touched like I am by this intimate glimpse of God’s love for His Son?

Think back on when you were first convicted by your sin and pled for God’s mercy. For me, it was at church camp when I was twelve years old. Over the last fifty years, the gospel has been continuously convicting me and restoring me. Where would I be without his transforming love?

For reflection and prayer:

Are there areas of your life where you are tempted to doubt God’s mercy? Take time to ponder how God has forgiven you specifically, and thank him for his mercy.

Meditate on John’s insistence that Jesus was infinitely greater than him. How does that sit in your soul? Pray with John, “He must increase and I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30).

Appropriate God’s message to Jesus for yourself: “I am God’s beloved child in whom he delights.” Sit with this ama-

Day 6 - Luke 4:1-30

Being Prepared

Jan Larson

Since I was little, Jesus being God incarnate has raised many questions for me. Did Jesus know he was God when he was three years old? Did he always know in advance what his mom was fixing for supper? Did he have to memorize scripture or was he born with it hard-wired? At what point did Jesus realize what was going to happen to him in the future? I have often wondered what Jesus thought about and how he felt as he grew up and began His ministry.

While scripture doesn't exactly address those questions, Luke describes two incidents that give us an idea of how Jesus prepared for and began his three-year ministry on earth. One was his 40 days of fasting and being tempted by Satan in the desert. In a classic understatement, Luke says "after 40 days he was hungry" and then describes how Jesus responded to the three final temptations by quoting scripture. The second incident was Jesus' first visit back to his home town of Nazareth, where he preached about the need for repentance to a group that may have included not only local religious leaders but perhaps his childhood friends, former teachers, neighbors, and relatives. Instead of being welcomed and encouraged, he was threatened with death. What a way to start a ministry career!

In both cases, Jesus faced tough opponents – Satan himself and the people in his home town. However, even though he must have known what he was in for, he didn't hesitate but met both challenges head-on. Jesus had evidently put his pre-ministry years to good use, because he was well-prepared. He knew scripture well, he knew God his Father well, and he

knew the importance of his mission. As a result, he triumphed over temptations that could have resulted in mankind being lost forever. He clearly conveyed the need for repentance to a hostile audience and then, undeterred, continued teaching those who would listen.

Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.” As a result, when we are facing temptations or difficult times, we can look to Jesus. He understands hunger, fatigue, difficult personal relationships, false accusations, and so much more. Through the Spirit he gives us not only compassion and understanding but also the strength and wisdom to persevere. Like Jesus, we can prepare for whatever life brings us by studying scripture, by knowing him well, and by focusing on our mission for him. And because of Jesus, we can live our lives with purpose and victory. “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 15:57)

A Prayer for Today:

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all you went through to redeem each one of us. Help me to be faithful, to trust in you, to know you a little better every day, and to follow your Spirit's leading throughout each day of my life.

Day 7 - Luke 4:31-44

Beth Weitzel

In the previous section, the crowd from Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, became so furious with him that they tried to cast him off the cliff. Jesus managed to just walk through the crowd and "went on his way" to a neighboring town, Capernaum. Think about what He did next:

- Taught with authority in the synagogue
- Commanded unclean spirits to leave a man they had possessed
- Rebuked a fever in Peter's mother in a house that had been Jesus' home for much of his ministry
- Healed people of all kinds of sicknesses and cast out more demons

What a busy day of ministry! Next, Jesus tried to get away to a secluded place as he had often done in his ministry. This usually allowed him time with his Father to recharge and refocus, but the crowds continued to pursue him. Jesus told them he had other duties for his Father. He kept his focus on the ministry he had been given.

Do we seek time to be with our Heavenly Father often, to let him and his Spirit help us to recharge our spirit and refocus on our ministry and our lives? I know I don't do this as often as I need. In this time of Lent, let us allow ourselves and our Holy God frequent time together, even though other voices compete. Then we can carry on with the ministry that God has given to each of us.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, help me to be present to you today. Help me get quiet enough to hear you so I can carry on with the mission you have given me.

Day 8 - LUKE 5:12-16

Lord if You are Willing...

Mike Shupp

The practice of social distancing and quarantining that we have experienced recently is actually nothing new. The most vivid example of this historically was how leprosy was dealt with in biblical times. Lepers were considered the walking dead of that day. It was a horrible disease that excluded them from the people of Israel and more significantly from any spiritual participation. Everything a leper touched was considered unclean. Most believed that leprosy came upon people because of their sin. Not only were they socially isolated, but they were required to give a warning cry of “unclean” to others in their vicinity.

We have recorded in Luke 5:12-16 a brief encounter between Jesus and a leper (see also Matthew 8:2-4 and Mark 1:40-44). It says this man was full of leprosy, a visibly advanced case. He was so desperate that he broke all social rules when approaching Jesus. We can imagine the response of those around Jesus in shrinking back from this grotesque figure as he drew near.

This was not a random encounter. The leper sought out Jesus. Helpless and hopeless, he came to Jesus in humility and faith. Like many others, the leper acknowledged that Jesus had power and authority over his sickness. What was different about this man was that he understood he was undeserving, yet he appealed to Jesus. But his request was for more than healing. His request was for Jesus to make him clean, cleansing both his physical health and his spiritual condition before God the Father.

Jesus’ response to this man’s request is so compelling. Jesus

could have simply spoken and the man would have been healed. But Jesus went beyond this. Being moved with compassion (Mark 1:41), He reached out and touched him. Can you imagine what that felt like to one who had not felt a human touch for years?

Jesus said, “I am willing.” The Greek here conveys more than simply agreeing to do something. Rather it is an expression of one’s heart desire to do so. This is why Jesus came – to seek and save the lost. Jesus met him at his greatest point of need.

What a picture for us as well. Just like the leper, we are helpless and hopeless in our sin before a holy and righteous God. And just like with the leper, we can come before Jesus in our uncleanness with humility and faith and say to Him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” If we will come, God’s mercy and grace can and will touch us at our greatest point of need and cleanse us from our unrighteousness.

May we then, like the leper in Mark 1:45, freely tell others about what Jesus has done for us, so that they will know him also.

A Prayer for Today:

Jesus, help me to be willing and bold to talk about what you have done in my life.

Day 9 - Luke 6:1-16

Sabbaths and Car Horns and Bears, Oh My!

Jennifer King

Have you ever broken a law? I am sure I have at some point. Our country has many laws, some quite ridiculous. In Little Rock, Arkansas the municipal code states, “No person shall sound the horn on a vehicle at any place where cold drinks or sandwiches are served after 9:00 p.m.” In Missouri, it is a health hazard and Class A Misdemeanor to wrestle a bear!

In today’s reading Jesus broke some Old Testament laws about the Sabbath, and I am so glad he did. Old Testament laws were put in place to help imperfect people attempt to come closer to a perfect God. Jesus shows through his actions a more essential truth. His presence and purpose on this earth was greater than any former law. By breaking laws on these particular Sabbath days Jesus teaches that we are no longer bound by the law for righteousness but given the ability to draw nearer to God through faith. Jesus is the bridge over that chasm from imperfect to perfect. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus tells us, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.” Unfortunately, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law could not see that. They were fixated on the law, not “the way, the truth, and the life” who was right in front of them.

Paul explains it perfectly in Galatians 3:23-25 (NLT): “Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it

protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.”

Praise God! A way was made for all to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, what a glorious way you have made for us to come to you. Thank you for your son, Jesus. Help me to see your purpose for my day and not get too bound up in the rigidity of regulation and routine. Amen.

Day 10 - Luke 6:17-49

A Radical Message, Messiah, and Morning

Kip Hamby

Have you ever thought of yourself as a radical? Probably not.

For most of us, that term is loaded. Our minds quickly go to radical politics, to terrorists, to that which is unbalanced.

But I would offer that we follow the greatest Radical that the world has ever known: Jesus Christ. And that makes us—his followers—radical as well if we truly live as his disciples.

Luke 6:17-49 makes this abundantly clear. Called “the sermon on the plain,” it contains attitudes and actions that are totally upside-down from the world system. No status quo here, no life as normal. But plenty of radical.

We see Jesus’ radicalness demonstrated first in his power (vv. 18-19). Diseases and unclean spirits were no match for him. His supernatural power was so evident that a great multitude of people came to him to witness and experience it. Jesus was radical in power.

We also see Jesus’ radical nature in his teaching (vv. 20—49). In his beatitudes and the woes that follow (vv. 20-26), Jesus placed perceived reality on its head. For example:

The world says: get rich, be well-fed, party on, be loved by all.

Jesus taught: be dependent on God, be satisfied with Him, mourn your sin, be hated because you follow me.

The world says: love your friends, and those who can give back to you.

Jesus taught: love your enemies, and those who can't give back to you.

The world says: judge and condemn, remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Jesus taught: see your own sinfulness first. There's more there than you realize!

Perhaps Jesus is more radical than we realize. Need further examples? His radical teaching and actions led to his execution on the cross. Jesus did not line up with the religious status quo of his day. The Radical was a threat to their system and power!

But here's the good news. Jesus the Messiah was radical in his love for us, and in his resurrection. "For God so loved the world" (emphasis added), "that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." His lavished love for rebellious sinners on the cross is the epitome of radical (Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 3:1).

And his resurrection which we will soon celebrate is, alongside the crucifixion, the most radical event in history. Easter morning is the hinge event of all history. As the great theologian and church historian Jaroslav Pelikan put it: "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters"

Let's embrace the truth this Easter season that we are called to be radicals in a fallen world.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, please keep us from conforming to the world this Easter season. Help us live and love in such a counter-cultural way that people can see He who is beautifully radical. Amen.

Week 3

Day 11 - Luke 7:1-10

Are You Known For Your Faith?

Aaron Rosheim

How do people know you? What do they think about when your name is mentioned? In today's reading, Luke introduces us to a Roman centurion from Capernaum. We will never know his name, but from this passage we see that he was a worthy man of faith who cared for the community he was charged with securing.

Apart from this story, and two other cases in the New Testament (see Matthew 27:54 and Acts 10), we would hardly associate centurions with faith. Roman centurions were officers in charge of one hundred soldiers or legionaries. They often received their title and position due to heroics on the battlefield. They had status and authority, and they were widely used to oversee the sprawling Roman Empire. When the Romans conquered a land, they set up garrisons of legionaries in all the towns to administrate, police, and secure the populace. Because they were the occupying army, Romans and their leaders were generally disliked.

The centurion in our passage was different. He was assigned to the garrison in Capernaum, and he invested in that community. He had a servant who was deathly sick, and when he heard of Jesus' abilities, he sent some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come heal the servant. The local Jewish elders described the centurion this way to Jesus: "he loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue." They believed this Roman centurion's actions made him worthy to receive the help of Jesus. However, Jesus was more impressed with the centurion's words. As Jesus approached the house, the centurion sent some friends to Jesus exclaiming that he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his home. Instead, he

believed that Jesus could just say the word and his servant would be healed. In those words, the centurion communicated a humble belief in who Jesus was and what Jesus could do. Jesus turned to the crowd following Him and declared, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

So, what do we do with this story? First, let’s start with faith. Believe in WHO Jesus is and WHAT He can do. Second, turn to Him whenever you are in need. He will provide for you. Third, go to Jesus on behalf of others in need. Finally, let your actions and words proclaim your faith so that others may see Jesus through you.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord Jesus, help me grow my faith to trust you more. Give me a faith that guides my words and actions so that others may see You through me. I want to be your ambassador to my family, my friends, my coworkers, and my neighbors. Help me grow my legacy around faith and care for others. In your name I pray, Amen!

Day 12 - Luke 7:24-50

Who Is this?

Bethany Kroeze

As humans born sinful, we often find ourselves judging the significance of each other's sins. Well, at least I do. Telling your aunt that you love the "old lady" pajamas she gave you for Christmas? Small sin. Stealing a pack of gum from the store? Bigger sin. Prostitution? Murder? Biggest sins.

Thankfully, Jesus doesn't judge us based on the degree of our sins. All sins are sin in His eyes, and as such, are deserving of eternal death. In today's passage, we learn that no sin is too big for Jesus to forgive. A woman of the city "who was a sinner" came to see Jesus, anointing his feet with her tears, wiping them clean and dry with her hair, and anointing them with expensive ointment.

The Pharisees, who still aren't sure what to make of this Jesus character, are quick to judge. If He knew who this woman really was and the sins she had committed, Jesus would not allow such a sinner to even touch him. Jesus responds with a blunt parable about forgiveness.

We aren't much better than the Pharisees. We witness people who have committed "worse" sins than us and are quick to judge, exclude, ignore. But if we put our faith in Jesus, if we believe that he died to take away our sins and rose to eternal life at the right hand of God our heavenly Father, then all sins, big and small, will be forgiven. Those who have committed "big" sins will surely be more grateful for Jesus' sacrifice and forgiveness. Our "small" sins earn us the same punishment as those "big" sins, but can lead to the same

forgiveness when we believe.

In giving his testimony to the Romans, Paul reminds us that nothing is unforgiveable. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). Nothing, not one single thing, can keep us from the love of God!

Jesus explains that this woman welcomed him as a guest should be welcomed, while Simon did not. To Simon, Jesus explains, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” To the woman, Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven.” The people murmured, “Who is this, that even forgives sins?” We know the answer: only our Savior Jesus Christ, who bore the burden of our sins, died in our place, and was raised again to eternal life with the Father, has the power to forgive sins.

As we remember Jesus’ sacrifice this Easter season, thank God that Jesus Christ redeems us from our sins, no matter how big or small. Nothing can keep Him from loving us.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, thank you for forgiving my sins and rebellion. Would you help me be present today to your love that is extended through your willingness to forgive?

Day 13 - Luke 8:1-25

Have Courage and Be Brave

Breta Stewart

In Luke 8:16-18, Jesus tells His disciples that no one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. I can almost see Him smiling as He says this. How silly would it be to put a lamp, fully lit, under a bed?! Light makes it possible for us to see the unseen. Hiding it defeats that purpose.

Earlier, in 8:13, Jesus says, “...but in a time of testing they fall away.” I can imagine that being a “light” for all to see had its challenges for the disciples. They lived with the very real possibility of persecution, torture, imprisonment, and even death. For sure, those were times of testing. It might have been tempting for them to hide their light, to not share the life-giving message of Jesus.

This makes me wonder: do I hide the light—the message of the Gospel? What am I afraid of? Is it the fear of being rejected by friends and family? Fear of losing my job? Fear of being an outcast? It takes an eternal perspective to have courage and be brave, to see things the way God does, through the lens of eternity. The only way to maintain that perspective is to fix our eyes on the One who reigns in love over us.

This dark world desperately needs the light of Christ! He wants to use us, his followers, to light the way for others to find Him — to be the light, to share the Good News with a neighbor, co-worker, family members, and friends. He uses us to bring hope to a hopeless land. What an honor, blessing, and joy to live for Him! These are exciting times to walk

boldly with our eyes fixed on Christ, friends!

A Prayer for Today:

Heavenly Father, thank you this Easter for the resurrection of your son, Jesus. We want to celebrate Him every day of our lives. In a world that grows increasingly dark, help us hold up His light. Give us the courage to speak boldly and be brave for you, and never compromise or be ashamed of proclaiming your Good News. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 14 - Luke 8:26-56

Fear... or Faith?

Kerrie Rosheim

How do you respond to Jesus' authority over your life? In today's passage, we see Jesus demonstrate His power over 1) the spiritual world as He drives a legion of demons from a man into a herd of pigs, 2) the physical world as He heals a long suffering woman, and 3) death itself when He raises Jairus' daughter to life. Despite these displays of supernatural authority, the response is mixed. The herdsmen fled and spread stories, the witnesses to the healing got scared and asked Jesus to leave, and the mourners simply laughed at Jesus. Yet the man healed from demons sat at the feet of Jesus and begged to go with him. The woman who touched his garment came forward trembling, falling down before Him. Jarius and his wife were amazed when Jesus called their daughter to arise. Fear... or faith? How do I respond to Jesus' authority?

When Jesus reveals his deity, power and authority in the gospels, it inspires awe. Merriam-Webster defines awe as "an emotion variously combining dread, veneration (reverence), and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred." The same root makes both the words awesome and awful. To those who welcome Jesus' authority, he is awesome. Those who reject Jesus as Lord find his power awful. Which side do I fall on? What might be keeping me from desiring more of Jesus' rule in my life? Am I like the herdsmen, afraid of what I might lose in embracing Jesus' lordship? Or maybe I fear the unknown, like the people who just wanted Jesus to leave them alone? How might Jesus be waiting to heal some part of me, if I only would embrace his authority?

Fear is part of being human. Reverent fear is a right

response to God himself; we can also call it faith. Faith in Jesus enables us to push through the fear. Take Legion, the demon-possessed man Jesus healed. He wanted to go with Jesus, but instead, Jesus directed him to tell his story to those very herdsmen and people who had rejected Him. Legion returned to his home and proclaimed how much Jesus had done for him, his faith stronger than his fear.

Can you imagine being the woman called out by Jesus in front of the crowd? She trembled at his feet but declared in the presence of all why she had touched Jesus. Her faith made her well and empowered her to testify. How has faith in Jesus helped you push through fear? What and who might you still need to tell of what Jesus has done for you?

A Prayer for Today:

Lord Jesus, remind me that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18a). Your authority works in complete harmony with your perfect, sacrificial love. May your love cast out my fear today and enable me to respond to your authority in faith, proclaiming how much you have done for me!

Day 15 - Luke 9:1-32

In Jesus's Name, We Are Called.

Stephanie Lundberg

Right away in verse one of Chapter 9, we see Jesus send out the disciples to drive out demons and heal diseases in his name. He gave them the power to accomplish this. I don't know about you, but when I read that, I doubled back and thought – Wait ,what? Can you imagine for a moment all the disciples, following Jesus, learning from him, feeling pretty inadequate and amazed at what the Son of God can do when all of a sudden – 'It's your turn'!

Do you recall the last time you watched a tutorial for a new skill? Perhaps how to french braid hair? The teacher does the skill without any effort and then says "Your turn." You might be left squinting in confusion. After watching another demonstration, I feel confident to try, yet halfway through, with my daughter's hair intertwined in my hands, I realize I have no idea how to execute the next step!

The difference between following a tutorial, though, and going in Jesus's name is that we are not called to minister from any strength or knowledge of our own. By Jesus's power and authority, the disciples were called to go and accomplish God's work and spread the gospel, not taking any payment in return, so only God would be known and glorified. I am so relieved and blessed that I do not have to rely on my own knowledge or strength in order to accomplish God's good work in this world.

Later in this passage, we read that when the disciples have returned from being sent out to minister they gathered and "told [Jesus] all they had done" (v. 10). What wonderful

stories of God's faithfulness and grace must have been shared in that reunion! I do have to chuckle, though, (and am, in turn, reminded of my own need for humility) that even after their experiences healing people of diseases and demon possession, the disciples really didn't think that feeding 5000 people seemed feasible with "no more than 5 loaves and 2 fish." How many times in my own life do I experience Christ's work clearly in a situation and then turn around to face doubt and insecurities about another? I am so thankful for God's grace, that he provides not only salvation through his work on the cross (which he foreshadows for his disciples in this passage), but for his provision in each and every detail of my life and yours.

A Prayer for Today:

Dear Lord, I pray you would ready my heart and hands for your kingdom work. Use me in mighty ways to spread your Gospel and remove fear, doubt and insecurity from me as I go forth in your name in the everyday places of my life. Remind me of your faithfulness as I face new situations every day. May you be glorified and known to others through me.

Amen!

Day 16 - Luke 9:28-62

Jesus Wants Your Whole Life

Kyle Bartholic

Who is Jesus? And, who is Jesus to you? According to a pastor I knew in my high school years, those are the two most important questions of life. And, to be honest, he is right. The way we answer those two questions will not only determine the scope of our lives here and now, but it will shape our eternities. The reality is that we need to answer both of these questions and not just one or the other. In today's passage, that is precisely what is happening. The disciples, the tormented, the Samaritans, and the believers along the way are all called to answer.

Who is Jesus?

This passage is filled with various answers to this question. Luke opens this section with a recounting of the transfiguration (vv.28-36). If the disciples had any question up to this point regarding the divinity of Jesus, that question is now satisfied by a voice coming from a cloud and saying, "This is my Son, my chosen one" (v.35). Jesus is also the one who casts out demons (vv.37-43) and sovereign enough for the disciples to argue about who is closest and most important to Jesus (vv.46-48). All of these things are true. The funny thing is, we can believe all of them and still not follow Jesus. According to James 2:19, demons also believe.

Who is Jesus to you?

That's where this second question comes into play. Is Jesus a divine and exalted teacher, a healer, a great leader, or is he Lord of your life? As Luke closes this section, that is precisely

the question that must be answered, and Jesus makes it clear: He doesn't want half of your heart or life but all of it. Those that were following along with him on the road that day included people who had heard of the transfiguration, watched him heal a young boy, listened to him teach, and decided to follow him. That is, until Jesus demanded their exclusive loyalty. Yes, the statements seem harsh, but Jesus wants them and us to understand a simple fact about life in the Kingdom: discipleship is about surrendering your whole self.

If Jesus is Lord enough for my eternity, what is holding me back from surrendering every part of my life to him right now?

A Prayer for Today:

Father, help me today to see Jesus more clearly than I did yesterday, and grant me the grace to hand over a little more of my life to him.

Week 4

Day 17 - Luke 10:25-37

Who is Your Samaritan?

Craig Mack

Chapter 10 of the Gospel of Luke provides background for the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus, a Jew, is engaged in a conversation with a Jewish lawyer on Jewish law, so it is helpful to understand this story as Jesus' disciples would.

A first century Jew would be familiar to the Hebrew word *Hesed* (hes-'ed). It appears nearly 250 times in the Old Testament to describe God's steadfast "loving kindness." Human acts of kindness (also called *hesed*) are our response to God's loving kindness. The New Testament was written in Greek so *hesed* is not used but its concept is firmly imbedded in grace and mercy. In fact, when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, *hesed* was translated to *e'leos*, which means mercy.

In today's passage a Jewish lawyer is testing Jesus on the law. Jesus allows him, the expert in the law, to answer his own question. Knowing the answer is more complicated than just knowing the law, he asks Jesus a tricky question, "Who is my neighbor?"

As Jesus so often did, he shifted to a parable, using a familiar illustration to explain an unfamiliar idea. The parable ultimately focuses on two men, a Jew and Samaritan, whose race, faith and culture were very different. They worshiped differently, understood scripture differently and observed different holidays. Their nations despised each other and had become enemies. One would hardly consider them neighbors. Yet, the parable ends with the Samaritan (not the priest or Levite) stopping to care for the Jew when he was

attacked and left half dead. When Jesus asks the lawyer, “who do you think was a neighbor?” he has no choice but to answer, “the one who showed mercy.” The lawyer said “mercy” but as a Jew, had to be thinking hesed. The one who showed loving kindness acted like a neighbor. Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

This message is as relevant today as ever and strikes right between the eyes. We live in a world with a multitude of differences: different races, politics and faiths. We have become frustrated with those who disagree with us. Frustration is turning to hate and we are beginning to see anyone who thinks differently as our enemy. Perhaps they are our “Samaritans.” Jesus says even those opposite of us are our neighbors and we are to love them. His love is for all as his salvation is for all.

What would the world be like if we were to love those who disagree with us? It would be like the kingdom of heaven.

A Prayer for Today:

O Lord, help me to see others through your eyes and show your hesed. Give me strength to love as you do, even my enemies. Grant opportunities for me to act with kindness and serve today in your name. Amen.

Day 18 - Luke 11:1-28

Fish, Snakes, Scorpions and the Lord's Prayer

Mark Henderson

*Read through this passage before we get started. Stop here.
Trust me. Go read it.*

Wow! That was Jesus' answer to one of his disciples asking Him, "Lord teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." Jesus makes us think about prayer in an outside-of-the-box way and invites us to see prayer through His eyes. Even after all these years of following Jesus and reading His Word, this answer still surprises me. Jesus gives an answer that is probably more than this disciple was asking for, but just the answer the disciple needed to hear. The example He gives for how to pray is fairly simple (v. 2-4), but the concepts he unpacks after that are not typical for how we think about prayer. Jesus begins by telling them to ask their heavenly Father persistently because he's a GOOD Father. He gives good gifts like the Holy Spirit. So be tireless in prayer, bordering on over-asking.

In the passage Jesus continues to speak to the spiritual battle going on all around us. Jesus casts out a demon from a mute man who was then able to speak. This spiritual battle demonstrates the reality that God is more powerful and will ultimately win, so choose the right side!

Our passage today wraps up with a clear reminder from Jesus to not only hear the word of God, but "keep it!"

I'd like to invite you to pick one of these sections (1-4, 5-13, 14-23, 24-26, 27-28) and read it several times so that you can meditate on it today. Let these passages reshape the way you have thought about prayer and then don't just hear the word

of God, keep it. Pray the way that Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

A Prayer for Today:

Jesus, I know that blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Give me insight into the spiritual battle going on around me as I pray. Help me be persistent in praying for the things that matter to you as the Holy Spirit guides my prayer life.

Day 19 - Luke 11:29-54

Clean Temples and Dirty Hearts

Kyle Bartholic

In the reading for today, Luke reintroduces us to two groups of religiously devout men, Pharisees, and lawyers. Pharisees we have often heard of, but who exactly were these lawyers? The lawyers were men who gave themselves over to the study of the Old Testament Law. They were religious men, and many of them were Pharisees. There was a difference in that the lawyer was a member of a learned profession and the Pharisee of a religious party. There was a link in that the essential Pharisaic position was based on a close study of the law.

These two groups knew the law inside and out. They had devoted much of their lives not only studying it but memorizing large portions of it. Their study would have also included the prophets. Yet, as Jesus points out, even though they know every in and out, they missed the true heart of the law. He says in verse 42, “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” This wasn’t the first time religiously devout members of Israel heard these words. In Isaiah 58:1-8, the prophet Isaiah accuses the nation of Israel of doing the very same thing, knowing the law and following it with precision, but missing the heart of it altogether. Jesus called out tithing and knowledge, while Isaiah called out fasting. Jesus accused them of disregarding their neighbors because they wanted to remain ritually clean, and Isaiah accused the people of Israel of perpetuating injustice while claiming to be just.

I wonder if that afternoon, while Jesus was speaking, the

words of Isaiah rang in the ears of the religious men who listened? We know from verse 54 that some remained hard in their hearts and continued to set theological traps for Jesus. But, did some hear that afternoon the heartbreaking reality that we can have clean temples and dirty hearts? That our lives can be devoted to morality and God's law, and yet we can tragically miss the point of it all? I hope some that day had a soft enough heart to receive Jesus' rebuke and repent. But, even more, I hope that we today have soft hearts to hear Jesus' warning and not make the same mistake. Are we more passionate about avoiding sin or loving others? Jesus continues to model how we can be equally passionate about both, how we can be filled with grace and truth.

Friends, let's not walk around with clean temples and dirty hearts. A dying world desperately needs to hear the truth about Jesus and see how Jesus makes a difference not just in our behavior but in our attitudes and hearts as well.

A Prayer for Today:

Jesus, would you examine my heart and my motives for following you today? Would you root out any pride that lingers from my obedience? Would you help me to see others with compassion and through your eyes?

Day 20 - Luke 12:1-32

Fear Not, Little Flock

Rhonda Rippey

As I read Luke 12:1-32, I am struck by how many times Jesus addressed fear and anxiety in this passage. Often these emotions can take over our lives and consume our time. They can drag us down, make us ineffective in the world, and limit what we could be doing for God. Jesus addressed some of the causes of anxiety in our world and offered both comforting encouragement and a warning.

1. Jesus addresses persecution which was a cause for anxiety for Luke's Jewish audience. They were living under Roman authority. They faced the threat of both torture and death. Jesus reinforces that they should only fear the ONE real authority--God, not the Romans. He also speaks of our value to God, and reassures that God is aware of our situation. When we are in a precarious position, we need to focus on God and Heaven.

Warning: Place your fear in the right Authority (God). Follow Him.

He is a God of both love and justice.

2. Jesus also discusses the anxiety we can have regarding how we speak about Jesus when asked to by earthly authorities. Many of us can't articulate thoughts well or we fear our words will be taken out of context. I'm reminded how Jesus was silent before his accusers. But when He did speak, he made it clear he was King. We have the Holy Spirit residing inside of us. He will speak the words that need to be heard, just as He did for Peter at Pentecost and for Stephen

as he was being stoned. Have faith that God will speak his message through you in times of trouble.

Warning: Do not deny Jesus, but if you ask for forgiveness, it will be granted.

3. Jesus speaks to our fears regarding having enough food, clothing, and riches not just for today, but for when we are old. He encourages us to store up treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19), to live thankful for God's gifts, and to give generously as he directs. God values us and will provide what we need.

Warning: Avoid covetousness. Our life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

Verse 32 is precious reassurance from our Good Shepherd: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." This verse immediately brings to mind Psalm 23. As valuable sheep in his flock, we should listen to his voice and follow our Good Shepherd. He will provide for us, protect us and lead us down paths of righteousness until we reach our Heavenly home and dwell with our Father.

A Prayer for Today:

Dear Heavenly Father, quiet our anxious hearts. Thank you, Father, for our Good Shepherd who loved us enough to sacrifice himself for us. Help us listen to your Spirit's direction in our lives and rest in your love and the promise of Heaven.
AMEN.

Day 21 - LUKE 12:33-59

Debbie Johnson

We are asked to do two things as Christians: “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). If we truly follow these commands, it will be evident in the way we live, the words we speak, and where we store our treasures. Are we storing up treasures on earth, such as accumulating more and more possessions or second homes, or looking for more pleasurable activities upon which we spend our money? Has our “self” become the center of our world?

Luke 12:33 encourages us to not store up treasures on this earth because they are all temporary. They will all eventually decay and can be taken from us at any time. Our goal in life should not be to become rich on this earth. We are to store up treasures in heaven which will last for eternity. We are to value first our heavenly Father and the relationship we have with him. We are to also value our relationships with other brothers and sisters in Christ and with all of our neighbors. We are to treasure what God treasures. Nothing on this earth should be more important than our relationship with God and with others.

Luke 12:33 tells us to “sell your possessions, and give to the needy.” If we are looking to the needs of others, especially those who are suffering or have little, then we are showing God where our treasure is. God has promised that he will provide all the necessities in our life if we put his Kingdom first. There are many practical ways that we can ensure that our heart is in the right place. We need to take time to encourage others, build our relationships, donate our excess goods, be a friend to the internationals we meet, reach out to

our neighbors, and learn new ways we can help those struggling on our community. Put others first, before ourselves.

This passage also tells us to be ready for Christ's return because it can happen at any time. While we wait, we are to continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth, doing good works for His glory and not for our own. We are to continue in our sanctification as we strive to learn more about Him and become more like Him every day.

One of my favorite quotes in French translates as follows: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eyes."

-Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

A Prayer for Today:

Heavenly Father, I pray that your Holy Spirit helps us to ignore the world and what it values. Help us to have humble hearts and open hearts as we lead our daily lives. Help us to count you as more important than anything on this earth and help us to do everything for your glory. In His most holy name, Amen.

Day 22 - Luke 13

Repent and Produce Fruit

Mary Wiedenhoef

When I read chapter 13 of the book of Luke, I notice that twice within the first five verses, Jesus says, “... unless you repent, you too will perish.”

Jesus often used parables to help people understand his message. He tells a story about an unproductive fig tree. After three years without fruit, the owner decides to destroy the worthless tree. The owner wants his figs! In this illustration the owner is God who is seeking fruit from us, his creation. The fruit he expects are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23): love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The owner appears to be patient, as he waits three years for fruit. Oh, how patient God has been toward me.

Why is the tree not productive? Plants need an abundance of water, sunlight, nutrients, and a healthy soil to produce fruit. What is this fig tree lacking? What keeps me from being fruitful?

The manager of the orchard asks the owner to “leave it alone for one more year!” God gives us second, third, ... chances to repent and begin bearing fruit in our lives.

The manager’s plan is to give more attention and care to the unproductive fig tree: “I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.” As a plant scientist, I think of the care the manager gives the tree as examples of God’s love.

Many times, plants lose their productivity because of soil

compaction, which reduces the pore space in the soil. Compaction happens in my life when I try to do too much, pressing myself, and not allowing space and time for God.

The manager digs a trench around the tree, thus increasing the amount of water the tree will receive and its productivity. How can I focus more on God instead of myself, spending more time in worship and praising God?

Proper fertilizer, originally manure, promotes growth. Manure is not a waste product but a collection of nutrients that a plant needs to produce fruit. Nutrients are like nuggets of wisdom that can be found in the Bible. Am I spending time studying God's Word, to nourish me and become wise? Am I seeking to know God and to live in a godly way, which produces fruit?

Although God is a God of second chances, He is still a just God. A day of reckoning will come (ie. the manager will cut down the tree) if the tree never produces figs. Can I continue to wait to begin living my life for God's glory and not mine? How much time do I have for continuing in my barrenness?

A Prayer for Today:

Dear Father, thank you for loving me and desiring a relationship with me. I repent of my selfishness and seeking the world's wisdom instead of your wisdom. Please forgive me. Produce within me the fruits of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control so my life glorifies you.

Week 5

Day 23 - Luke 14

Blessed Are The Poor

Craig Mack

In today's reading Jesus is attending what appears to be a Sabbath evening, invitation-only meal. Dignitaries such as lawyers and Pharisees are present. He uses this occasion to teach about his Father's kingdom. He warns them not to push to the front of the table, reinforcing the principle that "the first shall be last and the last will be first." He encourages them to invite the poor and disadvantaged (who normally are not invited because they're unable to return the favor) to their banquets. He says that is how it's done in the kingdom of God.

When a man at the table hears Jesus mention the kingdom of God he blurts out (maybe lifting his glass as a toast?), "Blessed is he who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Jesus takes this opportunity to tell a parable explaining who it is that will be "eating in the kingdom of God." In the parable, an invitation is sent to friends and relatives. They are too busy to come so, in anger, the host sends invitations to those living in the streets. Some come but not all. Is it because they feel they're not good enough? The banquet room is still not full so the host again sends servants out to "strongly encourage" more to join the feast.

This parable says much about the kingdom of God, which Jesus says is already in our midst. It implies that the privileged who were in the room with him that evening are not guaranteed that they will be eating with him in the kingdom. Only those who respond to his invitation have a place at the banquet. And second, the invitation is extended to everyone, especially those disadvantaged physically, financially and spiritually.

Most of us have been blessed in this life. The question is, are we sharing that blessing only with family and friends, who have also been blessed and can return the favor? Or are we sharing it with others who are disadvantaged, living on the street and otherwise not able to enjoy life as we do? I know I fall short at sharing my fortune with those who are unfortunate. May God help us to remember He blesses us to be a blessing. This is how His kingdom works.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, teach me to better share the blessings you have given me with those in need. Bring to me today someone who I can share with. Help me to sustain this gift of giving from this day forward. Amen.

Day 24 - Luke 15:1-32

Rejoice! The Lost Are Found!

Joseph Scarfone

There are few truths more comforting than Jesus' proclamation that he came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). God's loving character is put on display as he pursues those who are lost. This truth is revolutionary when it is personally realized in the life of a sinner. When God seizes the heart of the lost it is a great moment of transformation and a moment worthy of celebration.

This passage in Luke helps us to see the power in repentance and the joy that follows. Rejoicing is the natural response when repentance happens and the lost are found. Luke gives three amazing examples -- the lost sheep, coin, and son -- to help us understand God's persistent search for the lost.

Can you identify with the lost sheep being found by the Great Shepherd? Can you relate to the lost coin experience? Or perhaps you better identify with the prodigal son. No matter which of these connects with you personally, the end result is the same: there is great joy over one sinner who repents. Each of us who follow Christ has had our own prodigal child experience where God has said, "that which is dead is now alive, that which was lost is now found" (Luke 15:32).

How amazing to think that no matter how far astray we may go, the Good Shepherd searches for us, finds us, and celebrates our return. Whether you are in a season of straying or a season of staying, rest in the truth that God comes to seek and save the lost. This is a reality worthy of celebration. Rejoice for your own salvation. Rejoice for those whom God has saved. Rejoice for those whom God will save.

As the Apostle Paul declares, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice” (Phil 4:40)!

A Prayer for Today:

*Father, would you help me to remember the joy of salvation
and to respond in rejoicing praise to you?*

Day 25 - Luke 16: 1-31

Small Things with Great Love

Jonathan Compton

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Mother Teresa

Luke 16:19-31 tells the story of a colossal reversal of fortunes. Here we see a rich man who literally has to step over a poor man, Lazarus, every day to get into his own house. Meanwhile, Lazarus wishes only for the scraps from the rich man’s table and a few rags to bandage his wounds. It is a parable, so we should use caution in drawing strong conclusions from the eternal consequences given to the rich man, but Jesus clearly condemns the rich man’s neglect for his neighbor.

Two points should not be missed in this story: the first is the physical proximity between Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus is right on the path that the rich man walks every day, suggesting that God puts people in our path that he wants us to serve as we go about our normal daily routine. The second thing is that small acts of service are important to God. All it would have taken for the rich man to be a blessing to Lazarus was the scraps from his table and a few old rags—his excess that he has no need of.

Regardless of our position in life, we are all able to do small gestures to people in our daily path, whether it is a kind or encouraging word, spending time with someone when it interrupts what we think we should be doing, or catching ourselves before responding with impatience. It’s often in the humble and simple acts of service that God calls us to the

most faithful ministry. As we go through our day today, let's focus on the small ways that we can love and serve people. Let's ask God to open our eyes to see these interactions from his perspective so our ordinary day can be infused with joy and meaning.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, open my eyes today to the ways that I can be

*generous with gentleness in a world of outrage;
generous with presence in a world of seclusion;
generous with wealth in a world of greed;
generous with hope in a world of fear;
generous with personhood in a world that
dehumanizes others;
generous with grace in a world of retribution.*

Day 26 - Luke 17:1-37

Serving and Being Served

Rick Borkowski

Jesus describes the kingdom of Heaven as a mustard seed. In Matthew 13:31-32 Jesus notes that this smallest of all seeds grows into the largest of all the garden plants. In this passage God describes our faith as similar.

Years ago while attending a Discovery class at our church, one of the attenders introduced himself to me and added that he was going through a divorce. After class I could have walked out and gone home. Instead, I introduced myself to my classmate and told him that I had experienced the same hardship. My “mustard seed” act of obedience led to a twenty-year friendship between us and our families. I could have forfeited this great gift of God by ignoring his prompting.

While most of us would love to do great things for God, we can't get there without completing the small steps first. Paul says in Ephesians that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). What are these good works that God has prepared for us? Have you asked Him? Has someone asked you to do something for the Kingdom? Some of us turn down opportunities because we feel unqualified for a task or not gifted in that area. If that were true, God would not ask you to serve in that way. Small, uncertain, faithful steps of serving can open up greater experiences.

Jesus compares us to “unworthy servants” who have only done their duty. Then he travels toward Jerusalem, stopping to heal ten men with leprosy in a village. Was Jesus just “doing his job?” One of the ten realized this was a merciful

miracle. One of the ten came back to Jesus, thanking and praising God. How often do I view God's mercy as him just "doing his job" instead of truly appreciating his miracles?

What do I wake up to everyday? A climate-controlled temperature, a greeting from my spouse, food, daylight, breath. That's usually the first 15 minutes of the day. If my heart and mind can recognize what God is continually doing for me throughout the day, I will be more ready to step into those small acts of obedience that he is calling me to.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, may our hearts be filled with awe and gratitude as we joyfully await your return. Show us what works you have prepared for each of us to do, and help us take faith steps for you.

Day 27 - Luke 18:1-17

Humble in Prayer

Mona Bichel

This passage in Luke shows Jesus teaching people of different generations to be humble in prayer. Verses 1-8 tells the story of a widow who continues to relentlessly pursue justice. She goes humbly and repeatedly to the judge and he finally gives in to stop her from bothering him. In verse six, Jesus' words tell us that unlike the judge in the story, God will quickly answer when we ask.

The next section tells a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector of a younger generation praying in the temple. The Pharisee stands up and offers a congratulatory prayer about himself while the tax collector's prayer is a cry for mercy. The story ends with the words, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Clearly, the tax collector in the story models how we should be humble in prayer.

The final section of this passage tells the story of the youngest generation, the little children. The disciples rebuke people for bringing their children and babies to be touched by Jesus. "But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'"

This last section about the little children brings the picture of being humble in view for me. As a child I especially looked forward to bedtime on Saturday nights (probably the only night I got ready for bed as I was supposed to). See, on Saturday nights my dad held me on his lap and read me a Bible story before bed. I loved this special time when I got

my dad all to myself. I cuddled up in his lap with the feeling that nothing in the world could possibly go wrong or be any more peaceful. I don't know that I was overly humble in those moments (I probably enjoyed telling my sister that it was my turn with dad), but I will forever cherish those memories. A picture often seen in churches shows Jesus sitting with a little girl on his lap and a group of children gathered nearby. Still to this day when I see that picture, I see myself as the little girl cuddled up on Jesus' lap, just like I did with my dad at home years ago.

When we are humble and have faith like a child, God calls us to him, holds us in his lap and wraps his arms around us in love. There is no better place to be!

So whether you relate to the widow, the tax collector, or the little children, humble yourself before God and he will pull you close and answer your prayers.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, hold us on your lap today as we humbly ask for your mercy and grace. Help us to have childlike faith as we draw closer to you. Amen

Day 28 - Luke 18:18-43

Good Teacher or Lord of All?

Jennifer King

I have many great teachers in my life. My mother was one of my first teachers and inspired my love of many things, including Jesus. My third-grade teacher taught me that counting to ten helps when you are at your wits end with little Jimmy. My driving instructor taught me to always anticipate that someone will drive recklessly. All of these teachers have helped shape who I am as a person and taught me valuable lessons on either what to do or not do. None of them have been Lord of my life.

In today's scripture passage we see how the rich young ruler saw Jesus when he came to him with a question and called him "Good Teacher." Possibly, he was looking for the recipe for a successful life. He was already morally successful by following all the commandments. He was already financially successful. Yet, he still sought out Jesus to find that missing piece. He must have had a very different idea of what that final piece of teaching would be. When he heard that the missing piece was to "sell everything and give to the poor . . . he became very sad."

This story prompts reflection: What do YOU hold with such high value that it is keeping you from Christ? What are your successes? Do you have great wealth? Have you amassed a list of accomplishments to be proud of? Do you hold dearly to a single possession? Do you hold dearly to your mornings to sleep in? All of these things can be wonderful blessings, but they can also assume lordship over our lives. Our God is a giver of good things, but he asks us to hold them loosely. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:19-21(NLT), "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust

destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

I have to admit that my heart is often found with my earthly treasure. So what hope do we have that any of us can enter the Kingdom of Heaven? Jesus provides glorious news when he replies to the disciples’ same question (v. 26) with, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (v. 27). Thank you, Lord! Paul describes the answer well in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT): “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” When we make Jesus first in our life and put our faith in him as Lord, we are given the greatest gift of all, a relationship with God Almighty and hope of eternity with him.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, you are the giver of all good things. Help me to value my relationship with you more than any other possession.

Week 6

Day 29 - Luke 19:1-28

Find Us Faithful

Nancy Janney

We've all heard about Zacchaeus, the wee little man who climbed up in a sycamore tree! We've all read the parable of the men who were given the opportunity to invest and increase their master's money. Those two stories sandwiched together in Luke 19 may seem disconnected, but they actually go hand in hand to shed light on the expectations that accompany our decision to embrace the Savior.

Zacchaeus' encounter with the Messiah – the man who had been performing miracles everywhere he went -- shows that Jesus is for all people and that he will transform the life of anyone who embraces him! Zacchaeus was hated by virtually all of his neighbors because of his work as a tax collector for the Romans, yet Jesus reached out to him in the midst of a huge crowd clamoring to get a better view of Him. Jesus singled him out, offering him salvation which he immediately accepted. Not only did Zacchaeus accept salvation, he promised to completely change his life and make amends for the wrongs that he had done. An intimate and surprising moment with the Savior changed one man's life forever!

The parable that follows immediately after this encounter may seem disconnected, but it actually illuminates the expectations of one who embraces the Savior. When we receive the free gift of God's grace, we must willingly become the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that needs him so desperately. Zacchaeus immediately promised to change his life in order to faithfully serve the one who saved him. Unfortunately, only one of the servants in the parable was

willing to be faithful while the Master was away.

Our lives are surrounded by challenging situations where only the Savior can make a difference. Am I willing to live as He lived? Am I willing to love as He loved? Am I willing to extend my hands out even to someone who is despised, like Zacchaeus? Am I willing to completely alter my life to invest in the work that Jesus has given for me to do?

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, reveal the truth through these probing questions. Help me be faithful to the work that you have graciously given for me to do. Remind me to encourage others in my life to consider the amazing message that your salvation offers.

Day 30 - Luke 19:29-48

Jesus Knew Us and Chose to Prepare to Die for You and Me

Marty Martinez

What would you do if you knew that this was your very last week to live? Where would you go? Jesus knew in our passage for today that this was the start of his final week on earth. What did He do? Where did He go? Jesus determined to do his Father's will. He celebrated the Passover with his friends. Jesus walked away from safety and into danger. He finally, boldly proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. Jesus walked every step, toward the cross, to die, for us.

Jesus knew where he was headed. Today's verses 30-31 remind us that He knew (and knows) the future. He knew everything that his disciples would encounter in the village as they prepared for the Passover. God had foretold this to Zechariah over 500 years earlier (Zech. 9:9). This was a time for rejoicing and praising God (v. 37-40). The time had finally come that all creation had waited for: Jesus proclaimed to the world that he was the Messiah. Even the stones knew and would cry out praise. Yet this was also a time for weeping, as Jesus knew that soon, Jerusalem would reject God.

Finally, Jesus knew that this final week was a time to be in his Father's presence, so he went daily to the temple to teach. On the first day, Jesus saw how the Pharisees allowed and benefitted from how the sellers and money changers cheated both His Father and the people. Jesus would later show no anger when they beat him and nailed him to the cross. But, when they dishonored his Father's holy place and cheated the poor, He drove them out. Jesus knew. He knew that they needed help. He knew that we needed help. He knew that we needed a Savior. Jesus was there for us. He prepared Himself

to die for us. Jesus knows us, you and me, and is there for us still, now and forever.

A Prayer for Today:

We serve a God who knows all things. We serve a God who knows us, personally. We serve a God who loves us, deeply. Thank you, Lord, for your love and faithfulness. We praise you today! Amen.

Day 31 - Luke 20:1-26

Jesus Challenges Our Preconceptions

Kyle Bartholic

The world that Jesus was born into was a world of significant inequities and polarized political realities. The Roman Empire, while quite vast and relatively peaceful for the period, was formed through expansive military campaigns, and power was held with an iron fist. Pride and selfishness ruled the day at every social and economic stratum. And, as Jesus' parable shows us, pride and selfishness can rule even in our hearts towards God.

Let's start with the question on taxes (v. 19ff). Jesus, being Jewish, was born into a people group that largely saw themselves as exiles and oppressed by the Romans. And, they weren't altogether wrong. Seven hundred years before Jesus would arrive on the scene, Ahaz would make a deal with Asshur, the king of Assyria, that would seal the fate of the Jewish people. Eventually, Assyria would take over Israel, then the Babylonians after them, then the Persians, next the Greeks, and finally, the Romans. And, paying taxes wasn't just a political act of submission, but a theological one as well. Romans believed Caesar to be lord (god), and any good Jewish person would not support that. Why? Because only Yahweh is God. Jesus' instruction stuns them; really, we are to pay taxes?!? Why? Because no one can replace God, not even Caesar.

But, this principle about taxes is further illustrated by the parable on the wicked tenants (v. 9ff). The wicked tenants reject the tax collectors, no matter who the king and generous vineyard owner send. Most dramatically, when the King sends his beloved son, they decide to kill him and take the inheritance. Why would they do this? Well, frankly, their

pride and self-centeredness. Pride and selfishness provide a dangerous concoction in our spiritual lives. When it came to paying taxes, their pride resulted in missing the grace and freedom of God. When it came to the wicked tenants, their pride would result in their ultimate destruction. Jesus challenges the preconceptions of the crowds by pushing on their pride and selfishness.

This is an important teaching we should not miss. Let's not be a people who miss out on God's grace or, worse yet, eternal life because of our pride, selfishness, or preconceptions. Let us be a people with hearts open and available to Jesus at all times.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, would you expose every ounce of pride and selfishness that is in my heart?

Day 32 - Luke 20:27-47

Motives Matter

Kyle Bartholic

Ah, those religious leaders, back at it again. Questioning Jesus, getting the values of the kingdom upside down, and excluding those who aren't astute or devoted enough to hang with serious theological conversation. It's good we're not like them... right???

Wait, why didn't anyone agree with me? ARE we actually like them? Or, do we possess the ability to become like them way too quickly? I know that I do. It is a challenge anyone who has been following Jesus for any amount of time or raised in the church faces. See, the thing is, the religious leaders weren't acting this way out of spite for others. Yes, their positions often resulted in others being excluded or downcast. But, they were actually acting this way out of a love for God. I know that might sound crazy or misplaced, but it is true. They understood that strict adherence to the law is how you demonstrate your devotion to and love for God. That is what separated them from everyone else, and they wanted to know how to follow the law even in the age of the resurrection (v. 27ff). But, while their zeal was well-intentioned, it flowed from wrong motives, missed the mark, and resulted in serious damage to already hurting people. As we hear in Jesus' voice in this passage, the right motives matter in this kingdom of God.

Jesus tolerates their questions about marriage and even the debate on if Jesus could be David's son (queue up long eye roll at academics needlessly arguing over the semantics and meaning of a word). Then he turns toward his disciples to teach them an important lesson about the kingdom of God:

right theology (orthodoxy) is important, but if it is divorced from right practice (orthopraxy), it is grievous, to say the least. After all, the greatest command requires BOTH (orthodoxy and orthopraxy), to love God with everything you are and to love others as yourself. And what is the motive for this? Because God loved us first, even when we were hopelessly lost and unlovable. Remember, the right motives matter in the kingdom.

A Prayer for Today:

Father, thank you for loving me when I wanted nothing to do with you. Help me love others from that place.

Day 33 - Luke 21:21-38

Careful, Watchful

Wayne Stewart

Certain Gospel texts give theologians night-sweats. This is one of them. Unlike so many of Jesus' teaching moments, this is not a parable. More fitting for Daniel or Revelation, these foretold woes must have come across as unique and forceful as Jesus paints a picture of suffering and trial for His followers, the city of Jerusalem, and the broader Jewish nation. But there is a glorious end in sight as well: His bodily return and reign. Diligent hearers have been trying to get a grip on it ever since.

Have these things happened already? Are they yet to come? When? To whom, exactly? What will set the stage? Are we close? How close?

It's not as if the timing and specifics aren't important to Jesus. After all, He says "... when you see these things happening, you know..." (vs 31). But there are two broader commands beyond "knowing" the details that are quite easy to miss.

Be careful (vs. 34).

Be always on the watch (vs 36).

First, Jesus commends us to being careful so our hearts will not become heavied by "carousing, drunkenness, or the anxieties of life." You might say this also as pleasure, dulling, and fear. These three, when in the lead, ask too much of our hearts, especially as we traverse a broken world, longing for what is still promised.

Then Jesus points to watchfulness as a posture of anticipation. But this kind of watching is more steady guard than detective ferreting clues. Yes, this is urgent. But it's more defensive perimeter than reconnaissance.

Together, these practices of soul and mind keep us light and aware.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, may this season deepen our ability to be careful, to watch, and to pray, as we consider again your great sacrifice, your amazing victory over death, and your soon return.

Day 34 - Luke 22:1-23

Eager for Presence

Kyle Bartholic

Luke 22:15 – “And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Read Jesus’ words out loud. Let them hang in the air as you meditate on them. Read them out loud again. What stands out to you as you do that? What word lingers a little longer in your mind?

For me, the word that most resonates is earnestly. The Greek word is *epithymia* (ἐπιθυμία), and it literally means, desire, craving, or an intense yearning for something. The NLT translates this word as *eagerly desired*. Jesus knows what is about to come. He knows that it means the cross, and he has seen the cross with his own eyes plenty of times as he came into Jerusalem. He understood all that was about to happen to his body and the social implication it would carry. He would die as an enemy of the state. Crucified on a cross to make a point that no one is greater than Rome. He would also experience the full depth of separation from the Father. And that would be far worse than the physical or social reality of the cross. In the shadow of that reality, he turned to his disciples and said to them that he earnestly desired to eat this meal with them. Why? Because it was symbolic of the new covenant he was about to establish. And with that new covenant would come the offer and reality of abundant life with the Father. In other words, Jesus was eager to eat that meal because, like his Father, he was eager to be an abiding presence with his disciples and all who would follow him. That includes you, me, and all people. Jesus eagerly desires for us to experience his presence. Maybe that is why he walked to and endured the cross with joy (Heb. 12:2).

Don't miss the abiding presence of Jesus today. He eagerly desires to be present to you and for you to be present to him.

A Prayer for Today:

Jesus, thank you for walking to the cross so that I might be able to experience faithful presence with you. Help me today to abide in your loving presence.

Week 7

Day 35 - Luke 22:24-53

Nevertheless...

Mark Chidister

Jerusalem was teeming with people celebrating the Passover. Jesus and his disciples were among the multitudes who had traveled from all corners of Israel to thank God for His deliverance. Thousands of priests had come to assist with lamb and goat sacrifices. The air was thick with the fragrance of wood fires, freshly baked flatbread, and roasted lamb. The Roman overseers and their troops were on high alert for any uprisings. Meanwhile, Judas had gone off the rails. The remaining disciples were jockeying for the best position in Jesus' kingdom – a kingdom they still did not fully comprehend. The Sanhedrin's chief priests and officers were working to capture and kill Jesus. And Simon Peter, despite proclaiming his willingness to follow Jesus to prison and even death, would soon deny that he even knew Jesus. Things were not looking good.

Jesus' response was to go talk with his Father. "And he came out [of Jerusalem] and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he ... knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done'" (22:39-42). Jesus was honest with his Father. He did not want to bear the pain of crucifixion at the hands of those he came to rescue or the pain of separation from his Father as he took on our sin. Nevertheless, he trusted his Father: "not my will, but yours, be done."

This, for me, is a powerful example of how to pray. Prayer is not reserved for special occasions but meant to be woven into everyday life. We are invited to be boldly honest and talk

to God about all our feelings and struggles. And we are called to trust that the Father knows what is best for us.

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb.4:14-16).

A Prayer for Today:

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Charles C. Converse, 1868 & Joseph M. Scriven, 1855

What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry, Everything to God in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Day 36 - Luke 22: 54-71

Growing In Christ Likeness

Ward Leek

The first part of this passage tells the story of Peter's denial, one of the most well-known and saddest passages of the crucifixion story. How could someone who drew his sword to stop the arrest of Jesus, moments later deny him, not once but three times?

In the last set of verses Jesus boldly answers, "Yes, I am," when asked if he was the Son of God. What a stark contrast to his friend Peter. Fear could easily have made Jesus take the path that Peter had chosen. Because of a life lived in obedience to the Father, along with his time in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was prepared for this moment.

As I look in the rearview mirror of seventy years of life, I see so much of Peter in me. While I haven't verbally denied Christ, I've denied him with silence when I should have spoken up. It is so much easier to be like Christ around fellow Christians than when I'm out in the secular world. As I have grown older, physically and spiritually, I have become bolder in my faith. I have learned how to speak with boldness and confidence while sharing with a soft heart. I still have times of failure, usually because I can get defensive. I have confidence that when Jesus spoke before the elders, he spoke truth with grace and humility. That is my desire for my witness.

The denial of Christ was a bitter experience for Peter. Through this low point in Peter's life, Jesus was preparing Peter for future ministry. As I move through the gospels into

the book of Acts, I see a different Peter who resembles Christ more than the early Peter.

My hope is that I allow Christ to mold me in his image and that I can finish well like Peter.

Question for personal reflection:

Am I allowing Christ to fashion me in his image?

A Prayer for Today:

*Father God, forgive me for those moments when I abandon you like Peter did. May I be open to your leading in my life.
Amen.*

Day 37 - Luke 23:1-31

For Look What People Can Do

Peggy Chidister

Be present with Jesus as he is dragged before Pilate by an angry crowd with false accusations.

Go with him as he's passed off to Herod who wants to see a "supernatural performance".

Stand quietly with Jesus as he remains silent before his interrogators.

Feel the mounting evil and resistance to Jesus' Kingdom by the new alliance between Herod and Pilate. His own Jewish people and leaders, gather and vehemently accuse him.

Feel the cruelty of the mocking robe of royalty.

Pilate: "I have found no basis for your charges against this man, neither has Herod. He has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and release him."

With one voice, the people cried, "Away with this man. Release Barabbas to us!"

We'd rather save an insurrectionist and a murderer than this Messiah, the anointed one, chosen before the beginning of the world.

Pilate wanted to release Jesus. The people kept crying out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

So, Pilate surrendered Jesus to the will of the people.

Simon of Cyrene was made to carry his cross behind him.

Jesus spoke to the large crowd that followed him, “weep for yourselves, weep for your children…”

For look what people can do.

John 11:45-53 tells us that after the death and miraculous resurrection of Lazarus, “many Jews put their faith in Jesus. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus has done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. ‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ Then one of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, ‘You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish.’ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.”

*A Prayer/Meditation for Today: From a hymn by Johann
Heermann c.1630*

*Ah, holy Jesus, how has Thou offended,
That man to judge
Thee hath in hate pretended?*

*By foes derided, by Thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.*

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?

Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee!

*’Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee;
I crucified Thee.*

*For me, kind Jesus, was Thy incarnation, Thy mortal sorrow,
and Thy life's oblation;*

Thy death of anguish and Thy bitter passion, For my salvation.

*Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay Thee, I do adore
Thee, and will ever pray Thee,*

*Think on Thy pity and Thy love unswerving, Not my
deserving. Amen.*

Day 38 - Luke 23:32-56

No Need For Jesus

Danielle Bartholic

My oldest daughter asked me one day, “Mama, what if you never asked Jesus into your heart and then right before you died, you did? Would that work?”

“Well, actually, yes.” I explained the story in Luke 23 about the two criminals who hung on either side of Jesus.

“I assure you, today, you will be with me in Paradise,” Jesus said to the one that repented.

After years of walking with the Lord, we can easily slip into a mindset of striving to earn God’s favor. We forget that He died for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). My greatest desire is to please my Savior. But as I reflect on Christ’s story this Easter, I quickly remember that my offerings of works to Him are really rags compared to the incomparable riches of his love and sacrifice for me. Yet, his grace to me is that he takes me just as I am. Rags and all. My salvation becomes as fresh to me as it was when I gave my life to him the first time. He exalts the humble (Luke 18:14) which, in a sense, describes everyone of us. If we open our eyes to our sin, we realize there is nothing we could give him in return for his sacrifice. Not one of us can wash our hands clean. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ trial, Pilot washes his hands clean in a futile attempt to rid the guilt of his sin (Matthew 27:24). How many of us try to do this with our works for God?

If there was anything we could do to earn God’s love and favor, there would be no need for Jesus to die. We are all

criminals. But God loves us just as we are and will forgive us of our sins at any point in our lives. God offers a once-and-for-all salvation, and a daily salvation where we live in his amazing grace.

A Prayer for Today:

Lord, you are gracious. Forgive us for trying to earn your love when Jesus has already paid for it with his life. Help us to live in your grace and walk in righteousness because of your great love. Thank you for loving us so deeply so we can live in your grace and peace.

Day 39 - Luke 24: 1-27

Jesus Christ, Our Living Hope

Mark Henderson

It's Good Friday, the day that we celebrate, mourn and worship as we remember the amazing sacrifice that Jesus made when he willingly gave his life to take away our sin. I am amazed and still get emotional when I think about God's love for me. I was dead in my sin and separated from God, but in his great mercy, he saved me. Let's worship Him together with the lyrics from this worship song, Living Hope!

LIVING HOPE

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke your name into the night
Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Who could imagine so great a mercy
What heart could fathom such boundless grace
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful savior, I'm yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

CHORUS

Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me

You have broken every chain
There's salvation in your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe.
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, yours is the victory!

Source: [Musixmatch](#)

Songwriters: Phil Wickham

Living Hope Lyrics © Bethel Music Publishing

A Prayer for Today:

*Jesus. Thank you for giving your life to save me from death. I
worship you today.*

Day 40 - Luke 24:28-53

Burning Hearts and Opened Minds

Joseph Scarfone

The reality of the resurrection literally changes everything! Jesus overcame the grave and defeated sin and death. Because of what He accomplished, we can see the power of the resurrection enable believers to experience God in a uniquely compelling way, through intimate relationship. A transformative relationship with Christ makes the reality of the resurrection to life very personal. As Jesus was raised to newness of life, so are believers.

In this new life we learn as students (disciples) to follow after Christ. Not only does Christ come to us to rescue us, but he remains with us and teaches us what it means to be his disciples. Today's passage describes two separate encounters Jesus had with his disciples where he personally teaches them. The same can be true for us: as we grow in our relationship with Christ, he teaches us what it means to follow Him. How does He do it? Just as in our passage, He teaches us through the Scriptures.

Jesus is our master teacher, and alongside the Holy Spirit, they teach us the power of the resurrection for the rest of our lives. We, too, have our own "Road to Emmaus" experience where our "hearts burn within us...while He opened to us the Scriptures" (Luke 24:32). When we experience the risen Lord in our own lives and the power of his Word personally, our hearts burn with a passion and zeal for God. Not only is there great emotion, there is a new understanding.

Just as Jesus with his disciples "opened their minds to

understand the Scripture,” Jesus does the same with us. He allows us to know the Truth through his Word, while in relationship with him. He opens our minds to better understand his grand story of redemption in which he rescues us and keeps us in relationship with him. The reality of the resurrection allows us to experience Jesus with burning hearts and open minds. Thank you, Lord, for giving us new life, one with you!

A Prayer for Today:

Jesus, thank you for my new life and for being my example of a life-defining love for God. Would you help me to follow you more whole-heartedly today than I did yesterday?