

Snapshots of a Savior
Lenten reflections on John Chapters 1-11
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Lent 2024

Dedication:

For Matt, Michaela, Luke, Gabe, KJ, Sarah, and Sol.

May you come to know Jesus and walk with Him all the days of your life.

Introduction:

Growing up in the deep south, the church I attended as a teenager never once said the word “Lent” and never once mentioned the Lenten season. We would celebrate Christmas (but not the Advent season) and then cruise along from Sunday to Sunday until we arrived at Palm Sunday. We would skip Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and then celebrate Easter Sunday. That was it until we arrived back at Christmas again.

On Easter Sunday, I always felt as if something was missing. In a deeper way I felt disconnected and unprepared to celebrate the resurrection. It wasn’t until I was an adult serving in full-time ministry that I became aware that some of the churches in our community were celebrating the season of Lent which began with Ash Wednesday (also something I was unaware of).

This set me on a path of discovery and research and years later I came to serve at a church that practiced Lent. What difference this made in my understanding of the journey Jesus traveled to the cross to pay for our sins. After 40 days of praying, fasting, and worshipping, my heart was truly ready to celebrate.

This 40 day devotional runs from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday and is based on the gospel of John Chapters 1-11. As such, this devotional is intended to familiarize the reader with the life and ministry of Jesus, His miraculous works, and the growing opposition to His ministry among the religious leaders of Israel.

It is my hope and prayer that working through this devotional, your journey through the season of Lent will prepare you to stand at the empty tomb and hear the ask, “Why do you seek the living among the dead.? He is not here, He is risen.”

Mark Williams, 2024

Day 1-February 14th

Ash Wednesday

From Dust to Dust

Joel 2:12-14

Today, as we begin the journey of Lent, we will gather with our church family and receive the sign of the cross in ash on our foreheads. These ashes come from the burning of the palm fronds from Palm Sunday the previous year.

But why do we do this?

We take the cross in ash to be reminded of several things.

First, we need to be reminded that God is God, and we are not. We are created in God's image and not the other way around.

Secondly, we need to be reminded that we are fragile human beings created in the image of the Invisible God. We came from the dust and will return to the dust.

Finally, we need to be reminded of the price that Jesus paid to cover our sins and justify us before God.

As we contemplate these things on Ash Wednesday, God will prepare our hearts to walk this journey of Lent for the next 40 days. As Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and 40 nights, the scripture tells us that Jesus fasted and turned His heart to God. The season of Lent provides for us the same opportunity to fast and turn our hearts to God, not out of obligation or tradition, but out of a desire to grow closer to God and experience the power of the resurrection in a much deeper way.

Consider the words of the prophet Joel...

*“Even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning.”
Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.
Who knows? He may turn and relent
and leave behind a blessing— Joel 2 :12-14b NIV*

In ancient times, people would tear their outer clothing as a sign of repentance and sorrow for sin. But, like today, sometimes things done outwardly for show don't always represent the true

attitude of the heart. Lent isn't a time to fake our sincerity so others will think we are "spiritual", but rather Lent is a time for us to personally examine our hearts and deepen our commitment to God. In this "tearing" of our hearts inwardly, we give God the opportunity to minister to our deepest needs.

Questions to consider:

What is the attitude of your heart towards Lent this year?

What blessing do you need to receive this year?

Day 2-Thursday. February 15th

And So It Begins

John 1:29-34

The ashes from yesterday have been washed away, and today we embark on this journey of Lent. This is a journey that we will take with Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God, the Man of Sorrows. His time of preparation is over, and now His time of public ministry will begin. His fateful march to the cross to purchase our redemption is fully in motion.

John the Baptist has been preparing the way for this public ministry of Jesus. The people of Israel, eager for the coming of the Messiah, are hopeful that John may be the One for which they have been waiting. John sensing this, turns the spotlight on Jesus...

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29 NIV)

Knowing the people would want proof, John gives some context to this statement...

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him. And I myself did not know Him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." John 1:32-34 NIV

Here John is referring to the moment when he baptized Jesus and the Holy Spirit came down from heaven like a dove and God spoke from heaven. For John, who surely had heard the stories of who Jesus was promised to be from his mother Elizabeth and Mary the mother of Jesus, this was the seminal moment when Jesus was affirmed as the Messiah. There would be no more doubting in his heart, Jesus was God's Chosen One, the Messiah.

As you begin this journey of Lent, is it possible that in your heart you harbor doubts about God, Jesus, the Bible, and more? How in the world do we even know all of this is true? How can we be certain?

Let me encourage you to press on in this journey, in spite of your doubts. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes in the same way He opened the eyes of John the Baptist. Ask Him to help you truly see Jesus the Messiah.

Questions to consider:

What doubts do you still have about God and His goodness. Take a moment to write these in your journal.

What are some things that you know are true about God? Write these down as well.

Day 3-Friday, February 16th

The Real One

John 1:35-42

In the late 1800's as Americans headed West to settle the frontier, families often had a final destination in mind, even if it was only a place they had read about in an East Coast newspaper. Some of these places, like San Francisco, were thousands of miles away and required travel through harsh uncharted territory. Many families, after running out of supplies, patience, energy, and determination decided to settle at different places along the trail far short of the destination.

I believe that it is possible to do this very thing with the Journey of Lent. We start off with the cross and resurrection in mind but end up distracted at different places along the road and never quite reach the desired place. We abandon our fast, our Bible reading, our worship attendance, and our sincere intentions lead us back to where we started.

John the Baptist understood that he and his ministry could be a distraction for these disciples. He makes it very clear that Jesus was the Messiah and encourages them to follow Jesus.

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God! When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus." John 1:35-37 NIV

I believe the role of encouragement and accountability in our spiritual lives cannot be oversold. Where one falters, two can stay strong and stay on the path. Through John's encouragement, the two disciples press on for an encounter Jesus!!

(How many times have we fallen short of a goal because we had no one to help us persevere?)

Jesus, sensing the disciples following Him, turned and asked quite a loaded question.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" John 1:38 NIV

Rather than overwhelm Jesus with a litany of questions, the disciples simply want to know where Jesus is staying so they can be with Him. During this season, may our hearts long for this as well!

Question to consider:

Today, as you spend time in reflection, consider your answer to the question of Jesus “What do you want?” Take time journaling today the answers that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind.

Day 4-Saturday, February 17th

Easily Impressed

Read John 1:42-51

When we are children, we can be very easily impressed by almost anything. Our world is so small that we don't realize that there are bigger and better things in the world. As we grow older, we become much harder to impress because we view ourselves to be wiser and more knowledgeable of the world.

When Philip tells Nathaniel that he has found the Messiah in Nazareth, Nathaniel is unimpressed-actually wondering aloud if “anything good can come” from Nazareth. Historically, Nazareth was known as one of the lowliest places on earth. It is worth considering that the God who created the universe came to earth and was born in the small town of Bethlehem and raised in the lowly town of Nazareth. Although both famous today because of Jesus, neither town was well-known at the time of the birth and childhood of Jesus.

Jesus, being aware of this attitude already, confronts it head on with Nathaniel.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” John 1:47-49 NIV

With this, the attitude of Nathaniel changes immediately. Nathaniel is ready to declare that Jesus is the “Son of God” based on Jesus simply knowing he was sitting under a fig tree. I can imagine a smile must have spread across the face of Jesus with this enthusiastic declaration from Nathaniel. Nathaniel had absolutely no idea what power Jesus actually had at His disposal and what he and the other disciples would experience in the days to come. For now, this simple declaration of faith would be enough.

In our world of wonders, have we forgotten what God has done and is able to do? Have others whispered in our ear that the Bible is full of myths and that believing in Jesus is for the weak and old? When we take our eyes off Jesus and neglect to spend time with God in scripture reading and prayer, the skepticism of our world can grow louder and we can begin to think like Nathaniel. But, when we turn our hearts back to God, He will reveal His true nature to us day after day and strengthen our faith.

Questions to consider:

What skeptical ideas have you recently heard about God and the Bible?

What do you think about these ideas? What does the Bible say about these ideas?

Day 5-Sunday, February 18th

A Day to Reflect.

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

Check your spiritual temperature. How committed are you to this journey of Lent?

How excited are you for the week to come?

Day 6-Monday, February 19th

Beyond Expectations

Read John 2:1-12

As we enter this first full week of Lent, it is possible that the reality of the depth of this journey is beginning to set in. If you have chosen to fast during this season, it is also possible that this is proving to be quite difficult as the longing has started to distract you. When we experience this

longing, we need to cry out, “God I want you more than I want _____”. We can pray that God will give us the strength to persevere along the steps of this journey.

Turning our attention to this passage, Jesus and some of His disciples attend a wedding with the mother of Jesus. At this wedding, a crisis arises as the host family begins to run out of wine (possibly because Jesus brought some of His disciples?) Jesus is put on the spot by his own mother in order to save the reputation of a family friend. In Biblical times, wedding celebrations would last up to a full week. It would be a disgrace for the host family to run out of food and wine. At this point, Jesus has not yet begun his public ministry, but his mother demands His help regardless. In providing this help, we learn an important lesson about the power of Jesus.

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. John 2:6-7 NIV

Filling these water jars would be no small task and would take considerable time and effort as these jars would be very heavy and the water source a distance away. Once this task was complete and some of water was drawn out and taken to the master of the banquet, it became clear that they now had a huge abundance of the best wine ever tasted.

This first miracle performed by Jesus teaches us a very important lesson about who He is. This lesson is simple: when Jesus provides, He provides in *abundance*. Put on the spot by His mother, it’s as if Jesus says, “You want wine? I can provide wine beyond your wildest expectations. If I can do that, what else can I do?”

Questions to consider...

What do you need Jesus to provide in your life during this Lenten season?

Do you believe that Jesus can provide this in abundance?

In prayer, ask Jesus to provide this in abundance now.

Day 7-Tuesday, February 20th

Shaking Us Up

Read John 2:13-22

It is a very human thing to want to take advantage of the Holy. Jesus travels to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. After entering the city, Jesus makes His way to the temple. Upon entering the temple courts, He finds, not a place of worship and fervent prayer, but rather a full-blown market filled with the stink and noise of animals, the shouting of merchants, and the exploitation of the desire of the people to draw near to God.

This was a sad reflection of the spiritual state of the nation of Israel: distracted, wealth-driven, and uninterested in spiritual things. (Would this be a good description of the state of our own hearts?)

Some have interpreted the reaction of Jesus to this scene in the temple as the rash actions of God in His fury. However, in contrast to this thinking, Jesus, with specific intention, takes the time to make a whip from cords before acting. Then, with great passion for what the temple was intended to be, Jesus clears the temple courts, overturning tables and driving out the merchants, animals, and money changers. It comes as no surprise that this was not well-received by the religious leaders.

The Jews then responded to Him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” John 2:18 NIV

Clearing the temple courts was such a bold and unexpected act that the religious leaders wanted to know exactly who Jesus thought He was. They weren’t prepared for His answer.

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” John 2:19 NIV

This answer from Jesus makes perfect sense to us on this side of the cross, but it was blasphemy to the Jews who only sought to defend their own positions of influence and power.

The situation had most likely been like this in the temple courts for as long as anyone could remember, but Jesus intended to shake things up and cleared the temple courts that day. That was a day that few who were present would ever forget.

Questions to consider:

Where in our lives does Jesus need to come and shake things up, clear out some distractions, and challenge our hearts and our way of thinking?

How receptive are we to the Holy Spirit barging in and shaking things up in our lives?

Day 8-Wednesday

Coming to Jesus

John 2:23-3:15

In a meeting that some have called the first “Nick at Nite”, the Jewish religious leader Nicodemus came to Jesus in the middle of the night. Why? Nicodemus was an important and

influential leader on the high Jewish ruling council—a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a fundamentalist sect of the elite ruling council, the Sanhedrin, who were known for being legalistic and closed-minded.

For this reason, Nicodemus came secretly at night to speak with Jesus so that He could speak his mind without the ruling council knowing. Although the ruling council had dismissed the idea that Jesus could be the Messiah, Nicodemus was uncertain and wanted to know more.

He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” John 3:2 NIV

The response that Jesus gives doesn’t answer the implied question from Nicodemus but rather answers a deeper question in his heart.

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” John 3:3 NIV

While Nicodemus represented the people, his visit was a personal one and Jesus could read his mind. This response of Jesus took Nicodemus by surprise. The old ways, the adherence to the law, these things can’t bring salvation to this nation or to his heart. “You must be born again.”

This is one of the most important statements in the gospel of John. In it we find a beautiful transition from an emphasis on *ritual* to an emphasis on *relationship*. Jesus is telling Nicodemus “Nicodemus, even though you are a faithful and Godly man, your righteousness cannot save you. I will soon give myself as the lamb of God, a sacrifice for all time. Place your trust in me by faith alone and I will cover your sin and make you completely new.”

These words speak just as loudly today in our “pull yourself up by the bootstraps culture”. Although our culture may teach “good people go to heaven”, Jesus is still saying to all today, “You must be born again.” We cannot save ourselves.

Some may fault Nicodemus for coming to Jesus in secrecy, but the truly important thing is that, when no one else dared, Nicodemus came, and I have to believe his life was changed. This is what the journey of Lent is truly about—coming to Jesus to be renewed and restored. May we come to Jesus as well!

Question to consider:

Are you ready today to trade simply going through the motions(ritual) to walk closely with God each day (relationship)?

What changes will you need to make for you to make this trade?

Day 9-Thursday

John 3:14-21

A Sign of the Gospel

Today we come to arguably the most memorized and quoted verse in the Bible. We can see signs that read “John 3:16” behind home plate at a baseball game, in the stands at a football game, on billboards, on car bumpers, on t-shirts, and so much more.

What is the fuss really all about? Why is this one verse in the Bible so important?

Our passage today is part of a larger passage in chapter 3 that records a conversation between the religious leader Nicodemus and Jesus (see yesterday’s devotion). Nicodemus sees God’s power manifestly alive in Jesus and comes at night to have a deeper discussion with Him. Jesus, knowing the heart of Nicodemus, cuts straight to the point: religious activity is not enough to save you, you must be in a personal relationship with God (“you must be born again”). Jesus goes on to share that the sacrificial system of the Law will end with His death on the cross.

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.” John 3:14-15 NIV

Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus rather than working hard to fulfill the Law will have eternal life. This must have been mind-blowing and overwhelming for Nicodemus to try and comprehend.

This transitions directly into this monumental verse that most Christians can quote (at some level) and that so many people have heard even if they didn’t fully understand. In this verse, and the verse that follows, we find the Good News of the Gospel succinctly and concisely stated...

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. John 3:16-17 NIV

God, understanding that the Old Testament Law and sacrificial system was never going to fully reconcile Himself to His people, gave His son Jesus as the final sacrifice once and for all people in all times. His motivation was simple-because He loved His own creation, He would save the world from condemnation from sin so that all people would have the opportunity to live with Him in eternity.

It’s hard to understand, much less comprehend, this kind of love-a love that would give so much to us to make it possible for us to live in relationship with the God who created us. You can’t help but wonder what Nicodemus was thinking walking home from talking with Jesus.

Questions to consider:

Thinking on God’s love, how does it make you feel to know that Jesus died on the cross because God loves you and desires to be in relationship with you?

During this Lenten season, how can you honor the sacrifice of Jesus in your life each day?

Day 10-Friday

John 3:22-36

Know Thyself

In the Greek precinct of Delphi, the philosophical maxim “Know Thyself” was inscribed at the entrance to the temple of Apollo. Visitors to this shrine were encouraged to take inventory of their own hearts as they worshipped the gods. Originally, this idea comes from the Greek philosopher Socrates who was quoted by Plato as saying, “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”

In our passage today, the disciples of John the Baptist seem to be jealous because the crowds are going out into the wilderness to be baptized by Jesus rather than John. John’s reply reflected the perspective of His heart.

You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of Him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. John 3:28-29 NIV

From his earliest days, John knew that he was the predecessor or forerunner to the Messiah, born and called to shine the light on his cousin Jesus. John had never led his disciples believe he was the Messiah. John understood who he was and who he was not and what his role in the life and ministry of Jesus would be. As Jesus began this earthly ministry and the crowds began to follow him, John knew that he had to recede into the shadows so that Jesus could take center stage.

He must become greater; I must become less.” John 3:30 NIV

The season of Lent gives us an excellent opportunity to reflect on the condition of our own hearts and take inventory of the life we are living for God. Do we understand the purpose for which God created us? Are we living according to God’s will for our lives and fully using the gifts God has given us?

Questions to consider:

For what purpose do you feel God created you? Are you living according to that purpose?

What are your spiritual gifts? How is God using these gifts in your service to Him?

Day 11-Saturday

John 4:1-26

A Cheap Substitute

Growing up in the 1980's, teenage fashion was vitally important and was directly connected to your social status at school. Name brands like Ocean Pacific, Member's only, Calvin Klein, and Ralph Lauren were a staple of any "cool" wardrobe. Member's only jackets and parachute pants were all the rage. No one wanted to be caught wearing "knockoff" brand clothing or be accused of wearing the latest K-Mart "blue light" special. Your popularity could be ruined by wearing the wrong outfits. (Today, teenagers wear hoodies, sweatpants, and even pajamas to school-much of which they bought at a thrift store-times have changed!!)

Today we read about Jesus traveling through the region of Samaria, and, exhausted, He sits down by a well near the town of Sychar. Historically, most Jewish leaders would travel hundreds of miles out of the way to avoid stepping one foot into the region of Samaria. (The Jews who lived in the region of Samaria were considered to be racially impure half-breed Jews (or knock-off Jews) because of the defeat of Samaria by the Assyrian empire and the subsequent deportations and importations that came at the hand of the Assyrian king some 700 years earlier.)

As Jesus rests by the well, a woman of low reputation comes to draw water around midday because she isn't welcome in the early morning when most women come to draw water. Jesus takes her completely off-guard when He asks her, a woman and a Samaritan, for a drink from the well.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"- (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to Him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) John 4:7-9 NIV

This woman was hoping not to encounter anyone at the well but instead encounters a most unusual Jewish rabbi who uses the opportunity to challenge her heart.

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:13-14 NIV

This woman, who lived out her humiliation each day coming to the well in the heat of the afternoon, couldn't believe her luck! This man can give me water so I never have to return to this well!

The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." John 4:15 NIV

At first, the motivation of this woman was purely selfish, and she was completely missing the point. She simply wanted Jesus to change her circumstance without changing her heart. Jesus had no intention of letting her off the hook that easy. Consider His reply...

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." John 4:16-18 NIV

Now we learn the reason the woman must come to the well by herself to avoid the other women from town. Faced with her sin, the woman tries to change the subject by attempting to draw Jesus into a theological argument which doesn't work. Finally, it dawns on her...

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am He." John 4:25-26 NIV

Questions to consider:

In what ways can you relate to this woman? How have you ever desperately needed Jesus to change your circumstances?

What sin do you need to confess to Jesus today? (Remember He already knows about this sin). Take time right now to seek His forgiveness.

Day 12-Sunday

A Day to Reflect.

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

Check your spiritual temperature. How committed are you to this journey of Lent?

How excited are you for the week to come?

Day 13-Monday

John 4:27-42

Throw Down Your Burden!

On Saturday, we read about the Samaritan woman who, to avoid humiliation, had asked Jesus to give her the “living water” so she would never have to come to the well and face the disapproving glances of the other women from town. Through this interaction with Jesus, the Samaritan came to understand that Jesus was the Messiah who had been promised.

Once the woman had been set free from the shame of her past, she was no longer concerned about the side-long glances of her neighbors. Instead, she felt a deep urgency to tell others about Jesus...

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town... John 4:28 NIV

Here was a woman with a bad reputation, who made it a daily practice to try to avoid the other women, running back into town to tell everyone about Jesus.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” John 4:28-29 NIV

When the woman told the people from town that Jesus was able to tell her “everything I ever did”, the townspeople must have wondered how long that might have taken!

Regardless of their initial reaction, the people were moved by her passion and urgency, and they came out to meet Jesus.

They came out of the town and made their way toward Him. John 4:30 NIV

The result was incredible-because of the testimony of this woman, many Samaritans from the village “believed in Jesus”.

Perhaps before reading about the Samaritan woman, you may have believed that you shouldn’t talk to others about Jesus because the life that you have lived over the years hasn’t always honored Him. The story of the Samaritan woman teaches us that salvation is not about us and the life we have lived, but rather about Jesus and the life He willingly laid down so that we could be forgiven and given abundant life.

Lent is the perfect time to share with others what Jesus has done for us!! We know that people are more willing to come to church during the Easter season and more willing to come when they are invited by a friend or neighbor. Who will you invite this week?

Questions to consider:

**When have you felt unsure about telling others about the way Jesus has changed your life?
Why did you feel unsure?**

Identify three people who need to hear about the hope you have found in Jesus. When can you reach out to them this week?

Day 14-Tuesday, February 27th

John 4:43-52

Hoping or Believing?

After spending two days in Sychar with the Samaritans, Jesus returns again to Cana, the site of His first miracle of changing water into wine. At this point, news of His power to work miracles has spread throughout the entire region. When word of the return of Jesus reaches a government official from nearby Capernaum, the official comes to Jesus begging Him to come to heal his son who was at the point of death.

When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to Him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. John 4:47 NIV

It would be easy to just skip over the response of Jesus in order to see the miracle of the healing of this boy. But, let's take a moment to consider His response...

"Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." John 4:48 NIV

Clearly Jesus is speaking to the entire group rather than just shaming the official. I believe that the words of Jesus speak as powerfully to us today as they would have to this crowd. There is a difference between hoping and believing.

It is human nature to doubt what we cannot see...this is where faith comes in. The writer of Hebrews states...

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1 NIV

Jesus desperately wants us to place our faith in Him and believe that what He says will happen is as good as done.

Returning to this passage, it is not clear that the frantic official even hears Jesus' response. He implores once again for Jesus to please come heal his son.

(Does Jesus sigh with resignation here?)

Jesus presses the point...

"Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." John 4:50a NIV

At this point, the official must make a choice. The news of the power of Jesus has spread like wildfire. Does He truly believe that Jesus has the power to heal His son with even a word, or is he simply hoping that Jesus might be able to save his son? The official chooses to believe...

The man took Jesus at His word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.” Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed. John 4:50b-53 NIV

Rather than begging Jesus further, he takes Jesus at His word. Was it hard for him to turn and begin the journey back home? On the way, he is met with the message that his son is healed, and this healing occurred at exactly the time Jesus spoke “your son will live.”

Choosing to take Jesus at His word had a far-reaching impact for the family of the official...

Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and his whole household believed. John 4:53 NIV

Because he chose to believe, his entire family was saved!!!

Questions to consider...

Think of a time you had the choice to take God at His word. What did you choose to do and what happened?

Consider the alternative to this account: the official refuses to believe and demands that Jesus come in person. How are the other people in his family affected?

Have we ever reacted like this-refusing to believe unless God does what we ask? How were other people affected by this choice?

Day 15-Wednesday, February 28th

John 5:1-18

Jesus Only

Leaving Cana, Jesus returns to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish feasts. Entering through the sheep gate, He passes a pool called Bethesda where many sick and disabled people gathered because they believed that the pool had magic healing qualities. It was believed that, on occasion, an angel would come and stir the waters of the pool, and the first person who was able to enter the pool after this stirring would be healed.

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had. John 5:3-4 NIV

It is worth noting that the gospel writer John chooses not to offer commentary on this type of superstitious belief of those around the pool but rather notes that Jesus simply ignores this belief and addresses the issue directly.

Jesus, seeing a man who had laid by this pool for 38 years, doesn't offer to help the man get closer to the pool or to wait with him for the stirring of the water. Instead, Jesus asks him a critical question...

One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" John 5:5-6 NIV

What an interesting question for Jesus to ask. Isn't it obvious? This man had laid by this pool for 38 years rather than living any kind of life with his family and friends. Of course, he wants to be healed!! It is worth remembering that Jesus created this man and knew his heart. (The Bible is full of such amazing subtle details!)

This is a question that should speak to our hearts and lives today.

Do we want to get well? Do we want to change? Do we want to experience healing? Do we want to forgive and be forgiven? Do we want to move forward with our lives?

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. John 5:7-9a NIV

Jesus completely ignores the response of the man about having no one to help him get to the pool, and Jesus heals him by His word instantly. When the man traded the doubt of superstition for the power of the Savior's word, he was fully healed and could leave his old life behind.

Questions to consider:

In what ways are you "waiting by the pool of Bethesda" for something to change in your life? How long have you been "stuck" at this place in your life? For what do you need to ask God to intercede today?

What sources (self-help books, horoscopes, psychics, crystals, philosophy) are you turning to rather than trusting Jesus and asking for Him to intercede?

Take a few minutes to write out this prayer in your journal.

Day 16-Thursday, February 29th

John 5:16-29

Who is Jesus?

It is the Sabbath day when Jesus heals the man who had laid by the pool for 38 years. Jesus instructs this man to “pick up his pallet and walk” and this kind of activity is not allowed on the Sabbath day of rest. This provoked the Jewish leaders to criticize Jesus because he had healed the man on the Sabbath. The response of Jesus escalated the confrontation...

In His defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” For this reason they tried all the more to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. John 5:17-18 NIV

This provides an opportunity for Jesus to clarify the truth of His identity with these Jewish leaders. These leaders were questioning His authority along two different fronts. First, they questioned His authority to supercede the law, and second, they questioned His implied relationship as being the Son to God the Father. Jesus “doubled down” on this idea in His response. Consider the words of Jesus...

Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all He does. Yes, and he will show Him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. John 5:19-21 NIV

The response of Jesus is two-fold. First, Jesus establishes His relationship with God as being the Son who is co-equal with the Father. This is more of an academic intellectual statement-head knowledge so to speak. Then, Jesus addresses how people should respond to the Son. This is the emotional “heart” response each person should have to His glory.

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him. Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. John 5:22-24 NIV

Jesus is differentiating here between having an intellectual understanding of who He is, and actually acting on that understanding by believing in God’s word and trusting in Him as Savior, making Him both the Lord and leader of one’s life. The response of Jesus is so bold He didn’t leave room for discussion about who He really is and why He has come in the flesh.

As we read through the account of this confrontation, we are also challenged to decide what we believe about Jesus. Do we believe that He is the Son of God, co-equal with the Father? Do we

believe that the Bible is the Living Word and teaches us the truth about Jesus? Have we surrendered our hearts to Jesus as Savior?

Questions to consider:

Who is the Bible according to God's word(the Bible)?

Do you believe the teaching in the Bible about Jesus? Why or why not?

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? What is holding you back?

Day 17-Friday March 1st

John 5:30-47

Living Proof

Today, we continue our look at the response of Jesus to the criticism He received after healing the lame man by the pool. These Jews specifically challenged both the authority of Jesus and the identity of Jesus. Jesus responded by saying that not only does He have the authority to do far more than heal the sick (see verses 20-21), but also, He, as the Son, is co-equal with the Father (see verses 22-23). However, it is not enough just to intellectually hear and understand these truths, a person must believe and trust in Jesus (rather than the Old Testament law and sacrificial system).

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. John 5:24 NIV

Jesus, knowing that these Jews would not accept His testimony on His own behalf, gives 4 different outside sources of witness to both His authority and His identity.

“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. John 5:31-32 NIV

The first witness to these truths about Jesus is John the Baptist...

“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. John 5:33-35 NIV

The second witness given by Jesus is His miracles that He works through the power of the Father...

“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent Me. John 5:37 NIV

The third witness comes from the Father Himself...

And the Father who sent Me has Himself testified concerning me. You have never heard His voice nor seen His form, nor does His word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. John 5:37-38 NIV

Finally, Jesus presents the witness of the Scriptures...

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life. 5:39-40 NIV

Even with these four witnesses, Jesus knows that these Jews will still not believe in Him and will not “come” to Him for eternal life because they don’t even love God the Father.

...but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. John 5:42 NIV

Jesus is able to diagnose their problem clearly: these Jews care far more about their own power and influence than they care about their own faith. If all they care about is receiving honor from each other rather than God, how could they humble themselves to trust in Jesus?

How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? John 5:44 NIV

Thinking today about our own belief in Jesus, of the four witnesses listed by Jesus, is it possible that the witness of the Scriptures could have the greatest impact on us today? I assume you are reading this today because you desire to dig deeper in God’s word.

Jesus makes it clear in verse 39, *“These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me...”*

When we dig deep in God’s word, the power of His word coupled with the influence of the Holy Spirit will testify to our hearts about the truth of both the authority and identity of Jesus for us today.

Questions to consider:

How has spending these past 17 days in the Scriptures each day encouraged you heart?

In what ways has your faith grown stronger?

Day 18-Saturday, March 2nd

John 6:1-15

Jesus sees us

Having stood His ground with the Jewish leaders, Jesus leaves Jerusalem and crosses over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. At this point, Jesus has reached near celebrity status due to word spreading throughout Israel about the different miracles He has worked.

Due to this new popularity, large crowds were following Him everywhere He went. It seems that the crowds even followed Him all the way from Jerusalem.

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the signs He had performed by healing the sick. John 6:1-2 NIV

This area was open country and Jesus attempted to withdraw from the crowds by going up on the mountain with His disciples. The crowds pursued them up the mountain as well.

Jesus, knowing in their poverty the crowds would be hungry physically as well as spiritually, has compassion on the crowds and decided to feed them before He teaches them.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" John 6:5 NIV

There is no surprise that the disciples don't believe that they alone can feed a crowd of such size. They find a young boy with a few fish and loaves of bread, but they are convinced this won't be nearly enough.

Philip answered Him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Another of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" John 6:7-9 NIV

How quickly these disciples have forgotten the changing of water to wine at the wedding, the healing of the official's son, and the healing of the man by the pool! They should have learned already that Jesus is capable of tremendous miracles and would be able to feed this crowd as well.

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, He said to His disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. John 6:11-13 NIV

This miracle would catapult the fame of Jesus to new heights-fame which we will soon see will be short-lived.

I believe there are several points of encouragement for us here in this passage.

First, Jesus truly sees us in our times of need. Just as He lifts up His eyes to see the crowd coming up the mountain, Jesus sees our hearts and can respond to our needs as He desires.

Second, when Jesus responds to our needs, He responds with power beyond our wildest expectations. Not only did Jesus feed this huge crowd, but there were also twelve baskets of leftovers after everyone had their fill. As we learned with the wine at the wedding at Cana, when Jesus provides, He does so in great abundance!

Finally, Jesus knows what we need far more than we know ourselves. Knowing that the crowds could not attentively listen to His teaching if they were hungry, He met this need completely first. Jesus works in similar ways in our everyday lives, meeting different needs to prepare us for even greater opportunities by His leading.

Questions to consider:

Take a few moments to consider what is your greatest need today. What is this need? Do you believe that Jesus can truly meet this need?

Write out a prayer asking Jesus to provide for this need. Specifically tell Jesus why you believe He can meet this need in your life.

Day 19-Sunday, March 3rd

A Day to Reflect.

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

How is your heart connecting with God during this journey of Lent.

What encouragement have you received this week from God's word and Holy Spirit?

Day 20-Monday, March 4th

John 6:14-21

Waiting for Jesus

With the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, the people needed no further evidence and decided to take matters into their own hands and force Jesus into His rightful place on the throne of Israel. Clearly, they weren't concerned about how the Romans would respond to the proclamation of a new king of Israel. Jesus, who could heal the sick and feed the multitudes could surely handle the Romans as well. Jesus, who had no intention of becoming an earthly king, slipped away into the mountains by Himself.

After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself. .John 6:14-15 NIV

Meanwhile, the disciples moved back down to the beach to prepare to cross back over the sea before darkness set in. Growing impatient waiting for Jesus to come down out of the mountain, the disciples set off across the Sea of Galilee without Him. Before long, they regretted this decision.

When evening came, His disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. John 6:16-18 NIV

Is it possible that Jesus, sitting on the mountain, was watching the storm gather strength as the disciples set off across the lake in the boat? Was He shaking His head as He made His way back down the mountain to the shore? If the disciples had simply waited for Jesus, they wouldn't have faced this storm alone. Knowing this was an opportunity to grow the faith of these men, Jesus stepped out onto the water.

When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But He said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." John 6:19-20NIV

Waiting for God to work is one of the most difficult parts of being a follower of Jesus. Too often, like these disciples, our impatience gets the best of us, and we take off on our own into the unexpected storms thinking that we have it all worked out. Before long, we regret our decisions and wish we had been willing to wait.

Walking on the water, Jesus approaches the boat with the disciples and scares them senseless. Once again, in the stress of the storm, they have forgotten that this is Jesus, the one who changed water into wine, healed the sick, and fed the 5000 just hours earlier. Jesus must speak into their fear to bring them back to reality.

Then they were willing to take Him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. John 6:21 NIV

Notice that these disciples had to make a choice: allow Jesus into the boat and relinquish control or keep rowing into the storm under their own power. They chose Jesus and the problem was solved instantly!

Questions to consider:

Think of a time you were impatient and decided to not wait on God to work in your life? How did that work out? How would this have worked out differently if you had waited on Him?

Take time today and ask God to give you the strength to wait for Him the next time you are facing a difficult circumstance.

Day 21-Tuesday, March 5th

John 6:22-40

The Call to Believe

The overnight crossing of the Sea of Galilee by Jesus and His disciples goes unnoticed by the crowds until the next morning when Jesus is nowhere to be found and they notice the boat is missing. It's breakfast time and the search for Jesus is on in earnest.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with His disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor His disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. John 6:22-24 NIV

Realizing Jesus must have crossed over the sea in the middle of the night, the crowd piles into boats and crosses over in pursuit of Jesus-or perhaps their next meal! When the crowds, feigning concern, finally locate Him, they question Him on when He had slipped away. Jesus sees through their false motives immediately.

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." John 6:26 NIV

The crowds are interested in another miraculous free meal far more than the One who worked the miracle to feed them. Jesus challenges the crowd to change their attitudes.

"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval." John 6:27 NIV

In a very unexpected response, the crowds ask Jesus what they must do in order to be about doing the work of God. The response of Jesus speaks not only to the crowds but to us as well.

Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent." John 6:29 NIV

We will never be able to do enough *good works* to fully please God, we must simply believe that Jesus is who the Bible teaches that He is and place our trust in what He has *done* to bring us into a right relationship with God.

The response of the crowd to this beautiful statement is honestly mind-boggling to the modern mind. The crowds who just witnessed the miraculous feeding of the 5000 the night before, immediately ask for another sign citing the miracle of the daily manna in the wilderness.

So they asked Him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" John 6:31-32 NIV

Jesus, seizing the opportunity, makes it clear that neither the bread He broke the night before nor the manna their ancestors broke in the wilderness is the true bread that will satisfy and bring life. He alone is the true bread of heaven, and He alone can give life to the whole world.

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty. John 6:32-35 NIV

If the crowds will believe in Jesus as the One who has "come down from heaven", then this true Bread of Life will grant eternal life to all who come to Him in faith.

"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day." John 6:40 NIV

Why is it so hard for people to humble themselves and just believe in Jesus and trust in Him? Somehow in our minds, it just doesn't make rational sense that some honorable work isn't required to please God and restore our relationship with Him. Yet, faith isn't rational-that's why it's called faith!

Questions to consider:

When do you ever fall into thinking that you must DO something good for God for Him to love you?

In what areas of your life do you need to simply believe and trust Him more fully?

Day 22-Wednesday, March 6th

John 6:41-51

A Help for Belief

At the seeming height of His popularity, Jesus has the opportunity to increase both His fame and influence among the crowds. Instead, He chooses to challenge the thinking of the crowd and this ultimately has the opposite effect.

One would think that, after the different miracles they have heard of and seen with their own eyes, this crowd would be eager to embrace Jesus and believe in Him as the Messiah who was promised to come. This doesn't happen.

Rather, the crowd, baffled that Jesus is claiming to be "bread of life" that "came down from heaven", grumbles among themselves that they know Jesus did not come down from heaven because they personally know His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph.

At this the Jews there began to grumble about Him because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" John 6:41-42 NIV

For those who lived in the days Jesus walked this earth, knowing His earthly family must have been a genuine challenge to belief. Jesus understands this and makes it clear that true belief does not originate in human hearts but with the Holy Spirit pursuing their hearts and drawing them to God.

Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. John 6:43-44 NIV

This verse is beyond essential if we are to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in our coming to salvation through faith in Jesus.

Despite all our doubts and excuses, God, through the influence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, draws us to Himself and works the miracle of belief in our hearts. It is this belief in Jesus that saves us, and it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit that seals us for eternal life.

Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. John 6:47 NIV

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30 NIV

In effect, Jesus is telling these Jews, I know it is hard to believe after generations of striving to fulfill the Law; God will help you believe-it will be a joint effort!

This juxtaposition between simultaneously doubting and believing can be seen clearly in the account of the healing of the boy with an unclean spirit in Mark chapter 9.

Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Mark 9:21-24 NIV

Surely, we can relate to the exclamation of the father in verse 24, *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

These Jews wanted to believe in Jesus but were struggling with doubt on many fronts and this doubt was winning the war for their hearts.

Questions to consider:

What are some things that you have always doubted about God and the Bible?

Ask God today to help you believe in the things in which you doubt the most.

(If you don't consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, ask God to help your unbelief today.)

Day 23-Thursday, March 7th

John 6:48-59

Counting the Cost

Continuing His conversation with these Jews, Jesus states again that He is the "bread of life" but then progresses this theme to the shocking statement that these Jews should eat this bread-His flesh.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” John 6:50-51 NIV

These Jews who were struggling with His claim to have “come down from heaven”, are now incredulous with His suggestion that they should eat “His flesh”.

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” John 6:52 NIV

This is one of the more challenging passages from the Gospels. What exactly does Jesus mean that His followers should “eat His flesh”? Let’s see if we can unpack this truth.

This chapter opens with Jesus feeding a huge crowd, and this same crowd pursuing Jesus the next morning hoping to receive another free meal. Jesus admonishes the crowd to desire “food” that is eternal and will never perish.

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval.” John 6:26-27 NIV

This contrast between physical food and spiritual food sets the stage for His statement about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In John 6, Jesus identifies Himself as this spiritual bread three different times (vs. 35,48, 51), and twice He emphasizes that faith(belief) is the key to salvation. (vs. 40, 47)

Jesus then compares Himself to the manna which was given to the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus, like this manna, came down from heaven to give life. Furthermore, Jesus, unlike this manna, gives eternal life.

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” John 6:49-50, 58 NIV

Thus, Jesus is establishing this metaphor that eating this “living bread” is equivalent to believing and having faith in Him. Let’s read today’s key verses again....

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. Just as the

living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” John 6:51, 53-58 NIV

To prevent being misunderstood, Jesus goes on to make it clear that He is speaking of spiritual matters.

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. John 6:63 NIV

Thus, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus is to fully believe and to completely place our faith in Him. Jesus leaves no room for what some have called “easy believism” where it costs nothing to follow Him. Clearly, if one is willing to “eat the flesh” and “drink the blood” of Jesus, then this person is fully surrendered and committed to following Christ.

Questions to consider:

Are you, without any reservation, fully committed to Christ? Have you placed your faith in Him and no other?

What is holding you back from truly surrendering absolutely every part of your life to Him?

Day 24-Friday, March 8th

John 6:60-71

Lord, to whom shall we go?

In the previous passage, we looked in depth at the statement of Jesus that His followers should “eat His flesh” and “drink His blood” and concluded that this statement was a metaphor for fully committing our lives to Christ, surrendering our all to Him.

In this passage, we will look at how the Jews responded to these statements from Jesus. In short, they found these statements difficult to swallow (pun intended).

On hearing it, many of His disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” John 6:60 NIV

Jesus, knowing their hearts, responds...

Aware that His disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.” John 6:61-65 NIV

Jesus clarifies that He was speaking of “spiritual matters” and that these followers are taking His words too literally. His call was and has always been for His followers to “believe” in Him and fully place their faith in Him. He once again reminds them that this belief comes from the Spirit of God working in their hearts, drawing them to salvation.

For many of these disciples, this level of commitment was too much to ask.

From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him. John 6:66 NIV

Instead of growing His popularity and increasing the number of His followers, Jesus affectively sinks His poll numbers as the crowd raised a dust cloud leaving looking for the breakfast they thought Jesus would provide that morning.

Turning to the original twelve disciples, Jesus asks the question that has echoed throughout the centuries

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. John 6:67 NIV

This is a question for our hearts today. When circumstances grow difficult, will we abandon our faith? When a loved one dies, will we turn our back on God? Or, with Peter can we respond...

Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that You are the Holy One of God.” John 6:68-69 NIV

Questions to consider:

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being fully committed), what is your commitment level to Jesus today? Why did you answer the way you did?

If you answered a lower number, why do you find it difficult to surrender and fully commit your life to Jesus?

Can you truly, with all your heart, make the same confession Peter makes in response to Jesus?

Day 25-Saturday, March 9th

John 7:1-13

Oh Brother!

After His controversial teachings in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus then travels around Galilee avoiding Judea (and thus Jerusalem) where there was a bounty on His head.

About 6 months later, the earthly brothers of Jesus come to Him try to persuade Him to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of the Booths, a week-long celebration of the fall harvest. This is one of the most joyful festivals in Judaism, meant to bring families, friends and communities together. The holiday also commemorates the 40 years that Jews spent in the desert after escaping slavery in Egypt when they lived in huts or “booths”.

The brothers of Jesus see this as a great opportunity for some good press and to increase the fame and influence of their big brother.

Jesus' brothers said to Him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world." John 7:3-4 NIV

It also becomes clear that His own brothers have their doubts about Him and want to see these things with their own eyes.

For even His own brothers did not believe in Him. John 7:5 NIV

Jesus, understanding their true motives, knows the danger that waits for Him in Jerusalem and declines to attend the feast. He knows that the time will come when He will go to Jerusalem to give His life, but this “time has not yet come.”

Therefore Jesus told them, "My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because My time has not yet fully come." After He had said this, He stayed in Galilee. John 7:6-9 NIV

It must have been frustrating and perhaps even painful for Jesus to deal with all the doubters. After losing most of His followers, He now must deal with doubt from His own family. He sends His brothers to the festival in Jerusalem on their own.

However, once His brothers have departed, Jesus Himself travels to Jerusalem in secret and discovers that He was right to fear the Jewish leaders.

However, after His brothers had left for the festival, He went also, not publicly, but in secret. Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is He?" John 7:10-11 NIV

In fact, observing in secret, Jesus finds that many in the crowd are debating quietly among themselves about Him, being careful to steer clear of these Jewish leaders.

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about Him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, He deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about Him for fear of the leaders. John 7:12-13 NIV

Doubted by His followers, doubted by His own family, and doubted by the crowds, Jesus bides His time to truly make Himself known.

Questions to consider:

When have you ever acted like Jesus' brothers-wanting Jesus to work miracles so that you could easily believe?

When do you ever fall into thinking that you could have greater faith if God would just work miraculously in your life? If He would answer all your prayers the way you want Him to answer?

What causes you to doubt God the most? What stands in the way of you having strong faith?

Day 26- Sunday, March 10th

A Day to Reflect

A Day to Reflect.

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

How is this journey of Lent changing your perspective?

What encouragement have you received this week from God's word and Holy Spirit?

Day 27-Monday, March 11th

John 7:10-36

Make Up Your Mind!

In Jerusalem during the Festival of Booths, Jesus, keeping a very low profile, mingles with the crowds and hears them debating about His identity.

Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is He?" Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about Him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, He deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about Him for fear of the leaders. John 7:12-13 NIV

Jesus sees the need to clarify with both the leaders and crowds in Jerusalem exactly who He is and why God has sent Him.

Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this Man get such learning without having been taught?" John 7:14-15 NIV

Jesus makes it clear that His wisdom comes from His connection to the Father.

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not My own. It comes from the one who sent Me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own. John 7:16-17 NIV

Yet once again, Jesus encounters doubt based on the fact that the crowds know His family and His hometown. In exasperation, Jesus cries out...

Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know Me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on My own authority, but He who sent Me is true. You do not know Him, but I know Him because I am from Him and He sent Me." John 7:28-29 NIV

This just causes more confusion-some tried to arrest Him while others believed in Him as the long-awaited Messiah.

At this they tried to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd believed in Him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will He perform more signs than this Man?" John 7:30-31 NIV

We see once again in this passage that Jesus stirs the heart of every person. The Jewish leaders fear His influence and so they want to arrest and execute Him; the crowds are divided: some believe Him to be a huckster who is just playing games while others see Him as the Messiah whom Israel has been waiting on for generations. Jesus keeps telling them who He is but everyone else seems to think they have their own answer.

On this side of the cross, we have access to the Scriptures, Scriptures which teach us exactly who Jesus is, and yet, so many still refuse to believe.

During this season of Lent, we have the opportunity to search the Scriptures and learn who Jesus is and what He is calling us to do.

Questions to Consider:

In a world that holds so many differing opinions about who Jesus is, how do you hold fast to your belief in the Jesus the Bible presents?

In what ways does the noise of the crowds affect your thinking about your faith in Jesus?

Day 28-Tuesday March 12th

John 7:37-52

Come to Me

After teaching in the temple for several days, Jesus, on the final day of the Festival of Booths, calls the people to decide who they believe He is and to come and place their faith in Him.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." John 7:38-39 NIV

Previously, Jesus had been debating His origin, His identity, and His authority, but now He sees these crowds longing for answers, longing to embrace the truth. He calls them to cease the endless debates and to trust Him with their hearts. He calls them to come and be fulfilled, be satisfied, be fully restored.

Jesus promises that if we will come to Him and believe that He is indeed the Messiah, that He will satisfy our longing with "rivers of living water" to fill our soul. The gospel writer clarifies that these "rivers of living water" refer to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that comes when a person trusts Christ as Savior.

Of course, this sets off another whole round of contention among the crowds. Some are convinced that He is the Messiah, and they believe in Him, but others still can't get past the fact that Jesus grew up in Galilee rather than Bethlehem. We know that He was born in Bethlehem and lived there as a young boy, but the crowds were aware not of this.

As the festival closes, the religious leaders are fuming, the temple guards are wondering, the crowds are debating, and Jesus is calling. Will anyone be able to hear Him through the chaos?

Questions to consider:

Over the past 4 weeks, what have you concluded about Jesus? Who is He to you personally?

Do you have a longing in your soul that only Jesus can satisfy? Are you ready to come to Him and believe?

Day 29-Wednesday, March 13th

John 8:1-11

No Condemnation

We come today to one of the most beautiful, and one of the most debated passages in the Gospel of John. When you read this passage, your Bible most likely had a disclaimer that “most early manuscripts do not include John 7:53-John 8:11”. The Gospel of John along with the rest of the New Testament was written in Greek. Thousands of different manuscripts containing portions of the New Testament have been discovered throughout the years since these New Testament books were originally written with a good number of these manuscripts including the Gospel of John. The oldest or “earliest” manuscripts do not include this passage. The woman caught in adultery first appears in the 5th century AD in the Greek manuscript called Codex Bezae. The thought is simple: the earlier the manuscript, the more faithful it is to the original manuscripts and less likely to have been edited either by omission or addition. There is no way we will ever know why this story isn’t included in the oldest manuscripts we have, but that doesn’t mean it wasn’t present in the ones we don’t have. So, where was this story hidden for the first 500 years of the church? No one knows, but, keeping in mind that the Gospel of John is not a biography of Jesus but rather a telling of the life and ministry of Jesus drawn from John’s memory and other eyewitness accounts, this story fits in well with the rest of the Gospel and this one of my favorite passages to preach. Let’s look more closely at this account today.

Frustrated that the temple guards were unable to arrest Jesus and bring Him in before the Jewish ruling council (see 7:45-47), these leaders try once again to trap Jesus in His own words and discredit Him, this time by bringing to Jesus a woman caught in adultery.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group... John 8:3 NIV

This raises more questions than answers. Who is this woman? How did they know how and when to find her? Where is the man she was caught sleeping with that day? It was Jewish law that both the man and the woman should be put to death.

If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel. Deuteronomy 22:22 NIV

Why was she the only one who was seized "in the act" and brought into the Temple before Jesus?

There is something rotten in the state of Denmark! (a pointless but relevant Shakespearean quote from "Hamlet") The corruption of these leaders is showing through more and more. They are showing that they are willing to do almost anything to protect their positions of power and influence.

With this woman standing humiliated before the crowds in the temple, the Jewish leaders lay the trap...

(they) said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Him. John 8:4-6 NIV

With smug glances back and forth these men are convinced they have Jesus caught in a catch 22. If Jesus says stone her, then where is all the love and forgiveness He preaches? If He says to forgive her, then does He not respect and honor the Law?

Jesus understands their motives and refuses to entertain the question. Instead, in a completely unexpected move Jesus begins to write in the dirt.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger. John 8:6 NIV

What was He writing in the dirt with His finger? Obviously, no one knows for sure, but was it possible Jesus was writing the names of all of these Jewish leaders who had slept with this woman themselves? Or possibly, Jesus was listing them one by one with the sin they most struggle with? Either idea would fit with the response of Jesus.

When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground. John 8:7-8 NIV

Knowing their plan had backfired on them, the older and wiser leaders knew when to cut their losses. One by one these leaders dropped their stones and walked away.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. John 8:9 NIV

With only the woman left standing before Jesus and this crowd in the Temple, the silence must have been palpable. What would Jesus say to this woman?

Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:10-11 NIV

Here we find a beautiful balance in the teaching of Jesus between grace and law. While showing compassion, Jesus doesn't just let this woman off the hook. He offers this woman forgiveness but also commands her to change her way of living and begin to live in a way that honors God's commands.

What encouragement this is for our hearts today!! Even though we sin and fall short of who God has called us to be, we are not condemned.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... Romans 8:1 NIV

We can seek forgiveness and receive it, but we also need to heed the call to repent of our sin and turn to walk in God's ways.

Questions to consider:

For what do you need to be forgiven today? Take time in prayer right now asking God to forgive you.

What sin do you need to stop committing today? What do you need to change in your life to make this repentance possible?

Day 30-Thursday, March 14th

John 8:12-20

Light in the Darkness

As a college student, I had the privilege (or misfortune?) of going on a spelunking trip as a leader with our church's youth ministry. Trying to appear brave for a group of junior high boys was easy enough I suppose but deep down inside I was very apprehensive. What if we got lost in the caves? What if all of our flashlights burned out and we got lost in the pitch-black darkness of the caves? What if our guide forgot the way and we got lost in the caves and were never heard from

again? (I was really afraid of getting lost.) Once we arrived at the caves, we were all surprised by the news that we were going to be camping inside the cave! Yippee! That night as we all lay down to sleep and one by one turned off our flashlights, the darkness descended upon us. It was so dark I literally could not see my hand one inch from my face. I didn't sleep well that night and have not forgotten the experience over the years.

Jesus came to a people "walking in darkness" to bring light and hope to the world. Speaking again in the Temple, Jesus shares this with the people.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 NIV

Instead of embracing and celebrating this wonderful truth, the Jewish leaders use this as yet another excuse to challenge Jesus about His identity and authority. They claim His statements aren't valid because there is no one else who can testify on His behalf that His statements are true.

The Pharisees challenged Him, "Here You are, appearing as Your own witness; your testimony is not valid." John 8:13 NIV

Jesus responds that He doesn't need to defend Himself because He knows the truth and that is more than enough. If they do need a second witness, God the Father is this witness.

In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for Myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent Me." John 8:17-18 NIV

The Pharisees next question is predictable and expected...

Then they asked Him, "Where is Your father?" John 8:19a NIV

Jesus points out that this is exactly the issue-they don't actually know the Father.

"You do not know Me or My Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew Me, you would know My Father also." John 8:19b NIV

This is a sad exchange, but it also highlights why the people were walking in darkness-the religious leaders themselves were walking in darkness. Jesus came because the spiritual situation in Israel was darker than that cave where I camped with the junior high boys. Claiming to be the spiritual leaders of the nation, these men couldn't recognize God in the flesh standing right in front of them. They couldn't recognize Him because they don't actually know God Himself.

Thankfully, Jesus also came so that we would not have to walk in darkness, wandering lost and without direction through life. Jesus came to bring the light of salvation to our hearts and that light would lead us to truly experience life here on this side of heaven and beyond. What is holding us back from embracing this light?

Questions to consider:

When have you ever missed the truth of something that was right before you? Why?

In what area of your life do you need to allow Jesus to shine His light and bring life? Ask Him to bring this life right now.

Day 31-Friday, March 15th

Read John 8:21-32

Set Free

For many who are adopted, the uncertainty of not knowing their birth parents can be a huge burden that they bear throughout life. They struggle with the obvious questions. Why did my parents give me up? Didn't they want me? What is wrong with me? Who are they and what are they like?

Some, when they come of age, can look into the details of their adoption and actually reach out to the birth parent(s) if they are still living. For those who are able to connect and meet their birth parents, many share a feeling of peace and relief in discovering an important aspect of their identity. They are set free from the uncertainty of their origins.

In this passage, we find a contrast between those who are paralyzed by unbelief and those who are set free by their belief in Jesus. The first group continues to challenge Jesus about His identity and His origin. They ask Jesus directly...

"Who are you?" they asked.

"Just what I have been telling you from the beginning," Jesus replied. "I have much to say in judgment of you. But He who sent Me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from Him I tell the world. They did not understand that He was telling them about His Father." John 8:25-27 NIV

Even though Jesus has answered this question over and over again, it seems like these Jews just couldn't ever comprehend the truth of what He was saying. Jesus tries to explain His relationship with God the Father more clearly...

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what pleases Him." John 8:28-29 NIV

Remembering the words of Jesus in John 6:44...

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws them.

God the Father was at work among some in the crowd, quickening their hearts to believe and come to Jesus. Those who had ears to hear were able to see that His testimony combined with the miraculous works He had performed was more than enough evidence to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Even as He spoke, many believed in Him. To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:30-32 NIV

It is important to note that here Jesus partners belief with obedience. This isn't a works-based salvation but rather the idea that obedience should be the product of true belief. We must keep in mind the intense debates that are occurring between the crowds. It would be easy to take sides and claim to believe or not believe, but it would be quite another to say you believe and prove that belief by living out the life to which Jesus calls you.

For those who refuse to believe, they will continue to be held captive by their doubt. For those who do believe, they are set free from all the contention to live obediently abundantly in the new life that Jesus brings.

Questions to consider:

In what ways is your belief and faith in Jesus proven by the life you live?

In other words, do you "walk the walk" as much as you "talk the talk"?

Day 32-Saturday, March 16th

Read John 8:30-47

The Father of Lies

This crowd continues to be divided concerning the truth of who Jesus is. For those who are now choosing to believe and walking according to teachings of Jesus, Jesus is promising new life that comes from understanding this truth.

Even as He spoke, many believed in Him. To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:30-32 NIV

Those who refuse to believe are offended and become defensive about their ancestry. They don't need this freedom Jesus is offering because they are children of Abraham and have never been slaves. As has been the pattern, they are once again missing the point altogether.

Jesus isn't offering freedom from some earthly slavery; He is offering freedom for the guilt and shame of sin.

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:34-36 NIV

Jesus goes straight to the point: they don't believe in Him because they aren't children of God the Father but rather, they are children of the devil.

Even though these Jews claim that they are children of Abraham, Jesus points out that they aren't acting like it.

"Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father." John 8:39-41 NIV

Now these Jews want to claim God as their Father. Jesus rebukes them even further.

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God Himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on My own; God sent me. John 8:41-42 NIV

Verse 43 is significant as it sheds light on why these Jews refuse to believe and why some refuse to believe today.

Why is My language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.

These Jews cannot comprehend what Jesus is saying because Satan has control of their thinking. They are listening to lies from the "father of lies".

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe Me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. John 8:44-47 NIV

There are those in our lives who refuse to believe for the exact same reason. Satan has control of their hearts and minds and continually feeds them lies about the truth of who God is. The most important thing we can do is pray that God will open their eyes and ears to the truth of their need of a Savior in Jesus Christ.

Questions to consider:

Who do you know that simply refuses to believe in God or place their faith in Jesus? Pray that God will open his or her eyes today.

Day 33- Sunday, March 17th

A Day to Reflect

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

How is this journey of Lent changing your perspective?

What encouragement have you received this week from God's word and Holy Spirit?

Day 34-Monday, March 18th

John 8:48-59

Playing All the Cards

The argument between Jesus and these unbelieving Jews comes to a head when Jesus truthfully tells these Jews that they are children of the devil-the father of lies (see 8:44) and this is why they are unable to believe in Him. This enrages these Jews who respond like children. In effect, they say that they aren't children of the devil, but rather Jesus is demon-possessed...and, on top of that, He is a Samaritan, a half-breed Jew.

The Jews answered Him, "Aren't we right in saying that You are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" John 8:48 NIV

This is some mudslinging here as these Jews attempt to discredit Jesus once again-this time with blatant insults. Jesus again speaks of His relationship with His Father.

"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and He is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death." John 8:49-51 NIV

The minds of these Jews are reeling. Never see death? No rabbi has ever taught in such a way in their hearing. Does He actually think He is greater than Abraham? With this statement from Jesus, the Jews begin shouting at Jesus...

At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that You are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet You say that whoever obeys Your word will never taste death. Are You greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do You think You are?" John 8:52-53 NIV

This must have been mind-numbing for Jesus to have to keep circling back to this question of His identity. He has revealed His true identity to the crowds numerous times with many in believing in Him (see 8:30) and yet these unbelieving Jews can't see the truth. Once again, He explains His relationship with God the Father.

Jesus replied, "If I glorify Myself, My glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies Me. Though you do not know Him, I know Him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey His word. John 8:54-55 NIV

The issue is simple, these Jews don't believe in Jesus because they don't know God the Father. Instead, they are children of the devil who distorts their thinking. Jesus circles back to Abraham, who has been a central theme in their arguments against Him.

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad." John 8:56 NIV

Not only is Jesus claiming to have come "from above" from the Father, but now He is claiming to know Abraham!! This is too much!

"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" John 8:57 NIV

Jesus sees this as the perfect opportunity reveal the full truth about while He has been speaking

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58 NIV

You can almost hear someone in the crowd saying "That's it! That blasphemy! Let's put this liar to death! However, Jesus slips away from their grasp.

At this, they picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus hid Himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. John 8:59 NIV

The Gospel writer John has focused on the true identity of Jesus now for two full chapters (6-7) building up to the statement of Jesus in verse 58. These Jews would have immediately connected this statement with the name of God given to Moses in the desert in Exodus 3:13-14.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

The crowd grabbed stones to execute Him because this was tantamount to pure blasphemy. Claiming to be the I AM was punishable by death-unless of course it is true!

Questions to consider:

What role do you think the devil really plays in keeping people from believing in Jesus?

How do you think the devil works to influence our thinking about who Jesus is?

Day 35-Tuesday, March 19th

John 9:1-41

I Can See

Now that Jesus has established His identity as the I AM, John recounts the healing of a man born blind.

Before we dive in and begin to unpack this chapter-long story, let's get an overview by reading over the entire story at once.

Read through the entire chapter and answer these three questions.

1. How does Jesus heal the blindness of this man?
2. Why do the pharisees get upset about this healing?
3. How does the faith of the healed man progress throughout the chapter?

Day 36-Wednesday, March 20th

John 9:1-17

Stirring the Pot

Jesus and His disciples are walking past a blind man who had been begging in His community for many years. He was simply part of the landscape of the daily life of this community as he sat on the side of the road begging for money because he would have no opportunities for employment to support himself.

In Biblical times, to be born with a disability was thought to be the result of some type of sin on the part of the person or the parents. (It is strange to think that an unborn baby could be blamed for a disability from sin committed in the womb.) The disciples question Jesus about this very thought.

As He went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" John 9:1-2 NIV

Jesus states that no one sinned but that this blindness would give an opportunity to see the power of God at work in Him. Jesus can heal this man of his blindness because He is the "light of the world".

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”
John 9:3-5 NIV

In the Gospel of John, we have previously seen Jesus change water into wine with a word (2:5-8), heal an official’s son with a word (4:49-53), heal a lame man with a word (5:5-9), and feed 5000 people with a prayer (6:10-13). Yet here Jesus does something unusual and different.

After saying this, He spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” He told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. *John 9:6-7 NIV*

Couldn’t He have simply spoken a word of healing as with the other miracles? Why did Jesus make clay, rub it into this man’s eyes, and have him wash in a specific pool?

Another detail given in the story gives us a hint-Jesus heals this man on a Saturday which is the Jewish Sabbath day. It was forbidden by the Pharisees to “knead dough” on Saturday. The Greek word for “dough” is the same word used here for “mud”. In other words, Jesus healed this man in this way to intentionally break the law and violate the prohibition from working on the Sabbath.

Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, wants to emphasize what the Sabbath was truly created for: rest and healing. While the Pharisees were ultra-focused on the letter of the law, they missed the intention of the law altogether. Jesus intended to challenge the Pharisees with this healing of the blind man on the Sabbath. Not only did Jesus actively and purposely break the law, he had the blind man also break the law by walking to the Pool of Siloam and washing the mud off his eyes.

As a point of application for our own lives, Jesus knew exactly what the man needed but chose to involve him directly in the process. It is entirely possible that Jesus has been pressing into your life encouraging you to take the next step in your restoration and healing but you have been delaying the process with your indecision.

Questions to consider:

What about in your life? Is Jesus calling you to act on something that could bring healing, but you haven’t responded to His call?

What do you need to act on today?

Day 37-Thursday, March 21st

John 9:13-34

Tattling on Jesus

The healing of this man born blind, on the Sabbath day no less, caused quite a stir in Jerusalem. His neighbors and others on the scene debated his healing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

"How then were your eyes opened?" they asked.

He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

"Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. John 9:8-12 NIV

Instead of celebrating with this man, they seize him and take Him directly to the Pharisees because they knew this healing violated the Sabbath laws.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." John 9:13-15 NIV

The Pharisees were far more concerned about carefully observing the laws of the Sabbath than the restored life of this man who had suffered his entire life. They begin to debate the intentions and motives of Jesus (which is exactly what Jesus intended).

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided. John 9:16 NIV

Since these Pharisees can't come to an agreement, they decide to try to intimidate this man and his parents into discrediting Jesus. They bully the man and then his parents who are too afraid of the Pharisees to get involved. Getting nowhere with their questioning, they bring this man in a second time to force him to denounce Jesus.

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this Man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether He is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples too?" John 9:24-27 NIV

At this chastisement from the man, Pharisees lose their cool and begin hurl insults at the man. How dare he challenge them, true disciples of Moses who are faithful to God, unlike this charlatan Jesus whose identity is unknown? The man gives them a royal smackdown.

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does His will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." John 9:30-33 NIV

With this, these arrogant Pharisees completely lose their minds and throw the man out of the synagogue.

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. John 9:34 NIV

What should have been the best day of this man's life was completely ruined by some religious folk who loved power and influence more than God and His call to love His people. What a shame!

I am sure some of you reading this can unfortunately relate to the experience of this man. We must always be reminded that God's people will sometimes fail us, but God never will. Notice what Jesus does next. God is always with us in every circumstance.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when He found him... John 9:35 NIV

Questions to consider:

Why do you think the Pharisees were so obsessed with the rules than it made them unloving and harsh? Can you think of a time when you have acted in a similar way?

How do you think the blind man felt after being thrown out of the synagogue? Why do you think Jesus came and found him?

Day 38-Friday, March 22nd

John 9:35-41

After the Pharisees mistreat, insult, and throw this man born blind out of the synagogue, Jesus comes and finds him and leads him to saving faith in the Messiah.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in Him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him. John 9:35-38 NIV

While this man responds in faith “Lord, I Believe”, we can see looking back through this chapter, that there was a progression to this man’s belief and subsequent faith in Jesus.

First, in verse 11, this man says Jesus is a “man”; in verse 17, he says Jesus is “a prophet”; in verse 27, the man says that he is “a disciple” of Jesus; in verse 33, the man says Jesus must be “from God”; finally, in verse 38, this man believes that Jesus is the “Son of Man”.

All of this occurred after the man was healed of a life-long disability. There are several important things we can learn about from the experience of this man.

First, we often need to care for the physical needs of people before they can hear the importance of our spiritual message. Second, people need time to process the idea of coming to faith in Christ. It may take a person while to progress through the man-prophet-rabbi-God-Savior stages of faith and we need to give them as much space and time as they need. Finally, we must remember that Jesus is ultimately responsible for bringing people to salvation. We can do our best to share our faith with others and trust God to take care of the rest.

Before we leave this chapter, we need to see the intentional juxtaposition between being blind and seeing created in this account. The Pharisees, who were supposedly the ones who could truly see, were blind to spiritual truth, while the man who was literally blind was the one who ended up being able to see. (v. 25)

Jesus tells us that this is exactly why He came into the world and we would do well to heed His words.

Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

Some Pharisees who were with Him heard Him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. John 9:39-41 NIV

May we never be like these spiritually blind hateful Pharisees!

Questions to consider:

Who do you know that is on a spiritual journey of faith but hasn’t yet made a decision to believe in Jesus and trust Him as Savior and Lord? How can you encourage this person?

Pray today for this person and ask God to open your eyes to always see His truth as we desire to be faithful to His call in our lives.

Day 39-Saturday, March 23rd

Read John 10:1-12

False Gates

After challenging the Pharisees concerning their spiritual blindness, Jesus continues to challenge them concerning their lack of love and concern for the people they are called to serve. As the leaders of Israel, these Pharisees are called to shepherd the people with the same care and compassion as shepherds watching over their flocks.

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”
John 10:1-5 NIV

The people will not follow these leaders because they don’t have the heart of a shepherd. They are false shepherds who enter the sheep pen “by another way” and who are not trusted by their own people. Their own need to hold on to their power and influence at any cost had made them blind to the coming of God’s own Son. It’s no surprise that the words of Jesus fall on deaf ears.

Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:6-10 NIV

Jesus continues His metaphor once again specifically telling these Pharisees that He is the promised Messiah, the “gate” for the sheep. Whoever believes in Him will be able to enter “the sheepfold” and be saved. He is the one and only gate for the sheep, all others are false Messiah’s for do not care for the well-being of the sheep. Those who pass through Jesus into His sheepfold will find true abundant life, both here and in the hereafter.

In our world today, there are many “false gates” that claim to lead to both salvation and a fulfilling and meaningful life. Today, instead of meditating over scripture, some are reading the daily horoscope. Today, instead of praying to the God who loves and leads, some are praying to inanimate crystals. Today, instead of yielding to the presence of the Holy Spirit, some are following their own hearts believing in the power of “me”. Some are reflecting on the philosophies of Hinduism, some on the commands and demands of the Quran, and some on the spiritism of the Native religions. Others are getting high to get away, still others getting drunk to numb the pain, and still others are giving themselves away to find an ever more elusive love and sense of worth. All of these and far more are all schemes of our enemy the “thief”. Satan’s goal

is not to bring life through all of these false sources of truth, but rather to “kill steal and destroy” all who fall prey to his influence.

These are harsh words directed at these Pharisees couched in a beautiful metaphor, but the stakes couldn't be higher. The incarnation of Jesus was an intentional opening of the sheep gate so all who believed could go in, be restored to a right relationship with God, and truly experience the life for which we are all created. Will the Pharisees be thieves and continue to lead the people away from the gift of Jesus or will they lead the people to Jesus, the true Good Shepherd?

Questions to consider:

What false gates have you tried to enter (or are you currently entering) over the years of your life in a search for fulfilment and happiness?

If you have turned to Jesus, what finally led you to believe and place your trust in Jesus as your Savior?

Day 40-Sunday, March 24th

A Day to Reflect

Each Sunday, we will take time to reflect on how God has been speaking to our hearts throughout the previous week.

Look back through your journal, write down 3 things that God specifically revealed to your heart this week.

As we head into Holy Week, the final week of Lent, how has this journey prepared you for the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus?

What encouragement have you received this week from God's word and Holy Spirit?

Day 41-Monday, March 25th

John 10:11-21

The Good Shepherd

Continuing His response to the criticism of the Pharisees over the healing of the man born blind, Jesus elaborates further on His metaphor concerning the sheep and the shepherd. Not only is Jesus the only gate through which the sheep shall enter the sheep pen, He is also the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for the sheep and is willing to lay down His life to protect them.

This contrasts with these Pharisees who are “hired hands” who are only watching over the sheep for their own benefit.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. John 10:11-13 NIV

Not only is Jesus the Good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, He is also the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep—not only the sheep from the nation of Israel—but also sheep from “other sheepfolds” which represent all the nations in the world. Together, this is one flock which is cared for by one shepherd, that is, Jesus. These sheep who know their shepherd, know His voice and will follow no other.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know Me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. John 10:14-16 NIV

Today, on Monday of Holy Week, let’s reflect on this Good Shepherd who will, in just a few short days, lay His life down for us His sheep.

If we have walked with Jesus for any amount of time, we have grown accustomed to the manner in which Jesus speaks into our hearts through His word and through the Holy Spirit. My mother and father have passed away, but I can still hear both of their voices clearly in my mind. In the same way, we grow to know the voice of God and are able to discern the difference between the leading of the Holy Spirit and the distractions of our world and our enemy the devil. The Good Shepherd watches over us, protects us, and desires to lead us day by day in a way that will nurture our soul. The Good Shepherd laid His life down for us so that we don’t have to be held captive by the “hired hands” of this world that don’t care about us at all. The Good Shepherd gives His life willingly so that we can be made fully alive in Him, free from all of the burdens and pain of the world.

Questions to consider:

Have you surrendered your life to the Good Shepherd? Are you one of the sheep in His sheepfold?

In what ways are you able to hear His voice speaking to you day by day? If you can’t hear Him very well, what distractions can you eliminate so you can hear Him more clearly?

Day 42-Tuesday March 26th

John 10:22-42

One with the Father

During the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus is once again teaching in the Temple Courts. The Jews who were there pressed Him and asked Him directly: are you the Messiah?

The Jews who were there gathered around Him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If You are the Messiah, tell us plainly." John 10:24 NIV

If you have been reading together with me over the past 40 days, you know that Jesus has revealed the truth about His identity repeatedly throughout John chapters 1-10.

Now these Jews are asking yet again.

Continuing with the metaphor of the Messiah being the Good Shepherd, Jesus replies that He has answered this question already through all of His miraculous works. However, these Jews aren't able to believe because they are "not His sheep". His sheep know His voice and follow Him. He knows His sheep and provides for His sheep a wonderful life both here and in the hereafter. His sheep are forever protected in His sheep pen.

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about Me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. John 10:25-29 NIV

Jesus then makes one of the most important statements in the entire New Testament.

"I and the Father are one." John 10:30 NIV

This could not be a more clear and direct answer to these Jews. I am the Messiah! I am God!

With this statement, the Jews gather stones with which to stone Jesus on the charge of blasphemy which would only be a legitimate charge if Jesus isn't the Messiah.

Again His Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." John 10:31-33 NIV

Today, on Tuesday of Holy Week, we too must contemplate the answer to the question: Is Jesus the Messiah, or is He, as the Jews claimed, simply a "mere man"? Our answer to this question will determine our future both here on earth and throughout eternity.

Questions to consider:

Do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is-the Messiah who is “one” with the Father or do you have your doubts and wonder if Jesus is simply a “mere man”?

In what ways do the miracles of Jesus add validity to the His claims that He is “one” with the Father? Do the miracles add to your faith and belief in Jesus?

Day 43-Wednesday March 27th

John 11:1-7

God at Work

With the incarnation, Jesus stepped down from heaven to be born as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. The incarnation continues to remain a beautiful mystery for Christ followers today. Jesus, in the form of a human baby, was not half God and half human. Rather, Jesus was 100% God while also being 100% human at the same time.

In John Chapter 11, the Gospel writer gives us a picture of this human side of Jesus. Here we see Jesus as a close friend of the siblings Lazarus, Mary, and Martha who live in Bethany. Lazarus has fallen deathly ill so the sisters have sent word to the one person they believe can intercede and save their brother.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped His feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” John 11:1-3 NIV

John includes a beautiful detail that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are beloved friends of Jesus.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. John 11:5 NIV

What comes next is shocking for us to read: Jesus loves Mary and Marth so much that He allows Lazarus....to die? Read it for yourself.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days, and then He said to His disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” John 11:5-7 NIV

You read that correctly, out of His deep love for this family, Jesus delays coming to Bethany for two more days thus ensuring the death of Lazarus before His arrival.

Today, on the Wednesday of Holy Week, Jesus allowing Lazarus to die is a powerful reminder that God is God, and we are not. While Jesus may have been constrained to the form of a man, He was still 100% God and was still powerfully at work in the lives of these He encountered, even these beloved friends.

There is one important part of this story that we haven't looked at yet. Jesus gives His reasoning for allowing Lazarus to die in verse 4.

When He heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." John 11:4 NIV

We may not always understand what God is doing, and sometimes we may experience pain in the circumstances through which we walk, but we can be certain that God is aware of our pain and is at work amid the uncertainty.

Keeping in mind that Jesus has been tangling with the Jewish leaders who are deeply divided concerning His true identity (see 10:19-21), Jesus intends to use the death of Lazarus as an opportunity to show His deity by the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

The sickness of Lazarus will become the greatest catalyst of faith for many who are present, but even more so for these sisters and Lazarus. These sisters cried out to Jesus in their distress and God responded more powerfully than they could have even dreamed, but He did so in His own timing and in His own way. This is a good lesson for us to remember.

Questions to consider:

What circumstance are you walking through today about which you are crying out to Jesus for help? How has He responded?

What would it take for you to place this struggle in the hands of Jesus and trust that He has it under control regardless of how and when He works?

Day 44-Thursday, March 28th

John 11:8-16

Faith or Fear

When Jesus announces that He intends to travel back to Judea to go to Bethany at the request of Mary and Martha, His disciples panic in fear because the Jews attempted to stone Him the last time they were there (see John 10:31-32). (Bethany was about 1 mile from Jerusalem and the Temple).

...and then He (Jesus) said to His disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" John 11:7-8 NIV

Jesus responds to their fear with a statement about the opportunity that faith will bring in spite of the dangers and fears they may face.

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." John 11:9-10 NIV

In other words, Jesus says that they must go to Bethany because the opportunity far outweighs the obstacles. All the debates, the arguments, the threats, the attacks have all led up to this moment, and Jesus has the opportunity to show His power in a way that will deeply impact the faith of those who witness what He does.

After He had said this, He went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." John 11:11-15 NIV

Jesus could have gone to Bethany immediately and healed Lazarus before he died, but instead Jesus chose to wait and raise Him from the dead instead. Why? So that those who witness this miracle will believe in Him and have their faith transformed.

It is entirely possible that Jesus could be arrested or attacked when word got around that He had returned to the region, but He worked from a mindset of faith rather than fear so He told His disciples that they were all headed to Bethany.

On the other hand, these disciples could only see the danger they faced when they returned Judea and the Pharisees, chief priests, and teachers of the law waiting in Jerusalem. Thomas summed up their fear...

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." John 11:16 NIV

Questions to consider:

When have you ever chosen not to do something based on fear of the unknown?

What would it take for you to step out in faith to do hard things that God is calling you to do?

Day 45-Good Friday, March 29th

John 11:17-27

Resurrection Power

When word of Jesus' pending arrival reached Bethany, Lazarus' sister Martha went out on the road to meet Him outside of Bethany. Grief-stricken, Martha shares her heart with Jesus...

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask." John 11:21-22 NIV

When these sisters first send word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, they believed that Jesus could heal him from his sickness. As Jesus approaches Bethany, Martha pursues Jesus with this hope still alive in her heart. The faith of Martha shines in her belief that, even now after the death of Lazarus, Jesus can still heal him in his death.

Jesus replies in kindness to Martha but Martha doesn't have the ears to hear the profundity of what Jesus means.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." John 11:23-24 NIV

Certain sects of Jews believed in a resurrection of the dead at the end days. Martha mistakenly thinks that Jesus is speaking of this resurrection.

Jesus clarifies His intention with one of His most essential statements in which we find the true heart of the gospel.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 NIV

In essence, Jesus is saying that when He is involved people and circumstances will come back to life. When hope is lost, resurrection is just around the corner.

It is vital that we don't miss the qualification of this resurrection: believing in Jesus. The one who believes in Jesus will experience life and resurrection in this life and in the life to come in eternity. Jesus asks Martha a very simple question: "do you believe this?"

Today on Good Friday, the full weight of the sacrifice of Jesus is on display on the cross. This was no empty sacrifice as the blood of Jesus covers our sins, and His death, burial and resurrection raise us to life.

Our answer to this same question is vitally important in light of the cross. The death of Jesus is sufficient to save all people, but only efficient in the life of the one who believes in Jesus. For

those who refuse to believe, who reject the offer of the free gift of salvation, no resurrection is possible. Faith and belief are the key ingredients of resurrection. For us to experience the full power of resurrection in our lives, we must exclaim with Martha...

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” John 11:27 NIV

Questions to consider:

What circumstance in your life seems like a lost cause that is beyond all hope?

Do you believe that Jesus can resurrect this circumstance? Like Martha, cry out to Jesus today asking for His power to work in need.

Day 46-Saturday, March 30th

John 11:28-44

Come Forth

As Jesus continues to make His way along the road to Bethany, Mary (the other sister of Lazarus) comes to meet Jesus on the road, falling at His feet. Like her sister Martha, Mary also expresses that she believes that Jesus can heal Lazarus.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. John 11:32-34 NIV

One of the key emphases of John 11 is the beautiful balance between God deity of Jesus and the humanity of Jesus. Deeply moved by the grief of Mary and Martha and their friends and family, John records that Jesus wept with the group. Stop and take a moment to picture this scene. The Creator of the Universe weeping with His creation.

Arriving at the tomb, Jesus instructs that the stone be rolled away. The crowd protests because Lazarus has been dead for four days and they fear the stench of the body.

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. “Take away the stone,” He said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” John 11:38-39 NIV

Jesus dismisses this concern and offers a prayer for all to hear.

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that You have heard Me. I knew that you always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me."

When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." John 11:41-44 NIV

At the command of Jesus, Lazarus comes out of the tomb with the grave clothes still wrapped around his body/ What a sight that must have been!!! Surely the crowd gasped in amazement! Of all of the amazing works of Jesus, this one was in a different category. Let's consider the implications of the raising of Lazarus in our own lives.

Dead in the tomb, the words of Jesus raise Lazarus to life. Jesus spoke and Lazarus rose from the dead. Lazarus didn't decide that he would believe in Jesus and come out of the tomb, rather Jesus spoke and Lazarus responded to His call. Theologically, understanding the difference is crucial to understanding the way salvation works in our hearts. We don't find Jesus, He comes to us and calls us to Himself. That's not to say that we are robots who have no choice when Jesus calls and who play no part in our salvation experience. Jesus calls us and draws our hearts to Him and we respond by faith.

Today, on silent Saturday of Holy Week, Jesus is in the tomb with the grave clothes still wrapped around His body. In just a few short hours, the Lord Jesus will be raised to life. The disciples will be amazed and surprised which seems odd since they were aware that Jesus held the power over life and death based on His raising of Lazarus.

May we not be surprised when the power of Jesus brings resurrection to our hearts and to the hearts of those who believe.

Questions to consider:

How would you have reacted to the raising of Lazarus from the dead if you had been an eyewitness?

How would seeing this strengthen your faith and belief that with God anything is possible?

Day 47-Easter Sunday-March 31st

John 11:45-57

Implications of Resurrection

Being less than two miles from Jerusalem, word of the raising of Lazarus from the dead quickly reached the Temples and the religious leaders who had been plotting to kill Jesus. The disciples of Jesus had cautioned Him about returning to the region because of the danger involved (see 11:8), but they had no idea what Jesus actually intended to do and what the consequences of these actions would be. The reaction was mixed, as could be expected.

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had 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 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 temple and our nation.” John 11:45-48 NIV

The religious leaders called an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of 70 of the most influential leaders in Jerusalem. These leaders don't even try to hide their true fears in this meeting. With the growing popularity of Jesus as He reveals His power more and more, these leaders are convinced that they will soon lose their positions of power and influence, believing that the Romans may even take away both the temple and their autonomous standing as a nation. (This may seem like a gross exaggeration, but this is essentially what happened in AD 70 when the Romans crushed the Jewish uprising. The temple is still destroyed today.)

Then, the High Priest Caiaphas (who will become very important as the story unfolds), makes a statement that resonates throughout the ages of human history...

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” John 11:49-50 NIV

Caiaphas presents to the Sanhedrin the idea that it would be better for Jesus to die for the nation rather than the nation die while He lives. This is the true meaning of the incarnation and the exact reason Jesus was born in Bethlehem-to give His life for His people so that they may be brought back to God.

The next verses are an unexpected nugget that John includes that are essential to this story. We are reminded again that the Gospel story is not some random act of a desperate God making some last-ditch effort to somehow save His people. Rather, God intended to redeem His creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus from before beginning of time. John includes that Caiaphas had prophesied earlier that year that Jesus would die not only for Israel but He would die for the whole world.

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 from that day on they plotted to take his life. John 11: 51-53 NIV

From this point forward, the collision between the ministry of Jesus and the plot of these religious leaders would be inevitable.

Today, on Easter Sunday, here we see one fundamental truth at work: it is impossible to ignore resurrection. Every where we look, we see God at work resurrecting futures, marriages, families, careers-raising everything back to life!! Will you in the power of resurrection, or will you skeptically reject this incredible power from your life?

Question for you to consider:

What are you going to do with this power of resurrection in your life?