

## OCTOBER

October 2, 2020 LAYING DOWN OUR RIGHTS

Readings for today: Nehemiah 5-7

October 3, 2020 GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY

Readings for today: Nehemiah 8-10

October 5, 2020 A DEPRESSING END

Readings for today: Nehemiah 11-13, Psalms 126

October 9, 2020 THE DIVINE GENEALOGY

Readings for today: Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3, John 1:15-34

October 10, 2020 TEMPTATION

Readings for today: Matthew 4:1-22, 13:54-58, Mark 1:12-20, 6:1-6, Luke 4:1-30, 5:1-11, John 1:35-2:12

October 12, 2020 THE FAME OF JESUS

Readings for today: Matthew 4:23-25, 8:14-17, Mark 1:21-39, Luke 4:31-44

October 13, 2020 FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...

Readings for today: John 3-5

October 14, 2020 LEVI'S FEAST

Readings for today: Matthew 8:1-14, 9:1-17, 12:1-21, Mark 1:40-45, Mark 2:1-3:21, Luke 5:12-39, 6:1-19

October 15, 2020 BUILDING ON BEDROCK

Readings for today: Matthew 5-7, Luke 6:20-49, 11:1-13

October 16, 2020 HOSTING A DINNER PARTY FOR JESUS

Readings for today: Matthew 8:5-13, 11:1-30, Luke 7

October 17, 2020 THE TRUE FIGHT

Readings for today: Matthew 12:22-50, Mark 3:22-35, Luke 8:19-21, 11:14-54

October 19, 2020 RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Readings for today: Matthew 13:1-53, Mark 4:1-34, Luke 8:1-18

October 20, 2020 DESPERATION MEETS COMPASSION

Readings for today: Matthew 8:18-34, 9:18-38, Mark 4:35-41, 5:1-43, Luke 8:22-56, 9:57-62

October 21, 2020 RIGHT HEART. RIGHT BELIEF. RIGHT PRACTICE.

Readings for today: Matthew 10, 14, Mark 6:7-56, Luke 9:1-17, John 6

October 22, 2020 READING THE BIBLE THROUGH 1ST CENTURY EYES

Readings for today: Matthew 15, Mark 7:1-8:10

October 23, 2020 **BIBLICAL IMAGINATION**

Readings for today: Matthew 16, Mark 8:11-9:1, Luke 9:18-27

October 26, 2020 **ACCEPTANCE VS. AFFIRMATION**

Readings for today: John 7-9

October 27, 2020 **LISTEN**

Readings for today: Luke 10, John 10:1-11:54

October 28, 2020 **OVERCOMING ANXIETY**

Readings for today: Luke 12:1-13:30

October 29, 2020 **AMAZING GRACE**

Readings for today: Luke 14-15

October 30, 2020 **THE PRICE OF ADMISSION**

Readings for today: Matthew 19, Mark 10:1-31, Luke 16:1-18:30

October 31, 2020 **TWO KINGDOM PRINCIPLES**

Readings for today: Matthew 20, Mark 10:32-52, Luke 18:31-19:27

October 2, 2020  
**LAYING DOWN OUR RIGHTS**

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 5-7](#)

The call of the gospel is to lay down our lives for others. To do as Jesus did. Jesus is God. As such, He could have chosen to hold onto His divine right to rule. His divine right to reign. His divine right to wield authority and power and compel obedience. But Jesus relinquished those rights. He laid them aside. Taking on the form of a servant. He became obedient even unto death. And not just any death but the most humiliating, degrading death possible. Death on a cross. At any time, He could have called down legions of angels to crush His enemies. At any time, He could have taken back up His authority and destroyed His enemies. But Jesus relinquished His rights because He had a greater prize in mind...the approval of His Heavenly Father. Jesus put no stock in the ways of this world. The accolades of this world. The kingdoms of this world. The treasures of this world. He placed no value on anything this world had to offer and instead looked to the world to come for His hope. This is why His Father exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above every name. His willingness to lay everything down in humble obedience to His Father's will was vindicated by His resurrection and exaltation.

I see Christ in Nehemiah. A man who was willing to relinquish his rights and lay everything down for the sake of God's people. A man who put service to His nation above his own well-being. He had every right to demand tribute as governor. He had every right to levy taxes and exact a heavy toll on his constituents. He had every right to demand a portion of the interest the wealthy had placed on the poor. But he gave all that up and by doing so, set a godly example before the people. "From the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah...neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver...But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work...we acquired no land...what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people." (Nehemiah 5:14-19) And how did the people respond to such godly leadership? The rich forgave the debts of the poor. Land was restored to their rightful owners. Interest was no longer accrued. The people were set free. Such acts of generosity were a sign to everyone that God was in their midst.

What about us? We live in a nation consumed with selfishness and greed. Everyone seems out to get "theirs." Everyone is concerned about protecting their "rights." Everyone wants justice. The problem is we don't all share the same view of justice. We believe all truth is relative. We all want an equal share but often refuse to make equal sacrifice. Too many feel entitled to what they have rather than view it as a gift from God. Too many do all they can to protect what they have rather than walk with open hands. Too many hoard all they have rather than give generously. And here I'm just talking about Christians! The very people who claim to follow Christ!

It is estimated by Relevant Magazine that if every American who called themselves a Christian tithed, an additional 165 billion dollars annually could be raised. Think of the global problems that could be solved or tackled with that kind of money! According to the United Nations, it would cost 265 billion dollars to potentially solve world hunger. Our tithe dollars could get us more than halfway there! According to the World Bank, 150 billion dollars could potentially provide clean water access to every human being on the planet. Think of the disease that could be prevented! Childhood mortality rates

would plunge! According to UNESCO, 14 billion could potentially provide literacy to 20 of the world's most illiterate populations. Literacy opens the door to education and job creation and all kinds of economic growth. Imagine how the reputation of the church would change if we got serious about following the example of our Savior and laid down our lives for others? Imagine how the world would change if the church would relinquish her rights and instead sought to serve? Imagine how many lives would be saved if we truly embraced the heart of the gospel like Nehemiah and so many others who have gone before us?

Readings for tomorrow: Nehemiah 8-10

October 3, 2020  
**GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY**

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 8-10](#)

Creation. Abraham. Egypt. Exodus. Judges. Promised Land. Kings. Temple. Priests. Prophets. Exile. Return. Whenever the people of God renew their covenant with the Lord, they take time to remember their story. They understood their current situation was but the latest link in a chain of events stretching all the way back to the Garden. All the way back to God Himself at the dawn of creation. But for God, they would have been destroyed. But for God, they would have been erased. But for God, there would be no history. No story to tell. Listen to them tell it again and think about how far they've come...

"You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. "And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. "And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them

back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress." (Nehemiah 9:6-37)

Those of you who have been tracking with us through the Bible this year know these stories. You read them in great detail. You pondered them. You prayed over them. You listened for the voice of God in them. Many of you grew frustrated at times. You couldn't understand why they kept making the same mistakes. You got angry at times. You couldn't understand the righteous judgment of God. Many of you laughed and cried and wrestled and struggled with the lessons the people were learning. About themselves. About their God. About His plan and His future.

It's important for us to remember this story. To read it over and over again for it is our story as well. As Christians, we are grafted into this story. Adopted into this family. Warts and all. These people are our people. They are our mothers and fathers. Sisters and brothers in the faith. And we are so like them. If we're honest with ourselves, we too make the same mistakes over and over again. We too sin and fall short of the glory of God. We too deserve judgment and death. Punishment and exile. But we have the benefit of living after Christ. Jesus Christ took the punishment we deserved. He went into exile for us. He endured the righteous wrath of God so we do not. He stood in our place just as surely as He stands in the place of the Old Testament saints who came before us. He is Savior of the world. Past. Present. Future. He is the Alpha and Omega. Beginning and End. His blood is sufficient to cover every sin. As we head into the New Testament, we must hold onto our history. Christ came as the climax of this history. He is the One to whom the Old Testament points. He is the One in whom all prophecies are fulfilled. He is the One every single saint from Abraham forward looked to by faith.

**October 5, 2020**  
**A DEPRESSING END**

Readings for today: [Nehemiah 11-13](#), [Psalms 126](#)

I grew up watching Star Wars as a kid and it is generally accepted that The Empire Strikes Back is the best of the original trilogy, if not the best in the entire series. It's a very dark movie. Evil is on the move and in fact, seems to be winning. The end of this second installment finds the heroes in disarray. Luke Skywalker has lost a hand and his innocence as he finds out Darth Vader is his father. Han Solo has been captured and frozen in carbon so he can be delivered to Jabba the Hut. Leia, Chewbacca, the droids, and Lando aren't quite sure what to do and the hopes of the rebellion seem very slim. It's all a set up of course. The final installment of the series will see the heroes overcome all these obstacles to win an improbable victory against a seemingly invincible enemy. Stop me if this plot seems familiar at all.

The Old Testament - whether you read it chronologically as we have this year or you simply read the books in order - doesn't end well. Israel is in disarray. Despite their return to the Promised Land, they simply cannot get it right. They are unable to remain faithful. They intermarry. They profane the Sabbath. They worship other gods. The whole point of the Old Testament on some level is to drive us to complete and total despair. To bring us to the end of ourselves. The end of our strength. The end of our resources. The end of our wisdom so we will cry out for God. It's to prepare God's people for the coming of the Savior who is Jesus Christ. Because it is impossible for us to remain faithful, He must do it for us. Because it is impossible for us to obey God's Law, He must do it for us. Because the sacrifices are only temporary, Jesus must become the perfect sacrifice on our behalf. Hanging between heaven and earth. Representing both God and humanity. He intercedes for us even as He takes our place.

If you are wired like me, you find the end of the Old Testament incredibly unsatisfying. It goes over like a lead balloon. A wet blanket. It just leaves a bad taste in your mouth. The reason I feel this way is because deep down I want to believe I can be a good person. Deep down I want to believe that if I work hard enough, stay disciplined enough, read the Bible enough, pray enough, worship enough, you name it; I can work my way to God. I can find favor with Him. I can earn His praise. But Ephesians 2:8-9 confronts me with the truth, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Saved by grace. Saved through faith which itself is a gift from God. None of my works matter in the grand scheme of things because God will not allow me to boast in anything except Christ.

We've spent eight months in the Old Testament. It's a long, hard slog no doubt. We have watched the same pattern repeats itself over and over again. God raises up His people only to watch them fall into sin. Adam and Eve. Noah and his family. Abraham and Sarah. Moses and the Exodus. Joshua and the Judges. Samuel and Saul. David and Bathsheba. On and on the list goes until you get to Ezra, Nehemiah and the Exiles. All of them sin and fall short of the glory of God. All of them are like sheep who have gone astray. All of them unworthy of anything but God's judgment. So how does God respond?

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Readings for tomorrow: John 1:4-14, Psalms 106

October 9, 2020

## THE DIVINE GENEALOGY

Readings for today: [Matthew 3](#), [Mark 1:1-11](#), [Luke 3](#), [John 1:15-34](#)

Today's blog features Greg Daniels. Greg is an elder at Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a good friend, and a great colleague in ministry.

"Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli," (Luke 3:23)

Notice how different this genealogy is from what Matthew shared. Matthew's genealogy for Jesus reads as if it were the worst possible genealogy he could present. First, He is the adopted son of Joseph. Then he is included in the cursed line of Jechoniah. He is associated with men who married women who were not Jewish, one of whom was even a prostitute. This genealogy would have been scandalous to the Jewish people of that time.

The names in Luke are all men. Luke was Greek and a trained physician. This genealogy is consistent with a Roman, or Jewish legal document. The lineage provided is Noble and of high status. There is no scandal listed. The lineage of Jesus is traced from King David's son Nathan, and not Solomon. This avoids connection to any of the kings who did evil. It also avoids connection to the cursed bloodline of Jechoniah. There is a pure bloodline to the kingship of David, to the blessings of Abraham, and to all of mankind through Adam.

With Joseph being Jesus adopted father, the Mark genealogy is not a natural bloodline. The words, "as was supposed" in the Luke genealogy let us know this was the bloodline through Mary. That would be a natural bloodline for Jesus. This poses a problem. Inheritance of property and rights, such as the claim to a Davidic bloodline, are passed from father to son.

How could Jesus claim He was a rightful descendant of David if he did not inherit that right from an earthly father? The answer comes in the story of the daughters of Zelephohad, a man who had no sons. These daughters argued to Moses that their father's inheritance should not be given outside of his family just because he had no sons. "Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin. And he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them. And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.' -- Numbers 27:3

What incredible detail God has given us in the Bible. Jesus was born in the time of the Pharisees, a time where the law was to be followed in painstaking ways. Not even these scholars of the law could find legal fault in the rights of Jesus. In fact, as we read the Gospel stories, we will not come across anyone who finds Jesus at fault. And they tried desperately to. Jesus is the spotless, faultless lamb of God sent to be the sacrifice for all of us who have faults. It is in his perfect, faultless blood that we are made clean. All who call on the great name of Jesus and believe in Him will be saved.

Readings for tomorrow: [Matthew 4:1-22](#), [13:54-58](#), [Mark 1:12-20](#), [6:1-6](#), [Luke 4:1-30](#), [5:1-11](#), [John 1:35-2:12](#)



October 10, 2020

**TEMPTATION**

Readings for today: [Matthew 4:1-22, 13:54-58, Mark 1:12-20, 6:1-6, Luke 4:1-30, 5:1-11, John 1:35-2:12](#)

”For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus was fully human. He took on a fully human nature. With all its weaknesses. All its vulnerabilities. As such, He knew temptation. He knew the temptation to provide for Himself. To satisfy His own needs. To put Himself above the will of His Father. “Command these stones to become loaves of bread.” He knew the temptation to make a name for Himself. To perform spectacular feats and miraculous deeds in an effort to extend His “brand.” To lift His name up above that of His Father. “Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple.” He knew the temptation to compromise. To accomplish His Father’s will by means other than the cross. “I will give you all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory if you will but worship me.” Jesus suffered these temptations and more throughout His life and ministry. And yet, He remained without sin. He remained faithful. Steadfast in His love for His Heavenly Father.

Can you imagine the frustration of the devil? Here is his chance. Here is his opportunity to wreck it all. To take down the very Son of God and destroy the eternal plan of God. He knows he’s no match for God. He knows he is a created being. He knows he exists only because God’s mysterious will allows for it. And yet, he is so bitter and angry and prideful, he wants to do all he can to kill and destroy that which God loves. And what does God love most? His Only Begotten Son. So if the devil can get to Him. Get Him to sin. Corrupt Him in some way, shape or form. Turn Him from the cross then he wins. But Jesus peeps his game. Sees right through his schemes. He raises the shield of faith and extinguishes every single flaming dart of the evil one. He counters every thrust with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and parries every blow. And what happens? The devil flees.

Friends, you and I face temptation every single day. 1 John 2:16 describes it as “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life” and these things are not from the Father but are of the world. They are part and parcel of our experience as human beings. It is a weakness we bear from conception. A vulnerability we all share due to our broken, sinful, fallen natures. None of us escapes. None of us is immune. The temptations may take on different forms or different shapes but, at their root, they remain the same. Learning to identify and resist temptation is a key part of the Christian life. It is one of the keys to deeper intimacy with Christ.

How does one resist temptation? How does one take their stand - as Christ did - against the devil and put him to flight? We do what Jesus did. First and foremost, we cultivate a deep and intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. Through prayer. Meditation on God’s Word. Worship with God’s people. Regular participation in the sacraments. These ordinary means of grace become extraordinary sources of strength when temptation comes. They are the wells we draw on for water when the devil would put us under siege. Second, we identify the lies the devil is trying to get us to believe. Lies about God. Lies about ourselves. Lies about others. Lies about life in this world. The devil is the “father of lies” according to Scripture and he is constantly seeking to deceive us so we will fall into his traps. Third, we counter the enemy’s lies with the truth of God’s Word. When tempted towards self-reliance, we remind ourselves every good gift comes from God. When tempted towards self-promotion, we remind ourselves it is God who lifts up and exalts those He loves. When tempted towards self-protection, we remind ourselves it is God who is our fortress, our sanctuary, our Protector.

When tempted to build our self-esteem, we remind ourselves we are not our own. We were bought with a price. When tempted to focus on our self-image, we cling to the truth that we were made in the image of God. These temptations are all around us. We are inundated by them every single hour of every single day. Social media. Peer interactions. The different voices in our heads. We are under constant bombardment to define ourselves outside of Christ.

And that is why the writer of Hebrews is so quick to remind us that our great High Priest is faithful. Jesus, though tempted in every way as we are, remains without sin. He lives to intercede for us for He knows the struggle is real. He knows the power of your compulsions and addictions and predilections. He knows what draws you away from Him. And He is faithful to strengthen us. He stands ready to guide and protect us. He is with you always. Even to the end of the age.

October 12, 2020

## THE FAME OF JESUS

Readings for today: [Matthew 4:23-25, 8:14-17, Mark 1:21-39, Luke 4:31-44](#)

“So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.” (Matthew 4:24)

For many years, I have felt a growing sense of foreboding. A growing sense that the tsunami of pain we are experiencing is just beginning of what’s about to hit our shores. Our children are suffering. Suicide rates are trending upward. Substance abuse is skyrocketing. Our culture is filled with an increasing amount of rage and anger. Death threats are now common against those who disagree. It seems like everything is taken to the extreme. It makes for a very hostile and dangerous environment. Of course it must be acknowledged that what seems new to many of us has been the normative experience for so many of our friends of color or members of the LGBTQ community. They have lived with these threats for decades or more. Add to this the strain of a global pandemic and the economic chaos and the mental health crisis and it begs the question...is this all there is? Is this all we can expect? Are we doomed to live the rest of our lives under such threats? Constantly withdrawing or drawing our boundaries ever tighter in order to protect ourselves and those we love? Or is there a different way?

First century culture in Palestine was little different than our own. Pharisees. Saducees. Essenes. Herodians. Roman collaborators. It was a divided society where different religious/political factions dotted the landscape. Each vying for power. Each seeking supremacy so they could eradicate their opposition. This was the world into which Jesus was born. This was the world in which Jesus launched his ministry. And what a ministry it was! So different than all the rest! Jesus welcomed the outcast. Ate with sinners. Spent time with the ritually unclean. He lifted up women. He cleansed lepers. He restored the isolated and lonely to community. As his fame grew, many people came from all over to bring him their sick. Their diseased. Their hurting. Their wounded. The demon-possessed were set free. He healed all their afflictions. And this only drew more hurting people to him. God was glorified. The Kingdom drew near. Salvation came to so many. All in the name of Jesus.

Could the church serve a similar role today? What if the church made it her aim to serve her community? To go out each and every week - having been filled and equipped in worship - to share the good news of the gospel? Bring healing in Jesus’ name? Freedom in Jesus’ name? Hope in Jesus’ name? What if the church was known as a refuge? A place of safety and security amidst the turmoil and violence of our world? What if the church was known for love rather than hate, even as she called the community around her to greater faithfulness? Would not the fame of Jesus increase? Would not people be drawn to the care and comfort we provide? What if we laid aside our internal theological fights and squabbles and instead linked arms to serve? What if we stopped stabbing our wounded in the back and instead embraced grace as a way of life? What if we put aside our need for political influence and power and instead sought to prayerfully and thoughtfully engage across the political spectrum? And what stops us? Why not start right now? Even today?

Friends, true followers of Jesus should be known more by what they’re for than what they’re against. Jesus was certainly against many things in his day but he was known for his love and compassion and ministry among the poor. The outcast. The sinner. What is your church known for? And how can you - as a member of that local church - represent Christ more faithfully today?

Readings for tomorrow: John 3-5

October 13, 2020

**FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD...**

Readings for today: [John 3-5](#)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17

It's one of the most famous and beloved verses in all of Scripture. John 3:16. We see it proclaimed at sporting events and graduation ceremonies. Many Christians consider it their life verse and cling to the truth revealed therein. It speaks of the vastness of God's love. The immensity of it all. God loves the world. Not just a part of the world. Not just a particular tribe in the world. Not just the beautiful people of the world or the rich or the powerful. God loves everyone. And because God loves everyone, God sends His Son. The living demonstration of God's love in the flesh. He wants to leave no doubt. Nothing to chance. He wants the world to know He's willing sacrifice that which is most precious to Him in order to save them from sin.

Nicodemus knew this love. A leader among his people. A member of the Pharisee party. He spent his life devoted to Torah. Devoted to the law of God. He was faithful. His heart was true. But there was something missing. Something he couldn't quite put his finger on. So he comes to see Jesus. By night, of course, so no one will see him. He's been impressed by the miracles Jesus has performed. They've convinced him Jesus must have come from God. And Jesus is so tender towards him. He loves him. He teaches him. Tells him how to respond in faith that he might be saved.

John the Baptist knew this love. A man fiercely dedicated to the Lord. Elijah reborn. The last great Old Testament prophet of Israel. He came preaching fire and judgment on the people of Israel. He came to prepare the way for the Messiah. He launched a ministry of spiritual renewal marked by a ritual cleansing which involved immersion (baptism) in the Jordan. But when the ministry of Jesus began to eclipse his own, he was happy. He understood. Jesus is the bridegroom and John is merely the “best man.” He rejoices at the day when the bridegroom comes for His own.

The woman of Samaria knew this love. Coming to the well in the middle of the day, she clearly is trying to avoid the other women in her village. Perhaps it's her “loose” reputation. The number of men she had been with that makes her ashamed. Furthermore, she is a Samaritan. Someone the Jews considered unclean because of their mixed race heritage. No respectable rabbi would ever be caught dead talking to such a person! And yet Jesus did. Jesus made time for her. Jesus loved her. Jesus engaged her and she went away marveling at all that she heard. She shared the good news with her village. Invited them to come out to hear. She wanted them to experience the same love she had experienced.

Over and over again, the Scriptures proclaim the love of God through Jesus Christ. We see it in all his interactions. We see it in the miracles he performs. He heals the official's son. He heals the paralytic at Bethesda. He preaches God's love to Jews and Samaritans alike. None feel condemned because God did not send His Son into the world to condemn but to save.

Can you imagine if the world experienced the love of God through Jesus' people? Can you imagine if Jesus' people would engage the world like Jesus did? Imagine us sharing God's love with both powerful and powerless. Rich and poor. Black and white and brown. Imagine both abled and disabled experiencing compassion and mercy and healing. Imagine those who are in desperate need finding

hope. Imagine Jesus' people leading a movement in our communities of love towards the outcast and the marginalized and those who feel lost and lonely. We don't have to imagine it. It does actually happen. So many churches in so many communities model this love well. But there's always more that can be done. More love that can be shared. More grace that can be given. And it is the charge God gives to each of us. To follow in Jesus' footsteps and be known by the love God first sent into the world in His Son.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 8:1-14, 9:1-17, 12:1-21, Mark 1:40-45, Mark 2:1-3:21, Luke 5:12-39, 6:1-19

**October 14, 2020**  
**LEVI'S FEAST**

Readings for today: [Matthew 8:1-14, 9:1-17, 12:1-21](#), [Mark 1:40-45](#), [Mark 2:1-3:21](#), [Luke 5:12-39, 6:1-19](#)

One of the things that always strikes me about Jesus is how much hurting, broken people love Him. He was the kind of person who seemed to love hanging out with the wrong kind of crowd. Prostitutes. Tax collectors. Lepers. Sick and diseased. He hung out with the sexually immoral. The politically corrupt. The outcast from society. The ritually unclean. He loved these people. He met them right where life found them and lifted them up. When challenged by the religious elite to explain his actions, Jesus gives a profoundly missional response...

"Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners." (Luke 5:31-32)

Levi is sitting in his tax booth. Most likely alone as tax collectors were some of the most hated people at the time. They were seen as traitors to their nation. Collaborators with Rome. Men who profited off the exploitation of their own people. Most people would have given Levi a wide berth. They would have avoided him like the plague. Jesus does not. Jesus marches right up to him and says, "Follow Me." I cannot begin to fathom the reaction of the other disciples. Especially Simon the Zealot. Before Simon became a follower of Jesus, he belonged to a group of people who literally would knife guys like Levi in the streets. He had dedicated his entire life to the eradication of such traitors to Israel. Now they would become brothers.

It's a stunning invitation. One that Levi embraces. Not only that but he wants all his friends and colleagues to know why he's left his tax booth. Why he's put aside his wealth and power to follow an itinerant preacher. Why he's given up his sinful ways. So he throws a feast. It's a motley group of people to say the least. Tax collectors. Sinners. The dregs of society. Jesus loves it. He reclines at table with them meaning He is making Himself one with them in a sense. Sharing a meal in that culture at that time was incredibly significant. It meant identifying with those who ate with which is why the Pharisees go nuts. They can't believe a rabbi of Jesus' stature would lower Himself in such a way.

They simply don't understand Jesus. And frankly, many Christians today don't understand Jesus either. Philippians 2:5-11 tells us Jesus emptied Himself in order to become one with us. Emptied Himself of all His divine glory and power to become utterly dependent on His Father. He emptied Himself to become a human being. He emptied Himself further to become a servant of humanity. He emptied Himself completely by dying on a cross for humanity. This kenosis or "divine emptying" remains one of the most glorious yet mysterious aspects of the gospel. And it is the source of our salvation.

So let me ask you a question...how are you emptying yourself in order to follow Jesus? What are you relinquishing? What are you sacrificing? What are you giving up? Do you find yourself more at home with sinners or do you only relate to saints? Do you find your heart broken for the outcasts and marginalized in our society or do you mainly spend time with those who look like you? Act like you? Spend money like you? Would you have gone to Levi's feast or would you have grumbled like the Pharisees? Are you willing to risk your reputation to build relationships with those who do not believe so that they might find salvation?

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 5-7, Luke 6:20-49, 11:1-13

October 15, 2020  
**BUILDING ON BEDROCK**

Readings for today: [Matthew 5-7, Luke 6:20-49, 11:1-13](#)

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever preached. Period. In it, Jesus casts His vision for His Kingdom. He defines what life looks like under His rule and reign. He sets boundaries around human desire and behavior to protect us from self-destruction and to teach us how to build a life that will last. Sadly, too many of us believe we can choose our own path. Defiantly, we try to chart our own course into eternity. Foolishly, we attempt to bushwhack our way through the wilderness of this world only to quickly lose our way. The results are tragic and heartbreaking.

I wonder sometimes why we find our culture’s pact with sin and death so enticing. What is it about our culture that draws us in? We all know it’s not good for us. We all know the pace we set isn’t healthy. We all are feeling the effects of isolation and loneliness. We all are struggling under the pressure that’s been created and exacerbated through social media. So why do we persist? Why can’t we seem to opt out? Are we truly so addicted we cannot stop?

How many families have to break up? How many pills do we have to take? How many children have to die before we wake up from the nightmare we find ourselves in? When will we stop believing the lie that life is all about me? All about my wants? All about my desires? The world tells us to “follow your heart” and “be true to yourself.” I can think of nothing more devastating. The world tells us we “can be whoever we want to be” and to do “whatever feels good.” I can think of nothing more heartbreaking. Do we not see the pain we are leaving in our wake? The broken relationships? And for what? So we can selfishly pursue our own happiness at the expense of others? Do we not see the toll this is taking? The high price we are paying? The cost to those around us, especially those we love most?

I meet them every single day. In coffee shops and bars all over town. Men and women and children who are suffering. Struggling. Wrestling with a deep sense of existential loneliness because they have tried their best to do this life on their own. They “believed in themselves” but that belief took them nowhere. Like Sinatra, they did life “my way” only to find themselves at a dead end. They tried to be the captain of their own destiny. The master of their own fate. The ruler of their own domain only to discover their reach far exceeded their grasp. In the words of Jesus, they built their entire lives on sand and their ruin was great.

COVID, of course, has only exposed the cracks in our foundation. The global pandemic hit and so many suddenly realized their lives were built on sand. Perhaps that describes you today. You are looking around at the ruins of your marriage. The ruins of your family. The ruins of your professional career. Your bank account is overdrawn. Your energy levels are dangerously low. Your emotional reserves are tapped out. Your relationships are broken. Your heart is aching. And you feel so very alone. Depressed. Angry. Frustrated. Anxious. Afraid. Perhaps you’ve even been tempted to put an end to it

all. Don't believe the lie! God is with you! Even in the valley of the shadow! Even in the darkest of nights! His presence is always there to comfort and to guide and to bring us back into the light!

But how do we get from here to there? We start building on the rock. We start by surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus. We invite the Holy Spirit to come and take up residence within us so He may transform us from the inside out. Only God can re-orient the desires of our hearts! Only God can re-prioritize the values of our lives! Only God can redirect our loves. As He does this deep work in us, what comes out of us begins to change. Life on the outside begins to reflect the new life that's emerging on the inside. Regenerate actions flow from a regenerated heart. New wine is poured from new wineskins as God removes our hearts of stone and gives us new hearts that beat for Him alone!

How do we know if we've received this new heart? Look at the Sermon on the Mount. Rather than treat it as a list of "do's and don'ts" instead consider it more of a diagnostic. Let the words of Jesus dissect your every thought. Your every deed. Your every emotion. Let it stand like a plumb line in your life against which you are constantly measuring yourself. Not because you must earn God's favor but because you long to bring glory to God. Not because you have to follow some law but because you want to chart the progress the Holy Spirit is making in sanctifying you for His Kingdom. Not because you have to clean yourself up before God can love you or accept you but because you trust He has already done so and is hard at work to present you blameless before His throne.

One can spend a lifetime learning from these few chapters and still never arrive. This isn't about perfection, friends. It's about the journey. It's about following the way of Jesus. And if you are like most, you will find yourself stumbling down the road like a drunk man, swaying from one side to the other. That's okay. That's actually quite normal. The key is to keep walking down the road.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 8:5-13, 11:1-30, Luke 7



October 16, 2020  
**HOSTING A DINNER PARTY FOR JESUS**

Readings for today: [Matthew 8:5-13, 11:1-30, Luke 7](#)

Imagine you're having Jesus over for dinner. You send out invitations. Line up a caterer. Clean your house. Put out tables and chairs. Light your scented candles. Maybe even spring for some live music. You leave nothing to chance. You want Him to be impressed. The day of the affair arrives. Your home is packed with people. These are your friends. Your colleagues. Your family. All of whom cannot wait to meet Jesus. He walks in. What do you do? Do you greet Him? Offer to take His coat? Get Him a drink? Give Him the seat of honor? Do you make sure to serve Him first as your guest? Introduce Him to all your friends by name? Make sure He feels welcomed and honored? Of course you would. You would be embarrassed if you didn't. Your friends would be ashamed of you.

Let's take it up a notch. Imagine what would happen if a homeless man wandered in to your home that evening. Or a prostitute. Or a drug addict. Imagine them disrupting things. Imagine the crowd parting as people stumble over themselves so they don't have to touch them. Imagine the room going silent and all eyes turning to you to see how you will respond. Now imagine those same eyes shifting to Jesus as the homeless man/prostitute/drug addict falls at His feet. Weeping. Shedding so many tears, Jesus' feet literally become drenched. Now imagine the homeless man taking out a dirty handkerchief to wipe His shoes. The prostitute letting her hair down to dry his feet. The drug addict using his ratty t-shirt. You would probably be uncomfortable with the whole scene. Unsure of what to do or how to respond. Embarrassed by their behavior. After all, this whole affair is supposed to be about impressing Jesus!

Imagine Jesus turns to you and tells you a story. Two people went into deep debt to a loan shark. One for five hundred thousand and the other for fifty. Neither could afford to pay. In a shocking move, the loan shark forgave both their debts. Which would love him more? The one who owed him the greater amount, of course. This homeless man. This woman of the night. This poor addict struggle with many things. Their lives are a trainwreck. Your life, on the other hand, is good. You live in a nice home. You are surrounded by people who love and respect you. You make a good living. You enjoy some of the finer things of life. Yes, you know you are not perfect. Yes, you have your own struggles. Yes, life is not always easy. But you have been given much whereas this man. This woman. This addict have been given little. And even what little they did have has been squandered away. Who do you think will love Me more?

The one who is forgiven much, loves much. The one who is forgiven little, loves little. Friends, ask the Father to show you the full measure of your sin. Ask Him to show you how far you have fallen short of His glory. Not so that you will despair but so you can more deeply appreciate the sacrifice He made to save you! God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it! NO! He sent Jesus so the world might be saved through Him! All of us from the richest to the poorest. From the most privileged to the most oppressed. Perpetrators and victims alike need forgiveness. We all need grace. And Jesus stands ready to offer it to us in abundance! Know your sins have been forgiven and let that fan the flames of your devotion to Jesus!

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 12:22-50, Mark 3:22-35, Luke 8:19-21, 11:14-54

October 17, 2020  
**THE TRUE FIGHT**

Readings for today: [Matthew 12:22-50](#), [Mark 3:22-35](#), [Luke 8:19-21, 11:14-54](#)

Another guest blog...this time from the late, great Dr. Gardner Taylor...

“We war not against flesh and blood, but there is some great struggle going on in the universe. Put it how you want: the struggle between light and darkness, between life and death, goes on in your body and mine right now, between health and sickness, between good and bad, between right and wrong, between God and Satan. There’s a battle, a mighty battle, raging through the universe, and evil in that battle is not weak. I hear my Lord on the night of his arrest saying to those who came to arrest him, “This is your hour and the power of darkness.” And is it not recorded in the Scriptures somewhere that scarcely shall the righteous be saved? It’s not an easy fight. There’s a mighty war going on. How will it come out? Who is going to win? When Friday morning began, we got a sign of what’s going to happen. The most powerful coalition of evil ever assembled on the face of this earth came together at Calvary, and they threw up all of their battlements and all of their armory against the Son of God. It was a mighty battle, an awful tussle; the earth watching it grew sick at how evil could challenge the very throne of God. The world shivered on its axis and trembled on its foundation. The heavens looked down at it and grew dark because they mourned at seeing evil standing up in God’s face. So the curtains of darkness were pulled across the face of the sunlight because the heavens could not watch it. Angels that sing around God’s throne grew suddenly silent and somebody wrote that there was silence in heaven for about the space of a half hour. It looked for a while as if God had lost. I hear that awful cry trembling up from that hill underneath a darkened sky - midnight at midday. I hear that awful cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” It looked like God had lost, but when the light came back on and the earth righted itself, God’s grip held and hell’s grip loosened. Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” The old account is settled. It has all been straightened out, fixed, the disease has been cured. I know how it’s going to come out. I don’t know when but somewhere in God’s own time, evil is going to bow down once and for all before the Lord. So where and somehow, all that is wrong will be made right. Somewhere and somehow in God’s own time, every valley will be lifted up, every mountain will be brought down, every crooked way will be made straight, every rough way will be made plain in God’s own time. Sickness and sorrow, pain and death, we will fear no more.”

**October 19, 2020**  
**RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Readings for today: [Matthew 13:1-53](#), [Mark 4:1-34](#), [Luke 8:1-18](#)

How do you respond to the Word of God? How do you feel when you hear it preached? When you read it during your devotional time? When you listen to it on your way to work? Do you find your heart open to its message? Is it comforting? Challenging? Life-changing? Do you find yourself wanting more of the Word or is it a struggle to read? Are you intentional about applying its lessons? Aligning your lifestyle with its laws? Submitting yourself to its authority? Do you trust its promises? Do you believe its truth? Do you hold fast to what it says no matter how much opposition may arise? As you think back over the course of your life, do you seek growth? Spiritual maturity? Are you bearing fruit?

These are important questions to reflect on and Jesus offers a great diagnostic tool for such reflection in the parable of the sower. Jesus is the sower. He is at work even now in the world spreading the seed of the Word of God. He works through preachers and pastors as well as ordinary men and women to spread the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth. As the seed is sown throughout the world, people respond in different ways. Some hearts are hard. Like a paved road, the seed cannot penetrate. It is rejected. It never takes root. And the enemy comes and steals it away. Some hearts are shallow. There is an initial response. Driven by the emotions of the moment. By all outward appearances, it looks like the seed has taken root. There is joy. There is excitement. But such feelings gradually wane. The seed cannot put down roots. The heart drifts away towards other things. Some hearts are divided. They receive the seed. Roots are put down. But the soil is mixed. There are weeds and thorns and thistles. As the seed springs up so do these other things and eventually the growth is choked off. The fruit never ripens. Their spiritual growth is stunted. Finally, there is the open heart. The humble heart. The heart that is good soil. Ready to nurture and water and grow the seed. These hearts hold fast to the Word and what it teaches. They seek to align their lives with what the Word says. And over time, they bear much fruit.

Now it's time for an honest assessment. Where do you find yourself in the parable? Is your heart hard? Unwilling to receive what Jesus says? Unwilling to submit to His ways? Unwilling to surrender to His Lordship? Is your heart shallow? You hear the Word but don't do it. Your devotion to Jesus only goes skin deep. In fact, reading the Bible. Worshipping Jesus. Spending time in prayer. These things are boring and often feel like a waste of time. Is your heart divided? Are there other activities that take priority over spending time with God? Do you find yourself rejecting God's Word along the way in favor of other desires? Other needs? Other wants? Have you fallen prey to the cares and worries and riches and pleasures of this world? Do you presume on the grace of God and assume God will overlook your sin? Is your heart true? Do you prioritize your time in God's Word? Do you intentionally seek to submit your life to His way? Do you allow God's Word to confront as well as comfort? Disrupt as well as affirm? When push comes to shove and God reveals something in your life that needs to go, do you obey? When doubt creeps in - as it always does - do you make the conscious decision to hold fast to the promises of God?

Friends, the seed is being sown. The Word is being proclaimed. God is making Himself know. How will we respond?

Readings for tomorrow: [Matthew 8:18-34](#), [9:18-38](#), [Mark 4:35-41](#), [5:1-43](#), [Luke 8:22-56](#), [9:57-62](#)

October 20, 2020

**DESPERATION MEETS COMPASSION**

Readings for today: [Matthew 8:18-34, 9:18-38, Mark 4:35-41, 5:1-43, Luke 8:22-56, 9:57-62](#)

I have met Legion. Men and women so tormented and oppressed. I have seen them sitting catatonic in the streets of Harar. I have watched them convulse and tremble behind the bars of a prison cell. I have met them in psych wards where they live for their own protection. Sadly, they feel so cut off from community. So isolated and alone. They feel helpless and afraid. They are desperate for freedom.

I have met the woman with the issue of blood. They live all over the developing world. Without access to basic sanitation and medical care, women are often left to fend for themselves. Their menstrual cycles make them feel cursed. Especially when there are problems. They too feel cut off from their community. Isolated from their families. Helpless and afraid. At the mercy of their biology. They are desperate for freedom.

I have walked with countless families through grief. The loss of someone they love. It's especially tragic when they are young. When they have their whole life ahead of them. The loss of children in particular can make or break a person's faith. I have wept with parents at the bedside of a child dying of cancer. I've been in the hospital room when the doctor delivers the terrible news of a rare and terminal illness. These are incredibly painful and difficult spaces. Those living through them often feel cut off from their community. Isolated from their friends. Helpless and afraid. They are desperate for healing.

What I love most about Jesus is His great compassion. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) One can only imagine the pain and suffering He saw as He surveyed the hundreds, even thousands of people who flocked to hear Him speak. He knows their every need. He knows their every desire. He knows their every heartache and heartbreak. He knows how desperate they are for healing. How desperate they are for freedom. And He loves them. He has compassion on them. He reaches out to them. Demons flee. Diseases are cured. The dead are raised. Everywhere Jesus goes, these miraculous signs accompany Him. Everywhere He goes, the Kingdom comes with power and authority. Everywhere He goes, new life breaks forth.

But the needs are too much even for Jesus. He cannot heal every single person. He cannot cast out every single demon. He cannot sit with every family in their grief. So He sends His disciples. They will be His hands and feet. They will minister in His name and under His authority. They will be His ambassadors, Christ making His appeal to the world through them. Christ healing through them. Christ delivering through them.

Our world is still full of desperation. People feel so harassed and helpless. They wander aimlessly through life like sheep without a shepherd. And the question for the church is this...do we have compassion? Are our hearts tenderized by the needs we see all around us? Do we make the time and take the time to come alongside those in pain? Are we willing to re-orient our priorities? Redirect our resources? Re-order our lives in such a way that we make space to care for the lost and lonely who live all around us? This, friends, is what it means to love and follow Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 10, 14, Mark 6:7-56, Luke 9:1-17, John 6

October 21, 2020

**RIGHT HEART. RIGHT BELIEF. RIGHT PRACTICE.**

Readings for today: [Matthew 10, 14](#), [Mark 6:7-56](#), [Luke 9:1-17](#), [John 6](#)

What does it mean to be a Christian? Over the years, I've heard a lot of answers to this question. Some think it means they raised their hand and prayed a prayer at some point in their life. Others believe it has to do with the fact they were baptized as an infant. Still others believe it means they go to church every Sunday and pay their tithe. Some of the people I've talked to see it as an inheritance. They were raised by Christian parents so they must be Christian. Others see it as a cultural designation. We live in a Christian nation so we are Christian by default. Like I said, lots of different answers to this all-important question...what does it mean to be a Christian?

Sadly, too many people refuse to look to the Bible for their answer. If they did, they would see Jesus offering a pretty clear definition for what it means to follow Him. First and foremost, you have to have what the ancients might have called "orthopathy" or the "right heart." The people who experienced the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand did not chase Jesus around because they loved Him. No, they wanted their bellies filled again. (A big deal in a 1st century subsistence agricultural economy.) They followed Him for selfish reasons. They wanted their needs met. Their illnesses cured. Their diseases healed. Their wants satisfied. And that's why Jesus tells them He is the bread of life. The food they are seeking is not temporal. Their needs are not just physical. They are spiritual and eternal and only the Christ can satisfy them but they must believe. They must have faith. This is what Jesus means when He talks about feasting on His body and drinking His blood and it was too much for some. They turned away. Even many of His disciples stopped following Him. Why? They did not believe. They did not trust. They could not accept the truth of what Jesus was teaching. They did not have the right heart.

The second thing we learn about following Jesus is that it takes "orthodoxy" or "right teaching." Jesus is who He says He is! He gets to define Himself. He gets to reveal Himself. We don't get to accept parts of Jesus and reject others. We don't get to reduce Jesus down to our size. We don't get to make Him comfortable or safe. Jesus is God. He is Lord over disease. Lord over death. Lord over sin. Lord over evil. Lord over this world and all that is in it. He casts out demons. He heals the sick. He messes with the atomic structure of bread and fish to feed five thousand people! He walks on water. He calms the wind and the waves. He is the bread of life. He is the manna from heaven. He alone has the words of eternal life. All of these different events may seem strung together randomly but they are not! They are designed to give the disciples. Give His followers. Give those who believe and trust in Him a true picture of Himself. Jesus wanted them to understand the true nature of His divinity. He wasn't just another prophet or miracle-worker. He was God Himself. True Christians take Jesus at His Word. They accept Him for who He is. They do not try to replace Him with a Jesus of their own making. Right thinking about Jesus is essential for the Christian.

Finally, there is "orthopraxy" or right practice. True Christians live what they believe. Their works flow from a heart that is full of faith. The disciples believed and were given authority to go forth and proclaim the Kingdom of God. Preach a message of repentance. Heal the sick. Cast out unclean spirits. These are the "right practices" that should mark the life of every believer to a greater or lesser extent depending on where one is on their journey.

As Christians, we do not get to pick and choose. We do not get to claim a right heart and hold to a heretical theology. We do not get to claim a right theology and live a heretical life. We do not get to claim a righteous life and yet cling to a hardened heart. It's an all or nothing deal. Now, are we perfect?

Of course not. Is there room to grow in every Christian's life? Absolutely. Is following Christ a journey? Complete with ups and downs? Doubts and fears? Successes and failures? Yes! Yes! And yes! But over the course of time. As days turn to weeks turn to months turn to years, we should be able to see the growth. Our hearts and minds and lives should reflect more and more of Jesus.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 15, Mark 7:1-8:10

October 22, 2020

**READING THE BIBLE THROUGH 1ST CENTURY EYES**

Readings for today: [Matthew 15](#), [Mark 7:1-8:10](#)

“And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15:21-28)

This is perhaps the most confusing story in the gospels. Read through 21st century western eyes, it appears like Jesus is reflecting the sinful, racist attitudes of his day. Jews and Gentiles simply did not interact in the 1st century. Especially a rabbi and a woman. Jesus was fully within his cultural rights to ignore this woman. Reject this woman. Diminish this woman. Some modern commentators point to this story as an example of Jesus’ humanity. They talk about how even Jesus needed correction from time to time. They claim even Jesus needed to progress in his understanding of divine love and the gospel. Nothing could be farther from the truth. True, authentic, honest Biblical exegesis must always begin by approaching the text on its own terms. We must do our best to remove our own cultural blinders and instead do the hard work of reading the passage against its own cultural backdrop. When one does this, the true meaning of the story comes into view...

The first thing to note is the place. Jesus has intentionally traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon. This was a major economic hub and trade center in that part of the world. As such, it was deeply Hellenized. Jews were the marginalized group. They were the ones being exploited for material gain. So why would Jesus go there? Earlier in his ministry (Luke 4) Jesus likens His ministry to that of Elijah who once miraculously fed a widow in Sidon when she was starving. The point, of course, is that Jesus’ ministry will transcend race and culture though He will preach first to His own people.

The second thing to note is the time. Like much of the Middle East today, 1st century Palestine was an “honor/shame” culture. As such, there were strict rules governing the behavior of men and women. When those rules were followed, honor accrued. When those rules were ignored, shame accrued. Men gained honor through acts of courage and generosity in the community while women gained honor through their modesty and privacy in the home and family. It would be crazy for an honorable woman to approach a strange man in public across not only gender but ethnic lines just as it would be crazy for an honorable man - a rabbi no less! - to respond to such a woman. However, in this instance, all bets are off due to the desperation this woman feels as she seeks to save her child.

The third thing to note is how the woman addresses Jesus. She addresses Him by his messianic title. She clearly sees Him as more than an itinerant Jewish preacher and teacher. She clearly recognizes He’s no ordinary rabbi. There’s something different about this man that makes her abandon all her honor in order to fall at his feet with the beggars standard cry, “Have mercy on me.” She would have not have interpreted His silence as insult. In fact, she would have expected it and sought to overcome it.

Finally, there is the actual exchange itself. When Jesus finally answers with, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”, He is not just responding to the disciples but inviting an interaction with the woman. In essence, He’s saying, “tell me why I should help you?” The woman responds by drawing closer. Her cries of desperation turn to the simple plea of “Lord, help me.” And now the so-called “game” is on. In honor/shame cultures there are rules for this kind of dialogue. A challenge is offered. A response is given. Honor is accrued based on who gets the “best” of the interaction. Jesus has challenged this woman. She has responded. So Jesus offers another challenge. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” Dogs in Jewish culture were almost as bad as pigs. They were mangy, half-wild animals who roamed the streets. Jews regularly used this term as an insult to Gentiles but even here Jesus softens it a bit. The term He uses is in the diminutive form - i.e. “little dogs” - which again suggests He’s fully aware of the game that is taking place. The woman doesn’t even miss a beat. “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” One can almost see Jesus laugh in appreciation for how she’s “bested” Him and He freely gives her the honor she has “won.”

Now here’s the really crazy thing about Jesus. It’s what I love so much about Him. In such “honor/shame” contests, a person typically gains honor at another’s expense. It’s why such contests were so important in 1st century society. It’s how one climbed the socio-economic ladder and became known in their community. Jesus is different. He isn’t interested in how much “honor” accumulates. Instead, He freely gives honor away at His own expense. What about us? We who have been saved by Christ have been given all the “honor” a person could ever receive! We’ve literally been invited into God’s family and adopted as His sons and daughters. What more could we want? Having been given much, should we not seek to give it away? Should we not seek to share the honor we’ve received from God with those around us? Should we not opt out of the power games our culture still plays and instead take the place of the servant?

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 16, Mark 8:11-9:1, Luke 9:18-27



October 23, 2020  
**BIBLICAL IMAGINATION**

Readings for today: [Matthew 16](#), [Mark 8:11-9:1](#), [Luke 9:18-27](#)

Inspired by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch and their book, ReJesus)

A man trudges up the dusty road. His feet are tired. His sandals about worn through. His robes are torn in several places. His face is streaked with sweat. His hair is more salt than pepper. He's got scars all over his body. He limps. He's hunched over in chronic pain. His eyes glance up at the sign above the door. An inn. A place to rest his weary bones. He opens the door and walks in. Orders a drink. Orders a bit of food. Finds a place at an open table and waits. Several minutes later, the door opens again. The man at the table waves. The new arrival comes and sits. Tells the waiter, "I'll have what he's having."

"How are you doing, Paul?" Peter asks. "You look tired."

"I am that", Paul replies. "I've been shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, and left for dead. My right arm barely works anymore. My left hip will never be the same. My back aches every morning. I've traveled more miles than I dare to count."

"You definitely have logged some hours, brother. The reports we hear back in Jerusalem about the churches you've planted and the cities you've reached with the gospel are a great encouragement. As are the funds you've raised to help sustain us in our suffering. But how are you doing? How's your heart these days?" Peter asks.

"About the same as yours, I imagine. The Corinthians are fighting among themselves. The Galatians are abandoning the true faith. I am being attacked by fellow Christians. My leadership is being questioned. I fear all this work has been for naught. What about you? How are you feeling these days?" Paul responds.

"Life in Jerusalem is still incredibly hard. We are persecuted by both the Romans and the Jews. Everywhere we go, we have targets on our backs. They kick down the doors where we gather. They drag us before the Sanhedrin. They throw us in jail. You probably heard about James? Herod got hold of him. It was ugly. His death was a huge blow to us all." Peter shares.

"What keeps you going,?" Paul asks. Peter replies, "I keep thinking back to that day when Jesus asked us, 'Who do you say that I am?' I'm not sure where the words came from but almost without thinking I said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!' Jesus told us this revelation did not come from man but from our Father in heaven and He went on to say that He would build His church on the rock of this confession. Initially people thought He might mean me. My name means "pebble" after all! But just look at me! I'm no rock. I'm about as broken and worn down as they come."

"Yeah, and if what I hear is true, you tried to stop Jesus from talking about the cross?" Paul says with a smirk. Peter smiles ruefully. "Not my finest moment." Paul claps Peter on the back. "We've all been there, my friend."

Peter goes on, "You know, in my darkest moments when it seems like I just can't go on, I think of Him. Hanging on that cross. Gasping for breath. Struggling for life. I think of the morning I ran to the tomb and found it empty. I think of Him appearing to me after His resurrection. Forgiving me for abandoning

Him and calling me back into ministry. All of my struggles. All of my suffering. All of my pain. All of my heartaches and disappointments. All my fears and failures. It's all been worth it, you know? Just for the sake of knowing and serving Him." Tears start running down Paul's face. He whispers, "I know exactly what you're saying. I wouldn't trade that moment outside of Damascus for the world. Everything I've done and everywhere I've been since that day has been an absolute privilege. But I have to confess, I sure wish I could have been there with you. To walk with Him and talk with Him." Peter reaches out and grabs his hand. "You are with us now. That's all that matters."

Imagine sitting at the next table, watching this exchange. Watching these two giants of the faith swap stories and encourage each other. Imagine them praying together before they leave, not knowing if this would be the last time they would see each other. Who knows if such a meeting ever took place? What I do know is this...for two thousand years, faithful men and women have taken these words of Jesus to heart. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25) They have braved all kinds of dangers. Faced all kinds of persecution. Suffered beyond belief. They have paid the ultimate price in many cases all to bring the gospel to the world. In so doing, they have received a crown of glory not worth comparing to the struggles of this world. They have given up fame and fortune but gained an eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. By their testimony, the church has been founded and established in this world. And the gates of hell don't stand a chance.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 17-18, Mark 9:2-50, Luke 9:28-56

October 26, 2020

## ACCEPTANCE VS. AFFIRMATION

Readings for today: [John 7-9](#)

“Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” (John 8:10-11)

We’ve all probably heard the phrase, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” I don’t know about you but I have not found it all that helpful. First of all, those who do not believe are not convinced they are “sinners” and tend to resent the moniker. Second, it’s really hard to do. Separating one’s behavior from one’s identity is growing more and more difficult in our world. In fact, there are many who would argue it is impossible. And yet Jesus seemed to do it.

The beginning of John 8 is a famous story. Maybe one of the most famous in all of Scripture. And though it’s origin is questionable - it doesn’t appear in the earliest and best manuscripts - it just sounds like Jesus so we tend to keep it in. A woman caught in the very act of adultery is brought before Jesus. The Pharisees and teachers of the law are almost gleeful in their condemnation. They can’t wait to pick up the first stone. They throw her down before Him, pretty convinced He will have mercy which in turn will allow them to accuse Him of breaking the Law. Of course, anyone familiar with the Law can already see the problems. If they caught this woman in the act, where is the man? According to Leviticus 20:10 both parties deserve the death penalty. Perhaps that’s what Jesus is writing in the dust? If they caught her in the act, why have they not carried out her punishment? The Law is clear. Perhaps it’s because they don’t really care about her crime but are far more concerned with trapping Jesus?

Then Jesus does this extraordinary thing. He puts the onus back on them. “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.” He hasn’t condemned her nor has He affirmed her. He hasn’t condemned the Pharisees nor has He affirmed them. Instead, Jesus brilliantly lobs the ball back in their court and forces them to make their own decision. The Pharisees put down their stones and slowly walk away. The woman is left all alone, prompting this famous exchange. “Woman, has no one condemned you?” “No one, Lord.” “Nor do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”

I simply love this about Jesus. He accepts people for who they are but loves them too much to leave them there. He meets us right where we are, takes us by the hand, and leads us to a better place. He accepts us, warts and all, without affirming our sin. To the Pharisee, he says, “Are you really without sin?” To those caught in sin, he says, “I do not condemn you.” And to both, he says, “Go and sin no more.”

As Christians, there is a lot in this world we simply cannot affirm. Changing attitudes in gender and sexuality. Abortion on demand. Racism and sexual abuse. Deceit and falsehood. Anger and hate. These things are not of God and yet so many embrace them. Defend them. Use them as means to a greater end. The answer cannot be rejection. Jesus simply will not allow us to walk away from anyone, including our enemies. So we must find a way - as Jesus found a way - to accept people for who they are without affirming their beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Thankfully, this is the heart of the gospel. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God, Christ made peace with us. While we were pushing Him away, Christ embraced us. May the Spirit give us the courage to do the same!

Readings for tomorrow: Luke 10, John 10:1-11:54

October 27, 2020

LISTEN

Readings for today: [Luke 10](#), [John 10:1-11:54](#)

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27)

Noise. There’s a lot of it in our lives. From the moment our alarm clocks go off until we finally put down the phone or turn off the television at the end of the night, our lives are full of noise. So many voices. Telling us all kinds of things. Much of it not good for us. The bully at school who tells us we’re worthless. The co-worker who’s so negative all the time. The spouse who badgers or berates us. The child who screams when they don’t get their way. The commercials that tempt us to think life is all about us. The subliminal messages coming through on social media that constantly invite comparison. The news outlets spinning world events to bolster a particular worldview. The proliferation of fake news, gossip, and a rumor mill run wild. And I don’t know about you but it feels like someone cranked the volume in the last several months. Probably due to a confluence of factors such as COVID, election year, economic uncertainty, and mental distress. It’s getting harder and harder to hear the still, small voice of God.

Can you hear Him? Can you hear His voice? Amidst all the noise and distractions? When was the last time you sat in silence? I mean true silence. No one around. No devices present to distract. No radio. No television. No social media. Just you and God sitting in silence together. “My sheep hear my voice...” Perhaps one of the main reasons we struggle so much with our faith is we do not take the time to listen for God’s voice. We expect Him to compete with all the other voices in our lives. Shout them down. Yell over the top of them. We expect Him to make Himself known to us but we refuse to create space in our lives for that to happen. Instead, we expect Him to push His way in. Elbow His way to the front of the line. Then and only then will we turn and acknowledge Him.

Jesus doesn’t work that way. There’s a great story from the Old Testament about a man named Elijah. He went out to meet with God. A great storm whipped up. God wasn’t in the storm. A great fire raged. God wasn’t in the fire. A great earthquake shook the very ground. God wasn’t in the earthquake. Then a still small voice. Elijah covered his head. He knew he was hearing the voice of God. “My sheep hear my voice...” Do you want to hear the voice of God? Make time for solitude and silence in your life.

For me, this is happening in the early mornings. I sit in my favorite chair in my office looking out my window at the front range. The sun comes up. The sky turns blue. The deer graze up the hillside. I don’t have any agenda. I just sit with hands open to the Lord. Letting Him speak. Sure, it’s hard. I have all kinds of voices in my head that demand my attention. What I’ve found is that I simply have to wait them out. If I sit long enough, they do begin to quiet down and space is made in my mind and heart for the Lord to enter in. That’s usually when I open God’s Word or journal or pray through our church directory. I think about what’s on tap for the day. The meetings. The conversations. The issues I’m facing. I ask myself some questions. What am I excited about? Nervous about? Who will I be meeting with and how can I serve them? What challenges will I be facing and how do they make me feel? And then I lay those feelings before the Lord. I ask Him to speak into them. Sometimes He does. Sometimes He simply reaches out and takes my hand. Let’s me know He’ll be with me no matter what.

My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me. There’s nothing more comforting than walking through life with the Good Shepherd at your side.

Readings for tomorrow: [Luke 12:1-13:30](#)

October 28, 2020  
**OVERCOMING ANXIETY**

Readings for today: [Luke 12:1-13:30](#)

We live in anxious times. I was talking to a family member recently. They expressed their fears over the outcome of the election. They are pondering a potential move out of the country depending on who wins. I talked to another family member who's suffered from loneliness and depression as a result of some of the COVID restrictions that have isolated them from friends and family and any sense of community. I talked to a friend who attends a church in deep conflict. He is struggling. He is hurting. The one "safe" place in his life is now racked with dissension and division. I spoke to another friend who lost their job at the beginning of the pandemic and has now come to the end of their resources. He may lose his home. He may have to move his family out of state. I know others who have contracted COVID and spent time in the hospital. Still others who have other health emergencies they are fighting right now. A young mom fighting cancer. A close friend who suffered an aneurysm. On and on it goes. And that's just my personal experience. What about the friends I have around the world who have it much worse? South Sudan has descended into chaos and civil war. Starvation is rampant and suffering is widespread. My friend Martin is ministering in the midst of it all. He's not the only one.

"Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Luke 12:22-34)

Don't be anxious? Surely Jesus isn't serious? Perhaps the people he's talking to didn't have the problems we do today? Perhaps life for them always came up roses and things were all good? Of course we know this isn't true. Life in first century Palestine was often short and brutal. Violence could break out at any time. Disease could devastate a village. Crops could fail. Herds could die. Starvation could set in. Water could be scarce. Life expectancy was low. Infant mortality was high. And still Jesus tells His followers to not be anxious. Why? Because Jesus trusted the heart of His Father. Our Heavenly Father is good. Faithful. True. He delights to give His children good things, even the Kingdom. He provides what we need if we will but ask in His name. He knows our struggles and fears and failures. He knows our sinful desires and wants and passions. He may not act in accordance to our will or in alignment with our schedule but He always comes through.

So how do we learn such trust? Jesus gives us that answer as well. Store up treasures in heaven. Set your mind on the things of God. Seek first His Kingdom and all the rest will get thrown in. As a dear friend of mine loves to say, "You take care of the things God cares about - the lost and the least among

you - and He will take care of the things you care about.” The cure for all our anxiety is to step out in faith to serve God’s mission in the world.

Readings for tomorrow: Luke 14-15

October 29, 2020  
AMAZING GRACE

Readings for today: [Luke 14-15](#)

Lost sheep. Lost coins. Lost sons. Lost managers. What do all of them have in common? They are the recipients of God's amazing grace. The Good Shepherd doesn't cut His losses. He refuses to let even one of His sheep slip from His grasp. Instead, He crosses heaven and earth to find the one who is lost and bring them home. The Faithful Woman carefully stewards every coin. She refuses to let even one go missing. Instead, She turns Her home inside and out in Her search to find that which was lost. The Faithful Father refuses to lose either of His two sons. It doesn't matter how far the country or how much they squander their lives in unrighteous living. It doesn't matter if they stay close to home but are consumed by bitterness and anger. The Father runs to each son. Embraces them as His own. Showers them with grace. The Rich Man in Luke 16 refuses to give His dishonest manager what he deserves. Instead of becoming angry at the endless manipulation and deceit, the Rich Man commends him. For though his sin abounds, God's grace abounds even more.

The unconditional nature of God's grace is a scandal to those inside and outside of the church. We simply do not understand it. We can't wrap our minds and hearts around the idea that God could love us without some kind of effort on our parts to meet some kind of standard. We read the stories from Luke's Gospel and we know deep down we would not make the same decisions. The lost sheep shouldn't have wandered from the fold. The woman should have been more careful with her coins. The father should punish both sons for their insolence and pride. The dishonest steward should go to prison. These are our natural responses and they only serve to illustrate the vast difference between divine and human grace.

Human grace is conditional. It is dependent on the other person meeting certain expectations. Living a particular way. Forgiveness comes only when the other party shows the appropriate level of remorse. I see it all the time. Marriages fall apart. Friendships fracture. Partnerships dissolve. Churches split. All because we define grace according to human terms. Anything else and we start to think we're getting soft. We start to believe people are getting a pass. Justice isn't being done. And that just doesn't feel right.

Thankfully, God's grace bears no resemblance to our own. It places no conditions. It sets no standard. Forgiveness is extended an infinite number of times to any and all who ask. God's grace shows no favorites. It cannot be bought or earned or achieved no matter how hard we work. It is free. It is lavished on our world. Every tribe and tongue and nation. All of us have the opportunity to receive it. All we have to do is believe. Place in our trust in the Author of Grace Himself, even Jesus Christ.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 19, Mark 10:1-31, Luke 16:1-18:30

October 30, 2020  
**THE PRICE OF ADMISSION**

Readings for today: [Matthew 19](#), [Mark 10:1-31](#), [Luke 16:1-18:30](#)

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17)

It’s a question I hear all the time. In various forms. What must I do to make God love me? What must I do to make God accept me? What must I do to get into heaven? What must I do to earn God’s blessing? It’s an age old question. It’s one that’s plagued the human race since it’s inception. We have this sense we are not alone. We have this sense we belong to a different world. We are a transcendent species, constantly seeking to rise above the struggles and suffering of this life. And the dissonance that seems hardwired into our souls drives us to wonder...what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus is clear. The one who inherits eternal life keeps God’s commands. Specifically, Jesus refers to the Ten Commandments in his answer. Don’t murder or commit adultery or steal or lie or defraud and make sure to honor your father and mother. Of course, a careful reader will quickly pick up that he’s left out a few. What happened to worshipping God alone? Not making idols or taking His name in vain? Keeping the Sabbath holy? Jesus is baiting the hook for the young man. Will he bite? The young man does. “I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus looks on him with love. Sees his desire to please. Begins reeling him in. “You lack one thing...”

Now here Jesus could have tried the direct approach. Let the young man know his problem was he loved his money, power, reputation, and social status more than God. All of that would have been true. But Jesus wants this young man as a disciple so he offers a test instead. A test that will reveal to the young man where his heart truly lies. “Sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven...” Jesus, in essence, calls out the one thing holding this young man back. He loves his money more than God and so breaks the first commandment. He’s made his money an idol and so breaks the second commandment. He is not a generous person which makes his worship empty so he breaks the third commandment. Finally - and the text doesn’t tell us this specifically - but how much of his money was made by working on the Sabbath? You see, there’s a reason Jesus didn’t mention these four commandments at first. He knows the young man’s heart. Knows where his true loyalties lie. And he wants to draw him in.

“Come, follow Me.” As I said above, Jesus loved the rich young ruler. He had compassion on the man. He saw the internal struggle in his eyes. Saw how much he wanted to please God and yet saw the hold his riches had over him. Jesus doesn’t hate rich people. In fact, He wants them as disciples! But Jesus knows the power wealth can hold over us. So He offers us a way out. The way of Jesus is the way of generosity. We give because we have received. We bless because we have been blessed. We hold loosely onto the resources God has entrusted to us because we know they come from God and they are His to command. We cannot serve both God and money so we need to make a choice and we need to make this choice every single day because we live in constant temptation. Just like the young man in the story. Friends, money cannot save us. Even if we give it all away, we draw no closer to God. Only He can save. The least. The lost. The rich. The powerful. There is no one who stands beyond the reach of His grace. Salvation ultimately will not be determined by the amount of money we give but by the grace that is given freely to us in Jesus Christ.

Honestly, I think this is one of the most difficult passages in all the Scriptures for me. Why? Because I am rich. I don’t like to think about it. I don’t like to acknowledge it. In fact, when I compare myself to



others in my community, I don't feel rich at all. But by the world's standards. By historical standards. I am one of the richest people to have ever lived on the face of the earth. Several years ago, there was a calculator where you could plug in your household income and find out where you stood in comparison to rest of the world. It was based on income figures from the World Bank Development Research Group. When I took the test, I discovered I am not only in the top 1% but am in the top tenth of a percent of the wealthiest people to have ever walked the planet! Isn't that nuts?! So when Jesus says it is harder for a person like me to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, it is terrifying. It sounds impossible. Like the disciples, I find myself crying out, "Who then can be saved?" Thankfully, Jesus has an answer. "With man it is impossible but not with God. All things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27) Amen.

Readings for tomorrow: Matthew 20, Mark 10:32-52, Luke 18:31-19:27

October 31, 2020  
**TWO KINGDOM PRINCIPLES**

Readings for today: [Matthew 20](#), [Mark 10:32-52](#), [Luke 18:31-19:27](#)

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."  
(Matthew 20:28)

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

I often wonder how different the world would look if followers of Jesus would take just these two verses literally. Can you imagine the impact we would make if we had the courage to serve as the Son of Man served and seek as the Son of Man sought? Perhaps that's why I love going to Ethiopia so much. When I'm there I get the opportunity to see this kind of faithfulness in action.

I think of Lydia. A 22 year old woman with two babies who ministers in a Muslim village outside of Dire Dawa. Everyday she travels the streets of her town on foot preaching the gospel in the open air. She suffers verbal and sometimes physical abuse. She has put her life and the lives of her family at risk. But she considers it a privilege to serve the least and seek the lost like Jesus. God has honored her faithfulness! Street women are coming to faith and leaving behind their former lives of prostitution. Her description of their desperation and the hope they find in Jesus is powerful.

I think of Gedesa. A young man of 25 who is single and serving in among the Muslim and Orthodox in a village 300 kilometers away near Harar. He longs to get married and have a family but has delayed those dreams so he can serve the least and seek the lost like Jesus. He gets attacked. Both Muslims and Orthodox are aggressive in their abuse. They disrupt his preaching. They pay his converts to recant. But still he persists. It is inspiring.

I think of Yitsgelu. A Somali man who converted to Christ out of Islam. His family publicly shamed him and drove him from their village. He came to Dire Dawa to serve the least and seek the lost like Jesus. His denomination sent him to a suburb of the city where he ministers among the Muslims, bringing many to Christ. It is not easy work as they suffer just like he suffered. Their families disown them. Their community abandons them. They often lose their jobs. But God is using Yitsgelu's own story to bring redemption in the name of Jesus.

These are just a few of the stories I've heard in my time over there and there are so many more to share. God is moving in Ethiopia. God is also moving here in America. And like the master of the house, He is looking for laborers who will work in His vineyards. He is looking for faithful believers who will answer His call. It doesn't matter when they come. They could get started at the beginning of their lives or the end or anywhere in between. What matters is that they serve as He serves and seek as He seeks. God is on a mission to save the least and the lost. Will you answer His call?

October 30, 2020