
FOURTEEN FOOTPRINTS

An Easter Devotional for 2012

Fox Valley Christian Church

Fourteen Footprints: An Easter Devotional for
2012

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Printed in USA by 48HrBooks
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DEDICATION

To our Lord Jesus Christ, the archetype of servant leadership and to our own Dan Fields for 25 years of service to the FVCC family.

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INTRODUCTION

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DAY ONE PRAYER IN THE TEMPLE

MATTHEW 21:1-11

BY BOB MACK

"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

--Matthew 21:13

During Jesus' triumphant entrance to Jerusalem, He was greeted, adored, blessed and exalted as a Prophet and King. He arrived as a humble teacher and was joyously welcomed as royalty. "The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"¹ Quite a well-deserved celebration!

As was the custom, Jesus soon went up to the Jewish Temple to pray and share. Talk about upset! When He arrived he found open sin abounding in the Temple. This caused grief and righteous anger, and He quickly kicked the robbers and thieves out of His Father's House, exclaiming, *"It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of*

¹ Matthew 21:9

robbers.’”² Robbers, of course we know, are sinners who come to rob, kill and destroy. Jesus had good reason to be upset as He saw up close the desecration of His House, His Temple.

I believe that Jesus’ reaction and anger reminds us of how important the Temple and prayer were then and are now to Him today. Temple worship and prayer were so vital to Jesus and should be to us. We are reminded in 2 Corinthians 6:16 “...for we are the Temple of the living God...” Wow! How awesome... the living God dwelling in us! Our bodies are His Holy Temple. Not only must we do our best to keep these temples healthy, but even more important, to keep them clean and free from sin, idols, and thievery. We know the importance of prayer, but could it be that the house of prayer we live in can’t really pray with pure hearts as the Lord asks? Remember in Psalm 66:18, God warns us, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” And in Isaiah 59:2, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” And also in John 9:31, “We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will.” We now know that God won’t hear the prayers from a sin-infested and sin-infected temple.

Maybe it’s a very good time and season for some “spring cleaning” in our temple. We want

² Matthew 21:13, Isaiah 56:7

to be like those dear little children the Lord loved to hear as they shouted, "Hosanna" in that very first Easter season.

How clean is my temple and yours? I think we now see how important it is to the Lord. I believe nothing worthwhile happens without earnest, sincere prayer emanating from a clean heart and temple.

APPLICATION

To help us in our "spring cleaning," a good word from that notorious sinner, King David, should motivate and encourage us. In Psalm 51:1-12, we are reminded,

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

*Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.*

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*³

So, for all of us that would like to honor our Lord and Savior with pure worship, prayers and praises this Easter season, I've added "THE LIST" as a cleaning aid. In our small group study, we've reviewed a list of some dark areas common to all of us. James McDonald, in his popular book, *I Really Want To Change... So, Help Me God*, prepared a list of hurts, sins, idols, and darkness that might be hindering our prayers and our relationship with the Lord. Is our temple cleaned? Take a look at "THE LIST" and see if we can use a little dusting or maybe a wholesale top to bottom cleaning and renewing. Don't be discouraged,

³ Psalm 51:1-12

remember, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”* Romans 8:1.

THE LIST: Anger, Anxiety, Argumentative, Addiction, Bigotry, Bitterness, Boastful, Bossiness, Causing dissension, Conceit, Controlled by peer pressure, Covetousness, Critical tongue, Deceitfulness, Depression, Dominance, Drug dependence, Drunkenness, Envy (depressed by the good fortune of others), False modesty, Fear, Feelings of rejection, Feelings of stupidity, Feelings of weakness or helplessness, Feelings of worthlessness, Gluttony, Greediness, Guilt (false), Hatred, Hostility, Homosexual lust, Idolatry, Impatience, Impulsiveness, Impure thoughts, Indifference to other’s problems, Inhibited, Insecurity, Intemperance, Jealously, Laziness, Loner, Low self-esteem, Lust for pleasure, Materialistic, Must strive to repay any kindness shown you, Negativism, Occult involvement, Opinionated, Overly quiet, Overly sensitive to criticism, Passivity, Prejudice, Profanity, Projecting blame, Prone to gossip, Rebellion to authority, Resentment, Restlessness, Sadness, Self-centeredness, Self-confidence, Self-deprecation (or self-hatred), Self-gratification, Self-indulgence, Self-justification, Self-sufficiency, Sensuality, Sexual lust, Slow to forgive, Stubbornness, Temper, Unloving (of the unlovely), Vanity, Withdrawal, Workaholic, Worry, and more...

Can any of us remember when, as little children, we would run to our Daddy and cry, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Daddy. I promise I won't do it again." Can we do less with our "Abba Father?"

Pastor Dan shared with us that, as we come, see, go, and tell... **all** must be bathed in prayer. Let's do it!

PRAYER

Lord, we are always in the process of keeping Your temple in us clean. Because it is so important to you and should be to us, we really want to clean up for Easter this year. That way, we can be sure and pray with all purity as we worship and adore You, our RISEN KING!

Amen.

DAY TWO THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

MATTHEW 22:34-40

BY KEN HEMPEL

"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments".

Jesus is responding to a challenge from the experts. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". Then he combines it with the second half of Leviticus 19:18 "But love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord." I suggest that Jesus combines these two passages because loving God with everything you are is such an abstract idea that it's a hard concept to wrap our brains around. The greatness of God, His power, His might, Eternity and His Love are just too much to comprehend. How do you give

God Acts of Service, Quality Time, Physical Touch, Gifts or Words of Affirmation? These are the love languages Dr. Gary Chapman has identified. So Jesus in His wisdom gives us a starting place; “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In Luke 10:25-37 Jesus defines neighbor as anyone who needs help. So first He asks us to show love to our neighbor.

To love your neighbor with your heart means to meet your neighbor where they are, to mourn when they mourn, and to rejoice when they rejoice. To share with them the rich blessings God has given us. Francis Chan says people who love do crazy things. Am I so committed to those around me that I will sacrifice anything, large or small for my neighbor? I might mow my neighbor’s lawn; I might bring them food if I knew they needed it, but would I visit their son in jail? Would I lend them my car?

To love your neighbor with all your mind means to support them wisely. We can ask, “How can I help my neighbor and not become co-dependent?” I struggle with this one myself. Yet, I hope I always come down on the side of grace. I talked about helping my neighbor but what if helping is keeping them co-dependent? Instead of making their situation better, I keep them stuck. I make it worse, it blows up in my face, and everyone gets angry. The person I'm trying to help then feels demeaned, and I feel disappointed and taken advantage of.

There was a time when aid organizations would provide food and water to the starving in third world countries and that was good. The problem was in not requiring accountability. People can become dependent and never become what God wants them to be. I am glad missionaries are addressing this issue and are giving us good council to not do for others what they are capable of doing for themselves. That does not necessarily mean walking away. It usually means we should be a cheerleader, encouraging our neighbor to do it for themselves. Giving them the Hope found in Jesus Christ.

Love your neighbor with your soul. What is God calling me to do, and what is your soul? I really had a hard time understanding what this means until I thought of the concept of soul-mate. Your soul mate is a person that you have an emotional bond with. When they hurt, you hurt. When they are joyful, you feel joy. It's the crux of love your neighbor as yourself: what they feel, I feel.

Let me tell you a personal story; I mentored a middle school boy named P.J. for 4 years, before he moved to Florida. It sounds a lot nobler than it was. I just committed to meet with him every Tuesday night. We did stuff together. We shot hoops, we worked on my Triumph TR4, we ran errands, and we did homework. We also spent

time playing video games, but not very often because he creamed me!

His mom really needed a new roof and did not have the resources to have one put on her home. I knew it leaked because I saw the water dripping from the ceiling. PJ's dad had remarried and was living in Iowa. PJ's mom was trying to raise two boys alone. God laid it on my heart to help get a new roof on their house. I organized a bunch of men and women to tear off the old roof and put a new roof on her single family ranch home. My helpers were all from our small group. Some knew they could not go up on the roof, so they provided food and drinks for the workers. Some gave money for supplies. And did it gladly! Sounds like the early church, doesn't it?

Acts 2:45b-47 says "...they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

I know that each and every person involved in any way felt closer to God, we each felt God's blessing for having the opportunity to make a difference. When the neighbors on the same block asked PJ's mom how this happened, it opened the conversation to spiritual matters. She said her friends from church were showing the Love of

Jesus. By showing love to our neighbor, we show love to God.

Francis Chan writes in his book, *Crazy Love*; "We know that God loves us and that we should love God. But there is no way I would characterize most Christians or most churches by their love for God. People in love act differently than do people who act with a sense of obligation. People do crazy things for love. Love has a way of making even the most difficult tasks feel simple and joyful. It has a way of pushing us to act with complete abandon and devotion. If we were truly in love with God, then our lives would be shaped by God. His desires for us, and our desire to maintain a close relationship with Him."

If we show our neighbors this crazy love, it will change the world for the better--one life at a time.

What should we do in light of this passage?

APPLICATION

- We can pray that God would open the doors for a spiritual conversation with our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends.
- We can pray for an opportunity to help our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends, and when we find such opportunities, we should let the body of Christ, his church,

know so we can help also, and therefore share in the blessing.

- How would you feel if your neighbor had information about how you could obtain the most valuable thing in the world, for free, and thought you might not be interested, so they didn't share the information with you? We have that information for our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends: we have Jesus. We can invite our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends to visit our church where we can help them find The Greatest Gift in the Universe, Jesus.

PRAYER

O Lord. We pray you open our hearts and minds and emotions as we interact with our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends. Make us sensitive to opportunities for spiritual conversations. I pray specifically for my (neighbor, co-worker, family or friend _____.) that their heart becomes soft for you. Then give me the words you need me to say, so that your harvest is plentiful. Thank-you for the Hope we have in your Risen Son Jesus. May we show our love for you in the way we love others.
AMEN

DAY THREE
PAYING TRIBUTE TO CAESAR

MATTHEW 22:15-22

BY CHUCK BOONE

*“Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”
–Matthew 22:17b*

Rival coalitions – the Pharisees and the Herodians-- united to trick Jesus with a political question that appeared to have no good answer. Either Jesus would defy Caesar or He would offend the Jewish people by an act of submission to Roman authority and Roman theology. But Jesus is neither an ordinary political figure nor merely a well educated theologian. Rather than claim divinity, he embodies it. He fully appreciated the challenge and the price to be paid as a rebel towards Caesar or towards His people. So he looks at the coin presented to Him and fully appreciated its worth and significance as a temporal object rather than a thing of eternity. It is a thing of Caesar’s earthly kingdom rather than a thing of God’s eternal kingdom. He leaves it to Caesar. Its value is irrelevant.

Brilliant! The challenge is stunningly refuted and everyone moves on to another topic--or so it seems.

This was not the first time Jesus confronted the issue of taxes. While in Capernaum, Jesus and Peter were challenged as to whether they paid the annual temple tax.⁴ His answer is to remind Peter that kings do not tax their own children, but rather they tax those of others. He effectively claimed to be exempt from the tax as the Son of God (and some would argue that Peter was exempt as well). However, Jesus then commands Peter to go catch a fish, find a coin in that fish, and pay the tax for both of them “...so that we might not offend them...”

So in Capernaum, Jesus paid a tax from which He, by all righteousness, is exempt. In so doing, His reply in Jerusalem could be read as merely a hypothetical extension of the same principle.

The question in Jerusalem is superficially one about paying taxes rather than a request for payment of a tax as in Capernaum. Additionally, the tax in Capernaum was for supporting the work of God whereas in Jerusalem, it was for the work of the oppressive Roman government. In Jerusalem, Jesus’ status as the Son of God has not changed and thus as the Son of the Creator, He ought to be exempt from all taxation as everything belongs to His Father. Yet He submits

⁴ Matthew 17:24-27

that the coin is a thing of the world and thus is under the authority of worldly rulers. He avoided offense by acting beyond reproach.

Jesus didn't ask what the taxes would be spent on. He knew it was not in support of the kingdom to come. He knew that those taxes would hang him on a cross and ultimately persecute his followers. But the principle of "non-offense" is the very core of righteousness. Jesus was not teaching "political correctness" – He invested way too much time critiquing the leadership of His day for that to be possible. When He taught "non-offense", He taught us to be blameless and to provide for the edification of others. To avoid manufacturing a stumbling block in the way of others.

He taught us to live a life centered on the needs of those "others" rather than one centered on our own desires. The humility that brings about an attitude of non-offense echoes throughout the writings of the apostles. They repeatedly call(ed) for a life of service rather than a life being served. Righteousness is not a question of rights or even of boundaries. Righteousness is about providing for the best interest of the Kingdom – and that includes the eternity of others.

Jesus said "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" as a lesson in submission to earthly authority less than a week before He was

crucified. Less than a week before His temporal, earthly body was taken for the convenience of the world by an agent of that very same Caesar-- taken by the same authority that fraudulently claimed authority over all as (a) god. Here Jesus applies the principle of righteous submission as embedded in the crucifixion to a very common worldly question about taxes.

Therein lays a challenge. Who is so faithful? Who believes in righteousness so much that they are willing to die rather than offend another?

APPLICATION

- As you filled out your income tax return this year, what was of greater concern to you: the good that your taxes do, the government-funded things you disagree with, or the speed with which your refund would arrive?
- When faced with a dilemma, do you ask yourself “what does God require of me”, “what does God expect of me”, or “how much can I do on God’s behalf?”
- When was the last time you made a decision favoring the needs of someone else? Could you do that today to start a new habit?

PRAYER

LORD, as we ponder the greatness and perfect righteousness of you, we acknowledge the inadequacies and failings that demonstrate our own insignificance. We thank you for your willing sacrifice, for your thoughtful teaching, and for your unwavering example. Be with us and grant us the strength to acknowledge our faith and your will regardless of the cost.

Amen.

DAY FOUR THE SEVEN WOES

MATTHEW 23:13-31

BY CRAIG NASRALLA

Matthew 23 records the last public address Jesus made before he was crucified. In these nine verses, he denounces the ruling religious establishment in a series of seven woes. While he directed his condemnation at the Pharisees, there are a number of lessons that can be gleaned when we turn the spotlight on ourselves.

I must admit to a severe case of writer's block every time I sat down to pen some thoughts about this passage. It seemed that every time a thought would come to mind, a telemarketer would call and it would be some political action committee or politician on the phone, trolling for votes. When I would return to study the passage, instead of hearing Christ's words about the conduct of the Pharisees who were the ruling political/religious leaders of the day, different thoughts kept coming up.

"Woe to you politicians who want to interrupt dinner with the family. Woe to you telemarketers who invade time with the kids. Woe to hypocrites who say one thing to get

elected then govern another way....” And so on and so on.

It’s always easy to criticize others but never comfortable when we apply the same standards to ourselves. Most things spiritual go to where the heart is centered. At the beginning of Chapter 23, Jesus points to the need of a servant’s heart. Verses 11 and 12 state:

“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

The world through the eyes of a servant becomes a much different place. Instead of wanting power, money and status as seen in the life of the Pharisees, we would be focusing on others and how to nudge them toward Christ and show them His love. Verse 13 highlights how our life can turn others away from Jesus instead of towards Him.

When we put ourselves first, pride and selfishness take center stage. We begin to major on the minors and become concerned with the secondary things. Verses 23 and 24 show how the Pharisees were legalistic to the point of tithing the correct amount of spices they got from their garden, but neglected the more important matters of ministering to others with mercy, justice and faithfulness. The outside looked good, but their heart was deceitful, greedy and selfish. A white

washed tomb may look nice, but it still is covering up death beneath it.

Earlier this summer, our family went to the wedding of my nephew in Kentucky. It was a nice gathering of family and a chance to reconnect with people. I had an opportunity to talk to his sister, who also attended the wedding. She and her husband had recently moved to Alabama for medical training. I asked how she was adapting to Southern culture and her response was intriguing. She said everyone is polite and words sounded caring, but there was no real concern or interest in what you had to say. Words like “How are you today sweetie?” or “I’m sorry that happened to you” seemed hollow and insincere. They were nice words, but had no impact because they had no heart or real concern backing them up.

One of the more interesting commentaries I read on Matthew 23 was from Warren Wiersbe. In his reflections, he contrasted the Pharisees attitudes in today’s passage with the Beatitudes in Matt chap 5. Read the following and then contemplate the questions below.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

APPLICATION

- Do I walk the walk or just talk the talk?
Are my actions and words bringing people closer to, or farther from the kingdom?
- Do I demonstrate a servant's heart or is my pride and ego getting in the way?
- Do I major on the minor when it comes to dealing with my family and co-workers?
- Are greed and selfishness influencing my decisions?

PRAYER

To close today's devotional may the lyrics of this hymn be your prayer.

MAY THE MIND OF CHRIST MY SAVIOUR

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

May the Word of God dwell richly

*In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.*

*May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.*

DAY FIVE
THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY:
JUST WHAT WAS HE THINKING?

MATTHEW 21

BY BEN PAULEY

*“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”
--Matthew 21:5*

Palm Sunday is the day Christians commemorate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. What a day it was! Jesus, riding into the city on a colt with adoring followers laying down their coats and placing palm branches in front of him. The crowd shouting *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* and *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Finally! Jesus was getting the recognition that was due him.

As he entered the city, Jesus’ entire mission was culminating into this last, but critically important week of his ministry. His last few days on earth were so important that Matthew devoted eight chapters to it. As we read the Palm Sunday story in Matthew 21:1-11, we clearly see that as he entered Jerusalem, Jesus was already thinking ahead. So just what was Jesus thinking as he began this sequence of events that

he knew would lead to his death? Let's take a closer look.

Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him in the coming week. He knew that the Jewish establishment was planning to capture and murder him. Before they entered the city, he said to the disciples; *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"* Matt. 20:18-19. Knowing this, Jesus could have remained hidden in the countryside, but he purposefully chose to enter Jerusalem. It is safe to assume that one thing Jesus was thinking about was the death sentence he was walking straight into.

Jesus also knew the adoring crowds crying out "*Hosanna*", which literally means "save us", would want him to use his demonstrated power to establish himself as a powerful ruler, delivering them from oppression. How tempting it would have been to ride the wave of popularity, please the crowd and become their conquering king. But that wasn't his mission. A conquering king would have been riding on a stallion, but he chose to ride a colt, the symbol of a peaceful ruler. At a moment when ordinary men would be basking in glory, the scriptures tell us that Jesus was actually sad to the point of weeping. The crowd still didn't understand that

salvation would come from the Prince of Peace. *“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you had only known this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.”* Luke 19:41-42. It was a day when Jesus was finally being glorified, but his thoughts were on a lost people in a lost city.

Perhaps most tragic of all, Jesus knew that this time of appropriate recognition would soon be over. He knew that the crowd now lifting up blessings and praise would soon give way to crowds shouting, *“crucify him!”* How heart wrenching it must have been to know in advance that his closest followers would turn on him, including Judas, one of the twelve. How was it possible that Peter, one of his inner circle would deny even knowing him - not once, but three times! All the miracles performed, all the teaching, all the scriptures fulfilled! And this is how he would be rewarded? What was Jesus thinking? Without a doubt his heart was breaking over the impending betrayal by his closest friends.

Jesus certainly had a lot on his mind as he entered into Jerusalem. In spite of the crushing weight on him history proves that above all Jesus was thinking about completing the mission of his Father. The cup he was about to drink was bitter indeed. Even so, his thoughts were not on himself, but instead on the will of his Father. If he didn't complete his mission, the plan of

salvation would be reduced to just another story about a teacher.

In spite of it all, I would like to believe that perhaps for a little while there was a smile on Jesus' face. In Psalms 33:1 we are told, "*...it is fitting for the upright to praise him.*" When some of the Pharisees in the crowd rebuked Jesus for the way the crowds were praising him he answered, "*I tell you... if they keep quiet the stones will cry out.*" Luke 19:10. Praising our Lord is going to happen and we need to be part of it. What are we thinking about this Palm Sunday? Let's think about a celebration! As did the crowds in Jerusalem, so let us celebrate Jesus! Celebrate his teachings and his salvation mission, and simply celebrate him for who he is! *Hosanna Jesus! Save us Jesus!*

APPLICATION

- Why did Jesus choose to ride into Jerusalem on the back of a colt? What message was being sent by doing so? Matt. 21:4-5, Luke 19:41-42
- Palm Sunday is a day of praise and celebration. Meditate on the difference between praising and celebrating Jesus for *what he has done* (Luke 19:37) versus praising and celebrating Jesus for *who he is*. (Revelation 5:12)

- The Jewish leaders found Jesus guilty of blasphemy and called for his crucifixion, but he was actually guilty of simply telling the truth. Am I living my life in a way that others recognize I am not afraid to tell the truth? Am I *guilty* of claiming Jesus as the true Messiah?

PRAYER

Hosanna Lord Jesus! I praise you today simply for who you are. You are worthy to receive glory and honor and praise. Thank you for your ministry on earth. As I reflect on that final week of your time on earth, where you experienced the high points of adoration and also the low points of rejection, I know that you took my place. I admit that I should be the one being punished. Thank you for loving me.

Amen.

DAY SIX
THE SERVANT LEADER

LUKE 22:24-30

BY HAROLD SECHREST

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no seroant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

--John 13:15-17

In John 13:1-17, we see that Jesus was the perfect leader and that He taught His servant attitude to His disciples. Washing guest's feet was a job for a household servant. But Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed and dried His disciple's feet Himself. Jesus was teaching His disciples that to be a leader, a person must first become a servant. He did not wash His disciple's feet just to get them to be nice to each other. His disciples were to move into the world serving God, serving each other, and serving all people to whom they took the message of salvation.

In Luke 22:24-30, we see the disciples arguing about who was considered to be the greatest among them. Jesus told them that the king of Gentiles lorded over their subjects, but His disciples were not to be like that. Instead the greatest among them was to be like the youngest and the one who ruled was to be as the one who serves. Jesus was again teaching His disciples that the leader is to be the one who serves best.

So, just what is a servant leader?

Robert K Greenleaf, the originator of the term *servant leadership*, thought and wrote a lot about the nature of servant leadership and character. He defines servant leadership the following way. "Servant leaders are leaders who achieve results for their organizations by giving priority attention to the needs of their colleagues and those they serve. Servant leaders are often seen as humble stewards of their organization's resources: human, financial and physical."

He further states that the servant leader is servant first. "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least not be further deprived."

Most of us start out serving God and become motivated to serve others. We realize that we serve God through serving others. It is a natural progression to then move on to become a servant leader. Servant leadership focuses on the needs of and growth of those being led, not the needs of those who are leading. Servant leaders desire to help others through unselfish servant hood. They have a real humility that serves others and leads them to become servants also.

One tool that the FVCC elders use to focus on the needs of our FVCC family is the spiritual inventory that each person completes annually. This helps each of us assess where we are in our spiritual growth and helps us ponder where we want to grow and improve.

Why should leaders strive to become servant leaders? Because traditional leadership roles that focus on power and control cause problems for the church just as they have caused problems for private enterprise and other organizations. The servant leader does not hold others back, instead he or she empowers and helps develop others to serve and lead, just as Jesus developed and empowered His disciples.

One defining factor in servant leadership is, what motivates us to lead in the first place? If we lead because we feel, in our heart, the need to serve others, then we are truly servant leaders. If we lead for personal gain, then obviously we are

not servant leaders. Servant leaders understand that everyone needs to be heard, praised, encouraged, forgiven, accepted, and guided back to the right path when they drift off course. As Christian leaders we need to practice these behaviors. Why? Because Jesus did.

Even though Robert K Greenleaf originated the term *servant leadership*, every Christian knows that it originated with Jesus. As already mentioned in John 13:1-17, Jesus was showing His disciples that in the same way He served them by washing their feet, they should serve one another. There is more to this incident than simply serving. Jesus, their leader, is showing great humility as He stoops to wash His disciple's feet. He is demonstrating the theme of the leader as servant.

As the ultimate servant leader, Jesus not only washed His disciples feet, but endured humiliation, pain, suffering and death on the cross to serve us so that God would forgive us for our sins and give us eternal life.

Since Jesus was the ultimate servant leader, we would naturally improve our efforts to become good servant leaders by trying to become more like Jesus. This is something that all Christians should already be striving for. We should be gentle and ready to forgive, never hold grudges, we should be merciful and kind to others, we should have a compassionate heart

and realize that our words and actions can help or hurt, lift someone up or shove them down, and remember that “the greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like this child” - Matthew 18:4.

APPLICATION

- If you are already a servant leader, what is the next step you can take to improve your servant leadership skills?
- If you are serving, are you willing to become a servant leader by volunteering to lead a team or a ministry?
- If you are not serving will you commit to serving in some capacity once a month?
- How do you treat the people who work for you? How do you treat your wife or husband, your children?
- Ask the people you lead how you can serve them better.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we love you, we worship you and we praise you.

We ask you to forgive us for our sins.

We thank you for this day and for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. We thank you for dying on the cross to save us from our sins. We thank you for the opportunity to serve you and our church family.

We ask you to give us wisdom and guidance and to help us to become more like you. We ask you to help us become better servant leaders and to always have a servant heart as we strive to lead others.

In Jesus name we pray.

Amen

DAY SEVEN THE LAST SUPPER

MATTHEW 26:17-35

BY KATHI COLTON

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

--Matthew 26:26-28

Imagine you are an apostle of Jesus Christ. You have traveled to Jerusalem with Jesus and the other apostles for the Festival of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day celebration mandated by God to be observed as a memorial forever, with the Passover meal observed the day before the start of the festival. This festival commemorates God's salvation of the Israelites from the Egyptians by the blood of the lamb, which they smeared on their doorposts so that the angel of death would "pass over" their houses. "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.

You help with the meal preparations and after the Passover meal is prepared, you enter the room where you see Jesus reclining with John next to him on Jesus' right side, the entire meal will be spent reclining, symbolizing that you are all free men. After everybody is seated, Jesus pours the first of four ritual cups of wine, the Cup of Sanctification, and blesses it with the following words: "Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine."

The second cup of wine, the Cup of Deliverance, is now taken, and Jesus breaks a piece of the matzah bread, over which he performs thanks. You know that every Passover meal includes three foods that must be eaten: the bitter herbs, the lamb and the matzah (unleavened bread). It is now time to partake of the bitter herbs, which symbolize the tears and sorrows of the Israelites. However, just before Jesus dips the bread into the bitter herbs, he states that one of the people in the room will betray him. You are immediately worried that it might be you and when you look around the room, you see looks of anxiety and concern on the faces of your fellow apostles, who are asking, "Is it me?" Jesus replies, "The one who has dipped his hand in the bowl with me will betray me." Judas was sitting to his left and had dipped his bread in the bowl with the bitter herbs first and also asks this question, but others had also dipped their bread, so nobody is really sure who he means and all

appear very worried. Jesus answered Judas, "You have said so," and you are not sure whether or not Judas is the one.

After the Passover meal, hands are again washed. By tradition, no more food is to be eaten once the meal is complete. However, at this time, Jesus takes a piece of matzah, breaks it into small pieces and gives each of the apostles a piece, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." You look around the room once more and see a look of amazement on everyone's faces.

What could Jesus mean, "This is my body?" You wonder about this, but you do as Jesus asks and accept the bread from him and eat it. As you ponder the meaning of all of this, he picks up the third cup of wine, called the Cup of Redemption because it symbolizes salvation by the blood of the lamb. Jesus blesses this cup and then passes it around saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new in my Father's kingdom." These words are shocking and now you are really confused and alarmed. First, he called the piece of matzah his body; now he is calling the Cup of Redemption his blood and talking about a covenant. What covenant could he mean? You are familiar with the scriptures and you wonder...is he talking about the

fulfillment of the covenant promised to Israel mentioned by Jeremiah?

With all of these thoughts racing in your mind, Jesus reads the final scripture and sings a hymn, which includes the words from Psalm 118:

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad." As you ponder the amazing events of this Passover meal, you head for the Garden of Gethsemane because Jesus wants to go there to pray.

It appears that except for one, the apostles did not clearly understand what Jesus was demonstrating to them through his use of the Passover symbols at the Last Supper – that he was about to become their sacrificial Passover Lamb for the atonement of their sins. Only one seems to have gotten the message, the Apostle John, who stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified. Where were the rest of the apostles?

APPLICATION

What about you? Do you trust in Jesus message? We have all of the eyewitness accounts relating to Jesus's first coming, but we still have to rely on both Jesus' promises and prophesy regarding his second coming. Do you trust that what Jesus has promised us is true? Are you standing at the foot

of the cross and allowing Jesus to be Lord of your life no matter what? Or are you instead hiding from the cross as you deal with your busy life?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, we humbly come to you in thanks for your greatest of all gifts to us...the gift of your forgiveness - the atonement for our sins. We thank you for your resurrection and the promises you have given of your second coming and of our own resurrection to spend eternity with Christ. In your name, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

DAY EIGHT PETER DISOWNS JESUS

MATTHEW 26:69-75

BY ARTHUR CARLSON

... "I don't know what you're talking about..." "I don't know the man!" ... "I don't know the man!"
--Matthew 26:69-75

What is the difference between someone telling a little white lie and a lie of someone cursing and swearing an oath denying that they know someone who was actually a friend, teacher, creator and savior? The answer is none. There is no difference in the eyes of God, for a lie is a lie. Many people look at this story as an apostle who let fear scare him into lying and denying he knew Christ. But in reality it's just a story about a person who knew Christ, believed in Him and told a lie.

Too much of our world today thinks that lies are judged on some sliding scale based on a number of factors. You know, like some lies don't hurt anyone, they can make some people feel better and if nobody finds out, then it's alright. I have even heard people say that it was acceptable to lie in court about someone because after all,

they had to be guilty of something and they just never got caught.

So what's the big deal about lying? I mean after all, it's not like its murder! So what is the big deal? According to Proverbs 6:16-19, there are six things the LORD hates, and actually, two of them are about lying. To be specific, it's a lying tongue, and a false witness who speaks lies. In Revelation 21:8, it gives us another indication of how God thinks about liars: "... and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

So why is truth important? It's important because Jesus said in John 14:6, "*I am the way and the truth and the life.*" If Jesus is truth and we trust that Jesus is truth, then we trust that He is the way to heaven. So then truth cannot have anything false within it. And if we have accepted Christ as our Savior, the truth of Jesus is within us, so lying has no place in our lives. If we are liars, how can we talk about Christ? How much of what we say about Christ to a nonbeliever would matter, if they witnessed us lying or found out that we were a liar? One thing most people agree upon is that it is difficult to know what truth is when a liar speaks.

APPLYING TO YOUR LIFE

It has been said that everyone has lied, and if you ever meet someone who says they never lied,

guess what? You have witnessed one of their lies. The Good News is, just like Peter, you too can be forgiven with true repentance. So the next time you are tempted to tell a lie whether it's to save you from something or to better your situation, think of Peter weeping about the lies he told. And remember that any compromise of the truth makes it a lie. And we all know what God thinks about liars.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, we know that speaking without your wisdom is easy. And when our words are not your words, they can be hurtful, demoralizing, self-centered and often false. Being just a good person and speaking of the wondrous things you have done, does not mean that we have accepted your truth. When we accept your Son Jesus as the truth and accept Him as our Lord and Savior in our hearts, we change. We become an instrument to be used by you and for your purpose. We begin dying to ourselves and to our old lives. We now recognize Satan's destructive forces in our lives and turn from them. And we become a living, breathing example of your truth. Father, help us to never deny that you are the Truth by telling a lie.

Amen.

DAY 9
THE CONDEMNATION
AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS WITH TWO
CRIMINALS

MATT 27:1 1-26

LUKE 23:32-43

BY JACK AND LORNA MORRISON

The chief priests and the elders accused Jesus of various acts which would cause them to lose power among the Jews. Their influence was quite strong and their accusations of blasphemy and other charges led Pilate, the governor, to question Jesus. Jesus did not answer any of the accusations against him, except when Pilate said, "Are you King of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

It was a custom, during the festival, for the governor to free one criminal chosen by the Jews. Pilate offered Barabbas, a known criminal, or Jesus knowing that releasing Jesus would not be their choice. They chose to ask the release of Barabbas, and Pilate asked what should be done with Jesus. They shouted, "Crucify him!" In the meantime, Pilate's wife had sent a note to him telling him not to have anything to do with that innocent man because she had suffered a great deal that day in a dream because of him.

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, that instead, an uproar was starting, he

took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility." All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. (Paraphrasing Matthew 27: 11-26)

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Him there, along with the criminals--one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people and the soldiers continued to mock and taunt Jesus. They placed a crown of thorns on His head and a sign proclaiming THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said, "He saved others: let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked Him. They offered Him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus,

remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Paraphrasing Luke 23: 32-43)

We know that Jesus was cruelly nailed to the cross even though the scriptures do not discuss the process or event in precise detail. Our sins were responsible for some of those nails that held Jesus to the "Old Rugged Cross" where he suffered, bled and died in our place. We do know that Jesus appeared, after the resurrection, to the disciples and showed them his hands and his side. (John 20: 20) Later, Thomas met with the other disciples who told him that Jesus had been there, to which Thomas replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later the disciples, including Thomas, were gathered together when Jesus appeared to them. He spoke to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Jesus also said, "because you have seen me you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Paraphrasing John 20: 20-29)

Why do we celebrate Easter?

To remind us to set aside a special time (even though we should thank God daily for this great blessing), to thank God for being willing to send His only Son as a sacrifice to die for our sins, so

that we do not need to pay the price for our sins, if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Through His death on the Cross and His resurrection He became an atonement for our sins and offers us that free gift of grace so that we become born again and are cleansed of our sins when we openly acknowledge that he is our Savior and we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To pause to ponder on the fact that accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, being baptized and walking in His ways, obeying His will, is the only way our sins are forgiven and we can spend eternity in Heaven and avoid the penalty of our sins. To give us a special opportunity to share the Easter Gospel with others to spread His word so that others can learn to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, to teach his word from the Holy Bible to friends, family, acquaintances, strangers and an unsaved world.

Pilot, the Governor, tried Jesus and could find no reason to Crucify Him even after many accused Jesus of blasphemy, other sins, and mocked him, encouraging Pilot to put Jesus to death. So, Pilot openly washed his hands of the situation and gave Jesus to the people to do their will. Their will was that Jesus should be Crucified. So, Jesus was cruelly nailed to the cross after flogging. Our sins were responsible for some of those large nails used to hold Jesus on that "Old Rugged Cross" where he suffered, bled and died in our place. He refused to accept the

pain killing drink that compassionate followers offered him since he wanted the world to know that He willingly accepted His Father's will for Him to be the sinless, unspotted Lamb offered for sinners as had been foretold in God's word.⁵

APPLICATION

The Cross of Jesus was between those of two criminals who truly deserved punishment. Even these criminals mocked Jesus until one said, "Jesus remember me when you come unto your kingdom." Jesus answered, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." Jesus forgives all sin, if we truly ask for forgiveness in sincere faith in Him. Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection provided witnesses that He is the Son of God and that the crucifixion really happened as scripture records. This event is recorded as a historical event as well as in the Holy Bible.

As we observe the Easter season, we must think about how we celebrate Easter--do we fulfill the goals or reasons for celebrating?

What other benefits do we find as we observe these important events?

⁵ SCRIPTURE REFERENCES USED

Matthew 27: 11-26, 27: 27-56, 26: 47-27: 26

Luke 23: 32-43, 22: 47-23: 25, 23: 26-49

Mark 14:43-15: 15, 15: 16-41

John 20: 20-27, 18:2-19:16, 19:28-37, 19: 17-30

May God richly bless you as you prayerfully and thoughtfully celebrate this Easter.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, we acknowledge you as the one and only Living God and the only omnipotent force who created the universe and everything that goes with it. We are truly amazed at all that you have done for us. You have provided everything we need and so much more. Your love and care are evident in our lives every day.

We are especially grateful for the Son you sent to die on the cross so that we may know forgiveness of our sins and by believing that Jesus will be our personal Savior and obeying and following Him we may be led to you for eternity.

We pray that we will always worship you in a way that is pleasing to you and that we always tell others of your glory. Our prayer is that we also help lead lost souls to you.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

DAY 10 THE DEATH OF JESUS

MATTHEW 27: 45-46

BY KIRSTEN HERTEL

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Isn't it interesting that hanging on the cross, Jesus cried out to God, His Father, asking "why have you forsaken me?" Jesus knew God and all of His promises better than anyone who came before or after Him, yet He felt, in that final moment, as if God had forsaken Him. Prior to his arrest, Jesus fell to the ground in the garden of Gethsemane and prayed "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39) He was pleading with God, is there any other way? Yet He knew exactly what was to come and He knew that it was indeed God's will!

In Matthew 26:53-54, as Jesus was being arrested, He said to His disciples, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of

angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

Jesus himself, spotless and blameless, the only person to ever walk on the earth without sinning, the Son of the one true God, closer to God than anyone, knowing full well what was necessary and required of Him, pleads with God to find another way, and before surrendering His spirit, even accuses God of forsaking him!

These points are relevant for us to know and understand today. Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived as we live (except without sin), suffered as we suffer, pleaded as we sometimes plead and died as we die. The wages of sin is death, and Jesus took the punishment for all of our sin upon himself when his blood was shed on the cross. That is the only reason we are forgiven and are promised eternity with God in heaven!

Jesus understands our pain and our trials. How many times have we cried out to God to "Let this cup be taken from me"? Jesus did just that. How many times have we felt that God has forsaken us? Jesus felt that way too! Ultimately, we have to trust, as Jesus did, that even though we don't want to endure the pain and trials of life on earth, what we are going through is exactly as God has planned and that He has a far greater purpose than we could ever imagine. Even though we may plead for Him to deliver us from pain or trials, even though we may doubt and feel

that He has forsaken us, we need to trust that it is all part of a bigger plan, a perfect plan that glorifies our Father in heaven. Also, we need to remember that Jesus himself felt the same way. We are not alone.

The truth is God will never forsake us. He promises us that!

APPLICATION

- Is there an area of your life that you are not trusting to God?
- Do you feel as though God has forsaken you?
- Have you pleaded with God to take something painful from you, but He hasn't done it?

-Remember that even Jesus doubted. He pleaded with God for some other way and he felt as though God had forsaken him.

-Remind yourself of the greater purpose that God had in mind. He had a plan for Jesus and He has a plan for you!

-God's plans are often not evident to us at the time and some parts of his plan we may never comprehend this side of heaven, but we have to trust that He is in control and He does have a plan for us. It isn't always pain-free and it isn't always what we would choose, but God still calls us to trust in him.

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that as we go through this life, we would remember that this is not our home. We are aliens here and we are just passing through on our way to our heavenly home with you. Help us to keep our minds focused on eternity, not the things of this world.

Help us to remember that when pain and trials come, you are with us and you have a plan, just as you did for your son Jesus.

In moments of despair, help us to remember that Jesus understands and we are not alone.

Ultimately, draw our focus to the salvation that you so graciously offer us through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus.

May we remember that your plans are always good and right and they are so much bigger than we are.

Amen.

My personal prayer is for each of you to be reminded of God's sovereignty and His faithfulness. I pray that whatever trials you are enduring right now, you would be able to keep an eternal focus and to remind yourself that it's okay to ask God to take it from you! But if He doesn't, trust that He is in control, He holds your heart in his hands and He has an eternal plan for you!

DAY 1 1

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

MATTHEW 27:57-61

BY RUTH ANNE BOONE

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

-- Matthew 27:57-61

The sky was dark, the landscape wind-tossed. There had been earthquakes as Jesus took his last breath, the very earth groaning at the death of the Creator. It was the day before the Sabbath, and there was yet much work to be done before sunset, when by Jewish law, all work must cease for a day.

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Counsel and a secret follower of Jesus,⁶ went to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus so that he could bury him before the Sabbath. He then went and bought linen in order to wrap the body, and he and Nicodemus took Jesus' body, wrapped it with a few spices, and laid it in a new tomb hewn out of rock.⁷ When they were finished, they rolled a stone across the entrance and went home for the Sabbath.

Now, we know that Joseph was a member of the Counsel AND a secret follower of Jesus, and we remember when Nicodemus had his secret late-night conversation with Jesus.⁸ At the time, Nicodemus seemed to want to understand what Jesus was saying, but was unable to grasp the whole concept of being born again *of spirit* in order to enter the Kingdom of God. He thought that being born a Jew, a descendent of Abraham and born into the covenant gave him the birth-right into the Kingdom of God. When he is mentioned again in scriptures, Nicodemus defends Jesus against the Counsel.⁹ He does not openly confess that he believes that Jesus is the Christ, but perhaps at the time he was already in the process of believing.

⁶ Mark 15:43

⁷ John 19:38-39

⁸ John 3:1-21

⁹ John 7:50-51

So here were two men, leaders in the Temple, knowledgeable of Jewish law, and they had both come to believe that Jesus was the Christ. But a secret belief is a very young faith that needs to grow in order to be mature enough for their fellow-workers and neighbors and family to see. And the time came when they had to make the decision to keep their faith a secret or to let it be known and declare that faith publicly. Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."

Joseph and Nicodemus had finally come to the place in their faith when they could no longer hide. They *believed* that Jesus was the Christ! And so they buried Jesus before the Sabbath, before the sun went down, when people were still scurrying here and there, making their own preparations for the Sabbath. There is no way they could have secretly moved the body of Jesus from the sight of the cross to the new tomb. They openly declared their love for Jesus in front of all of their fellow-workers, their neighbors, their family, even the Roman soldiers. The secret was out.

There is another part of the story that is little mentioned, and is only one little verse. "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb." They had loved Jesus and

followed him openly, they were heartbroken, they wanted to know where he was to be buried, and they wanted to know how the body was prepared for burial so they could do a proper job after the Sabbath was over. They were there when he died. They were there when his body was put in the tomb.

There is an old Spiritual written about this, but it asks each one of us, "were you there...?" This is not asking us if we were physically there at the death of Jesus. Of *course* not. But *why* did Jesus die? Was it simply that Pilate condemned Him to death? No. A resounding *NO!* He died for each of us. Every time we sin. Every time we speak before thinking. Every time we tell a little white lie. Every time we covet something that is not ours, or have ungodly anger in our hearts, or cause ourselves or the people around us hurt in any way. The Bible makes it very clear. It was for *our* sins He died. And so we were also there.

When Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus at that late night, secret meeting, he said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." John 3:16-17

And once we believe, we have to act it out publicly. This does not just mean going to church and being involved in a small group. This means

being an outward Christian for those outside the Christian community to see. This isn't as scary as it sounds. It means when you're having conversation and someone mentions a sick child or friend, say you'll pray for them. Don't expect a response and don't continue that part of the conversation unless they do. It means caring for those God puts into our lives, whether we like them or not. It means going out of our way to do the right thing, even if it's not popular.

APPLICATION

1. If you haven't put your faith in Jesus Christ, and you are ready, pray that you know you haven't lived the way God wants you to live, that you often have a sinful heart, and give every part of your life to Jesus so that you can begin living a new life in him.
2. If you have not told other Christians that you have become a believer, tell someone! And get connected in a small group so you can grow.
3. Find a way to be a public Christian to those outside the Christian community. Ask God for wisdom, and look for opportunities.
4. Invite a neighbor over for coffee or a barbeque. This is often a first step before the deeper conversations can happen. Keep it light!

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to show my love for you not only in front of those who also love you, but in front of those who do not know you. Help me to do so in a way that does not offend, but plants seeds and gently points the way to you. Give me your wisdom in how to be more public with my faith in you, give me opportunities, and help me to recognize the time to speak so I don't miss it!

Amen.

WERE YOU THERE
Negro spiritual

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble,
tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to the
tree?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble,
tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed him to the
tree?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in the
tomb?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble,
tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid him in the
tomb?

Were you there when God raised him from the
tomb?
Were you there when God raised him from
the tomb?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble,
tremble, tremble.
Were you there when God raised him from
the tomb?

DAY 12 THE RESURRECTION

MATTHEW 28
JOHN 20

BY BILL GALLOWAY

*“The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.”
Matthew 28:5-6a*

The resurrection of Christ. Bearing all of our sins, giving his life on the cross, dying and coming back to show himself. This is a critical and pivotal component of the good news that the gospel brings to us.

But let's face it, we were not there. We could not stand with Thomas, close enough to put our hands on His wounds. We have not seen the many miracles that Jesus did after He rose from the dead. What a privilege it would have been, to have this kind of proof standing right in front of you. If you are like me, you have not had a Damascus road experience like Paul, or stood in the presence of Christ after He had risen from the dead. I must admit, I get a little jealous when I think of the faith that could be mine if God would only grant me that kind of experience. And yet, Mathew 28:17 tells us that even being able to see

Him, and knowing who He was, and that He had risen from the dead, "some doubted.". Not just Thomas, it clearly implies there were others. Would I have been one of those? Does my faith only come from evidence? Does it come from putting my hands on a thing? Being able to turn it over and examine it closely? I am an engineer by trade. We tend to be skeptics, and we are constantly looking for the defects in things, trying to see what is less than ideal and then develop a solution to make it better. We are constantly looking for confirmation and proof that our solution will work. Usually we are more than a little skeptical if we are being asked to believe something that cannot be proven. Well, life after death is not something that can be proven. Even when the disciples could see and touch Christ after his resurrection, "some doubted". Belief in life after death is a matter of Faith. It is personal for each one of us. We each ask God to open our eyes and provide us with the evidence that He is there and that He has an eternity to share with us. But God tells us that we will not see Him face to face on this side of death. Our faith will be in things that we cannot see. But He has not left us with a total lack of evidence. Quite the contrary. He has written his existence all around us in nature, the world He has so intricately woven together, and in the heart of each one of us. We have a curiosity and spirit that is in His image. We have the Bible that was written by inspiration from God. John 20:31 tells us that the primary reason for having this scripture is so that we may

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, we may have life in His name.

I wish I had the ability to erase the doubts that sometimes come to my mind. To say with confidence what eternity holds for us. To confirm that the faith I have will be shown true after death. But death is a curtain I cannot see through. It is simply a matter of faith. I have family members who do not share my faith in Christ. I wish I had the absolute proof I could put in front of them so that there would be no room for doubt. I would desperately like to give them no alternative but to put their trust and faith in Christ and assure themselves an eternity with Him. But that is not what Christ has given us. He has asked us to believe an incredible story of life after death. He has asked us to have faith in what we have not seen.¹⁰ I would like to share with you a concept that I personally find a measure of comfort and merit in what is known as “Pascal’s Wager”. In the seventeenth century, the mathematician Blaise Pascal formulated his infamous pragmatic argument for belief in God. My paraphrase of his argument goes something like this. If I believe the Bible and follow its teaching and it turns out to be false, what have I lost? At most I would have missed opportunities to engage in certain activities that the Bible steers us away from. But, if I reject the Bible and fail to

¹⁰ John 20:29

follow its teaching and it turns out to be true, I will have lost eternity.

Wrapped up in the thoughts I am sharing here is that we all have a decision to make for ourselves. We have to personalize the evidence, we have to acknowledge the proofs that we do have, and take a stand. It is typically not a onetime event that you resolve and never re-visit. For me it is an ongoing process that in all honesty I see no end to, until I have stepped from this life into the next. But I am so grateful in noting in the Word of God that the reaction of Jesus to Thomas in his moment of doubt was not one of scorn, or ridicule, but encouragement to reach out and grasp the truth of God and believe. God's promise in John 20 is that, believing what we have not seen, is a blessing He wishes to bestow upon us.

APPLICATION

My invitation to you is to join me in that blessing.

PRAYER

Father you have made us. You have given us the intricacies of our minds that allow us to ponder your truths and the free will to choose to follow you or to walk away. My prayer is that you will give me the inspiration, the words and the resolve to share your truth with those around me in an effective effort to encourage them to accept you as their personal savior. You know so well the stumbling blocks that present themselves to someone who is searching for you. Please smooth that path and give each one who wishes, a clear path to a saving faith in you. And then Lord, give them the conviction and strength to continue to spread your word to the entire world, starting with the person standing next to them.

Amen.

DAY 13

JESUS REINSTATES PETER

JOHN 21:15-19

BY DARYL JOHNSON

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" John 21:15a

In order to reinstate someone they have to be un-instated.

What did Peter do?

DUH

Denied knowing Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested and in the process of being interrogated.

Easy answer. We all get an "A". Let's go for ice-cream.

Wait a minute. Is that how we read and understand the Bible?

Are we not to ask ourselves some deeper questions?

Why Peter? There were twelve disciples. Wasn't Peter one of the first chosen by Jesus?¹¹ Jesus gave Peter a nick name indicating a type of male bonding.¹² Wasn't Peter the one to give the

¹¹ Matthew 4:18

¹² John 1:42

correct response to the question about who Jesus really was, and rewarded by being called blessed by Jesus himself?¹³ Wasn't Peter a member of the "inner circle of disciples" that Jesus took to the transfiguration,¹⁴ and deeper into the garden to pray?¹⁵ Were not Peter's ears privy to Jesus words but also to the very words of God the Father himself?¹⁶ Wasn't he to be the one with whom Jesus was going to build His church that even the gates of HELL would not be able to overcome?¹⁷ Wasn't he to be given the very KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?¹⁸

Are we screaming WHY PETER yet? What am I to take home from this disaster and apply to my life?

Peter had all of the qualities that Jesus knew he needed to build his church on: courage, strength, leadership, passion, tenacity. All of these very important qualities that sometimes give the owner the "I" factor, that over-confidence in one's self. Jesus was establishing His church on total dependence on God. All glory to God. Jesus needed to remove the "I" factor from his champion. He needed to saddle break his untamed race horse so he could win races with him.

¹³ Matthew 16:16

¹⁴ Mark 9:2

¹⁵ Matthew 26:37

¹⁶ Matthew 16:17

¹⁷ Matthew 16:18

¹⁸ Matthew 16:19

So Peter was to fall. To be labeled a coward. To be shamed to the core when he looked into Jesus' eyes.¹⁹ The sweat-drenched stallion, standing exhausted, head down, with the saddle still on his back, beaten, submissive. Where all your power and character traits had failed you. Total hatred of one's self. Wanting only for darkness to hide you from the world.

But then it happened. The stone is rolled away. The angel says "He is risen! Go tell his disciples AND PETER."²⁰

Questions. Peter, do you know why this happened to you? Do you still believe in me and my mission? Are you still willing to do what I ask even if it leads to humiliation and even death? Peter, after all this, do you still love me?

Peter, go to work. The work I have selected you for. The work I will empower you to do. The work where all glory goes to God.

Great race horses, when they die, have an autopsy done and they usually weigh their hearts. I read about the great horse Secretariat, and although they didn't weigh his heart when he died, it was said to be the biggest they had ever saw. 14 pounds is about the size of huge hearts found in other extraordinary race horses. From

¹⁹ Luke 22:61-62

²⁰ Mark 16:7

the measurements of Secretariats heart it was estimated to be in the 22 pound range.

I think Jesus saw in Peter the great heart of a champion. One that could withstand the pruning, handle the hardships, see the martyrdom coming, and still run the race to the Glory of God. All the while saying, "Lord, you know all things: you know that I love you."

APPLICATION

- Have you as a Christian been broken of the "I" factor so God can use you to the fullest?
- Have you sought God's guidance in all you do?
- Have you given God the credit for all you do?
- How big is your heart?

PRAYER

Father in Heaven, all glory to you. Forgive me for trying to live parts of my life my way. Give me courage to say, "Please remove any personal ambitions from me and let me totally depend on you. Do in my life what needs to be done so that I am complete in you. Lord, I truly love you."

Amen.

DAY 14 THE GREAT COMMISSION

MATTHEW 28:16-20

BY DAN FIELDS

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20

In the Book of Acts we are told that following his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with his disciples, providing many convincing proofs that he was alive and also continuing their instruction about the kingdom of God.²¹ It was during this forty-day period of teaching and training, preceding his ascension, that Jesus gave what is commonly called "the Great Commission"--a formal statement of the work his disciples were to accomplish. In short, they were to mimic him and carry on the process of making disciples that he had initiated. Jesus taught them and made them

²¹ Acts 1:1-3

his disciples so they could go out to teach and make more disciples.

This formal commission of the eleven disciples took place on a mountain in Galilee that Jesus had specified. The eleven disciples are Matthew's identified recipients of the discipleship commission; although some Bible scholars have suggested that there may have been many other Christ-followers with them. These scholars identify Matthew's "mountain meeting" in Galilee with Paul's record of Jesus appearing to "more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time" (1 Cor. 15:6). This helps explain Matthew's confusing statement that when the disciples saw Jesus in Galilee, "they worshipped him; but some doubted." By this time the eleven Apostles were most likely fully convinced of his resurrection, but among those who travelled with them there were still some who doubted.

The commission Jesus gave to continue this disciple-making ministry was founded and built upon his power and authority--something the disciples were well aware of. Throughout his gospel, Matthew highlights the authority of Jesus. His authority was clearly revealed in both what he taught and how he taught (Matt 7:29). His power and authority were clearly demonstrated in his claims to forgive sin (Matt 9:6) and confirmed through his miraculous healings (Matt 8:1-15).

The power and authority of Jesus are clearly revealed by the other gospel writers as well, through his power over nature and also his power over Satan and his demonic forces. And finally, the divine power and majestic authority of Jesus was forcefully driven home in the minds and hearts of the Apostles by the resurrection event. They had no doubt about the degree or veracity of his authority. He had "ALL" authority, both in heaven and on earth!

And from his authority came the "therefore."
"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..."
The term "disciple" is the primary descriptive word used in the New Testament to identify and describe those men and women who believed in Jesus and followed him. This word, in its broad sense, simply referred to a "student"--someone who focused their mind on something or someone in order to learn more.

However, in the Jewish culture of the first century a disciple was more than just a student or pupil. A disciple was also a companion and imitator, someone who identified with, attached himself to, and lived with his teacher. Discipleship in Jewish culture involved a unique, personal learning relationship that was also characterized by loyalty, faithfulness, and commitment.

In his disciple-making commission, Jesus grammatically identifies a three-step pattern that is to be used in "making" disciples. He gives one

imperative (the command to "make" disciples) that is expanded and explained by three participial terms--going, baptizing, and teaching.

Going means we must cross some social, or cultural, or national boundaries. It may mean going to a new country, or to a new city, or only going across the street to meet a new neighbor. And those boundaries are to be crossed for a purpose--to share the good news and message about God's kingdom. Those who respond and accept that message are to be baptized and in this act be united with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection.²² These new converts are then to be well-taught, trained, and equipped so they can then go out and start this disciple-making process again.

It is quite possible that when the disciple-making commission was given to the Apostles, they may have experienced a bit of anxiety and fear. Their hearts must have failed them, for to go out and make disciples in all nations was a staggering mission. Did Jesus really expect this small band of Galileans to go out and conquer the whole world?

Yes he did, but not in their own strength or through their own skills and abilities. For with the disciple-making command and commission came a promise of presence and power. Jesus was not going to abandon them, even though he

²² Romans 6:2-3

would not be physically present with them. He would continue to be with them, guiding them and empowering them to successfully fulfill their mission.

It is important to recognize that the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28 stands in the immediate shadow of Jesus' resurrection. There could be no "Great Commission" were there no resurrection. This commission is directly tied to the divine authority that was confirmed and verified in the resurrection. And at the center of the Kingdom-message that is to be taken to "all nations" is the simple gospel story that "the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day..."²³

Today, the church exists because of the resurrection. Its message and mission are both centered in the resurrection. Its power is found in the continuing presence of the resurrected Lord. And its hope can best be described as a resurrection hope.

During this Easter season, may we, like those disciples on that Galilean mountain over two thousand years ago, come into the presence of the resurrected Lord and worship him (doubt is optional). And may we, too, in the shadow and power of that resurrection, "go and make disciples."

²³ | Corinthians 15:3-4

APPLICATION

1. The message of the resurrection is surely a wonderful message of hope and victory, but it also is a message that has practical and spiritual implications and consequences for our daily lives. Have you recognized and responded to those implications and consequences?
2. In Romans 1:4, the Apostle Paul says that Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead..." His divine authority was declared and confirmed in and through the resurrection. Have you fully yielded to his authority or are there parts of your life that you have held back from him?
3. In Philippians 3, Paul gives something of a personal testimony about his faith and relationship with Jesus. One of the things he says is: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..." Is this one of your "wants"? Has the "resurrection power" of Jesus been released in your life?

PRAYER

Father, may the reality of the resurrection stir our minds and hearts, and may the power of the resurrection move our feet, and hands, and tongues. In Jesus name,

Amen!