



LENT

A FORTY DAY JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY

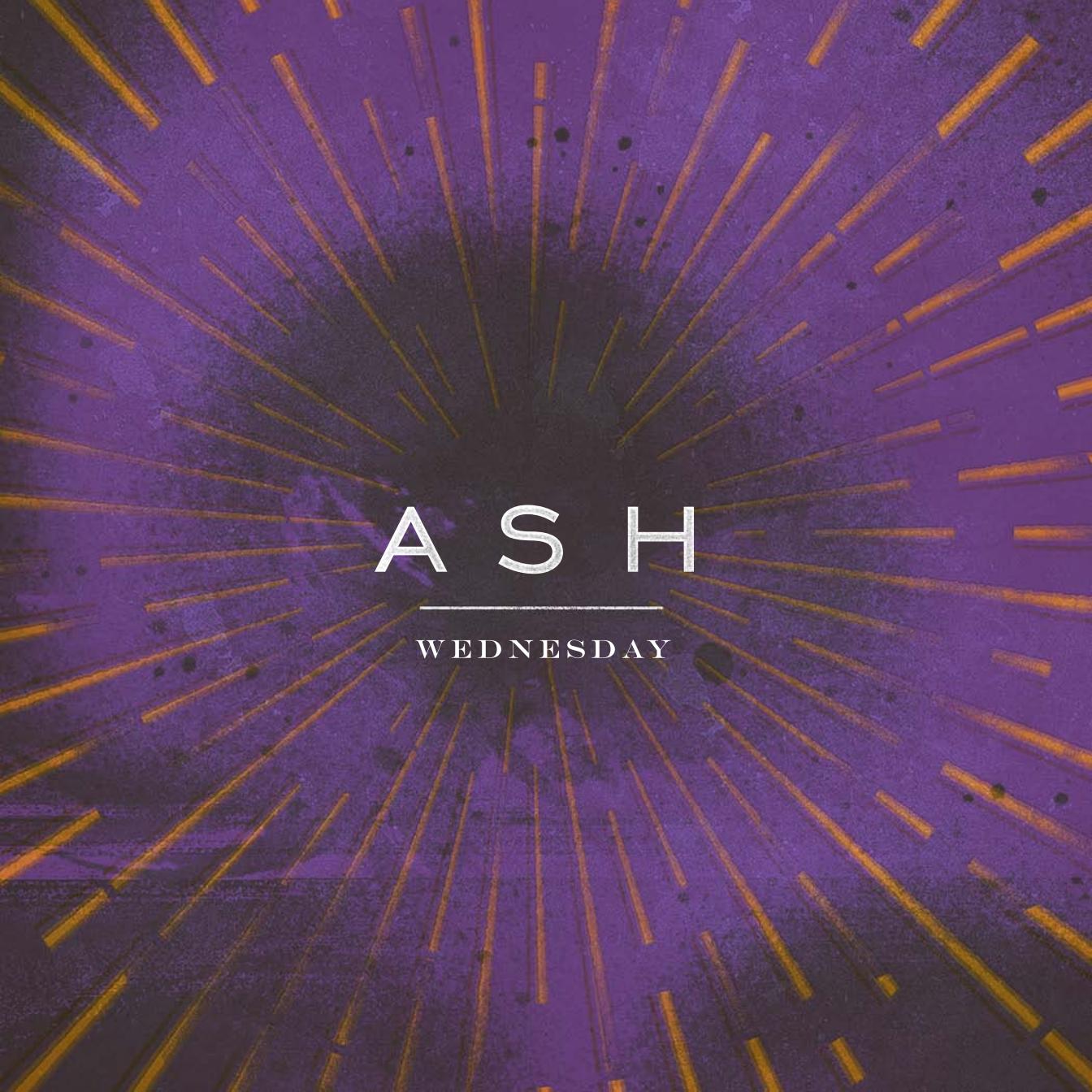
CHARLIE HALL

Welcome, my friends! We're so excited to begin this journey to the cross with you. When the people of a city take a season to be unified in prayer, turning from our dependencies, and looking on Jesus and the cross, shock waves are bound to happen. Let's stand in this season both individually and together. Let's throw our crutches to the side and let Jesus be better than anything else in our lives.

We worship so many things outside of the perfect Father Creator. I love to lift up "certainty" over God. I love to lift up the applaudable things I have done in life over God. I love to create a god from my imagination that will lead me through life as I see fit. My list goes deep, my friends. As we journey through this space called Lent, we look on Jesus Christ who makes all things new. He tramples on rebel lusts and lays our handmade gods to dust. He is the one who can break the grips and powers that these little gods or idols have on us.

Lent is a season in the Church that is kept to assist the heart in preparing and posturing to remember the Passion of Jesus Christ and the Cross. We will take a purposeful journey to expose our idols, the things we set up higher than God, and find our righteousness only in Christ and His work on the cross. Lent is a forty-day journey, much like Jesus's walk in the wilderness. During lent, we purposefully allow ourselves to become vulnerable to the power of God over our little gods. The fruits of setting ourselves in this season will produce contrition and repentance—not just simply sorrow, but a humble turning away from the things that keep us from affectionate, open-hearted, scripture-filled love for Jesus. Furthermore, we hope that by joining together for this season, the Church in the City is impacted by experiencing renewal, revival, and restoration to the Glory of Jesus!

Jesus, come and help fix our eyes on you! Tear down these idols, gods, and strongholds in our lives and set Yourself high above everything as the most beautiful thing we could ever behold. Thank You for what You have done on the cross, its present power in our lives today, and its perfect impact on the future!



A S H

W E D N E S D A Y

ASH WEDNESDAY

AARON ADDISON

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:5-6

There is a difference between knowing about God and knowing God. A man named Job was confronted with this reality. He was a righteous man who had heard about God. He heard about who God was and what God was like. But after a season of intense suffering, Job had an encounter with God and saw Him. The Lord spoke with him face to face in the midst of a storm. In that moment, his perspective of God changed. He saw God as He truly was. He was no longer a theory but a reality. The Lord is a holy God to be feared and a loving Father to be embraced. When Job saw God clearly, his perspective of himself changed as well. Job saw the depths of his sin. He saw the idols, or false gods, that he upheld above God. In light of the holiness and perfection of God, Job saw how impure and unworthy he was. He echoed the cry Isaiah gave when he had a similar experience with God: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” After such an encounter, Job despised himself, repented, and covered himself in dust and ashes.

As we enter into a season called Lent, we seek the same heart. Lent is a forty-day journey of repentance where we seek to see God and ourselves rightly. We strive to meet with God and turn from those things we set above him. The season of Lent begins with a day called Ash Wednesday. During this day, many Christians around the world place ashes on their forehead as a symbol of repentance, just as Job covered himself with ashes. It is a recognition of our lowliness before the presence of a holy God. In other words, we acknowledge that we are filthy and in need of the cleansing only Jesus can bring. It is a public confession that we have idols and sins that we place above God, and we are turning from those things back to the living God. Regardless of whether you cover yourself in ashes or not, this is a day to humble yourself and set your heart on repentance. It is a day to echo the cry of Job, who despised his sin and impurity and repented in dust and ashes.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Think through your relationship with God. Do you know about Him, or do you know Him?
In what areas are you seeking repentance? List out specific sins that you are asking God to cleanse you from.

OVERVIEW OF LENT

BEN NOCKELS

Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live on his presence. Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth. Hosea 6:1-3

Lent, the forty-day period of preparation for Easter, has begun. Lent reaches its climax during Holy Week, itself a journey within a journey. Henri Nouwen once described Lent as the season in which Winter and Spring struggle with each other for dominance. Others refer to this season as a time of “Bright Sadness.” Lent is a time of fasting and mourning, repentance and renewal; a time of identifying with Jesus in His suffering and death in order that we might identify with Him more fully in His resurrection and life.

It is to the vivid imagery of “Winter and Spring struggling for dominance” that I wish to return our collective gaze. This picture gives us a glimpse and foreshadows for us what can happen within our hearts and lives over these forty sacred days.

It’s so very earthy and real time. You can literally bear witness to the struggle transpiring. The struggle is all around (and in) us. An outward expression of an internal reality. The created universe serving as a guide to the journey toward our own new creation. Everywhere you look, you can see the world as it is and the world as it could be. Winter and Spring. Old and new. Despair and hope. Death and life. A not-so-amiable team of rivals. Neither submitting to the other. Back and forth they go.

The struggle for dominance lingers on. Winter looms large. It kicks and it screams. It puts up one serious fight. And just when you think you’re in the clear and you’d swear this cold dead season has seen its last days, it rears its ugly head for one last laugh and final gasp. Winter has become an obstinate and completely unwanted guest who has long overstayed its welcome.

But then all at once out of nowhere, Mother Nature runs Old Man Winter off into the distance. And Spring comes bursting forth, right before our very eyes, in all of its glorious splendor, to take its rightful place. The earth awakes and shakes off her slumber. What once lay dormant has now becomes vibrant. What seems to have taken place in one single instance has long been brewing under the surface in the deepest recesses of being. Colors pop and sounds emerge. The symphony of life is in full roar. It’s as if the songbirds themselves are ushering in new creation with each chirp, tweet, and whistle. Trees bud and flowers bloom. A fresh aroma fills the air. It’s a full-bodied, firsthand, multi-sensory experience second to none. Energy palpable. Borderline intoxicating. Movement everywhere. Life abounding.

The fight finished and the victor crowned. Winter threatened to conquer but Spring prevailed in the end. Spring wins. It always has. It always will. And that, my friends, is the very best of news.



GREATNESS OF GOD
& LOWLINESS OF MAN

REJOICE WITH TREMBLING

JEFF NINE

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Psalm 2

God's greatness is evident. All one must do is look at the universe and read the first chapter of Genesis to come to terms with the unfathomable power and goodness of this God. He merely speaks and the sun begins to burn, Saturn grows rings, continents move, and animals spring to life and fill the earth. He exhales and Adam breathes his first. He opens his mouth and the garden of all gardens blossoms around the first humans, giving them food and shelter and domain. And to top it all off: He is there, with them. His presence their sustenance. His nearness their life.

This is God on display. His power and authority are absolute. His purposes are good and right. His holiness is beyond compare. But how do we mortals respond to that greatness? With humility? With repentance? With submission? No. We scoff. We rebuff. We reject. We scorn. Psalm 2 brings each of us face to face with the many ways in which we have disregarded God and treated Him as common and unworthy, and the psalmist calls us to repent. We are called to recognize the foolishness of treating God as common or something to be trifled with. Instead of scoffing in pride, we are called to fear. Instead of posturing in strength, we are called to tremble.

What does this fear look like? Does it cause us to cower beneath his inapproachability? Does it cause us to scurry away from his impending judgment? No. It looks like obedience and joy. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." May that be our aim.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Take a minute and ponder the greatness of God. Does that recognition lead to retreat and hiding or to worship and pursuit? Spend a few minutes asking the Holy Spirit to lead you to place of fear and reverence, where you "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" because you have beheld His goodness and His greatness.

GLORIOUS CONDESCENSION

JEFF NINE

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Matthew 26:36-39

When you think of Jesus, what comes to mind? Second person of the Trinity? God incarnate? The one who created the entire universe, and for whom it was created? Do you see Him as the one who actively holds everything together and sustains all things? The one who raised the dead, healed the lepers, and gave sight to the blind? The one who conquered Satan, death, hell, and the grave? Of course all of these things are true and testify to the unimaginable greatness of who Jesus is. But what does He do with this greatness? Does He flaunt it? Lord it over us? Detach Himself from us in holy separation?

No. He lays it down.

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” Isaiah 53:3-4

You see, as wonderful as Jesus is, His greatness is on display most clearly in the misery and anguish He willingly suffered. The untouchable one wounded deeply. The impenetrable one pierced with grief. The creator of the world alone, rejected, and weeping, knowing that He will soon be slaughtered by the very people He created. And in this moment, Matthew gives us a window into both the humility and the humiliation of Jesus, to show us how truly great He is.

Jesus didn't merely draw close to us. He took on our struggles, our pain, our lowliness. He hurt more deeply than any of us have ever hurt. He was betrayed with more vitriol than any has ever experienced. He was lonelier than any of us have ever been. He cried with a ferocity that none of us can imagine. He did not just walk in our shoes, he took on our brokenness and died. In the midst of all the things that declare the wonder of Jesus stands the distinguishing mark of His greatness, His glorious condescension. When you look at Jesus, don't see His greatness in how high He ascends. Behold His greatness in how “low” He became. His greatness is clear in His power and goodness, but it is manifest in His stooping, in His sharing, in His suffering.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Take a minute to ask the Holy Spirit to show you more clearly the wonder and awe of Jesus's humility, that you might see how great He truly is. Spend a few minutes thanking Him for His glorious condescension, and rest in the fact that He knows your struggles and pain, because He bore them.

THE SPACE BETWEEN

DAVID ADAIR

For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself. Job 9:32-35

These words of Job are rooted in an awareness of two things. The first is the overwhelming greatness of God. The second is the reality of his own indescribable lowliness in comparison. Evidence of Job's awe is found in thoughts of God like, "one could not answer him once in a thousand times," "he removes mountains," "who alone stretched out the heavens," and "who does great things beyond searching out, and marvelous things beyond number." In his suffering, Job wanted an audience with God. He wanted to meet with his Creator. As much as he longed to speak with God, he knew it was impossible, essentially asking "How can someone as small as me deal with someone as big as God?" King David similarly thought, "How could someone as big as God deal with someone as small as me?" when he wrote, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" - Psalm 8:3-4

Job's awareness of God's greatness and his own lowliness, broke his heart. He was aware of the space between—a space torn into place when man rebelled against God. The need to cross the space between drove Job's need for an "arbiter"—a person who has the power to reconcile, a person of authority, a person who can stand in the gap between Job and God.

Thousands of years have come and gone since Job spoke of this need, but the need abides today. To truly live, not just exist, man needs direct communion with our Creator. It is what we were created for. "There is no arbiter between us" was Job's bad news. The Apostle Paul answers this bad news in one verse in his letter to Timothy writing: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. 2:5

That is the Gospel in one sentence. It is fundamental Christianity. There is a God whose greatness is unimaginable. Next to His greatness, humanity is beyond lowly. We cannot get to Him on our own because of our sin. However, "there is one mediator between God and men"! This mediator is the man Jesus Christ, and when anyone surrenders to Jesus, they find that the space between God and man is no longer a chasm. In place of the space is now a Rock. One can have surefooted access to God through Jesus.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Think today on the greatness of God. In light of that greatness, join with men like Job, Isaiah, and Paul and consider "I am of small account." With the greatness of God and your own lowliness in mind, pray that the Holy Spirit stirs your affections for Jesus as the one Mediator. The greatest act in the history of the Universe was accomplished by Christ when He made a way to cover the space between.

A LESSON FROM CREATION

DAVID ADAIR

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:28-31

Nothing in all of creation continues in its own strength; all things eventually die without renewal. Look outside and consider a tree. When drought comes, the tree dies without water. Likewise, life withers away from an uprooted cut off from nutrients from the soil. Humanity is the same in relation to God. Just as a weakened body is strengthened by a healthy meal, the soul of a person is fueled by God.

Taking in God's Word fuels our hearts. Gospel Community gives us life. Corporate worship feeds our soul, or as pastor Charles Spurgeon said, "the soul-fattening table" of communion is life giving to our hearts. As believers, we must wait upon God like a flower waits on rain. As lowly people dependent upon a great God, we must bloom in His light to grow and not close away in darkness. Without constant restoration from the Holy Spirit, we cannot hope to battle our own flesh, attacks from the enemy, or even hope to mature as disciples.

Every woman and man has no escape from weariness, growing faint, and exhaustion apart from the Gospel. The Son of God, who was eternally strong, became weak so those who trust in Him may find strength. Some of Jesus's last words on the cross were, "I thirst!" Remember those words today. Jesus knew thirst so those who trust in Him may never be thirsty again. So often when we are tired, we search for rest in all the wrong places. True rest is not found in a place nor a time. True rest is found in the person and presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Where are you looking for ultimate rest that will not satisfy? A place, a hobby, a relationship? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you places you're going that will never satisfy. Ask Him to renew your strength in Christ.

THE GREATNESS & LOWLINESS OF MAN

BEN NOCKELS

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

Joel 2:12-14

You’ve heard it said time and time again that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, and it is—the very best of news. However good you believe and have experienced it to be, it is always and forever better than that. It’s not so much that it’s too good to be true but rather that it’s too good not to be true. The ultimate fairytale if you will. The grandest “Once upon a time...” ever told. The most climactic “Happily ever after” ever conceived. “Of all the glad things in this world the gladdest of them all.”

But long before the gospel is good news, it is bad—the very worst of all news. The Season of Lent heralds the dreaded news “that man is a sinner, to use the old word, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart.” We must not try to detour around the bad news for the good. There is no detour. The road to our salvation runs through our sin.

“What we’re talking about when we talk about sin is not just our tendency to lurch and stumble and screw up by accident, our passive role as agents of entropy. Sin is our active inclination to break stuff, ‘stuff’ here including moods, promises, relationships we care about, and our own well-being and other people’s, as well as material objects. This is bad news, and like all bad news, is not very welcome, especially if you let yourself take seriously the implication that we actually want the destructive things we do, that they are not just an accident that keeps happening to poor little us, but part of our nature. Sin is in here not out there. The bad news is bad news about us, not just about other people.”

The only appropriate response (the one Lent makes available to us) to this bad news is one of confession that says: “I’m the problem.” This is the dark tragedy for which we must learn to “suffer the sadness of.” And so we fast and we weep and we mourn; we rend our hearts (not just our garments) and smear black ash across our faces.

“Come let us return unto the Lord...”



JESUS IS BETTER

JESUS IS THE BETTER REST

SETH STEWART

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Dorothy Sayers has no kind thing to say about sloth. “It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing. Lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for. We have known it far too well for many years...”

She continues by noticing that we, have masked sloth as business. Adding, that all other vices provide covering fire, distracting us from Sloth’s advance. Gluttony offers furious indulgence; Covetousness gets us productive to beat the Joneses; Wrath cleverly tells us that our only response to an evil world is the loud, vicious, incessant cursing of it. It’s all busy-ness, but it’s also all sloth. A refusal to do what we ought - fight sin; and a refusal to rest in what we ought - Jesus.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Jesus says our weariness comes first. He expects tired souls. The only prerequisite for coming to Jesus, is being heavy laden. When we come poor, and tired, and weary, he provides the rest. When the battle to fight sin is hardest, and our weakness most evident, it’s then Jesus breaks out the softest pillows, and warmest blankets, and most fortifying drinks. Forget the broken promises of sloth and come to Jesus, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Recognize the places that you are most busy. What godly virtues are you neglecting due to your busy-ness?

JESUS IS THE BETTER PLEASURE

SETH STEWART

***I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness...
as a bride adorns herself with jewels....*** Isaiah 61:10

Our salvation is a pleasurable thing. It causes rejoicing, it elicits exultation. Being in Jesus, is like wearing your wedding gown. This pleasure has been felt by every bride when she found the dress, and by every man when he saw it come down the aisle. Jesus offers real pleasure in his robes of righteousness. Yet, we settle for lesser things. Further, we have bought the lie that lust determines our actions. For the marketing professors tell us so. Lust is mathematics. It's equations will get us to buy beer, cars, and watch Game of Thrones. The Christian struggle isn't recognizing lust, it's recognizing it can be fought. Sexual desires are not determinative. Jesus is. Genes will never be stronger than Jesus.

But fighting lust isn't primarily physical, it's spiritual. We never pursue lust for it's own sake. We worship Lust, as a means to an end. Offering our bodies in order to be more secure, comfortable, approved, or powerful. Pick your poisonous idolatry. Each is irrelevant, because Jesus offers a better pleasure. He offers a security better than lover's arms, and one lasts longer than the night. A comfort that is heavenly, eternal, and softer than words cooed at a bar. A royal and divine approval. An infinite power - better than play, pause, or rewind- it destroys sin, saves souls, comforts hearts. In this we rejoice, in this we revel. Compared to this, how can lust compete?

Rejoice in the Lord!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Besides regularly scheduled worship, when have you last rejoiced in God? Write out three things (these could be personal, but also could be Scriptural) God has given you that cause you to rejoice. Thank him for these things at breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

JESUS IS THE BETTER TREASURE

ANDY EDWARDS

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

Food is good to the taste buds and material items are exciting to purchase and enjoy. Actually, a great steak and sweet potato can bring satisfaction after a long day of work, and new pair of shoes, or a nice Patagonia sweater might make you feel quite unique! The world tells us that getting the newest Apple iPhone or iPad will bring fulfillment. Is the world right? Yes and no. We will be fulfilled for a time, but the problem is, these things only bring temporary happiness or satisfaction. These items, whether food or material possessions, will completely fade away. They cannot remain forever!

There is only one who will actually satisfy us and never fade away. The Bible calls Him the bread of life, the living water, and the pearl of great price. His name is Jesus Christ. Let's pursue Him this week and feast and drink Him to the fullest. He promises to never leave or forsake us and will bring real, lasting joy and satisfaction. Drink and eat from His table today! Jesus Christ is the better treasure!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

What possessions or foods do you run to for comfort? How can you spend time dwelling on Jesus today? Where is your treasure today?

JESUS IS THE BETTER SAVIOR

ANDY EDWARDS

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" Luke 9:23-26

Have you ever thought of yourself as a god? I know its a silly question, but let's think about it. Do you live as though you were your own god? You make decisions based on what you want or what you think would be best. You depend on yourself to provide for your family or you depend on your own strength to try and overcome weakness and sin. You basically do things in your life that would most benefit, YOU. Have you noticed this seems to end in emptiness and a deep lack of joy and fulfillment. We don't make very good gods!

There is only one who can actually save us and lead us through this life. The Bible calls Him the creator and redeemer (Colossians 1:15-20). His name is Jesus Christ. Let's confess our weakness and pride and ask Him to come and fill us with the Holy Spirit! It gets so tiring trying to live as though we were God. Jesus actually holds all things together and we can rest knowing He is in control of all. Let's confess our need for Him, deny ourselves and realize today, that He is the better Savior!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Do you need to repent of self worship today? How can you better depend on Jesus?

JESUS IS THE BETTER PROVIDER

DAVID BOWDEN

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7

Envy is the sinful belief that something else can satisfy you more than Jesus. Envy causes us to view that which we do not possess as infinitely more attractive, and that which we do possess as infinitely less noticeable. Nowhere is this more true than in the way we overlook and ignore the riches we have in Christ Jesus so that we may notice and fixate on the fleeting gains of this world. To the Church in Laodicea, John wrote in Revelation 3:17 “You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” These people, who John famously condemned as being “lukewarm,” have gained much in a worldly sense and have given up their need for needing Jesus. In other words, these lukewarm Christians have found all their sufficiency in themselves and have forgotten their deep need for Christ. Believing that something else other than Christ satisfies our needs is the black heart of envy. The existence of envy obliterates the existence of our need for Christ. Envy blinds our eyes not only to our need for Jesus, but also to our actual depraved condition. These lukewarm Christians thought they were rich because they possessed on earth what others did not, but they were actually poor, blind, and naked.

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire,” John continues in verse 18, “so that you may be rich.” The Christian economy adds a new currency to the equation of envy. God’s riches cause such inflation in the Christian economy that all other possessions are devalued to the point of worthlessness, and only God’s currency remain lucrative. The astounding truth of these verses is found in the paradox between verses 17 and 18. If these lukewarm Christians are poor how are they to buy gold from God? The truth is that they cannot. They can only release their hold on the envy for their own possessions and receive the free gift of the riches they have in God. That is the beauty of the Christian’s battle with envy. Envy says, “You will never have enough.” Jesus says, “You have all that you need in me.” Envy says, “You can never earn enough to fill your desires.” Jesus says, “I earned everything you will ever need.” Envy says, “Look at all you don’t have.” Jesus says, “Look at all you do have in me.” As sinful humans, we long to be our own providers. But Jesus is the better provider for He has bought for us everything we will ever need and more, and lavishes it upon us through the grace of His blood. Jesus is better.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Ask God to show you areas in your own life where He is calling you to be content. Where have you have trusted in the gains of this world over the riches we have in Christ?

Meditate on the fleeting nature of your worldly possessions compared to the satisfaction of eternal reward in God.

JESUS IS THE BETTER JUDGE

DAVID BOWDEN

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Romans 5:8-9

Dante, in his famed Divine Comedy, identified wrath as the “love of justice perverted to revenge and spite.” As creatures made by the Creator, we have a God-given impulse to see wrongs righted. This desire is called justice and is a core characteristic of God and therefore a core characteristic of those made in His image. However, this desire for justice is often corrupted when we turn our personal injuries into divine law and our personal revenge into divine justice. In other words, when our feelings are hurt and our pride offended we cry out for undue justice for our personal injuries. This seemingly valid desire easily gives birth to sinful wrath. As Christians we must come to know that Jesus is better than our desire for retribution.

Wrath is an affront to God and a sin because no one on earth can experience a pure holy wrath. A pure holy wrath can only come from a pure holy judge, and none of us qualify for this post. When we act out in vengeful wrath, we are taking the exclusive claims to justice that God alone holds and warping them to our own pleasure and vindication. Romans 12:19 commands us, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” God is the only pure and holy judge who can rightfully enact justice.

The remarkable truth is that when we were sinful enemies of God, Jesus became flesh and bore God’s wrath for us. The only one who could righteously bring wrath on us lovingly took it on Himself. If He who is most justified to pour out holy wrath could instead show mercy, can’t we who are most unjustified to pour out our sinful wrath show mercy as well?

Seeking Jesus is better than seeking revenge, anger, and wrath because in Him we have been freed from the only just and righteous wrath. Jesus is the better judge because in waiting for His perfect judgment, we are given freedom to love our enemies. Jesus is the better justice because in Him we are both freed from the wrath we deserve and assured that the Lord will repay the evildoer. Jesus is better than vindicating ourselves before others because He has vindicated us before the Father. Jesus is better.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Take time to reflect on Romans 5:8-9 and the truth that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. This incredible reality should change the way we relate to other people. Ask God to show you relationships where you are harbouring anger or seeking revenge. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften your heart and lead you towards repentance. Run to Jesus and trust Him as the better judge!



3

IT WAS OUR SIN

CLEAN CLOTHES

RYAN HOYT

Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." Zechariah 3:3-4

I used to work in a Special Education program in a elementary school. Our program offered services to a wide range of kids. Some of our kids struggled with minor learning disabilities, while others were confined to wheelchairs and feeding tubes. Somewhere in the middle of this spectrum was Dustin. Dustin was a 4-year-old non-verbal boy with Downs Syndrome. If you have ever spent time around anyone with Downs Syndrome, then you know that they are typically the sweetest people you'll ever meet. Dustin was no different. He almost always smiled, wanted to be held or hold someone's hand and he had a great sense of humor! There was, however, one circumstance that adversely affected his disposition. Dustin's parents were either not capable or unwilling to provide the extra care that he required. Two or three days a week he came to school with grime on his face, dirty clothes and a soiled diaper. In response, one of the teacher aides bathed him, provided him with clean clothes and a fresh diaper. After getting cleaned up, Dustin was always happy, and although he was unable to speak, his smile showed that he was extremely grateful.

Like Dustin, we are dirty and helpless. This is not because of parental irresponsibility but because of sin. Sin is pervasive, controlling and inescapable apart from the person and work of Jesus. Dustin was incapable of washing himself; he needed another to wash him and so do we! Because of our sin, we are incapable of cleaning ourselves from sin's stains. God took away our sin-stained, tattered rags and replaced them with the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Take a minute to reflect upon this truth: no matter how dirty you may be, Jesus came into your world, washed away your sin and gave you his clean clothes!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Take time to reflect on Zechariah 3:4. Ask God to show you any ways that you are striving to clothe yourself with "pure vestments". Rest in the truth that it is Jesus who cleans and clothes you with new clothes, something you can not do on your own.

YOUR ADVOCATE

RYAN HOYT

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1

Do you ever feel like God is going to give up on you? After all, John writes with the hope that we will stop sinning. I don't know about you, but I have not stopped sinning. Thank God that John wrote the second sentence of verse one. Jesus is your advocate! But what does that mean?

As a probation officer, it was one of my duties to stand before a judge and explain whether or not my client was adhering to his probation plan. If my client was holding up his end of the bargain, then I would become like a second defense attorney and argue for him. I acted as his advocate; arguing on his behalf. On the other hand, if he was not adhering to his probation plan, I joined the prosecution. As a probation officer, my advocacy for my clients was totally conditional.

As Christians, we have a much better advocate. His name is Jesus, and unlike me, his advocacy is totally unconditional! Although we are not on probation, God is always aware of our sin. If we did not have Jesus as our advocate, God would be within his rights to punish us for the sins we continuously commit. The great news for the believer is that Jesus Christ will always speak up for you! He will always defend you! His perfect life, death and resurrection, has uniquely qualified him to speak for you! Jesus came into our world and lived a perfectly innocent life, but in order to be your advocate he also had to die a guilty person's death. Because of his incredible love for you, he chose to die that death. On the cross, Jesus bore the weight and punishment for your sin. Jesus completely exhausted God's wrath toward your sin. Because of this sacrifice, Jesus can, and does, remind the Father that he has already paid the price of your punishment when you continue in your sin.

So, if you feel that God is going to give up on you because you have not stopped sinning; STOP! You have an advocate who will always, always, no matter what speak for you! He is in your corner. He is on your team. He will never abandon you and he will always be your advocate!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

How does it feel to know that you have an unconditional advocate in Jesus as a believer? Write down these emotions and allow them to be launching pads for thanksgiving as you are reminded of God's love and mercy.

EYE SURGERY

ANDY DOWDELL

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Matthew 7:3

"When God wants to show you what human nature is like separated from Himself, He shows it to you in yourself... [T]hen you know that in reality there is no criminal half as bad as you yourself could be without His grace." - Oswald Chambers

The above quote is from a devotion in My Utmost for His Highest, and was one of those "ah-hah" moments for me during my college years. Having accepted Christ as a child, I can't say I ever went through a rebellious stage. I was a "good" kid... I didn't argue with my parents, was a good student in school, and generally got along with everyone. However, after my first year of college, I was tired of just being "good", and I rebelled. I truly believe that God allowed me to wander for a short time so I could learn the lesson that Oswald Chambers wrote about in this devotion. He wanted me to see the seriousness of my sin and to get a taste of what my life would be like without His saving grace. I still shudder to think who I'd be without His intervention! Left to my own desires, I'm a mess. I'm glad He showed me this truth the day I read that devotion.

Perhaps you came to faith in Christ at an early age and have been a "good" person who hasn't committed any of the "big" sins in life. This can, perhaps, put us in a very dangerous position. How easy it can be to forget that Jesus had to die for each and every sin that we, ourselves, have carried out in rebellion against the Father. How easy it is for us to look at the mess in other people's lives and think, "They should know better...tisk, tisk!" Oh, that God would show us clearly who we are without the cleansing blood of Jesus, and not let us forget the deadness that he raised us out of! I pray that God would give us, His Church, a renewed sense of mercy towards one another and especially to those still dead in their sin. We all need a little eye surgery from time to time!

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

How often are you disgusted by the sin you see in other people? Why are we always so quick to see and judge the sin in others long before we see it in ourselves? What would happen if we started exposing our own sin and bringing it to the light instead of trying to expose or fix the sin in everyone else?

THE WALKING DEAD

ANDY DOWDELL

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2: 1-3

Streets littered with vacant cars, empty neighborhoods, half burned out buildings... then you see it... a person limping down the middle of the road. He turns around suddenly and growls... a ghastly sight meets you. Hollow eyes, pale and torn flesh covers his face. It's a zombie!

I hate to admit it, but I'm a big fan of the show The Walking Dead. Obviously, though, the title takes on more meaning when you read the second chapter of Ephesians. In actuality (at least spiritually speaking), this program is probably the most authentic reality TV show out there. Compared to the holiness and righteousness of the Kingdom of God, how ghastly and evil our world must look in its current state. Because of our sin that's exactly what we were... spiritual zombies. Dead... but walking.

As Paul says in verse three, "we all once lived in the passions of our flesh... and were by nature children of wrath." Our very natures (not just our actions) were sinful and separated us from the love of God. This is spiritual deadness. Dead is dead, and nothing in and of ourselves can bring us back to life. How awesome then is the "but" in verse four! The story doesn't end for us in death, but in being made alive! Is this not the greatest miracle in the universe? God, in his great love, takes dead souls (rightfully following their master to eternal damnation) and not only brings life, but even seats us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Meditate on Ephesians 2:4-7 and thank God that He rescued you from death!
"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

THE GUILTY FOR THE INNOCENT

RYAN GIKAS

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:4-5

I remember a day in elementary school when I was standing in line after recess with the rest of my classmates. My teacher made it clear that she wanted there to be no talking as we made our way down the hall, but some of my classmates didn't take her seriously. For a reason I will never know, she was convinced that I was the perpetrator even though I passionately defended myself. I was scolded in the hallway and told that I would not be joining the other kids on the playground the next day. Even as a young child I remember the deep sense of injustice and helplessness I felt as I faced a relentless accuser. There was nothing I could do to convince her that I was not guilty and I was punished for an act I did not commit.

There is a lie hiding in the shadows of my soul that I am constantly preaching into truthful submission. It creeps to the surface and reveals itself in my closest relationships and lures me into self-righteousness and a sense of entitlement. The lie is that I am innocent and the truth is that I am guilty, not of simply talking in line but of crimes much more serious. The truth is that Jesus was undeservingly pierced for my transgressions and crushed for my iniquities. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Is 53:7) Jesus willingly gave his innocent life for mine and said not a word in his defense. Our Savior knew what had to be done and he did it for the joy set before him. May we live humbly, as those who are guilty but have been found innocent because of the blood of Jesus.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

In what ways have you made little of your own sin? Allow these to be opportunities for repentance and receive the forgiveness that comes only through the atoning blood of Jesus.

REPENTANCE THAT LEADS TO JOY

RYAN GIKAS

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8-9

One of the beautiful things about Lent is that as we carve out space in this season of repentance, we are strengthened in our ability to admit that we are in need of a Savior. The goal is for us to grow quick in our recognition of sin and to grow even quicker in our turning to Jesus upon realizing it. J.D. Greear says that, “Repentance and faith are heart postures you take toward the finished work of Christ”. This heart posture is a fitting picture of the journey we are taking together toward the cross in this season.

In the past, my posture before God could be likened more to the Heisman trophy, carefully guarding my heart in one arm and the other arm stretched out in resistance toward Him. As we mature in Christ, we are quicker to confess and receive the grace that He lavishes on us; we are quicker to present our hearts to the Father and receive the liberation that comes with his sovereign work of sanctification. We find that the purpose of repentance is to deepen our joy and satisfaction in Christ, not to lead us into despair.

May we be quick to confess our sin and may our experience of Christ be all the sweeter because we have tasted of his all satisfying grace once again.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Does your repentance lead to deeper joy and satisfaction in Jesus? If no, what gospel truths are you not believing?

Spend time thanking God for his faithfulness to forgive and meditate on what it means for us to be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Greear, J.D. (2013-01-31). Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved (p. 8). . Kindle Edition.



4

IN CHRIST ALONE

BEING IN CHRIST ALONE

KIMBERLY MCCAULEY

In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring..." Acts 17:28

It is so interesting to me to think about moving around and breathing and walking simply because Christ allows me to. It is only in Him that I can do any of these things. It is the very breath He gives that fills up my lungs. It is Him who promises to give words to the mouth He created. It is Him who promises to equip me where He calls me. It is Him who promises to sustain me daily.

Sometimes, however, I simply forget that. Not out of rebellion or rejection, but simply out of neglect. God continually called the Israelites to remember what He had done for them. To remember the promises and how He proved faithful. He called people to remember. Malachi 3:16 talks about how they wrote a book of remembrance. Hebrews 2:1 talks about how we must be careful to pay attention lest we drift away. Drifting isn't running away; it isn't rebellion. It's neglect. It is losing our first love like the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:4). It is so important to remember Him and His promises.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Ask God to awaken your heart to the things that you have assumed are in existence because you are doing something. As He reveals those places, turn to Him in repentance, for He is quick to forgive.

Ask Him to come and stir awe and wonder for the very breath that fills up your lungs. Ask Him to remind you of His grandeur and glory and majesty that you may not lose your first love but find your very being in Him alone.

STRENGTH IN CHRIST ALONE

KIMBERLY MCCAULEY

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God... Ephesians 6:10-18

The world around us clearly communicates the idea that we have to be strong. Maybe we don't always see how God is fighting for us, so we believe we have to do it ourselves and in our own power. It is easy to try and be strong in our own strength. It is easy to fight our own battles. It is easy to fight to make our own way. Here Paul is calling us to be strong in the Lord. He is calling us to stand in the strength of HIS might.

The good news of the gospel is that we no longer have to be strong in our own ability. It is Christ's strength that clothes us. Because of His sacrifice, we are clothed with His righteousness and His strength. He calls us to stand firm in Him. The victory is His alone! I think of 2 Chronicles where the Israelites were about to go into battle. They arose in the morning and worshipped God before doing so, and the Lord won the battle for them, turning the enemy on themselves. He sees each one of us. He is all powerful and mighty to save and deliver. He is fully capable of providing everything we need.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Where are you trusting in your own strength instead of being strong *in the Lord*? Ask the Lord to reveal those broken places. Ask Him to show you what you can't see. Repent and believe! Ask Him to be the strength that you are trying to be on your own.

ARROGANCE & EMBARRASSMENT: NONE OF US CAN OFFER ANYTHING

CHARLIE HALL

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. Ephesians 2:8-9

There's a beautiful story in the book of John about a woman caught in the act of adultery. I'm struck with the shame and embarrassment that this woman would feel.

She was brought in by the “perfect” white-robed, religious, moral men to the feet of Jesus. There publicly, Jesus was being pushed to agree that she should be stoned for her overt wrongs—sin. So Jesus stands inside the crowd and looks to his left, where the put together, “clean,” men stand. Then Jesus looks to his right where the naked, embarrassed woman lies weeping. Most of you know the story, but in that moment that woman would have needed to receive more grace, mercy, and forgiveness than the arrogant, religious men who were accusing her could ever know or experience. Finally, Jesus turns and opposes the proud group of men and then stoops to wrap this woman in His righteousness, not because she did anything to deserve it but because of who He is. Furthermore, Jesus would have loved the religious men to derobe their religious clothing and allow Him to clothe them in His righteousness as well.

In my early years of faith, I thought I was the gift and that God had really chosen wisely when He chose me. I was growing and learning about God. I was telling people about all He was doing with me, and I had story after story about all that I was accomplishing.

As time and life went on, I grew to realize, through exhaustion, that I was more like the man on the stretcher that was lowered to Jesus through a hole cut in the roof. I am more like the naked woman that lays embarrassed before Jesus's compassion. I am more like the dirty, smelly, strung-out prodigal son that is doing my best to humbly walk home. I am more like Lazarus who had laid dead for days when Jesus wept and raised him back to life. I am the guy that has to be lifted up to the waters by Jesus to become healed. When I look back at my journey I'm so grateful that God slowly caused me to realize that I brought nothing to our relationship. That I had no righteousness of my own, and that nothing saves me but Christ. There's literally no reason for me to boast. I didn't earn His love. He pursued me and clothes me in His rightness as I set myself in the power of the cross. Arrogance and embarrassment are both rooted in me!

Today I ask Jesus to cover my nakedness and strip the arrogance off of me to clothe me with His righteousness.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Take time to list your places of self-righteous arrogance. These are ways that you feel like you are earning God's love because of how well you are doing or the amount of boxes you can check off, or the gold stars you've attained for good behavior. These are places you might be boasting in your heart or to the people around you. Now derobe yourself from these things and simply find yourself in the compassion of Jesus, not how good you are but how good He is.

ADDICTIONS, ADDITIONS, AND TRUE SHALOM

CHARLIE HALL

For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Romans 10:3-4

There's a craving that is built into all of us, a longing and hunger to be right with the world around us, right with ourselves and ultimately right with God. The Hebrew word Shalom encompasses all of those hungers—its simplest definition is “completeness.” While I was a kid, I searched for completeness in my performances.

As a younger man, I tried to find my completeness in attachments, like what I did, or whom I was connected to. And even today I find myself worshipping the false god we call “certainty.” Many of us just can't find the peace that we are clawing for, so we find ways to physically circumvent the interior struggle and pain with momentary pauses that come from drugs, alcohol, sex, relationships, hobbies—the list goes on and on. When we use the most beautiful, applauded, cheered things that we do or attain to gain a sense of rightness, we simply replace the peace that Jesus can bring to our barren hearts. Our accolades are great gifts but when we lean on them as crutches, these “beautiful” gods have a sneaky way of climbing up into a place they don't belong.

All of the above is very normal. It's human. It's how we are born. When I sit with my friends who are heavily addicted to (fill in the blank), I don't shake my head in disgust. I think to myself, “well yea! this is normal.” But to be clear, the norm kills us, confuses us, and creates false and momentary shalom. Our only hope for full peace is putting our faith in Christ. We can't be bad enough or good enough to attain rightness. The completeness and peace we seek with the world, ourselves, and God Himself are found in Jesus. We can't do it! We can't get to God no matter how wise or intelligent we become. There is no amount of money or even poverty, no amount of relationships, no amount of sex that can get us peace with God. It's not who you know or who you have avoided, it's not where you've been, or where you're headed, it's not the depth of how you hurt others or how merciful you can be to your offenders that removes that canyon between us and the Father. There is no accolade or loss, there's no amount of religion or rebellious acts, it's not where you live or where you go to church, it's not what you've done or haven't done that brings the completeness we search for. Jesus is the only thing that makes us right, complete, and whole! We cannot establish our own righteousness. Weary friend come and let your exhaustion fall to the side, quit climbing that invisible ladder, rest and let Jesus be the one to make you righteous and bring true shalom.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

List some ways you're attempting to find shalom, rightness, and completion with God apart from Christ and the cross. Many times, these things are exhausting you.

Spend time laying these things to the side, moving them out of your patterns of life, or reappropriating them to the right places. Don't just stop there; put Jesus, Prince of Shalom and Peace, as the center, the most beautiful, powerful thing in your life, and rest in His finished work on the cross.

HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OURS

AARON ADDISON

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

When we see the standard of holiness that God lays on us, it is frightening. Even Jesus himself told us that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter into heaven. The scribes and Pharisees were the religious elite of the day. These guys were pastors and spiritual leaders. They had scripture memorized and followed it as best as they could. A normal person would see these men and say, "There is a righteous man. God is surely pleased with him." But when Jesus comes on the scene, he blows all that up. He tells us that our righteousness must exceed that of those who had everything together. Find the most righteous man in your city, and your righteousness must exceed his, or you won't be welcomed into heaven. This is terrifying, because if we are honest with ourselves, we are not even close to being that righteous.

When Jesus came to earth, he didn't sweep sin under the rug. He held the same standard that his Father did. Only the righteous will enter into heaven, and none of us is righteous. But Jesus came to save us. Jesus is the only one who ever lived a completely righteous life. He is the only one whose righteousness exceeded every other man's righteousness. He faithfully and perfectly followed God. And today, Jesus is offering that righteousness to us. We don't have to earn it. We don't have to do it ourselves. We simply receive it. When we look to Jesus, his righteousness becomes ours. Truly, all those who trust in Christ have a righteousness that far exceeds those of the scribes and Pharisees. Our righteousness is perfect and unblemished because it is not our own. It is Christ's, and He has freely and willingly given it to us.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

In what ways do you fall short of God's standard of holiness? Do you feel righteous enough to earn God's love?

Are you resting in your righteousness, or Christ's righteousness? What does it mean to say that Christ is our righteousness?

EMPLOYEE VS. BEGGAR

AARON ADDISON

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. But to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Romans 4:4-5

There are two different ways that people approach God. We can either come to God as an employee or as a beggar. When we come as an employee, we work hard for God. As long as we do what we are told, God will give us our check at the end of the day. As an employee, as long as we don't quit or get fired, we still get paid for our work. The biggest problem with this is that none of us have ever lived up to our job description. If we got what we earned, we would get the pink slip and not a pay check. We have earned punishment for failing to live a righteous life. The truth is that there is only one man who ever lived rightly as God would have him. He did not sin or turn from God. He did not place other things above God. He followed the Lord in every way that was commanded. He never hated or lusted. He never lied or stole. He didn't falter one time. Truly, He was the only righteous man who has ever lived since the beginning of creation. His name is Jesus. When Jesus died, He substituted His life for ours. He lived His perfect life in our place.

Because of Jesus, there is another way to approach God. We can come to him as a beggar. We don't come bringing our works, but we come empty-handed. Our hope is not based on how righteous we are but how righteous Jesus is. God wants all of us to come to him as ungodly beggars rather than righteous employees. When we approach him empty-handed, trusting only in his goodness and grace to save us, the righteous life of Christ is counted as if we had done it. He credits it to our accounts. God looks at us as if we had performed everything just as He said. We must lay aside trying to work to earn God's love. Instead, we must stop working and trust in the God who gives us righteousness by faith alone. In Christ, we can rest assured that God will never leave us or forsake us because of our sin.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Do you approach God as an employee or as a beggar? Are you working so that God will love you, or are you working because God has already given you His love?

How does it look to rest in Christ for righteousness? Think through specific situations and how you would have responded differently if you had meditated on this truth.



5

SIMPLICITY, SACRIFICE,
AND MISSION

WHAT WILL YOU EAT TODAY?

RYAN SMITH

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” John 4:34

What will you eat today? Not only breakfast, lunch, and dinner with a few snacks along the way, but what will you eat today that will bring nourishment to your heart and awaken a deep passion within your whole being? We often search for this nourishment by feeding on fast food - entertainment, food, drink, the Thunder(!), relationships, jobs, money, success, marriage. I say 'fast food', because living off of these things leaves us feeling bloated, unhealthy and sometimes even a little gassy. They just don't bring true satisfaction. We're looking for an eternal nourishment that awakens our hearts to zeal and passion for Jesus. In God's glorious design of mankind, He chose to implant in us a deep, outrageous, ready-to-be-awakened passion. And in this passage we listen as Jesus reveals how this passion can be nourished, fulfilled and released in us.

Jesus received an all-satisfying fulfillment from doing the will of God. And this will of God was to save sinners (1Tim1:15). Before the world was even created, God had a marvelous plan to rescue you and me. We were in the mind of God the Father in eternity past as He and the Son so lovingly set forth the plan to save us (Eph 1). What a wonderful truth! It was the Father's will from which Jesus experienced nourishment that led to a passion to complete it. And the Father's will is still active and ready for us to obey. The Church, Christ's hands and feet, are called to save sinners through the blood of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20). And as you and I obey we discover a deep nourishment for our own lives, a greater passion for the Father's heart and a lasting joy in advancing the Gospel.

So what will you eat today?

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

What are some specific things in my life that I need to deny so that I can make more room for feasting on the will of the Lord? Who must I share the Gospel with today, this week? Ask the Lord to give you a passion for the spread of the Gospel.

PEACE BE WITH YOU

RYAN SMITH

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” John 20:21

Peace be with you. Peace, because we are being sent in the exact same way the Father sent the son. Peace because the Father loves the Son. And the Son loves and listens to the Father, “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.” Jn 12:49. Jesus, in such close nearness and intimacy with the Father, never had to wonder what to say or speak; He just listened and obeyed what he heard the Father speaking.

In Christ, we have been invited into this same relationship of intimacy, the eternal loving relationship the Father has always had with His Son. As He sends us out, He goes with us, always speaking His words of life, words of intentionality, words of hope to the weary and words that bring forth the fulfillment of the great commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. Jesus has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). He has entrusted to us ordinary, weak, sin-prone followers the same enormous matters the Father entrusted to Him - reconciling man to God. But we are not alone! His power and authority lead the way. His voice is every speaking and all we must do is listen and obey. The Father had always been with Jesus, He too will always be with us, giving us words to speak. So, Peace be with you, as the Father has sent Jesus, even so He is now sending you.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

What words of Jesus are you hearing today that must be spoken? Meditate on 2 Cor. 5:18 - This ministry has been given to you in Jesus, how will you walk in it today?

COMING UNDONE, PT. 1: DISTRACTION AND DEMANDINGNESS

JJ SEID

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." Luke 10:38-40

Luke shows us a self-driven servant who's coming undone. Martha's trying to do something good, but her desires are bad. She's trying hard to serve her deserving Master. At first glance, her actions are noble, but out of the abundance of her unseen heart, anger bubbles up. She harangues the very person to whom she's striving to extend hospitality. Like Martha, we too don't realize we're self-driven in our service of Jesus until we come undone. But there's even more going on. Notice how the precise moment of her frustration is the precise moment of her realization. As she comes undone, a little light slips in. "Lord... tell her... to help me." In giving vent to her sinful anger and resentment, she confesses her real need!

If you're anything like me, all too often you've been hit with the painful thought: I'm all alone and this is too hard. What this text reveals—and what we often fail to realize—is that in the precise moment of those pain-filled and panic-stirring thoughts, we are halfway to holiness. Our anger and exasperation leave us undone—but in so doing, they also leave space for Jesus to speak. When we grumble and rehearse injustice, we're half-right. We do need help, but of a kind that our sister or brother cannot give. Anger festers when we stop halfway in our cry for help. In grumbling against our brother or sister, we make our confession: I am weak. I am in need of help. Our error comes in moving from that confession of weakness and need to demanding that another weak and needy person give us what none of us have.

Notice again what Martha says. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." Bob Dylan was right—God is not the errand boy of our wandering desires. His omnipotent power does not exist to be pressed into the service of our 'demandingness' towards others. Lord, don't you care? I demand that You make him/her give me what I want. In those moments our sin lies not in weakness and need, but in demanding rescue from false sources of refuge. We must first repent of our sinful desires before we can turn to Jesus to hear a better word.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

In the midst of your weakness and need, what false sources of refuge are you seeking? In what ways are you looking to your brother or sister for what only God can give? Confess those false sources of refuge out loud to the Lord. By faith receive the resulting removal of his fatherly displeasure, and enjoy the restoration of your intimacy and fellowship with him.

COMING UNDONE, PT. 2: A LITTLE LIGHT SLIPS IN

JJ SEID

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:41-42

Coming undone brings our frenetic self-driven service to a screeching halt, and a little light slips in. God stops us short and we become unwitting practitioners of the discipline of simplicity. We stop because what we’re doing is not working any more. We start to unravel. It’s the suffering of enforced simplicity that lets the light slip in. We come out of the kitchen, and we find ourselves undistracted and in a conversation with Jesus.

It starts with our angry accusations and ends with his loving guidance. He rebukes us gently. You are anxious and troubled about many things. And then he holds out a better way. But one thing is necessary. The Puritan Thomas Chalmers called this the expulsive power of a new affection. Jesus changes what we do and say by changing what we believe and desire. He says to us, “Only one thing is necessary. Say no to your evil desires and feed on something far better. Sit at my feet and seek a superior satisfaction. Stop missing me in the midst of your anxious, angry attempts at serving me. I have food you don’t know about (John 4:32).” In light of these truths—as we turn from and turn to—we’ll find ourselves increasingly able to worship him right on the spot. He invites us to come out of the kitchen, and lay aside our distracted serving, and, in the words of the old liturgy, feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Where are you coming undone? Who is Jesus in the midst of your unraveling? What does he say that’s good? Take a few minutes and meditate on the superior satisfaction that he offers.

DOING A SIMPLE MISSION

EDDY HELKER

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matt 28:19-20

My worst academic experience happened the second semester of my freshman year of college. I was assigned an apparently brilliant Ph.D. candidate that was a terrible algebra teacher. He would begin class by writing out a long and complicated equation and then proceed to tell us, "You will not use this math now, but when you are in Calculus 3..." To top it off, he did not abide by the office hours he was required to keep. He knew all about the complexities of math, and he made sure we knew he knew it. What he had no idea about was how to be with a group of kids and teach us how to do math.

We have a teacher that is the absolute opposite of that professor. The Holy Spirit is a very present teacher. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things..." (John 14:26). When Jesus commissioned the disciples, he made sure his followers incorporated the same components of being present and teaching. "...I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Notice the nuance in Jesus' command to them: "...[T]eaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). Disciples are commissioned to do more than teach what Jesus taught. They are given the Holy Spirit to do, and teach others to do, what Jesus taught. Jesus commands emulation and he provides everything we need to make it possible. "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Pet. 1:3).

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Have you been taught what to do (obedience), without being taught how to do it?

Do you believe the Holy Spirit is in you and teaching you?

Lastly, Peter connected teaching to doing by calling us to fix our affections upon Jesus; "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). What part do the spiritual disciplines play in the dynamics of being present to teach to do?

THE SIMPLICITY, SACRIFICE, AND MISSION OF JESUS

EDDY HELKER

SIMPLICITY

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. Isaiah 52:3

SACRIFICE

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:26

MISSION

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. John 17: 4
For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Luke 19:10

The redeeming mission of Jesus was rooted in glorifying his Father. The sovereign route of his mission coursed through a simple life in which he made himself a sacrifice. There is no greater example of simplicity than the Glorious One becoming human, and the death of the Son of God is the apex of sacrifice. We live in a time in which biblical teaching and mentoring on the disciplines is much needed. Yet, as exemplary, formative, and vital as these disciplines are, those attempting to live by the examples of Jesus without sourcing their actions in his finished work are doomed to become the local Pharisee.

The writer of Hebrews has a whole book of examples and typology of Jesus being our template. “Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God” (Heb 12:1-2). However, the writer is definitive in anchoring our living out that example through, and only through, the efficacious work of the cross and resurrection. “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). The resurrection life of Jesus is the only essential in which a follower can source simplicity, sacrifice, and mission. “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

How does the gospel influence your practice of grace initiated disciplines (i.e. simplicity and sacrifice)?

How are spiritual disciplines, and life as a whole, different for those attempting to do what Jesus did, and one living in what Jesus has done?



6

HEIGHT OF LOVE,
DEATH OF JESUS

SPY WEDNESDAY

TIM KIMBERLY

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. Matthew 26:14-16

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were rival Jewish religious groups. They were always disagreeing. On one issue, however, they perfectly agreed. They both equally hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him. That's right, they wanted to kill the one we love. The chief priests had a problem. How do you kill Jesus without killing your reputations? They wanted to murder Jesus swiftly before most people knew what had happened. The Pharisees knew they couldn't try to corrupt one of the disciples to help them. If they asked one of the disciples, they would risk word getting out about their intentions. They assumed all the disciples would die protecting Jesus.

A solution comes to the religious leaders on this Wednesday. The solution is far better than they could have ever imagined. Judas Iscariot walks in the door. No one pressures Judas to come. He just shows up. Judas was a man who had witnessed most of Jesus's miracles. He rubbed shoulders with the One who made the universe. Judas learned from the Word of Life. He ate with the Prince of Peace. He traveled with the King of Kings. How much did Judas charge to sell out Jesus? Judas accepted an embarrassingly small thirty pieces of silver. Common slaves were sold for thirty pieces of silver. Judas didn't consider Jesus's life to be anything valuable.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Allow yourself to enter into the emotions of this day. Would you be somber today as you continually ponder the treachery of Judas? Our Savior was sold out by one of his closest friends for virtually nothing. This should upset those of us who love Jesus. Wednesday is a sad, disappointing day.

OVERTURNING TABLES

TIM KIMBERLY

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' but you make it a den of robbers. Matthew 21:12-13

As Jesus walked into the temple on this day, He was filled with righteous anger. Jesus was furious with the messed-up religious nonsense happening at the temple. People were not allowed to bring their own animals for temple sacrifice. Animals could only be purchased at the temple. The animals at the temple were much more expensive. In addition to the animal prices being super high, the temple only allowed you to buy the animals with temple money. How did you get temple money? Well, you had to exchange your perfectly good regular money for temple money. Converting the money, of course, came with additional transaction fees. People had to pay extra money to then buy the extra-expensive animals. The poorest of people are robbed as they simply desire to worship God. This didn't sit well with Jesus.

At the beginning of this Holy Week, it is very clear Jesus is not here to keep business as usual. Jesus is communicating a strong message. He will not stand by as religious systems are set up to make it nearly impossible to come to God. At the end of this week, Jesus will purchase our souls for God. On this day, Jesus overturns the tables because He is a jealous lover. He is a relentless pursuer. We witness an incredible height of love as we see Jesus driving away anything keeping us from Him.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

What is keeping you from drawing nearer to your God today? Pray. If your life were laid out on several tables, would Jesus come and overturn any of them? If so, repent. He is in control. He is good. He loves you. He really loves you. He refuses to let you stay apart from Him. Let the words of Psalm 139:23 consume your thoughts today, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!"

THE SUPPER

ANDREW BURKHART

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for 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 again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Matthew 26:26–29

It was the night before His death. Jesus and His twelve disciples were huddled together in an upper room somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. They had gathered together to eat the Passover, an age-old meal rich with the history of God's redeeming love for His people. The Passover was put in place to serve as a reminder of how God had rescued the people of Israel out of slavery from Pharaoh in Egypt. You remember the story: Pharaoh refused to let God's people go, so God sent plague after plague to loosen Pharaoh's grip and break him of his pride. For Pharaoh, all of the plagues were horrible, but the last one was the worst of them all. God made a solemn and holy decision to take the life of every first-born male in all of the land of Egypt—Israeli and Egyptian alike. But to the Israelites, God provided a way of escape. Moses, speaking on behalf of God, told the people to slaughter a pure and spotless lamb and wipe the blood over the doorposts of their houses. In addition, God's people were to go inside of their houses, roast the slaughtered lamb, and eat it. That fateful night, God swiftly and silently swept through Egypt and took the life of every first-born son in every house in Egypt; but in an act of undeserved grace and love, He passed over those houses covered with the blood of the lamb. This became known as "the Passover," and for centuries, God's people would huddle together in houses all across Jerusalem and eat this sacred meal. But for Jesus's twelve disciples, this would be an unforgettable Passover meal.

At some point during the supper, Jesus stopped and did something scandalous. He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying these words: "take, eat; this is my body." His disciples must have been shocked! Was Jesus trying to say that he was the true Passover meal? What Jesus would say next would leave absolutely no doubt in their minds. Again, he interrupted dinner and passed around of a cup of wine, saying: "drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." It couldn't have been articulated more clearly. Jesus was pointing to the Passover meal and saying that it was all about Him. Jesus was trying to show His disciples (and all of us) that the events surrounding the first Passover were simply a shadow of what He was going to do for us. You see, because of our rebellion against God, we each deserve to be crushed. We are as hard-hearted and disobedient as Pharaoh himself. Like the first-born sons in Egypt, we deserve to die because of our sin. But instead of taking our lives, the Son of God gives his life for us. Jesus, the True Lamb, would be strung up on a cross, and His blood would be shed for rebels like you and me.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Today, join Christians from all over the world as we huddle together underneath the cross and find forgiveness through the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. Are you starving for love today? Jesus is turning to you with these words: "Take, eat; this is my body." Jesus lovingly offers His life to you as broken bread for your hungry soul. Do you fear the wrath of God? Hide yourself in the house of the gospel and in love; He will pass over you.

THE GARDEN

ANDREW BURKHART

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Matthew 26:36-45

Jesus had been in this garden before. Whenever life and the pressures of ministry reached a difficult level of intensity, Jesus would slip away to spend time with His Father and be refreshed by the Holy Spirit. This garden called Gethsemane was most likely among Jesus's favorite places to pray and rest. But this visit to the garden wouldn't bring any sort of rest, physical or spiritual. Jesus knew that in a matter of hours, he would be arrested, wrongly condemned by the Jews, and executed by the Romans. The Romans had mastered the brutal art of execution, the worst form being crucifixion. Crucifixion was a slow, embarrassing, and horrifically painful way to die. The criminal (for only the worst of the worst were crucified) would be stripped naked, mercilessly beaten, scourged, and nailed to a tree. Worst of all, this would all happen in a very public setting, giving rise to massive crowds of loud and angry mobs mocking the victim. Jesus knew that this terrifying death was fast approaching. But this wasn't the primary cause of Jesus's soul being "sorrowful, even to death." Something worse was coming his way.

Not only was Jesus going to suffer an immense amount of physical pain on the cross, he was also going to suffer in a spiritual way. God the Father was going to take the sins of His people and place them upon His Son. Jesus had never sinned, let alone tasted the shame and guilt that accompanies sin. But on the cross, Jesus would identify himself with sinners so much that He would actually become our sin. And worst of all, Jesus would become the object of God's holy and just wrath towards our sin. You see, Jesus wasn't afraid of Judas betraying Him or Peter rejecting Him. He wasn't afraid of the Jews wrongly accusing him or even the Romans executing Him. But Jesus was absolutely terrified and in a state of shock at the thought of becoming our sin and drinking the cup of God's anger towards our sin. As Jesus contemplates this terrifying reality, He asks His friends to stay awake with Him, while He spends some time alone in prayer. They don't. Sadly, Jesus comes back to find every one of His closest friends sleeping. Jesus wakes them up and asks them to stay awake and pray. Again, they don't. In the hour of His greatest need, Jesus had no friends to turn to. To make matters even more difficult and painful, Jesus asks His Father for an alternative to the cross. But for the first time in Jesus's life, the Father remains silent. Jesus has no one He can turn to. He is all alone. As C.J. Mahaney said, "The Savior's soul was crucified here in the garden of Gethsemane before His body would be crucified on a hill called Calvary."

In one sense, this scene in the garden is tragic. But in another sense, this is one of the most beautiful events that has ever occurred. To enter into this garden is to become deeply aware of our sin. But to enter this garden is also to become deeply aware of the heights and depths of God's love for us, despite our sin. Why would Jesus go through with this? Because of His great and unexplainable love, both for you and for His Father. When Jesus asked for an alternative to the cross, He ended His request with these words: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Let this sink in. The Father didn't have to send His Son. Jesus could have backed out at the last minute. But the deep love of God drove Him to the cross. This means that you don't have suffer for your sins anymore. You don't have to punish yourself because Jesus was punished for you. And you don't have to doubt God's love for you because of the events that unfolded in this garden. And let these words of St. Augustine cause you to hear God's sermon to your heart: "the cross was the pulpit in which Christ preached his love to the world."

SERVANT KING

JOSH KOURI

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:3

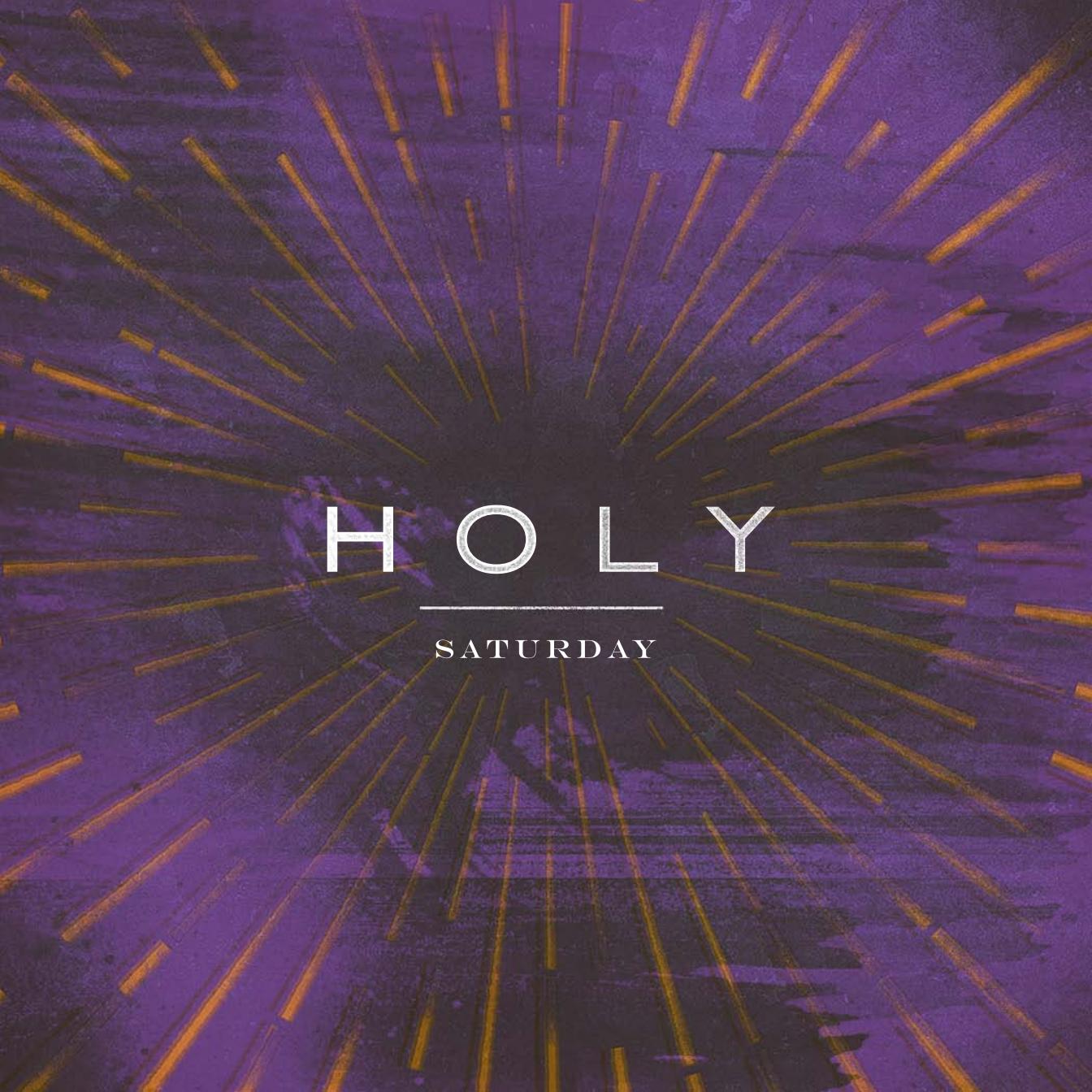
Now is the night. Betrayal is at hand. Jesus must drink the cup of suffering. If ever there was a time for Jesus to expect His friends to meet His needs, now is the moment. He has the right to be pampered and fed before he faces the sorrow. The leader gets up from his cushion and dresses for service. Humbly, He comes to each of His disciples. Jesus kneels before sinful men who will abandon Him. He kneels before Peter who will deny Him. He kneels before Judas who will sell Him. With each drop of water from the basin, the filth of human feet comes into contact with the hands of God. Mud, sweat, and animal dung are washed away. If ever His friends would be truly clean, the washing would be up to him. So, the Servant King who will wash hearts in blood is not afraid to wash feet in water.

"Teacher, you will never wash my feet." This is too much for Peter. This act of humility is not what a leader does. Great men are served; they don't wash feet. Peter is indignant. But why? Jesus's breathtaking humility has broken into a heart enslaved by pride. This act is like a spotlight shining into a dirty cave. Jesus's humble love is exposing Peter's hopes for greatness and glory as not great or glorious at all. It's not just sweat and mud being washed away. The Servant King is also washing away pride. He is so complete and secure in the Father's love that His friends understanding or misunderstanding of Him has no power over Him. His secure servanthood exposes insecure hearts looking for meaning in power and control over others.

You and I are smeared with the filth of our streets. Pride clings to us, demanding a demonstration of control, power, or greatness to justify our existence. The more we look to our good deeds or productivity to tell us who we are, the more we sink into our muddy streets. We try to make ourselves secure in our comparisons with others. Then the Servant King comes to us. He is so secure in the Father's love that He willingly stoops to meet us in our dirt. He washes us in His blood. He gives us a new identity in His finished work. He sends us so that we too can stoop to serve. This is what it means to be a Christian. We know where we come from and where we are going so we too can take on the clothes of a servant.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

You did nothing good or productive to get the Servant King to come to you. He stooped down to meet you. He laid aside His robes to find you and wash you. As you reflect on your Servant King's love, where is insecurity and pride exposed in your heart? How are you trying to find your identity in control or power? How are you looking to your productivity to justify your life? Tell Jesus about it because he already knows it's there, and He is stooping to wash you.



H O L Y

SATURDAY

HOLY SATURDAY

BRANDON LAIB

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. John 19:40-42

Holy Saturday marks the last day of Holy Week and the day Jesus's body was laid in the tomb. While the Bible is relatively silent about what actually happened on this day, a lot can be inferred from the events leading up to it and the actions of the disciples surrounding it. Take a moment and put yourself in the shoes of the people who loved and followed Jesus.

On Friday, Jesus's family and friends witnessed his brutal, public execution. They were in shock as they watched Him mocked and beaten, dragged from one false trial to another, and then nailed to a cross to die right in front of them. They watched in disbelief as their world came apart at the seams. The next day, reality set in. As Jesus's followers woke up on Saturday morning, shock gave way to anguish and despair. Wishing it had all been a bad dream, they came to the same conclusion: It was all real. Jesus is really dead! We watched His burial! He is gone!

While Jesus's body lay lifeless in a tomb, regret and anxiety were wreaking havoc on His loved ones as they tried to process their grief. But perhaps more than remorse or guilt or missed opportunities or fear of what was to come, the weightiest matter, for them, was that hope was lost. Jesus had claimed to be God, the Messiah, and they had believed Him. Now what would they do? They had given up everything to follow Him, and now He was dead. On the day Jesus's body was laid in the grave, as the disciples hid themselves in a room, they may have uttered the words that Paul would later write in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Because, of course, if Jesus remained in the tomb, all hope of salvation would be lost.

FOR YOUR MEDITATION:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-19. What are the implications if Jesus had not been raised from the dead?

Before His death, Jesus told His disciples, "take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). What does it look like for you to "take heart" on days of trouble and suffering?