

The True Jesus: A Year-Long Bible Study

*"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division."
(the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 12:51)*

There are a lot of misconceptions in the world about who Jesus truly is. In this series, we will go through the four Gospels chronologically, discussing points along the way to show who Jesus really is, what He came to do, and who He came to save. The chronological order of the four Gospels comes from the "Harmony of the Gospels" by A.T. Robertson.

"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

January 1 (Day 1) – John 1:1-3

- Jesus Christ is the Word of God, in flesh. God's Word, as a whole, tells us of the nature and attributes of God, and these same attributes are found in everything that Jesus said and did during His time here on earth.
- Every single thing that was created, way back at the beginning of the book of Genesis, was made by Christ. This offers further proof that He has always existed, and was not merely created by God. In fact, there are clear signs pointing to Christ all through the Old Testament.
- The Bible and Jesus Christ are both referred to as the Word. How can that be? The Bible is wholly about Jesus Christ, speaking about Him all the way from beginning to end. From prophecies of the coming Messiah back in the Old Testament to the fulfillment of those prophecies in the New Testament, the entire Bible points to Jesus Christ.

January 2 (Day 2) – John 1:4-5

- There is only one source of true spiritual, eternal life, and that is in Christ. So, not only has He always existed Himself, but in Him is the only true source of life for us. Anyone who is not born again through Christ is not spiritually alive and will not receive the gift of eternal life in heaven.
- Mankind as a whole has been in darkness ever since Adam's first sin, unable to comprehend or seek after God on our own. The light of Christ alone is able to shine through the darkness in this world, through Christ Himself and also through believers who have the Spirit of God within. Nevertheless, without the Spirit of God, those who are still in darkness cannot comprehend the light of God.

January 3 (Day 3) – John 1:10-13

- Although this world and everything in it was made by Christ, as John 1:3 says, He was rejected by many in the world when He came down from heaven.
- How do people receive Christ and believe in Him? Not through the will of the flesh, according to verse 13, because we are unable to seek after God on our own power (see also 1 Cor. 2:14 and Rom. 3:11). No, it is only through the will of God that some are given mercy, grace, and a new birth in Jesus Christ.

January 4 (Day 4) – John 1:14-18

- How can it make sense that Jesus came after John but was before him? Jesus was born about six months after John, but the idea here is that Jesus has always existed, so He did in fact exist for an infinitely long period of time before John was even conceived in Elizabeth's womb.
- Moses received God's law (the Ten Commandments). They tell us of God's nature and His standards, but as fallen man, none of us can keep God's law. Thankfully, God in His grace provided another way, through Christ Jesus.
- Although no one has ever seen God, we can come to know Him through Jesus, who actually did walk on this earth and who was literally seen by thousands while He was here. Jesus not only declares God to be real and true, but also gives us a glimpse into the very nature of God, when we look at what He said and did while on this earth.

January 5 (Day 5) – Luke 1:26-38

- Even though Jesus has existed along with God the Father since before time began, this was

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exactly the right time for Him to be born and enter this world, so that He could ultimately atone for the sins of His chosen people. His coming was prophesied hundreds of years earlier (from Isaiah 7 and 53, Zechariah 11-12, Micah Malachi, and others), but only God can see the past, present, and future, and so from God's perfect and eternal point of view, the time was now right for Jesus to come.

- Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and John was born of Elizabeth in her old age because all things are possible with God (see also Matthew 19:26)!

January 6 (Day 6) – Luke 1:46-56

- Mary rightly knew who she was--a lowly servant of God, just like each one of us who is among His children. God chose her for this responsibility because of His own will, not because of anything special in her. Certainly, Mary was blessed in a unique and special way, but she is not someone to obsess over or pray to, as Catholics so wrongly do. As Mary says in verse 49, God has done great things in her. God receives all the glory--not Mary or anyone else.
- As was likely the case with most if not all Jews of that day, Mary knew the Old Testament well. She knew that this was the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham (in Genesis 17:19) some 2,000 years earlier. We would do well to know the Bible like they did--but not for the sake of gaining knowledge; rather, to know more about our great and awesome God.

January 7 (Day 7) – Luke 1:67-79

- These are the words of John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, 8 days after John was born. He praises God for redeeming His people by sending a "horn of salvation" through the lineage of David, just as had been prophesied numerous times in the Old Testament. He also gives God praises for fulfilling His promises to deliver His people, which go all the way back to Abraham, similar to what Mary said in yesterday's passage.
- Read the words spoken by Zacharias more than just once, and spend time meditating on all that God has done for His people!

January 8 (Day 8) – Matthew 1:18-25

- Immanuel--what an awesome name of Jesus! God is not merely some distant power that created the world and then went off to do other things. Indeed, the very name "Immanuel" means "God with us." Jesus literally walked among people on this earth for 33 years, and God remains with His people today in the form of the Holy Spirit. How astonishing is the love of God--the all-powerful creator of the universe--that He would come down from heaven to be with sinful people such as us!
- The prophecy spoken of in this passage (verse 23) is a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, which was recorded by the prophet Isaiah some 700 years earlier.

January 9 (Day 9) – Luke 2:1-7

- God's plan is always perfect, and He makes things work out according to His divine will. In this story, we see that a decree from Caesar is what caused Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem, so that Jesus could be born in Bethlehem, the city of David, fulfilling more prophecy (see also 1 Samuel 17:12 and Micah 5:2). This was not merely luck or coincidence; it shows the providence of God over all things.
- Since this is commonly considered to be the beginning of the Christmas story, I want to give you a few other things to consider. The materialistic world places such heavy emphasis on the Christmas season, yet the Biblical story of Jesus' birth is told in a mere 20 verses in only one of the four Gospels. The Christian should put much more emphasis on the Resurrection of Christ, which is what actually provided for our salvation. Even the word "Christmas" comes from the Catholic mass of Christ, which is ungodly and unbiblical. So however you choose to celebrate next December, I encourage you to follow 1 Corinthians 10:31 and make sure that everything you are doing is for the glory of God.

January 10 (Day 10) – Luke 2:8-20

- Considering there were shepherds in the field watching their sheep at night, Jesus almost certainly wasn't born on December 25, because it would have been too cold for that to be going on. Most people believe He was born either in the spring or the fall, but the fact is, if God

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wanted us to know when Jesus' birthday was, He would have recorded it for us in His Word. Obviously, that is something that we don't need to know.

- Think about how our Savior entered the world. He was born to a lowly family in a smelly, dirty stable, and the first people to learn of His birth were a bunch of shepherds. God often does things backwards from what we would expect, and this is perhaps the best example of that.

January 11 (Day 11) – Luke 2:25-35

- With Simeon, we see a third example (following Mary and Zacharias) of someone who knew God's Word and had complete faith in His promises. What a blessing it must have been for Simeon to have been told by God that "he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ."
- Once again, we see someone who truly understands the Bible when he makes the statement that Christ has come to bring salvation to Israel, but also to bring a light to the Gentiles.
- Now that he has seen Christ, Simeon is at peace and ready to die (verse 29). What a marvelous end to his life, to see the salvation God has sent for His people just before his death.

January 12 (Day 12) – Matthew 2:1-12

- There are differing opinions on exactly who the wise men were and where they came from, but regardless of that, they obviously had knowledge of God and the Scripture. However, there are many misconceptions about this story. We are never told how many wise men there are; only that they brought three gifts. There may have been three wise men, or there may have been more. Also, the wise men did not come to see Jesus right after he was born, but rather, they saw Him when He was about two years old (see Matthew 2:16).
- Notice also the fear and arrogance from King Herod. He is the one and only king (in his mind)--the Jews certainly could not have their own king! So he gathered information about the location and age of this new King and told the wise men to return and tell him exactly where this King is. Of course, God warned them not to, so they went back home a different way.

January 13 (Day 13) – Matthew 2:13-23

- Mary and Joseph took the young Jesus to Egypt, to keep Him safe from King Herod. This is a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Hosea 11:1, which says that God will call His Son out of Egypt.
- As you might expect, Herod was furious! His response was to kill all the children under the age of two, based on the age he had learned from the wise men. But because of the providence of God, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were already out of the country and well on their way to safety in Egypt.
- Verse 18 is interesting because it refers to Rachel, Jacob's wife, weeping for her children who had been killed. Here, she is representing all those mothers who lost children in Herod's atrocious act. Why Rachel? Because she was buried in Bethlehem (see genesis 35:19), and this fulfills the prophecy given in Jeremiah 31:15.

January 14 (Day 14) – Luke 2:40-52

- At the young age of 12, Jesus was already astonishing the intelligent people of the day with His wisdom and understanding (verse 47). This was just an early sign of something that would become commonplace during His three-year ministry, as He often confounded the wise.
- The boy Jesus did not disrespect His parents (as He was sinless, of course) but rebuked them in love when they found Him, because they seemingly had forgotten, at least at this moment, that He was actually the Son of His Father in heaven. Nevertheless, Jesus then returned home with His earthly family and remained there until the age of thirty (see Luke 3:23), during which time He increased in wisdom and in favor with both God and man (verse 52).

January 15 (Day 15) – Mark 1:1-6

- Mark begins his Gospel by recording the preaching of John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. This fulfills two separate prophecies from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. Presumably, those prophecies were given so that the people would know that John truly was sent by God, and that he wasn't just some crazy man talking about a coming Savior.

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- What was the primary focus of John's preaching? He focused on repentance of sin. Sin is something that is too often left out of sermons and conversations today, where people are encouraged to come to Jesus so He can make your life better. The fact is, that's not at all why Jesus came. He came to forgive sins and to bring salvation to His people through that forgiveness. Skipping over the topic of sin does nothing but produce false converts who try to act like Christians but were never truly saved because they never repented of their sin before our holy God.

January 16 (Day 16) – Luke 3:7-18

- Here John speaks about fruit, which is something we will see addressed by Jesus Himself on numerous occasions. It is easy for someone to make a statement professing faith in Christ, but the evidence of whether or not that profession is true is found in the fruit. John addresses this in verse 8, because he is speaking to the religious leaders of the day who tended to pride themselves on their good works, as well as their lineage from Abraham. But as John tells them, neither of those things has anything to do with gaining eternal life. Instead, he told them to show fruit of the spirit in their lives, which would be evidence of true saving faith. He also gives some specific examples of this fruit by telling them to give to the poor and to be honest and fair in their business dealings.
- It is also important to note that John did not baptize these religious leaders, even though they wanted him to. It is the responsibility of a pastor to baptize people who appear to be showing fruit of the spirit, and therefore evidence of true salvation. While we are still humans and could still baptize in error from time to time, simply "baptizing" everyone who walks down the aisle at the end of the service and claims to make a profession of faith is certainly not consistent with what the Bible teaches.
- John also was careful to point to Christ in all things, not taking any glory for himself (see verse 16).

January 17 (Day 17) – Matthew 3:13-17

- We see John's humility here when Jesus came

to him to be baptized, and John was taken aback. He knew who Jesus was, and couldn't imagine baptizing the very Son of God! Yet Jesus needed to be baptized by someone, in order to give us an example to follow, and John was chosen to be that person. Jesus no doubt understood why John was hesitant and did not rebuke him, but instead told him that this was necessary, and so John complied and did baptize Jesus.

- I can only imagine what it must have been like to have been in that place and heard what was spoken from heaven: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." To hear the voice of God the Father speak in such a way must have been awesome and magnificent! In doing so, God also confirmed for all those who could hear that Jesus was indeed the very Son of God.

January 18 (Day 18) – Luke 4:1-13

- An interesting characteristic of Satan is that often, he is so sneaky and tricky that he doesn't even tell an outright lie. (Although he is without a doubt very capable of lying, when necessary.) That seems to be the case in his interaction with Jesus. He offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, which Satan does indeed have dominion over (see also John 12:31). Then, Satan even quotes Scripture from Psalm 91 in trying to get Jesus to tempt God the Father. But Jesus is perfect, and sinless, and so Satan could not prevail.
- How did Jesus respond to each temptation? By quoting Scripture. Other than telling Satan at one point to get behind Him, that's all that Jesus said. Nothing else is necessary. When we are faced with temptations of evil, we have this clear example to follow. Know Scripture, know it well, and quote it against Satan's temptations. As long as you truly know Christ, you can defeat any temptation through His power! But having intellectual knowledge about the Bible, and nothing more, will not save you. As we see in this story, even Satan knows a lot about the Bible.

January 19 (Day 19) – John 1:19-34

- John attempts to explain who he is and why he is baptizing people to the religious leaders of the day, but they are skeptical of his claims. He even quotes the prophecy from Isaiah 40:3-5

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that tells of his coming, in order to prepare the way for the Lord, but they still don't seem to believe him.

- The next day, Jesus Himself arrives, and John immediately identifies Him as the Lamb of God, baring record that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. In verse 32, John refers back to when he baptized Jesus, and the Spirit descended from heaven like a dove as the Father spoke "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He gives ample evidence that shows who Jesus truly is, yet the religious leaders will continue in arrogant and prideful unbelief.
- Note carefully what John says in verse 30. This is the second time John is recorded at making such a statement (see also John 1:15). Jesus came after John, but was before him. That statement only makes sense if you consider that Jesus was literally conceived and born after John, but that Jesus has existed since before the foundation of the earth.

January 20 (Day 20) – John 1:35-51

- Note what Jesus says to Philip in verse 43. He didn't say "Wouldn't you like to come and follow Me?" No, He simply says "Follow Me," and Philip does just that, as do the rest of the disciples. We don't see Jesus asking, begging, or pleading with any of these men to follow Him. He simply called them, and they followed, having been given the desire to follow Christ through the gift of salvation.
- Verses 48 and 49 remind us of exactly who Jesus is--the Son of God and the King of Israel--and that He knows all things. Just as Adam and Eve tried in foolishness to hide from God after they had sinned in the Garden of Eden, none of us can hide anything from God (or, of course, Jesus). He knows and has always known all things and all people.

January 21 (Day 21) – John 2:1-11

- Here we find Mary, who obviously knew who Jesus is and all that He could do, encouraging Him to perform a miracle to eliminate this problem where the wedding hosts had run out of wine. Jesus responds by saying His time had not yet come, meaning that He was not yet ready to begin His public ministry and fully reveal Himself to the world. We may not know all the reasons behind that, but we do know

that God's timing is nothing less than perfect.

- In any case, Jesus went ahead and performed His first miracle at this wedding, but He apparently did it in such a way that He did not gain much, if any, public attention. In verse 10, we see credit being given to the bridegroom, not to Jesus. But it wouldn't be long before Jesus would begin to reveal more of Himself and begin His public ministry.

January 22 (Day 22) – John 2:13-17

- People often tend to think of Jesus as a meek, lowly, gentle Man. (By the same token, many people are content to just remember the precious baby in a manger.) While those are some characteristics of Jesus, that certainly doesn't give us the full picture. God is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath, when it comes to punishing sin (see also Jeremiah 10:10, Nahum 1:2, Romans 1:18, and Hebrews 12:29, and that's just a start). God absolutely and completely hates sin. It certainly makes sense that He would, since He is perfect, He created all of us, and yet we continually sin against Him.
- Here we find Jesus entering the temple, where people are selling animals that would be used for sacrifices or for the passover meal, trying to take advantage of people who had traveled from far away. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the temple is not the place to be doing that! He chastises them harshly and drives them out. Far too often, we tend to take sin lightly, but this is a stark reminder that God does not.
- The quote in verse 17 is a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9.

January 23 (Day 23) – John 2:18-22

- After Jesus turned over the tables and drove those who were selling things out of the temple, the people asked Jesus for a sign to prove to them that He had the authority to do such a thing. He gave them one, but it wasn't one that they understood. He told them that they would "destroy this temple" and He would raise it up in three days. They thought He was speaking of the literal temple building, which seemed preposterous to them. It took their ancestors 46 years to rebuild the temple (see Ezra 6:15)--no one could rebuild it in just three days!

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- But Jesus wasn't speaking of the literal temple; He was speaking of His body, which would be killed and then resurrected on the third day. Verse 22 tells us that His disciples would recall this a few years later when Jesus' death and resurrection took place.

January 24 (Day 24) – John 3:1-8

- Nicodemus was puzzled by Jesus' statement that he must be born again. The question he poses in verse 4 may sound silly to us, but to someone who had never before heard the gospel message that Jesus was just beginning to preach, it is a legitimate question. But Jesus answers his question by explaining that, in order to be saved, one must be born again of the Spirit of God.
- In verse 8, Jesus gives a little insight into how the Holy Spirit works. We can't see exactly where He is or how He is working, but we can see the effects when someone is saved. Jesus compares this to the wind, which is something we can all understand: We can't see the wind, but we can see the effects of it.

January 25 (Day 25) – John 3:16-21

- Here, Jesus is still talking to Nicodemus. We encounter perhaps the most well-known verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16, which, sadly, is frequently misused and misunderstood among those who do not truly know Jesus Christ. Yes, all who truly believe in Jesus are saved--but implied in that statement is a whole lot more than simply saying "I believe," as we will see as we look at more of Jesus' teachings in the weeks and months to come.
- One must also look at John 3:16 (and any Scripture verse, for that matter) in context. Jesus says a lot of important things after that verse, but those other statements are often overlooked. God did not send Jesus to condemn the world, but to save some out of it--because the world is condemned already, due to sin. Jesus is the light that has come into the world, but many people would rather keep hiding in darkness than let the light show who they truly are. Does that describe you?

January 26 (Day 26) – John 3:25-30

- In verse 27, John tells the people that salvation is not something man can do, but it is purely a

gift from God. Jesus Himself will re-emphasize this point later on in His ministry (see also Ephesians 2:8-9).

- Once again, we see John's humility. He always points to Christ. In verse 28, he reminds the people that he had previously told them that he was not the Christ, but that he was sent to point the way to Christ. Then in verse 29, the term "bride" is commonly used to refer to the church--not any particular church in this world, but all those who are saved through the bridegroom, who is Christ. Finally, in verse 30, John quite simply says that Jesus will increase in his fame and work on the earth, while John's fame and work are coming to an end. John's purpose was to point the way to Christ, which he did--but the time was coming where John must get out of the way. All honor and glory must go to Christ (God) alone.

January 27 (Day 27) – John 3:31-36

- Jesus Christ has indeed come from above, and He is above all things. But no man, in his inherited sinful nature, receives the testimony of Christ--similar to what Paul tells us in Romans 3:11, that none seek after God. Only through the grace of God are some brought to a saving faith. Praise God for His mercy and grace!
- John ends by speaking of the wrath of God, which abides on all who do not have true saving faith in Jesus Christ. We see examples of the wrath of God throughout the Bible--especially in the Old Testament, where God destroyed many cities and nations due to their sin. Contrary to what some people think, God didn't change between the Old and New Testaments (see Malachi 3:6). Two verses in Hebrews give a clear picture of God's wrath (see Hebrews 10:31 and 12:29). Make no mistake about who God is. God is perfectly holy; He hates sin (and will punish it), and He does not change!

January 28 (Day 28) – Luke 3:19-20

- Although the details are not given in the Bible, we know (with reasonable certainty) from other historical accounts that Herod, a very wicked ruler (likely the son of the Herod who was king when Christ was born), had taken his brother's wife to be his own, while his brother

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was still alive. John the Baptist reproved Herod (meaning, he went to Herod and told him that what he had done was sinful), and naturally, Herod didn't like what John had to say! So, he threw John in prison. Knowing that John had previously said that he must decrease as Christ increases, this could have been God's way of making that happen. Nevertheless, we see great bravery on the part of John to confront sin and not back down from the truth, regardless of the consequences. He had strong faith and knew where his eternal home would be, so there was nothing Herod could do to him that he feared. If only all Christians could have this kind of faith to stand up for the truth and to stand against all things that are sinful and wicked!

January 29 (Day 29) – John 4:7-19

- This Samaritan woman sounds rather sarcastic in her conversation with Jesus, apparently supposing Him to be some crazy man when He speaks of living water. So Jesus then took a different approach, letting the woman know that He knew how many husbands she'd had, and therefore causing her to realize that He was a prophet (though, of course, He is so much more than that). This is only one instance in which Jesus was mocked by someone. Christians should expect to receive the same kind of treatment from unbelievers around them--perhaps frequently, but at least on occasion. Jesus did one thing in this story that we can't do (knowing things about this woman), but we can do the other thing He did: He shared God's truth with her, regardless of her attitude towards Him.

January 30 (Day 30) – John 4:20-26

- The Jews had always been God's chosen people, and salvation belonged unto them. A survey of the Old Testament will show that not all Jews were saved, and some Gentiles were saved along the way as well--such as Rahab, Ruth, and many in the city of Nineveh after they received God's call to repent from Jonah. But, primarily, the Jews were God's chosen people. However, we also see hints throughout the Old Testament that salvation would come to the Gentiles as well (see Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6), and that is exactly what Jesus is telling this Samaritan woman. He tells her that she

doesn't know what she worships, being among the lost Gentiles, but the Jews know who they worship--the true God of heaven. But the time will soon come when worshippers of the true God will come from all over!

January 31 (Day 31) – John 4:31-39

- Just like the disciples in this story, we tend to be so focused on the things of this world. But even basic necessities like eating were not at the front of the mind of Christ. He was focused on things of spiritual, eternal value--not meat to fill the belly for a short time, but rather He was focused on doing the work of God.
- The rest of this passage should encourage us to share and spread the gospel to the dark, sinful world around us! Jesus says that the fields are ready to harvest, and we need to go out and sow the seed of truth. As we see at the end of this passage, the reaping of this particular harvest included many Samaritans, who came to faith in Christ after hearing about His conversation with the woman at the well.

February 1 (Day 32) – Mark 1:14-15

- Jesus preached that the time of "the law and the prophets" (the Old Testament) has been fulfilled, and now the time has come for the New Covenant, which would be fully ushered in upon His death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the dead.
- This is the core of Jesus' message: Repent, which means to turn away from sin and renounce your sinful ways, and believe the gospel, which is the good news that Jesus brings from God. Both of these actions are essential to true, saving faith. Unlike most false religions which are based on good works, the true Christian must first admit that (s)he is a sinner, and then turn from those sinful ways. Then, true faith in the salvation brought by Jesus Christ is what makes someone a follower of Christ and a child of God.

February 2 (Day 33) – John 4:46-54

- Jesus rebukes people on multiple occasions for failing to believe in Him without seeing signs and wonders. Sadly, those people wouldn't believe anyway--they might follow for a while, caught up in the excitement of seeing those healings and miracles done by Jesus, but after

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a while the excitement would fade, and they would fall away, having never had true faith in Him to begin with. Jesus didn't give in to their misguided demands for a sign (Matthew 12:39 is an example of this).

- But this nobleman did have faith and knew what Jesus could do. When Jesus told the man to go back home, that his son would live, he believed Jesus and started to head back to his home without further hesitation. His faith was confirmed when he learned that his son did indeed start to get well at the exact same time Jesus spoke those words.

February 3 (Day 34) – Luke 4:16-21

- Imagine these people hearing Jesus read from the book of Isaiah (the verses quoted here are primarily from Isaiah 61:1-2), then listening as Jesus essentially says that He is the One being described in that passage. How remarkable that must have been! But, those people did not respond in such a way--as we will see tomorrow.
- Jesus preached the gospel to the poor--which means the meek, the poor in spirit, not necessarily those who are financially poor (though that is often the case as well, according to Matthew 19:24). Those who are poor in spirit and brokenhearted recognize their need for a Savior and are ready to hear and embrace the gospel message.
- He also preached deliverance to the captives, though as usual, He didn't necessarily mean it the way the people thought He did. The Jews were expecting a mighty political conqueror to rise up and deliver them in this world, but Jesus came to deliver His chosen people from the captivity of sin. Similarly, He came to give sight to those who are in spiritual blindness and darkness.

February 4 (Day 35) – Luke 4:22-31

- Jesus spoke these marvelous words after reading a prophecy from Isaiah 61 and revealing that it was written about Himself. So all the people who heard Him must have embraced Him warmly and become excited at what He had revealed to Him...right? As we see from Scripture, that's not what happened at all. But instead, they threw Jesus out of the city and intended to do him harm (verse 29), but

He slipped away from them and went on His way, unharmed, because the time had not yet come for His death. What caused such a horrific reaction to Him? Anger and jealousy, among other sins.

- Verses 25-27 are especially interesting. They show that the prophet Elijah was only sent to help one out of many widows, and Elisha was only sent to cleanse one out of many lepers (see also 1 Kings 17:10 and 2 Kings 5:14). Perhaps more significantly, both this widow and this leper were not Israelites, but they were Gentiles. This points to the salvation of Christ, who saves whom He wishes according to the will of God the Father, whether they be Jew or Gentile. Naturally, the Jews in this synagogue did not like this, and that is, at least in part, what led to their anger and jealousy.

February 5 (Day 36) – Matthew 4:13-16

- In these verses, we see another prophecy from Isaiah that is being fulfilled in Christ. We read these words in Isaiah 9:1-2, and it's all about salvation coming to the Gentiles! Before Christ came, we (all who are not Jewish by birth) were the people who sat in darkness, but since the coming of Christ, we have seen the great light that He is. It wasn't that all Gentiles had no hope in Old Testament times, because we do see cases of Gentiles being saved. But by and large, God was with the Israelites, and the Gentiles were left in darkness to follow their own sinful desires. But now, since Christ has come, all that has changed. It's amazing how many prophecies we can find in the Old Testament about salvation coming to the Gentiles, yet when Christ came, most of the Jews hated Him for that, since they view Gentiles as dogs. Sadly, after being under God's care and protection for so long (despite their many rebellions against Him), the Jewish people had become prideful, forgetting that God had chosen them to be His special people because of His own will, not because of anything they had done. There is a lesson in that for all of us.

February 6 (Day 37) – Luke 5:1-11

- This is a wonderful passage of Scripture that demonstrates the kind of faith we all should have! Let us look at three of these verses in

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particular.

- In verse 5, we see Simon Peter's faith. Jesus told him to put down his nets again, in order to catch some fish. Simon makes the comment that they hadn't caught anything all night, but since Jesus told him to try again, he would. Are we this ready and willing to obey God and trust in His promises to us? Verse 6 tells us the end of this story: After not catching anything all night long, Jesus caused them to catch so many fish that their net broke!
- Then in verse 8, Simon Peter responds as we all should, in great repentance and humility. Once he realizes what Jesus has done, knowing that He is God in the flesh, he falls down before Him in repentance, recognizing his sinfulness before a completely and perfectly holy God. We are far too casual about sin--we should all respond like this to God.
- Finally, in verse 11, we see that these men followed Jesus from this point forward. They didn't think about it for a while and come back later; no, they immediately forsook all that they had in order to follow Christ. Once again, we can learn a lesson from this--that is how we should respond to the call of God to follow Him.

February 7 (Day 38) – Mark 1:21-28

- Mark gives us an interesting perspective in verse 22. Jesus taught as one who has true authority from God, rather than as the scribes taught. Jesus taught on His own authority, as the Son of God, as opposed to the scribes, who were just teaching from their own knowledge (and, based on other passages from the gospels, we know that many of the scribes were not truly saved). The scribes were those who wrote and transcribed the Bible, which was all done by hand, since this was long before the printing press was invented. Therefore, these people probably knew more Scripture than anyone, yet many of them had completely missed the true meaning of it. We still see people like that today, who have an intellectual knowledge of the Bible, but lack true saving faith. Pray and examine yourself to make sure that you do not fall into that category, because if you die and meet Jesus and hear the words that He speaks in Matthew 7:22-23, it will be too late.

February 8 (Day 39) – Luke 4:38-44

- Here we find Jesus healing many more people, as word of Him and His deeds is spreading. But I wonder how many of these people were merely seeking a physical healing, and how many were actually there for a spiritual rebirth in Christ. Many people tend to focus more on the physical world; we even hear this during times of prayer requests, when most of the requests are typically for those who are sick. And that isn't necessarily wrong, but the true Christian should not be solely focused on the trials of this world but rather on things of eternal value.
- Jesus did not want these demons to reveal who He was to the people who had gathered. We don't know His reason. What we do know, though, is that the demons know who God is (see James 2:19), and they know Him enough to where they tremble! But they do not show repentance and they do not have salvation. Do you merely know things about God and about the Bible, or do you know the true God intimately and personally? Do you obey Him?

February 9 (Day 40) – Luke 5:12-16

- Jesus came to earth to die for the sins of His people. During His three years of public ministry, He came to teach. He also performed miracles to provide evidence that He truly is who He claims to be. Yet for many, the miracles were all they cared about. Either they wanted one performed on their own self, or they were simply caught up in all the excitement of what was going on. But Jesus' primary task was not to perform miracles.
- How did Jesus respond to all of this fame and excitement? Unlike some so-called preachers of today, who seemingly crave those things, Jesus most certainly did not. That isn't why He was here. Instead, He withdrew to a private place and prayed to God, His Father. That shows us something of His character. When He could have had all the fame and popularity from performing exciting miracles, He slipped away from the crowds to spend time alone with God.

February 10 (Day 41) – Mark 2:1-12

- Notice what Jesus did first, in verse 2 of this passage. These people may have come to Him for all sorts of reasons, and as we see from the

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rest of the passage, many came hoping to be healed. But what did Jesus do before healing any of them? He preached the word, the truth of God, for all of them to hear. Preaching, teaching, or sharing of God's Word in any way should always be the top priority, and we have this example from Jesus to follow in that regard.

- After preaching, Jesus began to heal people--most notably, the man who was lowered down through the roof. When Jesus told that man that his sins were forgiven (verse 5), he perceived the doubts that many of the people had (verse 6-8). After all, anyone could tell people that their sins are forgiven, because there's no scientific way to prove that statement to be either true or false. So, Jesus took it a step further, proving that He is God in the flesh by healing the man and giving him the ability to walk.

February 11 (Day 42) – Luke 5:27-32

- As we saw a few days ago when Jesus called a few other disciples, here we find another example of immediate obedience to Jesus. Levi, also called Matthew (see Matthew 9:9), "left all" according to verse 28, right after Jesus told him to "Follow me." He didn't hesitate; he just went. What makes that even more astounding is that he had a lucrative job as a tax collector and was probably quite wealthy, based on what we know about the dishonesty of tax collectors of that time period. But we see a wonderful example here of Jesus calling, and Levi immediately forsaking all his worldly treasures and following Jesus.
- When the self-righteous religious leaders condemned Jesus for having a meal with a group of sinners, Jesus responded by reminding them that those who are well don't need a physician, but those who are sick do. That's not to say that the religious leaders were free of sin--quite the opposite, in fact, since we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). But in their own sinful pride, they believed themselves to be better than those horrible sinners that Jesus was eating a meal with. The main point here is this: Until you recognize that you are a sinner, you don't realize your need for salvation in Christ.

February 12 (Day 43) – Luke 5:33-39

- Once again, the religious leaders were trying to condemn Jesus. This time, they are essentially accusing Him and His followers of not fasting enough. How did Jesus respond? He tells them that He is only here for a short time, and while He is here, they need to spend time with Him, fellowshiping and learning from He who is the very Son of God. The religious leaders prayed and fasted in order to impress other people, but their hearts were far from God (see also Matthew 6:1-18).
- Jesus also shares two more parables with them (verses 36-39). Essentially, He is telling them that they are so wrapped up in keeping the law of the Old Covenant that they cannot accept that Jesus has come to usher in the New Covenant.

February 13 (Day 44) – John 5:16-20

- What great crime did Jesus commit on the sabbath, the Jewish day of rest? He told a man who had been sick for 38 years, unable to walk on his own, to take up his bed and walk. (Read verses 1-15 for the complete story.) Where does it say that in the law contained in the Bible? It doesn't, but the Jewish leaders had added dozens, perhaps hundreds, of their own rules that they expected the people to follow. And of course, these same leaders were looking for anything at all that they could use against Jesus, whom they hated. Jesus wasn't here to keep their laws; He was sent to keep and to fulfill God's perfect law.
- Look at verse 17. Jesus also committed a second crime in their eyes: He said God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. These people couldn't see past their jealousy and hatred of Jesus to even consider that He might be speaking the truth to them.
- We also see Jesus' obedience in verse 19, which serves as an example to us. He never acts on His own accord, but always does the will of the Father.

February 14 (Day 45) – John 5:21-30

- Jesus continues speaking to the Jews, explaining His relationship to His Father in more detail:
- God quickens, or makes spiritually alive (saves)

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whom He will, and Jesus acts according to the same will (verse 21).

- God gave His Son the responsibility of judgment (verses 22-23 and 30). Why? So that Jesus would receive honor, because this is the ultimate responsibility that ultimately determines where each soul will spend eternity. We can trust His judgment because, as we have already seen, Jesus acts not according to His own will but according to the Father's will. They, along with the Holy Spirit, act as one.
- Does verse 29 speak of those who do good works? No, because we know that is not the basis of our salvation (see Ephesians 2:8-9). We also know that none of us does anything that is good in God's eyes on our own (see Romans 3:10-12, Isaiah 64:6, and Ecclesiastes 7:20). For that reason, we must be born again in Christ, through the work of God, in order to do anything that can be pleasing unto Him (see Romans 14:23).

February 15 (Day 46) – John 5:31-38

- No one can be a witness to himself. Anyone could make a claim that he is the Savior (as various people throughout history have attempted to do), but what proof is there? Having worked all of these things out before time even began, God first sent John to bare witness that Jesus was coming, and soon after that, Jesus did indeed come. But the witness doesn't end there. Jesus has a far greater witness: God Himself, which was proven through Jesus' teaching, fulfillment of prophecies, and the miracles He performed.
- But despite all these things, these people were hard-hearted and did not have the Word of God abiding in them (verse 38). If they truly knew the Word, understood it and believed it, they would have known that He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. He tells them to search the Scriptures (see also Acts 17:11), but they have no interest in doing that--they only want to condemn Him because of their hatred.

February 16 (Day 47) – John 5:39-47

- How true are the words of Jesus in verse 43? Think about how many people make claims of truth (even though they are actually lies), and how many people follow them. Joseph Smith

would be one such person, who claimed to receive a new revelation from God. How many people have fallen for his teachings, as unbiblical (and downright ridiculous) they are? But many people who do not know the true God will do anything to try to earn their way into heaven. Sadly, there is nothing we can do on our own, because we "have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (see Romans 3:23).

- Jews are proud of the fact that they follow in the steps of their forefathers, such as Abraham and Moses. Here, Jesus mentions that Moses wrote about Him--but these people are too hard-hearted to see it. Even though they claim to believe the Bible--in reality, they don't. (To read about when Moses wrote about Jesus, see Numbers 24:16-17, Deuteronomy 18:15-19, and Genesis 49:10.)

February 17 (Day 48) – Matthew 12:1-8

- We find the account that Jesus refers to here (v. 3-4) in the first part of 1 Samuel, chapter 21. David and the men who were with him were very hungry and in great distress, and under those circumstances, they were allowed to eat the showbread, which was a special, holy bread that was placed in the sanctuary on each Sabbath day.
- In addition, in verse 5, Jesus refers to the fact that the priests did work on the Sabbath--most significantly, all the work required in preparing a sacrifice (see Numbers 28:9), yet they were regarded as blameless in doing that work.
- The point Jesus is making to the Pharisees is this: God has always been concerned about the inside rather than the outside (see 1 Samuel 16:7). Although David and the priests referred to here technically violated God's law, their intent was not against God, and because they are among God's chosen children, saved through Christ, they were forgiven. On the other hand, the Pharisees attempt to strictly adhere to the law without really understanding it, and without truly knowing God. They knew the Bible well and no doubt knew the facts that Jesus referred to here, but in their hearts, they just didn't get it.

February 18 (Day 49) – Matthew 12:9-14

- Once again we find the Pharisees attempting to

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trap Jesus so that they might accuse Him of breaking their laws. (Actually, He did break their laws on numerous occasions, but many of their laws were ridiculous and were only in place to make themselves look good. Jesus, of course, never broke God's law.) They ask Jesus if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus responds, not with a direct "yes" or "no" but by appealing to something that was familiar to those people--perhaps something some of them had even done themselves. If a sheep fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would they not have rescued it? He then reminds them that a person is much more valuable than a sheep.

- After all of that, Jesus went ahead and healed a man, because He certainly wasn't afraid of the Pharisees (see also Psalm 118:6). And how did they respond? Verse 14 tells us: They continued to search for a way that they might kill Him--not because He had done anything wrong, but simply out of their hatred toward Him, because He knew the evil that was truly in their hearts.

February 19 (Day 50) – Matthew 12:15-21

- Verse 15 refers back to what we saw yesterday--that the Pharisees were seeking to kill Jesus. So, knowing that, He withdrew from that area. He continued to heal people and tell them not to spread the news of what He had done. Two possible reasons for this are that He did not want the fame for Himself, and the time for the Jews to crucify Him had not yet come.
- Verse 19 confirms this as Jesus recounts a prophecy from the Old Testament, where Isaiah prophesied that no one would hear the voice of God's Servant (Jesus) in the streets. We also notice something else in this prophecy (which, in its entirety, comes from Isaiah 42:1-3): Despite how much the Jewish religious leaders hated this, it is prophesied over and over in the Old Testament that the Messiah would bring salvation to the Gentiles. This wonderful passage from Isaiah is just one example of that.

February 20 (Day 51) – Luke 6:12-16

- Right after dealing with multiple controversies regarding the Sabbath, and right before calling His twelve apostles, Jesus went onto a mountain (presumably by Himself) and spent all night in prayer to God the Father. The Bible

records Jesus doing this on other occasions as well, showing just how important prayer is. If God's own Son, who is God Himself, needs to spend such a significant amount of time in prayer, how much more of a need do we have to spend time in prayer? Yet prayer often gets pushed aside as we are rushing around, doing things in this life which often do not even have any eternal value. You can never pray too much, and for many Christians, we desperately need to spend much more time in prayer than we do. And prayer isn't just asking for things--actually, one of the main purposes of prayer is to conform us more to the image of Christ, and to get our thinking more in line with the will of God. Spending time in prayer and in the Word of God greatly helps with both of these things.

February 21 (Day 52) – Matthew 5:1-6

- At the beginning of what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus begins to teach the crowd around Him a wide variety of things, we find what are called the Beatitudes. Let us take a close look at each one in the light of salvation, because Jesus is not teaching about earthly things but about spiritual, eternal things.
- In verse 3, Jesus says that those who have come to recognize their poor spiritual condition, and need of a Savior, belong to the kingdom of heaven.
- In verse 4, Jesus says that those who mourn because of their sin against a holy God, again realizing their need of a Savior, will be comforted by Him.
- In verse 5, Jesus says that the meek shall inherit the earth. Meek doesn't mean weak, however. Rather, someone who is meek is patient, humble, slow to anger, and not easily provoked. That should describe all true Christians, though we all fall short and sin at times. Meekness is a sign of maturity and strength in Christ (see also Numbers 12:3).
- In verse 6, Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. Who are those people? True followers of Christ, who yearn to be filled with His righteousness.

February 22 (Day 53) – Matthew 5:7-9

- In verse 7, Jesus reminds us that we are to show mercy to others, which is one way of

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shining His light into the world. Just as He shows mercy to us (pardoning our sins when we do not deserve to be pardoned), we are also to show mercy to those that we come in contact with. We can do this through love and compassion or by giving to and caring for their needs. We need to show Jesus' love to the world!

- In verse 8, Jesus tells us that those who are pure in heart shall see God. Who is pure in heart but the true Christian? Only God the Father, through Jesus the Son, has the power and ability to make such a change in a person. We are helpless on our own; we cannot change our own hearts, which are full of sin from even before we were born (see also Psalm 51:5 and Ephesians 2:1-9).
- In verse 9, Jesus tells us that the children of God are to make peace with one another. Now, we have to be very careful to discern what He means here. This does not mean that we are to be agreeable to the point of compromising our witness. We should not, for example, make peace with someone of a false religion and never share the truth of God's Word. That contradicts clear teachings in the Bible (see Luke 12:51-53). Rather, we are to live peaceably with others as much as possible (see Romans 12:18), but we still must live for Christ and put Him first.

February 23 (Day 54) – Matthew 5:10-12

- In verse 10, Jesus goes a step farther than He has so far. In the previous seven verses, He speaks of the attitudes Christians should have and some of the things Christians should do for one another. But now, He says that those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness are blessed. That does not include anyone who is persecuted for any reason--just all who are persecuted in the name of Christ. Through persecution, God is glorified and the gospel is advanced, and even though it may be unpleasant (or worse) in this life, the true Christian should be ready to stand up for the truth of God no matter what the consequences may be. If we are persecuted, we should just praise God even more, knowing that He will receive glory from our persecution (see also Acts 16:25)!
- Verses 11 and 12 continue with the theme of

persecution, emphasizing how much of an eternal blessing it truly is to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ in this life. Jesus goes on to say that those who are persecuted will even receive a great reward in heaven! Think about this for a moment: If persecution comes, are you prepared to endure it for the sake of Jesus Christ and in order to glorify God?

February 24 (Day 55) – Matthew 5:13-16

- As Christians, Jesus says here, we are the salt of the earth. If we lose our savor, how will the earth be salted? To put it another way, if we lose our zeal for preaching the gospel and spreading God's Word, how will those in the world around us hear about the gospel (see also Romans 10:14)? We must not fail to preach and share the gospel with others. God put us here to spread that salt on the earth.
- He makes a similar comparison between Christians and light. We are the light of the world--a world that is very dark with sin, where evil abounds. Think carefully about His words to His followers. If your light is sitting up on a hill, it cannot be hidden. No one is foolish enough to light a candle, then cover it up, and expect it to accomplish anything! But how often do you do that with the light of God's Word? If you have the light of Christ burning within you, Jesus tells us, you must let it shine before others!

February 25 (Day 56) – Matthew 5:17-19

- Jesus never does away with the Old Testament, and that is made perfectly clear here in verses 17 and 18. He did not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill it. And if you look carefully throughout the Old Testament, in the books of the law and the books written by the prophets, you will find prophecies of, allusions to, and even appearances by (the preincarnate) Jesus Christ all over the place! Contrary to what some people teach, the God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament (see also Malachi 3:6). Jesus does not do away with anything, but has come to fulfill all that was promised throughout the Old Testament.
- In verse 19, He commands Christians to keep God's commandments and to teach and lead others to do the same--not because we are saved by doing so; if we are saved, it is by faith

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alone (see also Ephesians 2:8-9). But in doing so, we become more Christ-like, and we separate ourselves more from the sinfulness of the world around us, so that the light of Christ in us can shine even brighter.

February 26 (Day 57) – Matthew 5:20

- The scribes and the Pharisees were considered to be the most righteous people of that day. They knew the law well and followed it strictly, and harshly condemned those who disobeyed even one little part. But they followed the law in pride, trying to earn their way into heaven. So notice what Jesus says here: He doesn't say that we will enter the kingdom of heaven if we are just as righteous as they were. Rather, He says that our righteousness must exceed theirs. How is that possible, when they were the most righteous people of their day? It is only possible through Christ. For the true Christian, the righteousness of Christ is given as a gift from God, so that when God looks upon us, He does not see our sins but instead sees the perfect obedience of Christ. So, how can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees? Only by having Christ's righteousness placed over our own sinfulness (see also Philippians 3:9 and Romans 10:2-3).

February 27 (Day 58) – Matthew 5:21-26

- It's all a matter of what is in your heart. We all know that one of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt not kill" (see Exodus 20:13). But where does murder generally begin? It begins with a hatred toward that person in your heart. So here, Jesus says that anyone who hates someone without cause is guilty, just as if a murder was actually committed. By hating that person, murder has already been committed in his or her heart.
- This passage also speaks of coming to God with a clear conscience. How can you come before God if your mind is preoccupied with a hatred toward another person? Jesus says to leave and be reconciled first, then you are able to approach God without anything else in the way.

February 28 (Day 59) – Matthew 5:27-28

- Here Jesus refers back to another one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (see Exodus 20:14). But, once again,

it is an issue of what is in your heart. If you have lusted after a woman, committing adultery with her in your mind, it is just as bad as committing the actual act. This is significant in our world today, where things of a sexual nature are found all around us. But God's Word never changes, and the command that Jesus gave here still stands. Adultery is sin, and so is lust in the mind. As Christians, we are to flee from all of these things, because they are worldly temptations that take our eyes off of God (see also 1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Leave all of the sinful, temporary pleasures for those who are not saved and who have no interest in God. Christians should want nothing to do with temporal, worldly pleasures. Our desire should be to please God and to live as He wants us to, especially when we stop to consider that, on the cross, Jesus Christ paid the ultimate price for each and every one of our sins against God.

February 29

- On this extra day, which comes around just once every four years, I encourage you to read and meditate upon your favorite passage within the four gospels.

March 1 (Day 60) – Matthew 5:29-30

- Nothing should come in between us and God, and that is the key to what Jesus is saying in verses 29 and 30. Honestly, what He suggests probably sounds crazy to many of us. But think about it like this: Which is better, to spend 80 or so years on the earth without a hand or an eye, or to spend all of eternity--which never ends--in the fires of hell? Not that doing any kind of work can keep us out of hell; only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that for God's chosen. Rather, Jesus is telling us that if our eye or our hand is leading us into sin (especially sexual sin, because these verses are in the section of His sermon that is focusing on adultery, though it could apply to other sins as well), we need to do whatever we can do to put that sin away from us in order to draw nearer to God.
- Many of us take our relationship with God, and our sin, far too lightly. God hates sin. Our sin is what sent Christ to the cross to die in our place. As we walk in faith and become more and more like Christ, we should hate sin more and more.

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Nothing should come before God. We do not hate sin as we should (see also Exodus 20:3-6, Psalm 5:4-6, and Psalm 97:10).

March 2 (Day 61) – Matthew 5:31-32

- Jesus also corrects what was apparently a common misconception about divorce. The idea comes from Deuteronomy 24:1-4, when Moses was writing the law that God had given to him. Jesus discusses this in more detail in Matthew 19:1-12, which we will cover at a later point in this series. Essentially, He tells us that God allowed Moses to make this provision because of the hardness of their hearts (essentially, because of sin), but that God never intended for it to be that way (see also Malachi 2:16-17).
- In Scripture, fornication (unfaithfulness) is the only permitted reason for a Christian to initiate a divorce. In marriage, God joins, and the two become one flesh. So, if a divorce takes place for any other reason, and then a second marriage follows, it is just as if adultery has occurred, because according to God, the original couple is still joined as one. Divorce has become far too easy in our society, but that was never God's design for humanity.
- Notice also that Jesus is not changing anything that was said in the Old Testament; He is merely clarifying while also giving us more insight into the heart of God.

March 3 (Day 62) – Matthew 5:33-36

- This passage refers back to another part of the original law, written by Moses, where God tells the Israelites not to swear by His name falsely (see Leviticus 19:12). But Jesus again clarifies and expands the meaning, letting us see what the intent behind that law really was. Swearing may still be necessary from time to time with regard to some sort of oath. But apparently the Jews were swearing with regard to all sorts of trivial matters, and that is what Jesus says not to do. Basically, He tells us that not only should we not swear by the name of the Lord, but that we also should not swear by heaven, the earth, the city of Jerusalem, or even our own heads. Why? Because all of those things were created by and belong to the Lord. People use God's name in poor ways all the time, and the Christian should be set apart in this way, not

using God's name in any way other than to glorify Him.

March 4 (Day 63) – Matthew 5:37

- In this verse, Jesus tells us to simply say "yes" or "no." This addresses something else that is commonplace today--people add words (and word that are often inappropriate) to their "yes" or "no" so that others know that they really mean it. But that also implies something else: When such a person merely says "yes" or "no" with no additional words attached, we really can't trust the person, if he or she has to add other words in order to really mean it. This actually goes back to matters of integrity and honesty. When you say "yes", that's exactly what you should mean! And the same is true when you say "no." If you are a person of honesty and integrity, as any Christian most certainly should be, then you don't need any extra words. People will know that they can trust your simple "yes" and "no" and, therefore, no additional words are necessary.

March 5 (Day 64) – Matthew 5:38-39

- If someone hits you, what do they most likely expect in return? They probably expect to get hit back, because that's the way a lot of people handle those kinds of situations. But Jesus tells us something different. He says that if someone slaps your right cheek, let the person slap your left cheek, too. Why? Because everything the Christian is to do should be about glorifying God. If you react the way the world expects someone to react, then there is no glory for God. But if you react in the opposite way, at the very least, you are going to cause the person to stop and wonder why you reacted in such an odd way. You may even get an opportunity to witness and share God's truth with him or her. Even if you don't get that opportunity, you have at least shared the love of God, and you have given the other person something to ponder.

March 6 (Day 65) – Matthew 5:40-42

- Again the emphasis of Christ in these statements is for the child of God to live in such a way that promotes love and peace with others. That doesn't mean acceptance of things, such as moral issues, that go against the truth of the Bible, but it does mean that we are to live

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in peace and harmony with others as much as possible. This is the exact opposite, for example, of Islam, which gives three and only three options for infidels (unbelievers): convert, enslave, or kill. The world expects hate, but Jesus tells us to show love instead. And if someone asks you for something (verse 42) or tries to take something from you by force (verse 40), He says to not resist that person. Showing love to them could open the door to sharing the love of Christ, while refusing to show love doesn't open any door at all. Yes, it may be that the Christian is taken advantage of from time to time--and, just being honest, the fleshly part of me does not like that! But God can use things like that to break our own human pride, while also shining the light of Christ into the dark world around us.

March 7 (Day 66) – Matthew 5:43-45

- Once again we find Jesus Christ urging His followers to do something that would put God first while crushing their own pride. (We will look at the “love your enemies” aspect of this more tomorrow.) He says to bless people who curse you, do good to people who hate you, and pray for people who use and persecute you. That goes directly against our human nature of wanting to stand up for ourselves! But it causes me to think of how Jesus Himself responded to Pilate just before His crucifixion (see Mark 15:3-5). He had every right to defend Himself against these unjust charges--but He did not. Jesus is continuing His theme of teaching us that part of being a Christian is standing apart from the world. We have been changed and set apart by God, and that should be evidenced in how we react to people and situations. In all that we do, Jesus Christ must come first, and you or I must come last.

March 8 (Day 67) – Matthew 5:46-48

- Here Jesus gets into the explanation behind the things He has been teaching. Even tax collectors, who were among the most noteworthy criminals of the day (as a result of their often dishonest tax collecting for their own gain), have a certain love for one another. One tax collector probably isn't going to cheat another tax collector--there is a sort of honor and bond among criminals. So for the

Christian, simply loving other Christians is (usually) easy to do and is not at all surprising to the world around us, because they would expect that already. But by showing love to someone who hates you or who has done something against you, you are truly displaying the love of Christ. How do the two compare? Because “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We were enemies of God, yet He died for us anyway, which was the ultimate act of love (see Romans 5:6-10). So, if Christ loved us while we still hated Him, surely we can show love to those who hate us!

March 9 (Day 68) – Matthew 6:1-4

- Now, Jesus begins to go into a different topic. If you do a good deed, is it for the glory of God or is it to receive praise from man? Jesus specifically calls out some people who were known to do good deeds for all the wrong reasons. They gave to the poor just so other people would see them giving to the poor, with the single goal of looking better in the eyes of those other people. For them, it was all about the praise and honor of man. They wanted to be recognized for being good people. There are still plenty of people like that in the world today, who do good deeds in order to be recognized by others. But if they don't know Christ and aren't doing it for the glory of God, then all that they do is just like filthy rags in the eyes of God (see Isaiah 64:6). Many people don't like to hear something like that, but that doesn't make it any less true. If you don't like to hear that, then you need to take a close look at yourself, because you very well may have a problem with God. Anything--absolutely anything--that is done for any reason other than in faith, to give glory to God, is sin (see Romans 14:23).

March 10 (Day 69) – Matthew 6:5-7

- Again Jesus speaks against those hypocrites who pray in public in order to gain attention and praise from other people. Prayer is not about impressing anybody; prayer is simply about talking with God, and we will soon look at what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer to see some things that prayer should include. But from these verses, we know not to pray like the hypocrites do. Now, Jesus

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certainly isn't saying that all public prayer is wrong, and that we are only allowed to pray in private. Obviously, public prayer is both appropriate and necessary at certain times. Rather, He is telling His people that, wherever we pray, we should only be focused on God, and we should not add extra words to sound ultra-religious or in any way think about what other people might think of our prayer.

- Take notice, also, what Jesus says about these people: They already have their reward. Now, which reward would you prefer--the temporary praise of man, or the infinitely more superior rewards from God?

March 11 (Day 70) – Matthew 6:8

- The hypocrites just talk to make themselves heard when they pray. But it isn't necessary for the true child of God, because our Father already knows our needs, even before we ask! What a beautiful promise this is from God for those who belong to Him. There is no need for fancy prayers or impressive words, because God already knows our needs, and there is nothing in us that can impress God anyway (see Romans 3:10-12 and 7:18). So don't try to impress men when you pray. Just talk to God and pour out your heart to Him, ignoring everything and everyone else around you. And if gaining the praise of man is more important to you than obeying God, then you should do a serious self-examination to see if you even know the true God (see also Philippians 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:31). Do all things for the glory of God!

March 12 (Day 71) – Matthew 6:9-13

- Now we have come to what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, although calling it the "model prayer" is perhaps a better title. The lengthy prayer actually made by our Lord is recorded in John 17. In any case, this is the prayer that Jesus gives us as a model for how we should pray. He doesn't say to recite this prayer word for word (though there is nothing wrong with doing that on occasion), because prayer should come from the heart. Rather, He gives us this prayer so that we have a general idea of how we should pray, because, let's face it: prayer is not something that comes naturally or easily to most of us.

- Over the next several days, we will take a close look at each verse in this prayer. For now, consider two things about the prayer as a whole. First, it is very short and concise. A prayer does not have to be long to be effective--though there is nothing wrong with a long prayer, if it is done with pure intentions. Second, the focus of this prayer is not asking for things--in fact, there is almost none of that.

March 13 (Day 72) – Matthew 6:9

- We do not take nearly enough time to meditate on who God really is, or all that He has done for us who are His children. We tend to think we're pretty good people, and this nice, friendly God came along and made a way for us to spend eternity in a wonderful place. If we really study the Bible, though, we will find that such an idea could not be farther from the truth. We are wretched, sinful people who are hopeless without God (see much of the book of Romans, especially chapter 3).
- Our prayers should begin by acknowledging who God is, and thanking Him for specific things He has done for us. Most of us--and I include myself here as well--need to do far more of this than we do. God's name is to be revered and adored, not used foolishly and taken in vain as many people do. God is holy and perfect and deserves the absolute highest respect that we can give. As you begin your prayers, praise the name of God and meditate on the perfect holiness of God!

March 14 (Day 73) – Matthew 6:9

- I believe the opening of a prayer is also the perfect time to thank God for all He has done. This should not merely be a general "thank you" (and I admit, I often just do that myself), but a lot of specific "thank yous" for all the things He has done and continues to do for us. Take some time to dwell on what God does for us. He gives us air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear, and shelter from the weather. Most of us in this country have even more reason to be thankful for food, water, clothing, and shelter, which are hard to come by in some parts of the world. We so often take things for granted. He sustains us and takes care of us physically. Even if you've been sick or if you're battling something such as cancer,

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God is still taking care of you. Most of all, we have His salvation through Jesus Christ to be thankful for, which saved His children from eternal punishment in hell. We owe everything to God, and should be far more thankful than we tend to be.

March 15 (Day 74) – Matthew 6:10

- The will of God will no doubt be done, whether or not we pray for it. God does not change, and nothing we can do could possibly change Him or His will (see also Malachi 3:6). But here's an important aspect of prayer: We tend to ask for things in prayer, and while there's certainly nothing wrong with doing that, another big part of prayer is about changing our hearts. When we pray for God's will to be done, we are also saying that we want what God wants--that we desire for His will to be done, whatever it may be. Praying for God's will to be done helps to conform us more to His image and helps tune the desires of our heart more in line with His will. There are other verses in Scripture that say that God will give us what we ask for in prayer--but only if we are praying in line with God's will (see also Matthew 21:22, James 4:3, and 1 John 3:22). Praying in this manner helps us to know and to desire the will of God.

March 16 (Day 75) – Matthew 6:11

- There is more than one way we can look at this verse. First, we can view it in terms of asking God to provide our needs for the day. Not our wants, but our needs--such as food to nourish and strengthen the body. But consider this: The request is only made for bread for today...not for tomorrow, not for next week, but just for today. I am reminded of the 40 years that the Israelites spent wandering around the desert. God provided manna for them each morning, but they could not keep any until the next day (except for the Sabbath). The lesson for the Israelites was that they needed to learn to depend on God for everything, and I think we can take the same lesson from this portion of this model prayer that Jesus gives us. Just focus on today, and don't worry about tomorrow, which is something Jesus will teach on in more detail a little later in this chapter of Matthew.

March 17 (Day 76) – Matthew 6:11

- Consider one other thing about this verse: In this entire prayer, this is the only request for anything. This model prayer clearly does not focus on asking for things, and while asking for things from God isn't wrong (other verses in Scripture tell us to do that), it certainly should not be as much of a focus in our prayers as it often is. This prayer primarily consist of reverence to God, praying for and accepting His will, asking for forgiveness, and asking for protection from temptation and sin. Only a tiny part of this prayer deals with asking for anything, and the part that does asks for a very basic need. There is no lengthy list of requests for things or money or even physical healing, which is something else that tends to comprise a significant portion of our prayers. We often fail to consider that God may be causing or allowing physical suffering from someone for their ultimate good (see Romans 8:28). Again, praying for those things isn't wrong, but that should not be our focus in prayer.

March 18 (Day 77) – Matthew 6:11

- I mentioned previously that there is more than one way that we can look at this verse. The obvious connection is to physical food. However, this portion of the prayer could also refer to spiritual food. In order to continually stay close to God and grow in our relationship with Christ, we need to be fed spiritually on a daily basis. This can be done through simply reading the Bible or by doing some type of Bible study, followed by meditation and prayer, reflecting on what you have read and studied. This can also be done through listening to the preaching of the word (which, thanks to websites such as sermonaudio.com, no longer has to wait until the next Sunday). However you do it, spending time in the Word of God is of utmost importance. If you are truly a child of God, you should have a desire for God's Word. We live in a busy, hectic society and sometimes it's hard to just set down and read the Bible (I speak from my own experience as well when I say that), but in order to grow spiritually, it is a necessity (see also Acts 17:11 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17). We don't have time not to read the Bible and pray!

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March 19 (Day 78) – Matthew 6:12

- Our sin is a debt owed to God--a debt that we can never even begin to repay on our own. This portion of Jesus' model prayer focuses on sin, asking God for forgiveness for our sins against Him. Repenting of sin and asking for forgiveness is one sign of true salvation, as is a changed heart that does not continually commit the same sins. This also serves as another example of something we often fail to do in our prayers--confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. You might ask, why do this if our sins are already forgiven in Christ? There are several reasons. Not only are we commanded to by God (see also 1 John 1:9), but confessing our sins also helps us to recognize them, leave them behind, and draw closer in our relationship with Jesus Christ. In summary, repentance and asking for forgiveness is a crucial part of prayer--not because God's forgiveness is based on it or dependent upon it, but in order to help draw our souls closer to Him and to remind us daily of His amazing grace and mercy.

March 20 (Day 79) – Matthew 6:13

- We live in a dreadfully sinful world, with temptations around every corner. But for the Christian, God has called us to live apart from this world (see also John 17:14-19 and Romans 12:2). The battle for sin is a very real one (see also Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:16-17). It is a war we must continue waging, yet with (and only with) the power of Christ, we can prevail over evil. This is a very necessary part of prayer, though it is something we rarely hear (I must confess, I rarely pray anything of this nature myself--something that God just recently showed me). But this is included in Jesus' model prayer for us, and as short as that prayer is, it should obviously be an important part of our prayers. Pray that God would keep you from sinning and keep evil away from you. It may be difficult at times, considering the fallen world in which we live, but just as Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (see Philippians 4:13).

March 21 (Day 80) – Matthew 6:13

- Jesus ends this brief but powerful model prayer

by once again giving all the praise, honor, and glory to God. Indeed, His kingdom, power, and glory alone will last forever!

- Let us once more consider the prayer as a whole, and break it down into six statements.
- Three of the six statements (v. 9b, 10, and 13b) are giving praise to God in some way, recognizing His everlasting kingdom along with His awesome power and glory.
- Two of the six statements (v. 12 and 13a) deal with sin--either repenting and asking for forgiveness, or asking God to keep us away from sin.
- The remaining statement (v. 11) prays for God to meet our daily needs in terms of food, both physical and spiritual.
- Take some time to think about your own prayer life, and ask yourself a few questions. How often do you pray? How many of these things are regularly included in your prayers? How many things do you typically pray for that are not part of this prayer from Jesus? Once again, there certainly are other things which we can and should pray for that are not part of this prayer, but it definitely shows us where our focus should be in prayer--and I would venture to say that the vast majority of prayers that are prayed probably do not look much like this one.

March 22 (Day 81) – Matthew 6:14-15

- Is God's forgiveness to a true believer based on our forgiveness of others? Of course not, because that would be a work--and there is no work we can do to earn our own salvation, and Scripture must be used to interpret other Scripture. We know that salvation is entirely a free gift from God (see also Romans 3:27-28 and Ephesians 2:8-9).
- So then, what does Jesus mean in these two verses? Essentially, he is saying that forgiveness is a fruit of true salvation (see also John 15:1-8 and Galatians 5:22-23). He knows that there are people listening who think they know God but really don't (such as the Pharisees and other Jews who are trying to earn their spot in heaven, which is impossible), in order to show them that their hard hearts and lack of forgiveness toward others is a sign that they are not truly saved. God doesn't

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change, and the same thing is still true today: If you think you are saved but your heart is full of unforgiveness and bitterness, that is a good sign that you may have never had a true work of the Holy Spirit in your heart (see also Philippians 2:12).

March 23 (Day 82) – Matthew 6:16-18

- Jesus began this portion of His sermon (see verses 1-6) by calling out hypocrites--specifically, those who give to the needy and pray just to look good in the eyes of others. After taking a few moments to show us the right way to pray, He now continues to address hypocrisy, and this time the topic is fasting. We will address the actual subject of fasting at a later point in this study, but for now, we are just looking at it in light of hypocrisy. Jesus condemns those who fast in order to gain attention and to look good in the eyes of other people, by making themselves look weak, pale, and starved. Rather, Jesus tells us, if you do fast, seek a reward from God and not from men. It's all about the motivation of your heart, and that is the overall theme of this portion of Jesus' sermon. Are you serving God in the things that you do, or are you merely trying to please men?

March 24 (Day 83) – Matthew 6:19-21

- This country as a whole has fallen into many sins, but greed and materialism may be at the top of that list, though that category of sin sadly goes largely unnoticed. Our society has embraced capitalism to such a degree that we are constantly bombarded with pushy advertisements trying to convince us how much we need some new electronic device, article of clothing, item for our home, or grossly expensive entertainment package (TV, internet, phone). We don't need 99% of the things companies tell us that we need! And they know it, too, but they really don't care, because they are just trying to make a profit. As Christians, we should run as fast as we can in the opposite direction! Regardless of what advertisements try to tell you, almost all of the time, you really don't need whatever it is they are trying to sell. Where is your treasure? Where is your heart? We will continue with this passage tomorrow.

March 25 (Day 84) – Matthew 6:19-21

- Think about all of your possessions. Also think about things that you want (not needs, but wants). How many of those things can you take with you when you die? Especially if you're a younger person reading this, how many of those things will you even still own by the time you die? Don't store up treasures on earth, Jesus tells us here, because they are only temporal. Nothing on this earth will last forever. Do you sometimes have to spend money on a legitimate need? Of course, and that is why God blesses us with money and the ability to work to earn that money. But we are called to be good stewards of what God has blessed us with (see also Luke 16:1-13). When you are thinking about making a purchase, I encourage you to think and pray about it first. Is it a need, or just a want? Are you being a good steward? Will this item that you want to buy bring glory to God in some way (see 1 Corinthians 10:31)? God only requires us to give back to Him a tenth of what He has blessed us with, but we can certainly give more (to the church, to missionaries, etc.), in order to further the work of His kingdom. Where are you laying up treasures--on earth, or in heaven? As Jesus tells us here, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

March 26 (Day 85) – Matthew 6:22-23

- What are your eyes drawn to? Are they singly, steadily focused on Jesus Christ? If that is the case, as Jesus tells us here, your whole body will be filled with the light that comes from Christ. Or, are your eyes drawn to other things--material possessions, fame and fortune, people or things that you're coveting or lusting after--are your eyes drawn to things of this world? If so, then the second part of this brief passage applies to you, and Jesus says you are filled with darkness. Take inventory of yourself. What do you focus on? Where do your thoughts go? What is at the forefront of your mind? Is your answer to these questions anything other than Jesus Christ? It should not be for someone who is a true child of God (see also Romans 12:2 and 1 John 2:15-17).

March 27 (Day 86) – Matthew 6:24

- Jesus concludes His teaching on materialism

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and worldliness with this verse, which is one of my favorites in all the Bible. He summarizes all that He has been saying quite simply, by reinforcing the fact that you cannot serve both God and mammon, which is a word that encompasses all kinds of worldly goods and riches. So, which is it for you? Do you serve God with your whole heart? Or is your focus on the things of this world? It cannot be both ways, and you should not be anywhere in the middle, either (see also Revelation 3:14-22). For many, many people, especially in today's world where many societies have easy access to material possessions like never before in the history of the world, mammon has become an idol for many (see also Exodus 20:3-6). Apparently John felt it was urgent enough to warn people about serving idols that he threw in a warning at the very end of his first letter (see 1 John 5:21). An idol doesn't have to be a statue; it can be anything that takes the place of God, who should be first in your heart. And you cannot truly serve God if you are preoccupied with the things of this world. So, what do you serve--God or mammon?

March 28 (Day 87) – Matthew 6:25

- Verses 24 and 25 may not seem connected at first glance, but this verse actually follows the idea presented in the previous verse about not serving mammon. Remember that the word "mammon" refers to all types of riches and material possessions--including basic necessities such as food and clothing, if you place their importance above God (see also 1 Corinthians 10:31). If you are overly focused on what you will wear, or if you take a significant amount of time getting yourself ready in the morning, how does that bring glory to God? Do you worry about what you will eat and what you will wear, or do you trust God to provide for you, wholly focusing on Him, and being thankful for all that He has blessed you with? (And even if you believe yourself to be poor in this life, if you are a Christian, God has still blessed you richly in many ways.) We are to completely trust God for all things. If we really take time to dwell on who God is and all He has done--especially in salvation--what reason could there be to not trust Him for everything we need?

March 29 (Day 88) – Matthew 6:26-30

- We are so foolish when we worry! And worry is sin, because it is the opposite of putting our faith and trust in God. When we worry, we are essentially saying that we don't trust God to handle something, whatever the situation may be. But if God even cares about the birds of the air so that they have food to eat, and if He cares about the flowers in the field so as to dress them more beautifully even than the wisest and most magnificent king who ever lived (Solomon, which is what verse 29 tells us), how can we doubt that He will take care of those of us whom He has adopted into His family as children, through the blood of Christ? We worry and fret over things because of our sinful nature, but truly, we have absolutely no reason to!

March 30 (Day 89) – Matthew 6:31-33

- Not only does our heavenly Father know what His children need as we read here in verse 32-- He already knows what we need before we even ask (see Matthew 6:8)! The more we read of this portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the sillier we should all feel for ever worrying at all. So once again, Jesus tells us to stop worrying about our needs in this life, because our Father in heaven will provide for us. If you belong to Him, think about that for a moment-- has He ever failed to provide what you need? You may not have what you want, you may not be comfortable, but you will have what you need. That is a promise we can count on.
- So, what's left for us to do? We are to seek first the kingdom of God, not worrying about things in this life that God has already promised to provide for us, but rather keeping our eyes on eternal things, trusting in God and spreading His Gospel to the world around us.

March 31 (Day 90) – Matthew 6:34

- Here, Jesus concludes His teaching about worry and worldliness by telling us not to worry about tomorrow. For one thing, we are not promised tomorrow--at any moment, life could end or Jesus could return. But aside from that, what good does it do to worry about the future? As Jesus says, today brings enough trouble of its own (see also John 16:33)! Now, that doesn't mean that we only live in the

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moment and don't give any consideration to the future, because that would be very foolish as well (see also Proverbs 21:20, 31). But what it does mean is that we should not sit around worrying and fretting over what the future may bring. That demonstrates a lack of faith, and anything not done in faith is sin (see Romans 14:23). The future is all in God's hands. Is there anyone else you could trust with the future more than Him?

April 1 (Day 91) – Matthew 7:1

- Out of all the verses in the Bible, this is probably the one that is used the most often by non-Christians. Unfortunately, they almost always use it out of context. Pulling Scripture verses out of context, you can make the Bible say just about anything that you want it to say (read just the last three words of Romans 14:23 for a good example of this). Some non-believers are very good at doing this, either intentionally or unintentionally. But you must read verses in context in order to understand what they actually mean. As we'll see in more detail tomorrow as we examine the verses following this one, Jesus is not saying that we should not judge at all. How can we know that for sure? Because Scripture does not disagree with Scripture, and we are told in other places that we are to judge the fruit of those who claim to be Christians to see whether or not they are true believers. One example of that is found just a little farther down in this same chapter (Matthew 7:16-20). We also know that God judges each one of us (see also Romans 2:1-2 and Romans 14:10-13). So, the next time you hear someone misusing this verse, take them just a little farther down the page (or also to John 7:24) and show them what this verse does not mean.

April 2 (Day 92) – Matthew 7:1-5

- If this passage does not condemn all judgment, what is it really telling us? The key to verse 1 is found in verses 2-5. This whole passage is about hypocrisy! Jesus tells us not to judge someone else's faults while ignoring our own. And the words He chooses are especially important. He chastens us for focusing on the mote or the speck--something very tiny and insignificant--in someone else's eye, while

ignoring the beam or the plank--something much larger--in our own eye. The whole idea is summarized in verse 5 when Jesus tells us to take care of our own sin first, then we are able to see more clearly to rebuke someone else of theirs. The trouble with people who like to quote verse 1 is that they never make it down to verse 5. Jesus never says not to judge someone else at all, but rather to judge righteously and not hypocritically (see also John 7:24), and to take care of our own sins before worrying about someone else's.

April 3 (Day 93) – Matthew 7:6

- God's Word is precious and holy and is not to be taken lightly. What do atheists and other people who are strongly opposed to Jesus Christ do when they hear something from God's Word? Many of them will tear it to shreds, attempting to disprove it and mock it. God's Word deserves better than that, and that is what Jesus is saying here. Don't share the precious things of God with people like that, because they will tear it up and trample all over it. People like that desperately need to hear the gospel--the good news that Jesus came to bring salvation to the lost--and they need to be told to repent. That's what Jesus told those who were lost over and over (see Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15, among other verses). But as for the precious truths about God, those Jesus shared only with fellow believers--because the mysteries of God are given unto those of us who belong to Him, but they are not given unto everyone (see also Matthew 13:10-16).

April 4 (Day 94) – Matthew 7:7-12

- In this passage, Jesus is again speaking of prayer. If people on earth, who are evil at heart, can give good gifts to their children, would the children of God expect anything less from our Heavenly Father? But, Jesus doesn't say that God will give us everything we ask for; rather, He says that God will give us the good things that we ask for. Only God knows what is ultimately for our good, and He is always working all things toward our good (see Romans 8:28). But we must pray according to the will of God (see 1 John 5:14-15). Prayers that are not made in accordance with God's will are not in line with His purpose, are not for our

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ultimate good, and therefore we have no promise that those prayers would be answered in the affirmative. Indeed, we should be thankful that God does not grant what we ask for in prayers that are not in accordance with His will, because those things, even if they appear good for a season, would not be for our ultimate, eternal good. Praise God that He always does what is best for His children, even when that means saying “no” to a petition. All earthly parents should learn from this example as well.

April 5 (Day 95) – Matthew 7:13-14

- Jesus tells us plainly in these two verses: Most people in this world are headed for hell. It may not be a pleasant thing to think about, but unless you view Jesus as a liar (although He assuredly is not), we must not take these two verses lightly. The road that leads to eternal destruction in hell is wide and easy to follow, and most of the world is headed down that path. But the road that leads to eternal life is narrow, and difficult, and few people, Jesus says, are heading down that narrow path.
- Which path are you on? If you believe you are traveling on the path that leads to life...are you certain of that? Over the next few days, we will look at some warnings that Jesus gives to those who believe themselves to be saved, but who actually are not. This is a vitally important portion of Scripture, and it should be carefully read and meditated upon by all who believes themselves to be Christians.

April 6 (Day 96) – Matthew 7:15

- False teachers are everywhere. Some are easy to see, like atheists and Muslims. But others can be very deceitful, which makes them difficult to spot. After all, we are told in Scripture that even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). That is why Jesus gives us this warning, to alert us to be on guard against those false teachers who pretend to be Christians. Some of these false teachers would include Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholics, those who proclaim the so-called prosperity gospel, and those, like Joel Osteen, who just want to make everybody feel happy. All of these people call themselves Christians and try to act like

Christians. Sadly, many are even being deceived themselves. But the truth is, if they do not proclaim Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ as the way of salvation, then they are false teachers and you must not follow them in any way (see also 1 John 4:1-3).

April 7 (Day 97) – Matthew 7:16-20

- Here Jesus continues to speak about false teachers and those who are not true Christians. All true believers will produce fruit--not of their own works, but as a result of God working in and through them. Jesus also explains this in John 15:1-8, and Paul gives us a list of some good and evil fruits in Galatians 5:19-25. Fruit is outward evidence that God has saved someone and is working in that person’s heart. Someone who is truly saved will continue to bear fruit as long as he or she lives on this earth. Someone who is not truly saved may appear to bear fruit for a time, but will not persevere and will fall away, as Jesus explains in the parable of the sower (see Luke 8:5-18).
- So, in this part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we have a two-fold warning. First, be on guard against false teachers, so that you are not deceived. Second, check your own fruit to be sure you are truly saved, lest you be deceived yourself.

April 8 (Day 98) – Matthew 7:21-23

- Here we find what is quite possibly the saddest passage in the entire Bible. Pause for a moment to really think about the implications of what Jesus is saying here. He is talking about people who believed themselves to be saved--people who have said “Lord, Lord” to Him. But what happened when they died? Jesus said to them, “depart from Me; I never knew you.” Could that be you? If you believe that you are saved, look for the evidence. Faith is not based on works, but as James tells us, faith without works is dead (see James 2). If you are truly saved, there will be evidence. You will have a desire to serve God, to please Him, to go to church as often as you can, to read and study your Bible, to spend time in prayer, and to share the gospel with others--and the list could go on. If you believe that you’re saved and you point to one day when you walked down the aisle at the end of the service or prayed the

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sinner's prayer, but most of those things are lacking in your daily life, could you be deceived yourself? Be sure of your salvation (see also Philippians 2:12)!

April 9 (Day 99) – Matthew 7:24-27

- Here we find the conclusion to what is known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and He makes a clear distinction between the two groups of people in the world: believers and non-believers. There are many other religions in which people try to earn their way into heaven, but those religions are all false. In Christianity, we find the truth: None of us is good (see Romans 3:10-12); none of us can earn our own way into heaven. The only way there is through Jesus Christ. All roads do not lead to heaven; only one road does.
- As we saw throughout this sermon from Jesus, there are not many who truly follow Him (see Matthew 7:13-14). There are also many who claim to follow Him but who truly do not, some of which are deceiving themselves (see Matthew 7:21-22). So, who are you like? Are you like the wise man who built his house on the rock--are you counting on Jesus Christ alone as the rock of your salvation? Or, are you like the foolish man who does not follow Christ and does not have a firm foundation on which to stand?

April 10 (Day 100) – Matthew 7:28-8:1

- The sermon from Jesus is now over, and the people who were listening are astonished. Why? Verse 29 tells us: Jesus taught as one who has authority--because He is the one and only Son of God! These people were apparently used to hearing teaching from the scribes, who knew the Word of God but, generally speaking, did not understand it. But now, they heard something different and powerful, and many followed Jesus when he came down from the mountain. Would you? Do you follow Jesus? Not the sweet little baby in a manger that is easy for many people to love. But do you follow the true Jesus? We get a glimpse of Him in these three chapters of Matthew. He tells some hard truths; He is not afraid to tell it like it is, even if He upsets and offends people along the way. He did not come to the earth to make friends and become popular; while He was

here, His objective was to share God's truth with all those He came in contact with. As we looked in depth at the Sermon on the Mount, did you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with the words of Christ? If you believe yourself to be a Christian but you found yourself disagreeing with what Christ said, you should be concerned about the state of your salvation--because you are not in agreement with God.

April 11 (Day 101) – Matthew 8:5-13

- Jesus encountered this centurion (who is a commander of 100 soldiers in the Roman army) after he had finished preaching His "Sermon on the Mount." Why did Jesus commend this man for his great faith? Because this man understood the power that Jesus has, and knew that his servant would be healed if Jesus merely spoke the words.
- Perhaps the more interesting aspect of Jesus' encounter with this man, however, is what Jesus says between verses 10 and 12. After commenting on this man's great faith, he then goes on to say that He has not found such great faith among the Israelites, who were originally God's chosen people. But with the coming of Christ, the gospel will now be spread across the world, and many people from all over will come and sit down with the fathers of the faith. Meanwhile, many of the Israelites, who have rejected Christ, will find themselves in hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is more than a miracle; it is a proclamation by Jesus Christ of the many Gentiles that will be saved, to provoke the Jews to jealousy (see also Romans 10:19-21 and Romans 11:7-11).

April 12 (Day 102) – Luke 7:11-17

- Here we find the first of several instances in which Jesus brought someone who had died back to life. This leaves no question that He holds the key to death and the grave; death has no power over Jesus, and He can bring back to life whomever He wishes--including Himself.
- This miracle has spiritual implications as well, for Jesus gives spiritual life to whomever He wishes (see also John 5:21). Those whom Jesus makes spiritually alive and calls to follow Him will do so, just as this man sat up when Jesus

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made him alive and told him to arise.

- The result of this miracle should be the result of all that we do as Christians: Verse 16 tells us that the people feared God and glorified God. Of course, we don't have the power that Jesus had to restore life--but we should live and share God's truth in such a way that we always glorify God.

April 13 (Day 103) – Matthew 11:2-6

- John knew that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, so it is likely that his question was for the benefit of his disciples, that they would know for sure who Jesus is and become stronger in their faith. In His response, Jesus reminded them of the miracles He had performed--but the things He mentions also have spiritual applications. The spiritually blind and deaf receive ears to hear and eyes to see when the Holy Spirit first comes in. Similarly, the spiritually dead are raised to new life in Christ, and sins are washed away just like the leper's spots. Finally, those who are poor in spirit--who recognize their need for a savior--have the gospel preached to them and receive God's gift of salvation!
- Don't miss the last verse in this passage. Do you love everything about Jesus Christ and fully agree with all that He taught? Or do you disagree and take offense at some of His teachings? Those who are not offended by Him shall be blessed, Jesus says here.

April 14 (Day 104) – Matt. 11:7-10, 18-19

- John the Baptist wasn't a well-dressed man sitting in a fancy, expensive home. He was quite the opposite, in fact--just as Jesus was the opposite of what many Jews expected. They were looking for a great king to come and rescue them from the Romans. Well, a great King did come, but His kingdom is of an eternal nature. Jesus wasn't concerned with the things of this world, but with the things of God's eternal kingdom.
- John, who is compared to Elijah in verse 14 (see also Malachi 3:1 and 4:5), was falsely accused of all sorts of things, just as Jesus was. The sad truth is, people who were jealous and wanted the glory for themselves made up whatever lies they could, even if those lies really didn't make sense, to try to convince

people that Jesus and His followers were not what they claimed to be. But Jesus was sinless, and no true fault could be found in Him. Praise God that Jesus did lead a sinless life on this earth so that He could pay for the sins of all God's children!

April 15 (Day 105) – Matthew 11:25-30

- Here we find a brief but very intriguing prayer from Jesus to His Father. Those who believe themselves to be wise, who are prideful and focused on this life, have not received the knowledge and understanding of the Father. Jesus thanks God for instead revealing Himself to those who seem much less "important" in this life. And why did God do it this way? We can come up with all sorts of possible answers, but Jesus simply tells us that He did it because it seemed good in His sight to do it that way.
- Who truly knows God? Only Jesus Christ, and whomever the Spirit of God reveals God to. There is no other way to know the one true God than through Jesus Christ. There are many religions in the world that teach many different things, but all of them except for Christianity have one thing in common: They teach a works-based salvation in one way or another (either you must earn your way to heaven, or salvation is Jesus plus something else). But true salvation is through Jesus alone.

April 16 (Day 106) – Luke 7:41-48

- A certain woman was washing Jesus' feet, and an onlooking Pharisee commented that Jesus must not be a prophet, because if He was, He would have known that this woman was an awful sinner. Jesus responds with this parable, which is easy for us to understand. Of course the person who had the bigger debt forgiven would be more grateful! So it is with this woman, who had apparently lived a very sinful life up to this point, but had now received forgiveness of her sins from Jesus and was so thankful for His forgiveness, knowing just how sinful she had been. The Pharisee, meanwhile, did not show any kind of love to Jesus but merely stood there in self-righteous judgment. The Pharisee most likely was not saved, based on what we see here, and he must have felt very righteous, comparing himself to this sinful woman. Therefore, the Pharisee had no reason

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to be thankful.

- Now, take a moment to meditate on this parable. Which person--the Pharisee or the woman--is more like you?

April 17 (Day 107) – Matt. 12:24-28, 33-35

- Once again we find the Pharisees making false accusations against Jesus that don't even make any sense, and Jesus is quick to call them out on it. How can Satan cast out Satan? The whole idea is silly, at best, but that is exactly what the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of out of their own pride and jealousy. A kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand for very long. But, of course, Satan is not divided against Himself, and Jesus is of the opposing kingdom--the kingdom of God. Clearly the Pharisees were completely blind to this, but not only is this what we are told by Jesus, but it's the only thing that even makes any kind of sense.
- Jesus then applies the same truth to the Pharisees themselves. Since they can't recognize the goodness of Christ, they are evil themselves--because, by the very same reasoning, one cannot be divided against himself.

April 18 (Day 108) – Matthew 12:38-41

- These people weren't interested in truly knowing Jesus; they just wanted to see signs and miracles because those sorts of things are interesting and exciting to many people. But Jesus wasn't here to cater to their desires; He was here to spread God's truth and to put people in their place who did not truly know God. So Jesus refuses to give them a sign or a miracle, and tells them that the only sign they'll see is His death and resurrection, which He compares to Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, and although that wasn't the exact same amount of time that Jesus was dead before He rose again (He actually spent two nights in the grave and rose on the third day), what happened to Jonah is similar and certainly points toward the resurrection of Christ.
- Jesus goes on to condemn these people for not listening to His teaching. The people of Ninevah, wicked as they were, repented when Jonah brought God's message to them. But

these scribes and Pharisees are stuck in their own pride and arrogance and will not repent.

April 19 (Day 109) – Matthew 12:46-50

- Jesus was in no way disrespecting His mother when He made these remarks. He couldn't have, or He would have been sinning--and we know He was sinless. He does, in fact refer to the commandment about honoring your father and mother at other times in His teaching (see Matthew 15:4-6, Luke 18:20, and Ephesians 6:1-3). But He is making it clear here that those of us who are Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ--a spiritual family, adopted by God. And while we should not be disrespectful toward our earthly family, our spiritual family should come first. Some people are blessed that their earthly family is also a part of their spiritual family; others are not. But whoever may be a part of your spiritual family should come first. Those are the people who can encourage you in the Word, admonish you if necessary, and help you to grow in the things of the Lord--and they are the people that you will spend eternity with!

April 20 (Day 110) – Matthew 13:3-9

- Jesus gave this parable to illustrate how God's Word will affect different groups of people. Someone who hears God's Word spoken but does not understand it and has no interest in it is like the seed that fell by the wayside. Someone who hears the word and is joyful at first, but soon falls away because of trials, persecutions, or the cares of this world, is like the seed that fell on stony or thorny ground. These first three groups all have one thing in common: All are unbelievers. Some may appear to be believers for a while, but will soon fall away, proving that they never were (see also 1 John 2:19).
- But the last group is the group of people who hears God's Word, truly believes it, and has a changed life to show it--all by the grace of God (see also 1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

April 21 (Day 111) – Matthew 13:11-17

- Jesus' disciples asked Him why He speaks in parables, and this is His response. The mysteries of heaven are not for all to know, but for those whom God has redeemed through

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Jesus Christ. What a true blessing it is for those of us who have been given eyes to see and ears to hear! For we have done nothing to deserve God's grace, but nonetheless, we have received it. This was even prophesied by Isaiah--that some would hear and see, yet not understand. This is why Jesus so often speaks in parables, then gives understanding to His children, but not to other people. These are precious truths--precious treasures, really--that we should hold close to our hearts.

- Jesus concludes His explanation by telling these people (and telling us as well) that many prophets and other people of faith desired to see what they see--specifically, Jesus Christ Himself--but the time had not yet come. We see in numerous places in the Old Testament where prophets wrote of their faith in God's salvation, but they did not know specifically how it would come about. Now it has been revealed, and completed--another wonderful blessing from God for His children!

April 22 (Day 112) – Matthew 13:24-30

- Those of you who have experience with gardening may already know what this parable means. If you don't, wheat and tares look exactly the same and grow together in the field. But only the wheat is good to eat; the tares are weeds that are not good. Within the church, we find both wheat and tares--true Christians, and others who may act like Christians and do some good (at least, good as it appears to us) things in the church but who have never truly been reborn by the Spirit of God. How does Jesus say we should handle this problem? It's not our responsibility to separate the good from the evil, the true believers from the false believers. God hasn't given us the ability to know with 100% confidence who is truly saved and who is not. It is between God and that individual to know for sure. So, instead of worrying about something that we can't know for sure, Jesus tells us to let them grow together, and in the end, God will separate the wheat from the tares. Those who are not true believers will be burned in the fires of hell, and the true believers will join Christ in heaven.

April 23 (Day 113) – Matthew 13:31-35

- Here Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to

a mustard seed and to leaven, which both start out as tiny things and grow into something much larger. This could be applied in at least two different ways. It could refer to Christianity as a whole, which at first was made up of a relatively small number of believers, but quickly spread in the decades following the death and resurrection of our Savior. It could also refer to the individual believer, who when first saved, generally starts out with a little faith and not much understanding of God, but through Bible study and teaching from fellow believers, guided by the Holy Spirit, can and should grow considerably in faith over time.

- Jesus also once more explains why He speaks in parables, to explain the mysteries of heaven to the children of God. Here Jesus refers to a prophecy from Psalm 78:2.

April 24 (Day 114) – Matthew 8:23-27

- Imagine what Jesus' disciples must have been thinking and doing as this intense storm hit their ship. No doubt they were worried, panicking, and running around trying to figure out how to keep their ship afloat. But what was Jesus doing? Not only was He not frantically trying to save the ship, but He was asleep in the midst of this great storm! He gives us an example of the faith we all should have, but generally, our faith is nowhere close to this. For those of us who belong to God through Jesus Christ, why would we worry? God has promised that He is making all things work together for the good of those whom He has called (see Romans 8:28), and we know that God is sovereign over all things; nothing happens apart from His will. He protects His children. Is God bigger than any storm we may face in life? Of course He is! So why do we worry?

April 25 (Day 115) – Mark 5:2-8

- Though this is a miracle of Jesus, it is also an illustration of what happens in salvation. Before a person is saved, evil reigns inside. Even people who appear to be "morally good" still have an evil heart if they do not truly know God through Christ. When the Spirit of God comes in and changes the person's heart through salvation, he or she is made clean and new, and comes eagerly and excitedly to

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worship Jesus, just as this man did!

- We also need to be reminded that the battle between good and evil is very real. These were real demons, of Satan, that occupied this man's body. Whether things like this still happen today can be debated, but the overall battle between good and evil continues, and will not end until Christ returns and binds Satan for good--for eternity! Until then, we must put on the whole armor of God (see Ephesians 6:10-18) and never stop fighting for the truth.

April 26 (Day 116) – Matthew 9:18-26

- Here we find two more miracles done by Jesus, where he healed this woman and brought a girl back to life. Both miracles were done to further prove that He is who He claims to be--the one and only Son of God. But also notice that He didn't perform these miracles for just anyone; He only did these miracles for people who had faith in Him. The girl's father shows his faith, knowing that Jesus could raise his daughter from the dead. The other woman also shows her faith, knowing that Jesus has the power to heal her if she only touches His robe as He passes by. Both demonstrated great faith and should be examples to us.

April 27 (Day 117) – Matthew 9:27-34

- Some people never learn. It wasn't that long ago that we saw where some of the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out Satan by the power of Satan, and He explained to them something quite obvious: that a kingdom cannot be divided against itself and stand. We don't know if this is the same group of Pharisees, but it quite possibly is, and obviously, they didn't get it, and here they make the very same accusations against Christ that He has already disproved. Sadly, some people have such a hatred for God's truth that they will say or do anything to try to discredit it, even when their accusations make no sense at all. Praise God that He saved and changed the hearts of His children, or else we might find ourselves doing the very same thing.

April 28 (Day 118) – Matthew 9:35-38

- While Jesus did heal many people during His time here on earth, the things that were far more important to Him are listed first here--

the teaching and preaching that He did to share the truth with others. We see that in the next verse as well. Why was Jesus moved with compassion for these people? Not because they were financially poor or because of the things they may have lacked in this life, nor because they were sick and needed physical healing. Once again we see how focused Jesus was on eternal things: The reason He had compassion on these people is because they were suffering spiritually, as sheep without a shepherd. That's why He tells His disciples to pray for more laborers to enter the harvest--people who can lead and teach and preach to those whom God has saved. Having few leaders (spiritual shepherds) who could proclaim the real truth of God's Word had left these people scattered and helpless, weary and burdened by religious traditions.

April 29 (Day 119) – Matthew 10:5-10

- Here Jesus prepares to send out His twelve disciples, those who had not only been granted salvation through the grace of God (except Judas Iscariot, of course), but these are also the men who had been the closest to Jesus and had received a considerable amount of teaching and wisdom from Him to prepare them for this task. He is now sending them out to the Jews first, for the time of the Gentiles would be coming soon, but the Jews were to be preached to first so that those who refuse to believe would be without excuse. He told them to preach and also gave them the power to heal, in order to confirm that their message was true. He also charged them not to take any extra supplies or money with them, but told them that as they labored for the gospel, God would provide for their needs through fellow believers.
- Jesus said much more to His disciples as He sent them out, which we will look at in the days to come. Much of what He told them was very unpleasant--nothing like the weak, fluffy messages that are preached in many so-called churches across America today. Following Christ was never meant to be an easy, painless task.

April 30 (Day 120) – Matthew 10:16-20

- Do you see Jesus begging and pleading with

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His disciples to follow Him so that they will have a better, happier life? I certainly don't see that in this passage (or anywhere else in Scripture, for that matter). That type of message which, sadly, is preached from some pulpits, is, quite simply, a lie and in direct contradiction of God's Word.

- Here is what actually took place: Jesus did not ask these men to serve Him; rather, He called these men, changed the desires of their hearts so they would want to serve God, and then sent them out to share the gospel with others. And Jesus never told them that it would be easy. We see quite the opposite just in these few verses, and there's more to come in this chapter of Matthew. Jesus tells them that government leaders will capture them and put them on trial, but that it will all be done for the glory of God, and that the Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak when that time comes so that they will glorify God. That's not the kind of message that would attract lots of people, is it? No, it is not--but that's not why Jesus came. He came to preach the truth, whether we like to hear it or not.

May 1 (Day 121) – Matthew 10:21-23

- The bottom line is this: The world hates God; the world hates Jesus Christ. Some people, such as Muslims and atheists, are vocal about that fact. Other people claim to love God (many of which have been fooled themselves--I pray you are not among that group), but actually do not. These people love their own version of God, but when shown Scripture passages such as this one that show Jesus as He truly is, they don't like it. They want to worship a version of God who is a lot like Santa Claus--a nice, friendly old man who threatens to withhold gifts from you if you're bad, but still gives them to you in the end. The problem is, that's not who God is at all, and if you read the Bible for what it truly says--not what you have always heard or what you want it to say--you will see a picture of God that is quite different from Santa Claus.

May 2 (Day 122) – Matthew 10:24-28

- Followers of Jesus can expect to be treated no better than how He Himself was treated. If Jesus was accused of being the master of a false

idol, those of us who follow Him can expect similar treatment! The servant is not above his master, and our Master is Jesus Christ Himself.

- Yet Jesus tells His disciples not to fear other people. What is the worst thing that any person can do to you? In their minds, the worst thing they can do is kill you, as we see in the example given here. But they cannot kill the soul, and for the Christian who knows where he is going when he dies, to die is gain (see Philippians 1:21) because we get to be with Christ! So we are called to speak and preach the truth without fear, knowing that no matter what other people may do to us, none of them are more powerful than God. We must not worry about other people and seek only to glorify God in all that we do (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).

May 3 (Day 123) – Matthew 10:29-33

- After Jesus warns His disciples of the kinds of persecutions they will face because of Him, He then reminds them that, even in the midst of the most difficult situations, we do not need to worry because God cares for and protects each of His children. God even takes care of the sparrow and knows each one of them, and He knows how many hairs are on top of one's head--so He will certainly watch over His children, especially when they are being persecuted for His name's sake!
- Jesus then enters another phase of His message to His disciples, stating that whoever denies Him, He will also deny before God the Father. There are a lot of people in the world who claim to love Jesus, but would they die for Him? True believers would, but generally speaking, others would not. If a Muslim came up to you and told you to deny Jesus or else he would kill you, what would you do?

May 4 (Day 124) – Matthew 10:34-37

- After a brief departure to remind His disciples (and all of us who are God's children) how much God cares for each of them, Jesus goes right into another difficult topic. He did not come to bring peace. Why? Because, by nature, we all hate God (see Romans 3:10-18). So when some are saved by God's grace, those people are now at war with the fleshly, sinful world that we all live in.
- Here, Jesus specifically speaks of family

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relationships, where different people within the same physical family will be at odds with one another, if some are saved and others are not. If you claim to be saved and you have no problem getting along with unsaved family and friends, then something isn't right--you are either a weak Christian or you haven't been saved at all. Once you are saved, through sanctification, you should look more and more like Christ and less and less like the world, which can cause strife and disagreement among families. But that should not be surprising, since Jesus Himself told us to expect that. Those in the world are living for themselves, while those who have been saved should be living for the glory of God.

May 5 (Day 125) – Matthew 10:38-42

- After Jesus has warned His disciples of the troubles and persecutions that they will face because of Him, here He concludes with this summary: If your primary goal is preserving your own life--and mankind is, by nature, selfish and self-centered--then in the end, you will lose your life and face an eternity apart from God. But if you truly have been saved through Christ, then you should live completely for Him, not worrying about anything--even your own life, because it is all in God's hands. And if the death of one of God's children brings Him more glory, then each of us who belongs to Him should be ready and willing to do just that, because all that we do should be for the glory of God (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- If you believe yourself to be a Christian but you are not willing to suffer or even die for Christ, you need to do some serious evaluating of your heart because you very well may not have the saving faith that you think you have. This is not intended to be harsh but is a warning given in Christian love. Jesus Himself tells us that many think they are going to heaven, but they do not actually know Him (see Matthew 7:21-23).

May 6 (Day 126) – Mark 6:17-20

- Here we see an example of what Jesus just finished sharing with His disciples--that each of us should be ready and willing to die, if necessary, for Christ's sake. Here we see that John the Baptist did not back down from the truth, telling Herod that what he was doing

with his brother's wife was sinful. But Herod did not like to hear the truth, as is the case with mankind in general apart from the grace of God, and so he put John in prison and eventually beheaded him at his daughter's request. But John never backed down from what was true and right, and we must follow that example as well. We read in this passage that even Herod, evil as he was, could see that John the Baptist was a just and holy man of God because his commitment to God's truth never wavered, and his testimony remained strong until the end.

May 7 (Day 127) – Luke 9:11, 16-17

- This is perhaps Jesus' most well-known miracle, and it is also the only one that appears in all four Gospels. But pay close attention to the order in which Jesus did things for the multitude of people who had followed Him on this day. First, He preached to them about the kingdom of God. That should always be our top priority, since the things of this life pale in comparison to those things which pertain to eternity. Then, He healed the sick, and only after that did He perform the miracle of the feeding of the many thousands of people who were there (which, when you include women and children, was much more than just five thousand). Of course, the miracle itself is quite impressive, but do not forget that Jesus' first priority was to preach and share God's truth with these people. Only after that did He help with their physical needs of sickness and hunger.

May 8 (Day 128) – John 6:14-15

- The things of this world are not the focus of Jesus! Not that He didn't care--we see how many times He healed people of various diseases--but His focus was on eternity, just as ours should be. Here we see many of His followers, excited by the miracle they had just witnessed where He fed thousands of them from just five loaves of bread and two fishes, and wanting to help Jesus set up a kingdom in this world and overthrow the Romans, who ruled over the Jews at this point in history. The truth is, though, Jesus doesn't need our help to do anything, and if His purpose in coming was to set up an earthly kingdom, He would have

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had no trouble doing just that. But that wasn't His purpose; His purpose in coming was to die for the sins of His people and to establish and preach about His eternal kingdom. Jesus may have done things to help people in this life, but that was never His primary focus. Let's make sure helping people in this life is never our primary focus, either, but rather pointing them to eternal truths.

May 9 (Day 129) – Matthew 14:27-31

- God controls all things, yet we worry and have such little faith. Peter was able to walk on the water as long as he kept his eyes of faith on Jesus, but as soon as he started to doubt and worry, he began to sink. This story has a very practical application for all of us. While we may not literally be walking on water, we do trust in Jesus to hold us up through all the storms of life. But how often do we fail at that? How often do we worry and doubt, or try to do things ourselves without keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus? For those of us who do belong to God, if He gave His own Son to die in our place, why would He not provide anything else that we need? That's exactly what Paul tells us in Romans 8:32, and we all need to remember that, especially during difficult trials when it can be the hardest to have faith. But Jesus didn't let Peter drown, and He won't let you, either, if you belong to Him.

May 10 (Day 130) – John 6:24-27

- These people wanted to be fed physically, not spiritually. This encounter took place the day after the feeding of the five thousand, but in spite of the preaching Jesus did and the other miracles He performed, these people just wanted Him to provide for their physical need of hunger once again. He rebuked them and told them that what they really need is the meat of God's Word--the deep truths about God that are revealed to us in the Bible, if we take the time to study what God has given to us (see also 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12). But these people didn't care about any of those things, instead wanting Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom and give them all the pleasures of this world. As we will see as we go through the rest of John chapter 6, Jesus is very different from what they were expecting or

even what they want Him to be. He is about to present some hard truths, and many people will turn away.

- What about you--are you in agreement with God, or do you find yourself turning away from His truth? Ponder that question as we continue through John chapter 6.

May 11 (Day 131) – John 6:28-34

- These people did not get it, just as many people today still do not. Basically, they asked Jesus what they can do to please God and earn their way into heaven. But none of us can do that on our own, because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). They also ask Him for a sign, but He does not grant their request, and instead explains how He is the bread of life.
- More importantly, look at Jesus' response to them in verse 29. Does He beg these people to believe in who He is and to follow Him? No. Instead, He tells them that belief in Him is a work of God, because salvation is all of the Lord. There is nothing that we can do on our own. In our human pride, we don't like that--because we want to do things our way and be in control. Such thinking has, sadly, led many people and many Christians astray; many no longer understand what true salvation really is. But Jesus makes it clear: Salvation is of the Lord; there is nothing we can do.

May 12 (Day 132) – John 6:35-37

- Verse 35 tells us that Jesus is all we need. Yes, we have physical needs in this life, such as hunger, that we have to take care of. But if we do not belong to Christ, we have nothing. If we do belong to Him, we have everything we need, both in this life and in the next.
- These people saw Jesus with their own eyes and even witnessed some of His miracles, yet still did not believe that He is the Son of God. But Jesus also explains (in verse 37) a theological truth that is often misunderstood today: All those whom the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him. Once again we see that salvation is of the Lord. No amount of begging or pleading or convincing on our part can bring someone to Christ apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in that person's heart. Likewise, we cannot keep someone away whom God is

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drawing to Himself. Pride is perhaps the most prevalent of all human sins, yet we so often fail to see it. In this case, in our pride, we think salvation is our work. But Jesus clearly explains that it is not.

May 13 (Day 133) – John 6:38-40

- Jesus always does the Father's will. Of course, He is one with the Father as part of the Holy Trinity; nevertheless, He submits Himself to the Father's will. We saw one example of this when He was crucified (see Matthew 26:39). This also serves as a model for us to follow, as we should always seek to do God's will and not our own will.
- We also find in this passage the important teaching that anyone who is truly saved cannot lose his or her salvation. Jesus says that He will lose none of those whom God has given to Him. If you have been taught that a Christian can lose his or her salvation, you can see here that such teaching is contrary to God's Word. And think about it like this: Are we more powerful than God? Of course not. So how can we lose the salvation that God has brought to us? The truth is, we cannot lose true salvation. The problem is, some churches and pastors have given people false assurance that they are saved because they prayed the sinner's prayer, yet never truly repented and never truly received the Holy Spirit, and so while it appears that salvation was lost, such a person was actually never saved in the first place. But if you are truly saved, you can rest assured in this passage--you can never lose your salvation. Praise God that it's not up to us, but that He keeps us!

May 14 (Day 134) – John 6:44-46

- Once again Jesus proclaims the truth that salvation is of the Lord. None of us is able to come to God on our own power; it is all of His drawing us to Himself. Jesus doesn't say any of these things to win any popularity contests (as John 6:66 proves). He says these things because they are truths from God Himself, and whether we as humans like what He says or not, this is the truth and that's the way it is. God made this whole universe and everything in it and does indeed deserve the praise and honor for all of it. He is the potter and we are

merely the clay (see Romans 9:18-24), yet in our sinful arrogance we tend to think so much more of ourselves than we should.

- Jesus also quotes a prophecy about Himself from Isaiah 54:13, which says that people would be taught by God (Jesus Himself, as well as the Holy Spirit that would come after Jesus ascended back into heaven). Then He states once more that everyone who has truly learned of the Father will come to Jesus.

May 15 (Day 135) – John 6:60-64

- Many of those who were following Jesus up until this point (the word "disciples" here is not referring to the twelve apostles) now ask a question that some of you may also have now that we have taken a close look at John chapter 6. They tell Jesus that He had proclaimed some hard truths, and ask him, who can listen to this? Jesus does not disagree with them; these are indeed some hard truths that He has proclaimed. He merely asks them if they are offended, and once again proclaims that He is speaking the truth from God. His words are spirit and life, and are welcomed by those who belong to Him. But those who do not belong to Him do not want to hear these things, because they are from the holy, perfect God, and they do not cater to the sinful desires of the human flesh. These words are life, Jesus says. Those who turn and walk away and do not heed them are headed for eternal death.

May 16 (Day 136) – John 6:65-71

- Twice more Jesus proclaims an often misunderstood truth that He has spoken about throughout this sixth chapter of the gospel of John. True saving faith does not come from within us but it comes from God Himself! No one can come unto Jesus unless salvation is granted to him or her by the Father, Jesus says here. He also makes the point once more in verse 70, mentioning how He chose His twelve apostles. Jesus chose them--it didn't happen the other way around. Sadly, so many people--perhaps including you--have been led astray from these truths by false teaching and weak doctrine that are common in churches today. But Jesus teaches these truths very plainly in John chapter 6, and they are also found in many other places throughout the Scripture. It

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is truth. If you want to argue about it as so many people do, your argument is with God, because you are in disagreement with Him. And that is a place I certainly would not want to be--in disagreement with the one and only God of the universe.

May 17 (Day 137) – John 6:65-69

- We see two end results of all the hard, unpopular things that Jesus has said to these people. First, we read that many of His followers turned and went back, and did not walk with Him any longer. These were not people who lost their salvation, but people who were never saved in the first place--like the seed that is tossed onto stony or thorny ground (see Mark 4:3-20). They followed Jesus for a time, either to see His miracles, or to receive physical food from Him, or just because of all the excitement that surrounded Him--but when the real teaching came, they did not like what they heard. They turned and walked away because they were never saved in the first place (see 1 John 2:19).
- But we also see the response of Jesus' twelve apostles when He asked them if they were going to leave Him as well. Peter basically says, where else would we go? You (Jesus) have the words of eternal life! They knew who Jesus truly was and had true saving faith (except for Judas Iscariot; see John 17:12), and here we see the evidence of that faith.
- Think about this: In which of these two groups do you fall?

May 18 (Day 138) – Matthew 15:1-2, 7-9

- Once again we find the Pharisees following their manmade traditions and trying to do outward things to impress other people, and once again Jesus rebukes them for it. They were criticizing Jesus' disciples for not washing their hands before eating, but eating with clean hands does nothing to show one's relationship to God. Jesus quotes a prophecy from Isaiah 29:13 which describes the Pharisees (and people who belong to other false religions today, such as Catholics or Mormons) who follow religious laws and traditions but have no desire to seek or please the Lord in their hearts. What's on the inside is what matters. What's on the outside is meaningless. As always, Jesus is

not concerned with the outward appearance, but with the condition of the heart.

May 19 (Day 139) – Matthew 15:10-14

- This is a continuation of the passage we read yesterday, where Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees who had criticized the disciples for eating without first washing their hands. Verse 11 is the key here: A person is defiled by what comes from his or her heart--including the words coming out of the mouth, which is the illustration Jesus uses here. Eating food without washing your hands isn't going to defile you, but having an unclean heart covered with sin most certainly will (for further explanation, read verses 15-20).
- Verse 13 makes it clear that God will care for those whom He has saved, but all of those who are trying to be religious enough to earn their place in heaven--who are not true believers--will be uprooted and destroyed. This passage concludes with a familiar saying: Jesus says to let the blind lead the blind, and those of us who are true Christians are to simply let them do whatever they are going to do. We are still commanded to share God's truth with them, but if they are determined to keep doing things their own way, we are not to waste our energy on them, but to let them go.

May 20 (Day 140) – Matthew 15:24-28

- This woman was not a Jew, and the time of the Gentiles would not fully come until after Jesus' death and resurrection. This time was for the Jews, most of whom would ultimately reject Jesus. Yet some Gentiles were still saved during this period of time, and even in the Old Testament (such as Rahab, Ruth, and the entire city of Ninevah after God sent Jonah to them). But that is why Jesus responds in this way, because the Gospel would not be proclaimed to the Gentiles in a significant way until after His resurrection. Yet this woman displayed great faith, telling Jesus that she did not want the bread that belonged to the children of Israel, but would gladly take even a crumb of God's grace. Jesus then recognized her great faith and healed her daughter, who was possessed by a demon (see verses 21-23 for that part of the story).

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May 21 (Day 141) – Matthew 15:32-38

- Here we find the lesser-known miracle that is the companion to the feeding of the five thousand. Here, Jesus performs a similar miracle, feeding four thousand from seven loaves of bread and a few fishes. The human side of Jesus understands and has compassion on these people who have not had any physical food to eat while they have been following Him and receiving spiritual food. So, after feeding them spiritually (which, as we see in many different examples, is always His first priority) for three days, He also takes care of their physical needs. We see multiple examples of Jesus doing both, but the spiritual needs always have priority.

May 22 (Day 142) – Matthew 16:1-4

- As someone with a longtime interest in the weather, this passage of Scripture is uniquely intriguing to me. Here we find the religious leaders asking Jesus for a sign, but He refuses to give them one. Their motives were neither pure nor sincere; they just wanted to see a sign for their own entertainment, or perhaps to use it against Jesus in some way. Of course, He did not give in to their request. Instead of giving them a sign, He gave them a rebuke. He criticized them because although they are able to watch the sky and predict tomorrow's weather, but they have completely missed the signs of the times--the fact that the long-awaited Messiah has come, and Jesus is fulfilling numerous Old Testament prophecies. The only sign they will receive is that of the prophet Jonah, symbolizing how Jesus would die and then be resurrected on the third day (see also Matthew 12:39-41).

May 23 (Day 143) – Matthew 16:6-12

- How dense could these people have been? Yet we are the same way, at different times. Here once again we see a comparison between people (in this case, Jesus' disciples), who were focused on earthly things, and Jesus, who is always focused on spiritual things. Jesus was warning His disciples to beware of the sin and false doctrine of the Pharisees, which spreads like leaven. It only takes a little sin or a little false doctrine to corrupt a lot of people, and that is why Jesus was warning His disciples

about this problem. But they thought He was telling them that they should have taken some bread, which they had forgotten to do before leaving on this particular journey.

- We are no better than they are, though--how often do we focus on earthly things instead of spiritual things? For Christians, our entire focus should be on spiritual things, because the things of this world have absolutely no eternal significance whatsoever.

May 24 (Day 144) – Matthew 16:13-17

- Many people recognize Jesus as a good teacher or as some kind of prophet. We find this in many false religions, as even Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet. Here, Jesus' disciples commented that other people think He is John the Baptist, returned from the dead, or a prophet that has come back from the dead, such as Elijah or Jeremiah.
- But when He asked His disciples directly, they knew the truth: Jesus is the very Son of God. And how did they know this? Jesus says plainly that it was not revealed to them by other people, but by God the Father. This statement by Jesus once again makes it clear that salvation begins with God, and is not the result of anything we can do ourselves. We are still called to preach the Word, but as Jesus states here in verse 17, only God Himself can reveal who Jesus truly is, and thus bring about salvation, to any of us.

May 25 (Day 145) – Matthew 16:18-20

- Peter may have held a key role in the foundation of the church, but he was never elevated above any of the other apostles, and he was most certainly not the first Pope. The false teachings of Roman Catholicism primarily spring from this passage of Scripture, but when considering the Bible as a whole, there is no support for their claims. They also grossly misuse verse 19, which has nothing to do with priests forgiving sins, but is simply referring to the spreading of the Gospel truth and the doctrines of the church. There is no reference to sin anywhere in this passage, and no basis for the Catholic interpretation.
- The time would come when Jesus would be delivered up to the Romans to be executed, but that time was not yet, and that is why Jesus

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told His disciples to tell no one that He is the Christ, the Messiah.

May 26 (Day 146) – Matthew 16:21-23

- We have such little faith. Look at Peter's response here, when Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He would be killed, then rise again on the third day. Peter rebuked Jesus! Apparently, Peter thought he knew better. He had a better plan than the plan God had devised from before time began (see Ephesians 1:4). It almost seems silly to read this passage, when we stop and think about it like that, but how often are we guilty of the same thing? We think our plans are better than God's, so we do things our own way--and generally end up in a mess.
- And how did Jesus respond to Peter's rebuke? He knew it was a lie from Satan, and Jesus called him out on it. Satan, and all who are under his influence in this world, desires the things of this world and not the things of God.

May 27 (Day 147) – Matthew 16:24-26

- This is what it means to truly follow Jesus Christ. It isn't about going to church from time to time, or singing along with an entertaining Christian song. It has nothing to do with talking about Jesus on occasion or being a kind and giving person. It's about denying our own selves and living totally for Christ, which the true Christian has been given a desire to do. When God saves us, He changes our desires, and we want to serve Him, please Him, and be more like Christ. But if your focus is on your own life--the things you do, learn, and accomplish in this world--you will lose your life in the end and face an eternity in hell. That's how Jesus concludes this passage: You can gain the whole world--riches, material things, fame, power, everything--but if you die apart from Christ, every bit of that is meaningless. So in the end, it is of no profit to a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul.

May 28 (Day 148) – Matthew 17:1-8

- I believe it is best to not try to comment on this particular passage; rather, I encourage you to read it more than once, and take some time to meditate on what this experience must have been like for these three apostles, to see the

majesty of Jesus Christ and to hear God speak from heaven about His Son for the second time (see also Matthew 3:17, and 2 Peter 1:16 for Peter's remark about this event).

May 29 (Day 149) – Matthew 17:9-13

- Here the three disciples who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain are discussing what they just saw, which included Moses and Elijah standing there, talking with Jesus. They specifically asked about Elijah, who must come before the Messiah, according to the scribes. We find this prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6. However, those who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah also failed to believe what John the Baptist was preaching. He was the one that the passage in Malachi was actually referring to--not Elijah himself but another great prophet like Elijah--but those people completely missed it, just as many people today continue to miss the truth. They knew the Bible, but they didn't really know the Bible. To say it in another way, they knew the words that were in it, but didn't truly understand the meaning of those words.

May 30 (Day 150) – Matthew 17:20-23

- God is all-powerful, completely sovereign and ruling over all. Much can be accomplished for the kingdom of heaven if we do things, such as prayer and fasting, that draw us close to God. Our faith tends to be very weak. We often let worry take over. But even a little bit of faith, the size of a tiny mustard seed, can be used by God to accomplish great things. Do not let yourself get wrapped up in the cares of this world, but pray, read Scripture, and draw near to God.
- In this passage we also find the second time that Jesus has told His disciples that He will be killed and will rise again on the third day (see also Matthew 16:21), but as Luke records in his account of this event, God did not allow them to fully understand what was going to happen until after Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Why? I don't know that we fully have the answer to that question, but we do know that God has a purpose for everything, and all that He does is perfect and for the good of those who belong to Him (see Romans 8:28).

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May 31 (Day 151) – Matthew 17:24-27

- Although Jesus reasoned that He could have been exempt from paying this particular tax, because of His royal lineage, He went ahead and paid it anyway, to avoid offending those who were collecting the money. Now, Jesus had no problem being offensive with God's Word, and neither should we. God's Word will offend those who are not Christians (see also Isaiah 8:14 and Matthew 11:6). But as far as our day-to-day actions, we are to live peaceably and not intentionally offend others, but seek to glorify God in all that we do (see also Romans 12:17-18, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:23, and 1 Thessalonians 5:22). Even though He would not have technically been violating the law, Jesus did not want to even appear as a possible lawbreaker. Christians should stay above reproach in all that we do.

June 1 (Day 152) – Matthew 18:1-5

- Following is a quote from "John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible" because I think he does an excellent job of explaining the meaning of this passage: "unless ye learn to entertain an humble, and modest opinion of yourselves, are not envious at one another, and drop all contentions about primacy and pre-eminence, and all your ambitious views of one being greater than another, in a vainly expected temporal kingdom; things which are not to be found in little children, though not free from sin in other respects..." Basically, those are characteristics that a child of God possesses, as a result of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Rather than being caught up in the things of this world, and being full of pride and arrogance, the child of God is more like a child on the inside, such as in the ways described in the quote above.

June 2 (Day 153) – Mark 9:43-48

- It certainly doesn't sound pleasant to cut off your hand or your foot, or to pluck out your eye--but the point Jesus is making in this passage is that eternal things are the most important. When you consider losing those body parts in light of eternity, it doesn't seem nearly as bad. Which is worse--to live for a few decades (or however long it is until the time of your death) missing a hand or an eye, or to

spend all of eternity suffering in hell? While neither option sounds pleasant, hopefully the answer is obvious to you. One is clearly far worse than the other. But, of course, doing some kind of action cannot keep anyone out of hell; that only comes through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone. And anyone who is a true child of God should be willing to do absolutely anything to get rid of sin in his or her life, in order to be more like Christ and to draw nearer to God.

June 3 (Day 154) – Matthew 18:10-13

- God is the Good Shepherd. He does not let even one of His sheep go astray. If one does try to wander off, God won't let him or her get very far before going out and bringing the lost sheep back. It is not possible for a true Christian to lose his or her salvation, and it is also not possible for a true Christian to wander away from church and have no desire to serve God. Both of these are false teachings that you will hear in certain churches, but Jesus clearly speaks against both ideas, both in this passage as well as other places in Scripture (see also John 10:25-30, Philippians 1:6, and 1 John 2:19). A true Christian will persevere until the end (either death or the return of Christ), and cannot go astray for very long, because God loves His children enough to chasten them and bring them back.

June 4 (Day 155) – Matthew 18:15-17

- Here Jesus outlines the proper procedure for Christian discipline within the church which, although God hasn't changed, our culture definitely has, and this doctrine is rarely taught or followed anymore. Jesus says that, if a fellow Christian sins against you, the first thing you should do is go and discuss the matter with the person individually. If the other person refuses to listen to you, then take two or three other people with you and try to resolve the situation in that way. If that still doesn't work, take the matter before the church as a whole. And if the person at fault still refuses to listen, you are to treat him or her as an unbeliever. This is the proper way to handle problems within the church, because either the two of you will be reconciled and will learn and grow from the experience, or the other person will be

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discovered to be an unbeliever, who is not truly saved or repentant at all.

June 5 (Day 156) – Matthew 18:21-22

- Forgiveness has no limit. Stop for a moment and consider how much forgiveness God has granted unto His children. This is something most of us rarely if ever stop to consider, but we should meditate on it often. Before we were saved, every single thing that we did was sin because we did nothing in faith, being still unsaved (see Romans 14:23). After being saved, we have the Holy Spirit to keep us from sin, but we still wage war against our fleshly nature, and still sin far more than we really want to think. We are all prideful and tend to think far more of ourselves than we should, but verses like Isaiah 64:6 can help us realize who we are in relation to a perfect, holy God. So when you consider just how much forgiveness God has granted to His children, how can you not forgive some (comparitively) little thing that a fellow believer has done to you? From God's perspective, you have no reason not to forgive.

June 6 (Day 157) – Luke 9:57-62

- Jesus tells the first man that no fame or wealth would come from following Him, as He does not even have a place to lay His head at night. To the other two people, Jesus was not being cruel in His responses, as some may think. Those people were making excuses, as people so often do, and Jesus would hear none of it. Either forsake all to follow Him, which is what anyone who is truly born again will gladly do, or continue to focus on the things of this world, which is a sign of someone who is not saved. Where do you stand? When it comes to spiritual things, such as going to church or reading the Bible, do you eagerly do those things? Or do you continually make excuses and put them off, placing a bunch of other worldly things ahead of God? If you are in the second group, you should be concerned about where you could be spending eternity.

June 7 (Day 158) – John 7:14-18

- These Jews marveled at the teachings of Jesus, because He had been raised as a carpenter, taught by His step-father Joseph, and He had

not gone to any of the schools that the Jewish religious leaders would attend. But higher education, while beneficial in certain ways, is not the mark of true knowledge and wisdom. We are told in the Bible that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (see Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10). There are many intelligent people at colleges and universities--but sadly, most of them are only intelligent in the things of this world, which have no eternal value.

- We also see here that Jesus never sought His own glory, but the glory of His Father in heaven. When we consider the Holy Trinity, that can be somewhat difficult for our finite minds to comprehend, but the important thing is for us to use this as our example. Just as Jesus sought to always bring glory to God, so should we do the same.

June 8 (Day 159) – John 7:24-29

- The first verse in this passage helps to clarify the often-misused verse about judgment in Matthew 7:1. God never tells us not to judge at all, but rather to judge righteously, according to the Word of God.
- The people here were commenting amongst themselves about how boldly Jesus was speaking. We should be just as bold, to the extent that everyone we encounter clearly knows that we are Christians. And if they don't like what we say about Christ--so what? Are you seeking to please men, or to please the Lord (see also Galatians 1:10)?
- Lastly, Jesus confirms that He was sent from God, but that these people do not truly know God. They worship with outward actions, but in their hearts, they are far from God (see also Matthew 15:8).

June 9 (Day 160) – John 7:30-35

- The first verse in this passage gives us an example of how God is sovereign and in control of all things. The Jewish religious leaders had started to try to capture Jesus, because of their pride and animosity toward Him, but the time that God had ordained for His capture had not yet come, and so they were unsuccessful. Yes, God does give us a certain measure of freedom to make choices, and He allows all sorts of evil things to happen in this world. But He is still

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ruler over all, and nothing happens apart from His divine will. What peace we can have knowing that!

- Still, Jesus knew what would happen to Him in the not-too-distant future, and that is what He is referring to in verses 33 and 34. He knew His time on this earth was short, and then He would return to His Father in heaven. He is also subtly telling these people that they are not saved, since He tells them that they will not be able to come to the place (heaven) where He will be going. However, they were blind to what He was saying, and once again thought in simple human terms--thinking that Jesus was talking about going out to live among the Gentiles.

June 10 (Day 161) – John 7:37-43

- The Holy Spirit would soon come, after Jesus was resurrected and, 40 days later, ascended into heaven, to fill the souls of every believer. Jesus invites all to come to Him, but sadly, most remain in their sin, unaware of their need for a Savior.
- The Jews may have been arrogant, prideful, and stubborn, but they knew the Scripture (at least in their heads--but perhaps not in their hearts). They knew the prophecies concerning Christ, that He would come from the lineage of David (see Isaiah 11:1) and that He would be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2). Of course, both of these things were true of Jesus, but many of the people were too blinded by their own arrogance to realize it. This divided the people, but as Jesus Himself said, He did not come to bring peace but to bring a sword of division (see Matthew 10:34-36).

June 11 (Day 162) – John 8:3-11

- Jesus in no way condoned this woman's sin of adultery, but He knew that the Pharisees were hypocrites, eager to punish others for their sin but not recognizing the sin that plagued their own hearts. One by one, these prideful religious leaders recognized their own sins (which some people believe is what Jesus was writing in the sand), and walked away, leaving the adulterous woman standing alone with Jesus. Then He told her two very important things. First, He did not condemn her--as we are not condemned for our sins once we are

saved through the blood of Christ. Second, He told her to sin no more--as all believers are called to live a holy life, pleasing to God, once we are saved. That does not mean we become perfect and sinless--no, we definitely still sin--but our overall lifestyle should no longer be defined by sin, but by being Christ-like in all that we do.

June 12 (Day 163) – John 8:19-24

- Jesus never sugarcoated anything. He told it like it is, and we need to do the same thing. Did Jesus beg these people to believe in Him? Did He come up with creative activities to capture their attention? No; He merely told them the truth, that they did not know Him or His Father in heaven, that they would die in their sins and in unbelief, that they would not be coming to heaven to join Him and His Father, and that they are of this world and are not reborn from above. That sounds rather harsh, does it not? But it is the truth, and if you are a Christian, you are also commanded to share the truth with others, whether or not it seems pleasant to you.
- But what was the end result after Jesus made these harsh comments? You might think everyone would have run away from Him, but that is not at all what happened. If you look down to verse 30, we read that many people who were listening to these words of Jesus became believers. Our responsibility is to share the truth, and then to trust God to work as He pleases (see also 1 Corinthians 3:5-7).

June 13 (Day 164) – John 8:31-36

- Jesus first makes a remark on perseverance--all those who are truly saved will persevere to the end. Those who do not continue in the faith until the end were never saved to begin with. It is not possible to lose one's salvation.
- Everyone who has not received God's gift of salvation is a slave to sin. A lot of people who are not Christians like to believe that they are free to live however they want, while Christians have to follow strict rules. However, that is not true at all. The reality is, the unsaved are slaves to their own sinful passions, unable to escape from them without the help of God. Yes, some unsaved people choose to do some things that appear to be morally good, but their sinful

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nature remains unless God saves them. The Christian, meanwhile, is set free to live a life that is holy and pleasing to God, and there is no greater freedom than that!

June 14 (Day 165) – John 8:39-44

- Contrary to the popular saying, we are not all God's children. True, we are all descendants of Adam and we are all created by God, but this passage of Scripture makes it clear that we are not all God's children. Here, Jesus tells the Pharisees in no uncertain terms that they do not follow in the footsteps of Abraham, that God is not their father, and that they do the deeds of their true father--which is the devil himself. Satan is the prince of this world (see also Ephesians 2:2-3 and John 12:31), and all those who are unsaved and who continue in their sin are his children--not children of God. Those of us who are saved, by contrast, have been adopted into the family of God, and through God's grace, get to enjoy all that comes from that adoption (see also Ephesians 1:4-6). All who are unsaved are just like the Pharisees that Jesus was talking to here, following Satan, who is a murderer and the father of lies.

June 15 (Day 166) – John 8:51-58

- Jesus has always been here. We see subtle evidence of that in Genesis 1:26, and more throughout the first chapter of the gospel of John. So He existed long before Abraham, and in verse 58, Jesus gives the same name to Himself that God said to Moses (see Exodus 3:14). But yet again these Pharisees did not understand what Jesus was saying. They called Jesus a liar because Abraham died a physical death, failing to realize that Jesus was speaking of eternal life. We all die physically (unless Jesus returns first), but those who are saved will not die spiritually but will receive eternal life.
- Even Abraham, the man these Pharisees looked to as their father but in all reality knew nothing about, desired to see the day that the Messiah would come--the One who would complete the promise that God gave to him so long ago, that through Abraham, salvation would come to people from among all the nations on earth (see Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:7-9).

June 16 (Day 167) – John 9:1-5

- People are not punished for sin in this life. Sometimes there are natural consequences that happen as a result of sin, but the only true punishment from sin comes straight from God and takes place during an eternity in hell. Those who are saved are never punished for sin because Christ took that punishment for us. How grateful we should be!
- But the assumption these people made was that this man was born blind because of someone's sin. Jesus quickly corrected them, explaining that it happened so that God might be glorified in this man's healing. Trials and tribulations that Christians face in this world often serve (at least) two primary purposes: God is glorified, and we are strengthened in our faith. We also see a great example of this in the Bible in the life of Job. For the Christian, illnesses and disabilities are for our good (see also Romans 8:28) and for God's glory, but are not punishment for sin.

June 17 (Day 168) – John 9:18-23

- The Jews are still discussing what happened with the man who was born blind but had just received his sight back due to a miracle performed by Jesus. They did not believe that this man was actually born blind--and, therefore, they did not believe that Jesus had actually performed such a miracle. They went to the man's parents and asked them, and they told the Jews that their son was indeed born blind. However, they were also afraid of them, because they would not attribute the miracle to Jesus. We see that spelled out in verse 22, which references the law that the Jews had passed, that anyone who confesses that Jesus is the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. So, they feared man more than they feared God, which shows their lack of faith and is contrary to the teaching of Scripture (see Psalm 118:6). If you were in such a situation, what would you have done? Would your response be true, because you fear the Lord, or would you cover up the truth, because you fear man? Jesus warns against being ashamed of Him. Do the words of Luke 9:26 describe you?

June 18 (Day 169) – John 9:30-34

- In this passage we find an interesting

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conversation between the Pharisees and the man who was born blind, whom Jesus had just healed. First the man almost mocks the Pharisees, since they were the intelligent, educated men of the day but they were unable to figure out who had healed him. He then states a couple of plain and simple truths about God: He hears only those who truly worship and serve Him (verse 31), and if Jesus were not of God, then He could do nothing in His own power (verse 33).

- How did the Pharisees respond? We see them respond in their typical pride and arrogance, not even considering what this man was trying to explain to them, but insulting him because of his lack of formal education and throwing him out of (which likely means totally excommunicating him from) the temple. We still see the same thing today: Just because someone has continued through a great deal of higher education (perhaps even seminary) does not mean anything when it comes to things of eternal value. Many of the most intelligent people in this world possess absolutely nothing that has any eternal or spiritual worth.

June 19 (Day 170) – John 10:1-5

- Many people are led astray, trying to find all sorts of routes to get to heaven--by giving to others, attending church, trying to keep God's law, or by doing other good deeds (though that idea is in contradiction to Isaiah 64:6). But shortcuts won't work; the only way to get to heaven is to go through Jesus Christ. Here, Jesus calls those false teachers who lead people astray thieves and robbers. Then He goes on to describe Himself, as the Good Shepherd of His sheep, who enters through the door and leads His sheep. He calls those whom the Father has chosen and drawn (see also John 6:37 and 6:44), and all of those people hear His voice and follow Him. Also, if we truly are among Christ's sheep, we will follow His voice alone, and not the voice of any strangers who would lead us astray. This brief parable is a beautiful picture of Jesus as our Shepherd, and us as His sheep, hearing His voice and following Him, in complete trust and obedience, wherever He may go. (For Jesus' own explanation of this parable, read John 10:7-10.)

June 20 (Day 171) – John 10:11-18

- This is a beautiful passage of Scripture to which I do not feel compelled to offer much commentary. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who freely gave His life on the cross for His sheep, and never leaves them. He knows His sheep intimately, and likewise, His sheep know Him. And none but Christ could lay down His life and take it back up again--raising Himself from the dead! I encourage you to read this brief passage more than once, and take time to meditate on all that Jesus says here.
- One other note: Verse 16 refers to Gentiles, whom were not of the original sheepfold of Israelites but who have now been grafted into the family of God.

June 21 (Day 172) – Luke 10:1-2

- Jesus had already appointed His main twelve apostles, but here He chooses and sends out seventy more, to preach and teach the gospel to all the cities in which Christ would visit, at some point during the remainder of His time on this earth. Why did He do this? We find and answer in the very next verse.
- Jesus commanded these people--and the command stands for us, as well--to pray for more preachers, teachers, and missionaries to go out into the field, spreading the Word of God! He says that there is a great harvest of souls, just waiting to hear the gospel, but more laborers are needed to sow the seed of the Word of God. This is no less a problem today than it was when Jesus spoke these words, when you consider the highly ungodly culture in which we live today.

June 22 (Day 173) – Luke 10:3-9

- Jesus tells the seventy people that He is about to send out how they are to live and act as they journey around and share the gospel. He first gives them a vivid illustration of what it will be like: They will be as weak little lambs among ferocious, ravenous wolves. The world is an evil place, full of sin and full of hatred toward God, but despite all of that, God still expects all of those whom He has saved to share His truth with those around us.
- He also told these seventy people that they were not to take anything with them, but to have their needs such as food and shelter met

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by those whom receive them peaceably--in other words, fellow believers. This command would have multiple benefits, such as increasing their faith and reliance on God, and also allowing fellow believers whom they would come in contact with the opportunity to provide for their physical needs.

June 23 (Day 174) – Luke 10:10-12

- Jesus is still talking to the seventy people He is about to send out to spread the gospel. He just told them what to do in a city that receives them peaceably, and now He is telling them what to do in a city that does not. He did not tell them to beg and plead with the people, to play music or tell stories that play on people's emotions, or to plan activities and programs to attract different people. All of those things are commonplace in many churches today, but that is not the Biblical model that we are supposed to follow as Christians. Instead, Jesus simply told them to shake the dust off their feet and leave--warning them about the coming wrath of God on their way out. There is nothing else said or done for these unbelievers. Churches and pastors today desperately need to follow Jesus' example in matters such as this. Pleading, story-telling, and fun activities will likely increase church attendance, but it will also likely lead to many false conversions, and the end result is that we have countless churches across this nation today that are full of unsaved people. The example Jesus gives us is to share the gospel, and either people believe it or they don't, but either way we move along and keep sowing more seed, sharing the gospel with others.

June 24 (Day 175) – Luke 10:12-17

- This passage of Scripture gives us the idea that there are different levels of punishment in hell, and that those levels are not based on how many wicked deeds a person did during his or her life, but on the person's knowledge of the gospel. Jesus was speaking about cities that His disciples, and perhaps He Himself, would visit during His time of ministry here on earth. Their punishment will be greater, He says, than the punishment people in other wicked cities received, because they did not receive the same level of knowledge of the gospel.

- The last thing that Jesus says to these seventy people before sending them out to spread the gospel is that anyone who hears them hears the true Word of God, and anyone who despises them also despises Jesus, and the One who sent Jesus--God the Father.
- Jesus did not tell these people that their journey would be easy, and at times I am sure that it was difficult. No doubt there were some people who heard and believed, and others who despised the truth that they were preaching. Nevertheless, because they held the honor of spreading the gospel, no matter what the result was, Scripture says that they returned with joy in their hearts!

June 25 (Day 176) – Luke 10:17-20

- These seventy people were excited to discover that, through the power of Jesus' name, even demons were subject to them. But Jesus redirected their enthusiasm. It was no big deal to Him, having seen Satan himself fall from heaven as quickly and violently as lightning strikes the ground. But He told them not to rejoice about having authority over demons, but rather to rejoice at the reason behind it all: Their names are written in the Book of Life. It can be easy to get caught up in other things that seem to be exciting, but in the end, that is all that really matters: Whether or not our names are written in that book in heaven. Is yours?
- Jesus gave them power over demons during this period of time to prove that they were His disciples and that He is indeed the Son of God, and He also promised that no harm would come to them as they proclaimed the gospel, which only He can do, as God is sovereign over all things.

June 26 (Day 177) – Luke 10:21-24

- God reveals Himself to whomever He chooses, and He often chooses those who are meek and lowly in this life. Most people would choose those who appear wise, rich, or intelligent, but God often does just the opposite, and in this brief but beautiful prayer, Jesus thanks God for that. Salvation is of the Lord, and God reveals His Son to those to whom He gives the free gift of salvation.
- After His prayer, Jesus turns to His disciples

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and tells them that they are blessed to be alive during His time on earth. Many Old Testament prophets and kings desired to see God's salvation, but God's appointed time to send Christ had not yet come (see also Hebrews 11:39-40). I also think of Simeon, who had received a wonderful promise from God that he would not die until he had seen God's salvation (see Luke 2:25-32). Yet there were many others who saw and interacted with Jesus, but still did not believe.

June 27 (Day 178) – Luke 10:25-29

- Here we find a man who was trying to earn his way into heaven by obeying the law. He knew God's law, but did not truly understand it. We see that evidenced by his question, when he asked Jesus to explain exactly who his neighbor was, so that he would know who he had to love and who he did not have to love. Jesus then responded with one of the most well-known parables in the Bible, the parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:30-37). Two men who should have been leaders of the faith, a priest and a Levite, walked by and ignored the man who had been beaten. Yet the Samaritan stopped to help. (It is also important to note that Jews and Samaritans generally did not like each other, which makes the meaning behind this story even more significant.) The point Jesus is making is this: Even though the first two men were of the same nation as the man who had been beaten and robbed--they were all Jews--the Samaritan, who actually showed love and helped this man, was the true neighbor at heart. Jesus says that is how we are to "love thy neighbor as thyself."

June 28 (Day 179) – Luke 10:38-42

- We live in a very busy world. There are always many things to do and many potential distractions. But in this story, Mary's heart was in the right place. She knew what was most important--to spend time with her Lord and Savior, listening to His words, during His brief visit with them. Martha, meanwhile, was too busy cooking food for all of them to take time to listen to Jesus. What's more, she even asked Jesus to rebuke her sister, Mary, for not helping her in the kitchen! Martha's focus was on preparing an elaborate meal for her

honored guest--perhaps to try to impress Him--but Jesus does not look at things in that way. Just as we saw in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus was first concerned with feeding the people spiritually, with the Word of God, and secondly with feeding them physically. Mary understood that order as well, but Martha had it backwards. Martha was concerned with the physical things while Mary was concerned with the spiritual things. The lesson here is to not let the busyness of life interfere with our spiritual needs. I believe we are all either more like Mary or more like Martha, so I ask you to ponder this: Which sister are you more like?

June 29 (Day 180) – Luke 11:1-4

- This is a separate instance from the occasion when Jesus gave what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer during His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 6:9-13), but the two prayers are very similar. In both prayers we see that the focus of Jesus is not on asking for things (He only asks for daily bread, which could mean physical food and/or spiritual nourishment). Instead, His focus is on showing honor and reverence toward God, seeking God's will, forgiveness for sins, and deliverance from evil. We should look to these two examples from Jesus as we pray. Yes, we also have Biblical support for praying for other things, such as healing for the sick (see James 5:13-18), but when we consider how Jesus Himself prayed, I do not believe that should be our focus in prayer as it often tends to be. Our focus should not be on physical needs but on spiritual needs--praising God and seeking His will, asking for spiritual nourishment, praying for forgiveness, and asking God to keep us away from evil. All of these things are vitally important to the maturing Christian.

June 30 (Day 181) – Luke 11:5-10

- God tells us to be persistent in prayer, and this is one parable Jesus gives us to help us understand that. In the parable, it was late at night, and this man did not particularly want to be bothered. Yet his friend needed some food to give to this surprise visitor, and knowing the need and the urgency of it, the man got up anyway and gave him as much bread as he

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needed. God tells us to be just as persistent and urgent in our prayers to Him.

- The last two verses in this passage most certainly do not imply that God gives us anything that we ask for. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, we are also told that God answers prayers that are made according to His will (see 1 John 5:14-15). So if we pray according to God's will, He is faithful to give us what we ask for. But if we do not, He loves us enough to say "no." Since God knows all things, and always does what is best for His children, an answer of "no" means that He has something better planned. But we must keep in mind that God sees things from an eternal perspective, so what He knows is better for us may not always be what we think is best.

July 1 (Day 182) – Luke 11:11-13

- While there may be a few rare exceptions in the world, even sinful unbelievers generally give good gifts to their children. Knowing that to be true, would those of us who are Christians expect any less from our loving Father in heaven? We shouldn't, that's for sure! But we tend to not think about it in this way, and so we worry and fret over things that we have prayed for, not trusting God to take care of us. Honestly, for most of us, it is probably a control issue--we are prideful by nature and we don't like not being in control! But if you are worrying about something, you should take it to God in prayer (if you haven't already), and then take some time to meditate on who God is and what all He has promised to His children. If we all lived in complete faith as we should, we would never have any reason to worry.

July 2 (Day 183) – Luke 11:14-20

- Once again we find people who are trying to discredit Jesus Christ in any way they possibly can, even when their arguments don't make any sense whatsoever. Jesus easily debunks their claim here. How could someone who is in league with Satan cast out one of Satan's demons? It simply doesn't make sense, and as Jesus put it, a house that is divided against itself cannot stand. We see that, in nations that have fallen apart through internal division (which could be the ultimate fate of the United States, but time will tell). We also see that

evidenced within divorced families. Likewise, Satan is certainly evil, but he cannot be divided against himself.

- Jesus ends with a stern warning: If He is who He claims to be, then the kingdom of God has come upon them. And the people He is arguing with are on the wrong side of the fence and will face the angry, consuming fire of God (see also Hebrews 10:31 and 12:29).

July 3 (Day 184) – Luke 11:21-23

- The "strong man" refers to Satan, who does have a certain measure of power given to him by God, and who has his weapons of spiritual warfare ready to use. But the "stronger man" is Jesus Christ, who has already won the final victory over Satan when He brought Himself back to life and gained victory over death!
- In the final verse of this passage, Jesus makes it quite clear that each one of us is either with Him or against Him. There is no inbetween. People in our post-modern culture don't like to hear things like that, but that doesn't change the truth. All religions do not lead to heaven. All church-goers will not be in heaven. The only way to heaven is through salvation in Jesus Christ alone. And if you are not trusting in Him alone for your salvation, then you are not with Him--you are against Him; you are not gathering with Him, but scattering and leading people astray.

July 4 (Day 185) – Luke 11:27-28

- In these two verses, Jesus speaks against one of the main points of focus in the Catholic church--the worship and adoration of Mary. A woman in this crowd commented on how blessed Jesus' mother was--and indeed, that is a true statement (see Luke 1:28, 42, and 48). Jesus did not disagree with the woman, but rather tried to turn her attention away from Mary and toward the eternal things of God. Mary certainly was a very blessed woman. Only one woman in the entire history of the world gave birth to the one and only Savior. But God calls us to do all things for His glory, not for the honor or glory of anyone else (see also Isaiah 42:8). Just as Jesus rebukes the woman here because her focus is on the wrong things, so should the Catholic church be rebuked for turning their focus away from Jesus Christ and

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elevating Mary to an ungodly place.

July 5 (Day 186) – Luke 11:33-36

- Here Jesus repeats a teaching that is very similar to what we read from His Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:14-16), but it is certainly an important truth that is worth a second look. Take a moment and think about what you do when the electricity goes out, since the Bible was written centuries before electric lights had been invented. Do you light a candle or turn on a flashlight, then hide it underneath something? Of course not! That would just be silly. If you are saved, God has called you to be a light to the world. Does your light shine brightly, speaking of Jesus whenever you can? Or do you hide your light from those around you, maybe talking a little about Jesus from time to time but never boldly proclaiming the gospel? Whether it be through actual conversations, through social media, or in some other way, we all need to shine our lights brightly in this very dark world in which we live.

July 6 (Day 187) – Luke 11:38-44

- The Pharisees during this time in history were just like many people today in this regard: They were concerned with outward appearances, of impressing or pleasing other people, and had no desire to please God. They wanted people to like them and to think highly of them. But what does it matter if God--the creator of and authority over all things--is not pleased? We live in a society now where many people are overly concerned with pleasing (or not offending) other people, while they do not care if they displease or offend the one and only God of the universe.

July 7 (Day 188) – Luke 11:46-52

- Here Jesus condemns the lawyers, and much of this passage reminds me of our modern-day lawyers. Earlier in the history of the United States, lawyers did actually study and learn law, at least in part, from the Bible. But that generally doesn't happen anymore, and just as this passage says in verse 52, lawyers have taken away Scripture, which is the key to true knowledge. For all practical purposes, the Bible is no longer a part of making and defending

laws in this country, which is why ungodly laws can now get passed by our government. Some lawyers would also be eager to use any part of the law that they can find in order to persecute Christians. Just the other day, I came across a number of videos of street preachers being questioned and even arrested by police in this country. It's all a result of sin--people do not want to hear the truth. What happened after Jesus said these things to the Pharisees and the lawyers? If you read down to verses 53 and 54, they started trying to trap Him in His words, to find something they could use against Him. He was merely speaking the truth, but in their pride and arrogance, they hated Him for it.

July 8 (Day 189) – Luke 12:1-7

- As the Pharisees intensify their attacks toward Jesus, trying to trap Him and find a reason to get Him arrested, Jesus turns to His disciples and gives them these words of wisdom on how to handle such people. Jesus tells us who to fear, and it is not other people--it is God Himself, who is the only one who has the power to cast people into hell for all eternity (verse 5). What can other people do? The very worst thing they can do, in their eyes, is to kill you, and people have done that to countless Christians over the last 2,000 years. But for the Christian, even that is not a bad thing, because "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (see Philippians 1:21) and "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (see 2 Corinthians 5:8). We know where we're going after we die, and it is a far better place than this fallen, sinful world! The point is, there is nothing other people can do to us that would take us away from Christ; therefore, we have no reason to fear them.

July 9 (Day 190) – Luke 12:8-12

- Do you confess Christ and boldly proclaim the gospel with your family, friends, co-workers, or anyone else that you spend time with? Or do you deny Him, living and speaking as if you are ashamed of Christ? Jesus makes it clear here what happens to these two groups of people. Do you want to be denied by God on the day of judgment? What an unimaginably horrible position to be in!
- The middle verse in this passage is a difficult

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one, but it should cause no concern for the true believer. Jesus is speaking of someone who is in such willful opposition to the Holy Spirit of God that they are unmistakably lost.

- Jesus also speaks about worry in this passage, comforting those who have a fear of speaking in public, who are afraid that they won't have the right words to say when there is an opportunity to speak of Christ. This is something that I personally struggle with and perhaps you do as well, but God promises that His Holy Spirit will guide us in such times and give us the words which we need to speak.

July 10 (Day 191) – Luke 12:13-21

- How many times have we seen this as we have been studying the four gospels? Over and over we find people who are caught up in the things of this world and are not at all concerned about the things of eternity. Here we find a man who is apparently in the midst of a dispute with his brother over their inheritance, and he thought Jesus would be the one who could help them settle the matter. But Jesus is not concerned with temporal things that have no eternal value! So He shares a parable with this man to show him where his priorities need to be. In the parable, this rich man had so many possessions that he had run out of room for everything! He was ready to just relax and enjoy life. But none of us knows when our last day on earth will be, and for him, this was his last day. What good did his abundant possessions do him then? In the words of God Himself, what a fool this man was! And many, many people in the world today are just as foolish.

July 11 (Day 192) – Luke 12:22-30

- Here we find another repeated teaching from Jesus, as He taught something very similar during His "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 6. But as these words are recorded in Scripture in two separate places, they are most certainly worth a second look, because our faith, generally speaking, is nowhere near what it should be. God created everything and is in sovereign control of all things. Why would we worry or fret at all? Yet we do, because of a lack of faith. Jesus says that all the nations of the world--meaning, those people who are

unsaved--seek after and worry about these things. But those of us who are God's children can be assured that He knows our needs and will take care of us.

July 12 (Day 193) – Luke 12:30-35

- Instead of seeking after and worrying about the things of this world, as unbelievers do, Christians are called to seek first the kingdom of God. What does that mean in a practical way? Our focus should be on things that have eternal value, such as preaching to the lost, sharing the gospel of salvation, teaching God's Word to others, spending time in Bible study and prayer, being active in the local church, having times of family worship during the week, and if you have children, raising them in the things of the Lord. We should not waste time on worthless worldly pursuits but seek to glorify God in all that we do. Verse 34 of this passage sums it up beautifully: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Where are you storing up your treasures--in heaven, or on earth?

July 13 (Day 194) – Luke 12:36-40

- Yesterday we looked at some practical ways to seek first the kingdom of God. If we are doing these things, seeking to glorify God in all that we do and devoting our lives first and foremost to Him (which, if you stop to think about it, is really not much of God to ask, considering all that He has done for His children), then we will be ready for Him to return. Are you? Do you eagerly look forward to the day of the Lord's return? Or does it make you sad or nervous (which would indicate an attachment to the things of this world and/or a lack of faith)? Perhaps you do not fall into either of those groups, and you are an unbeliever reading this. Make no mistake about it: whether you believe in Him or not, the Lord will return one day. God never fails to keep His promises. Are you prepared to face Him?

July 14 (Day 195) – Luke 12:45-48

- Continuing with the previous thought, here we find the sad parable of someone who was not concerned with eternal things, and who was not prepared when Jesus returned. The way the parable is worded, it seems apparent that

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this man claimed to be a Christian and was probably active in the church. Yet He was not truly following the Lord. Instead, as he became tired of waiting on the Lord to return, he started to drink to the point of becoming drunk, becoming completely wrapped up in the pleasures of the world. Jesus tells us plainly where this man ended up for eternity, and it wasn't in heaven but in hell. Even worse, because this man had been exposed to the teachings of the Bible, his punishment in hell would be worse than that for someone who had not been in the church and exposed to the teaching of the Word as he had been.

July 15 (Day 196) – Luke 12:49-53

- There are many liberal non-Christians in the world who have somehow formed the opinion that Jesus was all about peace and love, and so that is the way they think Christians need to act today. Luke 12:51 would be an excellent verse to share with such people. Jesus Himself said that He did not come to bring peace, but to bring division, because that's exactly what God's truth does--it separates the good from the evil. Christians are not supposed to be all-accepting of all the sinful things going on in the world. Yes, we should treat others in a loving way, but the very best way we can show true love is to share the gospel with the lost, because that is the only thing that matters with respect to eternity. The worst thing we can do is to show acceptance toward other people's sins. That is clearly not what Jesus commanded us to do, and it does not bring glory to God.

July 16 (Day 197) – Luke 12:54-59

- For a second time (see also Matthew 16:1-4), Jesus condemns the Pharisees for knowing enough about the signs in the sky to predict what the weather will be like, but for being oblivious to who Jesus is and what He came to do. They can recognize signs in the sky, but miss the signs of the time, as Jesus puts it. Isn't it the same way today? This doesn't just apply to weather forecasters (although there are plenty of them who are equally oblivious to the things of God and instead give credit to "mother nature"), but to anyone who is aware of things in the present world but oblivious to the things beyond it. Jesus rebukes and warns

all of these people. Does His rebuke apply to you? Are you focused on the things of eternal value, or are you caught up in the things of this world?

July 17 (Day 198) – John 10:24-31

- Some important Scriptural truths can be found in this short passage. As we see here, Jesus did not try to convert anyone. Instead, He simply explained to this group of Jews that they could not believe Him because they are not among His sheep. Those who are among His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him. We also find proof here that no one who is truly saved can lose his or her salvation, because no one is able to pluck someone out of the hand of God the Father. Anyone who falsely teaches that one can lose his or her salvation is essentially saying that Jesus was a liar and that we are stronger than God. But neither of those statements could possibly be true, and we find plenty of clear evidence right here in these few verses. People who believe they have lost their salvation were never truly saved in the first place, and fall into the category of those Jesus described back in Matthew 7:21-23.
- In a few short words to close, Jesus also disproves any false religion that does not recognize Jesus as God incarnate (in human form). Jesus was not merely a man or a prophet or a good teacher. He came to the earth as God in the flesh, and He and the Father are one. How did the Jews respond to all of this? They hated Him for what He was saying, and they wanted to kill Him! But His time had not yet come.

July 18 (Day 199) – Luke 13:23-28

- This is a reteaching of the sad passage of Scripture we find in Matthew 7. Jesus says that many will try to enter the gate to get into heaven, but won't be able to get in because they did not truly know Him. They followed a false Jesus, but were never truly born again. Listen to His words very carefully, and do not simply assume that He is talking to other people! Are you absolutely sure that He is not talking to you? Is this warning intended for you? Most people are not going to heaven. Few people will go. Be certain of your salvation, so you don't find yourself in the unimaginable position of

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hearing these words after you die, expecting to go to heaven. Make sure you are trusting in Jesus Christ, and His shed blood alone, for your salvation--not your baptism, church attendance, tithing, or anything else you may have done. You must be trusting in Jesus alone.

July 19 (Day 200) – Luke 14:16-24

- The people who made excuses in this parable represent the Jews, to whom the gospel was first offered. But they made excuses and would not come, giving the things of the world top priority in their lives. The rest of this parable represents the gospel being preached among the Gentiles, which was to happen shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection. And how does Jesus close this parable? By saying that none of those who refused to come--which no doubt included many of the Jews to whom He was speaking--would be invited to eternal life in heaven.

July 20 (Day 201) – Luke 14:26-33

- The point Jesus is making throughout this passage is found in the very last verse. This is not a message of hate; rather, Jesus is telling us that we cannot put anything before Him. Is your family more important than Christ? Is your own life more important? What about other things, such as money, possessions, fame, social status, or worldly (sinful) pleasures? If any of these things are more important to you than Jesus Christ, then you have reason to be very concerned about the state of your soul. It could be that you have temporarily fallen into sin and God will bring you out of it and teach you something from it, but it is far more likely that you don't have salvation at all, if other things are more important to you than Jesus Christ. This passage is also a challenge for the true believer to make sure we don't place anything in front of Jesus, but to always put God first in all that we do.

July 21 (Day 202) – Luke 15:4-10

- We have already covered a similar passage of Scripture found in Matthew 18, but for this passage, we will focus on verse 7. Is there anyone who does not need to repent from their sin? No, for we have all sinned and fall short of

the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). Jesus is telling these people, many of whom are self-righteous Jewish leaders who are trying to earn their salvation, that there is no rejoicing in heaven over them. But there is rejoicing over someone who is awakened by the Holy Spirit and comes to realize his or her need to repent, because that person will spend eternity in heaven with Jesus. No one can earn his or her salvation, and God has no place for the self-righteous.

July 22 (Day 203) – Luke 15:20-24

- This is just a portion of the parable of the prodigal son (read Luke 15:11-32 for the full story). We find the son who had left home to live like the world, likely succumbing to all kinds of sinful temptations, coming back with a repentant heart. Such is the spirit of one who has been quickened by God and born again in Christ. He did not even feel worthy to be called his father's son after all he had done, and those of us who have been saved by God should similarly feel unworthy to call Him our Father. He is our Father, by grace, but we most certainly do not deserve such an honor.
- This story can also represent the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were originally God's chosen people, but went astray and started trying to live righteously and earn their own salvation, just as the other son did in this parable (see Luke 15:29). When God commanded that His gospel go forth to the Gentiles, many Jews became jealous, just as the older son was jealous of the feast their father threw for his long-lost brother. This parable shows us how God humbles and saves the lost, and how He has no place for the proud.

July 23 (Day 204) – Luke 16:9-13

- Good stewardship and integrity in dealing with money and financial matters are important for the believer, and those are topics which Jesus is addressing here. If you are unfaithful with a small amount of money or possessions, perhaps by spending it unwisely or not giving a portion back to the Lord, why would He bless you with more? More importantly, if you cannot be trusted with worldly goods, how can you be trusted with true (spiritual) riches?

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Always be honest and upright in your dealings with others, in order to bring honor and glory to God.

- Jesus then repeats His teaching which is also found in Matthew 6:24. You cannot serve two masters; therefore, you cannot serve both God and mammon (material possessions). Which is important to you? Your answer can't be both; it must be one or the other. And if money and/or worldly possessions are important to you, then that is evidence that God is not important to you.

July 24 (Day 205) – Luke 16:14-18

- God does not change (see Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8). Some people will say that they don't like the God of the Old Testament but they love the God of the New Testament. Anyone who thinks this way fails to understand that God does not change, and we see the same God throughout the entire Bible. God is love, but that is only one of His many attributes. We cannot make the mistake of only talking about God's love while failing to talk about His wrath, justice, mercy, grace, and other characteristics.
- Jesus makes it clear in this passage that the law will not fail. He did not come to cancel out or replace the law, but to fulfill it and all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus gives an example concerning the law of divorce, which perhaps some who were listening to Him had broken. But none of us is capable of fully obeying all of God's law; that is why we need the righteousness of Christ to cover our sins and make us acceptable before God.

July 25 (Day 206) – Luke 16:19-25

- Hell is a very real place, and this is perhaps the most vivid picture we are given of hell in the entire Bible. We see here the picture of a rich man who enjoyed all the pleasures of this world, and a beggar named Lazarus, who suffered from painful sores and was a poor beggar all the days of his life. But Lazarus was a believer, and the rich man was not. So when they both died, the rich man was in such torment in the fires of hell that he begged for even a drop of water.
- Here is what many fail to understand: We are all deserving of hell, because we have all sinned against the one and only holy, perfect God.

There are plenty of nice people headed for hell, because no matter how nice you are, you have still sinned against God, just as we all have. Those who are saved by God's grace will get to go to heaven instead, but it is not because of anything we have done or because we are better people. It is solely because of God's grace.

July 26 (Day 207) – Luke 17:1-4

- To forgive means to pardon an offense, and to treat the offender as if they are not guilty. Take careful note of what Jesus says in this passage about forgiveness. We are commanded to forgive without limits--if the other person repents. If there is no repentance, we are not commanded to forgive. That may sound strange, but consider this: Does God forgive without repentance? We know that He does not. So how could God command us to do something that He does not do Himself? He couldn't, and He doesn't. When someone repents and asks forgiveness, we are to grant it, but forgiveness is not required where there is no repentance. Still, we are not to become bitter about it, because that would not be Christ-like either. If someone offends us and does not admit wrongdoing, even though we do not have to forgive the person, we must move on with life and continue to do all things for the glory of God.

July 27 (Day 208) – Luke 17:5-10

- Our faith is so weak. Jesus tells His disciples that if their faith was even the size of a mustard seed, which was the smallest commonly-known seed to the Jews, then they could command the trees to move. This sounds strange, but it makes sense when we view it in light of God's power. We know without a doubt that God has the power and authority to move a tree if He so desires. But our human minds are so frail and our faith, generally speaking, so weak, that we worry about things when we shouldn't and we truly do not comprehend what all God can do.
- Jesus concludes this particular discussion by keeping us humble. He reminds us that, no matter what we may do to bring glory to God, we are still unprofitable servants, because God doesn't need us. He has chosen to save and use some of us for His glory, but He most certainly

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does not need us, and we do not add anything to God. We should dwell and meditate on these things often to keep ourselves humble, and to remind us that God is the potter and we are merely the clay. It is so easy for pride to swell up, but compared to the almighty God, we are so small.

July 28 (Day 209) – John 11:1-8

- In John chapter 11, we find the well-known story of Lazarus, who died and was then resurrected by Jesus. Why did Lazarus die, and why was he even sick in the first place? Jesus gives us the answer in verse 4 of this passage: It all happened for the glory of God, and so that Jesus might be glorified through it all. There are many things that happen in this life that we don't fully understand, but always remember that God is constantly at work behind the scenes. Sometimes God causes or allows seemingly bad things to happen so that He might be glorified in the final outcome. And when we think of what Jesus did on the cross for His sheep, we should be willing and eager to persevere through whatever trials God may send our way, in order to glorify Him.
- Also take note of the final verse in this passage: Even though the Jews were attempting to capture and kill Jesus by this time, He knew that they could do nothing apart from the will of God.

July 29 (Day 210) – John 11:9-15

- As we have seen on many other occasions, Jesus' disciples didn't get what He was saying, so He had to explain it more clearly for them. Lazarus was dead, but Jesus would go and raise him to life again, to bring glory to God as we saw in yesterday's passage, but also to strengthen their faith and belief as they would witness such a miracle.
- We also find another comparison between light and darkness in this passage, with the light representing God and things that are good, and darkness representing things that are evil and sinful. We see an illustration of that every single day and night, as certain things that are easily done during daylight hours become much more difficult to do at night. Walk in the light of Christ, not in the darkness of this fallen, sin-filled world.

July 30 (Day 211) – John 11:21-27

- Martha may have been busily rushing around the house with her focus on the wrong priorities the last time we read about her (see Luke 10:38-42), but here, her faith is very evident. She knew that Jesus was so powerful that He could have kept Lazarus from dying if only He had been there sooner. She also knew that God the Father would grant anything Jesus would ask of Him.
- We see an interesting twist in this story, compared with so many of the things we read in the gospels. So often, Jesus is speaking about spiritual things, but the people listening to Him thought He was only talking about physical things. In this story, however, Martha was spiritually-minded, thinking Jesus was referring to the time of the end when all the dead in Christ will be resurrected. And while that is true, Jesus was speaking in a physical sense this time, as He was getting ready to perform a miracle and raise Lazarus from the dead. But even while performing an action in the physical realm, Jesus was still focused on bringing glory to God.

July 31 (Day 212) – John 11:32-38

- We also see Mary's strong faith when she, just like her sister Martha had done, commented that Jesus could have saved Lazarus from dying if only He had come sooner. We then see people mocking Jesus, asking why He couldn't have prevented Lazarus' death. But even death is no boundary for the power of God, and these people would soon witness an amazing miracle from Jesus Christ.
- This passage contains the shortest verse in the Bible, which simply says, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). But it is a powerful verse, giving us insight into the human side of Jesus. He is fully God, but also fully man, and even though He would soon bring Lazarus back to life, the sight of His dear friend lying there, dead, was enough to bring tears to His eyes. Yet He was also the only perfect man to ever walk on this earth--tempted, yet without sin (see Hebrews 4:15).

August 1 (Day 213) – John 11:39-44

- Here we come to the miracle itself. After Lazarus had been dead for four days (and he

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was literally dead, since the Scripture records that his body stunk by that time), Jesus came in and brought him back to life. He also prays, thanking God the Father for hearing Him-- which He did not have to say, but did so for the benefit of those listening (and for us who read about it now), that we might believe. Notice how Jesus does not even take the glory for Himself, but gives glory to His Father for what will happen next. Then we see the power of God demonstrated as Jesus doesn't even go over and touch Lazarus, but merely speaks for Lazarus to awake and come forward. That's exactly what happened, as Lazarus, still bound up in graveclothes, gets up and walks right out of his grave.

August 2 (Day 214) – John 11:47-54

- All the people must have been astounded by this miracle and began to believe in God, right? Well, many did, as we read in John 11:45. But in this passage, we see the reactions of those who were against Jesus. It seems that this miracle just caused them to become even more jealous and envious toward Jesus. But they did not fear God--they feared the Roman Empire and what they might do to the Jews if Jesus were allowed to continue. How blind were they! But we might all be just as blind if not for the grace of God.
- However, we also find an interesting prophecy from the man who was serving as high priest at that time. He prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for them but also that He would gather all of the children of God who were scattered abroad, among the Gentile nations. But the Jewish leaders did not care, and from this point forward, began to work even harder to find a way to put Jesus to death. So Jesus did not walk openly among them anymore, but went to another city with his disciples, to continue to teach them until they came to the time God had appointed for His death and resurrection.

August 3 (Day 215) – Luke 17:12-19

- Ten men were physically healed by Jesus, but as soon as they were healed, they went right back to their normal lives, living for themselves rather than for Christ. They couldn't even be bothered to come back and thank Him for what

He did for them! They selfishly only thought about themselves, just as many people do. Yet one did return and gave thanks, glorifying God for what was done for him. Jesus tells us that He received much more than physical healing-- he received spiritual healing as well, being born again by the Holy Spirit. There are many who attend church for the purpose of feeling better about themselves, then go right back to their normal lives. But that is most certainly not what church is all about, and if that is the reason you go to church, then you are probably not on the road to heaven. Those who are truly saved seek to glorify God in all that they do.

August 4 (Day 216) – Luke 17:20-25

- The kingdom of God is not something that we can physically see or touch. We cannot find it or get to it on our own. We don't have to go to a particular place to meet our God. We don't pray to idols or images or anything that can be made with human hands. We can in no way observe it with our senses. The kingdom of God exists solely and completely in the spiritual realm, and as Jesus says here, it also exists on the inside--within the souls of all believers. We can see the evidence of it, in the love for the brethren and the desire for God that comes from true Christians.
- Jesus, of course, knew what would be coming His way. One day, He will return suddenly--but first, He knew He would have to "suffer many things and be rejected" by the Jews of that generation. When He spoke those words, the time of His death and resurrection was quickly approaching and was in the not-too-distant future. It is a sad commentary on the incredibly sinful state of humanity that the very Son of God walked among us, and God's own chosen people group had Him crucified because of jealousy and hate.

August 5 (Day 217) – Luke 17:26-33

- Take a moment to think about what the world was like in the days just before God sent the great flood. Aside from the eight people who were saved in the ark, everyone else was no doubt enjoying all the sinful pleasures that this world had to offer. They were probably mocking Noah and his family, as well. They were taking part in all the normal activities of

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life--eating, drinking, marrying, working, building, and planting. But when God sent the flood, suddenly none of those things mattered, and they all perished in a matter of hours or days. A similar comparison is made with Sodom and Gomorrah, which were full of people living in sinful pleasures, but God destroyed them in an instant (as a side note, we in the United States should take note of what happened in those two cities). Lot's wife looked back because she longed to continue in those sinful pleasures, but we are commanded to forgo the pleasures of this world and to let go of our own lives in order to fully and wholeheartedly serve God and further His kingdom.

August 6 (Day 218) – Luke 18:1-8

- Jesus tells a parable here of an unjust judge, who had no desire to do what was right or just, but nevertheless gave in to this widow because she was so persistent in her request. If that corrupt judge would do such a thing, would not God, who is completely right and just in all that He does, honor the prayers of His beloved children? He has promised that He will! We do not pray as we should. Jesus gives us this parable to encourage us to be persistent in our prayers. On a personal note, that is something I struggle with a great deal. After spending a few days praying for something, I tend to stop and move on to other prayer needs. Perhaps you have a similar struggle. But God tells us to keep on praying, over and over, persistently. He loves His children; He wants to provide for our needs and give us protection.
- Jesus ends this parable with a challenge. Is a lack of faith one reason we don't pray as we should? It surely is, considering God can do anything yet we fret and worry over the tiniest little things. So we are challenged to pray persistently and to trust God in faith with the outcome.

August 7 (Day 219) – Luke 18:9-14

- This is a powerful parable that should speak to those who are self-righteous, who think God will accept them into heaven based on their own merits and good works. First, consider the Pharisee. He went to the temple and prayed, but if you look carefully at the words of his

prayer, He was solely focused on himself and all that he had done. Then consider the other man--a tax collector, and in those days, tax collectors were notorious sinners, because they would tell people that their taxes were higher than they really were and keep the excess for themselves. But this tax collector had been humbled by God's grace. He was so ashamed of his sins that he wouldn't even look up to heaven, but simply confessed that he was a sinner, praying for God's mercy that he knew he desperately needed. God has no place for pride, and while there was no place for that Pharisee in heaven, there was a place for the tax collector. Take some time to think about this: which man are you more like?

August 8 (Day 220) – Mark 10:2-9

- Again the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus by asking Him a difficult question, but of course Jesus will never fall into one of their traps. In marriage, God joins two separate souls together, and the two become one flesh. We learn that at the very beginning of the Bible (see Genesis 2:24), and Jesus restates it for us here. Why, then, did Moses give the Israelites permission to divorce? Jesus tells us here that divorce was not part of God's perfect plan. Once He has joined two together as one, that cannot fully be undone. Yet because of their sin, and the hardness of their hearts, they were permitted to divorce under certain circumstances. For example, even though divorce is permitted after adultery has occurred, it is certainly not required, and it would still be best if the two who are married can remain together. As Paul writes, just because something is allowed by God does not mean it should be done (see 1 Corinthians 10:23).

August 9 (Day 221) – Mark 10:10-16

- First, Jesus concludes His prior remarks on divorce by once more stating plainly that man should not attempt to separate what God has joined together. If there is a divorce followed by a remarriage, adultery has still been committed, because the two people who were originally married are still one in the eyes of God.
- Consider how humble and meek little children

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are. They are generally harmless and inoffensive, while adults so often are full of pride and arrogance--the exact opposite of little children. In that sense, a childlike faith is what God grants to those who will enter heaven. While many scientists and college professors and psychologists think they know all (or at least most) of the answers, a Christian is called to a different type of life. We should seek to honor and glorify God in humility and love, while distancing ourselves from pride, boasting, and arrogance.

August 10 (Day 222) – Mark 10:17-22

- This man wanted to find out what he had to do to earn his way into heaven. Jesus first rebuked the man for calling Him “good”--Jesus is good and perfect, of course, but this man didn’t really know who Jesus was, and therefore lacked an understanding of what it meant to be good. Jesus corrected the man’s thinking in that regard by making it clear that only God is good; none of us can be good enough to earn our way into heaven. Still, though, the man claimed that he had kept all the commandments from his childhood until that time. What a self-righteous man he must have been! God didn’t give us the commandments so that we might have a strict set of rules to follow; of course, it is good to try to follow them as best we can as Christians, but the ultimate purpose of God’s law is to show us that none of us is able to keep it on our own, and our only hope is found in Jesus Christ. This man did not understand that. He thought he was doing a good job at keeping the commandments on his own, yet as we see in his response to Jesus’ final question, his heart was still in this world.

August 11 (Day 223) – Mark 10:23-27

- This follows immediately after the story of the rich young ruler, who thought he was doing what he needed to do to earn his way into heaven, but went away sad because Jesus told him that he would have to give up his worldly riches first. Now, let’s be careful that we understand this correctly. Nothing but true saving faith in Jesus is required to enter into heaven. But how we live our lives, and what we place an importance on, are outward evidences

of that faith. Jesus told that man that he would have to give up his worldly riches because He wanted to show him that he was putting the things of this world ahead of God, and therefore he lacked true salvation. Now, there are some wealthy people who are saved--but not many, because most wealthy people are so caught up in the things of this world that they couldn’t care less about the things of eternity. But still, some are saved, because with God, all things are possible.

August 12 (Day 224) – Mark 10:28-31

- Here Jesus gives us one more example of what the life of a true Christian is like. God doesn’t say that we are forced or required to give up all of these things, or else we can’t enter heaven. If He did, then it would be about our works instead of about His grace. But someone who is a true Christian will not put any of these things ahead of Christ, and should be willing to leave some or all of those things behind if called to do so, in order to further the spread of the gospel. Jesus also says that we will be blessed for doing so--perhaps in tangible ways in this life, and perhaps not, but certainly in an eternal way, as He states at the end.
- Take notice, though, of one other thing that He promises to those who believe: persecutions. Some Christians are persecuted more than others. We have been richly blessed throughout the history of the United States, but now we see that persecution is increasing. To those who merely want to be happy, healthy, and wealthy in this life, that kind of promise would just sound silly. But to the true Christian, who knows that persecution can lead to the furtherance of the gospel and more glory for God, it is a thing of joy!

August 13 (Day 225) – Matthew 20:8-15

- This is the conclusion of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (start reading with verse 1 for the full story), in which the owner of the vineyard went out and hired people at different times throughout the day, but paid them all the same amount, whether they had worked all day or just for the last hour. In one sense, we wonder, how is that fair? But this man did not treat any of these people wrongly; each one agreed to his wages at the time they

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were hired, and he gave them all exactly what he had promised to give them. God saves some, and others He does not. Some are saved early in life, and some are saved later. Some lived centuries ago and have already gone on to eternity, while we are still here waiting for it. But whether or not all things appear fair to us, in our feeble human minds, God is just and righteous in all that He does. And He has kept and will keep every one of His promises, both to those who are His children as well as to those who are not.

August 14 (Day 226) – Luke 18:31-34

- The time of Jesus' death and resurrection was quickly approaching. Here He tells his disciples that they will head toward Jerusalem, and those events will begin to unfold. He knows exactly what is coming, and those events were also prophesied hundreds of years before in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. He knew He would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles (specifically, the Romans, who ruled the Jews in that day) and that He would be beaten, mocked, and treated cruelly by them. All those things had been prophesied and those prophecies were about to come true. Yet He also knew what the end result would be—that He would overcome death and the grave by rising again on the third day. But God had not yet revealed all of these things to Jesus' disciples, so that even though they heard His words, they did not fully understand what was about to happen. God knows all things, but often we only see a portion of what He is doing behind the scenes. We know, though, that He is always working all things for the good of His children (see Romans 8:28).

August 15 (Day 227) – Matthew 20:25-28

- This is a lesson in humility, and Jesus Himself is our best example. He tells His disciples that anyone who wants to be great, noteworthy, or a leader, is the one who must minister to and serve the others. The very best kind of leader is one who knows how to serve those under him.
- Jesus gives Himself as an example of this, stating that even He did not come to receive fame and glory as some great leader—though He certainly could have and would have deserved it like none other—but instead, He

lived as a servant, attending to the needs (needs—not necessarily wants or desires) of others. He ministered until their spiritual needs as well as their physical needs. And His ultimate purpose in coming was His ultimate sacrifice: to give His life as a ransom for many, to pay the debt that every one of us owes to God for our sin against Him.

August 16 (Day 228) – Luke 19:2-10

- Zacchaeus was a rich tax collector. We aren't told exactly how rich, but he was no doubt among the richest people in that society. But when Jesus came through, Zacchaeus desperately wanted to see Him. He had difficulty doing that in the crowd, but Jesus found him and asked to go to his house for a meal. Far greater than the gift of Jesus' presence in his house, though, was the gift of salvation that Zacchaeus received on this day, making him a spiritual son of Abraham. We recently looked at the story of the rich young ruler, where Jesus stated that it is very difficult for a rich person to be saved. But it is not impossible with God, and here we see an example of that very thing. But we also see a drastic change in the life of Zacchaeus. He no longer cares about money and promises to return fourfold to all from whom he had cheated in his career as a tax collector. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in his heart.

August 17 (Day 229) – Luke 19:11-15

- Jesus was now nearing Jerusalem, and His impending crucifixion was just days away. So after His encounter with Zacchaeus, He spoke this parable, which pertains to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is talking about Himself when He says “a certain nobleman”, and He gave to His people gifts and a command to spread the gospel until His return. His citizens—the Jews, Jesus' relatives by birth and God's original chosen people group—hated Him, and would soon have Him crucified. But He will return some day, and each of us who belongs to Him will be accountable for what we have done with the gifts He has given to us, and the gospel truth He has commanded us to share. Are you using your gifts, talents, money, and resources for the Lord? Or are you using them primarily for your own pleasures in this life? If you continue reading through verse 27, you will see

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that Jesus rewarded those who used their gifts and resources to help spread the gospel, but He condemned the man who had no interest in doing anything with that gift which belonged to the Lord.

August 18 (Day 230) – Jn. 11:55-57, 12:9-11

- The time of the Passover was drawing near, and the Jewish leaders were more eager than ever to try to find a way to capture Jesus, being completely overtaken by their envy and jealousy toward Him. But the second portion of this passage gives us even more insight into just how wicked were the hearts of these people. Not only did they want to kill Jesus, because He spoke the truth and they didn't want to hear it, but they also wanted to try to kill Lazarus, because Jesus' miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was drawing even more people to follow Jesus. Even in their eyes, Lazarus himself had done nothing wrong--but they were so filled with hate that they didn't realize that. They desperately wanted to get rid of Jesus, and anyone else who was helping Him gain followers. Little did they know, their pursuits of Jesus were rather futile, since God had already orchestrated all of these events, including Jesus' impending capture and crucifixion.

August 19 (Day 231) – Luke 19:29-35

- We can take several truths from this passage. First, Jesus--being God--knows all things; He knew that this colt would be at this specific place at this certain time, and that no man had ever ridden it before. Secondly, we see the faith of these two disciples, who did not doubt that but hurried to go and get the colt, knowing Jesus' words would be true. Thirdly, we see Jesus' personal lack of possessions during His time on this earth. We read elsewhere in Scripture that He did not even have a regular place on which to lay His head at night (Luke 9:58). He was solely focused on spiritual things, trusting in His Father to provide whatever physical things He may have needed, such as this colt to ride on or a place to sleep each night. This is the colt He would ride in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

August 20 (Day 232) – Mark 11:8-11

- It is amazing to see how many people were praising Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. It is just as astonishing, though, to think about how some of these very same people were cheering for Him to be crucified just five short days later. The Bible doesn't specifically tell us this, but it is safe to assume that some, perhaps even many, of the same people were probably present at both events. Anyone who was praising His triumphant entry and who also cheered for His crucifixion most likely did not understand anything about who Jesus really was, but was just going along with the crowd. Those who did truly believe were no doubt very excited on this day, emotionally crushed five days later when Jesus died, but excited again when Jesus arose and they began to understand that He had accomplished exactly what He had come to do.

August 21 (Day 233) – Luke 19:39-44

- The Pharisees became so angry over the wonderful greeting that the people were giving to Jesus, that they asked Him if He would quiet them down! That is astounding, in a way, considering how much they despised Him, that they would even want to talk to Him and make such a request. I suppose they were that desperate. But Jesus responded by saying that, because of who He is, there would be no silence. Either the praise would come from the people, or if they were quieted, it would come from the stones! That may sound strange to us, but all things are possible with God. And in this moment, Jesus was going to be praised and glorified, and no one else could do anything to stop it.
- Because the vast majority of the Jews did not realize who Jesus was and the true peace that only comes from God, here Jesus gives a brief prophecy about the future of the Jewish nation. Their enemies (the Romans, in this case) would soon overtake them and destroy many things, including the temple, which happened some 30 years later.

August 22 (Day 234) – Mark 11:15-18

- This well-known incident also happened around the time of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Have you been misled into

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believing that Jesus is all love, all the time, no matter what anyone has done? That is not an accurate picture of Jesus at all, and we see one very clear example of that in this passage. This was actually the second time Scripture records Jesus doing something of this nature in the temple (see John 2:13-22). Those inside were selling and taking advantage of people, and that is not at all what the house of God is supposed to be about! It is a house of prayer, not a den of thieves. Make no mistake about it: If we are acting in a way that is contrary to what God expects, He is not happy and He is most certainly not all-loving. God is love, but God is also holy, which means He is perfect in ways we can't even begin to understand. Sin does not please God, and sin will be punished in eternity for anyone who has not been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

August 23 (Day 235) – John 12:23-26

- Jesus came to teach, to heal, and to do many other things, but the ultimate purpose of His coming was singular: He came so that He could die, in order to atone for the sin of God's children. Jesus compares Himself to a grain of wheat, which must fall to the ground and die in order to produce fruit. His impending death and resurrection would accomplish something similar in the spiritual realm. He would accomplish salvation for His people, and His name along with the gospel truth would be spread beyond Israel--it would be spread throughout all the world.
- Are you in love with this life and the physical and material things of this world? Or, are you in love with Christ and the things of eternal value? You can't have it both ways (see Matthew 6:24); it must be either one or the other.

August 24 (Day 236) – John 12:27-31

- The first verse of this passage gives us a powerful insight into the heart of Jesus. His soul is troubled, from the rejection of the Jews and His impending separation from God during His crucifixion--which, though it was brief, was no doubt more painful for Christ than anything we can imagine. He was about to be crucified in order to glorify the name of God, which should be our purpose in all we do.

- The "prince of this world" is Satan, and this was the moment when the final victory was won by Christ. Yes, Satan still has a certain measure of power--under the ultimate control of God--to tempt people and cause trouble in this world. But Christians can rest assured, knowing that Jesus Christ has already won the final victory, by rising from the dead and overcoming death and the grave!

August 25 (Day 237) – John 12:32-41

- Even while the Pharisees and other Jews were busy trying to find a way to capture Him, Jesus already knew what would happen in a few days--even what kind of death He would die. He knew He would be lifted up from the earth on a cross, so that He might draw all His people to Himself.
- This passage also includes prophecies of Christ from Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 29:10, as God allows us to see some of the reasons why so many of the Jews did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. God allows many to remain in their natural state, in which they have no power to see or believe in Him. This is a difficult passage to grapple with, but in Romans 9:10-23, Paul gives us a reality check: God is the potter, and we are merely the clay. He made us, He can do as He pleases, and He is perfect in all that He does.

August 26 (Day 238) – John 12:42-43

- While these people may have believed, in some sense, that Jesus was who He claimed to be, they apparently did not have true saving faith in Him, seeing as how they were afraid to confess Him before the Pharisees. If God is for us, who can be against us (see Romans 8:31)? If we trust in God, what can man do to us (see Psalm 56:11, Psalm 118:6, and Hebrews 13:6)? But if you are afraid to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, and you are instead more afraid of what other people might think or do to us, where is your faith? It certainly does not appear to be in God (see also Matthew 10:32, 1 John 4:2, and 1 John 4:15).

August 27 (Day 239) – John 12:44-50

- Here Jesus once more presents the truth about who He is, where He came from, and what He came to do. He came to save those who are lost

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and who know their need of a Savior. But those who reject Him will be judged by Him at the last day because they are condemned already, as we are told in the often-forgotten verse that comes just after what is likely the most-used verse in the Bible (see John 3:18). Jesus came to speak about eternal life and then, through His own death and resurrection, to give eternal life to those who believe. These things, and all that He said, were given to Him by God the Father to speak to us. Jesus acts in accordance with the Father's commands in all that He does, which not only demonstrates His own obedience but also gives us the best possible example to follow.

August 28 (Day 240) – Matthew 21:19-22

- Again we see Christ give us an example of just how weak our faith generally is. We read this passage and wonder how a mountain could be thrown into the sea, but aren't all things possible with God? God created everything; moving a mountain is a small thing for Him!
- But, that's not the main point of this passage of Scripture. The main point is this: the fig tree represents the Jews, God's original chosen group of people. Jesus first came unto them, but by and large they rejected Him. So now He is casting them off, and they will not produce any spiritual fruit, just as He said this fig tree would no longer bear any literal fruit. Jesus' crucifixion is now just days away, and after His resurrection, the gospel would really spread beyond Israel and into the Gentile world.

August 29 (Day 241) – Matthew 21:23-27

- This group of Jewish chief priests had no desire to understand the things of God. When Jesus asked them this question, which was in response to a question they had asked Him, they didn't even attempt to figure out the correct answer. They reasoned among themselves and tried to decide how to respond based on their fear of other people. They knew they couldn't say that John's baptism was from heaven, because Jesus would rightly ask them why they didn't believe. But they couldn't say it was from men, either, because they feared how the people would react to that answer. So they cowardly gave no answer at all (this sort of reminds me of many of this country's

politicians). And Jesus, who could never fall into anyone's trap, likewise gave them no answer--neither to the question He had posed, nor to their original question. He wasn't avoiding their initial question (it was a question He had clearly answered at other times). Rather, He was redirecting them to what He knew they needed to hear.

August 30 (Day 242) – Matthew 21:28-32

- Jesus is still addressing the Jewish chief priests when He gives this parable. The first son represents people who are stubborn and obstinate sinners (as we all are), but who are later awakened by the Holy Spirit and come to recognize their need of salvation in Jesus Christ. The second son represents hypocrites, such as the Jewish religious leaders, who claimed to follow God and acted as if they did, yet in their heart they truly did not. These chief priests correctly answered Jesus' question, that those people represented by the first son are those who are accepted by God the Father. Yet they still failed to see their own sin and hypocrisy, for as we will see at the end of this chapter, they did not fall in repentance but put forth even more effort to capture Jesus. Scripture tells us that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (see James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).

August 31 (Day 243) – Matthew 21:33-39

- Read this parable with this in mind: God is the owner of the land/house, and the vinedresser (also called the husbandman or the tenant, in some translations) represents the Jewish religious leaders. God sent His servants, His children, to them--but they beat them and even killed some. Then He sent more of His children, and they received the same treatment. Finally God sent His very own Son, but the response was still no different. That is exactly what we see throughout all four gospel accounts, as Jesus speaks truth to the Jewish religious leaders, but they are full of pride and only want to kill Him. The last verse of this passage was now just days from happening.

September 1 (Day 244) – Matt. 21:40-46

- Look at the boldness of our Savior in how He addresses the Pharisees here! And they realized

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that Jesus was speaking about them, but He feared God and not men--just as we all should. They were indeed the wicked men who beat and killed God's servants as well as His very own Son. They basically condemned themselves by saying that God should destroy them and then spread the gospel to others. Spiritually speaking, that is exactly what happened: They would have no part in God's eternal inheritance, while many Gentiles would receive that inheritance instead.

- Jesus is the chief cornerstone, written about in Psalm 118:22. The builders--the Jewish priests, God's original chosen group of people--utterly rejected Him. But even now, we see no repentance from them; instead, they continue to try to kill Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

September 2 (Day 245) – Matthew 22:1-7

- Here Jesus gives another parable about the kingdom of heaven, comparing the Jews with the Gentiles. The Jews are represented by this first group of people who were invited to the wedding feast, but would not come. In verse 5, Jesus says that they even made light of it--going about their normal daily activities with no regard for those things which pertain to eternity. Some of them even treated God's servants poorly, even going as far as to kill some of them. The king--God Himself--would have none of this, and sent forth His armies to enact justice. Tomorrow, we'll look at the second part of this parable.

September 3 (Day 246) – Matthew 22:8-14

- Once the Jews had refused to come, the king (God) then began to extend the invitation to others (Gentiles). Note that Jesus says that these people were "both bad and good"--not that any of us are good before God on our own (see Isaiah 64:6), but in an earthly moral sense, some of us are pretty good while others are far worse. But God calls all different types of people to come to Himself, and that is the point Jesus is making here.
- Back in those days, people may have traveled long distances on dirty animals to attend a wedding, so the man who was hosting the wedding would provide wedding garments for his invited guests--but not for someone who snuck in. We can only enter into heaven if we

have been covered by the righteousness of Christ. If we do not have that--as was the case with this one man--we will be cast into hell for all eternity. This man tried to find another way to get in, but there is no other way apart from Jesus Christ.

September 4 (Day 247) – Matt. 22:15-16

- Again come the Pharisees, foolishly attempting to trap Jesus with a trick question. But what they say this time is particularly interesting. They have taken note of how Jesus speaks with no regard for what other people will think of Him. That is a compliment, although these people may not have intended for it to be. As Christians, we are called to imitate Christ, and most of us could do far better in this regard. How many times have you been afraid to speak about Jesus, or too shy to proclaim the gospel? Jesus is our greatest example, and of course, He never was afraid to speak the truth. We know for certain that God is protecting those of us who belong to Him, so what do we have to fear?

September 5 (Day 248) – Matt. 22:17-22

- Here is the next trick question from the Pharisees, and Jesus doesn't beat around the bush but directly calls them out, asking why they are testing and trying to trick Him. But He answers them anyway, and in the process, gives us some insight into what our attitude should be toward the government and taxes. None of us like to pay taxes, especially when the government uses our money in ways in which we disagree. But as Christians, we are to obey the government (unless those in authority specifically ask us to disobey God ourselves), paying taxes as we should and living uprightly. In one of his letters, Paul urges us to not only obey our leaders but also to pray for them, so that we might live quiet and peaceable lives during our time here on earth (see 1 Timothy 2:1-2).

September 6 (Day 249) – Matt. 22:28-33

- This is Jesus' response to a trick question from another group of non-believers, the Sadducees, who believed that there is no spirit and nothing after death. They asked what was a rather silly question about a woman who was married

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seven times and then died and went to heaven. Jesus gives them a brief answer, and also gives us a glimpse into heaven at the same time. In heaven we won't be married as we are here on earth. Actually, our relationship will be as if we are siblings--we will all be brothers and sisters in heaven with our Father.

- After giving a brief answer, Jesus then tells them what they really need to hear, since this is the group of people who does not believe in anything after death. Jesus reaffirms who He is and that there is indeed life after death. We can also learn from His response: While answering questions that people ask can be a good thing, it may sometimes be better to go in a different direction in order to give the person what they really need to hear (such as the gospel).

September 7 (Day 250) – Mark 12:28-31

- In this response to the scribe, Jesus first declares that there is one and only one true God. There are not many gods, nor are there many ways to heaven. But there is one God, and one way to heaven, through His Son Jesus Christ.
- Then, Jesus directly answers the scribe's question by explaining the two most important commandments. And if you take a moment to think about it, all ten of the commandments found in Exodus chapter 20 are included here (see also Matthew 22:40). Looking at the Ten Commandments, the first four pertain to our attitude toward and reverence of God. So if we do love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we are following all four of these commandments. The other six commandments pertain to how we treat one another, and if we love our neighbor as ourself, then that covers all six of these commandments. Once again we see how Jesus did not come to do away with the law (though there were times, such as this one, where He explained the same law in a new and different way), but He came to fulfill the law.

September 8 (Day 251) – Mark 12:32-34

- It is not clear from this passage whether or not this particular man had received the gift of salvation, but he clearly had at least some knowledge of spiritual things. He correctly recognized that God does not delight in burnt

offerings and sacrifices (see also Isaiah 1:11 and Hosea 6:6), but that what's on the inside is what truly matters. All those offerings and sacrifices that were done in the Old Testament showed obedience to God, and they were shadows of the one true sacrifice that was to come. But all those sacrifices never paid for a single sin. Only Jesus Christ was able to do that. Sadly, so many of the Jews got caught up in the sacrifices and began to think they could earn their way into heaven, but that was never part of God's plan for mankind. If you are interested in learning more about how the Old Testament is a shadow of things to come, I highly recommend reading the book of Hebrews.

September 9 (Day 252) – Matt. 22:41-46

- Now Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees and asks them a question, which causes them great difficulty. First, they correctly knew from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Christ would come through the lineage of King David. But then Jesus asks a question to which they are unable to respond. Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1, a psalm of David. The phrase "The Lord said to my Lord" means "God the Father said to my Lord", and the second "Lord" is a reference to Jesus Christ. But David refers to Christ as his Lord. If Christ is a descendant of David, how could David refer to Him in such a way? But he does, because Christ is God Himself, and has always existed, long before David was born. This makes sense to the Christian, but it stumped the Pharisees, and from now until the time of His trial and crucifixion (which was now only a couple of days away), no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

September 10 (Day 253) – Matthew 23:1-7

- Here we find Jesus publicly condemning the Pharisees for, as the saying commonly goes, not practicing what they preach. This is only the first portion of a rather lengthy discourse from Jesus and we find Him speaking as boldly as ever, as His crucifixion draws very near. Jesus explains to the crowd how the Pharisees burden them with so many rules and restrictions, yet they do not follow the same rules nor carry the same burdens themselves. They only want the fame and admiration of the

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people, being recognized by them as being righteous, even though in their hearts they are not. We should not care how other people regard us. Certainly, as Christians, we must seek to glorify God in all that we do, but if that upsets people--so be it. We see that exemplified here, as Jesus boldly speaks the truth with no regard for what other people will think while He condemns the Pharisees, who are so focused on appearances and what other people think but their hearts are not right with God.

September 11 (Day 254) – Matt. 23:8-12

- Jesus clearly condemns something that the Catholic Church does in this passage, even though they did not come into existence until a few centuries later. He is not saying that we cannot call our physical father by that title; rather, He is speaking in a spiritual sense. There is only one spiritual Father, and that is God Himself. No priest, nor anyone else, deserves that title. Our Father is in heaven.
- Some of the greatest Christians in history (in our mere human perspective) are also some of the most humble people who have ever lived. That is precisely because God hates pride, and as we are further and further humbled, we are enabled to serve Him even more. Any “pastor” or so-called “Christian” who focuses all of the attention on themselves is almost certainly not a true Christian, but is instead a wolf in sheep’s clothing. We see such things often in our society, and it is an abomination to God.

September 12 (Day 255) – Matt. 23:13-22

- Woe indeed to anyone who does these things--who is part of a false religion and who works hard to lead others astray from the one true God! The scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of that day, were guilty of such things--but so are many people in our world today. We may have new cults and new false religions, but they all still lead in the same direction--straight toward hell. In that sense, all false religions are the same, and have always been the same. There is nothing new under the sun (see Ecclesiastes 1:9).

September 13 (Day 256) – Matt. 23:23-28

- The people Jesus describes here are indeed hypocrites, caring about outward appearances

but being full of evil on the inside. Take a moment to carefully consider some of the specific things Jesus mentions here. They paid tithes to the church, but lacked mercy and faith. They carefully kept every little detail of their law--which included not eating a gnat--while completely missing the significant, most important things. They made sure to wash their cups and platters, yet were greedy with the food and drink that filled them, as well as with their possessions as a whole. The theme that runs throughout these verses is the same thing Jesus had been preaching to these people all along: They are focused on outward appearances, not caring about what’s on the inside, although that is the exact opposite of the way God looks at things (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

September 14 (Day 257) – Matt. 23:29-35

- Jesus delivers one more woe unto these hypocrites before concluding this particular speech, and it has to do with those who have been murdered for their faith. Once again we see how they are focused on outward appearances (they built great tombs for the prophets and righteous believers who have been killed), yet they themselves, or others like them, were the very same ones who did the murdering--all the way back to the beginning of Genesis, when Cain killed his brother Abel because Cain’s offering of his own works was not accepted by God (see Genesis 4:1-13). And these are the people who are about to murder the very Son of God! Jesus tells them as plainly and clearly as He possibly can--they are headed for hell, and there is no escape. There is no escape for anyone whose sin has not been taken away by the blood of Jesus Christ.

September 15 (Day 258) – Matt. 23:36-39

- You can hear how Jesus’ heart aches for Jerusalem. These were God’s chosen people, which He brought out of their slavery in Egypt and drove their enemies out of the land which He gave to them. And how did they thank God for all that He did for them? They killed God’s prophets, all the way up to the ultimate Prophet, Jesus Christ. Of course, God has a plan in all of this--but we still see the human side of Christ aching for the Israelites. If you

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read through the Old Testament (especially in 1 & 2 Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles), you will see how God gave Israel chance after chance--and then even more chances. But in their pride and arrogance, they kept turning away from Him. Now, their time has run out, and the time of the Gentiles is at hand, which was ordained by God in order to provoke the Jews to jealousy (see Romans 10:19 and 11:11). This was actually prophesied by Moses way back when Israel was just becoming a nation (see Deuteronomy 32:21), as a punishment for worshipping idols and false gods.

September 16 (Day 259) – Mark 12:41-44

- It doesn't matter how much we give; what matters is what's in our heart. God doesn't need our money; everything belongs to Him anyway, and He will accomplish His purposes with or without anything from us. Giving back to God is in fact a privilege for the child of God, and it is something that we should do gladly and willingly. In God's eyes, this poor widow gave more than all of the rich people had given, because she gave all that she had. Even though she was poor in this life, she knew what true wealth was, and she was laying up riches for herself in heaven (see Matthew 6:19-21). This widow also must have had great faith, trusting God to supply her needs after she gave Him all that she had. How would she buy food, or clothing, or pay for anything else that she might need? She knew--perhaps better than any of us do, living so comfortably as we do in the modern United States--that God has promised to provide for and take care of all of His children. This is a promise given by Jesus right after He warns against storing up treasures on earth (see Matthew 6:25-34).

September 17 (Day 260) – Matthew 24:1-8

- The prophecy Jesus gave in verse 2 of this passage was fulfilled about 40 years later, when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, in the year 70 A.D. The temple was in fact utterly destroyed, with no stone left on top of another.
- Then, Jesus answers His disciples' question concerning the end of the world. He first warns them not to let anyone else deceive them--which, as we have seen even in our lifetimes, is

a frequent problem. How many times have we seen false prophets predict when Jesus would return and when the world would end? From time to time, there have even been people claiming to be the Messiah. But we must not be deceived, and we must also remember that wars, famine, and earthquakes are but the beginning of sorrows.

September 18 (Day 261) – Matt. 24:9-15

- This is just one of many passages in Scripture which proves that those so-called preachers who proclaim that Jesus will give you health and wealth in this life are liars. Jesus states here, while talking to His disciples, that they will be hated, afflicted, and even killed, for His name's sake. (And history tells us that, in fact, all of the apostles, with Paul taking the place of Judas, were martyred for their faith except for John). Clearly, without a doubt, He is not preaching any kind of prosperity gospel! Then Jesus continues to share some of the things that will take place as the end of the world draws near--and it is certainly not a happy, pleasant picture that He paints. He again warns against false prophets, and proclaims that the gospel will be preached throughout the world, in all nations, before the end comes.

September 19 (Day 262) – Matt. 24:22-28

- Jesus again warns against false prophets and deceitful people. This is the second time He has done that within this passage of Scripture, although He goes into more detail this time. The fact that He warns about this twice tells us that we must take extra care not to be deceived. Indeed, deceit is abundant in this world. False prophets and false religions are all around, and it is a sad reality that many people fall victim to those lies and few see the truth (see also Matthew 7:21-23). In his second letter, Peter tells us to make our "calling and election sure"--that is, to be certain that our salvation is what we think it is, in Jesus Christ alone, and that we have not been deceived (see 2 Peter 1:10). Take some time to do just that, and never just assume that you can't be deceived. We are all fallible human beings, and many are deceived.

September 20 (Day 263) – Matt. 24:35-41

- Jesus Christ will return one day, but only God

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the Father knows when. That is hard for us to comprehend, since there is only one God who exists in three persons; nevertheless, that is what Jesus tells us.

- He then gives an interesting comparison to what was going on in the days of Noah. Noah spent perhaps as long as 100 years building this gigantic boat, with a world full of evil, sinful people all around him. No doubt he endured more than his fair share of mocking and insults from those people. They were all going about their usual business, filling their lives with all kinds of sinful pleasures, thinking Noah was some kind of religious lunatic. But then the rains came--and all of a sudden, they realized that Noah was right all along. But by then, it was too late. God had already shut the door on the ark. It will be similar when Christ returns. Most people will just be going about their usual business, and they won't realize the truth until it's too late.

September 21 (Day 264) – Matt. 24:42-51

- Christians must be looking and eagerly awaiting for Jesus to return. We must be about our Father's business until that time comes, spreading the gospel and seeking to glorify God in all that we do (see also Luke 2:49 and Matthew 28:19-20). For those people who are not focused on those things but are instead focused on worldly pleasures, the final verse of this passage tells us where their eternal destination lies, and that is certainly not a picture of heaven. "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a phrase found in Scripture that is always used to describe hell.

September 22 (Day 265) – Matt. 25:1-12

- Here Jesus gives us one more illustration of the kingdom of heaven, and the importance of being focused on things of eternal value in this life. The five foolish virgins were not ready for Jesus' return. They wasted time and were not prepared like they should have been. But the five wise virgins were ready at the very moment of Christ's return. The five foolish virgins had to go out and try to get ready at that point--but by then, it was too late, and they were shut out of heaven. Now is the time to prepare. Now is the time in which God has brought salvation to His people--because there will come a day

when it is too late.

Sept. 23 (Day 266) – Matt. 25:13-18,30

- Here Jesus gives yet another illustration of the kingdom of heaven, and the lesson is similar: We must be prepared for His return, and we must make wise investments during our time here on earth. Even though Jesus uses money (talents) as the illustration in this parable, He is actually referring to the preaching and spreading of the gospel. Christians receive different abilities and gifts from God, but we are all called to use those abilities and gifts for His glory and to accomplish His purposes. If you read this entire passage, you will see that two of these servants did that, and were rewarded for it. But the third did not do anything but bury the gospel message, and again we see the phrase that tells us that this person ended up in hell. He did not possess true salvation, and that is evidenced by the fact that he was not concerned about the things of the Lord.

Sept. 24 (Day 267) – Matt. 25:31-34,41,46

- Jesus concludes this lengthy discourse by painting a picture of what will happen at the end. If you read this entire passage, He gives an example of those who cared for the poor and needy versus those who did not. Not that our salvation is based on works, nor are all who do things for the poor among the saved, because some do it for their own glory--but that is one thing that could be an evidence of salvation. There will be a very clear separation between those who belong to Him, and those who do not. We know from Matthew 7:21-23 that many who think they belong to Him actually do not. Which side are you on? Are you absolutely certain of your answer to that question?

September 25 (Day 268) – Matthew 26:1-5

- Jesus now tells His disciples that His crucifixion is only two days away. He knows exactly what is coming, and yet He does not fear, because He knows who is ultimately in control. It is ironic, though, that at the same time Jesus makes this statement, the Jewish religious leaders gather together and are working harder than ever to figure out how they can capture and crucify Him. When the

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time comes, Jesus won't resist and won't deny who He is. He was perhaps the least resistant innocent "criminal" ever to be arrested and put on trial. But they don't understand this, so they think they have to work hard and plot deceitfully in order to get rid of Him.

September 26 (Day 269) – John 12:2-8

- As we all know now, but only Jesus knew then, Judas was a false believer and his heart was certainly not in the right place. He was concerned with outward appearances, and wanted others to see how much he supposedly cared for the poor. Or as verse 6 seems to hint, he may have even wanted that money for himself. But Mary's heart was in the right place--wholly focused on Jesus Christ as His brief time on earth was quickly coming to an end.
- We all know that Jesus cared for the poor and needy, but His focus was more on those who were aware of their spiritually need rather than those who were just physically needy. For us, this serves as an example of Romans 14:23. There are people in this world who give millions of dollars to the poor, but if they're not doing it for the glory of God but rather for their own glory or another reason, it is sin.

September 27 (Day 270) – Luke 22:3-6

- Right after Jesus rebuked Judas Iscariot for being concerned about the poor for all the wrong reasons and not being concerned about bringing God glory, he goes out and proves that he is in fact a false believer. Judas probably looked like a good "Christian" (though that word wouldn't be used until later) to all those around him. He was even in charge of handling the money, which is a big responsibility! But now we begin to see his true character come out, along with evidence that he has been a false believer all along and he does not possess true salvation. We don't know for sure one way or the other, but it is entirely possible that Judas had even deceived himself into thinking he had something that he did not. But we all hate God naturally, unless we are born again with the Spirit of God. So in Judas' hate for God, he went and found the Jewish religious leaders, who of course were already eager to find a way to capture Jesus.

September 28 (Day 271) – Luke 22:7-16

- This would be the upper room where Jesus' final passover would take place, right before His crucifixion. Again we are reminded of how Jesus owned virtually nothing Himself (see Luke 9:58), but depended on God and His brethren (believers) to provide for any needs that did arise.
- When the hour came for the passover feast, Jesus sat down with His disciples for one last meal and would soon begin His final discourse with them (which we find in chapters 13-17 of the gospel of John, and we will look at that portion of Scripture in detail in the weeks to come).
- Jesus' ultimate purpose in coming to this earth--to die for the sins of God's chosen people--was about to be fulfilled.

September 29 (Day 272) – Luke 22:24-30

- As humans, we can certainly be silly and ridiculous at times. Here Jesus was sitting down to speak to them one last time during their final passover together (although they did not fully understand that yet), and they started to argue with one another over which of them was the greatest! As usual, Jesus turns our conventional wisdom on its head, regarding how we see those who are the greatest. And He Himself is the best example of this. Jesus Christ, the great prophet, priest, and king, could have come to earth in dramatic fashion. But He didn't. Instead, He came to earth in the humblest of ways and spent His time here serving others. He is the greatest, but He lived as a servant. Take some time to meditate on that fact. We can all learn a great and valuable lesson from how Jesus lived. We do not see as God sees (see also 1 Samuel 16:7), and the kinds of people who are viewed as great here on earth are not the same kinds of people who are viewed as great by God.

September 30 (Day 273) – John 13:1-5

- This passage serves as the introduction to the final discussion Jesus has with all of His disciples, as they are gathered together in the upper room for what is commonly called the Last Supper. From our perspective, it seems like this must have been a solemn occasion, but in fact it probably was not. We must keep in

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mind that the disciples still did not understand what was about to happen, because God had not yet fully revealed it to them.

- Once they had finished eating, Jesus prepared to wash the feet of His disciples. Once again we see how God Himself, the Creator of the universe and everything in it, humbled Himself to such a lowly act of service. Now this in no way paints God as being weak, but rather shows us how we ought to live as Christians, being in submission to one another and ultimately to God.

October 1 (Day 274) – John 13:6-11

- Peter at first couldn't imagine that Jesus would humble Himself to the point of washing his feet, but after Jesus explained it further, Peter then wanted Jesus to wash not only his feet, but other parts of his body as well. However, this entire conversation is symbolic of something deeper. When Jesus tells Peter that he would have no part with Him if He didn't wash him, Jesus was referring to the washing and cleansing that would soon come from His shed blood on the cross. Those who are not washed clean by Jesus have no part with Him--no part of eternity in heaven with God. And anyone who is washed by Jesus is washed entirely clean, for it is not merely some of our sins that are washed away, but every single one of them!
- Jesus ends on a sobering note, commenting that everyone in that room with Him was not washed spiritually clean. He was, of course, referring to Judas, who would soon betray Him and show that He was never a true believer.

October 2 (Day 275) – John 13:12-17

- The act of Jesus washing His disciples' feet had symbolic significance in that Jesus washes away the sins of all those who belong to Him. But He also gives us an example to follow. Often in this world, we see "masters" (political leaders, company CEOs, Hollywood actors, etc.) who place themselves far above the average person. There are many who live and act as if they are better than everybody else. But for the Christian, Jesus teaches us just the opposite. He was and is the greatest Man who ever walked this earth--Lord and Master over all. Yet He washed His disciples' feet, not the

other way around as we might expect. We need to follow His example of humility in our actions toward others. We are all saved by God's grace alone, not by anything we did ourselves. Any gifts, talents, or abilities that we have come from God. Any money and possessions that we have come from God. None of us has the right to think that we're better than anyone else. We are all called to live in submission and service to one another.

October 3 (Day 276) – John 13:18-21

- The words that Jesus has been speaking are not intended for everyone, but only for those whom God has chosen out of this world to be His children. Not all are God's children--including one in that very room. The Scripture that Jesus quotes is from Psalm 41:9 and refers to Judas, who ate bread at the table with Jesus and the rest of the disciples but would soon lift up his heel against Jesus and betray Him. Jesus told them this prophecy ahead of time in order to strengthen their faith in Him once the events came to pass, which would happen in the coming days.
- Verse 20 refers to spreading the gospel, and fellowship among the brethren. Those who accept and care for fellow Christians are those who believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior, and vice versa. Meanwhile, those who go to church but have no true desire to share the gospel or care for believers are very likely not true believers at all.

October 4 (Day 277) – John 13:22-27

- The disciples had now become concerned. Jesus was telling them that one of them would betray Him, but who might it be? They may have been looking around the room, trying to figure it out. They may have even been questioning themselves. Similarly, we are told in Peter's second letter that we must make certain that we are truly saved (see 2 Peter 1:10), for there are many who have deceived themselves (see Matthew 7:21-23). Judas may have even thought he was a true follower of Christ--though we know that he clearly was not. But Jesus didn't leave them in suspense as to who would betray Him. Indeed, He already knew what would happen, and revealing the truth to those in that room would not change

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anything. This was all part of God's ultimate plan of salvation for His people. So Jesus identified His betrayer as Judas Iscariot, and told him to go and quickly take care of his act of betrayal.

October 5 (Day 278) – John 13:28-32

- Jesus would be glorified at His death, and God's appointed time for His death to take place was almost here. At His death and subsequent resurrection, all that Jesus came to earth to fulfill would become evident. All that He had shared with His disciples concerning His death would become clear. For the first time, God's plan of salvation would be complete and would be fully revealed to us. It is hard for us to imagine, but this has not always been the case. If we think back to people like Abraham and Moses, God only allowed them to see a tiny part of the coming promise of salvation. More was revealed to prophets like David and Isaiah, but the full picture wasn't revealed to us until the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. We know that these people and others were saved through faith from what we are told in Hebrews 11, but we are uniquely blessed to be living in this time, where we can see all of God's plan for salvation and have access to all of Scripture. It is easy to take that for granted, but it is a blessing that we all ought to thank God for.

October 6 (Day 279) – John 13:33-38

- Christians are all part of one family--brothers and sisters who have all been adopted by one Father in heaven. Because of our common bond in Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit--which had not yet taken place at this time, but would in the near future at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4)--we are uniquely able to have such a bond that is impossible among those who are unsaved. Too often, though, even we Christians let our fleshly selfish natures take over and do not act toward our brethren as we should. Jesus gives this command because this is one area in which we should clearly be different from the rest of the world.
- Jesus would soon die and go to heaven until the third day, and His disciples would not be able to go with Him at this point in time, though they would certainly go there when they

die (verse 36). This is also where Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times. The other gospels record Peter steadfastly claiming that He wouldn't, but that is mere human foolishness. Can God be wrong or tell a lie?

October 7 (Day 280) – Luke 22:35-38

- It wasn't long before this moment that Jesus' disciples were arguing over who was the greatest. But they must not get caught up in silly things like that. In these verses, Jesus describes the difficulties that they will face in the future as a result of their call to spread the gospel. They will face enemies and adversities, but Jesus reminds them that when He had sent them out once before, they never lacked for any of their physical needs, because God provided for them through fellow believers. We can depend on God to always do that for His children.
- The prophecy mentioned in verse 37 is from Isaiah 53:12. Indeed, our Savior, the very Son of God, was treated and crucified just like any common criminal--and alongside two of them. But His crucifixion would be the culmination of all of the prophecies from all of Scripture.

October 8 (Day 281) – Matthew 26:26-29

- Here we find the institution of the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine do not and never have become the literal body of Christ, as the Catholics falsely teach. But Jesus gave this sacrament to us as a solemn reminder of His crucifixion. His body was bruised and broken for our us, and His blood was shed for our sins. We must never take part in the Lord's Supper as a mere routine; rather, we should dwell on what Christ did for us each and every time that we partake of it. If you are saved, when is the last time that you specifically thanked Jesus for shedding His blood for your sins and for paying the debt that you owe to God?

October 9 (Day 282) – John 14:1-7

- Jesus is speaking of heaven, where He was soon going to prepare a place for all who believe, but His disciples still did not fully understand this. Thomas asks how they might know the way to where Jesus was going, and Jesus' response is the well-known verse of

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John 14:6. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only way to get to God. People have tried, and continue to try, to find all sorts of ways to get to God, generally through different religions or through their own good works. But Jesus Christ is the one and only way to get to the one true God. We know this is true by faith, as well as from the words of Jesus Himself, recorded by believers--many of whom were killed for their faith--and witnessed by hundreds more (see 1 Corinthians 15:6), all recorded in the Bible, which has more historical evidence than any other book ever written. Christians can indeed be certain that our God is the one true God!

October 10 (Day 283) – John 14:8-14

- Jesus Christ the Son and God the Father are one. Here we find Philip asking Jesus to show them the Father, and Jesus rebukes him for his lack of faith. When we consider the fact that Jesus and the Father are as one, as Philip is talking with Jesus, he is looking right at God.
- God may answer prayers for various reasons, including for the good of His children, but ultimately He answers prayers for His own glory. Jesus says here that when we pray in His name, the Father is glorified through Him. Lots of people pray to a god--but not the true God. Jesus is the difference between true faith as a Christian and all other false religions. So, when we pray in Jesus' name and those prayers are answered, God is glorified through Jesus Christ. It provides a testimony that Jesus is real and a witness of all that God can do.

October 11 (Day 284) – John 14:15

- This verse is so short and simple, yet profound and powerful in its application. A lot of people claim to love God. Many even claim to love Jesus. But that love is not true and sincere and the faith is not genuine for anyone who does not keep God's commandments. Now, none of us is perfect, and Jesus is not saying that we have to be perfect in order to love Him. But true Christians are given by God a desire to do His will and to follow His commands (see also Ezekiel 36:26-27). We still slip up and sin, but our desire to obey God is the opposite of the world's desire to disobey. Someone who claims to love Jesus but who adamantly disagrees with

His teachings on things such as homosexuality, sex before marriage, the roles of women in the church, or any other issues which are hot topics in today's society, does not love Jesus at all. They may love some version of Jesus that they have imagined, but it is not the true Jesus of the Bible. The primary purpose of this whole series of devotionals is to remind us of who Jesus is. He does not love and tolerate all things, but He stands for God's truth whether it is popular or not.

October 12 (Day 285) – John 14:16-20

- Verse 16 gives us a beautiful example of how the three persons of God work together as one. Here we find Jesus, the Son, praying to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit, who would come to comfort and guide all believers after Jesus ascends into heaven at Pentecost. The world doesn't see or understand and cannot receive the Holy Spirit; this is a special gift for those who believe.
- During His time on earth, Jesus was seen by believers and unbelievers alike. But the time would soon come when Jesus would no longer be physically present in the world. Jesus promises that those who believe would still be able to see Him--figuratively in this world, and literally in heaven, where we will have the privilege of living forever because Jesus died for our sins and now lives forever as well.

October 13 (Day 286) – John 14:21-25

- Here Jesus reiterates the fact that those who truly love God will keep His commandments. Those who walk in the opposite direction, seeking to satisfy the lusts of the flesh, have no part with Jesus or with God the Father. The same can be said for those who do not necessarily practice those sins, but who accept, consent to, and walk alongside those who do (see also Romans 1:32). Maybe you could never imagine being in a homosexual relationship yourself, but you proudly support their cause--in God's eyes, you are just as guilty as they are. He also tells us that those who truly believe, the ones who seek to obey God, are the only ones whom God loves. Love is a well-known attribute of God, but He is not all-loving to all people and all things. God hates sin and, despite what some preachers may claim, He

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does not extend His love to those who do not repent from their sins against Him. Too often people have a weak view of God, but we can see clearly who God truly is from His actions throughout the Old Testament as well as from verses such as Hebrews 10:31 and 12:29.

October 14 (Day 287) – John 14:26-31

- The true peace that comes from God through Jesus Christ is nothing like the peace that is found in the world. The world views peace as everyone getting along with each other and tolerating one another. The world wants all wars to end and all kinds of sexual sins to be accepted in society. The peace that comes from God, though, is quite different. Christians may have trials and difficulties in this world--in fact, we are told to expect it (see John 16:33). But we have a peace on the inside that only comes from God, and that everyone else in the world does not possess or even understand. As a result, even when we are facing tough trials, we can be at peace, knowing that God is in control; He is taking care of us and doing this for our ultimate good.
- The prince of this world refers to Satan, but He has no power or influence over Jesus, who is the only one who has ever walked this earth and remained perfectly sinless, even though He was tempted as we are (see also Hebrews 4:15).

October 15 (Day 288) – John 15:1-8

- True believers bear spiritual fruit, such as that which is found in Galatians 5:22-23. Believers also love the brethren (see the book of 1 John) and have a sincere desire to be in church with fellow believers (see Hebrews 10:25). Salvation is not based on works, of course, and only God knows exactly what is in each of our hearts. But these are some signs--fruits that God brings forth in His children--that can indicate that someone appears to be a Christian.
- As a vinedresser prunes his branches so that they may produce even more fruit, so God works in His children to steadily make us more like Christ and less like our natural selves, and therefore we produce more and more fruit as time goes on. Jesus is very clear about this fact. The opposite is also true: Those who are not being pruned and who are not becoming more and more Christ-like are not true believers, and

Jesus tells us that those people will be cut off, cast into the fires of hell and burned for eternity. These are the same people described in Matthew 7:21-23 who go to church, act religious, and may even talk about Jesus in some way--but they lack true salvation.

October 16 (Day 289) – John 15:9-15

- Being called a friend of Jesus is an honor that is not given to everyone but is only given to those who are saved by the grace of God. Jesus wasn't friends with everyone. Pay close attention to what He says here. We are His friends--only if we do what He commands. He has made similar comments throughout this particular discourse and it does not speak of a works-based salvation, but rather that desiring to follow God's commands and simultaneously desiring to turn away from the lusts of the world--even though we will still sin at times--gives evidence that we are true believers. If you attend church on Sundays but run with the world the rest of the time, finding pleasure in sin and voicing your agreement with others who proudly sin against God, Jesus is trying to make you understand that you are not saved and there is no place in heaven for you! Jesus laid down His life for His friends, but if you do not follow in His footsteps--which includes hating all the sinful things that God hates--then you are not among the friends of Jesus.

October 17 (Day 290) – John 15:16-20

- Those who are saved are chosen by God. Jesus states that clearly here, and we see that fact spoken of in many other places throughout the Bible as well. Many people don't like to hear that, and it is something that God only recently allowed me to understand. As humans, one of the biggest sins that we often fail to see is pride. We want to think more of ourselves than we should, and we can't stand the thought of not being in control. But a different perspective is this: Because of how fickle we can be as humans, we can be thankful that the only unchanging One is in control!
- The world hates Christians because it hates Jesus Christ. He has chosen us out of the world and is working to conform us to be more and more like Himself--the pruning process that we read about at the beginning of John 15.

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Sometimes that hatred is more noticeable than others, but regardless, it is there in some capacity. But if the world hated the very Son of God and crucified Him on the cross, why should we expect to be welcomed with open arms?

October 18 (Day 291) – John 15:21-27

- Here Jesus continues to warn His disciples about coming persecutions, and He also explains in further detail exactly why the world hates Him and, therefore, hates all Christians because of Him. What do we see Jesus doing time and time again during the time of His earthly ministry? Yes, He did perform miracles, but His primary focus was on teaching and speaking the truth of God's Word. As part of that, He frequently rebuked those who were sinning against God and told them what they were doing wrong. Jesus was a friend to those sinners who repented and received true saving faith from God, but He was clearly not a friend to sinners who pridefully continued in their sins and refused to repent. So, as He explains here in verse 22, the world hates Him because He exposed these people for what they really are on the inside. He exposed their sins for all to see. And they hate Him for it, and they hate all who follow Him as well. They have no justifiable reason to hate Jesus (see also Psalm 69:4), but out of their anger and pride, they do hate Him--and us--anyway.

October 19 (Day 292) – John 16:1-6

- In particular, think about what Jesus is saying to His disciples in verse 2 of this passage: People will murder Christians, thinking that they are doing it for God. In those days, the Jewish religious leaders were committing such acts. Paul is the perfect example: He was a great leader among the Pharisees and eagerly sought opportunities to kill Christians, believing that He was doing it for God. But that all changed the moment Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9). God changed Paul's heart and only then could he see the truth--all along, he thought he had been doing the will of God, but he had actually been acting against God. It's no different in today's world. We most commonly see this type of action from Muslims, who believe they are

doing the will of God by killing people who are not Muslim, but they are actually working against God. There is a very real battle between good and evil, and religion is not simply about making people happy. Do not be deceived: All religions do not lead to the same place in the end and there is only one true God.

October 20 (Day 293) – John 16:7-14

- During His time here on earth, Jesus Himself was the one who spoke the truth concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. But once He departed the earth and returned to be with His Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit would come and indwell all believers, guiding and instructing us to do those things which Jesus had previously done.
- Verse 13 tells us that the Holy Spirit will not speak of Himself, and in that we see a picture of the Holy Trinity of God. The three persons of the Trinity all work together as one, but there is also a clear hierarchy among the three. Just as Jesus the Son always acts in submission to the Father, so the Holy Spirit always acts in submission to both the Father and the Son. All are God and therefore there is no disagreement among them anyway, but the submission that we see also gives us an example to follow in our lives.

October 21 (Day 294) – John 16:15-19

- God the Father has given all things to the Son, which we read here as well as several other places in Scripture (see also John 3:35, 10:29-30, and 13:3). As is often the case with matters pertaining to the Trinity of God, this is difficult for us as humans to wrap our minds around, but we know it is true from Scripture. We also must accept that some things we will not fully understand until we are glorified after our earthly death. But also consider this: The grace, love, and mercy that comes from God flows to us through Jesus Christ, and that is another way in which we can look at verse 15 of this passage.
- The disciples continue to be confused by what Jesus says next, that He will soon go to a place where they cannot see Him. But, as we will see later in this chapter, as the end of His time on earth is drawing very near, Jesus will soon give His disciples a direct and clear answer to their

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question.

October 22 (Day 295) – John 16:20-22

- Think about the reaction of people in the world when Jesus was crucified on the cross, as well as the similar reaction of people when evil triumphs over Christian values and God's truth. Christians are sorrowful over such things, while unbelievers rejoice over their victory. But just as the sorrow of the disciples turned into joy when Jesus arose three days later, so our sorrow can turn into joy because, even though evil may triumph for a time in this world, we know who has already gained victory in the end--none other than Jesus Christ. We must keep that in mind and not fall into despair when it seems like those who oppose God are gaining more and more power. Any power they seem to have only exists in this life, and they will be punished for their rebellion against God for all of eternity. We can rest assured knowing that God is in control of all things!
- Verse 21, in particular, seems to indicate that we will quickly forget the sorrows of this world once we are face-to-face with Jesus in the next life. Praise God for that!

October 23 (Day 296) – John 16:23-24

- Jesus touches on the subject of prayer in these two verses. But He doesn't simply mean to attach the commonly used phrase "in Jesus' name" at the end of a prayer in order to have God grant the request. Thinking along those lines dramatically weakens God and essentially turns Him into our servant, when it should be the other way around. Only God knows what is best for His children, and sometimes, granting our requests is not best for us. Praise God that He is such a loving Father that He does not always give us what we want, but gives us what is best for us instead!
- Jesus is the Mediator between God and man (see 1 Timothy 2:5), and that is one correct meaning behind these two verses. Praying in Jesus' name also means praying according to the will of God, as we are also told in other places in Scripture (see 1 John 5:14). The ultimate purpose of prayer is not to ask for things but rather for us to spend time with God, and for God to use that time to mold us

and our thoughts more into the image of Christ.

October 24 (Day 297) – John 16:25-29

- Jesus had spoken many things in proverbs because it was not yet time for the culmination of God's plan to be revealed unto mankind. But that would soon change, as His death and resurrection are near. Once Jesus is resurrected, and especially once the Holy Spirit enters believers after Jesus ascends into heaven at Pentecost, Jesus' disciples will no longer have a need to ask the kinds of questions they are asking here because the fullness of God's plan of salvation will be accomplished and they will be able to fully understand (at least, as best we can as humans) all that Jesus has been telling them. But for now, Jesus does give them a plain and direct answer to one question in verse 28. He was previously with the Father in heaven and then He came into the world, and very soon He would be leaving the world to go back with the Father in heaven.

October 25 (Day 298) – John 16:30-33

- Once Jesus was captured and put on trial, all of His disciples forsook Him and fled, scattering in all directions (see Matthew 26:56 and Mark 14:50). At that point, they all left Jesus alone--yet He was not truly alone, because the Father would still be with Him. Similarly, God never fails to be with all of His children even in times when we feel like we are facing a difficult situation all alone.
- John 16:33 is one of my personal favorite verses in all of the Bible. Jesus never said that Christians will be healthy and wealthy in this life. In fact, He promises here that we will have troubles and tribulations in this world. But we can be at peace even in the midst of those trials. Why? Because Jesus Christ has overcome the world by defeating death and sin, and so we can look forward to eternity with Jesus in heaven and not have to worry about all the things and people that cause us trouble in this world!

October 26 (Day 299) – John 17:1-5

- The hour had come. It was now just a very short time before Jesus would be betrayed by

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Judas. Jesus also states in verse 4 that He had finished the work which God the Father had given Him to do on the earth--teaching and preaching, of course, but ultimately His perfect obedience to God's law which allowed Him to bear our sins. This chapter contains the last recorded prayer of Jesus before His betrayal, and we can learn a lot by reading closely and paying attention to those for whom Jesus is praying.

- Carefully notice the wording in verse 2. All those whom God has chosen to adopt as His children are given to Jesus Christ to receive the free gift of eternal life through His blood, which would soon be shed on the cross.
- In Verse 5, we have a reaffirmation from Jesus that He was with God before the earth was formed (see also John 1).

October 27 (Day 300) – John 17:6-10

- As His prayer continues, Jesus reiterates the fact that God chose who He would save out of the world, and He gave all of those--His adopted children--to Christ. He also makes another statement about this group of people: They have kept, followed, and obeyed God's word. There is no such thing as a "saved soul, lost body" as some people falsely claim. If you have truly been saved, then God has given you a desire to obey Him and follow His word. If you have no such desire, then you have never truly been saved.
- Notice in verse 9 that Jesus even says that He doesn't pray for the world, but specifically for those whom God has chosen out of the world to be His. In general, when people pray, we tend to focus too much on physical needs in this world rather than spiritual needs. Do you pray for the spiritual needs of yourself and fellow believers, such as stronger faith or boldness to share God's truth with others?

October 28 (Day 301) – John 17:11-12

- All who are truly saved can never lose their salvation. That fact is stated here (in verse 12) by Jesus Himself, as well as other places in Scripture. The false teaching that one can lose salvation is an error trying to correct another error, because such churches have proclaimed people as being saved who were never truly saved in the first place. True salvation is not

merely walking to the front of the church at the end of the service, but rather is evidenced by a changed life that comes from a changed heart (see also Ezekiel 36:26-27), and once a person has received the wonderful free gift of salvation from God, that gift can never be lost because we are not more powerful than God.

- The only person who has ever been lost from following Christ--in a sense--was Judas, in order to bring God's plan of salvation to completion and to fulfill prophecies in Scripture (see Acts 1:20 and Psalm 109:8). But even in the case of Judas, salvation was not lost. Judas gives us the perfect example of a religious church-goer who never had true salvation in the first place, because when opportunity knocked, He was quick to betray Jesus for money.

October 29 (Day 302) – John 17:13-17

- The world hates Christians because we are not of this world but are living for a different purpose than those who have not been born again from above. If all Christians boldly proclaimed God's truth and gospel much more frequently than we do, we would no doubt experience the hatred of the world to a much greater degree. The more Christians blend in with the world, the less reason they have to hate us--but the less God is glorified, as well. Still, it is easy to see how the world hates God and Christians anytime one or more Christians attempts to stand up for what God says is right or wrong, in opposition to what our society tries to force everyone to accept. Various things that have taken place as a result of the legalizing of homosexual marriage is a great example of this. Still, Jesus specifically mentions that He does not pray that God would take us out of the world before our time is up, because we have work to do here first. Rather He prays that God would keep us away from the evil of this world. This is also part of the Lord's prayer (see Matthew 6:13), and is something we should pray for ourselves and for our brethren every day.

October 30 (Day 303) – John 17:18-22

- Here Jesus prays more specifically not only for those believers who are there with Him at that time, but for those who would believe in future

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generations. And what does He pray for all of those current and future believers? That we may all be united together as one, which is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. That can never happen on our own apart from God; even though we may agree with people about some things, in our natural state, we are all selfish and self-seeking first of all and therefore cannot unite as one. But this is possible through God, as He adopts His children and then conforms us to the image of Christ (see Romans 8:29). As we are made to look more and more like Christ, then we find ourselves being more and more in harmony with one another. It won't be perfect in this life because we are all still subject to sinning, but true Christians should generally get along well with one another in love. The opposite is also true: Those who cause strife and discord in churches, amongst the brethren, are generally not true believers.

October 31 (Day 304) – John 17:23-26

- Jesus concludes His previous thought by stating why He is praying for God to unite all believers together as one: so that the world may know the truth about God and Jesus Christ. The type of bond that true Christians have is not possible through any other religion because all other gods are false and powerless. But our God is actively working to make each of His children look more like His Son Jesus Christ, so that His glory and His gospel message might be spread throughout the world. Jesus concludes His prayer by reiterating how this uniting of people is only possible because of God's love. But the world has turned their backs on God and do not know Him, except when He chooses to reveal His love, mercy, and grace to someone when He adopts a new child into His everlasting kingdom.

November 1 (Day 305) – Mark 14:32-36

- The sinless Son of God was about to die for the sins of many others. No doubt this burden of sin was weighing heavily on our Savior at this moment, as well as knowing that He would be separated from His Father as never before. We see the human side of Jesus in His sorrow and despair at this moment, as well as in the

request He asks of His Father. The Holy Trinity is impossible for us to fully understand, but we must keep in mind that while the three persons of God are united as one, they are also distinct. So, here we find the Son praying to the Father to let the cup of His wrath pass onto another. He knows better than anyone that all things are possible with God. Nevertheless, we also see the sinless Son submitting fully to the Father's will, even as His human side expresses such deep sorrow.

November 2 (Day 306) – Mark 14:37-42

- We must always be ready and prepared--spiritually speaking. The Spirit of God can do all things, but in our flesh we are weak. Jesus chastens His disciples for falling asleep after He has been away in prayer for just one hour. In fact, it is just a short time later when we see Peter succumbing to the very temptation that Jesus warns about as he denies his Lord and Savior (see Mark 14:66-72). As followers of Christ, we must be in prayer and in God's Word far more than we often are. How else will we be prepared to fight temptation when it arises?
- But then we come to the end of Jesus' time of prayer, and He tells His disciples to follow Him one more time. This time, though, they will follow Him to the place where He will be betrayed. Judas and the Pharisees are no doubt working hard behind the scenes in their efforts to capture Jesus, but He knows all that will happen and calmly walks toward the place where the betrayal will occur.

November 3 (Day 307) – Luke 22:47-51

- No doubt Jesus' words to Judas caught him off guard. He had been plotting and conniving to capture Jesus, and when the moment came, Jesus knew exactly what Judas was doing when he kissed Him and called him out on it.
- Again we see Jesus fully submitting to the Father's will. He certainly could have escaped if He had wanted to; we have read about several different occasions when He slipped out of a crowd unnoticed and went off by Himself to pray. His disciples were ready and eager to defend Him as well, but none of that was necessary. Jesus knew what He came to earth to do, and He knew that His appointed time had now arrived. Another gospel account

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records Peter as the one who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant (see John 18:10), but Jesus rebuked him for it (see Matthew 26:52) and healed the man's ear. Jesus would peacefully go with the authorities to be put on trial and then crucified, continuing to glorify His Father in all that He did.

November 4 (Day 308) – Matt. 26:52-54

- As human beings in our fallen condition, we love to take matters into our own hands. We often think we have far more control than we really do, and we want to fix things ourselves rather than relying on God. But the reality is, God doesn't need any of us. It is a privilege that we get to serve Him. These verses contain Jesus' response after Peter pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the men who had come to capture Jesus. If they were needed, tens of thousands of angels would have come to the aid of Jesus in an instant, who were more than capable of doing whatever was necessary to defend Him (we see what just one angel did in 2 Kings 19:35). But then the prophecies from Scripture would not have been fulfilled (see Psalm 22 and 69, Isaiah 53, and Zechariah 13:7), and Jesus would not have accomplished what He came here to do.

November 5 (Day 309) – Matt. 26:55-56

- After rebuking Peter and reminding His disciples that God doesn't truly need help from any of us, Jesus then turns His focus to those who are arresting Him. He mocks them for the deceitful way in which they went about capturing Him, considering He spoke freely with them so many times in the temple and they never laid a hand on Him. Scripture records on several occasions that they wanted to capture Him then, but were afraid of how the rest of the people would react. But again, Jesus shows how their actions have actually fulfilled Scripture (see Psalm 41:9, Isaiah 53:9, and Zechariah 11:12); they are just too spiritually blind to see it. Then out of fear and lack of faith, it is recorded in Scripture that all of His disciples forsook Him and fled.

November 6 (Day 310) – John 18:19-23

- Apparently the high priest is still trying to trick Jesus in some way, in order to find something

to use against Him in the upcoming trial. But as Jesus truthfully states, He has always spoken openly and not in secret. He has taught many doctrines that were not popular, but that didn't stop Him from speaking the truth. The question really is a silly one because they already know what doctrines Jesus has taught, and the very fact that they don't like His teachings is why they are arresting Him. But these religious leaders have gotten so caught up in trying to capture Jesus that they cannot possibly be thinking clearly or rationally.

- One of the officers apparently did not like Jesus' answer and struck Him for no reason other than anger, jealousy, or something else of that nature. Jesus asks the man who struck Him what evil He has done but receives no answer because, of course, Jesus has done nothing wrong.

November 7 (Day 311) – Mark 14:53-59

- This is the illegal trial which took place during the night, in an effort to find something for which to condemn Jesus to death. But as Scripture tells us, despite the authorities' efforts to find people who could provide a witness against Jesus, they found none. They found many people who gave a false witness, but their testimonies did not agree with one another. We see one example of the false testimonies in this passage, where someone claimed that Jesus said He would tear down the temple built with hands and rebuild it with hands in three days. This refers to a statement Jesus made that is recorded in John 2:19, but Jesus did not say "with hands" because He was referring to the temple of His own body. He also did not say that He would tear it down, but that others would. Interestingly enough, these people were helping to fulfill that very prophecy, but they were blinded to it. They tried to twist the words of our Savior to suit their own purposes, just as people still do today (see Matthew 7:1 for perhaps the best example), but the real truth of God's word never changes. Revelation 22:18-19 tells us what will happen to those who twist or misuse God's words by adding to or taking away from Scripture.

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November 8 (Day 312) – Mark 14:60-65

- Jesus gave no answer, except to confirm that He is the One whom they were seeking--the Christ (which also means Messiah), the Son of God. And to those religious leaders who were in charge of this illegal trial, that was all the so-called proof that they needed in order to condemn Jesus to death. They didn't stop to ponder over and study the Old Testament prophecies to determine if Jesus might actually be their long-awaited Messiah. They just wanted Him gone, because He spoke God's truth and called them out time and time again because of their pride and arrogance.
- Verse 65 ought to break the hearts of all whom have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. People mocked, spit upon, and struck our Lord and Savior when He had done nothing wrong. And this was only the beginning.

November 9 (Day 313) – Mark 14:66-72

- It had not been long--a few hours, perhaps--since Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed twice (see Mark 14:29-31). When Jesus said that to Peter, Peter fervently denied it. Did He really think that Jesus, the very Son of God, did not know what he was talking about? Jesus cannot be wrong or tell a lie. But perhaps we would all be like Peter in that situation, unable to believe that we would be capable of denying our Lord and Savior. But as Jesus tells Peter a little later, the flesh is weak (see Mark 14:37-38). There is no doubt that Peter did not deny Jesus intentionally; most likely it was out of fear, since Jesus had just been arrested and carried away. But regardless of the reason, He did deny Jesus just as Jesus has told him he would, and Peter was so distraught over that sin in his moment of weakness that he wept bitterly in remorse (see also Matthew 26:75). If only we were so distraught not only if we were to deny our Lord, but for any sin we commit against Him, for all of our sins are what sent Him to the cross, causing all these events to be necessary.

November 10 (Day 314) – Luke 22:66-71

- Now that the next day has come, Jesus is tried legally. But why do they ask Him the same

question that He already answered--not only in the trial the night before, but many other times during His three-year ministry? Clearly they do not believe that Jesus is who He claims to be, and that is why He responds as He does. He also knows that He will not receive fair and just treatment from them, because their minds are already made up--He is guilty, even though they were never able to find a witness against Him. But He knows where He is going--straight to the right hand of His Father--so He has nothing to fear from them. Similarly, any true believer has nothing to fear from other people, because God is more powerful than anyone on this earth and He cares for us (see also Psalm 56:11 and 118:6).

November 11 (Day 315) – Matthew 27:3-10

- Judas apparently felt remorse for what He had done by betraying Jesus--whom he even refers to as being innocent. But he only repented to other people and did not repent before God, who was the one he had truly sinned against (not just in this instance but throughout his life, as we all have done). What a miserable condition he must have been in at this point in time! So this Judas, the perfect example of a leader in the church who has never experienced true salvation, went and hanged himself, and will spend all of eternity in hell trying to pay for his sins himself, but never being able to, along with everyone else whose sins were not paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross of calvary.

November 12 (Day 316) – John 18:28-32

- Jesus has now been brought before Pilate, the governor. With the Romans in control over the Jews, the Romans exercised authority in many matters. However, there is some disagreement as to whether the Jews actually could have put Jesus to death themselves, or whether the Romans had to rule on this matter. In any case, the Jews are hoping that Pilate will condemn Jesus to death so that His blood won't be on their hands (at least in their own minds), and they can lay the blame for His death on others. That is typical of the attitude of sinful, prideful, arrogant people--they so desperately wanted Jesus to be crucified, yet they did not want to take the responsibility themselves.
- Jesus had prophesied to His disciples perhaps

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a week or so earlier that He would be delivered to the Gentiles to mock, scourge, and crucify Him (see Matthew 20:19). This prophecy was fulfilled here, which helps to confirm that Jesus truly is God, since this prophecy was fulfilled by others and, in a human sense at least, out of His control.

November 13 (Day 317) – John 18:33-38

- Notice how Jesus answers when Pilate questions Him. He does not give a direct answer when Pilate asks Him if He is King of the Jews, but rather He explains that His kingdom is not of this world. If it were, He says, then He and those with Him would fight, due to the terrible injustice that was being done against Him. But Jesus came to the earth for this very moment, and cooperated fully and peaceably because of His complete submission to His Father in all things. After the questioning, Pilate finally had to admit to the Jews that he could find no fault in Jesus at all.
- Jesus states, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” We not only hear Him but are able to understand Him through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Jesus stated earlier in His ministry that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, and those who do not believe nor follow Him are not among His sheep (see John 10:26-27).

November 14 (Day 318) – Luke 23:6-12

- After Pilate had found no fault in Jesus, he sent him to see Herod, because as a Galilaean, Jesus fell under Herod’s jurisdiction. (To avoid confusion, this is the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist, and is the son of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus as a baby.) Perhaps Pilate did this as a political favor to Herod, as we see the note at the end of this passage that Pilate and Herod became friends on this day. In any case, Pilate had already proclaimed that he found no fault in Jesus, and he did not want to be the one responsible for crucifying him, so this additional trial may have been an effort to shift the blame for Jesus’ crucifixion onto Herod. While all of this political jockeying may be intriguing to some degree, we ultimately must remember that God is in control of all things, including government leaders, who have no

power to act against God’s will. While many Jewish and Roman leaders were scrambling to get Jesus crucified without having to take the blame for it, God’s plan that was prophesied hundreds of years earlier was unfolding just as it was supposed to (see also Luke 3:1 and Isaiah 53).

November 15 (Day 319) – Matt. 27:15-21

- Even Pilate, who was not a Jew but a Roman governor, was able to see through the actions of the Pharisees and could tell that they had captured Jesus and put Him on trial simply out of envy. They did not like that He stood for the truth and spoke out against them. Pilate also recognized the innocence of Jesus (see John 18:38), as did his wife, as we see in this passage where she referred to Him as a “just man.” It was a custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Passover and Pilate tried to convince the people to release Jesus. Nevertheless, the Jewish religious leaders were determined to get rid of Jesus, and successfully persuaded the crowd to ask for a different prisoner--the well-known thief Barabbas--to be released instead. Of course, we must remember that God’s plan was at work all along, so that His Son might die and those who have been saved through His blood might live for all eternity.

November 16 (Day 320) – Matt. 27:22-26

- In verse 25, we read a statement that will no doubt haunt every single person who was in this crowd and who was in agreement with the Jewish leaders for all of eternity. Pilate wanted nothing to do with Jesus and did not want to be the one to put Him to death, so the people--presumably Jews--said they would bear the responsibility, that the blood of Jesus would be on their own hands, as well as those of their children. What a horrible sin to have to bear for all of eternity--right up there with the sin of Judas himself. Pilate even asked the crowd what evil Jesus had done, since he had come to realize that Jesus was innocent, but the crowd gave him no answer because there was no answer to give. They didn’t care if Jesus was innocent; they hated Him and wanted Him to be crucified.

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November 17 (Day 321) – John 19:1-8

- Here the Jews give their primary accusation against Jesus: He claimed to be the Son of God and therefore made Himself equal with God, which goes against their rules and beliefs. But they failed to recognize that He was indeed their long-awaited Messiah and that He did fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Savior.
- At the same time, Pilate continues to state, over and over, that he found no fault in Jesus. He gave Jesus over to the Jews and let them do with Him as they wished, but Pilate clearly wanted to have no part in putting Jesus to death. At the same time, though, we see in verse 1 of this passage that Pilate either whipped Jesus himself or commanded others to do so, which was a very unjust thing to do to someone he believed was innocent. As is the case with many political leaders today, it seems that Pilate was most concerned with pleasing other people while simultaneously trying to keep himself innocent in this crucifixion.

November 18 (Day 322) – John 19:9-11

- Even in the darkest moments, God is still sovereign and in control. Pilate, no doubt annoyed at Jesus for ignoring his question, boldly proclaims that Jesus' life is in his hands. Certainly, many prideful political leaders both before and after Pilate see themselves in a similar regard in all types of situations--that they have the authority and whoever they are talking to had better do as they say! But those of us who have been saved by Christ and reborn from above know differently: God is in control, no matter how things may appear to us. Pilate had no idea that he was helping to fulfill prophecies from Scripture leading to God's salvation of His people, but that is exactly what he was doing. This moment, and the crucifixion that would soon follow, is the very reason why Jesus was given a body and came to earth.
- The greatest sin, though, was not committed by Pilate or the Roman soldiers, who were ignorant of God's Word, but by Judas and the rest of the Jews who delivered Him to be crucified out of envy and hatred.

November 19 (Day 323) – John 19:12-16

- Now the Jews found a way to get under Pilate's skin and to go along with what they wanted. Certainly no Roman governor would dare to act against the wishes of Caesar! They were indeed successful at appealing to Pilate's vanity and pride, and he brought forth Jesus to be crucified. The Jews foolishly said they have no king but Caesar--and they, along with Caesar himself, will have all of eternity in hell to think about those words, because Caesar is most certainly not God and has no power to help these people now. Unless any were saved by the grace of God later in their lives, all are now suffering together for their sins against the one and only true God of heaven. Sadly, these people were concerned that they not speak out against Caesar, but did not care that they were speaking out against God Himself.

November 20 (Day 324) – Matt. 27:27-30

- These were the actions of poor, depraved human beings--abusing and mocking the Son of God. Nevertheless, they will bear less guilt for their actions than will the Jews who wanted Jesus crucified out of envy (see John 19:11). Most likely they had never even heard the gospel, or even if they had heard it at some point in time, they certainly were not exposed to it like the Jews had been. The verse referenced above is just one more place where Scripture tells us how God views sin--not in terms of how bad something seems to be in our human point of view, but in terms of the person's exposure to the gospel. The Jews received all of this, graciously from God (see also Romans 3:1-2), yet turned away from Him in their own self-righteousness. These soldiers didn't know any better. The Jews should have known better, though, because of all that God had done for them and revealed to them, and they will be held accountable for their foolish actions by God Himself.

November 21 (Day 325) – Luke 23:26-31

- These terrible things that were taking place--the beating, the mocking, and the impending crucifixion--were all being done to the very Son of God, referred to in this passage as a green tree, because He is the source of true life, and those of us who have been saved are the

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branches (see also John 6:48 and 15:5). So if all these unthinkable things were being done to Jesus Himself, how much worse might the world become once He has ascended back into heaven? Therefore Jesus tells these women to weep not for Him, because He is fulfilling God's purpose, but to weep for themselves and for their children because of the troubles and persecutions that would come after His ascension.

November 22 (Day 326) – Luke 23:32-37

- Although the Jewish leaders worked hard to get Jesus crucified, there were many others, from others among the Jews to Roman soldiers, who did not fully grasp this moment. They were caught up in the moment and went along with the crowd, foolishly mocking Jesus and shouting to crucify Him, all the while being ignorant of the fact that the Son of God was hanging on this cross. Jesus prays here that His Father would forgive those people, because they did not know what they were doing. This prayer was answered shortly thereafter, upon Jesus' ascension into heaven at Pentecost, when three thousand souls were saved by the grace of God (see Acts 2:41)!
- Jesus has all the power of God (see Colossians 2:9) and could have saved Himself. But He stayed on the cross and submitted to the will of His Father--saving us instead.

November 23 (Day 327) – John 19:17-22

- The Jewish chief priests must have been furious at this moment! Finally, they had gotten what they wanted--the crucifixion of Jesus--and Pilate did not write on Jesus' cross what they wanted him to write. They wanted the sign to say that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews, but Pilate simply wrote that Jesus was the King of the Jews. I read this particular passage of Scripture with a smile, seeing how God's truth prevailed even in this moment of darkness, and in spite of the jealous hatred of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus is the King of the Jews--indeed, He is the King over all who are saved (see also Romans 2:28-29 and Revelation 17:14). Pilate may not have written what the chief priests wanted him to write, but by the sovereign power of God over all things, Pilate wrote the truth!

November 24 (Day 328) – Matt. 27:39-44

- Those who were foolishly mocking Jesus were obviously anything but thankful for what He was doing on the cross, but for those of us who have been saved by His shed blood, there is nothing for which we should be more thankful. What else besides Jesus' shed blood in payment for our sins has such an eternal impact? Nothing else does. At this time of the year as we celebrate things for which we are thankful, the Christian should first and foremost be thankful for what Christ did for us on the cross.
- In the last verse of this passage, notice how Matthew records how the thieves who were crucified on either side of Christ were also mocking Him. However, the perspective of one of the thieves was quickly changed by God, which we will look at in more detail in a few days from Luke's gospel.

November 25 (Day 329) – Mark 15:27-32

- Jesus is the only One who ever lived who did not transgress the law in any way. Nevertheless, He was crucified with transgressors, including the two who were crucified on either side of Him as well as all the transgressors in the crowd watching, since none of us has fully kept God's law (see also Romans 3:23). The prophecy that is referred to comes from Isaiah 53:12, which speaks of how the coming Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors" as he bore the sins of many--exactly what took place here.
- We also see here Mark's account of those who were mocking Christ, which is very similar to what we read in Matthew's gospel. The Jewish chief priests mockingly commented that Jesus could not save Himself, but as we have previously discussed, He was fully capable of coming down and saving Himself--but He saved us instead.

November 26 (Day 330) – John 19:23-27

- In this passage we find another fulfillment of prophecy. This one is from Psalm 22:18 (which, by the way, is a psalm that contains many allusions to and prophecies of Jesus' crucifixion), where David prophesied that the Messiah's clothing would be divided up among the soldiers and that they would cast lots (roll

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dice, essentially) for those items. Certainly these soldiers had no idea they were fulfilling such a prophecy--and that is just one more way in which we see the amazing sovereignty and power of God at work!

- The other part of this passage centers around Jesus' care for His mother, Mary. Many people believe that Joseph had died before this point, leaving Mary a widow--and as Jesus would soon die and ascend into heaven, He would not be able to care for His mother as she aged. But He shows His love for her, specifically, at this moment on the cross as He commands John to care for her as if she were his own mother. He was also following an element of God's Word that would later be written by James (see James 1:27).

November 27 (Day 331) – Luke 23:39-43

- The two thieves who were crucified on either side of Christ had previously mocked Him along with the rest of the crowd (see Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32). But now we see a sudden and dramatic change in this thief--he now speaks out in support of Christ and he rebukes the other thief! What has caused this change? The only thing that can change a man's heart--the saving grace of God. This thief has received that gift from God at the very end of his life.
- This example can also be used to clear up some false teachings within the church. Any true believer will show fruit of their salvation (see also John 15:1-8), as this man did in rebuking the other thief. Those who do not produce fruit are not truly saved and are headed for hell. This passage can also be used to debunk the false teaching that baptism is required to be saved, since this thief obviously was not baptized. While it is commanded as a testimony of our salvation, it is not required; if it were, then we would be doing something to earn our place into heaven, which we could never hope to do (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

November 28 (Day 332) – Mark 15:33-36

- The darkness was another fulfillment of prophecy, which is found in Amos 8:9. Because of how the Jews tell time, with the day beginning at our 6 AM and evening beginning at our 6 PM, the sixth hour was indeed noon--

the exact time that the land was darkened. Apparently this phenomenon had no effect on the people--and why would it, if Jesus' own presence, teachings, and miracles were not enough to penetrate their hard hearts (see also Luke 16:31)?

- While God did not exactly forsake His Son, this was the moment during which God's wrath for all of our sins was placed upon our Lord and Savior. We can never fully understand what this moment was like for Jesus, nor can we thank Him enough for what He did on the cross, so that those of us who are saved might have eternal life with Him. I expect we would strive to sin much less often than we do if we took the time to meditate on this moment in time whenever we do sin, because all of those sins are the very reason why we needed a Savior to die on the cross.

November 29 (Day 333) – John 19:28-30

- The time had come. God's great and wonderful plan for the salvation of His people was now reaching its fulfillment in the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and subsequently His resurrection from the dead, which would take place on the third day. But in this moment, the very Son of God is dying on the cross of calvary--dying for each and every sin of those whom He came to save. If you are blessed to be one of God's children, then your sins were placed on Jesus Christ on this day, and He died the death that all of us deserve. The sorrow of this moment should cause each of us great sorrow each and every time we sin against God.
- Jesus thirsted literally, in His flesh, and also spiritually, for the salvation of His people. The prophecy that is referred to here can be found in Psalm 22:15 and 69:21.
- Jesus breathes His last breath (for now) and proclaims "It is finished." The great work of salvation that He came to earth to do has now been completed, upon His death.

November 30 (Day 334) – Luke 23:44-46

- Here we find Luke's account of Jesus' death on the cross, which is very similar to John's account that we read yesterday. The darkness that occurred during this time represented the curse of sin that Christ was bearing for all those who would be saved through His shed blood.

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Jewish Old Testament law actually states that everyone who hangs from a tree is accursed of God (see Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13). We see the providence of God in this, because the Jews were under the authority of the Romans at this point in history. The Romans killed people by crucifying them-- hanging them from a tree--while the Jews killed people by stoning them. But in order to bear the curse of our sin, taking the curse we deserve, Christ had to be hung from a tree, which was done by the Romans. This is just one more way that we see God making every little piece of the Old Testament fit together, with the ultimate fulfillment of the law and prophecies being found in Christ.

December 1 (Day 335) – Matthew 27:51-56

- No longer would there be the same type of barrier between God and mankind. In Old Testament times, the high priest had to intercede for the people, who were not allowed to come directly to God. But now, Jesus Christ is the one and only Mediator between God and man (see 1 Timothy 2:5, Galatians 3:19-20, and Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15). Praise God that we can now boldly approach His throne (see Hebrews 10:16-21) through Jesus Christ! The veil of the temple was torn as a symbol of this change, and also notice how it was torn from top to bottom and not the other way around. A man could have torn it from the bottom up, but only God could start at the top and tear it from top to bottom.
- Even a centurion, one of the leaders over Roman soldiers, recognized through all the natural phenomena that were occurring that this must have been the Son of God! But in spite of the darkness, the earthquake, the tearing of the veil at the temple, and other things that happened, so many of the Jews were still blinded by their own pride and jealousy.

December 2 (Day 336) – John 19:31-37

- It is sadly ironic that the Jews were so concerned with observing the sabbath day of rest that they wanted to make sure the three men who had been crucified were dead and their bodies could be taken down before the sabbath preparations began. But at the same

time, they had no concern about shedding the innocent blood of Jesus. Yet again, even in His death, we see how they were focused on keeping their laws and doing what they thought they needed to do to earn their way into heaven, without clearly seeing the wickedness of their own hearts.

- None of Jesus' bones were broken, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (see Psalm 34:20) as well as requirements for a lamb sacrifice (see Exodus 12:46). The second prophecy referred to here is fulfilled as the Roman soldiers look upon Jesus once His side was pierced, though that prophecy is also expected to have an ultimate fulfillment when Jesus returns in the end times and the Jews come to realize what they have done (see Zechariah 12:10).

December 3 (Day 337) – John 19:38-42

- Here we find the fulfillment of another prophecy, from Isaiah 53:9, that the Messiah's grave would be with the rich at His death, because of His innocence. This passage of Scripture shows us the great reverence with which some of Jesus' followers handled His body after His death.
- Apparently this Joseph had been a secret follower of Christ, afraid to confess Him because of the Jewish leaders. So even though he was saved, his faith had been weak-- something we all struggle with at different times and in different situations. But it seems that his faith had now been strengthened by God as he goes to Pilate to ask for the body, no longer worried about what might happen if others find out that He is a follower of Christ. Nevertheless, God calls all of His children to be that bold regardless of the circumstances, and to always confess Christ before others (see also Matthew 10:32, John 9:22, and Romans 10:9).

December 4 (Day 338) – Matt. 27:61-66

- The Jewish chief priests and Pharisees insult Jesus even after putting Him to death by calling Him a deceiver--the exact opposite of which is actually true. And even Pilate, to whom they were speaking, had found Jesus to be innocent. Sadly, their prideful hatred of the Son of God continued even after His death. In any case, they convinced Pilate to set guards by the tomb to ensure that no one would come

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and steal Jesus' body to try to claim that He had risen from the dead. But as we will soon see, such actions were pointless, since Jesus would indeed rise from the dead and would be witnessed by hundreds (see 1 Corinthians 15:6 and Acts 3:15). Praise God that no one can interfere with His plan or His awesome power!

December 5 (Day 339) – Matthew 28:1-8

- The sabbath has passed; it is now Sunday morning--and He is risen! Jesus Christ, our great Lord and Savior, has overcome death and the grave (see 1 Corinthians 15:54-58) and has risen from the dead--exactly as He had prophesied before His death (see Matthew 17:23 and 20:19; Mark 9:31 and 10:34; Luke 9:22, 13:32, and 18:33).
- The men who were guarding the tomb of Jesus could not stand up against the power of God! The angel came down and rolled the stone away not to allow Jesus to rise from the dead--because that had already happened--but to prove that His body was no longer inside the tomb.
- Imagine the great joy of these women as they rushed to share the wonderful news with the rest of Jesus' disciples! We should likewise be just as joyful to share the gospel with others, because Jesus Christ is still our risen Savior!

December 6 (Day 340) – John 20:2-10

- Upon discovering the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene found two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, and told them what had happened. They all rushed to the tomb and found the linen cloths that Jesus' body had been wrapped in, but there was no sign of the body. If His body had been stolen, as some of the Jews would later claim (see Matthew 28:11-15), whoever stole it probably wouldn't have taken the time to unwrap His body and leave the cloths behind. Of course, His body wasn't stolen; He had risen from the dead. But as verse 9 of this passage tells us, the fullness of God's plan had still not been revealed to His people. While they certainly did know Old Testament Scripture, God had not yet given them understanding of how the Scriptures speak of Christ all through the Old Testament. He would grant them that understanding very soon--but it had not yet happened at this point

in time.

December 7 (Day 341) – John 20:11-18

- Mary, like the two disciples who were there at the tomb with her, did not yet understand what had happened. She was weeping, wondering what had happened to Jesus' body. She did not even realize that it was Jesus who was speaking to her at first, but then He revealed Himself to her. But He did not let Mary linger; rather, He told her to go and tell His disciples about what she had seen, that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive and with them again! He also told Mary to tell them that He would soon ascend to His Father and His God, who is also our Father and our God--for all those who have been saved by Him, made to be the children of God through adoption into His family. So Mary did just that, rushing to tell the disciples what she had seen and what the risen Christ had told her.

December 8 (Day 342) – Matthew 28:9-15

- Here Jesus meets with more of His disciples and tells them to spread the word that He is alive again. Word of this also reaches the Jewish chief priests. It is amazing--and not in a good way--to see the lies that people can come up with, rather than believing in the power of God. The chief priests come up with this ridiculous lie, telling the Roman soldiers to spread the lie that Jesus' disciples stole His body while they slept. This lie doesn't make sense for multiple reasons. Why would Jesus' disciples steal His body when He was in the tomb, and they had not yet received the understanding from God that He would rise from the dead? And if the soldiers were asleep, how would they have known who took the body? Lies often make little sense; nevertheless, people will so often believe a lie over the truth of God (see also Romans 1:25). And that lie, ridiculous as it was, apparently was still being commonly told among the Jews some 10 or 15 years later when Matthew wrote this gospel.

December 9 (Day 343) – Luke 24:13-21

- These two men who were walking along the road to the village of Emmaus were clearly distraught over the events that had transpired

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over the last few days. The risen Jesus then walked up and joined into their conversation, but He temporarily kept His identity hidden from them. These are clearly men who knew the truth--that Jesus was a prophet sent from God (though, of course, He was much more than just a prophet). They also give Jesus the wonderful description of being "mighty in deed and word." They are distraught because they had trusted that Jesus would be the redeemer of Israel, but since this was now the third day since He was crucified, they are understandably uncertain about what they had believed.

December 10 (Day 344) – Luke 24:22-31

- Jesus continues talking to these two men, but keeps His identity hidden from them until the very end of this passage. They share the reports they have heard about His resurrection from the dead, but even though Jesus had told His disciples that He would die and rise again on the third day, they remain skeptical. But Jesus calls them out on their lack of faith in what the prophets had spoken, because everything that had transpired had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus then takes them to the Scriptures (our Old Testament) and interpreted the prophecies to them, showing them how everything pointed to Him. What a joyous moment it must have been for these men to come to understand how the Old Testament points to Christ, and then to realize that they had been talking to Jesus all along! Sadly, as a result of poor teaching in many of our modern churches, many people (believers and unbelievers alike) view the Old Testament God as being completely different from the New Testament God, which is totally, utterly untrue (see also Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8).

December 11 (Day 345) – Luke 24:32-43

- Now a larger group Jesus' disciples gathered together, filled with joy upon hearing the news that He had risen from the dead! And while they were together, Jesus suddenly appeared with them. They were startled, believing that He was something like a ghost, but He showed them His body so they could be assured that it really was Him and that He really was alive again. But even then, we see in verse 41 that

they were cautiously joyful, having a difficult time coming to terms with what they were seeing. Then Jesus offered even more proof by asking for something to eat--not that He necessarily was hungry, but eating gave His disciples further proof that He really was with them in human form, risen from the dead.

December 12 (Day 346) – John 20:19-23

- Here we read John's account of the same events that we read about in Luke's gospel yesterday. John specifically mentions how this took place on the first day of the week, the same day on which Jesus had just risen from the dead--which is why we now generally attend church on Sundays instead of Saturdays, as it used to be for the Jews. This precedent is first set here and is continued, as verse 26 in this same chapter tells us that this group met again on the eighth day, or the following Sunday.
- Jesus tells His disciples to go forth and share the good news (verse 21), giving them the gifts they would need to do that work (verse 22) and while the disciples had no power of themselves to forgive sins--that belongs unto God and God alone--they did have the message to spread to others of how God's forgiveness takes place.

December 13 (Day 347) – John 20:24-29

- Here we find doubting Thomas, who did not see the risen Christ on the Sunday of His resurrection, and he refuses to believe until he actually sees Jesus with his own eyes, and touches Him with his own hands. So on the eighth day--the next Sunday after the resurrection--Jesus meets again with His disciples. Of course, God knows all things, and Jesus already knew that Thomas doubted His resurrection. So He told Thomas to touch His risen body, and Thomas believed, calling Jesus "my Lord and my God." Thomas was blessed in a unique and special way to be able to see and touch Jesus himself. Few people received that privilege--only a small portion of those people who were alive at this time. For the rest of us who are believers, we believe in our unseen Savior by faith (see also Hebrews 11:1). We cannot see Him physically like Thomas did, but we have been blessed by God differently, having been given the ability to see and know

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Christ through our spiritual eyes of faith.

December 14 (Day 348) – John 20:30-31

- Everything that Jesus did is not covered in the gospel of John, or even in the four gospels put together. The very last verse of the book (John 21:25) goes even farther, stating that if everything Jesus did was written down, the whole earth could not contain the books that would have to be written. Whether that is to be taken literally or figuratively is not clear, but either way, Jesus no doubt did many more miracles and taught many more people than what was recorded in this small portion of God's Word. The Bible does not tell us everything that there is to know, nor does it answer every question that people may have. But it does tell us everything that God says we need to know, and it answers every question that He wants us to have an answer to (see also Deuteronomy 29:29). The Bible has been and continues to be used for all sorts of purposes--both good and bad--but its ultimate purpose is given to us right here in verse 31: These things have been written and passed down through the generations to us so that we might know the one and only source of salvation--by true saving faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior, Messiah, and only Son of God.

December 15 (Day 349) – John 21:1-11

- Here we find Jesus doing one last miracle for His disciples. A group of them had been out fishing all night and had not caught a single fish, but when Jesus came and told them to cast their fishing net on the right side of their boat, they caught so many fish that they were unable to pull the net back into the boat! They did not realize that it was Jesus who was speaking to them at first, but immediately knew who it was after catching such a multitude of fish. Peter was so excited to see his risen Lord and Savior that he jumped out of the boat and swam to shore to meet Jesus as quickly as he could! Are we so excited to spend time with Jesus, in prayer or in God's Word? The rest of the disciples soon followed in the boat, dragging the net behind them.

December 16 (Day 350) – John 21:12-17

- Here Jesus gives Peter an opportunity to

reaffirm his love for Jesus after having denied Him three times the night before He was crucified. Now, Peter does just the opposite; Jesus asks him if he loves Him three separate times. After his previous public denial of Christ, Peter is now unafraid to proclaim how much he loves Jesus.

- Jesus also gives Peter a command to feed His lambs (new believers) and sheep (all other believers) by guiding them along the journey of faith and teaching them as Jesus had taught His disciples. This is one way in which believers show our love for Christ, by teaching and encouraging fellow believers. Those who claim to know Christ but have no such concern for believers have deceived themselves and don't have the salvation they claim to have.

December 17 (Day 351) – John 21:18-25

- After Peter reaffirms his love for Jesus, Jesus then tells Peter that, at some point in the future, he would die a very unpleasant kind of death for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Then Jesus tells Peter to follow Him, and Peter does without hesitation. Such is the mark of a true believer: We have no hesitation about following Christ, no matter what the cost may be in this life, because we seek to glorify God in all that we do. Proclaiming eternal truths is far more important than anything in this life.
- Peter then asks Jesus about John, but Jesus redirects him, for that was not his concern. The apostle John was the only one of the eleven original, true disciples who did not die some kind of violent death for Christ. Such things are all in the hands of the Lord, who we know is working all things together for our good and His own glory.
- The final verse of the gospel of John echoes John 20:30-31. The Bible does not tell us everything there is to know, but it does tell us all that we truly need to know.

December 18 (Day 352) – Matt. 28:16-20

- Here Jesus gathers with His disciples once again (and not only the eleven, but more than 500 followers all together, according to what Paul records in 1 Corinthians 15:6) and gives them what we commonly refer to as the great commission. He commands them--and all believers--to go out into the world, proclaiming

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the truth of the gospel. People will not know that they are sinners and that they need salvation through Jesus Christ unless they are told (see Romans 10:14-17) and shown from Scripture. So we must proclaim this truth to others, not because we are hateful or intolerant as some would claim, but out of love for God and for others. True love means sharing the truth, even when it isn't easy or it won't be received well (see also Proverbs 27:6). If we don't tell them, who will? And how will they ever learn of their lost, sinful condition?

December 19 (Day 353) – Matt. 28:16-20

- Jesus also adds a qualifier. That qualifier is not baptism, which some people mistakenly think is a requirement to be saved. If it was, how was the thief on the cross saved? Believers are commanded to be baptized as a witness and testimony to others about the salvation that we have received, but it is not a requirement for salvation; if it were, then we would be depending on our own works rather than solely on God's grace (see Ephesians 2:8-9). The qualifier is that those who are saved must be taught to obey the things which God has commanded. Any true believer will be given such a desire by God Himself, and then we are to follow the Bible in our daily lives. Yes, we still battle a sinful nature--but it no longer has control over us like it did before we were saved. Anyone who claims to be a believer but who continues to live in sin and seems to have no real concern for the things of the Lord has deceived themselves.

December 20 (Day 354) – Luke 24:44-48

- One can read and study the Bible over and over for many, many years but never truly understand it without being granted the gift of spiritual wisdom from God. Such is the case with these Jews, who had been taught the Scriptures their entire lives yet did not understand how the Old Testament pointed to Christ until this moment, when God opened their understanding so that they might be able to see the things from the Old Testament that pointed to the coming Messiah, who was Jesus Christ. Even for believers, this is an ongoing process--we do not know and understand everything in the Bible at the moment of salvation; rather, it is a gradual process that

continues for the rest of our lives. Different Christians are at different points along that journey, and we must never be boastful if we know or understand something from Scripture that a fellow believer has not yet come to understand. We all must remember that none of us would have any spiritual understanding if it had not been given to us from God.

December 21 (Day 355) – Acts 1:3-8

- We have now arrived at the end of Jesus' forty days on earth after His resurrection. During that time He appeared to many people, including His disciples on multiple occasions, as well as more than 500 people at once (see 1 Corinthians 15:6). False prophets who claim to have received some kind of new revelation from God tend to be alone when it happens, but Jesus did the exact opposite, giving us plenty of proof that He is exactly who He claimed to be--the one and only Son of God, our Savior and Lord.
- Now, Jesus was about to ascend into heaven to be with His Father, but He assured His followers that another promise from God would be fulfilled shortly thereafter: He would send the Holy Spirit to be a guide and comforter (see Joel 2:28 and John 14:16). When that happened, Jesus told His disciples, they would be empowered to preach the truth of the gospel not only in Jerusalem, but out into all the earth. We see this promise gloriously fulfilled in the beginning of Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost (about one week after Jesus ascended to heaven), when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and filled the souls of all believers!

December 22 (Day 356) – Acts 1:9-14

- Once Jesus ascended into heaven, these two angles gave His disciples a rebuke for continuing to gaze upward. They would no longer be able to see Jesus with their physical eyes; now they had to use their eyes of faith. Just as it was throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, He often taught things or performed miracles that had a spiritual meaning, but most people missed the spiritual meaning and only focused on the earthly meaning. For example, Jesus often promised blessings to His people, but He meant spiritual blessings and not

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necessarily earthly, material blessings as some falsely teach. So here, the angels tell these disciples to take their physical eyes off of Jesus, now that He has returned to heaven, and to focus on the work that needs to be done here by going out and spreading the gospel.

- At the end of the gospel of Luke, we find a similar passage about Jesus' ascension, but there Luke also mentions that the people were continually praising and blessing God (see Luke 24:53). Do we praise God as often as we should, or with the joy and enthusiasm that we ought to give Him?

December 23 (Day 357) – Acts 9:1-9

- Saul was a great persecutor of Christians in the early days of the church, once Jesus has ascended back into heaven (see also Acts 8:3, 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:12-17). He thought he was doing the work of God by persecuting and killing Christians, until this moment when Jesus suddenly came and spoke to him directly.
- Saul, who would later be called Paul, is one of the greatest examples we have of God's sovereignty in salvation. Do we find God weakly speaking to Saul, asking him if he'd like to be saved by Jesus? Absolutely not! Instead, we find Jesus speaking to Saul and telling him what he must do for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. And Saul did not even try to resist because he didn't want to--salvation had already taken place; God had already changed his heart. When salvation takes place, God puts a new heart within us (see Ezekiel 36:26) so that we now have a desire to follow Him and do His will that we never had before. We see evidence of that with Saul, who immediately gets back up and goes where Jesus had told him to go.

December 24 (Day 358) – Acts 9:13-22

- Again we see Jesus explain how Saul had been chosen for God's purpose. He specifically chose and called Saul to be the one who would help lead the spread the good news of Jesus Christ not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. God doesn't have a bunch of different plans based on what we do or don't do. He has a plan, and is always working all things together to accomplish His will.

- Ananias, another follower of Christ, had been told by the Lord to expect Saul. At first, Ananias was suspicious, having heard about how Saul had persecuted Christians. But once the Lord confirms that yes, God has chosen and called Saul to be one of His children, Ananias accepts Saul into the fellowship, referring to him as "brother"--a title that is reserved specifically for the children of God.
- Saul wasted no time showing forth fruit of his conversion, preaching the truth of Christ in such a way that the Jews to whom he was preaching could not argue against what he was saying. There could be no doubt that Saul, the former persecutor, had now received the gift of salvation himself!

December 25 (Day 359) – Acts 22:12-21

- Later on, we find Paul (previously called Saul) recounting the events surrounding his conversion. It is recorded here that God told Paul that he would not stay in Jerusalem long. Yes, some Jews were saved, but by and large they would not hear him when he preached the truth of Christ--just like they refused to listen or repent under the teaching of Jesus Himself. So God quickly sent Paul out of the city of Jerusalem and into a variety of places in the surrounding region, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles for the first time. This was something new: While there were some Gentiles saved in the Old Testament (such as Ruth, Rahab, and multitudes in the city of Nineveh), God was with the Jewish people in a special way back then. But now, His message of salvation would be proclaimed to all the nations (see also Matthew 28:19) to provoke the Jews, because of their unbelief (see also Romans 11:1-11).

December 26 (Day 360) – Acts 11:7-18

- Once more we receive a message from God that has both a physical meaning and a spiritual meaning. While it is true that, at this point, God declared that certain foods were now okay to eat that He had previously said were unclean, that is only a physical example of the spiritual meaning behind these events: The previously unclean Gentiles will now be given the gospel, and many will be saved. God had told Israel that this would happen long ago--he

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told Moses (see Romans 10:19 and Deuteronomy 32:21) and Isaiah (see Romans 10:20 and Isaiah 65:1), among others, yet by and large Israel continued to go their own way and disobey the God who had blessed their nation so richly. So now salvation has come unto the Gentiles, so that God might provoke His original group of people--Israel--to jealousy, just as they so often provoked Him to jealousy by bowing down to and worshipping false gods.

December 27 (Day 361) – Acts 18:5-11

- Just as Jesus had told him it would be, Paul did not remain in Jerusalem for very long. Here we find Paul sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Jews, but they still refused to listen and blasphemed God in response. It is important to keep in mind that God commands His children to share the message of salvation with others, but not to continually beat the same people over the head with it. We have Paul's example to follow in this. He preached the truth to the Jews on several occasions, and after they continually refused to listen, he moved on to share the gospel with others (Gentiles, in this case) who had not heard. Since the Jews had heard the gospel and had not repented, he told them that their blood was on their own heads.
- Paul then went to the city of Corinth and began to preach to the Gentiles there. God told Paul not to fear those who were against him, because He had many in this city that He would save under the preaching of Paul. This example reminds us that, even though God will save whoever He will save, we still have a responsibility to fulfill as well.

December 28 (Day 362) – Rev. 1:5-8, 17-18

- This is the true Jesus. People like to think about a sweet little baby in a manger at this time of year, but Jesus was only in that form for a short time. The Jesus who will return someday is the all-powerful Son of God who will return in judgment and people across the world will mourn because of Him--because they missed out on salvation.
- Some false religions (such as Mormonism) teach that Jesus was the first created being. However, Scripture teaches us that Jesus has

always existed as a part of the triune God. This passage can be used to disprove that false teaching. We read "I am Alpha and Omega..." in verse 8, but we know that this is Jesus speaking because He continues in verse 18 by stating that He was alive, then died, and now is alive again and will live forever. Jesus is the only one who is able to say such a thing. And in Him alone is the power to take away the sting of death so that we might be forgiven of our sins against God and have eternal life with Him.

December 29 (Day 363) – Rev. 22:1-7

- Once heaven and earth pass away, this is what eternity will be like for the child of God. Salvation is not about going to heaven to see lost loved ones. While they may be there, it is truly all about Jesus Christ--the perfect Lamb of God who died for the sins of all of God's children. None of us deserve to go to heaven, but by God's grace, some of us will get to spend eternity there, praising Jesus for what He has done.
- In heaven there will no longer be a curse. There will be no darkness at all. It's hard for us to imagine that, as dark and sinful as this world is, but that is exactly what the children of God have to look forward to in eternity! And we will not have the burden of serving Christ forever; we will have the privilege of serving Christ as he reigns and rules forever!

December 30 (Day 364) – Rev. 22:8-15

- Note how the angel rebukes John for falling down at his feet in worship; we see this happen anytime someone in Scripture attempts to worship an angel, because God alone is worthy of worship. However, if you read something in the Old Testament where a person is not rebuked for such a thing, then it is no angel who appeared but it is the preincarnate Christ (such as in Joshua 5:13-15).
- Who will get to enter heaven, having a right to the eternal tree of life? Only those who have been saved through Jesus Christ, and in verse 14, we are reminded that we see evidence of salvation when someone desires to keep the commandments of God, because that shows how God has changed the person's heart. Merely talking about God or claiming to be

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saved are meaningless; your life will produce fruit for the Lord if you are truly saved. Carefully examine your own life and the lives of those around you. Is there evidence of true salvation? Do not take this question lightly, for it concerns all of eternity (see Philippians 2:12).

December 31 (Day 365) – Rev. 22:16-21

- Jesus reaffirms that He is the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies (see Numbers 24:17, Isaiah 11:1, and Zechariah 6:12). We also find a warning here against anyone who might add to or take away from what is written in Scripture--which many false religions do, by claiming to believe the Bible but adding something else to it or taking away the parts that they don't like. But the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God (see 2 Timothy 3:16), and it doesn't matter if we like it or not--every word of it is true.
- I hope and pray that you have enjoyed and benefited from this journey through the gospels, to see Jesus for who He truly was and is. Most people have major misconceptions about Jesus and still picture Him as a sweet little baby in a manger. But as we have seen,

that is not at all an accurate picture of who Jesus Christ is. Jesus is the all-powerful Son of God, the creator of all things, and the ultimate judge.

- If you believe that you are going to heaven when you die, I also hope and pray that you have searched your own soul to be sure of that (see Philippians 2:12). It is a sad but true reality that many people believe themselves to be saved but have actually never had a work of God in their hearts to give them a new birth (see Matthew 7:21-23). What an unimaginable horror it would be to hear those words when you die! Do you sincerely desire to spend time with the Lord and with the brethren? Do God's love and gospel truth flow out of you when you are around others? If you do not see these things in your life, you have reason to be deeply concerned about where you will spend eternity. But God is a God of mercy and grace, and He will save those who come with humble hearts in true repentance.