

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

RockPointe's 2021 Lenten Devotional





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JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

An Introduction for March 14th • **Scripture Reading:** Luke 24:25-27

Spring will soon arrive and with it our journey toward Holy Week and Resurrection Sunday begins. Each year we're faced with a choice—to mark the keystone events on the Church's calendar—Christ's death and resurrection—or to celebrate what's become known as Easter. It's easy to miss the real meaning of the season before us as most people do.

For most Canadians, the weeks ahead will involve the things of Easter—eggs and hunts, bunnies and chocolate. For Christ-followers, this season means much more. We remember what Christ did for us on the cross and by rising from the dead. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 summarizes this meaning as Paul writes: *Christ died for all so that all who live - having received eternal life from him - might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.*

Christ's life, death and resurrection have incomparable significance in our lives and we must often revisit their meaning. This *Journey to the Cross* devotional provides you with the opportunity to do just that.

With Jesus' death, His disciples became discouraged and disillusioned. God's plan to establish His Kingdom through His Son seemed to have come to an end. Jesus—in whom they'd placed all their hope—had died and with Him, their hope was gone. Then Jesus appeared to two disciples walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Both failed to recognize Christ as they walked along, complaining about their loss of Jesus. In time, though, Jesus said to them: *"How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"*

Then Luke penned a single sentence of great significance to our preparation for Holy Week. He wrote: *"Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."* Jesus walks them through all the various places where He appears in the Hebrew Scriptures—what we know today as the Old Testament. And everything changes!

Most of us think of Jesus as appearing in the Bible in the first chapters of the gospels. *"Jesus appears on the scene as the baby born in Bethlehem. He's a New Testament Bible character,"* we think to ourselves. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As Jesus demonstrated to those disciples in Luke 24, He's all over the Old Testament. He's the fulfillment of prophecies made long ago. In what He said and did, He often demonstrated and proclaimed He was fulfilling specific passages found in the Old Testament. And it isn't just individual prophecies and passages that point to Him, but the Old Testament as a whole. He's the point of the first thirty-nine books of our Bible as He says to Israel's Jewish leaders in John 5:39: *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me."*

As you'll discover as you walk through this devotional guide, Jesus is the bread of life foreshadowed by the manna God gave the Israelites in the desert. He's the true sabbath who frees us from our need to work for survival and salvation. He's the true tabernacle, the one who pitched His tent among us. He's the second and perfect Adam, the prophet greater than Moses, the priest greater than Melchizekek and the king greater than David. He's our city of refuge, our water in the desert, our perfect sacrifice and our great high priest. And much more.

The end result for those two disciples who walked to Emmaus with Jesus was a refreshed faith in Him. And this came because of time spent walking through the various places where Jesus appears in the Old Testament. As we walk toward Holy Week this year, our prayer is that you will meet Jesus for the first time or experience a refreshed faith as you walk that same Old Testament road with Jesus.

Journey to the Cross was written by several folks who have a vested interest in the spiritual success of our community. A few months ago, we wrote devotionals framed around Advent—the coming of Jesus to Bethlehem. A lot of us took advantage of the chance to read (and share!) what those devotionals had to offer. It went so well we decided to do the same thing for the Passion season.

So we encourage you to make *Journey to the Cross* part of your daily rhythm for the next three weeks until Resurrection Sunday. Why not find a specific time of day to sit in a quiet place with a hot drink and take some time to engage with the very events and stories that Jesus revealed to those disciples on their way to Emmaus? As you do, you'll engage in this season in a way that allows you to enter into the true meaning of this season. It's our conviction that when you do, it will be a far more fulfilling season because of your choice and in the end, we'll be more the disciples on mission together that God has called us to become.

So come and walk with us. Perhaps you'll meet Jesus in a way you've never met Him before.



THE OFFSPRING OF THE WOMAN



Day 01 • March 15 • **Scripture Reading:** Genesis 3:15

It was a perfect world, the one He had fashioned for them. He simply spoke and the universe was hurled into existence. The grand finale of His creation—humans. They were made in His image, designed so that all creation could look at them and know what God is like. He planted a garden that defied description and commissioned them to take care of it. He gave them one simple command. “The tree in the middle of the garden—it’s called ‘The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil’—it’s poison. If you eat from it, you’ll die.”

They hadn’t meant to, but the serpent was crafty. “You won’t die,” he said. “God’s holding out on you. In fact, if you eat it, you’ll become like God.” The irony of the serpent’s lie is that the man and the woman were already like God. Not in every way, but in every way that God needed them to be in order to be fully human. The serpent wanted them to be like God in the one way they could never be: the right to **define** good and evil. In a horrific act of treason, they listened to the serpent, rejected their Maker, and introduced guilt, sin, and death into their perfect world.

Then they heard Him walking in the garden. Ashamed, they hid. He spoke, a gut-wrenching cry of sorrow, “Adam, where are you?” As if He didn’t know. It was Adam, not the Maker, who was lost. The relationship was broken.

He began His judgements with the serpent. “You are cursed above all other creatures.” Before He even got to the judgements on the man and the woman, He offered the unimaginable—mercy. He said it to the serpent, but the message of grace was really for His humans: “Someday,” He said, “one of the woman’s offspring will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” He offered no details, simply promising that a future descendant of the woman would strike a fatal blow to the serpent, destroying evil at its source and restoring the broken relationship with their Maker. The “offspring” would in turn receive a strike to his heel, a mutual wounding of sorts, but fatal only to the serpent.

And so it was that thousands of years later, an angel appeared to a carpenter from Nazareth. “Joseph,” he said, “don’t be afraid. Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The “Offspring” of the woman was coming at last.

When Jesus died and rose again, He took the sin of all humanity into Himself and restored the broken relationship between us and our Maker. Forgiveness, life, reconciliation!

This is the story of Easter.

“For since we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through his life. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God” (Romans 5:10-11).

The *Journey to the Cross* is really God’s journey toward us, toward reconciliation. Maybe you’ve never experienced the reconciliation God offers. He wants you to join Him on that journey. It’s yours if you ask Him. Will you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank-you for dying for my sins so we can have a relationship. Please forgive my sins and come into my life. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Isaiah 53; John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:22



THE SECOND ADAM



Day 02 • March 16 • **Scripture Reading:** Genesis 2

Anyone who has played for a second-place team or rooted for a team that falls just short of winning a championship knows the feelings of disappointment and regret that arrive as time expires on the time clock. Lifelong Vancouver Canuck fans are well aware of these feelings along with the hollow self-talk that follows: *“There’s always next year!”* That longing and regret will never be displaced until the experience of the big win or when we place that trophy in the display case. Those of us who are big sports fans can be grateful that our satisfaction in life is not dependent on what any particular player or team can do for us. Jesus ended our winning drought the day we surrendered to Him and realized the magnitude of His victory on the cross.

Jesus is often referred to as the *Second Adam* because He comes after the Adam from Genesis 2. And He is a game-changer, similar to the way the first Adam changed everything. Jesus was second but in no way was He runner up. The First Adam fell short of victory when he chose to disobey God in Genesis 3. His disobedience opened the door to sin in the world. In Romans 5:12 we’re told that through Adam’s sin every person in world history received his inheritance—we all receive death. And outside of the special cases of Enoch, Elijah and Jesus, everyone has experienced or will experience death.

Like a drop of ink spreading through crystal clear water, Adam’s sin contaminated the pool of humanity with death. And yet, even though death permeated every square inch of real-estate in our earthly kingdom, Jesus the Second Adam—humanity’s second chance to win—reversed the effect of sin from death to life. His blood droplets extend and cover every disappointed and regretful sinner who becomes a Christ-follower by accepting Him as Lord and Saviour.

Adam’s sin resulted in death that went undefeated until the coming of Jesus. But God gave us hope by telling us in the beginning that one day the tide would turn. One would come, He said, who would hand our enemy a crushing defeat (see Genesis 3:15). And THAT is precisely what Jesus did.

He is the do-over the world had been waiting for. He is our second chance, our grace if you will—the one who reverses the effects of Adam’s sin for everyone throughout history. Adam *“gifted”* us sin resulting in death, but now the Second Adam—Jesus—*“gifts”* us grace resulting in life. For all those who were waiting for something different to happen *“next year,”* their identity has been changed forever. They are no longer on the losing side. In Christ, we are now on the winning side that is full of life—life now and forever.

Prayer: *Jesus, You are the Lord of second chances resulting in first place finishes. As I walk through today I pray that You will empower me to live the reward of new life on full display for a world who needs to see You as I do. I love You Jesus. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-49; 1 John 3:2



THE BURNING BUSH



Day 03 • March 17 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 3:1-15

It wasn't the life he'd envisioned. Raised in the palace of the most powerful king in the world, Moses had been rescued from drowning in the Nile by the daughter of the very Pharaoh who had commanded his death, along with all Hebrew baby boys.

When he was grown, he killed an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew slave and hid the body in the sand. Now a fugitive from Pharaoh, he fled Egypt and ended up as a shepherd in the Midian desert. For the next forty years, he herded sheep in the desert near Mount Sinai.

One day Moses was tending the flocks when he noticed a bush on fire. Intrigued, he moved closer to see why the fire wasn't consuming the bush.

And then God spoke. Moses wasn't expecting that. No one had heard from God in 400 years. Now He wanted Moses to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery to freedom.

Moses, seemingly confused about the identity of the characters in the conversation, protested. "Who am I?" and then, "Who are you?" God ignored the first question; only the second mattered. "I AM WHO I AM. Tell the people that 'I AM' sent you. This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations. Now go...and...I will be with you."

What powerful messages! God had just revealed His name, His plan to redeem His people, and the assurance of His presence.

750 years later, the prophet Isaiah announced the coming of a redeemer, called "Immanuel," God is with us (Isaiah 7:14). The Redeemer of Exodus would redeem once again. Yahweh stayed "with us."

But the prophets stopped speaking, and nobody heard from God for another 400 years. Until God spoke again. His message, unchanged. His name: Jesus. His plan: "to save his people from their sin"—from slavery to freedom. His presence: "The Word became human and lived among us" (John 1:14). Yahweh, the Redeemer, is "with us."

The same Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt with "signs and wonders," performed more "signs and wonders." He healed the sick, calmed storms, and raised the dead to life. He made claims they thought were outrageous. "I AM the Messiah," "I AM the bread of life," "I AM the light of the world," "I AM the resurrection and the life." Intentionally quoting Himself from the burning bush, He countered their disbelief. "Remember the God who redeemed you from Egypt with signs and wonders? I'm back, and I'm here to redeem you once again. This time from an enemy far more treacherous than Egypt or Rome: your sin." This time He would die to make that redemption possible.

Moses wouldn't have understood that the God who spoke to him from the burning bush would one day become human and die to redeem His people. But that's the story of the Bible. The God whose personal name is based on the verb "to be" is the ever-present-tense God who has never stopped saying, "I will be with you."

God was with Moses and his people through their journey of escape, fear, foot-weary travel, triumph and failure. What journey does God have you on? It may include fear, confusion, or doubt. God's promise to you matches His promise to Moses: He will be with you and will give you peace, hope, and joy, no matter the circumstances.

Prayer: *Lord, help me trust in Your presence as we journey through life together. Remind me that You are there. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Isaiah 42:1-7; 54:10; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-37:28; Hebrews 8:7-13



THE TABERNACLE



Day 04 • March 18 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 25

A love letter. A vacation picture. An urn containing ashes. We are people who love to touch, see and remember. Objects have meaning to us, but some things cannot be fully experienced in this way. Love cannot be confined to a letter, a memory cannot be contained in a picture, and an urn will never represent the vibrant life of a loved one.

God told Moses, “Have them make a sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). And even though God cannot be confined to a single space, this dwelling (and later the temple) would represent God’s presence with His people. In Isaiah 66, God states, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?... Has not my hand made all these things?” And yet, for the first time, God was going to live *with* His people. This was a big deal, and God had some very specific requests to ensure His people understood that.

God’s glory was paramount in every detail. In Exodus, we see God instructing His people to include very intentional items to furnish His tabernacle: a lampstand, a table to hold the bread of the Presence, a washing basin, one altar for incense, and another for burnt offerings. A veil separated these things from the Most Holy Place where only the high priest could enter. Each of these have a specific function and purpose, displaying God’s desire to rescue His people, hundreds of years before Christ’s birth.

Enter Jesus, the physical manifestation of the previously invisible God. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). He is the Old Testament tabernacle, incarnate. Living God, living temple.

In this context, “I am the bread of life” takes on new meaning as we remember His presence in our lives. The lampstand is reflected in Jesus being the “light of the world” driving out darkness. The cleansing basin and altar reveal to us that we are purified with Christ’s blood and His own sacrifice. As Jesus’s body was broken, the veil separating the people from the most holy place was torn in two, allowing us personal connection with God without separation. His death ushered us into God’s presence.

In John 2:19, in speaking about His body, Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He also says, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we’ll come and make our home with him” (John 14:23). If Christ dwells in us we become the tabernacle that houses Him. He fills us with His presence and thus we have direct access to the holy of holies anytime and anywhere. What an amazing mystery and privilege!

How is your temple today? Is it filled with a pleasing aroma of incense, or consistent prayer? Are you living an active life of remembrance of the great sacrifice that was made for us, filled with humility and deep gratitude? Is God’s law written on your heart and mind, and do you guard those things on a daily basis? We are a holy people, because we are dearly loved by a holy God who chose to make His dwelling among us.

Prayer: *Lord, we praise You making Your home in our hearts. Please help us to live our lives worthy of this great gift You have given us. Amen.*

Going Deeper: 1 Kings 8:27; John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19



THE SCAPEGOAT



Day 05 • March 19 • **Scripture Reading:** Leviticus 16

Scapegoating is a well-established North American practice. Dictionaries define it as *the act of blaming a person for something bad that happens or someone else has done*. Typically, a specific person is singled out as the scapegoat in any particular instance and in our world, scapegoats aren't difficult to find. Read any online news source and before long, an instance of scapegoating will pop up. Someone has said that *"the search for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions."* It's true—most of us have either scapegoated someone or become a scapegoat for others at some point.

Interestingly, the idea of the scapegoat begins in the Old Testament.

Leviticus 16 provides Israel with instructions regarding the Day of Atonement—the annual day when Israelites atoned for their sins. God instructed Moses that two goats were to be selected by the priests. One was to be sacrificed and its blood to be sprinkled on the Mercy Seat in the tabernacle—the place where God dwelled. The other goat was to be sacrificed in a different way—to the wilderness.

The first goat was sacrificed as a picture of substitutionary death for Israel's sin. The priest would lay his hands on the head of the second goat who'd absorb the iniquities and rebellion of the people as the bearer of sins. Following this transfer of guilt, the goat would be sent into the wilderness, taking those sins away from the Israelites to a remote place where it would die.

Imagine this goat's experience as the hand that has fed him abandons and betrays him in the wilderness. Now alone, lacking food, water and protection from wild animals, this goat bears the sins of the people. Isolated. Wandering. Starvation. Death.

Now think about how this practice of scapegoating fits Jesus' experience on the first Good Friday. He was our scapegoat. Foreshadowing Jesus' death, Isaiah 53:8 tells us that *by oppression and judgment he was taken away and yet, who of his generation protested? He was cut off from the land of the living and punished for the transgression of my people. Jesus was innocent and undeserving of death just like that scapegoat. 2 Corinthians 5:21 reveals that Jesus did for His people what the scapegoat did for Israel: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And Psalm 103:12 tells us that *as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us.**

In our world, justice tells us that scapegoating is wrong—we must own our wrongs personally. But Leviticus 16 reminds us that we need a spiritual scapegoat—someone without blame, qualified and willing to take our sins and remove them from us. Jesus is the only true scapegoat as Hebrews 9:28 reminds us: *Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. He did for us what he did not deserve.* He did what only He could do.

Our scapegoat has already taken the blame for all of our sins. But we must acknowledge Him as our scapegoat. Have you made that acknowledgement? Are you willing to do that today?

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for taking my sins and dying on my behalf. Thank you for the pain, loneliness and rejection You endured on the cross. I embrace You today as my Saviour, my scapegoat. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 26:36-42; John 1:29; 1 Timothy 2:5-6



THE SABBATH



Day 06 • March 20 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 20:8-11

Those who love to work often struggle with the Biblical concept of sabbath. Sabbath, the practice of taking a weekly break from our work, runs counter to many today. Perhaps you're one of them. If you are, today's devotional might just be for you.

The roots of sabbath go back to the story of creation in Genesis. After creating heaven and earth in six days, God rested His work on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2). The reason behind this is not, of course, that God was weary of His work and needed rest. His power and energy are unbounded.

So what does it mean that God rested? Simply put, it means He stopped working, ceasing from His labour. And this is crucial to understanding His establishment of a Sabbath day and the role of Christ as our Sabbath rest.

God set an example of a Sabbath day's rest to establish the principle of Sabbath rest for His people. In Exodus 20:8-11, God included this principle as one of His ten commandments. Every seventh day out of seven, they were to rest from their labours. Whatever work they were engaged in was to stop for a full day each week.

Now put yourself in an Israelite sandal for a minute. After wandering homeless in the desert for four decades, rest meant entering the land, cultivating crops, building homes and families and caring for flocks and herds. All these things involved significant hard work, but by God's command, their lives now involved rest. Now these folks could live in peace, without fear of attack.

And yet, Israel's rest in the promised land was not what God ultimately had in mind for His people. If that was all He had in mind, God wouldn't have spoken about another day of rest still to come as He did in Hebrews 4:8-9. We read: *If Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God wouldn't have spoken about another day of rest still to come. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God.*

The writer of Hebrews wants us to understand that the reason we can rest is because of the work Jesus has done for us. When we're saved by Christ, we can rest not because we're good or have done good, but because Jesus is good and He's passed His goodness to us as a gift.

Today, many continue to live as if their salvation depends on the good things they do. But the truth is, Jesus is the only one who can deal with our sin and give us rest. We can't work for our salvation; it doesn't work. Only by God's grace can we experience spiritual rest. And that spiritual or special rest is "still waiting" to be found in our true Sabbath—Jesus Christ—by anyone who has not entered into His rest.

But we must acknowledge Him as such—as our true Sabbath. We must find our rest in Him. Have you done that? Have you embraced Him as your Sabbath today?

Prayer: *Jesus, I want You to be my sabbath rest. I know You alone can give me rest. Help me to abide in You and remain in the rest You offer—not only rest for eternity, but rest for today. I place my trust in You and ask You to help me to rest in You today—all day—no matter what comes my way. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Matthew 11:28-30; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 4:1-11



A PROPHET GREATER THAN MOSES



Day 07 • March 21 • **Scripture Reading:** Deuteronomy 18:15

The Jewish community at the time of Jesus considered Moses to be the G.O.A.T. (Greatest of All Time). Even today Moses is considered the greatest prophet of all time in Jewish circles. Google it, “Jewish, greatest prophet,” and you will see. Those of us who are journeying with Jesus know He superseded Moses for that title, and we know that Moses publicly relinquished the position to the Lord before He went to the cross (Matthew 17:1–8).

In Deuteronomy 18:15–19, after Moses had led the people of Israel through their forty-year journey in the wilderness, God gave him a message of hope for Israel’s future. God said one who was “like” Moses would come and lead His people into an age culminating in ultimate submission and obedience (v. 19). Fifteen-hundred years later, Jesus began His public ministry proclaiming Himself to the Jewish community to be that prophet (Luke 4:18–19). Those in the temple that day could have tested Jesus’ claim by looking back on His life, checking off the boxes that made Him like Moses.

- An evil king sought Jesus’ death when He was born, just like Moses.
- Jesus was a foreigner in Egypt, just like Moses (Matthew 2:13).
- Jesus came out of Egypt and “wandered” for forty days in the desert, just like Moses wandered for forty years.

The community could have continued their test of Jesus in the three years that followed.

- Jesus shared a new law given on a mountaintop, just like Moses (Matthew 5:1).
- Jesus miraculously fed the masses in the wilderness, just like Moses.
- Jesus’s face glowed in the presence of God, just like Moses (Matthew 17:1–8).

If the people were looking for these comparisons, they would have realized that the message of hope God promised Moses fifteen-hundred years prior had been fulfilled in Jesus—*“I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you.”*

We see similarities in Moses and Jesus’ lives, but we also see how Jesus surpasses Moses as a prophet and has become the GOAT.

- Jesus freed His followers from sin’s effect—death, whereas Moses freed his followers from physical bondage.
- Jesus invites His followers into an eternal promise, whereas Moses opened the door for his followers to experience a temporal promise.
- Jesus empowered His followers to live holy lives as He gave His Spirit, whereas Moses gave the law which demonstrated the inability of people to live consistent, holy lives despite their best efforts.

The ultimate difference between Jesus and Moses that makes Him the greatest is the restored authority the Father gave His Son after the cross. God mentioned it to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:19: *It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.*

God was saying, “Gone will be the days of frustration that you have experienced with a people who grumble and are prone to wander. Under this prophet’s ministry I will make every knee bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.” Those who have chosen to follow Jesus can rejoice today that they have seen His greatness at the foot of the cross.

Prayer: *Jesus, You are the Greatest of All Time. Continue to teach me, encourage me, lead me in this journey to our promised reward. I am listening today for Your wisdom, Your exhortation, and Your guidance. I love You Jesus. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Luke 4:16–24, Acts 3:17–26



A KING GREATER THAN DAVID



Day 08 • March 22 • **Scripture Reading:** Psalm 110

Glory. Authority. Conqueror. Master. These are words that come to mind when we hear the word “king.” Think of all of the kings you have read or heard about. What makes him a good king? Is it his ability to take care of his people? His kind disposition? His mercy or swift justice? Maybe it’s something else. A king was always a part of God’s plan, but what kind of a ruler did God have in mind?

For a long time, kings led God’s people. Of the twenty rulers who ruled Judah, only five of them were righteous. The rest “*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.*” The righteous kings tore down pagan altars, built towers, and defeated enemies, but ultimately we are told that they were righteous because of their faithfulness to the Lord. They followed God and as a result they were blessed by Him. But they were flawed, broken and human. When it comes to following God, no one did that better than Jesus. He always has been, and will be, the real king. Psalm 110 prophesies of this greater King who is coming.

Jesus was born a king. He is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. He was born from the line of David, in the town of Bethlehem, and the Magi followed a star in search of this infant “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). While kings of the Old Testament were anointed with oil, Jesus was anointed by Mary when she poured perfume over His feet. He was recognized as king in His time on earth when He was welcomed into Jerusalem like royalty, the crowd waving palm branches and spreading their coats on the ground before Him. Jesus acknowledged His own kingship and authority.

All four gospels record a conversation between Pilate and Jesus, and we read that “*the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.*” Finally, Jesus died a king. He was mocked by the Roman soldiers and was forced to wear a crown made of thorns. When listing his crime, Pilate wrote that Jesus was the “King of the Jews.” Ironically, what was intended to ridicule and condemn, served to further illuminate Jesus’ true status.

In addition to the above, Jesus is king, not only of the physical world but of the world to come. Speaking of Jesus in Revelation 19:16 John writes, “*On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.*” It is who He is and was created to be.

Glory for the Father. Authority to cast out demons and sickness. Conqueror of the grave. Master of creation. Jesus embodied all of these kingly things, albeit in an unexpected way. This requires something of us—an acknowledgement of His Lordship over our life. Jesus is the ultimate king of not only the Jews, but Gentiles too. So we submit to His authority and give up doing things our own way to follow His example. We know someday “*at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth*” and “*that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:10-11). He is our king yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Prayer: *King Jesus, we praise You. We acknowledge Your authority in our lives, and give You Your rightful place as Lord of our hearts. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Psalm 110:1-7; Matthew 21:1-5; John 18:33-34; John 18:36; Revelation 17:14



THE PLACE OF REFUGE



Day 09 • March 23 • **Scripture Reading:** Numbers 35:6-15

Human life has always been precious in God's eyes. That's because He made us in His image. When God blessed Noah after the flood, He instituted capital punishment, requiring that "if anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image." In other words, if you commit murder, you've destroyed the image of God in humans.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples practiced capital punishment as a consequence for murder—to protect the rest of society permanently from the murderer. In a culture ruled by tribal law with no police force, the victim's next of kin, known as the "blood avenger," had a civil obligation to execute the murderer. This practice extended to manslaughter, the unintentional, accidental killing of another person.

But to the God of Israel, the heart's motive was as important as the action itself. So He created a distinction between murder and manslaughter. As Israel settled in the promised land, six "cities of refuge" were built to protect killers from the blood avenger. Anyone who unintentionally killed another person could flee to one of these cities and await a fair trial. If the fugitive was convicted of murder, he was turned over to the blood avenger who had the legal responsibility to execute the killer. But if he were convicted of manslaughter instead, the killer could live in the city of refuge, protected from the blood avenger until the high priest died. At that time, he could return to his home without fear of reprisal. It was a merciful legal arrangement, revolutionary in the culture. The city of refuge was a safe place to shelter in a time of trouble.

Refuge. It's a beautiful picture. Its original meaning is applied throughout scripture to describe the safety and security we find in the character of God during times of trouble. Here are a few examples:

Psalm 46:1—"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble."

Psalm 9:9—"The Lord is a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble."

Psalm 91:1-2—"Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'"

Hebrews 6:18—"We who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us."

It's been a year of losses for many of us. Loss of connection, income and family vacations. Some have lost family members. It feels like Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas passed us by. No family dinners, church community, Christmas carols. We've felt isolation, grief, impatience, and sometimes anger.

So how are YOU doing? Is there an area of your life that's especially hard right now? The losses seem overwhelming, the isolation endless? In need of rest? God invites you to find refuge in His unchanging character. He is for us when life seems against us. He offers inner peace when our outer world is chaotic, joy in the midst of sorrow, His presence during times of isolation. Hope when all this seems like it will never end. He invites us to trust Him.

Prayer: *Lord, whatever my circumstances or feelings, please draw me to trust in You, my refuge, my fortress, and my strong deliverer. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Genesis 4:10-11; 9:1-7; Exodus 21:12; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20; Psalm 62:5-8



THE SUFFERING SERVANT



Day 10 • March 24 • **Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12

700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote four “servant song” poems which portray the coming Messiah as a suffering servant.

When God first created humanity, His intent was that all of creation could look at humans and know what God is like. But His first humans failed. They were hardly an accurate picture of God’s character.

So God chose the nation of Israel to do what He intended for all of humanity to do—show the other nations around them what God is like. He called it becoming “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6). But Israel, like Adam and Eve before them, also failed. Isaiah accused them of being deaf, blind, and rebellious (Isaiah 42:18-19).

God would now provide an individual, the “Servant.” Depicted as the ideal Israelite, He would succeed where national Israel failed. A royal figure on whom is God’s Spirit, He’s a trusted representative who comes out of Israel and will act as a faithful witness to God’s purposes toward Israel and the other nations.

Isaiah paints a picture of His job description:*

1. He will bring justice and righteousness to the nations, ruling with strength like a king.
2. He will also be gentle and gracious, show compassion for the suffering, comfort the weary, mend broken lives, heal the sick and bring freedom to prisoners. People matter to this God.
3. He will be a light to the Gentiles, bringing salvation to the whole world.
4. His obedience to God will lead to terrible suffering. The nations will despise and reject Him, unjustly condemning Him, even though He came to bring justice for them. Though innocent, He will be put to death like a criminal and be buried “with the wicked.”
5. After being disgraced, God will vindicate Him, raise Him from death, and exalt Him. He’ll be satisfied with His accomplishments, like a king sharing in the spoils of a great victory.

The “Servant” would do all this so that through His injury, humanity could be whole; a substitute offering by the innocent on behalf of the guilty, like the Passover lamb. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests, but the “Servant” would be THE high priest who would atone for the sins of the world.

Jesus made it clear that He was that “Servant.” But His audience didn’t get it. They weren’t expecting their Messiah to be a humble servant. They thought He would reveal His “mighty arm” and defeat Rome, like He had Pharaoh. Healing the sick and raising the dead to life is what Messiahs are supposed to do. But dying? That was NOT what Messiahs do. His own disciples balked when He dared to suggest it. He countered, “There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends.” “Whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” I’m going to die—for you.

Have you allowed Jesus to be your “suffering servant” today? Do you believe He suffered and died for you so that you could live forever with God? Embrace Him as your “suffering servant” today!

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for taking the punishment for my sin upon Yourself. Forgive me for my sin. Thank you that by Your wounds I have been healed. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Leviticus 5:14-19; Psalm 22; John 15:13; Mark 10:41-45; Philippians 2:6-8

**See the Appendix at the end of this devotional guide (Pages 25-27) to examine how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies about the Suffering Servant revealed in Isaiah 53.*



LIVING WATER



Day 11 • March 25 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 17:1-7

The Israelites were in the desert and out of water—again. Last time it happened, they had just escaped from Egypt. Out of water and food, they complained bitterly. God miraculously provided drinking water from a rock, plus manna and quail. And the people saw “the awesome glory of the LORD in the cloud” (Exodus 16:10).

Now they were out of water and complaining—again. “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us?” They thought they were putting God on trial, but in fact He was testing them to see if they trusted Him to care for their needs. They had plenty of evidence. He had just finished demolishing the entire belief system of Egypt, bringing down their gods in disgrace. Then there was that pillar—the cloud leading them by day, and the fire at night. It had stood as protection between them and Pharaoh’s pursuing army. If that weren’t enough, He had created a pathway through the Red Sea to complete their escape to freedom. It would go down as the most momentous event in their history, retold for centuries through song, story, and national celebrations.

Incredibly (we arrogantly think!), they doubted His goodness. “Is the LORD here with us or not?” Moses already knew the answer. “I will be with you,” God had said at the burning bush. And He was. He simply had Moses use his famous staff to strike a rock and water gushed out! They were saved again.

Fast forward. They’d been wandering around the desert for years, experiencing God’s care the entire way. Again, no water. They turned on Moses and Aaron with a familiar accusation, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in this desert?” Moses and Aaron went to the entrance of the Tabernacle and fell face down on the ground. “Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them.” And—again—God provided water from a rock. What a pattern! Each time they needed basic sustenance, God performed two gracious acts: He provided for their needs, and He showed them His presence.

Fast forward a few centuries. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, levelled two blistering accusations against His wayward people. They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water (the one true God). And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water (false gods). In other words, “You’re looking for the thirst of your soul to be met everywhere except the one place it can be met—me.”

Fast forward again. Jesus, the Prophet Greater Than Moses, is now the thirsty one. He sits by a well and asks a woman for a drink. He doesn’t care that rabbis aren’t supposed to talk to women, or that she’s a reviled Samaritan. He tells her He can give her “living water.” She has no idea what He means. “Your water satisfies in this life. Mine gives you eternal life.” Using water as a metaphor for Himself, He claims she’ll live forever if she believes in Him.

Later, Jesus made the same claim, this time publicly. “If you’re thirsty, come to me. Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.”

Where are you looking for your soul’s satisfaction? Jesus says, “Come to me. I alone satisfy.”

Prayer: *Lord, draw me to trust that You are the one who can satisfy my soul. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Numbers 20:2-13; Isaiah 12:3; 55:1-3; John 4:1-42; I Corinthians 10:1-4



THE BREAD OF LIFE



Day 12 • March 26 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 16

The people grumbled. They were tired and hungry. Only a month before, they had watched, stunned, while Yahweh brought miraculous “signs and wonders,” one plague after another, on their oppressors, overthrowing Egypt’s gods and redeeming them from slavery.

Apparently, it wasn’t enough. “If only Yahweh had killed us back in Egypt,” they moaned. “There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Now you have brought us into this desert to starve us all to death.”

He could have been offended and let them die as they anticipated. Yet Yahweh, ever committed to His redeemed people, responded with grace. He sent manna—a miraculous bread from heaven—to cover the desert floor each morning accompanied by quail each evening. And God did so for the next forty years until they came to the border of the land of Canaan (Exodus 16:35).

Fifteen-hundred years later, their descendants found themselves in another desert, near the Sea of Galilee. They watched again as Yahweh, this time in human form, performed another set of “signs and wonders.” He healed the sick, cast out demons, calmed storms, and raised the dead back to life. Like their ancestors, they were tired and hungry. “This is a desert place,” said His disciples. “Send them away so they can go buy food.”

“No,” He replied, “YOU feed them.” They couldn’t, so He did. From a boy’s sack lunch, he fed 5,000 men, plus women and children. This was not the first time their Messiah had fed them bread in the desert and His claim was unmistakable. “You say I’m Joseph’s son. You’re wrong. Remember the God who brought you out of Egypt with ‘signs and wonders’? I’m standing in front of you. The Redeemer of Exodus is here. I’ve come to redeem you again.”

Still, they doubted. “What should we do?” they asked. His answer was simple. “Believe in me.” Incredibly, they answered, “Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you.” (Really? He just fed thousands from a sack lunch and they want another miraculous sign?!) “After all,” they continued, “our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the desert.” (Aha, they’re starting to make the connection!) “The Scriptures say, ‘Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

“No,” He countered, “that’s the second time today you’ve failed to recognize God. That wasn’t Moses. That was my Father. And now He’s offering you something far better than manna. He’s offering you ‘true bread’ from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “give us that bread.”

Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again.” In a moment, He moved the discussion to something (and Someone) far more important than manna. “The bread you ate today only gives you physical life. I give eternal life.” Focused on the wrong bread, they failed to grasp that He hadn’t come to GIVE bread, but to BE bread. That “bread,” His body, would soon be offered as a sacrifice for their sins.

How are you like Jesus’ audience, focused on the temporal rather than the eternal? Do you expect God to be someone who merely dispenses comfort, or will you trust that He alone can satisfy the deepest needs of your heart?

Prayer: *Oh Lord, teach me to pursue a lifestyle with eternal values, a life of satisfaction in You alone. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Exodus 7-12; Psalm 78:17-29



THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD



Day 13 • March 27 • **Scripture Reading:** John 8:12

A noise rises from the living room late at night. Groggily, you slip out of bed and fumble through the dark hallways and down the stairs. Your heart flips as you think you've reached the bottom step but find there was one more. You round a corner and bash your shin into a coffee table. You grope the wall for what seems like an hour before finding the light switch. You flip the switch, and everything comes into blinding focus. The noise was just the dog.

Without light, our lives are difficult. God knows this. From the very beginning of Genesis, God's first words are "Let there be light." This light would allow the rest of God's creation to see His glory and craftsmanship. It would allow plants to flourish and animals to navigate the garden. It would allow Adam and Eve to walk with God in the cool of the day without stubbing toes or stumbling into trees.

But God's light is not just a passive revealer of that which already is. It is also His guiding and protecting hand that leads us through the darkness. For forty years, God led His people through the desert with a pillar of flame that protected them from Pharaoh's armies. God's light was His shield of protection and the beacon that guided Israel on their journey.

And this is where things get interesting. Sun and fire and electricity are not the only sources of light. In fact, they aren't even the primary light. John tells us that, from the beginning, Jesus was the light of the world. "In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind," (John 1:4). All of the physical light we see is but a reflection of the true light. And, even more amazing, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

Jesus affirmed this truth Himself and showed how it would affect His people: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Did you catch that? When we follow Jesus, we never have to walk in spiritual darkness. We don't need to stumble through life wondering where we're going or if we're about to meet sudden disaster. Jesus illuminates the world around us, giving meaning and keeping us from wandering off in the darkness.

For those of us following Jesus today, we must trust in Jesus as He shines His light on us and on the world. It can be tough to have our sins brought to light. It's so much more comfortable to keep them hidden in the dark where we can deny that they exist. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). When Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, convicts us of sin in our lives, we must confess, admit that He is right, and allow His light to shine into our darkness.

Finally, as we draw close to the Light through His Word, He illuminates our path, just as He did for the Israelites. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105). When we follow this path, we steer clear of the darkness that brings confusion, pain, and hopelessness.

Prayer: *Lord, shine Your light in my life today. Show me where I keep sin hidden in darkness, and light the true path for my feet. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Matthew 5:15-16; John 9:35-41; Ephesians 5:8; Isaiah 42:16



THE GATE



Day 14 • March 28 • **Scripture Reading:** John 10:7-10

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus uses several metaphors to reveal who He is. By means of seven pictures, Jesus puts skin and bones to His character and purpose. He is the bread from heaven, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life and finally, the true vine. Today we zoom in on Jesus' picture of Himself as the gate.

John 10 begins with Jesus talking about an everyday element of life in His day—sheep. He compares Himself to the gatekeeper of a sheepfold who, every morning, opens the gate to the shepherd who leads his sheep from their nighttime pen to places of pasture. Jesus differentiates between a shepherd whose sheep know his voice and a robber from whom sheep will run. Jesus is the good shepherd whose sheep know him (John 10:1-5).

Immediately following, Jesus introduces Himself as the gate for the sheep. Verse 7 says: *"I'm telling you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They'll come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal, kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life"* (John 10:7-10).

"I am the gate for the sheep"—key words! Jesus makes the bold claim that He and He alone is the way to a *"rich and satisfying life."* And His words echo the exclusive claim made by our God that He is the only means by which we can experience true life. Put more pointedly—Jesus is the only *"gate"* to real life. He is our salvation.

Consider some of the ways this is expressed throughout the Old Testament. God says in Deuteronomy 6:4: *"Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone."* In 2 Samuel 7:22, David prays: *"How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There's no one like you. We've never even heard of another God like you!"* And Psalm 86:8-10 says: *"No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do! All the nations you made will come and bow before you, Lord. They will praise your holy name. For you are great and perform wonderful deeds. You alone are God."*

These and hundreds of other Scriptures loudly proclaim that our God is the true God, the One capable of saving us and giving us real life as Jesus says so boldly in John 10:10. He is the one and only gate to life. To enter abundant and eternal life, we must enter through Him. The fourth century church leader Augustine of Hippo put it this way in his Confessions: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

So a question for you before you return to your day: Is Jesus your gate to abundant and eternal life? Have you walked into eternal life through the gate that He offers to be for you today? If not, why don't you pause right now to invite Him to be your gate? If so, why don't you stop and thank Him for being your gate?

Prayer: *By faith oh Lord Jesus, I proclaim You to be my gate. Continue to lead me as I enter into real and abundant life through You and You alone. Amen.*

Going Deeper: John 3:1-17; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5



THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Day 15 • March 29 • **Scripture Reading:** Psalm 23

Look at any Christmas card portraying the nativity and you'll see a figure off to one side. Often solitary, he sometimes has friends. He'll be young, with brown, curly hair and often a lamb on his shoulders. He's the meek, gentle shepherd. One of those to whom the angels appeared and announced the birth of the Son of God. His job title conjures up images of green meadows, lazy afternoons and freedom from all the decadence of society. Carefree boys who lie in the grass or play softly on their musical instruments. While there may be truth to this imagery, the reality of a shepherd's life is far less quaint.

Sheep were plentiful in the ancient near east. They were kept for food, clothing, and sacrifice, and the size of a person's flocks were a good indication of their wealth and status. But the keeping of so many sheep required shepherds. These men and women were entrusted to lead the sheep under their care to pastures of good grass. They had to make sure the sheep got enough water to drink. They were expected to find any sheep that got lost along the day's journey and protect the flock from predators like bears, lions, and wolves.

Leadership. Provision. Protection. These are all attributes that God claims for Himself in the Old Testament. The well-known Psalm 23 paints a vivid picture of God as the Good Shepherd, leading His people to what they need and protecting them from enemies. Psalm 100 echoes this sentiment by claiming, "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture."

Jesus made specific use of this metaphor. In John 10, Jesus speaks about what a good shepherd looks like: "After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:4). The good shepherd leads his flock, but that's not all he does. Jesus goes on, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." He takes His responsibility to look after His sheep so seriously that He is willing to die for them. He continues: "I know my own sheep, and they know me" (John 10:14). The good shepherd has a relationship with his sheep, one where each is known and loved by the other.

What does this mean for us? Today, we often recoil from being called sheep. It brings to mind a lack of individuality (I probably couldn't tell one sheep from another if I tried), a lack of passion (the only energy we typically see from sheep is when they run from a sheepdog), and blind obedience. But this is not what Jesus is calling us to. He knows each one of His sheep, all of their dreams and challenges, their strengths and brokenness. He knows what each one needs and, like a shepherd, is willing to get His hands dirty to walk with us. His only request is that we, like sheep, follow Him. If we do, "His goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, my Good Shepherd, thank you for Your call to follow. Thank you for the provision and protection You give to all of Your sheep. Help me to follow You, wherever You lead. Help me to keep my eyes on You today and for the rest of my life. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Psalm 80:1-3; Isaiah 40:9-11; Ezekiel 34; John 10:26-29



THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE



Day 16 • March 30 • **Scripture Reading:** John 14:6

The book of Proverbs is an amazing book! Thirty-one chapters of wisdom written by Solomon and a variety of authors. Someone has suggested that meditating on a chapter from Proverbs each day will, over time, pay great dividends in the pursuit of becoming a wise person.

Interestingly, Proverbs is not addressed to those who read the book. As you read, you listen in as a father gives his son advice about how to live life in a wise manner, avoiding foolish choices along the way. Time and time again, this father makes it clear to his son that there are two pathways—two “ways”—that lie open to him. Throughout his life, this son will need to choose one way from the other.

The first path or “way” is the way of wisdom. This path leads him to a full and meaningful life (Proverbs 2:8). This way of wisdom is how we experience the presence of God in life. The other path or “way” is the way of folly. This way is dark and crooked (Proverbs 2:13-15) and filled with dangers along the way. In the end, as opposed to leading to life, this way clearly leads to death and destruction. Proverbs 14:12 makes it obvious that this is the wrong way: *“There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.”*

As we read the gospels, we realize how often Jesus spoke of the two paths or ways or choices His listeners needed to choose between. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the choice of two roads, the danger of trying to serve two masters and two ways of building. One road leads to destruction, the other to life. One master is God and the other is money. One can choose to be a wise or a foolish builder.

Perhaps the way of Jesus is best described in Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14: *“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”*

What Jesus tells those who will listen is that the way exposed in the choices put forth in the book of Proverbs ultimately come down to choosing Him and choosing His way. He is the way, the truth and the life. Proverbs describes a way of wisdom that leads to life through God. But Jesus brought far greater meaning to that “way”—He put it in far more personal terms for us. His statement in John 14:6 to the doubting disciple Thomas makes this very clear. Jesus says to him: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

Deciding about the “way” we choose in life is not merely about building or choosing wisely in life. Ultimately it comes down to the choice as to how we respond to Christ and whether or not we will choose Him as our path, our life—our “way.”

Let’s put it bluntly to close today’s devotional: Have you chosen Him as your way?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, my way of salvation and pathway to life, I choose You today. I run to You to find peace and joy, contentment and meaning even as I live into my salvation today. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Take time to read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.



THE TRUE VINE



Day 17 • March 31 • **Scripture Reading:** John 15:1-5

What is God like? Across the globe, throughout our existence, we've asked that question. Romans 1:21 tells us that throughout human history, we've refused to worship God and give Him thanks even as we've thought up foolish ideas of what God is like.

The folks of Jesus' day thought they understood what God was like. From their forefathers' stories, to the law of Moses, to temple practices, to what they read of the prophets, a particular picture of what God was like formed in their heads. And then along came Jesus, wrapped in human flesh, filling in the gaps of who God is. As He revealed himself in spoken words, those willing to listen and believe began to see what God was really like.

On one occasion, Jesus made the claim that He was the true vine and His Father was the gardener. As so often occurred, Jesus set His identity in relationship to God the Father, a practice that rocked all who listened to Him. This occasion was no different—what Jesus was saying was unprecedented and carried deep meaning.

Through the prophet Hosea, God compared Israel to a vine. *"How prosperous Israel is—a luxuriant vine loaded with fruit. But the richer the people get, the more pagan altars they build. The more bountiful their harvests, the more beautiful their sacred pillars"* (Hosea 10:1). Those words are not unique to the prophets; more than one of them used this metaphor to describe God's people. But even as Hosea points out, the use of a vine as a metaphor for God's people was a problem.

In truth, the fruit produced by Israel (the vine) was outward and nothing more. Throughout the Old Testament, we find Israel building hundreds of altars and sacred objects, but none of them were made to bring glory to God. Their "worship" was nothing more than religiosity, devoid of connection to God. So God used the prophets to remind Israel that the only way they could produce good fruit was by drawing their life once again from Him. He proclaimed through Hosea: *"O Israel, stay away from idols! ... I am like a tree that is always green. all your fruit comes from me"* (Hosea 14:8).

The real solution to Israel's need to produce righteous and bountiful fruit came with Jesus. This became abundantly clear when Jesus told His disciples He was the true Vine. Inviting them to draw their life from Him, Jesus offered all people—not only those who had historically been labeled as God's people, but all people—a way by which they could bear real fruit for God. *"Remain in me and I'll remain in you,"* He said. *"You can't produce fruit severed from the vine. You are branches who will produce much fruit connected to me. But apart from me you can do nothing."*

What a wonderful reminder in this season of moving toward Easter! Unlike those of Hosea's day, we have the Holy Spirit who helps us to bear fruit by remaining on the true Vine. The question is always: *Will I abide in Him today?*

Prayer: *Oh Jesus my true Vine, only You can give me life and make me fruitful. Without You I will live an empty life of religion. With You my life will fill with the fruit of the Spirit. I need You to come and fill my life with Your strength. Help me to abide in You today. Amen.*

Going Deeper: John 15:5-8; Galatians 5:22-23



THE SIN OFFERING



Day 18 • April 1 • **Scripture Reading:** Leviticus 4

No one intends to come up short. A student doesn't study day after day all semester long only to fall short of an "A" by fractions of a point. Promising scholars dream of acing their exams to gain acceptance in the university of their choice. No serious-minded student will deliberately tank a test, but we all have experienced failing grades. Thanks be to God for His foresight! He knew what our dilemma would be and He made a plan for all who come up short.

In both the Old Testament (written in Hebrew) and the New Testament (written in Greek), the word for "sin" means to "fall short of God's perfection." Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, mankind has time and time again missed the mark. In Leviticus 4, God outlined the specific way He would resolve humanity's sin problem—the Israelite sacrificial system. This passage teaches in detail that the sacrifice of a bull or a goat must be made for everyone who falls short, for everyone who sins. Leviticus calls it "the sin offering."

It's interesting to note that the sin discussed in this chapter is unintentional sin. God was sharing a noteworthy truth: Even if people don't intentionally set out to sin, inevitably they will fall short at some point. Whether that sin is calculated or involuntary, people are in need of God's resolution.

God shared His plan for cleansing and forgiving our sins some 1,500 years before Jesus entered our world. Throughout the centuries with the repetition of countless sacrifices, the people who knew the one true God—Yahweh—were familiar with His redemptive plan through sacrifice. They knew what the author of Hebrews knew, that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (Hebrews 9:22). When Jesus went to the cross, the people were so accustomed to the idea of sacrifice they weren't shocked by the idea of someone dying as a sacrifice for another. But rather they were in awe at the love of their God who would sacrifice His own Son for them.

The world is filled with almost eight billion people racing back and forth with all sorts of plans in pursuit of their dreams. Every day nearly eight billion people fall short. God in His grace knew, and He planned a remedy—His Son.

Oh, how sweet is the realization and acceptance of Jesus when a person comes to the foot of the cross. It is an amazing experience to look up at His blood-soaked hair and the skin ripped from His bones and not recoil with repulsion. How incredible it is to experience the love of the Father through the sacrifice of His Son. Oh, the wonder of it all!

Prayer: *Jesus... Jesus... Jesus. Thank you for loving me. Thank you, Father, for making a way for me to stand in your presence forgiven. Thank you for cleansing me from all sin—the sin I've willfully committed and the sin I was unaware of. I am in awe of You. Amen.*

Going Deeper: 1 Peter 4:19; John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:22



THE PASSOVER LAMB



Day 19 • April 2 • **Scripture Reading:** Exodus 12

Every spring Israelites from all over the country would go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover by sacrificing a lamb as part of the feast. Matthew 21 tells of Jesus making His triumphal entry into the city. This was the very day that flocks of Passover lambs were being herded into the city in preparation for the upcoming feast. That connection—Jesus entering Jerusalem even as those lambs did—is more than coincidence. As we continue walking toward Good Friday, it's important to recognize the deep connection between Jesus and those lambs.

Find Exodus 12 and read the first thirteen verses. In them we discover that God is about to bring His final judgment on the Egyptians due to Pharaoh's refusal to let his Israelite slaves go. God has announced His intention to put to death every firstborn male in Egypt both human and animal. But God intends to spare His people from the Egyptian's judgment.

Early in this chapter, God instructs each Israelite household to kill and eat a year-old lamb or goat. Then they are to take its blood and *“put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where you eat.”* Later in verse 13, God explains His rationale. *“The blood,”* He says, *“will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”*

The phrase God uses here—*“pass over”*—means more than skipping over something to avoid contact. The single Hebrew word that God uses here means to spread wings over something in order to protect. By it, God is saying that He will not only pass over the Israelites' houses, but He will also stand behind those doors, protecting all who are within. As the story unfolds, we discover that that is exactly what God does. Not a single Israelite firstborn is killed.

The Passover lamb—the source of the Israelites' protection—was to be a choice male in the prime of life. As we read that, it is natural to think about another Lamb who was in the prime of His life. Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His public ministry. The Passover lamb was to be without blemish and 1 Peter 1:19 tells us that Jesus was *“the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.”* The Passover lamb was to be killed to save the lives of others; Revelation 5:9 tells us that *“Jesus was slaughtered and his blood has ransomed people for God.”*

It is no wonder that when John the Baptist sees Jesus walking toward him in John 1, he says: *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* And it's no wonder that the Apostle Paul refers to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 5:7 as *“Christ, our Passover Lamb, who has been sacrificed for us.”* And He was put to death in the most public and painful way possible and with the application of His blood to our lives, we experience the “passing over” of the judgment of God even as those Israelites did so long ago.

Have you—like John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle—claimed Him as your Passover Lamb?

Prayer: *God of wrath and mercy, see the precious blood of my Passover Lamb covering my life and pass over me. The blood of Your Son has brought to me protection from judgment and payment for sin. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Isaiah 53:1-2; Matthew 26:2; 26:26-28. 1 Peter 1:19



THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST



Day 20 • April 3 • **Scripture Reading:** John 19:23-27

The soldiers had been ruthless. They had stripped Him, ridiculed His claim to kingship by putting on a purple robe and a crown of thorns, spit on Him, hit Him on the head, slapped His face and jeered. Kneeling before Him in mock royal worship, they had scoffed, “Hail! King of the Jews!”

And then they had nailed Him to the cross.

Now they took His clothing. In an act of petty gambling, they first divided His clothes, like the spoils of war, among the four of them. They each got a piece. But when they took His robe, they discovered it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom and therefore too valuable to tear apart. So they threw dice to decide who got it. It stayed whole, intact and untornd. One of those men got a free robe that day.

They were oblivious to the fact that, with uncanny precision, they were fulfilling a Messianic prophecy from Psalm 22. Written 1,000 years before by Jesus’ ancestor, King David, verse 18 states, “They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing.”

Perhaps the soldiers were reminded of their own cruelty earlier that day when they had forced Him to wear the other expensive robe, mocking His assertion that He was the King of the Jews.

And perhaps John, the writer, was making a poignant reminder to us of another robe, also a one-piece “tunic” of equally high quality, worn by the High Priest on the annual Day of Atonement, a powerful ritual reminding the people that it took a blood sacrifice to “cover” their sin (Leviticus 16:4, 23). Little did the soldiers know that the man hanging above them that day was the Great High Priest. They didn’t know. How could they have known? Actually, they should have known. On that cross He was preparing to offer the sacrifice.

Himself.

Nor would they have known that the sacrifice He was making was not just for Jews. It was also for Gentiles. Pagan Roman soldiers.

Them.

For as the soldiers beneath Him gambled for His clothes, He uttered a prayer that would surely have sent shockwaves through their souls. “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). He had been telling His disciples, “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). Now He was loving His.

Maybe you’re like the soldiers, overlooking the identity of the one who died in your place. The Great High Priest has covered your sin with His sacrifice on the cross, removing your guilt and giving you access to His presence and activity in your life (Hebrews 10:21-22).

Maybe you, like Jesus, have someone you need to forgive. A parent, child, or co-worker. An abuser, or a spouse who betrayed your trust. Your Great High Priest can help you forgive like He does.

Whatever your situation, may this be a weekend to reflect on the atoning sacrifice made by our Great High Priest on our behalf, to celebrate the life He has given us, and to look forward to His return!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord Jesus, my Great High Priest, for dying in my place. And for bringing me back to God. Amen.*

Going Deeper: Leviticus 8:7-9; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:23-26; 9:24



THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE



Day 21 • April 4 • **Scripture Reading:** John 11:1-44

“In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes.” The quote is attributed to Benjamin Franklin in 1789 (ironically, he died the following year), though a similar phrase was actually uttered by Christopher Bullock, an English dramatist, in 1716.

Nearly everyone in human history has believed it (at least the part about death!) since the tragedy in the Garden, when the Maker warned His first humans that if they rebelled against His goodness, they would die. Since then, everyone has. With the exception of three recorded stories in the Old Testament, nobody believes dead people come back to life.

Until a man called Jesus of Nazareth walked into the town of Nain and raised a widow’s son back to life in the middle of his funeral procession. Then He raised the 12-year-old daughter of Jairus, the local synagogue ruler, back to life. The crowds were stunned. “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” they mistakenly presumed.

But then Jesus started talking crazy talk. “I’m going to be betrayed into the hands of my enemies. I’ll be killed, but on the third day be raised from the dead.” It made no sense. Messiahs are supposed to heal people, show their power. Eventually, they’re supposed to really show their power and get rid of Rome. But dying at Rome’s hand instead? That’s NOT what Messiahs are supposed to do. His friend Peter told Him off.

Then their good friend Lazarus died. He lived in Bethany, a town only two miles from Jerusalem, where Jesus knew His enemies were laying a trap for His life. He went anyway. There was something He needed to show His audience. Lazarus’ sister, Martha, met Him coming into town. It was here that He made His most audacious claim: “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never die.” It seemed heartless, insensitive, taunting a grieving sister with the impossible. Martha and Mary had buried their brother just four days before. They knew what everyone else in human history knows. Dead people don’t come back to life. But Jesus wasn’t being cruel. He asked the two sisters to take Him to the tomb and roll the stone away. He prayed aloud, asking His Father to show His audience the “something” for which He had risked His life—He wasn’t the carpenter’s son; He was the Son of God.

And then He raised Lazarus from the dead. “I am the resurrection and the life,” He had boldly told Martha.

So it was that just a few weeks later, early on a Sunday morning after Passover, two women named Mary approached another tomb. To their utter astonishment, this tomb, like the one two weeks before, had the stone rolled away. Jesus’ body wasn’t inside. Yet they’d seen Him die on that cross on Friday afternoon. They knew what everyone else in the world knows. Dead people don’t come back to life. Terrified, they ran.

And then they saw Him. Wordless, they fell at His feet and worshipped Him. And they knew. This friend, this Jesus of Nazareth, truly was the Son of God, the world’s long-awaited Messiah. He had lived among them, died for their sins as He had predicted, and then—by far most importantly—had risen from the dead. He was alive!

“I am the resurrection and the life,” He claims.

There are things as certain as taxes. And there is even something as certain as death.

Resurrection.

APPENDIX

Isaiah 53 and the New Testament

Isaiah 53 Reference	Isaiah 53 Text	NT Reference	NT Text
Isaiah 53:1	Who has believed our message? (A rhetorical question, the answer being “no one.” Isaiah is lamenting that Israel has not heeded what he has just said about the coming Messiah in 52:13-15) To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?	John 12:37-38	Despite all the miraculous signs Jesus had done, most of the people still did not believe in him.
		Rom. 10:16	But not everyone welcomes the Good News.
		1 Cor. 1:27	God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.
Isaiah 53:2	My servant grew up in the LORD’S presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.	Luke 2:6-7	And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.
		John 1:45-46	Philip went to look for Nathaniel and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” “Nazareth!” explained Nathanael, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”
Isaiah 53:3	He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows and acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.	Matt. 27:21-22	The governor asked, “Which of these two do you want me to release to you?” The crowd shouted back, “Barabbas!” Pilate responded, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!”
		Mark 9:12	Jesus responded, “the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be treated with utter contempt.”
Isaiah 53:4	Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!	Matt. 8:16-17	That evening many demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. He cast out the evil spirits with a simple command, and he healed all the sick. This fulfilled the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, who said, “He took our sicknesses and removed our diseases.”
		Rom. 4:25	He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.
Isaiah 53:5	But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.	1 Pet. 2:24	He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.
		Matt. 26:67	Then they began to spit in Jesus’ face and beat him with their fists. And some slapped him, jeering...
		Matt. 27:26, 28-30	So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it.
		John 19:34	One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out.
Isaiah 53:6	All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all. [“God has piled all our sins, everything we’ve done wrong, on him.” – Max Lucado]	Rom. 3:23	For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.
		1 Pet. 2:25	Once you were like sheep who wandered away.
		John 1:29	The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

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Isaiah 53 and the New Testament

Isaiah 53 Reference	Isaiah 53 Text	NT Reference	NT Text
Isaiah 53:7	He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.	Matt. 26:62-63	Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" But Jesus remained silent.
		Mark 15:3-5	Then the leading priests kept accusing him of many crimes, and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer them?" What about all these charges they are bringing against you?" But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise.
		Luke 23:9	Herod asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus refused to answer.
		John 19:9	[Pilate] took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer.
		1 Pet. 2:23	He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
		1 Cor. 5:7	Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us.
Isaiah 53:8	Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people.	1 Pet. 3:18	Christ suffered for our sins once for all time, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.
Isaiah 53:9	He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. He was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.	John 19:4	Pilate went outside again and said to the people, "I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty."
		1 Pet. 2:22	He never sinned, nor deceived anyone.
		1 John 3:5	And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him.
		Matt. 27:38	Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.
		Matt. 27:57-60	As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follow of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left.
Isaiah 53:10	But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.	Phil. 2:8-9	He humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Isaiah 53:11	When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.	Rom. 5:18-19	Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.
Isaiah 53:12	I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for the rebels.	John 10:17-18	The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. Not one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again.
		Luke 22:37	For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: "He was counted among the rebels." Yes, everything written about me by the prophets will come true.
		Luke 23:33-34	When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified – one on his right and one on his left.
		Heb. 9:27-28	And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people.

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Isaiah 53 and the New Testament

Isaiah 53 Reference	Isaiah 53 Text	NT Reference	NT Text
Isaiah 53	[The whole chapter.]	<p>Luke 24: 46</p> <p>1 Pet. 1:10-11</p> <p>1 Cor. 15:3-4</p>	<p>And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.</p> <p>This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward.</p> <p>I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.</p>

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