

Jesus

The Gospel in the Flesh



*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,
(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)
full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

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Participant

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About this unit

The focus of this unit is the Gospels. We translate the Greek word, “*euangelion*,” as gospel in the New Testament.¹ The word means good tidings or good news specifically about the kingdom of God and even more specifically how the grace of God is manifested in salvation for us through Jesus Christ. With this definition we can see the logic of naming the first four books of the New Testament “The Gospels.” Those books share with the us the life, the ministry, the death and resurrection of Christ. He is the good news of salvation to the world, the very Gospel!

Mark in fact opens his book with these words, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Then he proceeds to share the prophecy regarding a messenger who would cry out “Prepare the way of the Lord,” and how John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy. John opens his Gospel declaring the Word was with God from the beginning and was God and became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus fulfilled the Word of God spoken through the prophets and the Law in the Old Testament displaying God’s glory, grace, and truth.

In Luke 4, Jesus was permitted to read in the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath. He shared these words about His ministry from Isaiah 61:1-2: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

As he closed the scroll, He said “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” We see evidence of this ministry throughout the Gospels. Jesus spoke of the Good News of the Kingdom, released people from bondage to sin, physically healed, and even opened spiritual eyes. John tells us in his Gospel the purpose of writing down all these works of Jesus: **“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”** (John 20:30-31)

Jesus is the Good News! He came to forgive sin, to offer abundant life, to offer healing, and to offer release from captivity to sin. That is good news! How did He accomplish that? During His time of earth, it was ultimately the power He had as God that allowed Him to bring healing, provision, and even resurrection of the dead. But it was His death and resurrection that ensure us the opportunity for a relationship with Him and eternal life as members of God’s Kingdom. That is the kind of good news that needs to be shouted from every street corner in our communities.

As we study the life of Christ in this unit, we will be looking at the different aspects of His ministry down on earth, and how each aspect is part of the message of the Gospel – the good news of Jesus that brings salvation, hope, healing, peace, and joy like nothing else in this world can. The Gospel offers abundant, eternal life!

The author of Hebrews tells us that **“In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** (Heb. 1:1-3)

I pray that these lessons will remind you of the radiance and glory of Jesus and of the simple truth of the Gospel. I pray this will help you know God more deeply and renew your passion to share the Gospel with the world around you.

The World in Jesus' Time

There have been many times over the course of history where you can see God's hand in a very clear way, but none are clearer than this time. Daniel recognized this and worshiped God by declaring that "He removes kings and establishes kings." (Daniel 2:21)

At the end of the last unit the Persian Empire controlled a lot of the known world. But the Greek leader, Alexander the Great, had expansion on his mind and successfully conquered the Persian Empire in the Battle of Issus in 333 BC.¹ He spread the Greek language and culture throughout the new Greek Empire. In the New Testament, Greek was still the language of the common people.² But Alexander the Great died a mere 10 years after conquering the Persians, and when no strong leader emerged the empire was divided into 4 parts each to be ruled by a different one of his generals. This was not a good situation because there was infighting between these 4 kingdoms for years.³ The one good for the Jews was the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. This translation was called the Septuagint after the 72 Jewish scholars who completed this first translation of the Bible.⁴

While all this unrest was going on in the 4 parts of the Greek Empire the Jews tried an uprising of their own in 167 BC called the Maccabean Revolt. This revolt started because their Greek rulers were demanding taxes and worship of Pagan gods. Many Jews were not interested in complying. This group of Maccabees managed to conquer Palestine, regain religious freedom, rededicate the temple, and push the troops back to Syria. But after the death of Judas Maccabeus in 160 BC a power struggle ensued, making it easy for General Pompey to come in 63 BC and subjugate Palestine once again, this time under Roman rule.⁵

While Pompey was on conquest to the east in the Mediterranean Basin, Julius Caesar was on the march in Gaul thus spreading power of the Roman Empire in multiple directions. But Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC and no one immediately assumed the throne.⁶ Ultimately, Octavian who was Julius Caesar's adopted son, hunted down his father's assassins and secured leadership of Rome in 31 BC.⁷

Octavian soon became known as Augustus and his rule ushered in the beginning of the 200-year period of peace known as the "Pax Romana" in the Roman Empire. Peace was not without a huge cost. The Senate granted Augustus almost unlimited powers. With this power he micro-managed the governors, often traveling with an army throughout the land. He rewarded the members of his army for their loyalty with both money and land. Having such a strong military kept revolts to a minimum. But to pay them, he increased his treasury through taxes. Taxation was the main purpose of the census he took that is mentioned in Luke 2:1-2. He personally kept all the taxes collected in the treasury in Rome to make sure the resources were spent appropriately. His other accomplishments included ridding the sea of pirates to open shipping channels for trade and expanding the road system to make travel and communication easier. He even attempted to restore traditional moral values by rebuilding decaying temples. The emperors who followed him maintained peace by following his practice of reducing conflict and expanding borders with military strength.⁸

The region of Palestine (once known as part of Canaan and the Promised land) was part of this vast Empire and governed by the Herod family. It is in this region in the Roman Empire that Jesus was born. God orchestrated this incredible period of peace to send Jesus and then to spread the Gospel throughout the known world through Paul and other missionaries. The system of roads, ease of trade and even the shipping channels provided safe travel for missionaries. Even the Greek language and the Septuagint provided helpful tools for communicating the Gospel to the Gentiles. This peace was not

perfect. Before the end of the New Testament Christians were being persecuted and even executed for believing that Jesus is the Messiah who died and rose again to take away the sins of the world. But even during intense persecution the Gospel continued to spread. And the Gospel today has survived periods of great peace in history, but also periods of religious corruption, crusades and even world wars. Why? Because the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16) The Gospel is more powerful than any authorities or governments in this world. Gamaliel said it best in Acts 5 “For if this plan or this work is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found fighting against God.”

The Roman Empire did eventually crumble, but the Gospel remains!

Maps and charts

Map of the Roman Empire during Jesus' life on Earth



How do we Know Jesus is the Messiah?

Jesus is one of the most influential and controversial people in history. Our modern calendar system is completely based on when Jesus lived (BC and AD), people have been persecuted and even killed for believing in Jesus, wars have been fought, and nations have been founded on what people believe about God and His Son Jesus. Christianity has also shaped western culture for centuries: Art, architecture, hospitals, education, politics, and even the founding of the United States.¹ But there have also been skeptics and doubters claiming that Jesus was just a good teacher, because no man could be God. So, who is right and how do we know?²

Biblical evidence:

1. Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah
 - Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill.
 - The Old Testament contains over 300 references to the coming Messiah, and all were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.³
 - The probability of a man to have just fulfilled 8 Old Testament prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} . To visualize this, take silver dollars and cover the state of Texas two feet deep, mark one and randomly draw a silver dollar. How likely is you will draw out the one you marked?⁴
 - The probability of a man fulfilling 48 of those prophecies in 1 in 10^{157} . Counting 250 items per minute, it would take us 6.9×10^{21} years just to count 10^{157} ! Then imagine the likelihood of drawing a specific item from that pile.⁵
 - There have been scholars over the years who claimed that Jesus knew these prophecies and orchestrated events, so He fulfilled them. This idea is absurd since many of the prophecies were completely out of His control like the circumstances of His birth and death, not to mention the staggering probabilities mentioned above.
2. Jesus displayed His power as God through miracles
 - Jesus exercised power over nature with his ability to calm storms and walk on the water.
 - Jesus exercised power over Satan and demons when he released people from demon possession.
 - Jesus exercised power over death with the raising of Jairus' daughter and Lazarus.
 - Jesus multiplied resources in the feeding of the 5000 and the fishermen catching so many fish they could not be hauled into their boat.
 - Jesus changed the nature of a substance when he turned water into wine for a wedding.
 - Jesus exercised His power to forgive sin, a power even the Jewish religious leaders did not possess.
3. Jesus resurrected from the dead
 - Jesus spoke of His death and resurrection in Matthew 16:21 and Mark 14:28.
 - The disciples saw the empty tomb and the empty burial clothes.
 - Jesus appeared to His disciples.
 - There are scholars who believe the disciples made up the story of the resurrection. In fact, the priests even asked the soldiers to say that the disciples came and stole the body. However, once the disciples started being arrested and executed this story just does not work. Who would die for a lie?
4. The transformation of the disciples.

- The night of Jesus' death the disciples had all run in fear. Even Peter chose to deny that he knew Jesus.
- Once they saw the empty tomb and the living, resurrected Jesus, that fear was gone.
- When the Holy Spirit came down in Acts 2, Peter first and then the others began boldly declaring the Gospel and many believed.
- All the disciples were ordinary men, there were no Bible scholars and great orators among them, but God used them all in extraordinary ways.

In the book More than a Carpenter, McDowell has a simple outline to answer this question, Jesus was either Lord, liar, or lunatic.⁶ Jesus spoke about the fact that He was God so either His claims were true or His claims were false. If His claims were false, either He intentionally lied or He was just crazy. Let's explore these two options and see why those who make these claims are the crazy ones.

- Let's say Jesus was a liar, essentially making him a con man of the masses. Most con men are running the con because there is something in it for them like fame or fortune. Jesus did not seek after those things, in fact He ran from them, asking people not to say anything and retreating from the crowds to pray. A con man would also know his life was a lie and would have no desire to die for that lie. So, the way Jesus lived, His teaching and his death refute this idea.⁷
- Let's say Jesus was a lunatic, essentially suggesting that He thought He was God. This would imply that he needed psychiatric help because he was mentally unstable. This argument really breaks down when we look at his interactions with people. He showed compassion and grace to sinners and those in need of healing while at the same time he could shut down an argument or question someone brought him designed to trap him. Even His teaching was deep and creatively inspired. There is no way someone who is mentally unstable could interact with the world around him at that level and with the kind of consistency we see in the New Testament Gospels!⁸

This leaves us with the final option Jesus was and still is Lord. He was the promised one in the Old Testament that was sent by God to bring salvation to the world. That is the only plausible explanation. We can have faith that God sent Jesus, the radiance of His glory, to die for our sins so that we might have eternal life. This is a gift that he offers us, we must accept the gift. Have you invited Jesus to be your Savior and the Lord of your life?

One cannot refute the prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus. McDowell comments, "I have met very few individuals who have honestly considered the evidence and yet deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of men. To me, the evidence confirming the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is overwhelmingly conclusive to any honest, objective seeker after truth." Not all will believe, but "not because they were unable to believe – they were simply unwilling to believe!"

The Gospel message is simple: **"This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:8b-9)** The choice to believe is up to each individual, but the evidence is there!

Metanarrative of the Bible

The definition of metanarrative is simply the over-arching story. In a nutshell the metanarrative of the Bible is God's plan for man's redemption. The Bible is about the nature and character of God that demanded a blood sacrifice for sin and then eventually provided that sacrifice through His Son, Jesus. During this over-arching narrative, there are also many basic instructions for human thriving. To help us grasp this idea, I am going to include some themes or keywords to help us remember the big ideas of each book that we have read so far.

Genesis: Beginnings

The beginning of the world, the beginning of sin, and the beginning of Israel.

Exodus: The Exit from Egypt

Israel flourished in Egypt until Pharaoh enslaved them. God sent Moses to rescue them and lead them into the land He promised Abraham (Canaan). God gives them the Law and directions for a Tabernacle which they build.

Numbers: The Wanderings

A lack of faith keeps Israel from entering the Promised Land, and God leads them "wandering" for 40 years so that generation can die off and the next generation can enter the land.

Leviticus: The Levitical Law

Moses details sacrifices, offerings, feasts, and the Law for the tribe of Levi, aka the Priests.

Deuteronomy: The Second Law

Moses' farewell sermon to the next generation of Israelites, reviewing their history and the law and commissioning Joshua before they enter the Promised Land.

Joshua: The Conquest of Canaan

The Israelites cross the Jordan River, prepare, and then begin the process of taking Canaan relying on the Lord to fight those battles. Joshua ends with land allotments and covenant renewal.

Judges: No King in Israel

After Joshua's death, there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. So, God sent nations to terrorize Israel, Israel cried out to God, God rescued them, they followed Him for a while and then the cycle began again.

Ruth: The Kinsman-Redeemer

During the period of Judges, this story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz shows how the Israelite law worked to take care of widows, from gleaning the leftovers of harvest to a close relative marrying and providing heirs for the deceased.

1 & 2 Samuel: The first kings of Israel

Samuel was the last judge of Israel and a priest and prophet that transitioned Israel to a nation with a king. First in Saul, the king the people wanted, then in David, the king after God's own heart.

1 & 2 Kings: A Historical account of King Solomon to the Exile

1 Kings opens with the death of David and moves through Solomon, the building of the temple, then the divided kingdom and the fall of both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

1 & 2 Chronicles: A Spiritual account of the kings from King David to the exile

This book may have been written by Ezra as those in exile returned to remind the Jews how the corrupt kings of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) led them to idolatry and ultimately to exile.

Job: Suffering

Job reminds us that one reason that suffering happens is that God allows Satan to cause suffering to test us. We also see how Job responds to that suffering by choosing to worship and to stay faithful to God.

Psalms: Songs

This book is a collection of songs, many probably sung in ancient Israel. They have a range of subjects and a range of authors.

Proverbs: Wisdom sayings

Written mainly by Solomon with Agur and Lemuel also contributing. In it we meet Wisdom and Folly personified and see numerous contrasts that paint a picture of obedience that leads to human thriving or disobedience that leads to human suffering.

Ecclesiastes: The Futility of the things of this world

Most likely written by Solomon. The rhythm of the book is a waltz between life without God and life with God. Life apart from God is meaningless, but life with God has purpose and joy.

Song of Solomon: Love Story of a Lifetime

Most likely written by Solomon. Courtship, love, marriage, romance, and even growing old together as a married couple are all contained in this beautiful love story.

Prophets to the Northern Kingdom

Amos: God's Justice and Righteousness

Amos, a sheep herder from the Southern Kingdom, spoke to the Northern Kingdom about their empty worship that had led to trusting in their military for protection, using their personal wealth to satisfy their desires and using their influence to trample the poor and needy. He says they are no better than the nations around them and that God will judge them.

Hosea: God's Faithful Love

Hosea is the story of a prophet who marries a woman named Gomer and they have 3 children together. Even though Hosea loves Gomer faithfully, she is unfaithful to him, and he must buy her back. God had Hosea walk through these trials as a picture of His relationship to Israel. God chose Israel and blessed Israel, but they committed spiritual adultery by worshipping other gods. Like a husband is jealous for the faithful love of his wife, God is jealous for the faithful love of His people.

Jonah: God's Compassion

Jonah was called as a prophet to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria and sworn enemy of Israel. In this story we see Jonah's reluctance and prejudice and we see God's compassion for this Gentile people group and for Jonah. God always meant for Israel to be a light to the nations, but Israel was content to be God's chosen people and keep God for themselves.

Prophets to the Southern Kingdom

Isaiah: God's Messiah is Coming

Isaiah prophesied to the Southern Kingdom around the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Although Isaiah speaks of judgment, he is known as the evangelical prophet because he speaks more about the coming Messiah than any other prophet.¹ Isaiah speaks about the "Holy One of Israel" who "must punish His rebellious people, but afterward will redeem them."²

Micah: God's Covenant Love

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and a prophet to the Southern Kingdom. He says they have broken God's covenant and so God will judge them. But that judgment will not be forever. One day there will be a new Jerusalem, a new king will sit on the throne, and he will be a blessing to all the nations.³

Nahum: Nineveh will Fall⁴

Nahum prophesies about the coming judgment of Nineveh for her oppression, cruelty, and wickedness. He reminds us that God is sovereign over all nations, writing their history and controlling their destiny.

Habakkuk: God is still Good (amidst evil in the world)

This book contains a dialogue between the prophet and God. Habakkuk trusts God but questions what God is doing because it makes no sense to him. God defends His goodness and power in view of the evil that is in the world. A key verse we also see quoted in the New Testament is 2:4b "the righteous one will live by his faith."⁵ This dialogue leads Habakkuk to pen a psalm of praise in chapter 3.

Zephaniah: God's Tough Love

Zephaniah was a descendant of King Hezekiah, and thus related to the royal line, so his prophecies are spoken with a familiarity of current political issues.⁶ The phrase "Day of the LORD" occurs seven times in this book⁷ as a great day of judgment. But in chapter 3, he also speaks of a future restoration and God who saves and loves (Zephaniah 3:17). This is the tough love of God, a love that disciplines and punishes to restore His people to a right relationship with Him.

Jeremiah: God's Word will Stand True

Jeremiah was one of the last prophets to the Southern Kingdom before the Babylonian exile. His fiery message of accountability and the consequences of sin fell on deaf ears.⁸ Two key repeated words in this book are "backsliding" (unfaithful, CSB) and "Babylon."⁹ As Judah refused to listen to his message, he was watching them backslide right into destruction and captivity in Babylon, and it was breaking his heart. No wonder Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet.¹⁰ As he watched God's words of judgment come true right before his eyes, he did not leave Judah without hope. He offered comfort in God's promise not to abandon His people and God's promise of a new covenant through the Messiah.¹¹

Lamentations: Lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem

The focus of this book is on the destruction and devastation of Jerusalem, sometimes using graphic language. However, in chapter 3 there is a section of hope in the goodness of God and in chapter 5 there is a prayer of repentance for the people. Jewish tradition considers Jeremiah the author.

In the Exile and Return

Joel: The Day of the LORD

No one knows exactly when Joel was written, but the theme is "the day of the LORD" in three different pictures: a plague of locusts, and invasion of Judah by Assyria (an army like locusts), and final judgment of the world in an ultimate day of the LORD.¹²

Daniel: God's Sovereignty

Daniel was taken to Babylon as a teenager and lived to see his fellow captives return home. This book has two distinct parts. The first 6 chapters explore God's sovereignty in Daniel's personal life, showing us how to walk with God in a pagan culture. The final 7 chapters are prophecies of future kingdoms and events reminding us that history is really God's story.

Ezekiel: God's Glory is Eternal

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah who was taken to Babylon. He ministered to his fellow captives in Babylon while Jeremiah prophesied in Judah.¹³ Ezekiel's message and visions focus on the sovereignty and glory of God and the sinfulness and judgment of His people Judah.

Obadiah: Edom will Fall¹⁴

Scholars disagree on exactly when this prophet lived but mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and celebration of that destruction in Edom suggest that he spoke around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. This book focuses on God's judgment of the Edomites (descendants of Esau) for their arrogance and violence against Judah.¹⁵

Ezra: The Exiles Return Home

Ezra was a descendant of the priest Hilkiah. He organized the synagogue and founded the order of scribes. He led two groups to return to their homeland, the first 50,000 and the second 2000.¹⁶ He was a great revivalist and reformer. His mission was to restore the spiritual heart of the nation,¹⁷ rebuild the temple and the city, and restore the Jewish community in their land.¹⁸

Nehemiah: The Exiles Need Strong Leadership

Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to the King of Persia. He saw what was happening in his homeland and requested a leave of absence. So, as a layman he returned to Jerusalem to help with the rebuilding efforts. "Watch and pray" and "work and pray" are the words that characterize him. This book includes rebuilding the walls, revival, and reform.¹⁹

Esther: God Providential Power

We see the providence of God on every page of this book. As God stands in the shadows, perhaps hidden from his people, he is still watching over them and protecting them through the life of Esther.²⁰

Haggai: Prioritize God

Haggai prophesied to the exiles who had returned to their homeland about 520 BC. The rebuilding of the Temple had ceased, and the nation needed to get back to work. The book contains four speeches: glorify God, stay committed to God's plans, live in a way that pleases God, and serve God faithfully.²¹

Zechariah: God's personal concern for His people²²

Zechariah prophesied to the remnant of the Jews during the time of Ezra and Haggai. He spoke through a series of visions exhorting them to repent and encouraging them with prophecies of glorious future events including the coming Messiah.²³

Malachi: Honor God in How you Live

Malachi prophesied while Nehemiah was leading the remnant of Israel in their homeland. He addressed many of the same issues as Nehemiah. The people were dishonoring God by offering blemished sacrifices, disobeying God with a failure to keep their marriage vows, robbing God by not bringing the full tithe to his house, and complaining that they did not feel God's love and God's promised blessings. He called them to return to Godly living.

The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because their content and order is similar.

Matthew: Christ the King

This Gospel was written by Jesus' disciple Matthew who was a Jew for a Jewish audience. We know this was his intended audience because of the use of Jewish language and customs and the opening genealogy that speaks of Jesus as a descendent of Abraham. The focus is on Jesus as King and His Kingdom.²⁴

Mark: Christ the Suffering Servant

This Gospel was most likely written by John Mark, Barnabas' cousin. Scholars believe that he was in Rome around the time that Peter was martyred and wrote during that time for the people in Rome. This is the shortest and most succinct of the Gospels, focusing on the actions of Jesus as God's servant and how following him will lead to persecution and suffering.²⁵

Luke: Christ the Son of Man

This Gospel was written by the physician Luke who traveled with Paul on several of his missionary journeys. Luke was a Gentile and wrote this book for Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4) a Greek name meaning "one who loved God." In his book we see order and compassion for humanity. From his genealogy tracing Jesus as a descendant of Adam to his focus on Jesus' concern for women, the poor and sinners he focuses on the humanity of Jesus and His compassion for all humanity, Jews and Gentiles.²⁶

John: Christ the Son of God

This Gospel was written by the disciple John. It does not follow the structure of the other 3, rather he clearly sets out to focus on the deity of Christ. He writes about 7 Messianic signs, 7 "I AM" statements, and how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament festivals and institutions.²⁷ John tells us his purpose in John 20:30-31.

October 6 – The Gospel of Re-Birth

Text: John 3:1-21

Big Idea: We must be born again (in Christ) to receive salvation.

Focus: *Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.*

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: Who is the best, greatest, or smartest person you know or can think of? What achievements or accomplishments make them the best, greatest, smartest?

Study: *Use this section for your small group Bible study time.*

About this book:

The gospel of John is unique among the other gospels. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) are similar in outline, contents, structure, and perspective. John, however, contains much more discourse than the synoptics as well as other material not covered by the synoptics. Though they are different, nothing in John's gospel or in the synoptics contradict. John's gospel serves to supplement the others. John's gospel, being written well after the other Gospels, assumes that the readers would be familiar with the events written in the synoptics. The thesis (or intent) of John is best summarized in John 20:30-31, **"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**¹

Introductory Material:

In John 3 we are reading of an encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a pharisee (3:1), one of the ruling sects of Judaism (the other ruling sect being the Sadducees) who had a zeal for obeying the law of God.² He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the "supreme" court made up of 70 men from the Pharisees and the Sadducees (3:1). Because he was a Pharisee, we know that Nicodemus was morally upstanding, a powerful leader, and extremely knowledgeable.³ It is often speculated that the reason Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night is because he was ashamed or afraid, while these reasons may be true, the text does not provide us with a reason for the time of his visit (3:2). What conclusions we are able to draw, however, are that Nicodemus was a respectful man as we can see throughout his interaction with Jesus (3:2) and he likely believed that Jesus was another Rabbi or teacher like himself.⁴

The Necessity of a Second Birth

Read John 3:1-13 and discuss the questions below.

¹*There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ²*This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."* ³*Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* ⁴*"How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"* ⁵*Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* ⁶*Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.* ⁷*Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.* ⁸*The wind blows where it pleases, and you*

hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”⁹ “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus. ¹⁰ “Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?” Jesus replied. ¹¹ “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man.

Commentary:

- From what we know of the Pharisees, they rebuked and rejected Jesus, however, here we have Nicodemus a Pharisee and Sanhedrin member approaching Jesus not with disdain or rebukes, but respect. He calls Jesus “Rabbi” or “teacher” which were titles of respect (v. 2). Nicodemus also acknowledges that Jesus was sent by God.
- Jesus gets to the matter at hand: salvation. We cannot enter the kingdom of God without being born again. Our regeneration or new birth is the act of God in which he gives eternal life to the spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 3:5) through faith.
 - Nicodemus’s credentials and his devotion to the laws could not save him.
 - Not one of his many achievements or accolades could save him.
- Jesus is communicating to Nicodemus that he is here to provide the only way for God’s people to be born again, to have another chance at life. Not through another physical rebirth, but through the birth by spirit.
 - Jesus’ use of “unless” (v. 3) is qualifying that the only way to see the kingdom of heaven (to have eternal life) is by being born again.
 - Many Jews believed that being born a Jew would automatically provide them a place in God’s kingdom, Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that is not the case.
- Nicodemus lacks understanding in his conversation with Jesus. He possesses knowledge from his Rabbinic training and knowledge of the TaNaK (Torah, Nevi’im, and Ketuvim).⁵ He has an earthly understanding but lacks spiritual insight (v. 9-12).
 - Nicodemus has been so focused on keeping the laws and trying to appear righteous externally, that he misses what is needed: the internal transformation.
 - As Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg say “The Pharisees thought God wanted radical external conformity, and they missed the promise of radical internal transformation. God said, ‘I don’t want you to clean yourself up. I want to make you brand-new.’”⁶

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What do our earthly accomplishments, accolades, achievements earn us eternally?
2. **Apply it:** Have you been striving for accomplishments and success to save yourself?

Salvation through Christ

Read John 3:14-21 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁴ *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man **must** be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

¹⁸ *Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. ¹⁹ This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may*

not be exposed. ²¹ ***But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.***

Commentary:

- Jesus provides an illustration of salvation, one that would be very familiar to an expert on the Old Testament Scriptures—Numbers 21:5-9.
 - When the Israelites were in the wilderness the Israelites were complaining and grumbling against God, and as a judgment God sent serpents to infest the camp. The Israelites repented and asked Moses to intercede on their behalf. And God showed mercy to His people. He instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and raise it above the camp on a pole, so that when the Israelites were bitten, they could look up to the bronze serpent and be healed.
 - John MacArthur says it this way, “Those who were bitten would be healed if they looked at it [the serpent]. Thereby acknowledging their guilt and expressing their faith in God’s forgiveness and healing power.”⁷
- Jesus uses the word “must,” which in Greek is δεῖ (dei) and means “it is necessary.” The Son of Man **must** be lifted up for the salvation of the people (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22).
 - Christ’s death was a necessary part of God’s plan for salvation. Jesus had to die to serve as the atoning sacrifice for sinners because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22).
- Jesus’ death had to occur because of God’s love for us. God showed his love for us in a real and tangible way, through the death of his “beloved,” “begotten,” “one and only” Son.
 - “The stricken Israelites were cured by obediently looking apart from any works or righteousness of their own in hope and dependence on God’s word at the elevated bronze serpent. In the same way whoever looks in faith alone to the crucified Christ will be cured from sin’s deadly bite and will in Him have eternal life.”⁸
 - We are undeserving of God’s love and mercy, we have not earned it, yet God gave us the gift of His Son. God does not love us now that we have been made His children, He loved us **before** we were saved (Rom. 5:8).
- Jesus came to save the world not to condemn the world. We are already condemned (v.18). Through Christ’s sacrifice we are no longer guilty, Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. None of us are innocent (Rom. 3:23), but when we place our faith in Christ to save us, our sin and guilt are washed away, and we are made blameless or “declared innocent.”⁹
- Verses 19-21 describe judgment by using the contrast of light and dark (which was first introduced to us in the Prologue of John 1). Those in spiritual darkness are not ignorant, but willfully reject the truth. Those who live by truth come to the light, not fearing what the light will expose. They hate their sin and love righteousness. Those in the light want their actions to be seen so that the work of God in them is evident.¹⁰

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What is the motivation of God for sending His son for us?
 2. **Apply it:** Have you been striving to save yourself? Or be a good person? To measure up? What do you need to let go of, confess, to receive salvation?
-

Apply: *Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.*

From this text we have no evidence that Nicodemus trusted in Jesus for salvation, though based on John 7:50-51 and John 19:39 we are hopeful. What we've learned today: there are no credentials we possess and no works we can do to save ourselves. Our salvation and assurance of eternal life comes only through faith in Christ. God is our loving heavenly Father; He desires a reconciled relationship with us. We can be reconciled through Christ, who was the atoning sacrifice, because apart from faith in Him, we are condemned. God is loving and merciful providing rescue from our sin through salvation in Jesus Christ. It was not the nails that held Jesus on the cross, but His love for us.^{11 & 12}

Leaders, this may be a good time to offer an opportunity for people to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction in their hearts.

October 13 – The Gospel of Healing & Forgiveness

Text: Luke 5:17-26 (See also Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8)

Big Idea: Jesus not only has the power to heal, but the authority to forgive sins.

Focus: Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.

Option 1: What have you learned in your Bible reading this week?

Option 2: Have you ever been forgiven of something by someone you know?

Study: Use this section for your small group Bible study time.

Introductory Material:

The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke the physician to his friend Theophilus. He purposely attempts to write a very detailed account (Luke 1:1-4) of the good news of Jesus Christ, utilizing eyewitness accounts and other gospel accounts (many scholars believe he used the Gospel of Mark). It is meant to be part one of a two-part series, with the book of Acts being the second part. Luke writes primarily to a Gentile (non-Jewish) audience, trying to show how Jesus is God's Son and came to save the whole world, not just the Jews. Consequently, Luke focuses on Jesus and His interactions with people.¹

Traditionally, the ministry of Jesus is taken as a three- or three-and-a-half-year period, divided into a year of obscurity, a year of popularity, and a year of rejection.² This story of Jesus healing the paralytic comes most likely in Jesus' year of popularity. He had already shown His ability to heal diseases, and so many people would come to hear Him teach and be healed (Luke 5:15-16). However, as Jesus continues His ministry, His ability to heal was easier to accept than the authority He would lay claim to in a series of several controversial stories. Today's passage is the first in a series of four in Luke's Gospel which offend the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, who silently or directly challenge Him or His disciples.³

In Jesus' ministry, it appears that healing and forgiveness tend to be intertwined. In the Old Testament worldview, sickness and suffering were punishment for sin and healing could only be brought by God with the forgiveness of the sin which caused the particular punishment.⁴ When Jesus exercises His ability to heal, He also demonstrates His authority to forgive.

Teachers and Friends

Read Luke 5:17-19 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁷ On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him. ¹⁸ Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. ¹⁹ Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.

Commentary:

- Pharisees were typically laypersons interested in the practical application of Scripture to enable the community to remain faithful to the covenant with God. Here, they were present with the teachers of the law who were learned interpreters seeking to apply it to Jewish life. They were known for their strict piety but also a liberal application, seen for example in their limiting Levitical washing laws to the simple act of washing hands. They focused on maintaining Israel's distinctiveness among the nations through laws which clearly separated them from others, such as observance of the Sabbath.⁵
- In verse 17 Luke records the "Lord's power to heal" was with Jesus. He does this to make clear that Jesus' authority and power derive entirely from God, not any skill in the black arts or association with demons or Satan.⁶ The term "Lord" is a direct reference to Yahweh, the God of Israel. The fact that the power of Christ comes directly from the God of Israel will continue to be an important theme throughout the Gospels.
- Notice that not only do the paralytic's friends help him, but they persevere in helping him. To lower him into the house from the roof required digging through material which consisted of wooden cross beams overlaid with a matting of reeds, branches, and dried mud.⁷ They are already going out of their way to assist him, and to meet resistance and continue to persevere in their goal of getting him healed demonstrated the kind of love Christ calls us to have for one another. It is a love which perseveres hardship and is a mark of authentic Christian discipleship (John 13:35).

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Who were the Pharisees and teachers of the law?
2. **Apply it:** Have you ever seen somebody's friends go out of their way to help them with something? Have you ever seen somebody's friends go out of their way to make sure they met Jesus?
3. **Apply it:** What would it take to have the kind of love for others in our lives as the paralytic's friends had for him?

Healing and Forgiveness

Read Luke 5:20-25 and discuss the questions below.

²⁰ *Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."*

²¹ *Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

²² *But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, "Why are you thinking this in your hearts?"*

²³ *Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."*

²⁵ *Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.*

Commentary:

- While the friends are concerned with the paralytic being healed, Jesus is concerned with faith. He saw past the need and past the love these friends had for the paralytic, seeing also the faith in them, that Jesus indeed had the power to heal. Furthermore, Jesus uses this moment to teach an important lesson. There were two needs the man had: physical healing and forgiveness of sin, which most everyone present would have considered bound together. Jesus begins by declaring his sins forgiven, and then proves it with the healing. It would have been easy to say “sins are forgiven” but less easy to provide physical healing. However, Jesus could do both! This is meant to illustrate His authority because of His direct relationship with God the Father.
- This is the first time Luke uses the phrase “Son of Man” to refer to Jesus, likely because it is Jesus’ own words. This is significant because Jesus is making a Messianic reference, indicating further where His authority comes from.⁸
- In verse 21, the scribes and Pharisees quietly accused Jesus of blasphemy. Blasphemy is a transliteration of a Greek word meaning literally “to speak harm.” In the Bible this term is understood as an attitude of disrespect that finds expression in an act directed against the character of God. It is a capital crime meant to be met with execution by the community.⁹ Jesus would continue to face accusations of blasphemy and ultimately is tried and crucified for this “crime.” Of course, Jesus’ claim to have authority from God to forgive sins is only blasphemous if it is untrue. As it so happens, it is true!
- The paralytic man had two problems: physical ailment and unforgiven sins. The main point of this text after proving Jesus is the one who has authority to heal and forgive sin, is that the greater need is of the spiritual health. It is possible for one to be forgiven and not healed, and to be healed and not forgiven. Luke’s narrative affirms that forgiveness is the most important.¹⁰

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Where does the authority of Jesus come from?
2. **Get it:** What is blasphemy?
3. **Apply it:** Which is a bigger deal, that Jesus healed the man, or that He forgave him of his sins? Why?
4. **Apply it:** Have you ever seen somebody neglect their spiritual health, but stress about their physical health?

Glory to God

Read Luke 5:25-26 and discuss the questions below.

²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. ²⁶ Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, “We have seen incredible things today.”

Commentary:

- The paralytic is clearly healed by his actions. His ability to obey Jesus’ command to get up, pick up his mat, and go home is evidence of his physical healing for all to see. Moreover, his glorifying God signals the spiritual transformation. Glorifying God is the appropriate response to a miracle¹¹ and is necessary when one has been forgiven of all sin.
- Notice the Lord gave the man three instructions: get up, pick up your mat, and go home. The man does all three of these things *immediately*. Belief is followed by obedience and often proven by it. The man’s willingness to obey the commands shows he believed he was healed. It

is extremely important to show our belief through obedient action. After all, faith without works is dead (James 2:17-18).

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What is the appropriate response to a miracle?
2. **Apply it:** Why is it important to glorify God when He does something miraculous?
3. **Apply it:** How do our beliefs affect our actions?

Apply: *Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.*

The main point of this text was to begin to show Jesus' authority to forgive sins. This is crucial in the narrative of the crucifixion. Jesus was a good teacher and a healer, and many people came to Him for those reasons. The house was full of spectators hoping to hear or see something amazing. In fact, it was so full that people who really needed to see Jesus that everyone could not get in the door. In the end, the most amazing thing was not the act of healing, but the news that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins—and He was willing to do it. May it be for us that when we look to Jesus, we do not merely spectate, watching for physical needs to be miraculously healed, but believe and find our sins forgiven.

October 20 – The Gospel of Freedom

Text: Mark 5:1-20 (See also Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39)

Big Idea: Jesus has the power to set us free from bondage to sin and Satan.

Focus: Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: How would you define freedom?

Study: Use this section for your small group Bible study time.

About this book:

Since this lesson will be focused on the accounts of Luke and Mark, let's take a moment compare these two gospels.

Luke was a Gentile physician who lived during Jesus' time on earth and later traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys. He wrote Luke and Acts for a man named Theophilus. This is a Greek name, so this book was written for a Gentile audience. As a physician Luke devoted special attention to the circumstances of Jesus' birth, Jesus' healing miracles, and Jesus' death and resurrection. He also wrote a very detailed and orderly account. We usually consider the book of Luke as a look at Jesus as the Son of Man. Meaning He is not a distant God like the stories of the mythological gods of the Greeks and Romans (the idols of this time) but a personal God who wants a relationship with us.

Mark is attributed to John Mark, Barnabas' cousin that traveled for a while on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and focuses more on the actions of Jesus than his teachings. His audience is most likely Gentiles in Rome. He explains Jewish customs, does not use Aramaic words unknown to Romans, and focuses on persecution and martyrdom.¹ We usually consider Mark a look at Jesus as a servant, as His actions point to His desire to serve God the Father, even to the point of death. This is a contrast to the stories of the mythological Greek and Roman gods (the idols of this time) who were portrayed as acting on selfish impulses.

Introductory Material:

This story of incredible release from bondage is found in Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, and Luke 8:26-39. Immediately preceding this passage in all three accounts is Jesus calming a storm. He and his disciples were traveling by boat across the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gerasenes, the land of Gad back when the 12 tribes were settling Canaan and the areas east of the Jordan,² when the storm came up. Interestingly, at the end of this story they get back on the boat and return to the other shore. There is almost a sense that this encounter was a divine appointment specifically to free the man (or two men according to Matthew).

Living in Bondage

Read Mark 5:1-5 and discuss the questions below.

¹*They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes.* ²*As soon as he got out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs and met him.* ³*He lived in the tombs, and no one was able to restrain him anymore—not even with a chain—* ⁴*because he often had been bound*

with shackles and chains, but had torn the chains apart and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

Commentary:

- As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, He was met by this man. Please note that Matthew's version of this story includes two men. Commentaries say that even if there were two men, one man did all the talking to explain that difference in accounts.³ Since there is just one man mentioned in this Gospel, that is how I will refer to him.
- We have no information as to how or when this man became demon possessed, so don't read anything extra into this story.
- Let's look at how the passage describes him:
 - He was a man with an unclean spirit. We will learn later that this was not just his spirit living in sin, but a legion of demons indwelling him.
 - He lived in the tombs. He was alive, but living among the dead away from his friends, his family, his home, and his community. The unclean spirit had isolated him. He was living out Ephesians 2:1 "dead in (his) trespasses and sins."
 - Luke 8:27 adds that he wore no clothes. The unclean spirit had taken away his sense of modesty and decency.
 - His community had shackled him, but he apparently had superhuman strength that could break out of the shackles, so no one could subdue him. The unclean spirit had robbed him of his self-control.
 - He cried out and cut himself with stones. This was a man who was tormented to the point that he had been robbed of his sanity.
- The opening of this story is almost hyperbolic and shocking. But really it is a reminder that Satan is powerful and influential here on earth. Those who are drawn away and enticed with Satan's false promises risk losing everything that truly matters. This man is a witness to that. He was living in bondage to the "unclean spirit."
- Notice the answer society had for this man: They bound him with shackles and chains. They considered him a threat or a danger to the community and the answer was to lock him up. Except, their chains did not hold him, nor did they solve his problem. The government could try to control his behavior and protect the community, but this was not a problem that could be solved without some divine intervention.
- The opening to this story begs the question: Are demons real? This is not the only story in the New Testament about demons. They are in both the Gospels and Paul's missionary journeys. The Bible was written for its original audience then, but it was also written for us today. This naturally implies that if demons were real and active in society then, they are still around and active today. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us that the Devil is prowling around like a lion waiting for someone to devour. If you want some insight into Satan's possible playbook, check out [The Screwtape Letters](#) by C.S. Lewis. He seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).
- We also know from God's Word that God has given believers some tools to battle with Satan and his demons because we no longer live in bondage to sin (Romans 6:17-18).
 - 1 Corinthians 6:19 – your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He indwells us, there is room for no one else.
 - Ephesians 6:11-18 – God has given us armor to stand against the schemes of the Devil including the belt of truth (your foundation), breastplate of righteousness (to protect

your heart and vital organs), the shoes of the Gospel of peace (to give you firm footing as you stand your ground), shield of faith which can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one, the helmet of salvation (to protect your mind and your eyes) and the sword of the Spirit (that is the Word of God, your one defensive weapon). His final instruction in verse 18 is to pray in the Spirit at all times. Jesus provides an example of how to use these tools in Matthew 4 when he is tempted by Satan.

- James 4:7 perhaps has the best advice of all: “**Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**”

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Where does this story take place?
2. **Get it:** How is the man that meets Jesus described in this passage?
3. **Get it:** How had society determined to deal with him?
4. **Apply it:** This is evidence of demons in Jesus’ time. Do we still see evidence of demons in our society today? How does knowing this change how you view the world?
5. **Apply it:** What tactics do you think Satan uses today to keep believers from the abundant life that God has for us?
6. **Apply it:** How should we do battle against Satan today?

Freedom in Jesus

Read Mark 5:6-13a and discuss the questions below.

⁶ *When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and knelt down before him. ⁷ And he cried out with a loud voice, “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you before God, don’t torment me!” ⁸ For he had told him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”*

⁹ *“What is your name?” he asked him.*

“My name is Legion,” he answered him, “because we are many.” ¹⁰ And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region.

¹¹ *A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. ¹² The demons begged him, “Send us to the pigs, so that we may enter them.” ¹³ So he gave them permission, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs.*

Commentary:

- In verse 9 Jesus asks the demon his name. The reply is “Legion, because we are many.” The word Legion is not really a name but a military term. A Roman Legion was a group of up to 6000 fighting men.⁴ So, it is very possible this man was being tormented not by one demon, but a whole army of them. Ephesians 6:12 says the struggle is against the cosmic powers of darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.
- In verses 6-8 the man comes to Jesus. This section shows us the incredible power the demons have over him and gives us some insight into what the demons believe about Jesus.
 - He kneels before Jesus as one would kneel before a king. So, the demons recognize the power and authority of Jesus.
 - He calls Jesus “Son of the Most High God.” So, the demons recognize that Jesus is God.
 - He tells Jesus not to torment him. In Luke 8:30 the demons request not to be banished to the abyss. So, the demons know Jesus’ word has authority over them.
- Since the demons did not want to leave the region, they begged Jesus to send them to the pigs feeding on a nearby hillside. Jesus granted them permission in verse 13a! Notice again that Jesus

had to grant permission to those demons to relocate, they responded to the WORD OF GOD (Note our defensive weapon in Ephesians 6:17 is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God). Notice also that the demons apparently see no difference in inhabiting pigs or humans.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What does the man reply when Jesus asks his name?
2. **Get it:** How do the demons interact with Jesus? What do their actions and words say about who has more authority?
3. **Apply it:** So, the demons obey Jesus and in Mark 4:41 the disciples on the boat comment that even the wind and the sea obey him. Why is it so hard for us as humans to submit to His authority?
4. **Apply it:** Every good soldier spends time training to learn his weapon. As believers, how do we train in using the Word of God (The Bible)?

The Responses

Read Mark 5:13b-20 and discuss the questions below.

The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned there.

¹⁴ The men who tended them ran off and reported it in the town and the countryside, and people went to see what had happened. ¹⁵ They came to Jesus and saw the man who had been demon-possessed, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. ¹⁶ Those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs. ¹⁷ Then they began to beg him to leave their region.

¹⁸ As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged him earnestly that he might remain with him. ¹⁹ Jesus did not let him but told him, "Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰ So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed.

Commentary:

- Response of the pigs (verse 13b) The demons so upset these pigs that they decided they would rather drown in the sea than be inhabited by them. The demons drove those pigs to commit suicide!
- Response of the pig-herders (verse 14) they ran into town to tell this crazy tale because they had just managed to lose an entire herd of pigs and probably their jobs. They needed the town to know that it wasn't their fault.
- Response of the man (verse 15, 18-19) by the time the townspeople arrived on the scene this man who had been naked, crying out and cutting himself with stones while living in the tombs was now seated with Jesus dressed and in his right mind. What a beautiful picture of salvation.
 - **2 Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."
 - **Ephesians 2:4-5** "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great Love for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace."
 - **Isaiah 61:10** "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation and wrapped me in a robe of righteousness."

In verse 18, as Jesus prepares to leave, the man wants to go with him. Jesus answers this request with a no. He leaves him in his hometown to "report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." And verse 19 says that is exactly what he did!

- Response of the town (verses 15-16) they were afraid and asked Jesus to leave the region. He complied, loading onto the boat and going back to the other shore of the lake. We know from verse 19 some eventually were amazed so hopefully some believed.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What was the response of the pigs?
2. **Get it:** What was the response of the man?
3. **Get it:** What is the response of the pig herders?
4. **Get it:** What was the response of the community?
5. **Apply it:** Who do you relate to out of these responses? *I hope we can say that we relate to the man in this story that God set free from his bondage who wanted to stay with Jesus, but was willing to stay behind and share his miraculous transformation with his community. But I fear we may be like the pig herders or the townspeople, looking at the miraculous right in front of our noses and choosing selfishness and self-preservation over spiritual transformation and mission.*

Apply: Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.

There is freedom in Christ. Freedom from bondage to sin and freedom from the power of Satan. There is opportunity for spectacular and dramatic rescue because of the Gospel. A rescue that not only frees us from sin but transforms our lives. Are you willing to pray for and to share the Gospel with those around you who desperately need it? Are you willing to go where God leads you to share the Gospel? When we step out in faith, we will see God move in dramatic ways!

October 27 – The Gospel of Mercy

Text: Luke 10:25-37

Big Idea: We don't get to pick our neighbors.

Focus: *Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.*

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: Describe a time when someone came and helped you out when you didn't expect it.

Study: *Use this section for your small group Bible study time.*

About this book:

Who is the author of Luke?

- The Gospel of Luke doesn't have a named author. A lot of literary evidence points to Luke "the doctor" being the author (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24). Luke's literary style has undertones of one with a medical background or context. Early Christian writers and most historians also support Luke's authorship.¹

What is the Gospel of Luke's purpose?

- Both the book of Luke and Acts are addressed to "most honorable Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The Gospel of Luke is a carefully investigated compilation of eye-witness accounts of Jesus' person and ministry. Luke is a Gentile writing to Gentiles, telling his friend Theophilus (which means: Friend of God) and us about the validity and certainty of Jesus Christ as Lord (Luke 1:4).²

Introductory Material:

In our passage today, we find Jesus being challenged by an expert in the Law. Jesus was not trained by any prolific Rabbi or teacher. In fact, He continually amazed the Jews and crowds with His authoritative teaching despite His humble background (Luke 2:47; 4:32; Matthew 7:28). So, this expert, wanting to expose Jesus as a false teacher, asks Jesus one of the most basic, but foundational questions to Jewish and Christian doctrine alike. As we walk through this story and parable, there are some key terms to know:

What is a parable?

- Where a proverb is a pithy saying to help memorize wisdom, a parable is often an illustrative story "assisting to make truth intelligible, or, if intelligible before, to present it more vividly to the mind."³ These stories were used to help teach doctrine and theology in memorable and adaptable ways.

What is the Law?

- When Biblical authors refer to "The Law" they are usually referring to the Torah or "The Law of Moses" given to Moses and the Israelites by God. The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

What is a priest?

- Priests came out of the tribe of Levi, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Their primary role was to serve as the go-between of God and man. They offered sacrifices, prayers, and presided over festivals on behalf of the entire nation of Israel (See Exodus 28).

What is a Levite?

- A Levite was a member of the tribe of Levi. While all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests.⁴ Levites were designated to take care of the temple. Many were artisans and craftsmen of different practices (See Numbers 3).

What is a Samaritan?

- Samaritans were descendants of colonists in Israel who were brought by the kingdom of Assyria. "The Samaritans were a mixed race with a pagan core (Ezra 4:2). Their blood would become more and more Hebraized by the addition of renegade Jews and by the intermarriage with surrounding Israelites, who would find among them the familiar worship of former times."⁵ *During Jesus' earthly lifetime, Samaritans were a class of people strongly looked down upon by the Jewish people.*

Do This and Live

Read Luke 10:25-37 and discuss the questions below.

²⁵ *Then an expert in the law stood up to test him, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ²⁶ *"What is written in the law?" he asked him. "How do you read it?"* ²⁷ *He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "your neighbor as yourself."* ²⁸ *"You've answered correctly," he told him. "Do this and you will live."* ²⁹ *But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* ³⁰ *Jesus took up the question and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on olive oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'* ³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"* ³⁷ *"The one who showed mercy to him," he said. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same.*

Questions & Commentary:

- **Get it:** What did the lawyer/expert in the law ask Jesus?
- Matthew and Mark have similar accounts to this story, but in those, Jesus is asked "what is the greatest commandment?" (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40). Here, the expert/lawyer is asking a different question altogether.
- This was not an innocent question. The CSB translation calls the man an "expert in the law" but the Greek word is *nomikos*, which also means lawyer. He was likely a Pharisee and knew the Law of God forward and backward. Just as it says in the text, this man was not there to learn from Jesus, but to test Him.

- **Get it:** How did Jesus reply?
 - Jesus' reply is almost comical. It is as if he is saying, "You're the expert! You tell me!"
 - Jesus often answered questions with questions.
 - Just a few of the many examples: *Matthew 9:14-19; Matthew 15:1-3; Mark 4:10-13; Luke 6:1-3*
 - **Get it:** According to the Law and affirmed by Jesus, how do we inherit eternal life
 - The lawyer is quoting two passages of the Torah. The first he quotes is what is known among Jews as the Shema (which means listen, hear, or obey) - Deuteronomy 6:4-5:
 - ***Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.***
 - The second passage is from Leviticus 19:18:
 - ***Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.***
 - In Matthew 22:40, Jesus said that "*all of the Law and Prophets depend on these two commands.*"
- 1. Get it:** So, what's the big deal? Why did the lawyer try to justify himself? (v.29)
- The reward for true righteousness and/or perfect obedience to the Law is eternal life. "Do this" Jesus said, "and you will live." Or in other words, "Perfectly uphold all of the Law and Prophets, and you will live." The problem is we can't!
 - In John Calvin's Institutes of Christian Religion, he equates God's Law to that of a mirror. When we look to God's Law, all we get is a glimpse of our inability to fulfill it.
 - "The requirements of the Law are beyond us, and so a man may see the promises [of salvation] held from a distance but he will never benefit from them. All he can do is get a clearer picture of his own misery by comparison of [the Law's] loveliness, while he realizes that the hope of salvation is cut off and certain death hangs over him."⁶
 - **Get it:** How did the lawyer try to justify himself?
 - When he asked the question "who is my neighbor?" it is important we consider some background context. Theologian R.C. Sproul points out that in Jewish tradition, Jews only considered other fellow Jews under the Law to be their neighbor.
 - "Those who were unclean, the Gentiles and the Samaritans, who were outside of [the Jewish community of faith] were not to be included in the mandate to love one's neighbor."⁷
 - Essentially, in the Jewish mindset, you had to earn the right to be considered their neighbor. You had to be clean in their eyes for them to love you as they would themselves. If we only had to love one specific set of people based on certain conditions, perhaps following the second greatest commandment would be easier. However, Jesus would turn that mindset on its head.
 - **Discuss:** What are ways we tend to try and justify ourselves and our sinful behavior? When do we tend to find ourselves trying to defend our thoughts or actions?
 - **Get it:** How did Jesus answer the expert's question?
 - Jesus could have answered bluntly to the man with "everyone is your neighbor!" But instead, Jesus took this as a teaching moment for those around to hear. Through this parable, Jesus not only shows who our neighbors are, but how to be a good neighbor ourselves.
- 2. Summarize it:** Ask your class to summarize the parable (v.30-35). What happened? Who are the key figures?
- The path from Jerusalem to Jericho was a brutal one. Jericho is roughly 17-18 miles East and downhill from Jerusalem.⁸ This route was literally called "the bloody way."⁹ It was a

route filled with robbers and thieves. Robberies and assaults were something that priests, Levites and Samaritans alike would be aware of on this road.

3. Discuss it: Why did the priest and Levite walk around the beaten man? (v.31-32)

- There is much speculation on this, all of which we should hold with an open hand. Let's consider the wording.
 - The priest was "going down" that road. That means he was leaving Jerusalem headed to Jericho. Maybe he had finished his priestly duties in the temple for a season. He had been serving people, offering sacrifices on their behalf, and simply had no more energy to spare for a man who chose to walk a dangerous road by himself.
 - Likewise, the Levite was leaving Jerusalem, going down the same road. Maybe he had a meeting with a fellow artisan in Jericho. Levites didn't have land of their own, and their wealth was based on the share of the other tribes (Deuteronomy 18), so perhaps he felt he didn't have the ability on his own to aid the downtrodden man.
- There is just one problem: both priests and Levites were called to be ministers to the people in one way shape or form and to "serve in the name of the LORD" (Deut. 18:7). By walking around the man, they failed one of their most basic duties.
 - **Discuss:** Why is it often easy to turn a blind eye to suffering or to those less fortunate? What excuses do we tell ourselves?
- **Get it:** Why did the Samaritan stop and help the man?
- This road down to Jericho was already a dangerous one. For a Samaritan though, it was twice as dangerous. Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the Jewish people. Not only that, but they were the descendants of invaders and traitors. This wasn't a kind place to be for a Samaritan. Yet the Samaritan stopped to help this (likely Jewish) dying man! Maybe he saw himself in the man on the ground. Maybe he thought, "That could easily be me" and that was what stirred his compassion. But he didn't only *feel* for the man, he *acted* on what he knew to be right.
- **Get it:** How did the Samaritan help the man?
- *He poured on oil and wine.*
 - This would have helped disinfect any wound and relieve a little pain. He used two expensive commodities of his own to heal the man to the best of his ability.
- *He took him to shelter and cared for him.*
 - The man was already robbed and down. The Samaritan could have stopped at healing the man. That was a caring act by itself. But then the man would be vulnerable and defenseless in a dangerous land. The Samaritan went the extra mile to bring the man to somewhere safe to rest easy free of charge.
- *He covered the man's debt.*
 - I don't know what hotel costs were then, but the Samaritan gave the innkeeper two denarii to continue caring for the man. This is the equivalent of two days wages at the time.¹⁰ This would have likely covered all costs and then some. And the Samaritan left with the promise to the innkeeper he would cover any other possible expense for the man. Wow!
- **Christ connection:**
 - Notice any parallels between the Good Samaritan and Christ?
 - Because of our waywardness, we were wounded and afflicted with the curse of sin. Like the Samaritan, Jesus took the cup of wine that was his blood and poured it out that we might be healed (Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 26:28, Romans 5:9).

- Our sin made us scattered, and lost. Yet Christ has compassion on us and shepherds us. He gave us His Spirit to guide, care for and seal us in Him. By Him, our salvation is secure (Psalm 23; Matthew 9:36; Ephesians 1:13-14; Ephesians 2:13)!
 - All debt we owed to God for our sin was paid for by Jesus at the cross and His Spirit is the down-payment for our inheritance in Him (Colossians 1:19-20; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:7 Hebrews 9:12).
4. **Apply it:** With this parable in mind, what does it mean to be a neighbor to someone? (v.36-37)
- Jesus was showing the lawyer and us something very important. We don't get to choose our neighbors. We should never have the Pharisaical mindset that someone has to earn the right to be our neighbor. We should never ask "What have they done to be *my* neighbor?" Instead, we should ask, "Am I humble enough to be a neighbor to them?"
 - **Get it & Apply it:** Why do we show mercy to our neighbors? In view of the Law of God, we know that we could never love God and our fellow man with perfection. On our own, we stand condemned in view of the Law. But that's why Christ came. He lived the Law perfectly. Now to those of us who know and believe Jesus as Lord and Savior, we have been shown mercy. God the Father no longer sees our imperfection, but instead sees Christ's righteousness imputed to us. Therefore, "***we love because he loved us first***" (1 John 4:19).
5. **Apply it:** What are some ways we can "go and do the same?" (v.37)

Apply: Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.

Who is someone you can be a neighbor to? Are your eyes open to those around you who may be weary and broken? Is your heart in a place where you can show the same mercy to someone that Christ showed you on the cross? Oh believer, oh you who are also called to "serve in the name of the Lord" just as the priests and Levites were, may we not neglect to love our neighbors! May we go from here seeking in all ways to soar on the two wings of God's Word, loving Him, and loving the people He made.¹¹

GOD MY FATHER,

Teach me the happy art of
 attending to things temporal
 with a mind intent on things eternal.
 Send me forth to have compassion
 on the ignorant and miserable.
 Help me to walk as Jesus walked,
 my only Savior and perfect model,
 his mind my inward guest,
 his meekness my covering garb.

Let my happy place be amongst the poor in spirit,
 my delight the gently ranks of the meek.
 Let me always esteem others better than myself,
 and find in true humility
 An heirdom to two worlds.¹²

November 3 – The Gospel of Life

Text: John 11:17-44

Big Idea: The power of life resides in the person of Jesus Himself. That's why He could boldly claim, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Focus: Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: Reflect on how you worked through the death of a person very close to you? What was your initial response? What helped you heal and move beyond the grief?

Study: Use this section for your small group Bible study time.

About this book:

For an introduction to the Gospel of John see the introduction for the October 6th lesson.

Introductory Material:

In preparation for teaching, be sure to read the entire chapter beginning in John 11:1. This will provide additional context for understanding our primary text. Besides the Lord Himself, we are introduced to three primary characters: Lazarus (who was sick) and Mary and Martha who are identified in verse 2 as his sisters. These three siblings were considered friends of Jesus.

Much of the focus on this story is on Mary and Martha as they interact with Jesus. Mary and Martha are the same sisters who appeared in Luke 10:38-42. In verse 2, Mary is described as "the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair." It is presumed that this was the event (or events) described in Luke 7:38 and John 3:12. Verse 2 makes it clear that it was "her brother Lazarus who was sick." The nature of the illness is not described, but we will soon see that it was terminal. The sisters then sent a message to Jesus that "the one you love is sick." Without any further details in John's narrative, it is clear that Jesus was well acquainted with the sick man. This is most clearly shown in verse 11 where Jesus identifies him as "our friend Lazarus."

The story is set in the village of Bethany. This "Bethany" was located about 2 miles from the Mount of Olives (see v. 18). It should be distinguished from the "Bethany" that was beyond the Jordan seen in John 1:28 and alluded to in John 10:42. Understanding the proximity to Jerusalem is important. The disciples were hesitant to go anywhere near Jerusalem, because they knew the "Jews" wanted to kill Jesus. Once Jesus insisted that it was time to travel to Bethany, Thomas displayed both his commitment to Christ and his lack of faith. In verse 16, he said to the other disciples, "Let's go too so that we may die with him."

One other item of note is Jesus' timing. John tells us in verse 5 and 6, "Now Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was." If Jesus loved them so much, why did He hesitate a couple days before going to his friends. The best answer is likely found in verse 4, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God." Once Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been dead 4 days. If he'd left to go to Bethany immediately upon hearing the news, it seems that Lazarus would have been dead, but only for 2 days.

This delay emphasized the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection that we read about in our text. Certainly, the glory attributed to God through the resurrection of Jesus' friend was magnified.

Jesus Meets Martha on the Road

Read John 11:17-27 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem (less than two miles away). ¹⁹Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. ²⁰As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

²¹Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. ²²Yet even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

²³"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her. ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. ²⁶Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."

Commentary:

- The real conflict in the passage begins when Jesus "arrived" in verse 17. He finds that Lazarus had been dead four days. There was no mistaking the circumstances. His body would already be in the state of decay. "For all the details not provided by the narrator, the insight regarding the four days Lazarus had already spent in the tomb is significant."¹
- Bethany was near Jerusalem, so there were many visitors (and witnesses) joining in the grieving process with Mary and Martha.
- Hearing Jesus was near, Martha went outside of the house to meet Him while Mary remained behind "seated in the house." Perhaps Mary remained with the many guests who had come to comfort the family.
- Martha's initial words to Jesus can be taken a couple ways. She simply stated that if Jesus would have been there Lazarus would not have died. Some see this as a simply outcry of a grieving sister. Edward Klink argued that it was a form of rebuke from Martha. She was upset that Jesus had not been there for them. "The respect Martha paid to Jesus by going out to greet him is counterbalanced by her first-recorded words for him. While several interpreters take her statement as 'an expression of faith,' by speaking in the form of a conditional statement Martha is offering an indirect rebuke."² When coupled with her statement of faith in verse 22, other commentators see Martha's entire statement as an expression of faith.
- Jesus responded to Martha with the simple statement that her brother would rise again. To which Martha replied with another statement that could be taken a couple different ways, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Here one could suggest Martha was hurting and made a tongue in cheek comment that simply communicated, "well yeah, in the last days, but what good does that do us now." As a pastor, I've found that those who are deep in the throes of grief sometimes struggle so greatly with missing their loved on in the "here and now" that promises of future or eternal comfort fall flat and bring frustration. On the other hand, she may have been making a simple statement of faith in Jesus as the true Messiah and giver of life.

- Jesus' next response is a succinct Gospel truth. Jesus proclaims, "I am the resurrection and the life." Life and the power to raise the dead reside in Jesus. He holds the power over our greatest enemy, death, and convincingly proved that when He rose from the tomb Himself.
- I find the greatest encouragement in verse 26, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." The Christian has no reason to fear death. Jesus guarantees that they will never die. The body will certainly succumb to physical death, but the soul that has been made alive by Christ will never taste death!

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What was the relationship between Jesus and this family?
2. **Get it:** What was Martha's complaint?
3. **Apply it:** What does Jesus' statement in verses 25 and 26 mean to you personally?

Jesus Weeps with His Friends

Read John 18:28-37 and discuss the questions below.

²⁸Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹As soon as Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. They followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there.

³²As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died!" ³³When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ³⁴"Where have you put him?" he asked. "Lord," they told him, "Come and see."

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

Commentary:

- Verse 30 makes it clear that Jesus had not entered the village of Bethany. Martha goes to tell Mary who comes outside the city to meet Him there.
- Mary did not hesitate to hurry to Jesus. She left the house immediately and came to Jesus. She fell at his feet crying out, "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died!" This is the exact same thing that Martha had said in verse 21 with only a slight variation in word order in the original language.
- When Jesus saw her tears and the tears of the mourners who had followed her from the house, He was "deeply moved" and troubled. The primary meaning for the word translated "deeply moved" is to be angry or displeased. Edward Klink prefers the translation "outraged" in his commentary.³ Commentators and translators quibble over the best translation because a lesser used, secondary, meaning of the word is "to be moved." This is the option chosen by most English translators.
- The word translated "troubled" in our text carries the idea of being "shaken" or "disturbed."
- Then, Jesus responded in two ways. First, He asked, "Where have you put him?" Second, Jesus wept.

- Gerald Brochert’s commentary on this passage in *The New American Commentary* series is helpful:

“It was then that Jesus wept (11:35). John carefully used a different word (*dakryein*) for Jesus’ tears, a word that is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. It was almost as though the evangelist wanted to send a signal to his readers not to misinterpret Jesus’ weeping. It is, I would argue, precisely what the Jews here did. They interpreted his weeping as the loss of one “he loved” (11:36). They also questioned why the wonder-worker could not “have *kept* this man from dying” (11:37; italics added). After all, he had already opened the eyes of a blind man (cf. 9:6–11). But the time for miracles had by their reckoning already passed. Clearly, it had been four days since the death of Lazarus, and for them the situation was closed.

Yet in interpreting this text it is important for us not to rely on what other people have said about Jesus. Their evaluations may be skewed. Of course, Jesus loved Lazarus, but I doubt that that was the basic reason Jesus wept. Of course, Lazarus had been dead four days, but I doubt that death was the main reason Jesus wept. The evangelist had made it clear from the very beginning of this story that the illness of Lazarus would “not end in death” but would bring glory to God and to the Son of God (11:4).”⁴

- Jesus’ expression of deep emotions put His humanity on display. Many question the reason for Jesus’ weeping. Was it simply human emotion? Was it disappointment in the faith of His followers? Was it the fact that He was soon to call Lazarus, His friend, back to this life only to face physical death a second time? This seems to be one of Scripture’s mysteries.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** How did Mary respond when she heard Jesus was near?
2. **Get it:** How did Jesus respond?
3. **Get it:** Why do you believe Jesus wept?
4. **Apply it:** What can you learn from Mary’s response?
5. **Apply it:** How does Jesus’ response make you feel?

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

Read John 11:38-44 and discuss the questions below.

³⁸*Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.*

³⁹*“Remove the stone,” Jesus said. Martha, the dead man’s sister, told him, “Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days.”*

⁴⁰*Jesus said to her, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* ⁴¹*So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. ⁴²I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me.”* ⁴³*After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”* ⁴⁴*The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unwrap him and let him go.”*

Commentary:

- This climactic paragraph begins with the description of Jesus being “deeply moved again.” This is the same word that appeared in verse 33 that could be translated more harshly as angry, displeased, or outraged (see commentary above).
- In any case, this deep emotional response was His reaction upon approaching the tomb. With this context in mind, it may be understood that Jesus was responding to the great enemy that he would soon vanquish on behalf of all who believed in Him. That enemy is death.
- When he commanded that the stone be removed, Martha responds with the concern that her brother’s body would stink as he had been dead for days. By then, natural decomposition of the corpse would be well underway. Unfortunately, many police and firemen know this stench very well. “The events in this segment of the story are a study in contrast. When Jesus uttered his first of three commands at the tomb, ‘Take away the stone’ (11:39; cf. 11:43–44), Martha (here designated as ‘the sister of the dead man’), who obviously had joined the crowd, tried to take charge of the situation by informing Jesus of the passage of time (four days) and the fact that the deteriorating body had already begun to stink (11:39; The NIV ‘bad odor’ is much too mild for the story). Bodies began decomposing rather quickly in Palestine because they were not preserved by embalming processes in the manner of Egyptian funerary procedures.”⁵
- In verse 26, Martha had already said that she “believed.” The time had come for Jesus to put the “glory of God” on display. So, they removed the stone.
- Borchert notes that Jesus’ prayer in verses 31 and 32 are the first of three prayer texts found in John. The others are found in 12:27-28 and 17:1-26. Here, Jesus calls out to His Father asking for him to display His power for the benefit of the crowd standing around. His purpose was that the people may know that He was sent by the Father.
- At the end of His prayer, Jesus shouted for the dead man to come out of the tomb, calling him by name. At that moment, Lazarus appeared from the tomb still wrapped in the burial clothes! Imagine the shock that must have reverberated through the crowd, as well as, the joy that filled Mary and Martha in those moments!

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What does it mean that Jesus was “deeply moved?”
2. **Get it:** What is significant about four days?
3. **Get it:** What would you suggest are the two primary purposes for this miracle? *God’s glory and that the crowd might know Jesus was from the Father.*
4. **Apply it:** Do you believe that the Lord still does miraculous things in order to glorify Himself?
5. **Apply it:** How have you seen God bring glory to Himself through miracles?

Apply: *Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.*

What did you learn about God from this passage?

What does it mean to you that Jesus is the “resurrection and the life?”

Has your belief in Jesus impacted how you view “death?”

Do you believe that you will die?

November 10 – The Gospel of Service

The Heart of a Servant

Text: John 13:1-15

Big Idea: The principle and practice of humble servanthood

Focus: Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: What would you do if you knew that you would die in the next 24 hours?

Study: Use this section for your small group Bible study time.

To the teachers: I have added a number of supplemental passages since the events leading up to and including the Last Supper have prophetic and theological significance not to just Jesus' disciples then, but to Jesus' disciples today.

Introductory Material:

John surveys the incarnation and public ministry of Jesus in the first twelve chapters, but radically changes the pace in the next five chapters to give a detailed account of a few crucial hours leading up to the crucifixion.¹ Jesus' public ministry now completed; he concentrates his energies on the disciples.² In close to 24 hours, Jesus would hang on the cross. This was the beginning of the end of his earthly life, and Jesus used these last precious hours to serve and prepare His disciples.³

What Jesus Knew

From the beginning Jesus knew what his mission was and that God had ordained the timetable for his life and ministry. He saw His destiny in terms of a suffering Son of Man and Servant of God (Mark 8:31-38; 9:31; 10:33-34).⁴

- He knew that he was to be the “suffering servant” that was so clearly prophesied in Isaiah.
Isaiah 42:1 “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”^{ESV}
 - Matthew 12:17-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1 as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
Isaiah 53:10-12 ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.”^{ESV}

- He knew that he came as an obedient servant to do the will of the Father.
 - **John 6:38** *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”*
 - **Mark 10:45:** *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*
- He knew that he came to suffer and die for the sins of the world and willingly submitted. Philippians 2 tells us that he willingly took on the form of a servant by being born in the likeness of man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- Jesus knew his hour had come. More than any of the gospel writers, John emphasized the fact that Jesus lived on a “heavenly timetable” as He did the Father’s will. Note the development of this theme:
 - 2:4 “My hour has not yet come.”
 - 7:30 “His hour had not yet come.”
 - 8:20 “His hour had not yet come.”
 - 12:23 “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”
 - 13:1 “Jesus knew that his hour had come.”
 - 17:1 “Father, the hour has come.”⁵
- He knew who would believe and who would betray him from the very beginning. The events of John 13 did not take him by surprise.

John 6:64;70-71 – ⁶⁴*“But there are some among you who don’t believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning those who did not believe and the one who would betray him.)* ⁷⁰*Jesus replied to them, “Didn’t I choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.”* ⁷¹*He was referring to Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, one of the Twelve, because he was going to betray him.*
- He knew that his disciples had a competitive spirit and needed a lesson in humility and servitude.⁶

Luke 22:24-27 – ²²*Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest.* ²⁵*But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them have themselves called ‘Benefactors.’* ²⁶*It is not to be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you should become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving.* ²⁷*For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn’t it the one at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”*
- Finally, he knew that God had given him all things. He knew who he was, where he came from, what he had and where he was going.⁷

John 3:35 – *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands.*

John 13:3 – *Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God.*

Before the Feast

Read John 13:1 and discuss the questions below.

¹***Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.***

Commentary:

- This is the third Passover recorded in John’s Gospel (2:13; 6:1-14). The opening three stories of John 11:55-12:50 set the stage for what is coming. First Jesus is anointed in Bethany prior to his own burial and resurrection (Jn 12:7; cf. Mt 26:12). Second, entering Jerusalem, he is hailed as

king of Israel. (Matthew 21:5; cf. Zech 9:9) Finally, the Greeks, or Gentiles (that is, all humanity) come to him (cf. Isa. 49:6), signaling that his hour has come.⁸

- This section begins by restating that his hour has come.⁹ That was this divinely appointed hour. It was at this time when He would be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view it meant suffering, but from the divine point of view it meant glory.¹⁰
- The time has come for Jesus to return to the Father. This is their last Passover feast and Jesus uses this time to serve and prepare his disciples. John presents to us Jesus' example of a servant while Matthew, Mark and Luke show Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper presenting himself as the Passover Lamb.
 - ***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!”***
 - ***1 Corinthians 5:7 “For Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed.”*** (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23)
- Now before the Passover – this gives us a time reference. Jesus was about to share a meal with his disciples. Scholars disagree whether this meal was actually on the Passover, or if it was the Passover meal, but celebrated the day before. The verbs for 'reclining' (John 13:23) suggest that, although this meal fell "before the (official) festival of the Passover" it was nevertheless treated by Jesus and the disciples as a Passover meal.¹¹
- The book of John begins with "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. "His own" received him not: His own country, his own city, his own temple where everything spoke of his glory, his own covenant people, received him not. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name (1:12). And these are the ones spoken of now as "His own".¹²
- He loved them to the end is better translated "to the fullest extent, to the uttermost."¹³ He showed the full extent of his love in its most complete measure through his willing sacrifice.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What meal was Jesus having with his disciples?
2. **Get it:** To whom does God give the right to become His children?
3. **Apply it:** Is it easy for you to view suffering as a means to glorify God?

During the Feast

Read John 13:2-3 and discuss the questions below.

² Now when it was time for supper, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray him. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God.

Commentary:

- There are two scenes playing out here. The one that we can see which is the Passover meal with Christ and his disciples. The other scene is between Satan and God. Although we don't see the conflict it is just as real as the one we do see.
 - ***2 Corinthians 10: 3-4 For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds.***
- Satan had been cultivating Judas by planting the seeds of betrayal in his heart. Judas was not an unwilling participant though. His desire was in step with Satan's plan and he acted according to that desire.

- **James 1:14-15** *But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire.¹⁵ Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.*
- Judas failed to guard his heart and let the seeds of betrayal take root.
 - **Proverbs 4:23** *Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life*
- Jesus, knowing that it was his time, had full assurance that even through Judas' betrayal and its consequences, that God had already given everything into his hands. He knew that he had a secure destiny because of the Father's promise.
- He went into this as the victor, not the victim.¹⁴

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What is the real war that we fight?
2. **Get it:** How well did Judas do in the unseen spiritual battle?
3. **Apply it:** Can you remember a time when you clearly knew that Satan was planting seeds in your heart?
4. **Apply it:** Do you have the assurance that you have a secure destiny?

Living lesson in humility

Read John 13:4-5 and discuss the questions below.

⁴ So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. ⁵ Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

Commentary:

- The streets were dusty and the sandals that they wore didn't keep their feet from getting dirty. Typically, the host would provide a servant to wash the guests feet. In their society this task would have been given to the lowliest servant.
- Jesus was the Sovereign, yet he took the place of the lowest servant. He had all things in his hands, yet he laid aside his outer garments and picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet He served his followers.¹⁵ Jesus provided a personal service to them that was below their dignity to do for someone else.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Why was it typical for a host to provide a servant to wash the feet of his guests?
2. **Apply it:** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being most likely, how likely are you to offer to do a degrading task to serve someone else?

Spiritual Cleanliness

Read John 13:6-8 and discuss the questions below.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I'm doing you don't realize now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ You will never wash my feet," Peter said. Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me.

Commentary:

- Peter most likely asked what they were all thinking, but Peter was never one to be shy about saying what he was thinking. You can almost hear his emphatic protest that Jesus will never wash his feet. In Peter's question the word YOU is emphatic in the Greek.¹⁶
- The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translated Peter's statement, "You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never"¹⁷

- Peter did not understand the theological or symbolic meaning of Jesus washing their feet. Jesus tells him that he doesn't understand it now, but afterward he will. This wasn't just a matter of physical cleansing. It wouldn't be until after Jesus' death and resurrection that they would begin to understand the true extent of Christ's humility.
- The Greek word used here for wash means to cleanse especially the hands, face or feet. For the one who has been thoroughly cleansed (bathed) only the part that was dirty needed washing.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Was this just a matter of physical cleansing or is Jesus teaching a deeper truth?
2. **Apply it:** What action could Jesus do in our culture today to convey the same meaning?

The Lesson of Cleanliness

Read John 13:9-11 and discuss the questions below.

⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰"One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who would betray him, this is why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Commentary:

- Again Peter responds in the extreme. If the washing of his feet is essential to fellowship with Christ, then he requests that his whole body have a thorough cleansing. Jesus' response to Peter's request to be washed shows that Peter is still missing the point of what Jesus is doing. Jesus replies that the one who is bathed, only needs his feet washed. The theology that Jesus is showing through example here is that the one who has been thoroughly bathed (through their belief in Christ) needs only to "cleanse" himself of the sins of his daily walk (I Jn 1:9).
- Jesus makes the stunning statement that not all of you are clean. Jesus knew all along that Judas had never accepted the washing of the Word and was an unbeliever (Jn 6:64-71). This statement of Jesus also shows us that the literal act of foot washing was not so important. Judas had his feet literally washed, but he had no part with Jesus because Judas did not let Jesus wash him in the way that Jesus intended.¹⁸
- Judas is a sober example that it is possible to look like a true disciple and go through the motions of "following" Jesus without ever having known him as his Lord and Savior.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What is the spiritual lesson that Jesus is trying to teach his disciples?
2. **Get it:** Did Jesus know that Judas was his betrayer?
3. **Apply it:** Examine your heart. Do you look like a Christian and just go through the motions like Judas did or have you been thoroughly cleansed by Christ?

The Lesson Explained

Read John 13:12-15 and discuss the questions below.

¹² *When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, “Do you know what I have done for you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you.*

Commentary:

- Having washed their feet, Jesus once again reclines with them and asks if they understand what he has just done for them. Having reminded them that he is Teacher and Lord, he explains that he has given them an example or pattern of Christian living. If he, their Lord and Teacher is servant enough to wash their feet, they should also be humble enough to wash each other’s feet. Jesus’ purpose in this action was to establish the model of loving humility.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What titles does Jesus’ use for himself to show his authority to instruct them in Christian living?
2. **Apply it:** What character trait is necessary to serve others?

Apply: *Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.*

Washing their feet meant something, but it was far greater than the cultural practice of cleaning the dust off of one guest’s feet. This washing of the disciple’s feet presents to us a living example of the theology of salvation and the true Christian life.

- We first see with Jesus’ answers to Peter that there is an initial bathing that is distinct from an ongoing washing. We need to be bathed by placing our trust in Jesus and what He did for us on the cross.²⁰ Afterward we have a continual need to have our “feet washed” in ongoing fellowship with him. (CF 1 Jn 1:7-9)
- Jesus himself is a living parable of the Christian life. By taking on the form of a servant in washing their feet, Jesus is showing the disciples that they also should live with the same humility and love for each other.
- Jesus’ greatest example of this sacrificial love was when he willingly offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins.
- The true picture here is not one of ceremonial foot washing. It is Christ the servant who offered himself up for us giving us an example of the principle of showing humble, sacrificial love to one another that should mark both our attitude and action.²¹
 - ***Philippians 2:4-7 “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”***

November 17 - The Gospel Mission

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Big Idea: Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations.

Focus: Use this section to open in a large group or small group setting.

Option 1: What did you learn about God this week in your reading?

Option 2: Does evangelism stop at sharing the Gospel?

Study: Use this section for your small group Bible study time.

Introductory Material:

These are the last words written in the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus' time of ministry and teaching on earth and after His death and resurrection. Matthew's Gospel leans into the Kingship of Jesus and His authority as God. So, this ending is fitting as He reminds readers of the character and nature of God as well as the mission we have as members of His Kingdom.

Jesus Appears in Galilee

Read Matthew 28:16-17 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁶The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them: ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped, but some doubted.

Commentary:

- To set the scene, the resurrected Jesus has already appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem. In Matthew 28:10, He told the disciples, "Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." Verse 16 adds the detail that He told them to go to a specific mountain.
- It is traditionally thought the mountain He directed them to was the Mount of Transfiguration.¹
- While it is a short verse, there are multiple ideas to highlight here. Jesus is sending the disciples back to Galilee where His ministry began. Galilee was a despised region ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" John 1:46), and Galilee had a more diverse population of Gentiles living there.² How fitting that the Great Commission is going to be launched against this backdrop.
- It is not clear if those that doubted were among the eleven disciples or were other followers that had gathered there. However, the term "doubted" may better be understood as "hesitated." That not all followers instantly believed Jesus had risen speaks to their prior inability to understand Jesus when He foretold of His death and resurrection.³

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** Where did the disciples go?
2. **Get it:** Why is being in Galilee significant?
3. **Get it:** How did the disciples respond according to verse 12?
4. **Apply it:** What stirs up doubts or hesitation in our hearts? How do we conquer those feelings when they arise?

Jesus has all Authority

Read Matthew 28:18 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁸Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

Commentary:

- It was pointed out in one of the commentaries how Satan tempted Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8-9), and now compare that with the dominion Jesus has. He demonstrated perfect obedience, even unto death, and here He claims His complete authority.⁴
- This is a fitting ending to the Gospel of Matthew, as Matthew's entire Gospel points us to Jesus the King who has all authority.
- Jesus did not receive a higher level of authority post-resurrection. During His earthly ministry, He still had the power to forgive sins, and His words and commands are everlasting. Rather than a higher authority, Jesus' scope of authority now encompasses all of heaven and earth.⁵ It signifies the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, and Jesus is the King of the Davidic covenant who will rule all nations. (2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 9:6-7, Daniel 7:14)
- Wiersbe says "Since Jesus Christ today has all authority we may obey Him without fear. No matter where He leads us, no matter what circumstances we face, He is in control. By His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated all enemies and won for Himself all authority."⁶

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** What does Jesus tell the disciples gathered there?
2. **Apply it:** How is it hope for us that Jesus has all authority?

Go and Make Disciples

Read Matthew 28:19-20 and discuss the questions below.

¹⁹"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Commentary:

- After proclaiming His universal authority, Jesus commands His disciples to go and make more disciples of every nation. His last recorded command, in His resurrected glory, was to go disciple the world to follow Him and observe all His teachings.
- The word translated "go" in the original language is a participle.⁷ So, a better translation is "as you are going." This leaves us with two different and important ideas when it comes to sharing the Gospel.
 - The choice of verb tense means this was not a suggestion but an expectation.
 - "As you are going" implies this is part of the natural everyday flow of your life.⁸
- Evangelism as Jesus lays it out is not simply sharing the Gospel. It must start with that, but Jesus clearly includes making disciples through baptizing, and teaching. This implies there is a whole process that needs to happen if you share the Gospel with someone and they respond in a positive way.

- Baptizing
 - Baptism in Matthew’s Gospel connected to the baptism of repentance most famously associated with John the Baptist. We all come to faith when we recognize our need for a Savior (confession), and then turn away from sin and toward Him (repentance). Baptism is the outward sign of that confession and repentance (Matthew 3:1-11).⁹
 - The word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo.” One of the ways this word is used is dipping cloth in fabric dye. Once the cloth is dyed, it has a new identity. That is exactly what baptism represents, it is a believer publicly identifying himself as a follower of Christ. The other way this word was used is for ceremonial washing, and we certainly consider baptism an ordinance, representing a cleanness and newness of life.¹⁰
 - Paul describes baptism this way: **“Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.”** (Romans 6:4)
 - Peter describes baptism similarly: **“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** (2 Peter 3:21)
 - Baptism is a symbol of the new life we experience when we believe the Gospel. So, all believers should follow their faith with baptism. It is the first step in the journey of becoming a disciple.
- Teaching
 - Teaching is simply the act of speaking instruction, precepts, or doctrine. Inherent in the word used here is the intent to influence the understanding of the person being taught.¹¹
 - We are to teach them to observe everything I (Jesus) have commanded you. Today we have all of God’s instructions written down in the Bible, so that is what we are to teach.
 - Paul describes Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 with these words, **“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”** Teaching God’s Word is profitable because it equips and completes Christians for every good work.
 - We are to teach because as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us and we learn more about God, His Word, and the Gospel a beautiful transformation happens. Romans 12:2 says that we are transformed by renewing our minds. The word transformed is the Greek word “metamorphoo” where we get our word metamorphosis. This transformation happens from the inside out, the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. That transformation gives us the courage not to be conformed to this age (pressured by the world into the mold it has for you).
 - All new believers need a community around them as well as a mentor who can teach them God’s Word.
- Making disciples
 - The words disciple and disciples occur only in the 4 Gospels and the book of Acts. This word is a noun to identify the followers of Jesus, especially the 12 men that Jesus called to follow Him. But it is also a verb, meaning to make a disciple through instruction and teaching.

- In Jesus relationship with the 12 disciples, he taught them through both His words and His actions. He also had a goal in mind, that these men would be able to spread the good news of the Gospel even after He ascended to heaven.
- Here the phrase “make disciples” is the prominent instruction in this passage. As you are going, make disciples by baptizing and teaching.
- This is why we have a discipleship program at our church. We connect a teacher or mentor to someone who wants to be discipled and they meet together to study God’s Word, pray, and even memorize Scripture. Titus 2:1-8 describes this sort of relationship where those older in the faith encourage and train younger believers. This is also often how we train future leaders and teachers in a church, and this is how the church continues from one generation to the next.
- A perfect example of this is the relationship Paul had with Timothy. Paul added Timothy to one of his missionary journeys in Acts 16:1-4. He writes Timothy many words of encouragement in the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy. One particular encouraging passage is 2 Timothy 2: 15, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (ESV) “Do your best” is also translated “study” and “be diligent.” Can you see the encouragement Paul gives Timothy to pour over God’s Word thoroughly and consistently? He also tells him to focus on having God’s approval and not to be ashamed. Shame can lead us to hide our faith or water down the Gospel, so it keeps us from speaking with boldness. When we are not ashamed, we can rightly handle the truth. Other translations of that last phrase include accurately handling the truth and correctly teaching the truth. Paul was training Timothy as his disciple to be a leader in the church so he could disciple others. We all need those kinds of encouragers in our lives, and we need to be those types of encouragers to other believers!
- God calls all of us to go and make disciples, so anyone who is a church member can do this. But there is also a special group of people called to go, as in leave their home and go to a specific area in the US or in the world to share the Gospel with a specific people group. Missionaries live out this great commission every day, leading people to faith and training up those locals to eventually be teachers and church leaders. They often make great sacrifices to go where God has called them.
- Finally, we do not need to fear the task ahead, for Jesus is with us always. His presence empowers us in our mission to grow His kingdom.

QUESTIONS:

1. **Get it:** How are we to disciple all nations?
2. **Get it:** What is baptism? Why does a believer need to be baptized?
3. **Get it:** Who are we to teach? What are we to teach? Why are we to teach?
4. **Get it:** What does this process of making disciples do for the church?
5. **Apply it:** Has your idea of evangelism expanded after studying the Great Commission? What are some ways we can do more to make more disciples?
6. **Apply it:** If sharing the Gospel is difficult, are you encouraged to know that Jesus is with you to accomplish His will?

Apply: *Use this section to conclude your lesson for today.*

Jesus, with all authority, gives His final command to go and make disciples of every nation. It is not merely sharing the Gospel with others, but it is more so forming a commitment with new believers. We must be with them through the steps of repentance and then feed them with Scripture. True evangelism, as laid out by Jesus, is to build relationships through this process of discipleship. It is a simple concept, but it can be hard to practice. Thankfully, Jesus promises that He is with us as we work to carry out His commands and build His Kingdom.

End Notes

Cover Page

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