



A JOURNEY TO EASTER

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*"O Christ, Savior of humanity,
direct the words that celebrate who you are,
and teach me to sound your praises. Amen."*
Eusebius of Caesarea

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

INTRODUCTION

The journey to Easter is a pilgrimage scores of Christians have made—every year, in every age. The journey typically begins in the bleak days of winter and gradually emerges into blooms of springtime. But more than the thaw of a changing season, this journey to Easter is a warming of the heart by recalling daily the story of God in Christ.

These contemplative days are intended to pave this remarkable season with deeper meaning. Through daily readings from Scripture, where every page reveals the King of kings and Savior of the world, your journey through Resurrection Sunday will be made holy for time with Jesus.

It might be a bumpy journey, however, because the Word reveals both the glory, goodness, and grace of God along with the ugliness of sin and the gut-wrenching rejection of His Son. But (spoiler alert) it ultimately soars with the renewal that comes—heart, mind, and soul—for remembering our Lord’s triumph.

May your journey through these pages be far more than daily time in God’s Word (commendable as that is). May it be but a ramp into intimate time with the Lord in fellowship and worship. And an instrument He’ll use to transform your days, through the powerful working of His Word and the Spirit. May He also prepare your heart to celebrate the greatest miracle ever—the resurrection of the world’s Savior.

Don’t let this blessed season quickly pass you by. Rather, take the long, slow pilgrimage toward it. You will be renewed for the journey . . . and primed for the celebration of Jesus that awaits.

*Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name;
deliver us and forgive our sins for your name’s sake.*

PSALM 79:9 NIV

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY ONE

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

GENESIS 14:18–20

After the calling of Abram (Genesis 12:1–3), but before God’s covenant with him (recorded in Genesis 15), and about 700 years before the establishment of the Levitical priesthood (Exodus 28), there is this brief but beautiful account of the blessing of Melchizedek.

This lends insight into the fact that, as Jesus confirmed (John 5:17), God is always working—often in unseen ways and places. He is working even now in other parts of the world, through servants we know nothing about, in ways we don’t understand—all pointing to the Christ of God.

The priesthood from the tribe of Levi, and the familial line of Aaron, seems to be the primary focus in the Bible. However, the Spirit here reveals another order appointed by God, by oath (Psalm 110:4). While the Levitical priesthood served the Israelites for a time, the order of Melchizedek would eternally serve all humanity. For the Bible subsequently reveals that Jesus is the Great High Priest appointed by God from that order.

We further learn from Hebrews 7 that “this Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. ... First, the name Melchizedek means ‘king of righteousness’; then also, ‘king of Salem’ means ‘king of peace.’”

The resemblance is uncanny, isn't it? Oh, the infinite wisdom of God! But the thing about resemblance is that although things look similar in some ways, they can be completely different.

We do see a very real type in Melchizedek—of one holding both offices of priest and king of the Most High God, who blesses with bread and wine. But Jesus, who now fulfills those roles to perfection for eternity (Hebrews 7:3), is also Creator and the One who delivers us from our enemies. He is both the offering and the sacrifice, who has provided eternal atonement. He is the holy, unstained, indestructible, exalted High Priest. And His priesthood, without flaw or weakness, is permanent, therefore, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25). And since He is also Son of God and Son of Man, He is empathetic to the plight of our humanity (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, “let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

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DAY TWO

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

GENESIS 35:1

Jacob returned to Canaan, the land promised his forefathers, some 30 years after he deceived his father and betrayed his brother, Esau (Genesis 27:18ff). He had been wandering since he left his father-in-law, Laban. But from Shechem God bid Jacob to journey to Bethel and dwell there. He knew the place well, for it had provided a sanctuary for him when he was running for his life (Genesis 27:1). It was the place God blessed him with a dream of a heavenly ladder (Genesis 28:11–12).

But before they could move forward, before they could make their pilgrimage to Bethel, the House of God, before Jacob met with God, or built an altar to worship God, and only God, they needed purification . . . and to bury their idols (Genesis 35:2–4). They needed to lay aside everything from their former lives. Everything that competed with their sole allegiance to the One True God.

What is it that you place ahead of God? That keeps you from moving on, closer to Him? That hinders your wholehearted worship?

For the duration of their 20-mile journey, God protected them (Genesis 35:5), striking fear in the hearts of the people—as He would centuries later for the tribes of Israel returning to the land (Joshua 5:1).

God reminded Jacob of his new name (repeated here for emphasis). “No longer” was he Jacob, but Israel (Genesis 35:10). God wanted Jacob to move forward in his new

identity. (A struggle we share in moving forward in our new identity in Jesus.) God then pronounced His name, El Shaddai, God Almighty—so there would be no doubt that God was able to accomplish all He intended. God also pronounced a blessing upon Jacob, His ancient, perpetual blessing from the beginning, then passed on to Noah, and extended to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham.

God then reiterated his covenant to Jacob as a descendant of Abraham—because it was meant for future generations. And thankfully so! Humans have a propensity toward forgetfulness. But not God! He remembers His covenants (Deuteronomy 4:31). There, God declared kings would come from his familial line. Kings would indeed come from the line of Judah, as promised. Ultimately leading to King Jesus, the Lion of Judah.

Jacob built an altar, anointed it with oil, and presented an offering to God. He fulfilled his earlier vow, with the last altar he built in that certain place. Jacob stated at that time that if God would be with him and keep him, He would be his Lord and God (Genesis 28:20). God had brought him to the place where he could testify that God had been with him wherever he went (Genesis 35:3). It was as though God called him back to Bethel to remind him, not only of his identity, but of his earlier vow.

His journey had come full circle, at last.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THREE

“So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.”

GENESIS 45:8 NLT

The long stretch of road from Genesis 37–50 tells of the humbling and exaltation of Joseph. But the narrative preeminently tells the story of God’s sovereignty to accomplish His will and perpetuate His promises.

It is also a story pointing to the Christ.

Israel favors this son of his old age—which puffs Joseph up and creates dissension in the family. Joseph’s boasting about his dreams incites jealousy and rage in his brothers—which lands him in a pit. His humbling has begun. Then he’s loaded on an Ishmaelite slave caravan headed to Egypt.

Things go from bad, to better, to worse. But through all the ups and downs, “God is with Joseph” (as the text reiterates a whopping four times). And despite the plotting and treachery of his enemies, in the end, Joseph gained the victory.

Eventually he rises to power, exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Could it be that he is, after all, the Seed, the promised one of God?

Governor Joseph saves his people, and the nations, from an unrelenting famine. Is God not blessing the nations through Abraham’s line (as God’s covenant proposed)?

After 20 years, Joseph sees his brothers, but hides his identity for a time. Eventually, he forgives them (albeit after a prolonged struggle and a series of tests), and the family is

reconciled. Joseph brings them down to Egypt and ensures safe settlement for them in Goshen. But then, plot twist, Jacob's blessing for kings to come is bestowed upon Judah. Not Joseph!

Joseph enters the silent years (from age 56 until his death at 110).

Our hearts can journey through the narrative of Joseph's life with that of Jesus beating in the background. The similarities are so striking, they make your head spin.

The Beloved Son, Jesus, humbled himself—to become a servant (Philippians 2:7). He was sometimes despised by his own brothers. He, too, was falsely accused and arrested. He forgave those who sinned against Him and overcame His enemies. God exalted Him to His right hand—offering salvation to all who come to Him, the Promised Seed of Abraham. And the famished feast upon the Living Bread from Heaven.

But, most remarkably, God is bringing about the greatest good from evil (Genesis 50:20). From crucifixion to resurrection. And from the greatest betrayal, agony, and injustice multitudes from every nation are saved.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FOUR

Then Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and called all the elders of Israel together. Aaron told them everything the Lord had told Moses, and Moses performed the miraculous signs as they watched. Then the people of Israel were convinced that the Lord had sent Moses and Aaron. When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

EXODUS 4: 29–31 NLT

The Israelite foremen could see that they were in serious trouble when they were told, "You must not reduce the number of bricks you make each day." As they left Pharaoh's court, they confronted Moses and Aaron, who were waiting outside for them. The foremen said to them, "May the Lord judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!"

EXODUS 5:19–21 NLT

Leaders are familiar with a phenomenon of having supporters fall away when something is required of them . . . or things get difficult. This isn't a modern phenomenon because Moses experienced the same sort of reactions. And then some.

Early on, the people were overjoyed when Moses first told God's people that he had been sent to approach Pharaoh and demand their release. But when Pharaoh made things more difficult for them by taking away their straw, and things became harder to meet their master's requirements, they blamed Moses for their troubles. Not Pharaoh—Moses.

But for Moses, even with a disgruntled people and the opposition of Pharaoh, he needed to remain faithful to God's calling. In the face of rejection, displeasure, and hard "nos," Moses had to persevere.

What Moses experienced was but a foreshadowing of what Jesus also endured.

Jesus confronted the religious leaders on behalf of the people and yet faced great opposition. And when He told those following Him hard things—people He came to save—they rejected Him (John 6:60). "But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, 'Do you take offense at this?'" (John 6:61) He further inquired, "Do you want to go away as well?" (John 6:67).

The question Jesus posed to His disciples then is one we too must decide for ourselves.

I applaud Peter for his astute reply: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Regardless of the disapproval of others, the rejection of His teaching, and the opposition He faced, Jesus remained resolutely steadfast and faithful to the mission of God.

People disapproved of Jesus message, means, and methods. They did so then. They do so today. But He was perfectly righteous in all He said and did. And because He was, His righteousness, by grace, is attributed to those who are His.

Living the kingdom life is a high standard, with many challenges, but His followers are called to faithfulness.

It's a narrow path . . . but it leads to life (Matthew 7:14).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

*Who among the gods
is like you, Lord?
Who is like you —
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?*

*In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.*

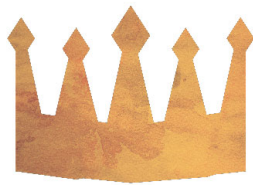
EXODUS 15:11, 13

*Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hands I commit my spirit;
deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.*

PSALM 31:3–5

The Lord reigns forever.

EXODUS 15:18



THE LORD REIGNS FOREVER.

EXODUS 15:18

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY SIX

When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

EXODUS 15:23–25

I don’t like anything bitter. In fact, I don’t even like the word “bitter.” I’ve got to admit, “Marah” sounds much better. But the story behind the name is far more interesting. . .

The newly released captives were making their foray toward the promised land, with Moses following God’s lead. They had traveled in the desert for three long days without finding any water (Exodus 15:22). That would put anyone on edge. But when they finally found water – and then it was undrinkable – that tipped them over the edge. In the face of such a crisis they did what humans do best—they grumbled. And forgot. They forgot everything they witnessed regarding God’s sovereignty over Creation.

The people of God saw Him change water to blood. And part the sea for their grand exodus. On the banks of the Red Sea, they sang of the Lord’s might—just three days prior. There they stood, at the very place where God had led them—facing a watery test.

Moses prayed. He cried out to the Lord for help, and God provided a solution (Exodus 15:25).

The solution? Wood. Sounds preposterous. But it was God's provision for reversal.

A piece of wood, and God's gracious will, turned the bitter sweet.

The Lord led them . . . to a test. And Moses prayed.

This brings the Lord's Prayer to my mind, where Jesus teaches His disciples to pray in this way: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

When the Lord brings you to a pivotal point of testing, pray. Pray for His deliverance from everything the evil one might use against you. Pray for protection from forces that will tempt you to sin. Pray that you won't succumb. And pray for God's provision to pass the test.

Be assured: God will not tempt you—but provide a way of escape. And the strength to endure.

Little did the people know that Elim, an oasis of blessing, was just on the other side of testing (Exodus 15:27).

Only God knows the blessing He has for you on the other side of what may now seem bitter. So, pray.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY SEVEN

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

EXODUS 34:6–8 ESV

In Genesis, God revealed that He is the Almighty Creator who is also mercifully covenantal. In the opening chapters of Exodus, He revealed He is sovereign and redemptive. When asked, God revealed His name to Moses, I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14). In chapter 33, Moses asked God to show him His glory. And now, here in chapter 34, as God passed by Moses, He proclaimed:

- Y^hōvā Y^hōvā ‘ēl – Yahweh Yahweh God
- raḥûm ḥannûn – compassionate and gracious
- ‘ārēk ‘āp – slow to anger
- raḥ ḥesed ‘ēmet – abounding in goodness and truth
- nāṣar ḥesed – keeping mercy
- nāsā’ ‘āôn peša’ ḥaṭṭā’āt – forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin

That is goodness . . . and glory! It’s not merely a list of adjectives describing attributes of His character. It’s who He is.

That is God! He is gracious and merciful. He is longsuffering. He is abundant in goodness, faithfulness, and forgiveness. All at once . . . all the time. All of which is demonstrated fully in Christ Jesus, God’s Glory.

Moses saw God's glory and heard His proclamation of who He is. We, too, "see" God's glory by hearing the proclamations of Jesus. We see God's glory when we read the gospel of who Jesus is and all He has done. And continues to do.

Jesus is the exact image, radiance, and glory of God (Hebrews 1:3). He is the love and mercy of God—manifested in the flesh. And evident in His salvation.

Behold the glory of God in Christ Jesus! Set your eyes upon the Word and see glory revealed. For Jesus embodies all of God's names.

And now, because of Jesus, God has invited us to call Him by another name: Father. How glorious is that?

Moses heard God proclaim His name, and he saw His glory. Then we read that he māhar, he hurried to bow in worship. That's the only fitting response. And it is the response due Jesus, for, as the apostle Paul wrote, at the name of Jesus, Yeshua, every knee with hurry to bow in worship (Philippians 2:10).

Why wait?

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY EIGHT

And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

NUMBERS 21:8–9 ESV

It was their 40th year in the wilderness. They were nearing their destination. But, on the other side of victory, there were greater dangers than snakes they needed to beware: like impatience (Numbers 21:4) and their fiery words (Numbers 21:5).

The strike from impatience slithering in the human heart can be worse than a snake bite.

It seemed the serpent’s temptation of Eden was on replay. And the hearts disgruntled by God’s provision of food caused their serpent tongues to lash out at God and Moses.

If they wanted to act like serpents, well, add more to their number. Turns out, though, fiery serpents sent by the Lord will kill you.

However, there was a noticeable (and refreshing) change in the heart’s response that wasn’t exhibited in Eden. Rather than hiding and blaming, the wilderness people of God confessed and requested prayer.

Moses interceded. And God provided a cure (one that sounded as preposterous as a piece of wood thrown into the water at Marah). God told Moses to make a serpent and lift it up on a pole. Whoever looked on it would live.

The people needed to look upon God's provision for healing, believing in the salvation He offered.

Jesus, while privately teaching a teacher of teachers, used this historical event as an object lesson (John 3:14–15). Jesus was making a connection between the healing God provided to those bitten by the serpents to the healing He would offer the sin-bitten by Himself also being lifted up.

The ancient Israelites were to look upon the serpent, lifted up, to live. As believers are to look upon the Son, lifted up, to live.

We must lift up our eyes, away from the snake-like things in the world, and gaze upon the Son. For poisonous, deadly sin is coursing through our veins. And we desperately need healing.

We need Jesus. For life. Because He is the only cure.

God has provided the remedy. Jesus, the One high and lifted up, is holding out salvation to those who look up, through eyes of faith, and believe.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY NINE

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger.

JUDGES 2:11–13 ESV

What is the first thing you think of when you hear “unfaithful”?

It’s likely you thought of marriage. Or adultery.

When the prophets of God heard “unfaithful,” they likely thought of Israel.

Israel was unfaithful to God, their Husband (Isaiah 54:5). Because they failed to follow God’s wisdom to drive the Canaanites from the land, they were influenced by them to worship other gods—thereby giving their hearts away. Therefore, they failed to keep covenant with God and committed spiritual adultery through their idolatry.

The era of Israel’s judges was often dark and sinister. While the nation was unfaithful, God remained ever-faithful. Thankfully, God’s faithfulness does not depend on the faithfulness of His people. And, while He was provoked to anger and gave them over to their desires and consequences, He also raised up leaders to deliver them from their enemies (Judges 2:18).

However, “they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the Lord’s commands. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for

them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways” (Judges 2:17–19 NIV). This very pattern was habitually on repeat for over 400 years. Which tells us two things: the people desperately needed a more lasting heart-change and a permanent and greater deliverer.

Where faithfulness is in living a God-centered life, unfaithfulness is to live a godless life. But you can drop-kick the “un” with a turning back to God.

Judges 21:25 made this comment about that era: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.” The spiral of Israel back into darkness and chaos didn’t have to be the end of their story. And it certainly doesn’t have to be ours. Because you have a King! He has provided the hope and the means for faithfulness. And He has demonstrated how to walk in faith—doing what is right in His eyes.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TEN

At the close of the Book of Judges, Israel is in an autonomous period of rebellion and increasing unfaithfulness to God. But as 1 Samuel opens, we are introduced to a couple practicing faith in God.

Elkanah, a Levitical priest, lived in Ramah with his wife Hannah. And his other wife, Peninnah, and their children. This is but one problem in Hannah's predicament. She was also barren. (A double whammy!) This also gave cause for her arch-rival to bully and abuse her. Then, added to these difficulties, was the plight of her times—for she lived in an honor-shame culture and was powerless as a woman.

Hannah was depressed. Devalued. And desperate. But she did have faith. And there's one thing faith does: it drives you Godward. Hannah's faith expressed itself in devotion, in worship, and in prayer.

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life."

1 SAMUEL 1:10–11A

Bill T. Arnold, in his commentary on 1 Samuel, wrote, "Hannah's earnest prayer in the Shiloh sanctuary is the pivotal point in the narrative. After Eli blesses her, she is able to eat and 'her face was no longer downcast.' There is a telling contrast between the Hannah who is too despondent to eat and the Hannah who emerges from God's presence full of hope and confidence. Though her circumstances have not yet changed,

she has found a peace with God, a peace that leaves her buoyant and capable of returning with her family.”

Prayer changed everything. Not because we always get what we pray for (or if we do, it’s not always immediate). But because we enter into the presence of God—who lifts our hearts, our countenance, and boosts our faith.

Hannah’s song of worship (1 Samuel 2:1–10), filled with the dramatic and merciful reversals of God, reveal far greater blessings from God—above and beyond His eventual blessing of a son for her. God delivered Hannah from her anguish (1 Samuel 1:8, 10). He turned her agony to rejoicing (1 Samuel 2:1); her barrenness to motherhood (1 Samuel 1:20, 27); her disgrace to a place of honor; and removed the cause for further torment from her enemy (1 Samuel 2:1). Her son would also usher in a sort of deliverance for the nation, as well, when he eventually anointed David as their king.

Our God is a Deliverer. We can say with the psalmist, “You, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling” (Psalm 116:8). For we can point ahead to the scene of Revelation 21:4 before us with confidence . . . all because Jesus has delivered all those who belong to Him.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY ELEVEN

Eli's sons were wicked men; they did not respect the LORD.

1 SAMUEL 2:12 CSB

On the heels of Hannah's worship-filled prayer comes a stark contrast. The very next account provides record of the great sins of Eli's sons. What makes their behavior so wicked? They were priests.

Things were so bad in Israel that even the priesthood was tainted by sin—all because they “did not know the Lord” or “have regard” for Him.

Instead of being priests who bestowed the Aaronic blessing upon God's people (Numbers 6:24–26), they extorted them. They acted as opportunists who used their position to take the best for themselves.

When it came to the sacrifice and offerings, prime belonged to God. But they “scorned the sacrifice” by taking the best and fattening themselves on the choice parts (2 Samuel 2:29). Scripture tells us this treated “the Lord's offering with contempt” (2 Samuel 2:17). They were also guilty of other detestable practices.

They dishonored the calling of God to be his representative in the world.

Therefore, God sent a messenger to Eli with a verdict and judgment (2 Samuel 2:27; see also 2 Samuel 3:12–14). They both lost their lives on the same day, in a battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:10–11). However, even more tragic than the other lives lost, was losing the Ark of the Covenant in battle. It was hauled off to Dagon's Temple in Ashdod (1 Samuel 5:1–2). But God promised He would raise up a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35).

Zadok would take the place of Eli as High Priest, eventually serving under King David and King Solomon.

But the infinitely perfect and infinitely holy High Priest of God was yet to come.

Called and confirmed by God's oath, from the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is that faithful High Priest. He "is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Therefore, He is able to meet all our needs (Hebrews 7:26). He is also the final, and permanent, High Priest (Hebrews 7:23–24), who is now exalted and seated at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 8:1). This makes Him "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25). There is no need for Him to offer a sacrifice for sin . . . He was the sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27).

The sons of Eli, in great avarice, greed, and sinfulness, corrupted the priesthood. But Jesus, the Son of God, redeemed and fulfilled the priesthood as a humble servant.

In the case of Hophni and Phinehas, God pronounced, "Those who honor Me, I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30). Jesus, too, declared in John 2:26 this same "law of reciprocal honor" (to quote A W Tozer). As God's "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), will we honor the calling of God as His representatives in the world?

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God, the Almighty,
who was, who is, and who is to come.*

REVELATION 4:8B

*Our Lord and God,
you are worthy to receive
glory and honor and power,
because you have created all things,
and by your will
they exist and were created.*

REVELATION 4:11

*Great and awe-inspiring are your works,
Lord God, the Almighty;
just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.
Lord, who will not fear
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All the nations will come
and worship before you
because your righteous acts
have been revealed.*

REVELATION 15:3–4



HOLY, HOLY, HOLY,
LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY,
WHO WAS, WHO IS,
AND WHO IS TO COME.

REVELATION 4:8B

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTEEN

Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.”

1 SAMUEL 15:10–11A

King Saul’s reign had a couple shining moments early on. Both times it was because God sent the Spirit upon him. The first time, he prophesied (1 Samuel 10:6–7). The next, he rightly gave glory to God for victory in battle (1 Samuel 11:13). But then the wheels fell off.

God sent Samuel to Saul with the long overdue task of ridding the land of the Amalekites. This was an act of justice toward the enemies of God’s people.

God gave the Israelites the victory—but . . .

Saul didn’t carry out God’s clear instructions. All that was despised and deemed worthless they destroyed. But Saul kept the best for himself, reminiscent of Eli’s sons, the priests—except now a king was profiting from his calling (1 Samuel 15:9). And, to make matters worse, Saul erected a monument to himself—instead of building an altar to God for the victory (1 Samuel 15:12).

Saul’s disobedience grieved God. (Note to self.)

When confronted, Saul tried to pass off that he had kept the best “to sacrifice to the Lord” (1 Samuel 15:15). Then he tried the age-old Eden trick of shifting blame (1 Samuel 15:21).

Samuel revealed one of the most important truths in the Bible: “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

What is in the heart is of greater concern to God than our actions.

The downfall of many is precisely this: disobedience. God doesn’t want some... or second—but all. He does not want partial obedience. For partial obedience is really no obedience at all.

But Saul... He presented his actions as obedience (1 Samuel 15:13). He was either lying, or that was how he viewed his sin.

Was he truly repentant? Or merely regretful that he got caught?

Eventually the Spirit departed the fallen king (1 Samuel 16:14) and Saul descended into utter madness.

Saul was unworthy of the throne and the great privilege of leading the people of God—proving God’s word right and true. God warned Samuel, who in turn shared this solemn warning with the people of what would happen with a human as their king (1 Samuel 8:10–17).

Saul rejected God’s instruction, as did his forefathers in the Garden of Eden. And the people rejected the rule and wisdom of God. Wisdom in our own eyes isn’t always wisdom at all. And selective obedience isn’t obedience, either.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FOURTEEN

So King David had [Mephibosheth] brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, "Mephibosheth!"

"At your service," he replied.

"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

2 SAMUEL 9:5–7

King David showed his loyal kindness to Mephibosheth because of a covenant he made with his friend, Jonathan. The favor David extended gave privilege and honor to this man based solely on promise. Mephibosheth (whose name means "a shameful thing") became crippled and an orphan when he was five years young—when both his father, Jonathan, and grandfather, King Saul, were killed in battle.

His esteem was so low by the time David found him that he identified himself as a "dead dog." But the king reassured him not to fear his standing before him. Then David brought him to live in the palace, where he dined at the king's table the rest of his days. Though he was "lame in the flesh", Mephibosheth was treated like one of the king's sons (2 Samuel 9:11).

When the king came into Mephibosheth's life, all that was lost to death was restored. Mephibosheth inherited property and his relationship to the king was restored. He became a member of the royal family and was given helpers to work his fields.

No longer was Mephibosheth exiled, orphaned, or seen as an enemy of the throne. He was treated like one of the family.

There are events in the Old Testament which are a foreshadowing of a greater spiritual reality yet coming. The shadow of this one stretches far into eternity future. The parallels in this narrative to the gospel are better than any in Scripture. And they're fully realized in gospel graces of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel good news is that because of Jesus, those united to Him have been given a new identity, new citizenship, and a rich inheritance. What was lost to death has been restored. We are no longer enemies of the King. We are members of the royal family. And we've been given a Helper, the Holy Spirit. No longer are we exiled or orphaned. And the King's table awaits us.

Ephesians 2:6–7 says, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." We are richly lavished in the kindness of our King. All because of covenant. No matter where we live here on earth, our citizenship is in heaven! Jesus has made us rich beyond measure—for we are heirs of eternal life (Matthew 19:29); heirs of promise (Ephesians 3:6); heirs of the kingdom (Luke 12:32; Matthew 25:34); and of the Spirit (Galatians 4:6). And, according to the apostle Peter, none can rust, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:4).

We have been lavished in blessing upon blessing—all wrapped up in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Adapted from Debbra Stephens, *ID'd—Your God-Given Identity in Christ* (Nashville: 21st Century Christian, Inc., 2016).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FIFTEEN

When the priests came out of the holy place, the cloud filled the Lord's temple, and because of the cloud, the priests were not able to continue ministering, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

1 KINGS 8:10–11 CSB

After the priests of God brought the ark of the covenant from the City of David and placed it in King Solomon's newly completed temple, the shekinah glory of God descended upon it.

It was not the first time God displayed His glory. He did so in imposing the 10 plagues before Pharaoh. And in parting the Red Sea. He did so at Mt. Sinai, to test the people (Exodus 20:20). He did so to Moses, to reveal His goodness (Exodus 34:6–7). And His glory filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:35).

However, the glory of God departed the temple, as revealed in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 10-11). And Solomon's temple was destroyed by Nebuzaradan, an official of Babylon, when he burned it down (2 Kings 25:8–9). It was rebuilt, more than once, but never to the same glory. The final version built by King Herod was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans—as foretold by Jesus when He declared that “not one stone would remain upon another” (Matthew 24:2). It was never rebuilt—for the purpose it served was obsolete.

Jesus referred to His own body as the temple (John 2:18–22). Borrowing Athanasius' brilliant phrase regarding the Incarnation, he wrote that it was “the Word's fashioning for Himself the body from a virgin as a temple in which to dwell.” Now that Temple was full of glory indeed! It was a temple God raised to even further glory.

Now, at yet another level, when believers in Jesus Christ receive the Holy Spirit, they become temples.

When Paul addressed the church and its leaders in Corinth for their worldliness, he wrote, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Sounds preposterous! But that doesn’t mean it’s not true. We dare not destroy that temple either for, as he went on to say, “God’s temple is sacred.”

In 1 Peter 2:4, we read that as we come to Jesus we are being built into a spiritual house. The people of God are the temple of God. And the church is His spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). There, too, as His Body, the Head is present. There is Jesus, the Lord of glory. It’s as we sing, “God is in this place.” And our unity is a glorious thing!

When the Spirit-filled people of the Lord assemble to worship before the presence of God, the glory of God is in His spiritual house. Is that not a beautiful and awesome thing? It’s like an embassy, if you will. An outpost for the Kingdom of Heaven. Since the kingdom of the Christ is altogether glorious, then so is the temple.

May we “incline our hearts to Him” (1 Kings 8:58).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY SIXTEEN

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.

1 KINGS 18:21 ESV

When a person limps along, they tend to favor a weak side. They struggle to have a strong, steady gait. I guess the same can be said when someone wavers between two opinions. The Hebrew word used in that situation is *pasach*. It means “to hesitate, or become lame,” and it can be translated as “limp.”

The prophet Elijah, in the famous showdown at Mt. Carmel recorded in 1 Kings 18, rhetorically asked the people gathered how long they would continue to go on *limping* between two opinions. Their faith straddled a proverbial fence. They refused to choose one god—causing their hearts to be divided, and their allegiance irregular. *The people did not answer* Elijah, because they couldn’t decide. They couldn’t make up their limping minds.

It’s impossible not to waver when you refuse to take a stand. A person certainly can’t stand firm when they’re swaying.

Elijah confronted the evil of his day, even though he was called a “troubler” for it (1 Kings 18:17). However, God proved—definitively—that He is God. And because He is, He wants our whole hearts.

Jesus addressed the same proclivity when He said, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matthew 6:24). Paul expounded similar logic when he, too, asked

the rhetorical question, “Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey?” He immediately followed this up with this foundational doctrine: “You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living” (Romans 6:16 NLT). While we’re adding up rhetorical questions, there is this one—with an emphatic statement—from James: “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). It is clearly presented as an either/or, not a both/and statement.

The choice seems obvious. Which means we don’t need to drift with the tides of change. Or limp along between altering opinions. We can resolutely determine that *the Lord, He is God* (1 Kings 18:39). There’s nothing false or hollow in that—for it is rock-solid truth. It’s not opinion, but fact.

When you follow the One True God, you won’t have multiple masters vying for your attention. Or dividing your heart. There’ll be no limping along on this spiritual journey!

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY SEVENTEEN

*Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!
Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory!*

PSALM 24:7–10 ESV

I have such profound memories of this psalm from the liturgical procession during the Greek Orthodox Easter service. It's a climactic moment when members of the church, all standing outside, with only candlelight in the dark of night, are led by the priest to the closed doors of the church. Scepter in hand, he knocks loudly upon the door, announcing the arrival of the King of Glory. Will she open her doors?

This psalm, sung by the Israelites in worship, reenacts a verbal exchange made during a historical temple ceremony or occasion. The announcement was made that their King had come into their presence and was requesting entry.

To ward off invasion, gates of ancient walled cities were locked up tight—to keep out marauding kings, whose only desire was to conquer and destroy.

There is an enemy of the Lord's church with the same desire. Which explains the oft repeated command of Jesus to keep watch. The Bible reveals this spiritual war being waged against God's people and provides wisdom for the battle. God has also provided armor for the fight (Ephesians 6:10–18) and the powerful defenses of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Revelation holds out hope as a beacon, that the gates of Zion will never be closed (Revelation 21:25). For we will be in the presence of the King of Glory.

The Spirit led the apostle John to write this message from Jesus to the church at Laodicea: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:20–22). Ultimately, the Lord's message to them was to be zealous, as opposed to being lukewarm (Revelation 3:16). And to repent from being blind to their true state (Revelation 3:19).

This season, let's join together in praying that the Lord's presence is not denied from any outpost of His global church. May His people fling wide the doors to their hearts. Let's permit the victorious King of Glory to enter in!

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY EIGHTEEN

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.*

PSALM 29:3–4 NIV

That same voice of the Lord was over the waters of Creation. And the waters of the Great Flood. The God of Glory, awesome in power, thunders over the waters! He is enthroned over the flood, a King over the storm.

Here in Psalm 29, David opens with a call to worship (Psalm 29:2). He goes on to scribe God's name, YHWH, a whopping 18 times. And He mentions His voice seven times. The poetry of this song ascribes to God power, majesty, and greatness.

Awed by His power revealed in the storm, all cry, "Glory!" (Psalm 29:9).

The storm is fierce, but the splendor of the Lord's majesty is inexpressibly greater.

The Lord comes with the storm, enthroned over it (Psalm 29:10). He comes, bringing His people strength, and blessing them with peace (Psalm 29:11).

Undoubtedly, these are beautifully poetic words. But the Lord actually demonstrated just such glory and lived out this psalm in the flesh, as recorded by Mark in his gospel (4:35–41).

A violent storm crashed down upon the disciples as they crossed the Sea of Galilee—to the point that these experienced fishermen feared for their lives. Then, the Lord of Creation tread upon the ferocious waves, bringing peace. With the thunder of His voice, He brought calm to the sea . . . and peace to His disciples.

Our saving help comes from the Word of the Lord. It is mighty in power—to topple our greatest fears and foes.

We don't will peace. True, lasting peace comes only from the Lord. When we recognize His glory and trust in His power, authority, and sovereignty over all things, His unsurpassed peace comes in like a flood. And our strength is His strength.

May all the people shout, "Glory!"

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.*

PSALM 8:1

*No one is like you, O LORD;
you are great,
and your name is mighty in power.*

JEREMIAH 10:6

*O my Strength, I sing praise to you;
you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.*

PSALM 59:17

*Your arm is endued with power;
your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.*

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
love and faithfulness go before you.*

*Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.
They rejoice in your name all day long;
they exult in your righteousness.*

PSALM 89:13–16

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible,
the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.
Amen.*

1 TIMOTHY 1:17



O LORD, OUR LORD,
HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME
IN ALL THE EARTH!
YOU HAVE SET YOUR GLORY
ABOVE THE HEAVENS.

PSALM 8:1

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY

“Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.”

PROVERBS 8:34–36 ESV

You might think you were reading a passage in the New Testament. This sounds just like something Jesus has said (John 1:4; 17:3). But the “me” here is wisdom speaking. The similarity isn’t confusing really. For the attribute of God personified as Lady Wisdom in Proverbs is actualized in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the wisdom of God. And whoever has the Son has life (1 John 5:12). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that Jesus became to us wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). He embodies God’s wisdom and put it on full display. In wisdom, God’s redemptive plan has been displayed across history’s timeline. That wisdom is no more clear than in the Cross—as foolish as it seems to human intellect.

Wisdom resides in God. God’s wisdom is so infinitely deep and so infinitely expansive, that no more can be added to it. It is beyond measure . . . and improvement. He is the only wise God (Romans 16:27). But, in Christ, God extends His wisdom—an invitation. God sets before humanity a choice: the way of wisdom or that of folly.

Seeking God’s wisdom is foundational to our life in Christ. With it comes blessing, favor . . . life. To reject His wisdom brings harm. As Proverbs also teaches: Folly is the way to death.

The one who listens (which always includes an action of obedience), is the one who is blessed.

Since we, mere fallen humans, lack wisdom, it is crucial to heed the exhortation of James: Ask God, “who gives generously” (James 1:5–6).

Paul further teaches that God’s manifold wisdom is seen through the Church (Ephesians 3:10). Allowing the Word to dwell in us richly is how we instruct one another in wisdom and apply God’s wisdom in her administration of His grace (Colossians 3:16). Let us continually pray Colossians 1:9 for the Church, to exercise wisdom in all her deeds, to the honor of the glory of Christ Jesus.

It never ceases to amaze when the Bible proves that it is not two separate books, but one Word of God. It is wisdom indeed that neatly ties together a teaching in the Old Testament to its New Testament fulfillment in Christ—which is precisely what is happening here. Proverbs expounds, “Whoever has wisdom has life.” Jesus, very wisdom from God, has said, “Whoever has Me has life.” So, if you’re looking for wisdom, seek Jesus. And you’ll also find life.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-ONE

This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people: “Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.”

ISAIAH 8:11–13 NIV

I’m sure you’ve overheard them, too. Those frenzied conversations of people overwhelmed by incessant streams of media. I think the media feeds on fear. People desperately surf every platform for more information about the events of the day that plague us—as if that will calm our anxious minds. However, rather than answers, we often run into a quagmire of fake news or conspiracy theories—never truly knowing who or what to believe.

But Christians are not to be like them. We aren’t to behave like unbelievers.

That was the case in Isaiah’s day. There was a lot of buzz about Assyria. There was talk about the kings of Aram forming an alliance against Assyria (Isaiah 7–8). There was talk about Assyria conquering Syria. And there was talk about Assyria capturing northern Israel. The people all around Isaiah were buzzing. But God “placed a strong hand upon” Isaiah when He spoke firmly with him about all that talk. In essence, God told him, “Don’t be like them.” And Isaiah was to share that message with Judah—in the face of their own fears about Assyria.

The rationale God provided in verse 14 is key: God “will be a holy place; for both Israel and Judah he will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them

fall.” God is a holy place. But it was also prophetically foretold of their potential for stumbling over Him.

There was a similar buzz in Jesus’ day. And Peter’s. And Paul’s. In fact, both Peter and Paul quoted Isaiah 8:14. Of course, they were referring to Jesus—because many got tripped up over Jesus.

Jesus is either or. He’s either a rock of salvation. Or a rock of stumbling to those who reject Him.

To the persecuted Christians in Asia, Peter wrote, “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (1 Peter 3:14–15).

Jesus, enduring persecution Himself, preached this to His disciples: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus followers need not have disordered fear.

The sovereign Lord of Hosts is our refuge, our sanctuary, our hiding place. He is our strong tower, our fortress, our courage and peace. Feel His strong hand upon you.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-TWO

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

ISAIAH 40:10–11 NIV

The Book of Isaiah is beautifully poetic—in expression and content. God reveals many facets of His character through Isaiah. One metaphor He uses is that of shepherd. It's a powerful metaphor that paints a vivid portrait for its audience. It is used of God as early as Genesis. When Jacob blessed Joseph, he called God “my shepherd all my life” (Genesis 48:15). However, it's sometimes unfortunate for us moderns—because our familiarity with shepherds is mostly lacking. In our age, the role of a shepherd is unknown to most of us. Even though it was common to the ancients, shepherds were considered lowly outcasts and were often despised and shunned. The Bible, however, does give several honorable mentions, like that of Moses and David. But, most supremely, Jesus.

God judged leaders of Israel through His prophets for being poor shepherds of His flock. Ezekiel spoke woe to the shepherds who scattered God's sheep. “No one searched for them” (Ezekiel 34:6). They were lost and vulnerable prey to every beast. But God promised, “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:23).

Through Isaiah, God warned His people of impending judgment. But He gave them hope to endure their captivity. He consoled them with promised restoration. And Isaiah spoke of another coming in judgment, when God would come with might (Isaiah 40:10). But He would be like a shepherd who would tend His flock. He assured them that the

enemies of God should fear what was coming. But not His flock. He would show them His tenderness. He told Isaiah to take this news to the exiled. But this too is our comfort. For Jesus is that Shepherd, something He attested to more than once. The apostle John quoted Him proclaiming, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

There are several reasons why Jesus is a good Shepherd. He knows us (John 10:14). He was the sacrificial Lamb of God who gave His life for His sheep (John 10:15). He is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, the One who provides and protects. Who brings refreshing and rest. Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). He holds us close (Isaiah 40:11), an image from Isaiah that makes me think of an infant carrier a mother wears close to her heart to comfort her child.

Oh, to be a lamb in His flock! To be led from these dangerous fields of exile into His fold.

Listen for His voice. And surely goodness and mercy will follow us all our days (Psalm 23:6), as the Good Shepherd escorts us on our journey.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-THREE

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

ISAIAH 55:6 NIV

The God of compassion extends an invitation to all to seek and call upon the Lord. He implores, “Turn to the Lord” (Isaiah 55:7). To the wicked He says, “forsake your ways.” And to the unrighteous, forsake “your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:6). That’s everyone!

Why? So “that He may have compassion on them” (Isaiah 55:7). “For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

This is our God! Full of grace and compassion. He cries out to those who do not know Him, to those not yet His, “Come!”

Jesus put the attribute of God’s compassion into action. The Suffering Servant of God has done the work. It is finished! He has made the turning for mercy possible. Eternal redemption has been obtained for all—bought by the precious blood of Jesus.

We celebrate God’s compassion in sending Jesus as our Savior this season. It is His faithful, loving grace to save a family for Himself and a Bride for His Beloved Son that causes our hearts to sing.

God graciously revealed Himself so we would have faith to seek Him. And find Him. He has called us to repentance. And extends the mercy of forgiveness when we do. Through the Holy Spirit, He is always near. For this, we rejoice. And our hearts are filled with gratitude.

There may be seasons when His nearness doesn't feel real. The key word there is "feel." But God doesn't move away from us. (Although sometimes we move away from Him.) When that happens, persevere. Remain faithful . . . because He is. Continue to look to Him . . . journey with Him. Spend more time in prayer, for however long the season lasts.

Let's share God's invitation—while we can. For we know "the end is near" (1 Peter 4:7). But "about the day or hour no one knows," Jesus assured (Mark 13:32)—which should confer a sense of urgency. It's imperative that people seek the Lord while it's still possible. Before the invitation expires.

The eternal rejoicing of those who have made Jesus their Lord has already begun. We can live by the power of the resurrected life now. Let's remain faithful throughout the journey, celebrating the salvation Jesus has secured with great joy this season . . . and forevermore!

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.

ISAIAH 59:15B–17 NIV

You've looked around. You've seen it. Felt it. A time when, everywhere you looked, all you could see was injustice. You longed for rescue. Prayed for it. Then felt despair when it was nowhere to be found. There was no one righteous, or even willing, to step in and sacrifice for the cause of moral truth.

The world has seen such times before. In the days of Noah. The days of the Judges. During the Babylonian, Assyrian, and Roman empirical reigns. But God was not blind. Detached. He was angered by the detestable state of things. The Lord saw there was no truth, justice, or righteousness. And "He saw that there was no one to intervene." This provoked Him. The translation in the New International Version Bible says this "appalled" Him. The Hebrew, *shamem*, can also mean "horrified."

So, what did He do? He stepped in. The Word of God, Creator of man, not only put on flesh, He dressed Himself in divine armor for battle. "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak" (Isaiah 59:17). It's a vivid picture. The Messiah, God's Anointed, came as a conquering victor. God's "own arm" came to intercede... to conquer the evil no one else could.

God promised a Redeemer would come to Zion, to those in Israel who would turn from their transgressions (Isaiah 59:20). He has assured, “he will repay according to their deeds: fury to his enemies, retribution to his foes” (Isaiah 59:18).

He did come! He came wearing righteousness and faithfulness (Isaiah 11:5). But His own didn’t recognize Him. He was despised and rejected (Isaiah 53:3). But the Father was “well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus was faithful. He accomplished His mission to perfection. He “achieved salvation” for mankind (Isaiah 59:16)... and glory for His Father. Dressed in righteousness, the Lord Himself conquered His enemies and provided rescue for His people. And the hearts of those He has redeemed look radiant, their hearts throb and swell with joy (Isaiah 60:5a). We look expectantly to the skies, for the day when the Son of Man will come “on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The Victor, returning to claim the spoils of war.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because their wickedness has confronted Me.” However, Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the Lord’s presence. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, from the Lord’s presence.

JONAH 1:1–3 HCSB

Jonah has got to be the most hilarious chapter in the Bible! It reads much like the chase of lion and mouse when everyone sees the foolishness of the mouse... except the mouse.

God said, “Go!” (Jonah 1:2). And Jonah essentially said, “No!”

I don’t recall any other prophet having such a rotten attitude. One whose values were such a jumbled mess. Who openly defied God and blatantly revolted—all because he loathed the mercy of God. But you have to wait until you get to chapter four before you find out the reason for his rebellion (Jonah 4:2).

Where there’s a “but Jonah,” a “but God” follows (or vice versa). It’s a key theme throughout.

God exhibited great patience (as He does with us all). He extended grace in sending a great storm, believing sailors (who suffered because of Jonah’s rebellion), and a great fish, all to change his defiant attitude. Jonah wasn’t living up to his purpose. Or potential. A great change needed to occur in his heart. And in his understanding of God!

Jonah knew God was pursuing him in the storm (Jonah 1:12). Could it be that he wanted to be thrown overboard, to sink to the depths, only to flee further from God?

But God took hold of Jonah for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). God worked a miracle in Jonah's heart—which moved him to pray. He confessed God's grace to rescue him (Jonah 2:6) and offered thanksgiving (Jonah 2:9). God's will became his will. Then "the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10).

God's second command to go was issued to Jonah and Jonah obeyed (Jonah 3:2-3). The Ninevites responded to God's call to repentance (Jonah 3:5) and the king issued a proclamation to the citizens to fast and pray, to turn and "give up their evil ways" (Jonah 3:8). "Then God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster He had threatened to do to them" (Jonah 3:10).

But Jonah. Jonah resented it (Jonah 4:1). The old attitude returned, along with the audacity to condemn God for grace (Jonah 4:2). Jonah's resentment was so extreme, he begged God to take his life (Jonah 4:3). But God. God didn't strike him dead for such obstinance. He tried to reason with him (Jonah 4:4). But Jonah. Jonah would have none of it! He stormed off—again (Jonah 4:5). But God. God still extended mercy by providing comfort in the scorching heat (Jonah 4:6). Always teaching, God removed the vine. And Jonah became angry.

The chapter abruptly ends on a sad note. Unresolved. With God still trying to change his heart. And with Jonah still rebellious and resentful.

How many life stories end similarly—with God pursuing and persuading? But a beloved remains reluctant to receive grace? Let's end today's journey praying fervently for a "But God" in their life.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.*

PSALM 8:1

*No one is like you, O LORD;
you are great,
and your name is mighty in power.*

JEREMIAH 10:6

*O my Strength, I sing praise to you;
you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.*

PSALM 59:17

*Your arm is endued with power;
your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.*

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
love and faithfulness go before you.*

*Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.
They rejoice in your name all day long;
they exult in your righteousness.*

PSALM 89:13–16

*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible,
the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.
Amen.*

1 TIMOTHY 1:17



O LORD, OUR LORD,
HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME
IN ALL THE EARTH!
YOU HAVE SET YOUR GLORY
ABOVE THE HEAVENS.

PSALM 8:1

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

[The Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

COLOSSIANS 1:15–17 NASB

Have you ever written a tribute for someone? Might this exaltation of Jesus read like the Father's tribute, through the Spirit, of His Son? This passage expounds the excelling excellencies of Jesus. And it presents His preeminence in everything (Colossians 1:18).

That Jesus is "firstborn of all creation" is translated elsewhere as "over all creation" (Colossians 1:15 NIV). Because firstborn is a title which speaks to His primacy and position, the use of "over" might aid our understanding better.

Since all of creation came to be through Jesus, The Supreme One, He is before all things. The Word of God is Creator even of things beyond what we can see. All of creation, made through Him, has sacred purpose—for it was all created *for* Him.

The Creator is also Sustainer and Order Maintainer. It might feel like things are falling apart. That is partially true. Due to the curse from the fall, the mortal, temporal things are perishing. But they are still being held together, kept from imploding back into nothingness from whence they came. For God has a plan . . . and a timeline. So, the One with all-might, continues to hold the universe together. And if He can do that, He certainly can hold us together. He can hold relationships, families, and the Church together.

Even with all that might, He is also always merciful. And in that mercy, He is also the Reconciler—for He shed His blood to make peace. He has created a reconciled people for God. And reconciled that relationship between them and God.

What more does Paul say? He says that Jesus “is the image of God.” And that all God’s fullness dwells in Him (Colossians 1:19). He is filled full of all that is God!

Jesus “is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:10). He is Lord of creation, Lord of recreation, Lord of heaven and earth. Lord of all!

Because of the supremacy of Jesus Christ, Paul urges to “continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

So, now that our journey to Easter has moved into New Testament territory, take some time today to consider the hope we have in the gospel in light of the preeminence of the Lord of the Gospel

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

LUKE 1:32–33 ESV

Often, when we're looking for a leader, we realize the ideal combines a few different roles—in order to meet a variety of needs (and expectations). Well, look no further. Look only to Jesus, who fulfills the three major roles of ancient Israel—that of Prophet, Priest, and King.

Anointed by the Spirit (Matthew 3:16–17; Luke 4:18), appointed by the Father on oath (Hebrews 7:20; Psalm 110:4), and given full authority (Matthew 28:18), Jesus is now the only Mediator we'll ever need. This is precisely and strongly defended throughout the letter to the Hebrews. In chapter one, the preacher presents Jesus as the final herald of God's message to His people. The author also presents Jesus as performing the duties of a priest by "making purification for sins" and that of a king by sitting "down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1–3).

Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. He offered Himself, the spotless Lamb, a sacrifice, providing atonement for sin. And He conquered sin, death, and the grave as Ruler of heaven and earth. He is the Perfect Prophet, Priest, and King. And He holds these offices permanently (Hebrews 7:24).

You may wonder why it's important for us to have a Prophet, Priest, and King. The best explanation I've come across (next to that in Hebrews) is from Francis Turretin, a Protestant scholar and theologian from the 1600s. He wrote, "the three miserable

consequences introduced by sin—ignorance, guilt, and bondage to sin—required Christ to fulfill three roles for us. Ignorance is healed by Christ the prophet; guilt by Christ the Priest; the tyranny and bondage to sin by Christ the King. Prophetic light scatters the darkness of error; the merit of the Priest takes away guilt and procures a reconciliation for us; the power of the King removes the bondage of sin and death. The Prophet shows God to us; the Priest leads us to God; and the King joins us together and glorifies us with God. The Prophet enlightens the mind by the Spirit of illumination; the Priest by the Spirit of consolation tranquilizes the heart and conscience; the King by the Spirit of sanctification subdues rebellious desires and emotions.”

It is a grace to have such a Rabbi, Savior, and Lord of our lives! Though fully God, He too is fully Man. Therefore, He empathizes with our weakness (Hebrews 4:15) and identifies with us, but in purity and holiness. Let this understanding of the ongoing work of Jesus Christ fuel our celebrations as we journey to Easter.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY TWENTY-NINE

But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.

HEBREWS 8:6 NLT

The new Jewish Christians were suffering. They were being alienated and persecuted—to the extent that they wanted to go back. They wanted to revert to Judaism. They thought that would ease their burden. That returning would solve their problems. They had become so convinced that when they remembered their old way of life, it started to sound better.

It was reminiscent of the time when their ancestors, newly delivered from Egypt, found life in the wilderness too difficult. Rather than endure, they thought it easier to go back to Egypt . . . to what was familiar . . . to captivity.

That's relatable. The search for better can be a lifelong quest for some. Until you've found the best, that is And life in Christ, while challenging, is by far the best life!

The author wrote the letter to the Hebrews, filled with a whole host of convincing proofs of the betters of Jesus, to encourage endurance in his audience. He referred to it as a letter of exhortation (Hebrews 13:22), which it is—for they are great and many. But for excellent reason: All the betters of our King!

Here's a brief recap of those betters found in Hebrews:

- In chapter one, the author preached that the revelation through Jesus is better than through the prophets. And that Jesus is superior to the angels.
- In chapter three, he preached that Jesus is better than Moses. And a better mediator.
- In chapter four, Jesus is better than Joshua. And provides a better, lasting rest.
- Chapters five and eight uphold Jesus as better than Aaron. He is a better High Priest, who offered a better sacrifice, and assures us of a better hope.
- In chapters seven and eight, he proved that Jesus has instituted a better covenant, which is enacted on better promises.
- Jesus in the better tabernacle in chapter nine.
- In Christ, we have a better possession and a better country (defended in chapters 10 and 11).
- In chapter 12, he reasons the blood of Jesus is better than that of goats and bulls. And that His kingdom is unshakeable.

This sermon has the same power to affect today's readers. Returning to it again and again aids our endurance—especially when we are tempted to believe the old life was the better life. These truths remind us of the supreme glory of our Lord. And they rejuvenate gratitude so we “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28–29).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

HEBREWS 1:1–2 ESV

God has spoken. And He has spoken to us through Jesus, the Word of God. The Son is both “the radiance of the glory of God” (Hebrews 1:3) *and* very God. “He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made”(John 1:2–3a). Psalm 33 confirms, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. ... He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (Psalm 33:6, 9). That’s a mighty powerful Word!

Do you know what else?

He is still speaking. His voice goes out across all He has made. In *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer wrote, “A word of God once spoken continues to be spoken.” God breathes life into His living Word—to reveal His glory and draw people to Himself. It is a Word to convict the heart and prick the conscience in every generation.

Jesus told His disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit, our Advocate, speaks only the words of God that He hears. To the people of God, Isaiah shared, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21). For those in

Christ, in whom the Spirit dwells, is that His guiding “voice” you’re hearing? The voice of our speaking God? Ah, but often our hearing is dull and our hearts hard.

Tozer continues, “It is important that we get still to wait on God. And it is best that we get alone, preferably with our Bible outspread before us. Then if we will, we may draw near to God and begin to hear Him speak to us in our hearts.” As for the Bible, he writes, “It is the infallible declaration of His mind for us, put into our familiar human words.” While I find it hard not to quote the entire chapter, I’ll offer one final quote of valuable application: “If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible, expecting it to speak to you. Do not come with the notion that it is a thing which you may push around at your convenience. It is more than a thing; it is a voice, a word, the very Word of the living God.”

God speaks. He commands the whole hosts of heaven. He speaks truth through His Word to counter the lies of the enemy and the world. Jesus speaks life into hope. He speaks courage into our wavering nerve. He speaks perseverance into our faltering resolve. He speaks peace into our anxious minds. He speaks calm into our racing hearts. Jesus, our Intercessor, is speaking to the Father on our behalf. And the Spirit is speaking, uttering prayers for the words we grapple to find.

Still to listen.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-ONE

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

1 JOHN 5:20 ESV

That God granted to be knowable and known is such a grace! And yet there remains much mystery. “Mystery is not the absence of meaning,” writes Dennis Covington, “but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend.” I also agree with the thoughts from antiquity which expressed that, “God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped, he would not be God.”

However, God wants to be known. What He has disclosed is enough to fill a lifetime with continual discovery. Paul wrote to Rome that God’s “invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made” (Romans 1:20). We’ve learned that God has spoken. He has entered into covenant for relationship. To the Corinthians, Paul explained that we come to understand God through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12). And He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. To know Jesus is to also know God (John 8:19; 14:7). Because of Jesus – and only because of Jesus – can we truly know God . . . and be fully known by Him.

It’s a wonder, indeed, to be able to come to know God. But doesn’t it warm your heart to know you are also known by Him? Take a few moments to look at verses like John 10:27, 1 Corinthians 8:3 and 13:12. Ponder Psalm 139:1–3, 13 and 16, and Jeremiah 12:3 slowly. Feel their affect flood your heart and mind with comfort and a better sense of His love for you. Pray the knowledge those verses impart increase your faith and fuel a longing to know Him more.

God knows your desires, your joys. Your sorrow, your pain. He knows your disappointments and fears. You are known intimately and personally by the King of the Universe! Doesn't that speak volumes of His gracious heart? Of your intrinsic value? And that of those all around you?!

Join me in praying 2 Peter 3:18: That we will "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity."

DAY THIRTY-TWO

It's common to read about devotion to God in Christian literature. It's a key element in our relationship with Him. But we might find ourselves asking, "What does devotion look like?" How is devotion evident in my life? How does it express itself?

The ancients believed devotion strictly keeping God's law. While obedience is essential, it's not the whole of devotion. I doubt obedience without heart is entirely pleasing to God.

I find the best way to explain devotion is by way of example. The first occurrence that comes to mind is Mary's "Yes!"

The angel went to [Mary] and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

LUKE 1:28–31, 38 NIV

When the angel Gabriel went to young Mary with God's assignment, she replied with a humble, "I am the Lord's servant." Mary was willing to do the will of God—whatever that required of her.

Devotion is seen in the women who rose early, in their enormous grief, to anoint the dead body of Jesus—when it would profit them nothing (Mark 16:1).

Devotion is like the poor widow (Mark 12:42) who gave sacrificially—though she had very little. Regardless of how little we may have, we can always give Jesus our devotion.

Devotion, like love, is a verb . . . an action. It's not a feeling. It's an expression. We best express our devotion when we do the will of the Father. When we give our allegiance to the King. When we keep in step with the Spirit. And when we joyfully serve the Body of Christ.

But it's not just an action—because they can be done mindlessly. Or with improper motives. Acts of devotion are a form of righteousness performed with a pure heart. They're not done out of obligation. They're not done for applause or approval. They're not done to earn favor. They are, like Mary, done because you already are favored.

As a stream naturally flows from its source, so too devotion flows from a heart full of love and gratitude stored up in the heart.

With the Cross and the Empty Tomb of our Lord in view, consider how might give the Lord your devotion as you journey to Easter.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

*We give thanks to you, O God,
we give thanks, for your Name is near;
men tell of your wonderful deeds.*

PSALM 75:1

*Great are the works of the LORD;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.
The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.*

*They are steadfast for ever and ever,
done in faithfulness and uprightness.*

*He provided redemption for his people;
he ordained his covenant forever —
holy and awesome is his name.*

PSALM 111:2, 7–9

*My mouth will tell of your righteousness,
of your salvation all day long,
though I know not its measure.*

*I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD;
I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.*

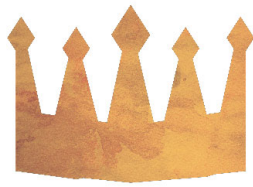
PSALM 71:15–16

Praise the LORD!

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!

For His mercy endures forever.

PSALM 106:1



PRAISE THE LORD!
OH, GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD,
FOR HE IS GOOD!
FOR HIS MERCY ENDURES
FOREVER.

PSALM 106:1

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

MATTHEW 4:1 ESV

The first battle with temptation was fought—and lost—in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1–7). The war against God’s image-bearers has waged ever since. God cursed Satan. And, through Genesis 3:15, He has warned all humanity to expect ongoing enmity. That battle reached its fullest extent against the Seed of the woman during the days of His earthly ministry.

The Spirit led Jesus out to test Him. Satan, however, took full advantage of the opportunity with additional temptations. Where Israel failed the test in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), Jesus succeeded. And where Adam failed temptation, Jesus triumphed. Had He not, we’d be lost. And when we do, we risk becoming lost.

Satan unleashed all of the demons of darkness in a full-scale war against Jesus, trying with all their might to thwart God’s plans and disqualify Jesus as Savior. That which didn’t overcome Him, only made Him stronger. Temptation doesn’t make us weak—only surrender does.

Jesus endured 40 days in the wilderness immediately following His baptism, but before He launched His ministry. Matthew and Luke only mention three of those temptations. They were similar in principle as those in Eden. After all, it was a strategy proven to work. They involved three key areas: physical needs, power, and pride.

When satan tempted Jesus to misappropriate His power over creation and position as Son for selfish gratification, by turning stones into bread, he was trying to get Him to

fulfill a physical need the wrong way. With his, “If you are the Son of God,” (Luke 4:4), he was essentially saying to Jesus, “Prove it!”

Satan further tempted Jesus to give His worship away in exchange for glory (glory he didn’t possess to offer) (Luke 4:5–7). He also tempted Jesus to disbelieve God’s Word and to test God (Luke 4:9).

All the while Satan quoted Scripture, using it as a weapon. So can we! It’s sword upon sword. (Only we mustn’t twist it like he did.)

Jesus, as the Son of God, was not exempt from temptation. Which means we shouldn’t expect otherwise. But because He was tempted, the Hebrew’s writer wants us to understand that He is now therefore able to help those being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

The temptations in the desert were not Satan’s final attempt. They faced off more than once. He would not be satisfied until he rid the earth of Jesus. Though Jesus refused the temptation to avoid the cross in another garden, it did lead to His death. Something Satan and his cohorts must have deemed a victory. But it was Jesus’ ultimate triumph over the powers of darkness. However, their relentless assault continues.

Both testing and temptation will come—especially when we’re most vulnerable, like Jesus was. We must remain alert. Heed Jesus’ words to His disciples in the garden, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). The priceless prayer He gave us should continually be on our lips, “Father, deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

MATTHEW 5:1–2 NLT

Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness handed down in the Torah and Prophets.

He came preaching the kingdom of God.

He came teaching its values and ways.

Matthew's first discourse in his gospel is one such teaching, commonly referred to as The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). After 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus delivered the best sermon ever preached, in what scholars have tagged His inaugural address. It was delivered by the One given all authority—with the expectation of obedience.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a new Torah. It's how to rightly live out *the* Torah, *the* instructions of God. But He didn't shy away from issuing imperative commands—from Sovereign King to His citizens. In his commentary, Daniel Akin clarifies, "The sermon does not teach men and women how to live to get into the kingdom but how men and women in the kingdom should live."

In one of the most revolutionary narratives in the whole of the Bible, Jesus revealed the deeper principles underlying God's laws. And revealed both the heart of the law . . . and the hearts of mankind.

Jesus opens by pronouncing the blessedness of those who are truly His. They're blessed because, beyond status or circumstance, He has graced them with the kingdom of heaven. Citizenship is not reserved for the elite. Or even the religious. In the nine beatitudes, Jesus also affirms the valued traits of those who would faithfully follow after Him. They read much like a biography of the Christ Himself! But for the saints, they are what living like salt and light look like (Matthew 5:13–16).

Jesus then launches into ethical admonishments, contrasting God's intended principles in the Torah with the traditions of His day. He shines His light on the underlying issues of the heart and provides a higher standard of application—all for the purpose of living in right relationships with God and others.

The teachings of Jesus are challenging, to say the least! But they point to a surpassing righteousness for the ultimate good of humanity.

Journey to that hillside in your mind. Sit at our Master Rabbi's feet. And lean into this sermon often—for its lessons outspan a lifetime. And its wisdom and perfection are timeless.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-SIX

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

LUKE 7:36–38 ESV

Gratitude has a force all its own. And that force is evident in this unnamed woman. It's a force which produces action. A force for courage. A force, even for tears.

Also visible in this scene is a rigid piety. One which lacked mercy. Lacked heart. Lacked love and compassion. A piety which blinded its vessel of his own need for forgiveness.

Uninvited, and unrestrained, this woman dared to enter this gathering to express a love so great. Her lavish demonstration stands in stark contrast to the lack of the host in providing even the basic, customary hospitality toward his Honored Guest (Luke 7:44).

We deem Simon, the Pharisee, harsh in his judgement toward this woman. In an honor shame culture foreign to us, it wasn't uncommon for the times. And yet, Jesus allowed this sinful woman's worship. Though inestimably holy, Jesus is approachable—receiving repentant sinners. To those unworthy to untie the sandals of His feet, He extends an invitation to come. And she did. This *immoral woman, whose sins were many*, would not be shunned by a merciful Savior (Luke 7:37, 47).

Jesus seized the opportunity to serve up a transformative parable for the guests to feast upon (Luke 7:41–42). In unparalleled wit and brilliance, Jesus presented the rival responses of two vastly different debtors. Even Simon had to admit that the one forgiven a larger debt would have greater love (Matthew 7:43).

Greater love is not something you hide under a basket.

Jesus commended the woman for her faith—not her actions. It wasn't what she did that earned His favor. His forgiveness. That was already hers. The immensity of her love flowed from an immense debt forgiven. And now He blessed her further with peace (Luke 7:50).

The forgiven can rise from their tears and walk in peace.

In another highly charged moment, Jesus corrected the false beliefs of sin . . . and those who bear them. Before a crowd of stone-wielding men, Jesus contended, “Let the one without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). They dropped their stones. As should we. For none are without sin (Romans 3:23).

Let all—whose individual sins are greater than the national debt—*wet His feet with tears. And love much.*

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

LUKE 18:9–14 NIV

Does a prayer have to be seen to be noticed? Or be loud to be heard?

Both questions have the same answer. But greater matters of prayer have been addressed by Jesus in true parabolic form. Luke 18:9–14 has Jesus contrasting a Pharisee with a tax collector, yet again. These two pray-ers have two very different positions—most honored and most despicable—as well as two very different postures.

Jesus primarily addresses two dangerous attitudes (Luke 18:9):

- Trusting in one’s own righteousness.
- Treating others with contempt.

It wasn’t as much a posture of the first pray-er’s hands as it was the posture of his head . . . and heart. His prayer contained three dangerous “I”s (Luke 18:12),

elevating himself with what he's not and what he does. While it might stroke his ego to compare his righteousness to others, isn't God's standard the true measure? But to be honest, I've done it. The more guilty I've felt before God, the more I try to divert attention from my sin to that of others.

But the first gospel truth is that not one has any righteousness of their own. Righteousness belongs to Christ Jesus alone. And any I possess came solely from Him as unmerited gift. That truth levels the playing field, as it were. A sinner is a sinner.

Then Jesus exalts the humble by presenting the contrasting pray-er, a sinner (Luke 18:13). Not just any sinner, but the kingdom ideal. The sinner who fully realizes their unworthiness. As well as their desperate need for God's mercy.

Who wants to admit they're a beggar? But aren't we all? Doesn't begging for mercy rightly exalt Jesus? And rightly correct my posture before Him? In its truest form, it has the power to remove tendencies toward entitlement and comparison. And present before the Exalted One an authentic self.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard."

MARK 12:1–2 NIV

The closer Jesus journeyed to the cross, the more intense things became. His ministry intensified. Emotions intensified. Even His parables got more intense. Gone were the days of parables about lost sheep, mustard seeds, prodigals, and praying widows. Jesus' later parables included The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1–14) and The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33–44; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–18). Considered parables of judgment directed at the chief priests, scribes, and members of the Sanhedrin, they only intensified their hostility. But to those with ears to hear, Jesus' parables could have been allowed to do their intended work. But the accused stood rigid . . . immovable . . . steadfast in their fury and malicious intent.

The audience of Mark 12 would have recognized that Jesus employed a common metaphor for Israel when He spoke of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–2). God established the land, blessed and provided for it (Mark 12:1). And appointed leaders, identified in the parable as tenants, to steward and tend it. God sent His servants, the prophets, to collect payment from the harvested fruit. The opening seems pleasant enough. It would have all sounded familiar, and plausible, to those listening. But then Jesus rent the veil and revealed the evil lying in wait in the tenant's hearts. They beat the first servant, abused the second, and killed the third (Mark 12:3–5).

Jesus already pointed to Israel's abominable history regarding God's prophets in another parable (Matthew 22:1–14). It was common knowledge that Isaiah, Zechariah, Micah, and Amos were all martyred by Israel's leaders—something Jesus lamented before entering Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37). I imagine nostrils flared and temperatures rose with such a stark reminder.

But the escalation of the tenant's wickedness had not yet reached its climax. The owner of the vineyard would provide another opportunity for them to do right, however. He would send his beloved son. Greed had so gripped their hearts, they conspired to murder him and steal his inheritance (Mark 12:7).

It's gut-wrenching to read. But you come away with the impression that the hearers had no such response.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders perceived that Jesus' parable was about them (Mark 12:12). But it didn't raise any red flags. It didn't change their hearts. It didn't convince them of their greater responsibility as leaders. Or help them realize their accountability to God as stewards of His people. All of which was possible. It just made them more determined to arrest Jesus. To silence Him. To oversee the vineyard their way.

May the Spirit keep our hearts soft—to listen and to learn. And to respond to the teachings of our Lord in the kingdom's revolutionary ways.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY THIRTY-NINE

For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6 CSB

In one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that God made His light shine "in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). God's magnificent light has shone in our hearts. Directly from God Himself! That light of knowledge has revealed the glory of God. And that glory is Christ Jesus, the King of Glory.

The goodness, grandeur, grace, and glory of God undeniably reverberates through Jesus and the gospel He proclaimed. The glory of the Christ arrayed in His miraculous signs and wonders all revealed divine glory. As did His transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. And radiant beams of the Lord's glory shines from the gospel's red letters like a laser cutting through dark places. It pierces . . . renews . . . molds hearts of stone, to be etched by the very Word of God.

May we abide in the "gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:1). For Jesus is the Beginning and the End of the gospel. He is the Breadth and Depth of the gospel. He is its Creator and its Content. He is its *Glory*! C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "The less you make of Christ, the less gospel you have to trust in. A little Christ means a little gospel; but the true gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ."

If we want the much-ness of the gospel, we must make much of the Christ.

The glory of the gospel that shines from the Lord shocks dead hearts to life, opens blind eyes to see, delivers the enslaved, sets faith ablaze, and ignites true hope for living.

Peter says that those in Christ are partakers of His glory (2 Peter 1:4). For Christ in us is our glory (Colossians 1:27). But our lives fall drastically short of glory, don't they? They feel anything but glorious—especially in the face of suffering. But there, too, the gospel radiates the good news that life's sufferings are preparing for us “an eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17–18). The sheer gospel-truth of it swells hope to tread this valley and gives strength for our journey through it.

Matthew informs us that the Lord will return in glory (Matthew 25:31). And when He appears we also will appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). But God has already “raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms ... to show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6–7). Since we are united with Jesus, we can live the raised life now. Glory be!

By the grace of God, we can bask daily in glory by immersing ourselves in the gospel, where the glory of God, in the majestic face of Jesus, is on full display.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."

LUKE 19:41–42 ESV

The day was Nisan 9, six days before Passover (John 12:1). Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem, to the week of His passion, under the shadow of a looming cross. But He did so amid a grand and frenzied procession, multitudes shouting, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Our calendars mark the observance of this occasion as Palm Sunday. Our Bibles label it as Jesus' Triumphal Entry. But it hardly seems like a triumph—when you compare it to historical parades of kings returning victoriously from war.

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, He wept over her (Luke 19:41). He commiserated, "If only you had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). He lamented over the City of God and her impending fate, but the people couldn't know the destruction their future held.

John noted in his gospel that the disciples didn't really understand the deeper meaning of the things happening at the time (John 12:16). When "the city asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, *the prophet* from Nazareth'" (Matthew 21:11 emphasis mine). Their chant from the Hallel (Psalm 118) was recited every year at Passover. Was it rote? Or did they truly believe what they were saying? Luke wrote that the crowd started to praise "in loud voices *for all the miracles they had seen*" (Luke 19:37, emphasis mine). John observed that the crowd witnessed the raising of Lazarus and followed because they had heard of His miraculous signs (John 12:17–18). And the

religious authorities? Well, they wanted Jesus to silence His disciples (Luke 19:39-40). Regardless, it was all according to God's plan, prophesied of old.

Undeniably, the people wanted a king. Mobs had tried to force the crown upon Jesus earlier in His ministry (John 6:15). But they wanted a different sort of king. The masses seemed to have a faulty understanding and expectation of God's Messiah . . . let alone Jesus' means of fulfillment as God's Son.

The crowds praised their Messiah. Their excitement in celebrating Jesus as King is understandable—for He is the unsurpassed King of kings. But were they venerating *Jesus* as that promised and long-awaited King? This side of His enthronement on a cross, His victory over death, and His exaltation in the Ascension, we have an unfair advantage. We know by the faith God has graced us, the revelation through His Word, and insight provided only by the Spirit.

Before the city, atop a humble foal of a donkey, Jesus viewed the city and wept. They simply didn't know. They didn't understand what it would take for Him to take His throne. Or the crown He would wear. They knew they were desperate for a Deliverer from their torturous oppressors—Rome being the least of which. But we, as recipients of His costly salvation, can raise our voices and our palms in praise of the King who came. And who is coming again. And we look forward expectantly to that glorious day when multitudes from every nation will encircle His throne, palms raised, in praise of our victorious King, "Crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-ONE

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.

MATTHEW 21:14 NIV

The first stop Jesus makes that Monday was the temple. He needed to tend to His Father's business.

Tucked away in Matthew's gospel is a short statement, that can easily be overlooked. But it speaks volumes into the unfailing love and compassion of Jesus for the suffering. Matthew includes the detail of the healings Jesus performed after His thorough temple cleansing (Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 19:45–48).

Granted, these miracles He performed throughout His ministry. What struck me was that He did them at this particular point. Even after they wanted to kill Him for recently raising Lazarus. Even though the authorities were plotting to kill Him. Even though He had just passed judgment upon the corrupted festival practices and scandalous abuse of His Father's House. He did it anyway.

The rebuke of Jesus, that the temple was to be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17), really riled the religious leaders. Mark 11:18 says, "The chief priests and scribes heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching." (I feel pretty sure it was the "every nation" part they didn't like.)

The One who interpreted and applied the law to its perfection. The One who preached the kingdom of God had come . . . to the outcast, poor, and powerless. The One who relieved the suffering from demon-possession and a variety of ailments. Who championed women and children. It was this Suffering Servant they feared—

specifically because the crowds were listening . . . learning . . . following Him. The next day they would publicly question His authority (Mark 11:28). He is to be feared—but certainly not silenced!

The leaders of His day were threatened by truth. And the light that exposed them. Truth and light have a way of doing that even today.

But Jesus' eye is on the sparrow. "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). And He will reign in righteousness despite the plotting of others.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-TWO

[Jesus said,] “Then there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and there will be anguish on the earth among nations bewildered by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and expectation of the things that are coming on the world, because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is near.”

LUKE 21:25–28 CSB

Tuesday of that last week was a heavy teaching day for Jesus—both in volume and subject matter. That morning, He taught in the temple courts, imparting parables and invoking woes upon the Pharisees and Scribes. Then Tuesday afternoon, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus delivered what has been called The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:1–25:46; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–36). It is centered around the theme of end times, for Jerusalem and then His return at the end of the world.

Mercifully, Jesus provided words of great comfort to lend strength and endurance for His followers for the coming persecution. He assured His followers He would give them “the words and wisdom that none of their adversaries would be able to resist or contradict” (Luke 21:15). They were forewarned and therefore forearmed with the awareness that they would have enemies (Luke 21:16–17). They could expect great distress, but Jesus affirmed, “By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:19).

Standing firm. That’s key—then and even now. And standing firm is possible when people heed His warnings. Warnings like, “Be on your guard” (Luke 21:34). We must be careful, so our minds won’t be dulled, and the end comes unexpectedly (Luke 21:34). The examples He gave on what that looks like has contemporary application

for us, because it includes being weighed down by the worries of life and numbed by drunkenness. Then He reiterated (which bears repeating) to “be alert at all times” (Luke 21:36). And “pray that you will have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Isn’t that the heart’s desire of every disciple? To “stand before the Son of Man”?

Yes! Let’s heed His Words—for He said they are sure (Luke 21:33). So when He comes in glory, we will “stand and lift our heads because our redemption is near” (Luke 21:28).

Although some of His words in this discourse have been interpreted differently (and wrongly) by many over the centuries, there are still plain things we can understand and put to use. And we can trust that He has graciously provided those things we need to be prepared. Visiting the gospels on a regular basis keeps His warnings to remain alert fresh on our minds—as we await His glorious return.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-THREE

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the courtyard of the high priest, who was named Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus in a treacherous way and kill him.

MATTHEW 26:3–4 CSB

There's an age-old question penned by David, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?" (Psalm 2:1). Rulers conspire . . . and conspire some more—all in vain. Why?! We know why. Power, greed . . . sin. But why against God? Or His Anointed?

In Psalm 2:4 it says, "He laughs." It is utter vanity. For God has set His King on high and none shall dethrone Him. The earth is His possession. And He's been given all power and authority.

Earthly plots may succeed. But those against heaven? I think not! People conspire. And they just might get what they desire. For a time. But they will be called to account.

You would think the last place you'd find plotting against the Son of God would be in the palace of the high priest, another anointed by God. Their plan was to wait until after the festival—because they feared the people. But shouldn't they have feared God? But they joined the ranks of many who made futile attempts to thwart God's plans. His timing always prevails.

After the anointing of Jesus in Bethany, Judas joined the plot (Matthew 26:14). Luke tells us that Judas was influenced by Satan (Luke 22:3). Who knows his motive? Or what he was thinking? There are more than a few theories. Regardless, he didn't resist the

temptation to commit evil. And Satan was certainly mistaken in thinking the death of Jesus was His defeat. Or that even he could stop God's plan.

It was the conspirators plan to have Jesus arrested that inaugurated everything else that followed. They may have led the charge, but Jesus didn't resist. Ultimately, God's will was being done. And Jesus willingly submitted to it.

The trivial coins Judas took profited him nothing. For mere days later he would be dead. And the money used to buy a grave site for strangers (Matthew 27:7).

What is ever gained by wicked plots? But more wickedness! It multiplies darkness in a world already brimming.

The tragic end of Judas, one who knew Jesus, gives cause to deeply meditate upon the fallen nature of humanity. And the capability within all of us. But we can rest assured, knowing the Holy Spirit is our Seal and Power to overcome such treachery.

Jesus knew the thoughts and intentions of the those plotting in the shadows. And He went to the Cross for the redemption and salvation of all plagued by such sin—realizing in great agony just how necessary it really was.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-FOUR

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

LUKE 22:43–45 NIV

It was late. And the day was long. After sharing in the feast of their holy day (which included wine), the disciples were exhausted. They must have been weighed down with sorrow from the heavy, solemn words of their Master (Luke 22:45). They could fight the fatigue no longer. Sleep overtook them. Leaving Jesus to pray alone.

The hallowed ground was soaked with His sweat, mingled with drops of blood (Luke 22:44). How it must have tore at the Father's heart! Enough to send ministering angels to tend Him (Luke 22:43).

The Suffering Servant was full of sorrow. Did He grieve for Himself alone . . . or us as well? What He faced was cause for greatest grief. Humanity merely added to the weight He already shouldered. He too bore our grief, our sorrow, our lost condition, our suffering. It was an anguish unequalled.

His suffering did not come up short. He suffered entirely through it—drinking the cup to its last dreg. Jesus struggled in the flesh, which feared what His body would endure. He persevered, until He laid down His will. He withheld nothing from His Abba but gave of Himself to do God's will (Luke 22:42). The matter was settled—mind, body, soul, and spirit. Prayer has a way of doing that.

When He rose from prayer—strengthened, resolved—He did so to the sound of a marching mob, descending to arrest Him, their Messiah . . . their Savior.

Pray we, when in the throes of battling wills, so too choose His. May it be a prayer unceasing—lest we become weak. So, as Jesus warned His disciples, we will stay awake and pray—that in weakness we won’t give in to temptation (Matthew 26:41).

Jesus, dear Jesus, on the night of His arrest—agonized in prayer. But it wasn’t a selfish prayer. Before He even went to the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed He would glorify His Father (John 17:1). He prayed for His disciples and His flock (John 17:6–19). He prayed God would protect them (John 17:16). He prayed for those who were yet to believe in Him (John 17:20–23). And He prayed that His love would be in us (John 17:26).

Our Lord prays still (Hebrews 7:25).

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-FIVE

And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." Saying this, he breathed his last.

LUKE 23:46 CSB

Jesus, counted among transgressors (Isaiah 53:12), hung between two thieves at His life's end. At birth, He was surrounded by lowly shepherds. In life, He hung out with sinners. He was born, lived, and died among the impoverished. He truly was God With Us.

Consider the great paradox of it all. The lofty, those He also came to save, remained detached . . . distant. In the temple, on the royal throne, and on the judgment seat, places were traded. Skewed. Roles reversed. Perverted. Sinners sat in seats of honor, the Honorable Lord tarried with sinners. He died convicted, legally guilty—taking upon Himself the judgment of all our despicable sins.

It stabs the heart . . . stings the eyes.

After declaring, "It is finished," Jesus laid down His life. He committed Himself to the charge of His Father—willingly placing His life into God's providential hands. The final act of His passion was one of absolute trust and devotion.

The Servant of God—Servant of Man surrendered to death to faithfully serve both—knowing that He laid it down "only to take it up again" (John 10:17).

Peter would later explain that Jesus died so His people can live in His body, in relational righteousness with God (1 Peter 2:24). That mission was more valuable to Him than the temporal tent of His humanity.

All one can do is humbly give thanks and worship:

“Here is love, vast as the ocean,
lovingkindness as the flood:
when the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten
throughout heav'n's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion
fountains opened deep and wide;
through the floodgates of God's mercy
flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
poured incessant from above,
and heav'n's peace and perfect justice
kissed a guilty world in love.”

- William Rees

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

DAY FORTY-SIX

The next day, which followed the preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember that while this deceiver was still alive he said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give orders that the tomb be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come, steal him, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”

“Take guards,” Pilate told them. “Go and make it as secure as you know how.” They went and secured the tomb by setting a seal on the stone and placing the guards.

MATTHEW 27:62–66 CSB

Saturday began much like Friday ended—Jesus was still dead. And yet time somehow went on. In the quiet, in the immensity of their grief, the witnesses were left to their thoughts.

The co-conspirators were still conspiring (Matthew 27:62), even mocking the dead (Matthew 27:63). They remembered how Jesus said He would rise, and so they scrambled to ensure it couldn’t possibly come true. So, they sealed the tomb and posted guards—plotting, once again, in vain.

In the stillness of their shabbat, did the priests even wonder about the temple’s torn veil (Matthew 27:51)?

John Mark may have remembered taking flight from the arrest scene so quickly that only his clothes were left behind (Mark 14:51–52).

Did ten of the disciples remember fleeing under the cover of darkness, seeking the nearest hiding place?

It grieves to think of John, Mary Magdalene, the mother of Jesus, and her sister, who beheld the gruesome Crucifixion (John 25:25–27). How that prophesied sword pierced His dear mother’s heart (Luke 2:35). Scripture says, “the women rested” (Luke 23:56). But did their minds play on repeat the place where Jesus was buried?

Then there’s Pilate, the one who could find no fault in Jesus and yet gave in to the crowds yelling, “Crucify!” I doubt he suffered from a guilty conscience. But he could hardly put this Jesus behind him, with the Jews continually plaguing him with their paranoid requests.

The Roman centurion must have wondered about the righteous Son of God dying on a Roman cross (Matthew 27:54).

I wonder if the multitudes who, days earlier, raised their hosannas in praise of God’s Messiah were pondering how the One they pleaded would save could now be lying in a tomb.

And Peter, alone with his thoughts, may have recalled cutting off the ear of the servant of the temple (John 18:10). It’s doubtless that his denial—not once, not twice, but three times—could be erased from his mind. There was no escaping the haunting sound of a rooster’s crows (John 18:15–27). I imagine he underwent incessant self-condemnation. After all, wasn’t he the one who asserted he would lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37)?

But Jesus, knowing all this, “loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

None of this is written in judgement, but wonderment. It is to honor their tremendous suffering. For those who loved Jesus suffered excruciating pain that dark and mourn-filled Saturday. They had been under assault, caught in the line of fire of the spiritual warring legions, battling to take out Jesus.

And what of Jesus? No one knows what happened beyond the veil. But we do know that a thief on a nearby cross was spending his first full day in paradise (Luke 23:43).

Sometime after 6:00 p.m., when their Sabbath was over, the women went and bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1). Though low in a grave He lay, they ached to serve their beloved Lord.

A JOURNEY TO EASTER

RESURRECTION SUNDAY: NOTHING BUT PRAISE

Christ is risen! Truly, Jesus is alive!

*God raised Jesus from the dead,
freeing Him from the agony of death,
because it was impossible for death
to keep its hold on Him.*

ACTS 2:24

*Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.*

REVELATION 19:1B

*Sing to the Lord a new song,
for He has done marvelous things;
His right hand and His holy arm
have worked salvation for Him.
The Lord has made His salvation known
and revealed His righteousness to the nations.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.*

PSALM 98:1–2, 3B

*How awesome is the LORD Most High,
the great King over all the earth!
For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to Him a psalm of praise*

PSALM 47:2, 7



HALLELUJAH!
SALVATION AND GLORY AND
POWER BELONG TO OUR GOD.

REVELATION 19:1B