

NEW TESTAMENT



# EVERY SINGLE DAY

*Daily Bible Reading Plan for West Virginia*

**[PREVIEW]**

WV CONVENTION *of* SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

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*Strengthening and sending  
churches to make Jesus known  
in and through West Virginia*



# DEDICATION

*Every Single Day*



**A**T THE 2016 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WEST VIRGINIA CONVENTION OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS, CONVENTION PRESIDENT RON MCCOY, DURING HIS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, DECLARED, "THERE'S NO REASON WEST VIRGINIA CANNOT BE THE EPICENTER OF REVIVAL IN OUR NATION."

A part of seeing this revival take place is when God's people connect every single day with God's Word.

This year's devotional is dedicated to three individuals who passed away and went on to be with the Lord in the past year, including Ron, who were instrumental in developing and encouraging the spiritual and missional climate of West Virginia:

- **Ron McCoy** served as President of the Convention and as Director of Missions for the Upper Ohio Valley Baptist Association.
- **David Mellquist** served as Director of Missions for the Monongahela Baptist Association.
- **Shirley Finley** served as a member of the WVCSB Executive Board and was instrumental in missions education and promotion throughout West Virginia.

May God's Spirit be poured out on us *every single day*.

- *West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists*



# DECEMBER 23

*Matthew 1:1*



**H**AVE YOU EVER HAD A RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE WHO WAS 100% RELIABLE? SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER LET YOU DOWN?

How about someone who has always been completely truthful with you? Or never wrong? The fact is that no one is perfect in keeping their promises but the Bible goes out of its way to demonstrate that God always keeps his Word. In fact, even though God is all-powerful there is one thing he cannot do. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

God does not have the ability to act outside of his character. If he promises to do something we can be sure that it will happen because he never lies as the sovereign Lord over all creation, he has the power to ensure that it will happen.

In the Old Testament, we see God making two prominent promises to Abraham and David. He promised Abraham that he would (1) give his physical descendants permanent possession of the Holy Land, (2) that he would bless those descendants and (3) that people who blessed his descendants would be blessed and people who cursed his offspring would be cursed. God also promised that through Abraham's seed (singular) the entire world would be blessed.

In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David that one of his descendants would rule over Israel forever and that the Jewish people would someday live in the promised land and be disturbed by their enemies no more.

It's no accident that Matthew begins his gospel with these words, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). Matthew is sending the signal that every sentence in his letter is there to demonstrate how God is in the process of fulfilling his promises to Abraham and David through the God-Man, Christ Jesus.

# DECEMBER 24

*Matthew 1:18-25*



**W**E OFTEN SPEAK OF THE GREAT MIRACLE BY WHICH JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD AS THE VIRGIN BIRTH, THOUGH WE SHOULD PERHAPS SPEAK INSTEAD OF THE VIRGIN CONCEPTION.

Jesus' birth into this world was actually quite natural and normal. However, Jesus' conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary was supernatural—the work of the Holy Spirit alone in Mary. Just as God's Spirit was at work when God created the world when there was nothing, so too God's Spirit created something from nothing in Mary's womb in the beginning of the gospel. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that before Mary was married to Joseph, she was "found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit" (1:18). And this miracle changes everything!

The virgin conception means that Jesus was not simply a holy man who became a god. It also means that Jesus was not an otherworldly ghost who just appeared to be a man with a lot of good things to teach us. The virgin conception means that the baby born to Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, was fully God and fully human at the same time, yet without sin. As fully human Jesus is able to go to the cross in our place, as our substitute, to pay the penalty that our sin deserves. As fully God Jesus' death and resurrection constitute the victory of God over sin, death, and the devil. The Christmas miracle is God's ultimate answer to all the evil, injustice, and suffering that we see around us.

The virgin conception also tells us something significant about our salvation. Our salvation is entirely by grace without human effort. God takes the initiative apart from any human effort to send us Jesus who will save us from our sins. What a miracle!

# DECEMBER 25

*Matthew 2:1-12*



**W**HAT WAS THE BEST GIFT YOU RECEIVED TODAY? DID THE GIFTS YOU RECEIVED TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE YOU?

How about the gifts you gave to others? What did your gift communicate about your love for them?

In Matthew 2 we see the wise men coming to present baby Jesus with gifts. Each tells us a little about how these men valued the Christ Child.

Gold was a gift fit for a king. As the ancient world's most precious metal, a gift of gold signified that you recognized someone was most valuable. Gold demonstrated that someone had the right to rule.

Frankincense, a form of incense, was an expensive gift used in worship. In Judaism, incense was used to anoint the priests of Israel and was part of the ceremonial praise offering to God. This gift was a sign recognizing that Jesus was born to be a priest. It may even have demonstrated this child deserved their worship.

Myrrh was a peculiar gift to give a newborn. Myrrh was an incredibly costly ointment that was used for embalming the most affluent after their death. Whereas giving Jesus gold signified that he came to rule, and frankincense symbolized that he would become our great high priest, myrrh demonstrated that this child was born to die. As Gentiles, how would the Magi (the Wise Men) know that this was the destiny of the baby Jesus?

These men would have been familiar with Old Testament prophecies. The Messiah would be a king (2 Samuel 7) and that the Messiah would be a great high priest (Psalm 110, Zechariah. 6). But Isaiah 53 gives an even more explicit account of how the Messiah, through death, would bear our sins and serve as the suffering Savior of us all. The Magi knew who Jesus was the same way we can: by studying the Scriptures. What gift will you give Jesus today?

# DECEMBER 26

*Matthew 1:2-17*



**G**OD CAN USE ANYONE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.  
HIS GRACE IS GREATER THAN ALL OUR SINS.

Matthew highlights four women spanning the ancestral line of Abraham to Mary and Joseph. Think of all the godly women that could have been included in this list—yet Matthew chose only four.

Tamar (1:3) entered the royal bloodline by posing as a prostitute and secretly tricking her father-in-law into getting her pregnant (Genesis 38). Who was that father-in-law? Judah, son of Jacob and great-grandson of Abraham, the head of the largest tribe of Israel. Jesus is known as the Lion of Judah as a result of that illicit affair.

Rahab (1:4) didn't have to pose as a prostitute, she really was one (and a Canaanite, no less!). One can only imagine her original motive for inviting Joshua and Caleb to her apartment while the people of Jericho searched desperately for the hidden spies. Through her interactions with them, her heart turned to faith (Hebrews 11:31).

Ruth is probably the least disreputable of the four women, but her place is conspicuous as well. Ruth came from the Moabite people, an incestuous group that were forbidden from intermarrying with faithful Jews. The Moabites were known for child-sacrifice and worshipping the most violent of gods. Yet here is this woman who renounced her heritage, demonstrated extreme loyalty to her Jewish mother-in-law, and fell into the arms the man who would become King David's great-grandfather, Boaz.

Bathsheba, the adulterous wife of Uriah, came to Jesus' lineage through a series of events that culminated in the murder of her husband at the order of King David. In all of the Hebrew Bible, the story of David and Bathsheba is probably the most scandalous.

If God can use these four ladies with their challenging pasts, we can be assured that he can still use all of us.

# DECEMBER 27

*Matthew 2:13-23*



**Q**UICK! WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE QUOTE FROM JOSEPH, EARTHLY FATHER OF JESUS? THINK HARD.

On a recent worldwide survey of famous historical figures from the Bible, Jesus was number one, his mother Mary was number two, and Joseph was number three. Other than Jesus, Joseph is the most famous man in the Bible. Yet most can't come up with one thing he said.

In Matthew 1, Joseph gets word that Mary is pregnant with someone else's child. At first he planned to break off their engagement quietly but an angel informed him that Mary's baby was of God and that Joseph should marry her and raise the child as his own. Without saying a word, Joseph embraces the scandal that may have come with marrying an unwed mother-to-be and faithfully obeys God's command.

In Matthew 2, after the birth of Jesus, an angel warns Joseph that King Herod is searching to kill the Christ child. Immediately, Joseph rises up, grabs his family and evacuates Bethlehem.

After Herod's death, we read of an angel instructing Joseph to take the now toddler Jesus and raise him in the land of Israel. In keeping with his character, the righteous and faithful Joseph obeys, gathers up his wife, son and a few possessions, and makes the long trek back to Nazareth. There he would faithfully raise Jesus for at least another decade.

But there's one thing we don't see coming from Joseph throughout the gospels: words. That's the reason you couldn't come up with a quote from Joseph, the Bible doesn't record even one word from his mouth.

I'm sure Joseph had many instructive words for his wife and son, but that's not what the Bible emphasizes. Instead, we see the highlighting of his obedience. God didn't need a verbose man to raise his Son but he did require an obedient one. Let's not forget God desires obedience more than words. Like Joseph, if we love God, we will obey his commandments.

# DECEMBER 28

*Matthew 3:1-13*



**O** THER THAN JESUS, WHO WAS THE GREATEST MAN IN THE BIBLE? NOAH? ABRAHAM? MOSES? DAVID?

All these men did mighty things for God but Jesus says there was someone greater. “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11a).

John the Baptist served as the chief prophet to announce the coming of Jesus. The Book of Luke tells us that Jesus and John the Baptist were relatives and likely knew each other since birth. John was born with the task of preparing the nation of Israel to meet their Messiah, Jesus.

But as great as John the Baptist was, in Matthew 3, we see John telling the people that he was not even worthy to carry Jesus’ sandals. Jesus was more than just a man; he was more than a king. He was more than just the Jewish Messiah; Jesus was the creator of the universe. Jesus was God in the flesh.

As Jesus was creator of all things, John warned the people that the Messiah would have the authority to baptize - to fully immerse - people in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). If we accept Jesus as our Savior, he will forgive us of our sins and gather us to be with him in heaven when we die. If we do not receive his forgiveness, he will immerse us in unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12; 13:41-42).

John the Baptist’s message was both grace and judgment. He calls on his listeners to repent (or turn) from their sins and to come to God. What sins do you need to turn from? If you haven’t come to God and asked him for forgiveness, come to him right now. By his grace, he will give you the power to walk away from those sins and walk faithfully in his love.

# DECEMBER 29

*Matthew 3:13-17*



**I**F YOU ASK PEOPLE WHY SOMEONE NEEDS TO BE BAPTIZED, MOST WILL SAY IT DEMONSTRATES THAT THEIR SINS HAVE BEEN WASHED AWAY.

But if that is the primary reason, then why did Jesus get baptized? Did he need his sins washed away? Of course not! Jesus never sinned (John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; et al).

Yet in Matthew 3, we see Jesus coming to John the Baptist to be baptized in the River Jordan. Jesus said his baptism was necessary to “fulfill all righteousness.” But if Jesus didn’t need to demonstrate that his sins were washed away, why was this necessary?

The answer lies in the primary purpose of baptism. Jesus will tell his disciples that all authority has been given to him and therefore they should go forth “baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). To be baptized in the name of someone means that you are under their authority.

When Jesus gets baptized by John the Baptist, we see a picture of all three members of the Trinity working together. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove and God the Father verbally proclaims that he is pleased with his Son. By being baptized, Jesus demonstrates that he is coming in the name of, and in submission to, the will of his Father. That’s the primary meaning of baptism. It’s to demonstrate we are under the authority of someone else. We are committed to obey all that Jesus commands us to do.

Thank God that he washed my sins away, and to a certain extent, my baptism represented that as well (Acts 22:16). But baptism demonstrates when someone truly comes to Christ, they are not just asking for forgiveness, they are placing every area of their life under Christ’s authority. What area of your life do you need to submit to Christ today?

# DECEMBER 30

*Matthew 4:1-11*



**A**FTER FORTY DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING IN THE WILDERNESS, THE DEVIL HIT JESUS WITH ALL THAT HE HAD.

First, the devil knew Jesus' flesh was weak and he tempted Jesus with using his divine abilities for physical pleasure. "Turn this stone into bread" (4:3). For the person who created the universe out of nothing (Colossians 1:16), this would have been an easy task. But Jesus doesn't make decisions based on the whims or will of our adversary, even if it would be for his own benefit. Jesus reminded the devil that his sustenance came from with Word of God.

Next, Satan tempted with a provocative statement, "If you are the Son of God ...". Calmly, Jesus replies that he doesn't need God to prove himself in order to know that his Father loves him.

Finally, the devil offers Jesus everything the world has to offer. Satan turned Jesus' gaze to all the kingdoms of the world in hope that Jesus' focus would be on earthly things instead of the God who loved him. Once again, Jesus rebukes the devil with Scripture and demonstrates all that he desired was a pure relationship with his Father.

Each of Jesus' rebukes began with "It is written." Each came from the book of Deuteronomy. What if your spiritual survival depended on your knowledge of the Book of Deuteronomy? If anyone in the history of the planet would have the authority to state his own opinion, it would have been Jesus, yet he chose to quote Scripture. Never doubt the power of speaking God's Word when facing temptation. If you think about it, every sin has its root in what Jesus was tempted with here: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16). But as powerful as these sins are, God's Word is greater.

# DECEMBER 31

*Matthew 4:12-22*



**T**HE GOAL OF EVERY FIRST CENTURY JEW WAS TO HAVE A SON WHO WOULD BECOME A RABBI, THAT IS, A TEACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

In order to for your child to become a Rabbi (the modern equivalent would be seminary professor with a Ph.D.), some Rabbi must choose your son to become his disciple at the age of 14. From there the young man would basically go to Bible college, doing everything in his power to mimic the rabbi who discipled him. A disciple walked where his rabbi walked, studied what his rabbi studied, even ate what his rabbi ate. He goal was to become the perfect clone of his rabbi.

Each Rabbi had his own set of rules that his disciples had to follow known as the rabbi's "yoke." In addition to the rules set forth in Scripture, the rabbi would say, for example, "Here are my set of 100 rules in addition to what Torah teaches you." The more rules, the more you showed yourself to be a true disciple and lover of God.

When Jesus calls his disciples, most of them were older than 14. This demonstrates that no other rabbi chose them. They weren't good enough. They weren't considered, not even by one rabbi, to be smart enough, disciplined enough, committed enough. They weren't "enough."

But Jesus saw something in those young men that all the other rabbis rejected. He said the other rabbis made things too difficult. They were adding all these man-made rules that really didn't matter to God. His yoke was light. Just follow the Word of God.

As we enter into the New Year, rest in the fact that Jesus' yoke is not heavy. He doesn't expect us to be "good enough" to enter the Kingdom of God on our own. Like the strong ox, he carried the weight of the law on his shoulders. By faith in him, we are empowered to follow the teachings of Scripture. No man-made rules added.

# JANUARY 1

*Matthew 5-7*



**W**HAT'S THE GREATEST SERMON YOU'VE EVER HEARD? I CAN RECALL A FEW. BUT THE BEST ONE WE'LL FIND IS IN MATTHEW 5-7.

In it, Jesus gives his “yoke.” In the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches his disciples what it takes to be his disciple.

Jesus contrasts the Pharisaical focus on outward behavior with God’s concern about what is going on in our hearts. The Pharisees said, “Don’t commit adultery.” Jesus said, “Don’t lust.” The Pharisees said, “Don’t murder.” Jesus said, “Don’t hate.”

He says we have to forgive others like God forgives us. We cannot worry, our motives must always be pure and whatever standard we use to judge others, God will use that standard to judge us. Here’s the kicker. He says we are to be perfect, just as God is perfect!

We’re doomed! None of us, absolutely none of us can measure up to the bar set in the sermon on the mount. I’m thinking, “But Jesus said that his yoke was light. What he’s asking of us is impossible!”

To which Jesus would reply, “Exactly. Now you’ve got it.”

This is why Jesus said come to him and he’ll give us rest. Followers of Christ realize that only Jesus can meet God’s standards. We can’t live this life on our own power.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3:21–22). By faith in Christ, God’s righteousness is imputed. When God regenerates our hearts so that we might believe, he also attributes the perfect righteousness of Jesus to us so that we become perfect in his sight. Jesus took our sin to the cross “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Happy New Year! That’s the greatest sermon of all!

# JANUARY 2

## *Matthew 8*



**S**AY THE WORD,” THE CENTURION EXCLAIMED, “AND I KNOW MY SERVANT WILL BE HEALED.”

In Matthew 8 we see a contrast in faith. While the Jews struggled to recognize Jesus for who he is, we find a Roman centurion who recognizes Jesus as someone with supernatural authority over both the physical and spiritual realm. Jesus purported to the Jewish crowd a shocking exposition, “In all of Israel I haven’t found such faith!”

A few days later, Jesus again demonstrates his authority over all things physical and spiritual by removing demons out of two men and placing them into a herd of pigs. Newly possessed by such evil, the swine ran down a cliff and into the sea, drowning themselves.

(We learn from Luke’s Gospel that nearby villagers were aware that at least one of these men had been suffering from demonic possession for years and was doing great harm to himself. They could do nothing to help him. They had even tried chaining him up, perhaps for protecting him from himself or, more likely, protecting themselves from him.)

So when the villagers get word that Jesus had relieved the man of his demonic affliction, what would you expect their reaction to be? Like that of the centurion? Would it be one of thankfulness?

Sadly, the people were more upset about losing a herd of pigs than they were excited a man had been released from demonic oppression. Instead of celebrating with Jesus, they asked him to leave. Those pigs were worth money. The souls of the men meant nothing to them.

How often do we see people value pigs more than other people? The same people who protest, “Save the Whales,” do nothing to stave abortion. How many churches spend more on buildings than on missions? As we walk our way into the upcoming year, let’s be sure our focus is on people instead of pigs.

# JANUARY 3

## *Matthew 9*



**A** FEW YEARS AGO OUR CHURCH HOSTED SOME OF OUR AFRICAN MISSION PARTNERS. THEY WERE ATTENDING ONE OF OUR SEMINARIES AND STAYED WITH US OVER THEIR EASTER BREAK.

These men grew up in impoverished conditions so we wanted to show them some good old Mountaineer hospitality. Each day we fed them some country cooking then took them on an excursion. They rode 4-wheelers, shot skeet (they had never even held a gun), jumped on a trampoline, went hunting, went muddin' in a pickup truck... Things we take for granted, they experienced for the first time.

At the end of the week, one of the Zambian pastors asked me, "Pastor, we have thoroughly enjoyed our time with your church this week. Your typical meal is like a feast for us. But we were wondering, with all this abundance, when do you take the time to fast? We have been here a week, and we haven't fasted once."

Since that time I have visited more than 20 countries and asked native pastors about the practice of fasting. Only in the West do we find Christians who do not fast. We rarely skip a meal for the sake of turning our focus toward God and prayer. Jesus expects us to fast. "When you give..." assumes we will give. "When you pray..." assumes we will pray. Doesn't it follow that when Jesus states, "When you fast..." it assumes fasting on the part of his followers? Jesus explicitly states that after his death, his true disciples will fast, in part, due to their longing for his return.

When is the last time you were more concerned with prayer than you were consumed with a desire for food? "And when the bridegroom is taken away, they will fast" (Matthew 9:15). *God, give us a greater desire for you than the things of this world.*

# JANUARY 4

*Matthew 9:35-38*



**W**HAT IS THE GREATEST NEED FACING THE WORLD TODAY? WHEN WE STOP AND CONSIDER ALL OF THE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING AROUND THE WORLD THERE ARE PROBABLY A LOT OF ANSWERS THAT COME TO MIND.

Perhaps you thought about something wonderful like world peace or a cure for cancer. World peace and a cure for cancer would indeed be remarkable improvements to our world that we should pursue. However, the world has a need that is greater than a cure for cancer and world peace.

The world needs to know that Jesus is a Savior who died for their sins so that we can be restored to a right relationship with God. You see, if we bring about world peace or find a cure for cancer, but we do not give people Jesus, then tragically, we have simply made people more comfortable on their way to judgment for their sin. The reality of sin is ultimately why Jesus looks on the crowds and “has compassion on them” (9:36).

But how do people come to have a relationship with Jesus? No matter where people live or what language they speak, people come to know Jesus by someone telling them about Jesus. This is why Jesus says “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (9:38). One truth this verse tells us is that God plans to accomplish his rescue mission through the prayers of his people. Have you ever prayed that more people would go out into the world to tell people about Jesus? Would you take some time now to pray that God will raise up more people who will go out into the world and tell others about Jesus?

# JANUARY 5

## *Matthew 10*



**I**N CHAPTER 10 OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW JESUS SENDS OUT HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES TO GO AND TELL PEOPLE “THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND” (10:7).

But before he sends the disciples out he tells them something shocking. He says “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (10:16). What do you think happens to sheep in the midst of wolves? They get eaten!

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He goes on to tell the disciples they are going to be beaten, arrested, put on trial, everyone is going to hate them, and they are going to suffer terribly simply for telling people they can be saved by Jesus. But, believe it or not, this is not the most radical thing Jesus tells them. Jesus tells them that all of these evil acts people are going to commit are actually going to cause the gospel to spread. Jesus says, “you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake.” Why? In order “to bear witness before them and the Gentiles” (10:18).

God is teaching us here that there is no amount of evil and rebellion that can be done in the world, or to you, that can overthrow God’s purposes or overcome God’s power. We see the greatest example of this truth in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus was the most evil act that humanity has ever committed. Yet, in the resurrection of Jesus, God turned this evil act upside down and turned it into the most remarkable event that has every happened—our salvation. This is why Jesus can say to his disciples, and to us, do not fear! Preach the gospel and entrust yourself to Jesus because he will be with you.

# JANUARY 6

*Matthew 12*



**T**HE UNPARDONABLE SIN. MANY SAY THAT IF SOMEONE DIES WITHOUT FAITH IN CHRIST, THAT PERSON WILL NOT BE ALLOWED INTO HEAVEN.

While it is true that someone must have faith in Christ to be forgiven of their sins, it does not seem that is what Jesus is specifically addressing in Matthew 12:31-32. If rejecting the gospel is what is in question here, then most of us at one time were guilty of that “unforgivable” sin.

There are three elements to this “unpardonable” sin. (1) Jesus is physically present. (2) He performs an undeniable miracle right before their eyes. (3) Instead of recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit, they attribute it to Satan. In his omniscience, Jesus knows that if they reject something that takes zero faith, they will never receive anything that requires faith. There’s no other proof he can give other than performing a personal, verifiable, undeniable miracle right before their eyes. He did that, but they gave glory to their true spiritual father, the devil (John 8:44).

So, is it possible for us to commit that sin today? No. Jesus is not physically present before us. No matter what supernatural event takes place today, it takes some element of faith to know what caused it. The Pharisees had no such excuse!

There be a time in the future when Jesus physically returns to the earth and displays supernatural power in accordance with the Holy Spirit. Just like the Pharisees who blasphemed the work of the Holy Spirit during Jesus’ first advent, at the second coming of Christ those who render the Spirit’s work to the devil will be condemned as well.

Whatever this passage means, nearly all Baptist pastors believe that if you sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit, it is *not* too late. Listen to God’s voice and give him your life today. God is always willing to receive the repentant sinner.

# JANUARY 7

*Matthew 17:1-13*



**I**N THE FACE OF ALL YOUR TRIALS, JESUS GIVES HOPE THAT IS GREATER THAN ANYTHING THIS WORLD CAN THROW AT YOU.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray and he was changed into a glorious state. This was an incredible validation to Peter's confession just earlier of Jesus as the Messiah as well as an encouraging "sneak peek" of the Christian's future.

So, what is significant about this occasion? It gives hope. Hope that is directly put in the person of Jesus. The week this happened we see Jesus teaching his disciples about his upcoming suffering and the cost of following him. This had to be a very sobering week. Pain and suffering are guaranteed to come. Not only for Jesus, but to those that follow him. The disciples were faced with the question, "will you take up your cross and follow me?" This was a call to die then as much as it is for us today. As much as we can be assured of trials to come, we can be even more assured of our hope to come - Jesus.

Jesus reveals himself to them as the glorious Messiah. What a dose of hope this must have given the disciples as they see Jesus more accurately for who he truly is. Whatever trial you may be going through, look to Jesus the risen King. God is not blind to your situation, rather he is orchestrating it to show you a glimpse of who he is more clearly. How do you need to see Jesus differently today as your hope?

Don't focus on your fear, failures, and circumstances. Focus on Jesus.

"And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (17:8).

# JANUARY 8

*Matthew 17:14-20*



**I**HAD BEEN A BELIEVER FOR MANY YEARS, BUT NOTHING LIKE THIS HAD EVER HAPPENED TO ME, OR MY FAMILY.

When my wife became sick a few years ago, my faith was shaken. These situations will do one of two things – drive you to your knees, or push you away from God. My family chose to believe and pray. Over a six-year period, we saw answered prayers, and experienced God’s miracles. We believed that God was on the throne, and my wife was under the protection of God’s hand.

In this biblical story, the disciples were unable to heal a man who was demon possessed and continually fell into the water. The man’s father comes to Jesus and says, “Lord, have mercy on my son... I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him.” It was almost like the miracle police were telling on them! After Jesus healed the boy, the disciples came to Jesus and asked why they were unable to drive out the demon. Jesus simply replies to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (17:20).

This verse has frequently burned in my heart as I have reflected upon six years of miracles. Though we saw many things happen that no one can explain, God eventually gave my wife respite, and a new body in heaven. Why did my families’ prayers not work? Why did she have to go through those trials, only to end in her imminent death? My family still does not know the answer to that question, but I will tell you we still believe in healing, even if it is in heaven. Don’t let the world shake your faith. You of little faith: keep on believing, keep trusting, and keep praying.

# JANUARY 9

## Matthew 18



**M**ATTHEW 18 IS A GREAT PICTURE OF WHAT THE DAILY LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN AND THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD LOOK.

*Sin and pride* (18:1-9). Temptations are opportunities to grow in faith and obedience to Jesus. It's not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to act on that temptation. We must be on guard against sin and be real with the fact that we do sin at times (so don't hide it). Pride is a horrible sin that we all fall to in various ways. Pride takes your eyes off God's greatness and focuses on self. ("Who is the greatest?") Our natural tendency is to think that we're "OK" and don't need help. We all need humility in our lives. Humility is a gift from God (no matter how it comes).

*Repent* (18:10-14). Jesus (the Good Shepherd) goes after his sheep that go astray. We have a loving God who pursues you and I even when we sin. When confronted about sin by the Holy Spirit directly or through fellow believers, don't be mad that you 'got caught', rather rejoice that you are being loved. The only way sin is dealt with properly is when it is brought into the light. A call to repent is a loving gift.

*Forgiveness* (18:15-35). Just as God in Christ forgives you, you are to forgive others. When the condition to forgive is "as Christ forgives you," then there's hope to be free from anger, bitterness, resentment, and control.

Does this cycle characterize your life? Your church? Who do you have in your life to offer these gifts and calls to you? Have (or find) someone to be this to you as you should be to them.

# JANUARY 10

*Matthew 19*



**W**HEN WE LOOK AT THE TRACK RECORD OF GOD THROUGHOUT HISTORY WE CAN CLEARLY SEE AND TRUST THAT HE WAS, IS, AND WILL ALWAYS BE COMPLETELY FAITHFUL.

When we look at the track record of humanity you can clearly see that you and I are not completely faithful and obedient. The greater we see this gap of faithfulness the greater our awe of what Jesus did for us should grow.

Jesus uses marriage to reveal our hard hearts. Just like in the times of Moses and Jesus, divorce runs rampant today because we are unfaithful. What hope does an unfaithful friend or spouse have? Jesus. Jesus is the faithful friend and husband that we are not. His Spirit is in you and empowers you to become more faithful. If marriage requires faithfulness, then the people said, “it is better not to marry.” The problem isn’t marriage, it’s unfaithful hearts.

Jesus also turns to a rich young ruler who is considered a morally ‘good person.’ He claimed to obey all the rules, yet when Jesus asked him to sell his stuff and follow him, he left sorrowful. We may think we can do enough ‘good works’ to earn God’s favor, but we cannot. Your external actions are driven from your internal heart. Seeing this, the disciples then asked, “Who then can be saved?”

No one is perfectly faithful, obedient, and good. This rightly separates us from God. Jesus is faithful, obedient, and good. He brings us, undeservedly, back to God. It’s only by his work in you that you can change from naturally unfaithful to supernaturally faithful. Salvation by your own work is impossible; salvation by Jesus’ work is assured.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (19:26).

# JANUARY 11

## *Matthew 20*



**W**HOO DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE A GREAT PERSON? A COMPANY CEO? A SPORTS STAR? A MUSICIAN? WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES THEM GREAT?

Greatness, by definition, is to be above average, to do something with excellence or very well. To strive to be great is a wonderful thing. You should strive to be a great employee, manager, teacher, mom, neighbor, friend, or student.

As Jesus continues to engage with people, we can see that he spends most of his time with what would be considered the average and below average people in the community. This gives us a contrast of what the world would consider great people and those that are not. Jesus, throughout the Book of Matthew, has been showing us what his kingdom will be like.

Jesus redefines greatness from one based on power, position, prestige, and prosperity, to one based on humility and service. Which dictionary do you pursue greatness from? May we, his people, be marked by humility and service in our cities. Think and pray about ways you can begin to humbly serve your city this week.

Worldly greatness is measured by how many people are under you. Kingdom greatness is measured by how many people you lift up. The world values power, Jesus values humility. Worldly greatness is about how known your name is. Kingdom greatness is about how much we make Jesus' name known.

As we pursue kingdom greatness, let's use Romans 12:10 as an awesome challenge, "Outdo one another in showing honor." Look at the people that God has put around you as opportunities to show honor by serving and encouraging.

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (20:26).

# JANUARY 12

*Matthew 21*



**W**E ARE NOW IN THE PASSION WEEK - THE LAST SEVEN DAYS BEFORE THE RESURRECTION - OF JESUS' LIFE.

It begins with Jesus entering into Jerusalem in a humble way. Is this how a king should enter into a city? A king should enter with a grand entrance, right? The president has Air Force One. Celebrities have red carpets. Bands have stages and spot lights. What about Jesus? No private jet. No red carpet. No spot lights. He comes to his city as the humble King on a donkey.

As we were once not citizens of his kingdom, there are many in West Virginia who are not yet a part of Jesus' kingdom either. Praise God that he has given us this day to spread the good news of Jesus to those that haven't humbly submitted to King Jesus.

Humility is required to enter into the kingdom of God. It takes recognizing God's holiness and our sinfulness, then looking to the cross as the means to be reconciled to God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). It takes humility to recognize your sin and turn from it and to Jesus. Humility, not position or authority, is the entrance to Jesus' kingdom.

Just as this unworthy donkey was used by Jesus to carry him to Jerusalem, we too (as Jesus' servants) get to carry the gospel (the good news of Jesus) throughout our cities and great state with the certain hope that some will turn to King Jesus. What a privilege.

Seeing Jesus as King produces humility. It recognizes his greatness, power, and authority, not yours. Where do you need to grow in humility?

"They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them" (21:7).

# JANUARY 13

## *Matthew 22*



**J**ESUS IS NOW IN THE MIDST OF A HEATED DAY OF CONFRONTATION FROM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

This is, perhaps, the most clearly exposed contrast between Jesus' kingdom that he is building and the kingdom of earthly institutions.

We see a picture of a king sending out invitations to a wedding feast. This raises the question of who decides who can join the party. The king does. Matthew then moves to the authority of the Roman Caesar and paying taxes. This raises the question of who owns anything. Jesus owns everything. Jesus then is confronted about a relational dispute, but Jesus shows them their error according to Scripture. God's Word is true. Lastly, Jesus is asked, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus rightly tells them to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart..." (22:37). Jesus was being barraged from various people groups about authority and he left them all speechless.

Jesus then goes on the offensive and asks, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (22:42). The book of Matthew is aimed at showing Jesus as the promised Messiah coming from the genealogy of King David. Here Jesus is connecting himself directly to David and leaving the Pharisees "unable to answer him a word" (22:46) because Jesus truly is the promised Messiah that the Old Testament was waiting for.

What do the people of your city think of Jesus? What are the various authorities and prevailing cultures that are not in submission to Jesus? How can you effectively take the gospel into those arenas?

Don't get too caught up in the earthly organizations/authorities. Jesus is Lord over them all. What areas might you need to repent of from putting your hope, identity, value, worth, and trust in?

# JANUARY 14

## *Matthew 23*



**I**N MATTHEW 23 WE SEE A GLIMPSE OF JESUS THAT SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR PEOPLE AND HATRED OF SIN. TWO POWERFUL EMOTIONS THAT REFLECT GOD'S HEART.

What was the last thing that you mourned over? What do you cry about? What does it take for you to be emotionally moved? What causes you sleepless nights? Stop and answer those questions for yourself before continuing.

Because of God's holiness and love for people he has a hatred for sin. Jesus unleashes a heavy indictment (Seven Woes) against those who were not loving God nor people as they were supposed to. The religious leaders had a system set up that made their lives comfortable, showed them as the authority, and didn't require them to do much. Allow this to be a warning to you if your life reflects the same characteristics (comfort, control, pride). This is certainly a passage of Scripture that combats Jesus as simply a soft, gentle, loving, peaceful, non-confrontational person. Jesus lovingly and compassionately confronts those in sin.

The heart of God is also displayed as Jesus looks over the city of Jerusalem and laments. Jesus weeps over those that reject him. It might be good to go to one of the hilltops around your city and simply gaze upon it and think of all the people that God has put you around – and weep. When is the last time you wept for people? Over sin and its impact on people's lives in your city? Over people rejecting Jesus? This might need to become a prayer of yours, "God soften my heart to have a love for people as you do."

"O Jerusalem... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (23:37).

# JANUARY 15

## *Matthew 24*



**Y**OU WANT TO MAKE EVERY DAY COUNT FOR SOMETHING. YOUR PRIORITIES ARE REEVALUATED AND YOUR RESOURCES ARE SPENT TOWARDS THOSE ENDS.

Each year you get older and the closer you get to death, the more you consider each day of life as a gift and realize more that tomorrow isn't guaranteed.

As we're moving through Matthew, in a couple days, Jesus will be crucified. He starts to talk about the future. He tells us before his death that our time is not a stopwatch counting up, rather it is a timer that is counting down. Time is running out.

Jesus begins to clearly teach about signs of the end times. With various signs to look forward to, down to an unknown specific day and hour, we are on borrowed time.

The purpose of Jesus coming was to take the wrath of God for sinners upon himself, thus making it possible for the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. This is great news for every human being that has ever lived or will ever live. This is only great news, though, if people hear it.

With the time of Jesus' return (and your death) a mystery, it should fuel our passion for evangelism and making every opportunity count to share the gospel. In West Virginia, more people are dying than are being born. About 60 people will die today in our state. How many of them are in your city? Not knowing who'll die, when they'll die, nor when Jesus will return, let that drive your prayers for the lost and personal evangelism to those that are in your life and city.

Who will you share the good news with today?

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows..." (24:36).

# JANUARY 16

## *Matthew 25*



**J**ESUS CONCLUDES HIS FIFTH AND FINAL DISCOURSE HERE. THIS IS ABOUT BEING READY FOR JUDGMENT.

This will come at Jesus' return or at your death. Either way, you are always to be living in a constant state of readiness. As you await the return of Jesus, you are to be actively on mission to spread the gospel to the nations and steward your life in a way that loves God and the people that he has entrusted to you well. Readiness can be gauged by your devotion, stewardship, and mission.

Devotion is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is to worship God for who he is and what he's done for you. This is to quickly repent of sin as it appears in your life and to continually put your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus. Devotion is to seek God's face. Are your affections for Christ constantly being stirred?

Stewardship is hit on here by the parable of the talents. The idea is that you are to take what God has given you and make it grow through wise and faithful stewardship. God expects you to be faithful with what he's entrusted to you: people, jobs, money, possessions, positions... How is your faithfulness to God, your spouse, your kids, your job, your friends?

Mission is telling others of Jesus before he returns or they die. As you read this chapter you need the descriptions of hell to hit you hard. It's a real place that real people will go to. You have the opportunity to be the means of grace that God uses to bring people into his eternal rest.

"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master" (25:21).

# JANUARY 17

*Matthew 26:1-46*



**I**F YOU KNEW TONIGHT WAS GOING TO BE YOUR LAST NIGHT BEFORE YOU DIED, WHAT YOU SPEND IT DOING?

Jesus spent it sharing a meal with his disciples and in prayer to his Heavenly Father.

Jesus knew he was about to be crucified and has been telling the disciples that this was going to take place. Knowing that he would soon be deserted by his disciples, betrayed by one, and denied by another, Jesus still chose to draw close to them. The heart of God is to save sinners.

“When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve” (26:20).

The Last Supper was full of deep meaning. It was the transition of Passover from an annual sacrifice to a remembrance of Jesus as the Passover Lamb who would sacrifice himself once for all. He was giving his disciples a preview of what was about to happen to his body on the cross. His body will be broken like the bread and blood spilled like the wine. It was also an encouragement that Jesus would again share a meal with them in the future.

We also see Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. What a picture of human failure and Jesus’ faithfulness. His closest friends and disciples couldn’t keep watch, couldn’t pray, couldn’t even stay awake in Jesus’ greatest time of need. Yet through it, Jesus faithfully kept watch, prayed to his Heavenly Father, and entrusted himself to his Father. Jesus was strengthened by God the Father in his weakness and abandonment from his friends. Jesus can strengthen you in your times of weakness and abandonment.

“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray’” (26:36).

# JANUARY 18

## *Matthew 26-27*



**T**HE GREATEST HUMAN DILEMMA IS THAT GOD IS HOLY, AND WE ARE NOT.

God is righteous, and we are not. Everyone will admittedly state, “no one is perfect.” While this is true, we don’t often see how this plays itself out. We minimize sin to try to make us feel better about ourselves than we truly are. God knows and cannot be fooled. We are not good.

Man’s heart is on full display here. The stage is set for the very act that would split time as we know it in half – the crucifixion of Jesus. In this act, we see many characters in this epic story.

Let’s consider the characters Matthew shows us:

- 26:3-4 Religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus
- 26:14 Judas is seeking an opportunity to betray Jesus.
- 26:56 Jesus’ own disciples deserted him.
- 26:59 The Sanhedrin false testimony to put Jesus to death
- 26:74 Peter denying him Jesus
- 27:23 The crowds shouting for Jesus’ crucifixion.
- 27:26 Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified.
- 27:30 Roman soldiers mocked, spit, struck, and stripped Jesus.
- 27:44 Robbers were crucified with Jesus and reviled him.

We cannot disconnect ourselves from this story as if we would never do this. Our hearts do the same thing today. Have you ever hidden your faith in fear? Walked away from the Church? Fallen to peer pressure? Blamed God and been angry at him? Been an unfaithful friend?

Thank God for his saving grace despite our wandering hearts.

“Peter answered him, ‘Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away’” (26:33).

# JANUARY 19

*Matthew 26:36-46*



**J**ESUS, KNOWING HE WAS ABOUT TO FACE THE GREATEST SUFFERING IN ALL OF HISTORY, WAS PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (26:39).

The reality of what Jesus came to do, to bear the sins of the world, was about to be fulfilled. Jesus refers to this as “drinking the cup” that God the Father had for him. Why would Jesus need to drink the cup of God’s wrath? Why would Jesus need to take the punishment for sin? He hadn’t sinned, nor deserved God’s wrath. This doesn’t seem fair!

This is not fair, it is grace. Jesus being falsely accused, betrayed, beaten, mocked, and ultimately crucified on a cross, was not a mistake – it was the plan. Jesus said in John 12:27, “For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” What happened to Jesus on the cross is exactly what was prophesied would happen to the Messiah in Isaiah 52-53.

Suffering and God’s wrath are also what you and I rightly deserve. We have and do choose sin at times, we turn from God, and can become depressed when thinking about the current state of West Virginia and the world. Suffering, as a believer, though, must be seen within God’s sovereignty.

See your suffering as a redeeming tool in God’s hand that shows you a glimpse of what Jesus went through to rescue you, the severity of what sin does in this world, the grace of God who is with you in the midst of it, and a reminder that one day suffering will end because of the suffering that Jesus went through for you.

# JANUARY 20

*Matthew 26:21,34*



**M**ATTHEW 26 GIVES US TWO EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE DEALING WITH SIN AND GUILT.

Both Judas and Peter, just like you and I (Romans 3:23), sin. They betrayed Jesus. The work of God in our lives is to reveal our sin (to show us our need for a rescuer) as well as reveal Jesus to us as the only means of being rescued. Christians should see growth in our repentance of sin and faith in Jesus. As long as there is breath in our lungs on this side of life, you and I will continually have opportunities to choose to either sin or bring God glory in our lives. We sin when we do anything that goes against God's nature and Word. Guilt and shame follow sin.

So, what are we to do when we do inevitably sin? How do we deal with guilt and shame?

Judas and Peter give us great examples of the two ways we can deal with sin. Judas betrayed Jesus for money. Simon denied Jesus out of fear.

First is the way of Judas. We can see our sin against God and rightly feel guilty. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:26). Death is the consequence of sin from the Garden of Eden. The death of Judas, to pay for his own sin, is one way to make atonement. This death is eternal.

Secondly is the way of Peter. After realizing his sin, he doesn't lose faith. His sorrow leads him to repentance and restoration with Jesus. John 21 gives us a beautiful picture of Peter's restoration. The death of Jesus, to pay for Peter's (your) sin, is another way to make atonement.

The cost of sin was paid for on the cross of Jesus. Take it there.

# JANUARY 21

*Matthew 28*



**T**HE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS WHAT SEPARATES CHRISTIANITY FROM EVERY OTHER RELIGION.

The Messiah was prophesied hundreds of years earlier that he would be rejected, tortured, and killed. This had just taken place, much to everyone's surprise. This was the darkest moment in all of history, when humanity crucified the Messiah. On a spiritual level, it would appear that Satan and sin have victory over God. Oh, how God has flipped the script though.

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said” (28:5-6).

This very dark, sinful human act, is what God would use to bring the light of his saving grace to the very people that rejected him. That was you at one point. That is someone else right now. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the greatest light of hope that could ever come to those living in darkness.

The resurrection of Jesus is what makes salvation possible for you, me, and everyone in West Virginia. In the midst of a dark and depressed state, it's only the light of the gospel that can bring about hope and change. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is what gives real hope to real people who need to really be rescued from sin and its effects. Jesus rose so that we too will rise with him.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, we are to be pitied above all, but with it we are to be the most hopeful and joyous of all. This same hope and joy is needed most for your neighbors, baristas, roommates, co-workers, and professors.

# JANUARY 22

## Mark 1



**O**NE OF THE MANY ATTRIBUTES MY FATHER HANDED DOWN TO ME WAS AN INCREDIBLE RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY.

Coming out of a military family, I learned respect for my parents, elders, teachers, pastors, and supervisors. I believe this is a quality lacking in many generations.

Yes, it is important that one understands authority, but even more important to know where that authority comes. Mark 1 is full of great examples from John the Baptist “proclaiming a baptism of repentance” (1:4). Though John understood his purpose, he also realized the foundation in which his ministry was rooted. “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie” (1:7). John was successful in what he pursued, but the authority John was given was even more clear in John 1:8, “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”

What about Jesus? Yes, even he was subordinate to the authority given him. The Father speaks to him with deep pleasure in his obedience of baptism, he walks loyally into the desert when the Holy Spirit drove him into the wilderness. The worshipers in the synagogue also recognized his power as they stated, “What is this? A new teaching with authority?” (1:27)

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, *and there he prayed*” (1:35). Why would the Son of God need to pray? Because he understood authority and from where his authority came. If one can ever grasp that principle, Jesus’ power, purpose and plan for their lives will be evident.

# JANUARY 23

## *Mark 2*



**W**HEN I FIRST BECAME A BELIEVER, I WANTED TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. THOUGH I WAS NOT TRAINED, I SHARED MY STORY.

In Mark 2, I love how many brought their friends to hear Jesus. I am envious of the four men who determined to bring their crippled friend to Jesus. They tried to get him through the door. Because “there was no more room,” they decided together to take him up on the roof. This method would have been possible because of the thatched roofs that were so prominent during the time of Christ. They would not take no for an answer.

“Seeing their faith” (all five of them), Jesus healed the man of his disease, but also forgave him of his sin through faith alone. The paralytic was not saved because of being healed, but rather saved because of his faith that Jesus would heal him. His confession of Jesus was the turning point of his life! When was the last time that you went out of your way to bring someone to Jesus, not taking no for an answer?

Consider this illustration:

“A medical doctor attended a conference in a hotel near the ocean. During break, he looked out and saw a young boy throwing something in the ocean. At noon, he again saw the boy throwing objects into the ocean. The doctor walked out on the beach and saw the boy picking up starfish and throwing them back in the ocean one by one. The doctor asked, ‘Why are you throwing the starfish in the ocean, there are hundreds on the shore. What good do you think throwing a few will make?’ The young boy picked up another starfish and threw it in the ocean and said, ‘It will make a difference to this one’” (unknown).

# JANUARY 24

## Mark 3



**I**N OUR CULTURE, COLLEGE COLORS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT NOT AS CRITICAL AS KNOWING ON WHICH SIDE OF THE CREATOR YOU STAND.

College sports are an amazing phenomenon. In my lifetime I have not encountered anything more divisive than college colors. I grew up around the Alabama-Auburn rivalry, which can split the strongest of families, and prove thicker than blood! There was also no fence riding allowed. It is a scary concept.

Mark 3 begins the confrontation of the gospel during Jesus' ministry. First, the Pharisees went out and started plotting how to destroy Jesus. The demons acknowledged the incarnation of the Messiah when confronted, "You are the Son of God" (3:11).

Once Jesus chose his disciples, the polarity of the gospel began to escalate. He went to see his family, and they said, "He's out of his mind" (3:21). He also declared that the only sin that does not allow repentance is the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit (3:29). Though difficult to swallow, the gospel is inclusive in its love for people, but exclusive in its demand for confession. That exclusivity is why Christians in other countries are worshiping underground, teaching in secret, losing their families, and being stripped off their livelihood.

Believers in America have had it easy for quite a long time. Take some time today to thank God for the salvation granted to you, and that he was longsuffering with you. When the gospel causes division in your family or friendships, be committed to the truth and to the power it has to save anyone! "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

# JANUARY 25

## *Mark 4*



**O**NE OF THE MOST USELESS CLASSES I TOOK IN COLLEGE WAS BRITISH LITERATURE.

I cannot remember much about it for two reasons. First, the teacher resembled someone from an insane asylum. Second, I just needed a class to fulfill a humanities elective. Bad combination. This class became like a foreign language to me, and whenever I was called on to participate in class, it was like one who was asked to explain the theory of relativity through prose.

This chapter begins the use of parables in Mark's Gospel. This method of teaching was a common practice of Jesus as he dealt with the crowds and privately with his disciples. The use of parables had a two-fold purpose. It was easier for the common person to understand the gospel with a common story, and made it harder for those whose heart was already hardened by their religiosity.

Being a simple guy, I am glad he spoke in parables, because it makes the Scripture very personal to me through its simplicity. Oddly enough, the ones who were the worldlier and spiritually educated had a difficult time grasping the common language of the people. This mindset is a result of centuries of legalism; it became a series of imprisoned thoughts on a page.

When asked why he used parables while teaching, Jesus assured the twelve that "to you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God" (4:11). For those with hardened hearts saw the parables as stumbling blocks of rhetoric, "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven" (4:12).

In his sovereignty, Jesus already knew the religious would reject the gospel. Be thankful the Word of God is understandable as he reveals it to you.

# JANUARY 26

## *Mark 5*



**W**HEN SOMEONE IS EXCITED ABOUT A SPECIAL DAY OR A MILESTONE IN THEIR LIFE, THERE IS NO HESITATION OF TELLING SOMEONE ELSE ABOUT IT.

When I believed I was going to marry my wife, I told my parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and then even my acquaintances. I was not ashamed of this news. I knew in my heart that she was the one!

Many in Scripture had an experience with Christ and were not ashamed to tell others about him. One such occasion was the demoniac who was found in the region of Gerasenes. This man, overtaken by multiple demons, approached Jesus as he came onto the shore. Jesus had not even said anything to this crazy man, but he knelt before Jesus with no prompting or coercion. He then commenced to say, “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (5:7). This action of the demoniac’s approach said a lot about Jesus’ character.

A couple of things to remember. First, the demons, no matter their quantity, had no power over Jesus no matter the scenario. Second, the demons begged Jesus to send them into the pigs (5:12). This showed the deity of Christ, and the authority he possessed over all created beings, even spiritual ones. It is good to know that the God we willingly serve has power over things seen and unseen.

Legion went into the pigs, ran off the cliff, and drowned. The man was immediately returned to his right mind and dressed in appropriate attire. The man’s response to his regeneration needs to be emphasized. He went to Decapolis (ten town region) to tell others “how much Jesus had done for him” (5:20). Knowing what Jesus has done for you, when was the last time that you were not afraid to share that news with your parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and eventually people outside of your circles of influence?

# JANUARY 27

*Mark 6*



**I**N THE 1953 MOVIE, “THE ROBE,” A ROMAN SOLDIER NAMED MARCELLUS HAS TAKEN PART IN THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

Marcellus has nightmares about Jesus, the robe, the crucifixion, and is under the impression that the robe of Christ has cursed him. He takes a trip back to Jerusalem to find the robe so he can be freed of the apparent curse. In the end, Marcellus becomes a believer, and realizes the saving power was in the God-man Jesus and not the robe.

There is an interesting verse in this chapter that can be overlooked. When Jesus went into villages, the people longed to touch his robe to be healed, just like the woman with the issues from bleeding (5:28). Scripture says that “they implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well” (6:56). For one to believe that Jesus’ robe could heal was an amazing act of faith. These people had been imprisoned by legalism for centuries, but were now desperate for the coming of the true King. This King would be able to overcome the Jewish law as well as Roman tyranny. According to the Law, disease was associated with sin present in your life. This teaching caused many to question the belief system they had followed for so long. Also, the act it took for Jesus to heal was an incredible miracle that could only come from God!

Yet, there are many days that we just wish that Christ would do something miraculous. That desperation is what we need in our lives as we long for Christ to show himself as a healer, teacher, and savior. Do not be so skeptical to think that miracles don’t occur. Instead, be like Marcellus, who believed in the power of Christ, and walked to his own death because of it.

# JANUARY 28

*Mark 7*



**A** YOUNG MAN HAD BEEN TO WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY. THE PASTOR HAD SPOKEN ABOUT LISTENING TO GOD AND OBEYING THE LORD'S VOICE.

The young man couldn't help but wonder, "Does God still speak to people?" Later that night, sitting in his car, he just began to pray, "God, if you still speak to people, speak to me. I will listen. I will do my best to obey."

A Gentile woman comes to Jesus full of faith. She kneels at Jesus' feet and begs him to cast a demon out of her daughter who is not present. When I think of this type of faith, I cannot help but be somewhat ashamed of the lack of faith I possess. Jesus' response is an interesting one, "...It is not right to take the children's [Jews] bread and throw it to the dogs" (7:27). Not only did Jesus seemingly insult her, but called her a dog, which was customary towards Gentiles.

Instead of going away dejected, I love her faith answer that gives hope to all who believe: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). What? Jesus was testing her faith to see how deeply it really voyaged. I quake at her answer as she longed to see her daughter whole. Jesus' response is a beautiful picture of mercy, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). Her faith had saved the spiritual and physical life of her daughter!

So, the young man in the story above was prompted to buy a gallon of milk and take it to an apartment next door. As crazy as that may sound, the family who lived there had run out of money, and had no milk for their crying, hungry infant. Why should we listen and obey God's voice? In the words of Paul Harvey, "Now you

# JANUARY 29

*Mark 8*



**T**HERE ARE MANY POPULAR QUOTES FROM WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE PLAYS.

One of his most popular quotes from the tragedy “Romeo and Juliet” goes like this, “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” In other words, call a rose by something else, and no one would really care. Why? Because one would still appreciate its beauty, creativity, and incredible scent. In this case, the name doesn’t really matter, only the essence of the rose.

Mark records for the Church one of the most important passages in Christendom. The Twelve are with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi which was city full of statues and art forms dedicated to multiple gods from the Greco-Roman culture. Amid this culture, Jesus breached the subject of his increasing popularity over the last few months. He was not feeding his ego, rather, he was testing the disciples understanding of who he revealed himself to be. Verse 27 says, “Who do people say that I am?” Interesting question. Interesting response.

Jesus then shifts the focus in verse 29, “But who do you say that I am?” What Jesus meant was, “Who do you, my closest comrades, believe that I am?” I love Peter’s response and how quickly he shares it, “You are the Messiah.” Peter got it right! The title Messiah, or Christ, is one that cannot not be replaced. It is one that claims deity, power, and relationship. When coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus, one must understand that he is the only way to life (John 14:6). Jesus was called many names during his ministry. Most of them were negative, or sarcastic, but none of those names meet the criteria of the God-Man. There is no substitute.

# JANUARY 30

## Mark 9



**T**HOUGH I DON'T UNDERSTAND, GOD IS SOVEREIGN, AND HE MADE ME.

I enjoy being on the mountaintop – smell the goodness of God, feel the wind of Christ's freedom, and experience the joy of worship. I tend to lean towards staying there – on the mountaintop! Last time I checked, I am not independently wealthy, so the mountaintop is a temporary place. One must come down to reality, smell the true roses of life, and experience the thorns that come alongside them. If one is in the arms of Christ, it is not a bad place to be.

Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to experience the ultimate mountaintop! He invited them to come up a high mountain and watch him transfigure (Greek: metamorphoo) which means "his divine glory shone out through his human form, and not in the case of Moses, caused by God having appeared to him" (Unger, pg. 1112). Wow, what a scene to behold! Jesus was in his glorified state, from that of an "ordinary human being to a divine being in all his glory" ("New American Commentary"). Though hard for us to understand, that was Jesus' original state, so he was comfortable with that.

But for Peter, James, and John it was completely foreign. How often does one experience a portrait of God in his glory? So, what did they do? Peter spewed from his pie hole, "Rabbi, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents" (9:5) He didn't know what to say because they were terrified" (9:6). Attempting to be helpful, Peter was alluding to the fact that he didn't want to leave. Who would blame him? For believers, no matter how good the mountaintop might be, eventually one must come down in the valley where the you belong. Enjoy the mountaintop when it is available, but don't get too comfortable.

# JANUARY 31

*Mark 10*



**W**HEN MY DAUGHTER WAS SIX, HER INQUISITIVE MIND AMAZED ME. SHE WOULD ASK SO MANY QUESTIONS AND MANY WERE ABOUT GOD.

She had a deep intellect and one day her questions led to an incredible insight about Jesus. She asked, “Daddy, what does God look like?” I was obviously the “more mature” one of the two, so I replied, “Honey, we don’t know what God looks like.” She sat there a moment, and I could tell her mind was churning 100mph. She looked at me and said, “Well, if Jesus is God (we had taught her that truth), then doesn’t God look like Jesus?” I immediately realized that sometimes wisdom comes from the mouth of children.

Jesus loved children. He is described in Scripture as seeing them as important to society. In Judea, the crowds had smothered him with their needs and hunger for truth. In verse 13, “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them.” Such an honor for children to be held by the God of the universe. His intentions were to just hold them and bless them. He loved his creations.

The disciples thought it to be a waste of time and tried to run them away. Jesus said, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (10:15). Jesus was not only teaching the world to love and take care of children but to realize they teach us how to come to God for salvation. John MacArthur says, “Children are readily accepted into the kingdom... We are wise to become like children in our spiritual dependency upon the Lord.” I miss those days with my children when they were soaking in the truths of God, but I also cherish those times as I learned so much from them. This passage shows us what God looks like.





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