

Christ Wesleyan

CHRIST  WESLEYAN  
sharing the light  
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EYEWITNESS  
**VIEWS**

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CROSS

***Devotionals***

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Welcome to the 40 Days of Prayer & Fasting and welcome to our series' emphasis called "Eyewitness Views". "Eyewitness Views" is more than a new sermon series! It is taking a firsthand look at what it would have been to live at the time of Christ. What would it have been like to walk with Jesus in the flesh? What would it have been like to know the disciples? What would it have been like to be present at the trials, at the cross, or at the tomb after the resurrection? What would you have seen if you were eyewitnesses to the greatest life-changing events of all history?

Our desire for this 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting is to take each one of you and help you discover what it would have been like to experience "Holy Week" in a deeply personal way. Each day, during the time leading up to Easter, we will offer you passages of Scripture to read, devotional thoughts to consider, and a challenge to grow in your faith. These devotionals have been written by directors and pastors from our team. Each week, the sermon will focus on those same passages. Each week, one of the pastoral team, will place himself in the time period of Jesus' last week on earth and share with us his eyewitness account. These "Eyewitness Views" will cover the experiences from the Triumphal Entry to the Resurrection. The sermon that will follow will help bring greater clarity, as well as challenge you to envision yourself in their places during that "Holy Week" period.

Join us and invite your friends to come along to share the "Eyewitness Views" of that last week that Jesus lived on this earth.

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Christ Wesleyan Church has followed the pattern of a "40 Day" corporate fast for more than 20 years. God has blessed us in incredible ways over the years, but I believe His blessing is directly related to the emphasis we have placed on prayer and fasting. Our hope is that this time period will draw you closer to the Lord than ever before. Although it is generally impossible to sustain these disciplines on a regular basis, it is our hope that it will lift you to a new level in your walk with Christ and that you will continue stronger in your journey after it's over.

The 40-day period is meant for you to draw near to God by building in some new routines and by deleting something from your life that will cause you to think of God more. Fasting is not an attempt to twist God's arm to make Him do something He doesn't want to do, but rather an opportunity to heighten your intensity in prayer and to draw you closer to Him so that your desires are His desires.

You might consider giving up something for the 40 days, or you might give up something different each week. You might add some special time-alone-with-God times, some fresh challenges to your faith, or some new goals. Be as creative as possible in how you will approach the 40 days. Whatever you fast...whether it is food, gum, coffee, sweets, desserts, movies, video games, reading, music, or any number of new ideas that God brings to mind...you always need to let the fasting item be a prompt for you to remember to pray. When you set aside food, it is your desire to pray during that time and to focus your heart on the God given goals for this time.

Here are some helpful passages from other writers that keep your focus right during this time:

*"The purpose of fasting is to loosen to some degree the ties which bind us to the world of material things and our surroundings as a whole, in order that we may concentrate all our spiritual powers upon the unseen and eternal things."*

- Ole Kristian O. Hallesby

*"Fasting is important, more important perhaps, than many of us have supposed...when exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; a spiritual weapon of God's provision, might, to the pulling down of strongholds."* - Arthur Wallis, God's Chosen Fast

*“Is fasting ever a bribe to get God to pay more attention to the petitions? No, a thousand times no. It is simply a way to make clear that we sufficiently reverence the amazing opportunity to ask, help from the everlasting God, the Creator of the universe, to choose to put everything else aside and concentrate on worshiping, asking forgiveness, and making our requests known—considering His help more important than anything we could do ourselves in our own strength and with our own ideas.”*

- Edith Schaeffer L’Abri

*“We tend to think of fasting as going without food. But we can fast from anything. If we love music and decide to miss a concert in order to spend time with God, that is fasting. It is helpful to think of the parallel of human friendship. When friends need to be together, they will cancel all other activities in order to make that possible. There’s nothing magical about fasting. It is just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with Him, sorting out whatever is necessary, and you have concealed the meal, party, concert, or whatever else you had planned to do in order to fulfill that priority.” - James I (J.I.) Packer*

Join us for this 40-day period and see what miraculous things that God can do...especially for those who believe! God is working!

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## The Purpose of the Triumphal Entry

The Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11: 1-11, Luke 19:28-44, and John 12:12-16) report the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. This event occurred just days before the crucifixion of Jesus. This was prophesied 520 years before His birth, by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). The Jews at that time were expecting a king who would free them from the Roman Empire. Today, the Jews believe they are still waiting for the Messiah because they wanted Jesus to fulfill the rest of the prophecy spoken by the prophet, Zechariah (Zechariah 9:10), not knowing that this will happen at His second coming. The most important thing for Jesus at that time, and still today, was to die for all humans, meet the requirements to pay for our sin, and meet what was said also by another prophet, Isaiah (Isaiah 53:4-7). And that was really the purpose of His first coming.

The Lord Jesus Christ wants to fill your life (Revelation 3:19-20) to give you the eternal joy only He can give. Real joy you've never had: what neither drugs nor alcohol, nor sex, nor money, can give you. He gives an eternal happiness, for although problems come into your life, you will overcome with the help of God, and so celebrate win after win (John 10:9,14,16).

### Prayer

*Dear God, today we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into our hearts today and for eternity (Luke 18: 29-30). Today we open our hearts and ask You to come into our lives. We recognize You as the King of Kings and Savior of our lives, and want to be your true children and enjoy spending our eternity in Your presence (John 1:12-13). Amen.*

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### Humility: The Attitude We Should Imitate

A few days before His suffering on the cross, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem in the middle of praise and popularity of the people. His entry into Jerusalem was not by chance or whim, but Jesus did it in obedience to fulfill the perfect will of God.

The first thing we look at is Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey, which had been prophesied by the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). As the Son of God, Jesus could have entered Jerusalem in the most outstanding manner, but to fulfill the Word of God, He humbled Himself by going on a donkey. In the most humble manner, not only did Jesus enter Jerusalem, but was also obedient unto death to save us, so doing the will of His Father (Matthew 26:39,42).

Thus entering riding a donkey made manifest His humility. He could have gone to Jerusalem accompanied with a host of angels and great trumpet sound, but entered humbly instead. Before His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus said of Himself to His disciples and people: *"Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."* (Matthew 11:29)

#### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your example of humility when You came to Jerusalem. Father, please forgive us and remove all our pride and arrogance. Your Word says in Matthew 23:12, "For whoever exalts himself will be so humiliated and he who humbles himself will be exalted." We come before You with humble and contrite hearts, recognizing that You are King of kings and Lord of lords. We praise and love You; we give the honor and glory that You deserve. Amen.*

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### Jesus' Two Options in a Triumphal Entry to Jerusalem

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He knew His ministry on earth was coming to a close—that He would deliver His own life by rescuing each of us. People greeted him with shouts of "Hosanna, Hosanna!", meaning *"blessed is he who comes in the name the Lord!"* (Mark 11:10). All the people did this in good faith with joy and rejoicing, but unfortunately, only a few days later, at the time of the crucifixion, people were shouting, *"Crucify him!"* (Mark 15:13).

Unfortunately, this applies today in our lives as Christians. How many times do we praise and glorify our God with our mouth and say "Hosanna!", but then with our words and actions unwittingly say "Crucify Him"? We do it when we say that we love Him, but do nothing for Him. We do it when we sing in jubilation and rejoicing every time we meet in church, but we never open our mouths to be faithful witnesses to the people around us to tell them the great things God has done for us (Mark 5: 19), and do nothing for His kingdom grow. Dear brothers, when we do not live according to His will, it is like we are hammering the nails into His hands. What is your choice in this time—to praise Him with all your heart or to crucify Him with your actions and words?

#### Prayer

*Dear God today, we apologize because we often sin against You with our words and actions. Please cleanse our minds and hearts with Your precious blood. We want to be agents of change, and reach the lost for Christ with help of the Holy Spirit. Please help us to be your witness, help us to live a life pleasing to You. We are thankful. We want to be your true children sharing Your Light with our world, and enlarging Your Kingdom. We praise and glorify You in spirit and in truth every day of our lives. Amen.*

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### Surrender By Following

God calls us to follow Him through our victories, struggles, and even trials. How are you giving God complete surrender in your life? Do you fight Him every step of the way when He is calling you to step out of your comfort zone, or do you let go all your fears and distractions as you follow Him?

In this passage, we see two disciples, Peter and John, being sent into the city with only the instructions of finding a man carrying a jar of water. When truly thinking about this, we see that the disciples followed Jesus' every word and trusted that what He said would be what they found. They never once questioned Jesus, but dropped everything and entered the city. Think about this: enter a **city**, where most people carried water jugs, find a man you don't know, follow him to a home, and ask the owner to use a room in his house! Peter and John went without having a clue what would be ahead of them. I don't know about you, but I would have muttered to myself every step of the way. These disciples, however, trusted their Savior and confident that they would find things just as Jesus said. Guess what? Everything was just as Jesus said!

We are always called to surrender and follow Jesus. In what areas of your life are you struggling to let go and follow? Finances? Job? Relationship? Ask God to help you to let go of your fears, and follow His direction while He leads you toward the doors He has opened for you. Write down three things God is pressing on your heart to give Him complete control and **follow**!

#### Prayer

*Lord, help me today to let go and completely surrender the things I've been holding onto. Help me go confidently through my day as I look for direction and guidance from You. Thank You for being a God who is always here for me and being the footsteps in front of me to follow.*

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### Like Judas

The time has come! Judas is set to betray Jesus after the Last Supper. How can someone who has seen Jesus work His wonderful miracles, and loved everyone equally regardless of their status, end up betraying Him? Judas was a normal human being who lost his way, and started searching for a way to get a little ahead in life.

So many times we look down on Judas when, ultimately, a lot of us are like **him**! If we follow Jesus only when it's easy and brings us good things, we start blaming God when trials come, eventually give up on God, and falling away from Him because He didn't answer us the way we wanted Him to! It's scary to think that Judas knew Jesus better personally than most people ever will and he still ended up betraying Him. That's why it's important for us not to go through the motions when it comes to our faith with Christ. Things like doing daily devotions, praying, and personal reflection are vital to our relationship with God and not becoming stale or immune to what Christ is doing in our lives.

In what ways do you need to start fully committing your life to Christ? Do you see areas in your life in which you are like Judas? Satan is always alert and ready to pounce on our weaknesses when we least expect it. It's important to have time alone with God through reading your Bible and prayer--this allows us to stay sharp and ready when Satan tries to attack us. We can be just like Judas who allowed his desires and wants to blind him. Remember to seek God first through everything, and to give Him your frustrations and struggles.

#### Prayer

*Lord, help me not become stale in my relationship with You, but that I continue to grow in amazement of You. Show me Your love, power, and grace as I relate to people in my life. Use me to show others Your love while continuing to grow personally in my relationship with You.*

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## You Had to Be There!

Jesus' last meal before the crucifixion was a festival meal - the Passover. But it was a Passover with a twist: He made a new tradition out of the old tradition. If you were there and wanted to tell this story to a friend, you would probably tell them, "Jesus served us the Passover meal, but afterward told us how He was playing a role in this ancient story. It blew our minds. You had to be there!" I grew up in a Baptist church. Each first Sunday of the month, we celebrated communion as a congregation. There was something incredible about hearing each month in the same words that Jesus did on our behalf. We looked back on that day two thousand years ago and wondered: what would it have been like to look on Jesus as He hung on the cross knowing I put Him there? The repetition month after month didn't detract from its value - it added to the depth of our devotion.

When Jesus served the Last Supper to his disciples, it was much the same way. He had not died yet, but then again, when He celebrated this meal with them, it was not yet "Communion" as we now call it - it was the Passover Meal (see Exodus 12:1-28). For hundreds of years, the Hebrew people celebrated this meal together. There were very specific instructions detailing how this meal was to be celebrated - and it is still celebrated today by observant Jews worldwide. Jesus walked the disciples through the Passover meal and at the end, with the cup after supper, interpreted for the group how He had come to fulfill the law by becoming Himself the Passover Lamb.

When you celebrate communion next time, put yourself in the story. Jesus reinterpreted the meal of Passover when He served it putting Himself in as the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:23) because that is the part of the law He was fulfilling. ("This is my body...This is my blood" vs. 27 and 28). The disciples were placed in the story, also, when they were commanded directly to: "Take, eat." Why not use your imagination to cross the thousands of years, and put yourself there at the table with the disciples? Jesus' redemptive sacrifice reaches backward and forward in time to cleanse those who own their sin and confess it to God. No one can say then that "you should have been there," because you were.

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## Speaking First, Thinking Second

Directly after Jesus serves His disciples the Passover meal, He leads them to the Mount of Olives to pray. He had spent time during the meal explaining that one of the disciples - one of those sitting at the table - would betray Him. And here He is again - telling the group that not just one would betray Him. What results is a fun argument between Jesus and Peter—like many others Jesus and Peter have. Along the way, Peter makes some pretty bold statements: "*Even if everyone else stumbles, I won't...If I must die alongside you, I won't deny you.*"

Even if you are not a bold person like Peter was, I'm sure you are aware that we all write "checks our mouths cannot cash". A few of my friends have this reputation. In fact, they are so notorious for promising things that there is running joke behind their back. Of course they don't intend to join us for a movie - they just can't say "no." These friends, and Peter, need to hear again from Jesus: "*All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*" (Matthew 5:37 NIV)

The strong feelings Peter has that make him burst out this way are real - they are not right or wrong - they just are. Jesus just told him that he would betray Him. Of course that would make Peter upset! But in declaring his planned faithfulness - in reacting to this strong emotion within him, he misses what Jesus was actually saying. Jesus was warning the whole group that despite their imperfect faithfulness, He still had a plan and all would still be under control. "*But after I have arisen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*" (vs. 28). Peter misses the point with his emotional outburst.

### Prayer

*Dear God, my emotions are not bad or good - they just are. Help me to use them as a tool to connect with others, rather than allow them to control me. I realize they are a gift not to suppress, but to discipline. Help me to begin to view my emotions in a healthy and constructive way so I don't miss opportunities to minister and to be ministered to. Amen.*

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### Awkward Submission

I struggle to be a gracious guest. A great family in Massachusetts let me stay with them on my way to and from school. On my first overnight visit there returning home for Christmas break, I was so anxious to get home and not be a burden that I got up about 4:00am and left before anyone in the house was up. Returning to school in January, I stayed with them again. After I was warmly greeted at the door I was scolded: “We love to have you stay with us, but don’t you dare leave before we can feed you breakfast.” The family had prepared a great meal and I had missed out - offending them in the process.

We want to pay our own way and not to become a burden. We can serve others all day long, but to be served makes us uncomfortable. To suggest that we should depend on our community (interdependence) or any single person (dependence) offends us.

But here is Jesus in this odd scene serving His disciples—taking the place of a household servant as He strips Himself of His normal clothing, dresses in a towel, and makes His way around the table - washing their feet. Peter resists at first, but Jesus responds (vs. 8): “*Unless I wash you, you won’t have a place with me.*”

John Wesley cautioned people against working for God before they were saved in case people were trying to earn their own salvation. It takes a great deal of spiritual maturity to work in *response* to God’s work for us instead of working to *deserve* God’s favor. Here is a question to think about: how do I take the towel from Jesus and insist that I wash myself? When I serve God, do I do it because I am “washing away” bad things I have done? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you sit there and let Jesus wash you clean. It might hurt your pride. It is humbling. It is awkward. But unless you do, you won’t have a place with Jesus.

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### Who Do *You* Say I Am?

“*Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’*” John 14:6 (NIV) Who does Jesus say He is? It was during the calm just before the storm of His execution that Jesus took the opportunity to declare that He was God in the flesh (John 1:14), “*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation*” (Colossians 1:15 NIV). He pronounced to His followers that He and the Father are one and the same, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had revealed Himself throughout history to the Jewish people; the God who appeared in the pages of their Scriptures as the One walking them from bondage in Egypt and into the Land of Promise. Just before this declaration, Jesus Christ, the Author of the universe, had stooped down to wash the mud from in-between the toes of His disciples’ feet.

Who does the world say Jesus is? This is a question Jesus asked the disciples (Mark 8 & Luke 9). The first-century Hebrews weren’t convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, they were expecting the Son of David—a warrior and a powerful military leader who would lead them into battle to free them from the oppression of the surrounding nations. Instead, Jesus came as a servant. Today, not acknowledging the history that affirms Jesus walked the earth would be foolish, yet many people believe that He was simply a great teacher or a wise prophet, not the visible image of the invisible God.

Immediately after asking the disciples who the crowds thought He was, Jesus turned the question on His followers: “*Who do you say I am?*” They knew the world didn’t believe in Him, but they knew Him personally and had seen His work in their lives—how would they answer? So many people today don’t believe that Jesus is “*the Way and the Truth and the Life*”, but look back across the pages of your existence, and observe the hand of an Almighty God whom you know intimately and personally through Jesus Christ. So stop—pause from whatever it is you are doing, and ask yourself this question: Who do *you* say Jesus is?

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## Sunshine

*“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”* John 14:26 (NIV)

It is a beautiful day. The sun is shining. The birds are singing. The flowers are dancing in the gentle breeze that blows across your face just enough to tickle your nose. As you stand in the light of the sun, blazing down upon your skin in all its glory from nearly 93 million miles away, you look up at the brilliant ball of fire hanging above your head sending light and heat...

You stop cold. Frantically, you hold out your arms, trying to absorb as much sunlight as possible through your skin, attempting to confirm one thing: you can't feel any heat! Not only that, but you realize that the temperature around you is much colder than it should be on such a beautiful day in the middle of spring. There isn't a cloud in the sky, the wind is but a whisper, and the magnificent noonday sun is ablaze, yet your body is chilling and getting colder by the minute!

What if the sun didn't provide us heat here on earth? Sure, it still would hang above us across the vast gap between our world and its massive axis; it would still provide the light we need to see during the day - the beautiful sunsets we stand in awe of as it drops below the horizon on its way to encircle our beautiful planet, finally to rise the next morning, once again. But what if the warmth that the sun provided to both our bodies and our planet didn't exist?

The sun is much like God in its nature—it is triune. The star itself hangs at the center of its solar system, a ferocious, fiery intensity that would consume our planet if it were just a little closer. The sun isn't simply a ball of fire; it is also a source of light—light that illuminates our planet day after day after day. The sun is also a source of heat, warming our bodies, providing life, and energy simply by supplying nutrients to plants, animals, and we as people each and every day.

Jesus promises His disciples the Holy Spirit in John 14:26. Jesus Himself has already claimed to be and has been revealed as God in human flesh, the visible image of the invisible Father. He was there with God when the foundations of the earth were laid. But the revelation of Almighty God was not made complete in Jesus – limiting the nature of God to simply Father and Son would be like stepping outside to enjoy the sunshine without experiencing the warmth it provides. The Holy Spirit, the third distinct person of the experience on earth, the warmth we feel from the fiery epicenter who is our Creator. The “Intercessor” who was promised by Jesus, now communes and dwells within the children, the sons and daughters, of God.

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## Where's the Fruit?

Let's face it folks, we are busy people. Busy with our occupations, busy going here and there, busy doing this, that, and the next thing, and on and on it goes. I must confess that I enjoy being busy, and as a result, have difficulty remaining in one place for very long. As a matter of fact, depending on the circumstances, it is sometimes absolute torture for me to have to remain in one place for an extended period of time.

In John 15, Jesus uses a metaphor of a vine and its branches to illustrate to His followers how we are to bear spiritual fruit. In this metaphor, Jesus is the Vine, the Father is the Gardener, and we, who are genuine and true followers of Jesus, are the branches. Vines were not grown for ornamentation, but rather they were grown for a single purpose—to bear fruit. And so it is with the lives of followers of Christ. We are to be fruit-bearing branches connected to the life-giving Vine. So, how do we bear fruit?

Just as the Vine is the source and sustenance of life for the branches, so is Jesus the true Vine, the source and sustenance of life for His followers. John 15:4 says, *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”* Jesus' words are very clear that in order for us to bear fruit, we must remain or abide in Him. As we remain in Him, we are promised His continued presence in us. We must remain in a constant, permanent, vital union where we belong to and fully depend on Him for our every need, strength, and provision. Jesus is, in effect, saying, “just stay right here in the nourishment of My presence, My strength, My power, and My will”. If we do this, we will not simply bear fruit, but Jesus promises that we will bear much fruit. What happens when we don't maintain a close and vital connection to the Vine? Jesus states the result this way: *“Apart from me you can do nothing”*. We can do **nothing**! We are simply powerless, fruitless, withering branches.

The Father's role as the Gardener in this metaphor is two-fold. According to John 15:1-2, the Father will cut off the branches that produce no fruit, and make the fruit-bearing branches more fruitful by pruning them. The genuine Christian life will be a fruit-producing life. In Matthew 7:16-17, Jesus said that a genuine believer can be tested by their fruit. We, as true followers of Jesus, will be known by the evidence of fruit produced in our lives. Our faith in and relationship with Jesus must be genuine and sincere, not superficial, only appearing to belong to Him. The Father also will prune our spiritual lives in order that we may produce even more fruit. His pruning may be done in many ways. Sometimes that pruning may involve pain, hurt, discipline, trials, or loss, and sometimes we may question what God is up to. Hebrews 12:6 says, *“Because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”*

Whatever methods God chooses to refine us and prune out those things which keep us from bearing more fruit, be assured that He loves us and cares for us and has a much deeper purpose for all that we face.

These words from Hudson Taylor so vividly picture the vine/branch relationship: "The branch of the vine does not worry, and toil, and rush here to seek for sunshine, and there to find rain. No; it rests in union and communion with the vine; and at the right time, and in the right way, is the right fruit found on it. Let us so abide in the Lord Jesus."

### **Prayer**

*Lord, in this sometimes hurried pace of life, remind us and teach us to simply abide in You that we may be genuine fruit-bearing followers of Christ all to the glory of God. Amen.*

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Day 12

March 7

**John 15:18-16:**

### **Jesus Said It Would Be Like This**

Years ago, there was a rather entertaining weatherman for a local news channel named Vince Sweeney. Vince would show the weather maps and talk about the forecast and let everyone know what was going to happen over the next few days. Whenever it would rain or snow as predicted in Vince's forecast, folks would proclaim "Vince said it would be like this"! In fact, that catchy phrase became a slogan for that channel and Vince's weather segment of their news broadcast.

In John 15:18, Jesus issues a solemn warning about the coming hatred of the world toward His followers. While warning that we also will be hated, He reminds us that the world hated Him first. In fact, the Scriptures testify that Jesus Himself was hated during the entire period of time from His birth right up until His death. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" Given Jesus' warning and those recorded elsewhere in the Scriptures, we should not be surprised at the violence and hatred we see being played out around the world.

Why will the world hate Christians? Our passage indicates three primary reasons. First, we no longer are identified with the world. In John 15:19, Jesus makes this clear: "*If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*" Jesus is proclaiming that we are in the world, but not of the world, and for that reason we will be hated. Second, as Christians, we are identified with the person of Christ. In verse 20 of our passage, Jesus says "*Remember the words I spoke to you: No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*" We must be ready to face persecution and hatred as Jesus did. Who are we to think we should suffer any less or differently than the One who gave His life for us? A third reason we will be hated is because the world does not know God. In verse 21, Jesus warns us with these words, "*They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.*" We will face the world's hatred because of the name of Christ and its ignorance of the One whom we serve.

Some challenging questions arise from this passage of Scripture. Are you ready to face persecution and hatred as Jesus did? In the face of the world's hatred and scorn, will you stand firm on the Rock of our salvation? Are you prepared to love and bless those who hate you? We must be ready! "Jesus said it would be like this."

### **Prayer**

*Lord, we thank You for warning us ahead of time that we will face persecution. Thank You also that You chose us out of the world, and Your Spirit will equip us to stand against all that may come our way in the world. Teach us how to genuinely love those that do not know You so that we may bring glory and honor to Your name. Amen.*

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### Jesus Prays in the Upper Room

In Jesus' high priestly prayer recorded in John 17, He prays for Himself, for His disciples, and for you (and for me). First, He prays for Himself—that He will bring glory to God the Father and that God will glorify Him. In this part of the prayer, Jesus clearly states that He had existed with God the Father before the world began and asks the Father to return Him to His previously held position of glory. This request is granted when Jesus is resurrected and He returns to the Father.

Second, Jesus prays for His disciples—that the Father will protect them so they will continue to be unified—to be one, and that the Father will protect them from the evil one. Jesus is emphasizing the importance of being one in Him. Had there been major divisions in the early Church, its influence on the world would have been severely hampered. Jesus knew how important their unity was. He also knew how vulnerable the disciples would be—especially over the next several days when He was not going to be with them, and then again after He ascended to heaven. Jesus acknowledges the fact that the evil one exists, but also indicates that the Father has dominion over the evil one—thanks be to God.

Third, Jesus prays for us—for all those who will believe. Wow—this is incredible! The day before Jesus is crucified, He prayed for you and for me; this should encourage each of us. Jesus prays that we too will be one. Again, He emphasizes the importance of unity. We are one body with many different parts. He prays for us to be one so that the world may believe in Him—that the Father sent Him. We are not to be unified just so we all “get along”. It is always about reaching those who don't yet know Jesus. He also prays that we will be with Him in His glory.

I don't know about you, but it is so encouraging to know that Jesus prayed for me—and, especially, that Jesus prayed that I would be with Him in all His glory for all eternity. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

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### Jesus Prays in the Garden of Gethsemane

One of my most vivid memories from my childhood is the painting of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane by Heinrich Hofmann. This huge painting dominated the front of a church near where I grew up as a child. The voice of the pastor of that church singing “Were You There” in front of this painting every Maundy Thursday service helped the story of Jesus death and resurrection come alive for me.

Have you ever thought about for what Jesus prayed in Gethsemane? Three of the Gospels record that Jesus prayed to the Father, if possible, that this cup would be taken from Him. We can only imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to know exactly what He would be facing the next morning. He knew the terrible beatings, the humiliation, and excruciating pain that He would have to endure. His human side pleaded with God the Father—if there is any way, please do not make Me go through this.

The Father's response to Jesus is not recorded in Scripture, but I can imagine it may have been something like, “You know that this is the only way we will be able to bridge the gap so humankind can be reconciled to Me for all eternity”. Jesus' response is a testimony to the amount of love He has for each of us: “Yet not as I will, but as You will”. Jesus, in essence, says to the Father, “I don't want to face this, but I will submit to Your will because I love them so much.”

Walk today in the knowledge that God loves you. Be encouraged by knowing that Jesus loves you so much that He chose to suffer death on the cross for you. “I am loved by the King and it makes my heart want to sing”.

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### Jesus Allows Himself to Be Arrested

All four Gospel writers record the account of Jesus being arrested. A large crowd composed of temple guards, some officials from the chief priest and Pharisees, along with Judas Iscariot come to find Jesus. When the crowd finds Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, one can almost feel a pause in the dramatic narrative as the Son of God freely places Himself into the custody of men doing the work of the evil one.

It is interesting how John records that Jesus initiates the conversation by asking who it is they are seeking. When they indicated they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responded with the words, “I am He,” and they drew back and fell to the ground. Even the armed men in this crowd sent to arrest Jesus were literally knocked over by His presence.

One of the disciples drew a sword and struck one of the men in the crowd in an attempt to defend Jesus. In response, Jesus instructs him to put away the sword and heals the man’s ear. Jesus basically says that if the goal were to save Himself, He could have called on God the Father and would have had 72,000 angels at His disposal. The goal was not to save Himself, but was to fulfill Scripture and sacrifice Himself now that the time was right. So Jesus freely gives control to the crowd and to the forces of evil for a time. He willingly lays down His life—why? He does so for each of us – for all of humankind – so that we can one day enjoy eternity in God’s presence.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

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### Do I Deny Jesus by My Life?

In this passage, Jesus is arrested and taken to the Jewish religious leaders to be questioned. Earlier in the evening, He had met with the disciples in the Upper Room for the Passover supper and had told them that they would all desert Him that night. At the time, they could not imagine such a thing, and Peter had declared, “*Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will.*” Then Jesus told Peter that not only would he desert Jesus but that he would also deny knowing him three times before the rooster crowed in the morning hours. Such a thing was inconceivable to Peter because he loved Jesus deeply, and he again declared that even if he had to die with Jesus, he would never deny Him.

How did things change so quickly? Only a few hours later, he was questioned by three people who were sure that Peter was one of Jesus’ followers. Fear of what might happen to him kicked in, and before he knew what was happening, Peter denied knowing Jesus three separate times. The rooster crowed, and it suddenly hit Peter that he had disowned his Lord just as Jesus had said. At that moment, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Peter was overcome with remorse and left the scene crying bitterly.

While we might be quick to fault Peter for his actions, I have to ask myself, “How do I deny Jesus in my life?” How often have I let fear of what other people think of me thwart my witness for Jesus, or like Peter have tried to preserve myself at any cost? Have I denied His power by lacking faith that He can do the impossible in my life and in the lives of my loved ones? Have I surrendered myself completely to His will, no matter what He may ask of me? Lord, help me to be faithful!

#### Prayer

*Lord, I surrender every area of my life to Your will. Help me to deny myself and follow You all the days of my life, and be worthy of the sacrifice You made for me. How can I show faithfulness to Christ today at work, in my family, and in my thoughts and words?*

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## I'll Never Do That!

How often have you and I found ourselves confidently declaring to someone, "I'll never do that!"? Maybe you have firmly decided that you will never repeat words or actions that you saw carried out by a relative, a co-worker, a friend, or someone you heard about in the news. I can remember when I was a teen and saw children throwing loud tantrums in the store, I declared to whoever was with me at the time, "I'd never let my children do that"! As time went on, and I had children of my own, they generally did not throw loud tantrums in the store, but they often presented challenges to me which caught me by surprise, and it was a struggle not to default to what I might have seen modeled or said by someone else that seemed like something that I would not particularly care to do or say myself.

Peter had rather pridefully assured Jesus that even if everyone else forsook him that day, Peter would not! And it was only a few hours later that Peter found himself doing the exact thing that he had sworn he would NEVER do. It is probably best that we not make prideful declarations of what we will never do, because we often find ourselves to be much weaker than we anticipate, and we have to humbly realize that our own strength is small indeed.

We may find ourselves in Peter's position of having to confess our sins and failures to Jesus and calling upon him to restore us and give us new resolve to be faithful to him in our daily lives. The wonderful news about Jesus is that He will forgive and restore our relationship to Him, just as He forgave Peter for denying Him that awful night. Peter went on to become a strong, steady church leader who stayed loyal to Jesus, even though it eventually cost him his life. As the worship song states, "I will boast in the Lord my God" and not in my own strength!

### Prayer

*Lord, I know that I cannot trust in my own strength to find the power to obey You. Give me your strength, Jesus, to deny myself each day and to follow the plans that You have for my life. How do I need to humble myself to You so that I don't find myself doing something that I said I'd never do?*

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## In the Silence

He could have said, "I don't think you know who you are dealing with", but instead He said "*Who do you think I am?*" He could have said, "You may want to think twice about condemning me." He could have said, "I have to tell you, my Dad is a pretty big deal!" But no, He was silent. Let's face it, Jesus could have summoned an army of angels to save Him. He could have stopped what was happening, but He chose not to. He chose to make the sacrifice. He thought of me. He thought of you, and He was silent.

I remember watching the movie "The Passion of Christ" and in the scene where they were questioning him, I felt sick knowing that He had to endure that pain for me. I could barely look at the screen simply because I knew what was coming and watching Him be beaten because of my sin was too difficult. I felt like I wanted to stand in front of him and say "This man is a King. This man is my Father. This man is my Savior." I wanted to stand up for Him, because He wasn't standing up for himself. *I* wanted to *save* Him. I wanted Him to open His mouth and save Himself.

How often have you been in a situation that one sentence spoken could have changed the outcome? One sentence could have shifted the blame to someone else? One sentence, one lie to get you out of hot water. One sentence to save you. What would it take for you to bear the shame? What would it take for you to stay silent? What would it take for you to sacrifice your very life? For Jesus, it was simple...what it took, was great love.

### Prayer

*Dear Heavenly Father, show me when to be silent. Thank you for loving me enough to give up your life. Remind me of that sacrifice each and every time I come up against a trial or temptation. Show me how to love the way you loved. Please Father, make me more like you. Amen.*

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## One Bad Choice

The ultimate betrayal was committed by Judas. Under pressure, he caved. He was swayed by money. He made a choice. He made the wrong choice. Judas led them to Jesus, and Jesus said, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” In that moment, I think we would have felt so much anger and hatred, but I feel like Jesus asked the question hoping he’d do something different, something better. I think He was trying to give him a minute to decide to be noble. I think Jesus was still loving him.

Judas couldn’t bear the thought of what he did, and so he did the unthinkable...he took his own life. It makes me wonder if Judas was ever really listening to Jesus. Did he really even know Jesus? I think if he had, he would have chosen to go to Jesus, to ask for forgiveness, then repent, and live the rest of his life, not in the shadow of the betrayal, but rather in the light of His Savior.

How many times do we feel like Judas? How often do we deny Jesus? How often do we cave under pressure? How often are we swayed by worldly things? When we live a life for something or someone other than Jesus, we betray Him, but He still keeps loving us. He keeps waiting for us to make a better choice. He keeps forgiving, keeps hoping, and keeps pursuing us even though we don’t deserve Him. I wish Judas had known Jesus the way we know Him. I wish Judas had trusted Jesus the way we do. In that knowing and trusting, he would have found a peace even in the midst of his failure.

### Prayer

*Dear Heavenly Father, be with me as I face tough choices. Help me make the better choice. Be with me as I stand under the pressures of this world. Speak to my heart and strengthen me in the face of temptation. Guard my thoughts. Guard my tongue and keep me focused on living a life that is holy. Help me forgive my betrayers. Help me to love others the way you do. Amen.*

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## Sunday’s Worship, Monday’s Disappointment

Only days before the crowd would lift cries of, “*Crucify Him!*”, they waved palm branches before Jesus singing their loud hosannas. “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” How quickly hearts and attitudes changed from moments of worship to moments of betrayal. How could *those* people, those traitors, hand Jesus over to be crucified? Such hypocrites! Jesus was put on trial for crimes He didn’t commit. The people who should have come to His defense abandoned Him in an instant. Why? Perhaps, embarrassingly, because of pressure from religious leadership. Again I say—Hypocrites!

As I raise my hand to add physical support to my strong internal disgust for *those* people, my heart sinks. I can feel the familiar lump in my throat. The one caused by absolute shame and sorrow. We have all had times in our lives spent worshipping in church on Sunday, only to turn on Jesus Monday morning. Of course, we intend to live out our Sunday praise through the week, but the pressures of our world cause us to hand Jesus over to the soldiers of our sin. That’s when I realize, I have been where *those* people were. Yet, without a physical Jesus in front of me, my betrayal feels disguised. It parades around as a “smart” business move, or a “white lie”, or a socially acceptable practice. How I long for Sunday’s worship to be Monday’s actions! Before I point my finger at *those* people, I must examine my own heart and rid myself of anything that betrays my Savior.

### Prayer

*Lord Jesus, I don’t want my Sunday “Hosannas!” to turn to Monday’s betrayals. Help me to examine my heart and life, so that I can be consistent in my attitude towards You. You died for me; I want my life to be lived for You on Sunday, but especially Monday through Saturday. Amen.*

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## Shouting ‘Barabbas’

We so often realize that *those* people, individuals or groups in scriptural stories who make wrong choices, put a mirror in front of us. We see ourselves and suddenly realize we aren’t that different. If I had lived 2,000 years ago during the time of Christ, would I have acted differently? I’d like to think so, but without the benefit of time, the development of the Gospel, and a complete Bible in my hands... who’s to say what I would’ve done?

In this historical account of Jesus’ trial, Pilate puts a choice before the people gathered. “Which of these two (Jesus the Christ or Barabbas the criminal) do you want me to release to you?” The crowd, swayed by religious officials, cried, “Barabbas!” This cry was followed by a detailed death sentence, “Crucify Jesus!” But why choose Barabbas instead of Jesus? At the very least, shouldn’t both men be viewed as criminals in their minds? Yet, one was a convicted murderer, the other a prophet. How is Jesus the greater of two evils for them? Why didn’t they choose Him to be released?

Again, I’m struck by the moments in our lives when we shout, “Barabbas,” by our choices. When we gossip to a friend, we shout, “Barabbas!” When we give in to sinful peer pressure, we shout, “Barabbas!” When we take an answer from someone else’s test paper, we shout, “Barabbas!” Any time we choose sin over Jesus, we join in the failure of that crowd 2,000 years ago. Every day, let’s make the choice as the song says, “I choose Jesus!”

Today, or in the next few days, when you’re faced with temptation, try this: out loud, speak these words, “I choose Jesus!” It’s amazing what saying something out loud can do for your spirit. God is with you; have courage, be strong. It’s worth it!

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## You Can’t Wash Your Hands in Dirty Water

After Pilate realized he wasn’t getting anywhere with the crowd who was insisting Jesus be crucified, he requested a basin of water to wash his hands of Jesus’ blood. He told the crowd the consequences were on them; that he was innocent in this matter. But was he? Perhaps he wouldn’t be reprimanded by a higher official, or worse killed or removed from his position, but Pilate made an error nonetheless.

As a result of a dream, his wife cautioned to spare Jesus. She believed there was something different about Him; punishing Him could even bring a curse to their house. Pilate certainly heard these words. That’s why, I believe, he requested the water to wash his hands. Would there be consequences to deal with if He had released Jesus? Certainly. The Jewish leaders were causing riots over Jesus; they were hungry for blood. If Pilate had dismissed their accusations, things would have undoubtedly intensified. But aren’t we all faced with decisions that doing the right thing causes difficulty for us?

Pilate had the power to release Jesus and chose not to. He could have requested 10 more basins of water, and yet his hands would have remained dirty. When we have the power to make change and don’t, we choose to join the problem... even if we walk away. Sometimes, sin is doing nothing. Of course there are always right and wrong ways to combat issues, and there are times to speak and times to be silent. Jesus teaches us that by His actions. But that day, I believe Pilate knew the right thing to do, and chose not to do it. God, help us to see the needs of our world and meet them whenever we can!

Find someone in your world this week you’d consider to be the “least of these”. Look for someone who needs a friend, an advocate, a voice... and speak into their life. Be an encouragement to them, buy them lunch, find some way to show them you love them. You have no idea what a difference it can make.

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## Take Up Your Cross

What would you do? If you saw Jesus coming toward you, exhausted and bleeding, would you feel for Him or would you join the surrounding crowd by yelling at Him? Simon was from Cyrene and was intrigued that Jesus was the Messiah. When he made it to Jerusalem, the city was in an uproar. He didn't see it coming, but he was pulled from the crowd and forced to assist Jesus in carrying the cross.

In spite of the emotions or concerns that flooded him, he picked up the cross and followed Jesus. He saw that instead of focusing on the hatred of the crowd, Jesus was focused on the road ahead. But, why would they make Him carry the cross? Crucifixion was the Romans' most painful form of execution. Forcing Jesus to carry the cross, was to weaken and shame Him as He passed all the onlookers.

What would you do? In the Gospel of Matthew 16:24, Jesus says clearly, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* But what does "take up your cross" mean? This means you need to die to self – stop giving in to your fleshly desires and temptations – and fully surrender your life to Christ. When you fully put your faith and trust in Jesus, you can do anything. Matthew 19:26 states, *"With man, this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Jesus knew He had to die. He could have walked away. He could have saved His life, but He knew He had to do this to save us. What would you have done? Would you be willing to put your life on the line to save others? Are you willing to put your faith of Jesus Christ on the line and take up your cross?

### Prayer

*Lord, as I walk through this life, help me to understand the value of what You have done for me. You were beaten and willing to walk the streets, preparing Yourself to die for me. Let not one day pass that I underestimate the power of Your love for me.*

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## Ultimate Sacrifice

When Jesus arrived at Golgotha, the soldiers offered Him wine with myrrh. Why wine? And why mixed with myrrh? Myrrh was typically used to anoint the dead, but was also used to alleviate some of the suffering. Wine mixed with myrrh was offered to those being crucified to manage their pain and to make them manageable when nailing them to the cross. It was given as a convenience for the soldiers and not to aid the ones being executed.

Then, why would Jesus refuse it? Mark 15:23 states, *"Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it."* Matthew 27:34 mentions that *"after tasting it, he refused to drink it."* Why? If it is going to help relieve some of the pain of being crucified, would you not drink it? Jesus' dying was voluntary. He did not want something to subdue Him. Nothing was necessary for Him to submit to this crucifixion. Jesus was going to suffer for each and every sin we had committed and will commit in all of our lifetimes. He felt each and every sin of ours for many hours, willingly, to redeem us then and forever. How amazing is that?

Jesus not only sacrificed Himself for us, He suffered for us. Consider the love it takes to be willing to lay your life down for someone else. In Jesus' case, it wasn't just for one person He sacrificed Himself for, but it was for **you**. Jesus died so **you** could have life. Jesus intentionally died to give **you** a blessed life. How do you intentionally live for Jesus?

### Prayer

*Lord, thank You for your sacrifice. You sacrificed Yourself to save me! Father, guide me in how I can live intentionally for You. Teach me how I can intentionally live to love and serve others as You have done for me.*

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## Jesus on the Cross: The Contrast of Right and Left

We have all represented or have known someone who has represented each criminal to Jesus' right and left. To His right was a man who didn't believe in Jesus' claim to be "the Son of God." He was one who challenged Jesus to show His so-called power and save Himself along with the others. The one on Jesus' left believed Jesus was who He said He was. He was the one who responded to the criminal on the right saying, "*Don't you fear God?... We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. This man has done nothing wrong*". He even asked Jesus to "*remember me when you come into your Kingdom*". For this kind of belief, Jesus rewarded him and told him he would that day surely be with Him in paradise.

Right and left, black and white, and good and evil are all opposite comparisons. It almost seems that you can't have one without the other. This has been a truth dating back to the beginning of humanity when God gave two opposite choices to Adam and Eve: good or evil. We all know how that story goes, but to put it into modern relevance, we are now stuck with the same truth. We have "right" and "left" believers. Not to be confused with right and wrong, but rather to the criminal to Jesus' right or the criminal to Jesus' left. We have all heard the "right" skeptic's approach. The one that says, "If God is real and is all powerful, why does he allow bad things to happen in this world?" The one that says, "I will believe in God if..."

We all are criminals and guilty of our sin. We all have a rightful place on the cross with Jesus. But I thank God for taking our sin and freeing us from the pain and suffering that Jesus bore. However, with that freedom comes a choice: the choice to be the criminal on Jesus' left, or the criminal on His right.

### Questions

Am I on the right or on the left of Jesus?  
Am I on the left only in the good times, but on the right during the bad times?  
How can I be on the left in **all** situations?  
What can I do in my day-to-day to make sure I am always on the left?  
How can I help others shift from "right" thinking to "left"?

### Prayer

*Jesus, we thank You for dying on the cross for us. Thank You, God, for sending your Son, so that we may have life everlasting. I praise You for blessing me richly in this life. Thank You for preserving Your Holy Word so that we may know the truth. I pray for strength as I go through this life as Your servant. I pray I can **always** be on Your left in **every** situation and trust You will give me the strength to do so. Be with the ones who doubt You and mock You, for they know not what they do. Forgive them, Father. Open my eyes to be your witness to them and give me opportunities to reach them. Guide my every step and be with my every thought. I love You and thank You for Your cross and sacrifice. Amen.*

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## The Claim: King of the Jews and a Follower of Jesus

At the time of His crucifixion, Jesus had a charge written above Him reading, "*This is Jesus, The King of the Jews*". Jesus had this title from the day He was born to the day He died. He was born to be the King, and was appointed by God to be our Savior, for He was God in the flesh. At the time of His trial, Pontius Pilate gave Jesus the chance to deny His claim in return for His freedom. Jesus answered, "*My kingdom is not of this world*". Jesus lived and died by His claim, for He had **one** mission—to be about His Father's business.

The term "King of the Jews" did not end when Jesus breathed His last. To believe Jesus was who He claimed to be had its consequences. In the early church, those who believed this were known as followers of Jesus, and suffered persecution for it. Today, we see the same thing. To claim we believe in "the King of the Jews" comes with consequences and ridicule. It does not come without sacrifice. We will be charged and accused of what we claim to be. When we are approached, questioned, mocked, ridiculed, and spat on, our response needs to parallel that of Jesus—being about our Father's business and proudly wear the charge against us.

### Questions

What is my claim? Do I live each moment reflecting that claim?  
Does my talk and walk match that claim?  
How can I make sure they match up on a daily basis?  
What are some simple steps I can take to make sure everyone knows I am not ashamed of my claim?  
What can I do to make sure others are affected by my claim?

### Prayer

*God, I thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for the life You lived so we may truly live and have happiness in abundance. I pray I can live that life of Your Son, Jesus, so all may see Your glory. Be with my walk and talk. May it be pleasing and glorifying to You so all may see me as a true follower of You. May my life have impact beyond measure for Your Kingdom. Be with me, guide me, and show me opportunities to serve and reach those who don't know You. My prayer is that You are seen in all I do. I love You and trust You hear my prayer, and answer it in accordance to Your will. Amen.*

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### The Most Wonderful Truth—The Mediator

In the courtroom, the term "mediation" broadly refers to any instance in which a third party helps others reach an agreement. This third party is often times called a lawyer—or mediator. According to Wikipedia, a mediator is a person who attempts to make people involved in a conflict come to an agreement; a go-between.

In my life, I had a peculiar mediator. I was scheduled to get a spanking because of something that was done at school by my brother, but since we are twins, we both were going to get it. So, knowing a spanking was coming, Brent and I decided to put something extra—a third party—in-between our skin and my dad's paddle. It would act as a protector from pain and suffering. We went to our room upstairs and put on multiple pairs of shorts underneath our jeans. When my dad got home he gathered our family around a chair in which he sat. He called Brent over and began spanking him. Brent did not cry and it did not take long before my dad knew what was going on. To make a long story short, my brother and I were spanked without a mediator. It hurt. A lot.

We are all in need of a mediator—a third party who arranges an agreement between us and the Creator. Well, we've got more than an ordinary mediator, we got our Creator's only Son. Jesus Christ is His name.

Jesus, now hung on the cross after a brutal scene of mockery and torture, spoke the very reason why He came to earth: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" He prayed for His enemies. He prayed for the very ones who crucified Him moments earlier. He prayed for the ones who mocked Him and gambled for His clothing. It's a painted picture of love and forgiveness—the picture of Jesus, the Mediator.

Are you thankful for a God who sent His Son to make you pure and holy? You are free from pain and suffering for an eternity because of Jesus, our Savior.

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### Jesus Exposed—Gambling Away His Mortal Clothes

In these passages, the soldiers gambled for Jesus' clothes. The custom in that day seemed to be that the crucifying soldiers get to take the criminal's or crucified person's clothes. We know that Jesus was stripped of all His clothing and the soldiers started to divide it. There was one particular item that they all wanted, so they cast lots or gambled for it. This was foretold by the psalmist in Psalm 22:18. His coat was valuable because it was a seamless, one-piece garment, woven from top to bottom just as the High Priest's coat or cloak was.

This event was not only significant because it proves true a prophesied event, but because there is an incredible amount of symbolism. Notice just two points:

1. Jesus was stripped of His mortal clothes. He allowed **all** of His mortality be stripped so that He might abolish death and bring life and immortality to light. What an awesome picture of our eternal value! Death has no sting over us; this mortal body we now possess will be no more, and we will receive our immortal ones before we know it. Wow! I love to keep this in mind when this life gives me trials and pain. Thank you, Jesus, for going before us and showing us Your grace and love.

2. The insensitive, worldly-minded men were void of compassion. Jesus' mother, Mary, was standing by the cross, yet the soldiers showed no compassion whatsoever in sharing His belongings with her. At this point, the earthly matters did not matter. Later, when Jesus bowed His head and died, the earth shook and darkness filled the gloomy sky, we get a picture of a soldier seeing the Light—an "Oh no, what have I done and who are You really?!" moment.

When we understand that even though we can be worldly and worry about the things of this world, we have a God who still sent His Son to die for us, we are blessed. God deserves our all because He gave us His.

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## Not Ashamed—Standing at The Cross

John is the only Gospel to record this event happening. It is a conversation between Jesus and Mary. It is a beautiful picture of Jesus' love for His mother and her love toward her Son. There are a couple things to consider about this event:

1. The women (Mary was not alone at the cross) were there at great risk. Jesus was a rebel in the eyes of Rome, and a heretic in the eyes of the religious. Any supporter of Jesus who stood at the cross ran the risk of being arrested or at least made fun of. Nevertheless, there the women stood. There Mary stood and conversed with her Son—unashamed. Why? Mary and the women loved Jesus. That's it! They loved Him because of all He had done for them. They stood there no matter the cost. Am I or are you standing for Jesus no matter the risk or cost? Do we love Him more than we love the world? In Luke 9:23 Jesus says, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow me."*
2. Even as Jesus hung on the cross, in pain, He was concerned for His mother--every fiber of His being existed for others. He was touched with the feelings of Mary's hurt and pain. In the last moments of His life He made arrangements for her care. Jesus was then, and still is today, touched with the feeling of our hurt and pain, so He takes care of us. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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."* I love that verse! We must come with confidence, not doubting, but trusting in Jesus and His ability to take care of us. He will give us His power through the Holy Spirit to overcome! We must overcome our shame of Jesus sometimes. We must overcome our own flesh and daily follow Him.

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## He Did It Willingly

If you have ever envisioned the crucifixion death of Jesus, grotesque seems to be a bit of an understatement. Pain, suffering, agony, ridicule, along with lacerations, and the piercing of His side would not be something we would place among beautiful artworks. However, when we look closely we see something beautiful that is at work on the cross. You see, the Bible tells us that Christ "gave up" His spirit. He did it willingly. No one took it from Him.

Here are two life lessons we can take away from the willingness of Christ to stand in our place and take the sin penalty that we deserve.

First, when Christ willingly gave up His spirit, He demonstrated the depth of His love for us. Only by doing this voluntarily are we able to say it was done out of love for us. Many of us have been the recipients of generosity from a stranger at some point. Maybe it was the car in front of you that picked up your tab at the Dunkin' Donuts drive-thru. It seems to have greater significance because they really didn't have to do it, and we would understand if they didn't. After all, we ordered the mocha latte skinny with no foam; they did not. Consider the way we feel cared for by this random act of kindness that only impacts our morning coffee fix. What Christ willingly did for us on the cross changed each of our eternal destinies. He demonstrated the depth of His love!

And second, consider the power of God that is set into motion when we come to the point of willing surrender. It is at the point of willing surrender that God's plan for the redemption of mankind moves forward to the conquering of the grave. I once heard it said that God waits for us to ask before He moves so that we will know for certain it was Him that answered. Willing surrender unlocks the power of God.

This week, set out to willingly give up something for another, and be sure to ask God to intervene in the circumstances of your life. Your willing surrender will be life-transforming.

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## You Look Different

*“It is finished.”* Or was it? As Christ breathes His last and willingly gives up His spirit, the world goes into shock. Curtains tear, the earth quakes, tombs open. Those in attendance, specifically the centurion respond with the only words they can: *“Surely He was the Son of God.”*

Undoubtedly, not the centurion’s first crucifixion, he was eyewitness to every step of the processional. He witnessed Christ stripped down, flogged, mocked, spit on, pierced with a crown of thorns, and tortured on the road to Golgotha. Many men, including two others on that day, had to face the shameful and painful death that comes with crucifixion. I’m sure the centurion had observed both wimps and tough guys, criers and stubborn men be placed on a cross. But on this day, something was different with this “King of the Jews.” This Man seemed to be despised on another level. The hateful behaviors and words were off the charts. And for many, all eyes were on Him to see what He would do.

Whether we realize it or not, as professing believers, our lives are under a microscope of skepticism every moment of every day by an unbelieving world. Eyes are watching to see how we will react or respond.

As I spend most days at Meadowbrook Christian School among some fantastic spiritual role models I am reminded of a poem by legendary basketball coach John Wooden:

*No written word or spoken plea  
Can teach the kids what they should be  
Nor all the books on all the shelves  
It’s what the teachers are themselves*

Wherever you are, whatever you do, remember we have the opportunity to handle life’s twists and turns in a manner that stands out for Christ. This week, while eyes are watching, purposely stand out in your world. Live out your love for Christ authentically and enthusiastically, so when it is all said and done, people might say—surely they were a son/daughter of Christ!

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## The “Oh No!” Moment

Many times when I read the Scriptures, I find myself wondering what it might have been like or felt like if I were living in this passage. Throughout the events of Jesus’ trial, beating, and the crucifixion, I can only imagine the diverse emotions of those who witnessed or were part of these events. I am sure many in the crowd were outraged, furious, and angry, while others were sorrowed, grieving, and compassionate. Many were yelling, *“Crucify Him”*, while others couldn’t understand why. Some of the ones who were the most irate are seen having a complete shift in emotions just after Jesus yields His spirit up to the Father. Matthew points out the centurions’ “Oh no!” moment:

Verse 54 states, *“They were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘surely He was the Son of God’.*” This whole time, these were the men who were cursing Jesus, tearing off his garments, beating, and spitting in His face. All of this torment because they “knew” that His claims were false. They “knew” that He was not the “King of the Jews”. They held these raging emotions until suddenly, it hit them. At that moment, they had a complete realization of their sin and knew that *“Surely He was the Son of God.”*

Sad to say, in our human nature, we have many of these moments. We take our eyes off our Savior, or put our faith aside to indulge in our own sinful desires. We tend to our own agenda, and put so many other things before God. But then, we have that “Oh no!” moment. We then realize what we have done, and how we are not living the way that God calls us to live. Thankfully, Jesus went through this torment and died this awful death for this reason. He tells us to call on His name and confess our wrongdoings to Him, and we can reunite our walk with Him.

### Prayer

*Lord, I am sorry for all of the “Oh no!” moments that I find myself in. Thank you for loving me through these times, and receiving me back into your open arms. I love You, Lord!*

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## Burying the King

Once all of the events leading up to the death of Jesus took place, most people thought everything was over. Can you imagine the feeling? Jesus was tried before Pilate and Caesar and was found to have done no wrong, yet the crowds still wanted to kill Him. He was flogged, tormented, and humiliated. He then carried His own cross, was hung on this cross, and died. To all of the people there, it is over. This man is dead, now onto their busy lives. However, some remained at the cross and were still grieving the loss of their Lord. Joseph was one of those, and demonstrated his faith to give their King a proper burial.

John points out that Joseph approached Pilate pleading to care for the body of Jesus. Many times in that day, the bodies of those who were crucified were left to be food for the beasts of prey. This was considered the final humiliation in a crucifixion. However, Joseph, being a disciple of Jesus, wanted to care for Jesus' body and give the respect that Jesus deserved. He took the body, carefully prepared it for burial, and also gave it a place in a new tomb in his gardens. This act of love and respect for the body of Jesus was dangerous, costly, and without personal gain.

God calls us, too, to live our lives in full service to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15:58 tells us to *"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*

### Prayer

*Jesus, I desire to give you my best. I vow to always place You before any of my personal desires. You are my King, and I cherish Your grace You have given to me through the cross. Thank You for Your forgiveness and mercy.*

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## The Last Words of Christ

As Jesus hung on the cross dying, He cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* The same phrase is found earlier in Scripture in Psalms 22:1-2 where David wrote, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest."* (NIV)

Are we able to grasp the mystery that is found in this phrase? Some sources claim that Martin Luther once said, "God forsaking God—who can understand it?" We can try to understand that Jesus entered into a state of separation from the Father. This can best be described as Jesus entering into hell. God the Father abandoned Jesus because He chose to accept the penalty for our sins. This penalty was more horrendous than any physical pain that Jesus had experienced on the cross or the events leading up to it. Jesus experienced what it is like to be rejected by the Father. The Father abandoned Jesus, the Son, for the sake of every person in this world. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (NIV). Even though we may respond as Martin Luther did, and never fully grasp the understanding of God forsaking God, we can at least gain a better understanding of the confession, humility, worship, and adoration which we are called to through Christ's sacrifice for us. Have you really taken the time to consider that Jesus was abandoned by the Father so that you wouldn't have to be? What does His sacrifice mean to you?

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, You are such a gracious and loving God. You gave to me Your Son, Jesus Christ, as an example and sacrifice so that when I stand before You on the Day of Judgment, You won't have to abandon me. Your love for me is so great that You would give up your Son to have me. May I not miss the message of the cross, and may I come to a better understanding of Your love for me.*

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## A Tabernacle Divided Will Not Stand

The Holy of Holies is translated as “Most Holy Place”. This is where the Holy Spirit dwelled among His people. In Jewish tradition, only the high priest was able to go into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people of Israel. This was only done once a year on Yom Kippur, the most holy day of the Jewish calendar year. During Yom Kippur, the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies to burn incense and offer a blood sacrifice before the mercy seat which was the gold covering over the Ark of the Covenant. This whole process is extremely important in the Jewish faith because this is the process which causes all of Israel's transgressions to be forgiven. Hebrews 9 can help you gain a better understanding of this. As long as this process was still in effect, people did not have direct access to the Holy Spirit. By tearing the curtain in two, there was no longer separation between the people and the Holy of Holies. This made the statement that Jesus’ death paid our penalty for sin. With the final sacrifice made, all people who repent and believe in the gospel can enter into a relationship with their Holy God. Because Jesus died on the cross, every person who believes in Him is set free from their sin and from Satan's power over them.

You can experience this freedom too by repenting of your sin and believing in the gospel message that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He overcame death by rising again on the third day. This freedom is yours by simply asking for it. If you desire to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior simply pray this prayer:

*“Lord Jesus, thank You for Your gift of eternal life. I know I am a sinner and I do not deserve eternal life. But You love me so much that You died, and rose from the grave to purchase a place in heaven for me. I now trust in You alone for eternal life, and repent of my sins. Please take control as Lord of my life.”*

If you have prayed this prayer for the first time, do not keep it a secret. Tell someone today! Allow the joy of the Lord to fill your heart and soul. Also, please feel free to contact any of the pastors at Christ Wesleyan Church. We would love to celebrate with you and hear your story.

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## Why Bury Him?

The Apostles Creed, which is an early statement of the Christian belief, states that Jesus “was crucified, died, and was buried”. What is the importance of the fact that Jesus went through the burial process? The Heidelberg Catechism\*, which originated in Germany, was created as a teaching instrument to promote religious unity and it suggests that Jesus’ “burial testifies that He really died” (Heidelberg Catechism, A.41). There are some religions that believe Jesus never died on the cross but was taken up to heaven before death took place on the cross.

The chief priests and the Pharisees feared that Jesus’ disciples might rescue Jesus from the cross before His death. They also feared the disciples might steal Jesus' body after His death and claim He had risen. But the burial process of Jesus Christ confirms for us that Jesus did die. Christianity finds evidence in all four Gospels that suggests that Jesus died on the cross and was buried, confirming His death. The importance of the confirmation of Christ's death comes through the understanding of God’s judgment on Christ. Romans 6:23 tells us, “*For the wages of sin is death*” (ESV) and that death is required for atonement. Hebrews 9:22 says, “*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*” (ESV). Through the death of Christ on the cross who bears our sins, we can live in peace with our Father in heaven.

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I bring praise to You every day for the gift of life that is given to me through Your Son, Jesus Christ. And to the Son, I pray thanks for Your sacrifice that was made for me and delivered through Your death here on earth. Through this sacrifice may I learn more about the love that You have for me, and the desire You have to know me and have a relationship with me.*

*\*Heidelberg Catechism (1563) Retrieved from*  
<http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>

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### A Firsthand Account

Have you ever made a prediction and it didn't come true? Weathermen (and women) are known for this all the time, right? After Jesus' body was placed in the tomb, Pilate made sure the tomb was on serious lockdown (Matthew 27:65-66) because the guards remembered what Jesus said, "*After three days I will rise from the dead.*" The secure tomb was where Jesus' body lay ... or so they thought! Why would Pilate, a man of such great power, go to these great lengths to protect the tomb? Fear of the truth perhaps?

When the angel of the Lord came down and rolled away the stone from the tomb, it put the guards in such a fear that they "shook" and "fell into a dead faint" (Matthew 28:4). These guards then went into the city and told the leading priest what had happened. What happened next? The same guards that shook with fear are the same guards who were **bribed** to tell others that Jesus' disciples came and stole His body! If you saw an angel rolling the stone away, would you have accepted that bribe? Granted, we probably don't have the whole story, the guards' lives were probably threatened if they didn't take that bribe.

Our lives may not be at risk, but our egos may be. Don't we do this with our faith? Wheel and deal with others so that we don't look awkward at work even though we **love** Jesus. Aren't we afraid to tell certain people about the miracles and answers to prayer in our lives? Can't we get over ourselves so that others know Jesus died on the cross so they can be saved? **Don't be the guards! Don't take that bribe!** Go and tell others about Jesus, because the truth is **Jesus was right!** He predicted His resurrection, no fooling around about it! He is the perfect predictor and His way is always right! JESUS HAS RISEN!

#### Prayer

*Lord, thank You for sending Your Son to die for me. Thank you that Jesus overcame death! Help me to be stronger in You so that I may reach others for Your kingdom. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

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### A Heavy Problem

Do you ever wake up to that alarm on Monday morning saying "Just 10 more minutes"? Or if you're like me, "60"? Well, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James must have been morning ladies! "*Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb*" (Mark 16:2). As they continued to the tomb they asked each other a pretty obvious question—"Who will roll away the stone for us for the entrance of the tomb?"

In Mark 16:4, it tells us that the stone was "*very large*". In fact, Jesus' tomb was dug into the rock hillside to make a cave like room with an opening nearly big enough to walk through without stooping. After the Lord was placed in the tomb, the stone (which was on top of the hill), had to be rolled down the incline, and dropped into the indentation to cover the opening and lock the stone in place. It would have taken **several men** a considerable amount of time to dislodge the stone and open the tomb.

So the question for the ladies perhaps should have been, "What small army will help us move this stone?" Isn't this a lot like life? Ok, we aren't moving huge stones from tombs, but sometimes it feels like it! The great part about the stone is that the women were worried about what they thought would be a hurdle or a problem, but God took care of that and then some! So what's your stone—that heavy problem? Maybe it's hard to make ends meet or maybe it's a relationship that seems it will never be mended. The stone can be so hard to look past, but when we focus on what **God can do**, not "what are we going to do?"—that's when we see the good that is behind the stone! Whatever that stone is for you in your life, God has it covered. He has already moved the stone **and** will reveal something even greater behind it.

#### Prayer

*Lord, thank You for hearing my prayer. You know what stone I will ask You to move before I even ask. Thank You that You are stronger than I could ever be. Help me to trust You in every adversity I face, big or small. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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### Immanuel—He Is Here with Us

So, we're reading this today on Friday—Good Friday. This is the day that we commemorate Jesus' crucifixion. The day that, "*It is finished*," was uttered, and so many things at the same time found newness. There was fear in the disciples. There was confusion. And then, there was resurrection. Old things made new. Death overcome. Now, Jesus appeared multiple times before going to prepare a place for you and me. And it was wonderful. He still taught His disciples. He still led His guys. While they rejoiced at His life, presence, and power, there was one who still chose to live as though He, Jesus, was still in the grave. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared, and because he didn't see he did not believe. "I've gotta see it to believe it," he demanded. So, Jesus showed up later and said, "*Blessed (or happy) are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*" This is tough. I don't want to knock Thomas. I think he did what many of us do today, and simply served as an example for us to learn from.

How often do we live as though Jesus is still in the grave? We might not say it out loud, but how do our actions, thoughts, and conversations show our belief (or lack thereof) in our all-powerful, all-sufficient Savior and Friend? He's alive. You might feel as though His nail-scarred hands couldn't be further away. You might feel like, "God, if you could just show me something." Like Thomas, you and I are susceptible to thinking our need is seeing something rather than believing in someone. An old song sang something to the effect of, "When you can't trace His hand, trust His heart." Immanuel is the Truth—He is here with us. So, wherever you are right now, be reminded and encouraged. Jesus is alive. And, Jesus is with you, now and forever.

#### Prayer

*Father, reveal to me anything I've doubted about Your capability or presence. Forgive me. And when Satan would want to distract me with the feeling that I need to see Your proof, may Your Spirit remind me of Your promise of presence. I love You! Thank You for loving me first and always. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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### Where've You Been?

So, you're walking along the road with a friend and you're talking about the recent events. Jesus was crucified. What is there for you to do, but walk to Emmaus? And then someone joins you on your trek and asks you what you're talking about. Chances are the response of these two guys are both something we've probably done and something we want to avoid. The two disciples thought that Jesus might have been an out-of-towner. *Where have you been?*, they rhetorically asked. Now, this is Jesus that's walking beside them, but for whatever reason they do not recognize Him. Maybe it's their despair. Maybe it's the fact that they're focused more on the *what do we do now?* instead of the *Who is this walking beside us?*. Maybe it was plain and simple disbelief. It's both fascinating and refreshing to know that Jesus still invested into these two amidst their struggle to see Who was right beside them. Jesus corrected them, and at the same time, spent the whole afternoon with them. Loving them. Serving them. Teaching them. And, you know what it took? It took willing hearts wanting to learn by spending time with Truth Himself.

Jesus is near. Just like He was right beside those guys, He is right beside you. Follower of Jesus, be encouraged, for He is wanting to sit at the table with you. If you are searching for Him, you need not look far. As you go throughout your day today, think about what these two went through as they walked to Emmaus. Think about Who was with them. Often times, Satan would like us to think we're alone. The truth to hold fast to, though, is that much like the disciples who were in despair, we must cling to promises God has given, the track record that proves Him perfect. So, if the thought crosses your mind to ask God, "*Where have you been?*" remember, He walks right beside you. So, simply in response to the love that He has given to you and me, simply in response to the presence of The Almighty Only God who loves you more than you and I could comprehend, remember the truth—He is right beside you.

#### Prayer

*Jesus, thank You for walking right beside me. Open my eyes like You did for these two disciples, that I might see and experience Your presence for the sake of giving You glory and being a part of the process. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## The Best Tomb

Funerals are not fun. For followers of Christ, there is certainly a time that is founded in rejoicing that the loved one is in the very presence of Jesus, but at the same time, mourning our loved one's passing is also a very present reality. It would be so surprising, so shocking, so un...supernatural if the following scenario happened. Imagine if a funeral director shows up to prepare for a funeral service, walks up to the coffin set for the viewing, and he sees it. His eyes widen, his jaw drops, and his heart races. The body isn't in the coffin. The people are going to show up any minute. What does he say? "I'm sorry folks, but there's been some sort of mix-up. I need to check with my colleagues because I think they took the body..." And then, from the back of the room... you get the picture.

Just think of the shock and comfort at the same time that overcame those who saw Jesus resurrected and out of the tomb. What would have come across their faces? They saw the empty tomb, and even walked in it. They saw firsthand the Risen Savior. They experienced what it looked like to see death rendered powerless. They read with their eyes before it was ever on a page that *"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life"*. Jesus died three days earlier both completely undeserving of what humanity deserved, but completely willing to do so anyway. Death was overcome and replaced with life everlasting. Jesus' resurrection signified not only His victory over death, but the resurrection to be had in each one of us – physically and spiritually. Funerals are not fun. Tombs are not something we'd have a party about—unless we were celebrating the Best Tomb—the one that was empty. Even more importantly, we're celebrating The One who rose from it. He is risen, and as Paul said, *"The Spirit of the God who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you."* The Best Tomb is empty.

### Pray

*Today is a day to celebrate: Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me enough to die for me while I was still a sinner, before I ever knew I needed You. Your plan is perfect, Your presence is eternal, and You are everlasting. Lead me in a way that my life may be a window that others can look through to see You. For Your glory and praise, and in Your name I pray. Amen.*

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If you would like Jesus to be Your Savior, talk to Him wherever you are with this:  
*"Jesus. You are everything that I am not. I'm thankful and humbled at the same time. Thank You for helping me to see my sin and falling short so that I can see Your perfection. Forgive me for what I've done and the things I've said. I believe You lived. I believe You were crucified. I believe You rose from the dead so that I may spend forever with You. I ask You to come into my life and clean house. In response to who You are and what you have done, I give you me. Thank You, Jesus. I believe and I am Yours. In Your Name, Amen."*

**If you have prayed that prayer or want to talk with someone more about knowing Jesus, call us at 570-742-8987. God is so good!**