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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

How to Use This Devotional

Week 1 - 2/19/2018

God's Glory is central

God's Glory is for our good

God's Glory is God's righteousness

God's Glory is God's grace

God's Glory is Jesus on the cross

God's Glory is Jesus resurrected

God's Glory is Jesus glorified

Week 2 - 2/26/2018

Jesus is the Sacrifice

Sacrifice is the result of sin

Sacrifice is a substitute for us

God as substitute for his people

Sacrifice is God's desire and plan

Jesus, our Passover Lamb

Jesus, our faithful substitute

Week 3 - 3/5/2018

Faith is essential

Faith is belief

Faith is dependence

Faith is not alone

Faith is tested

Faith is pleasing to God

Faith is satisfying

Week 4 - 3/12/2018

Confession and Repentance leads to God

Confession and Repentance affirm God's righteousness

Confession and Repentance are earnest and from the heart

Confession and Repentance are first and foremost to God

Confession and Repentance to the Lord is safe

Confession and Repentance is turning from dark to light, from sin to God

Confession and Repentance is why Jesus came to earth.

Week 5- 3/19/2018

Grace is welcoming

Grace glorifies God

Grace trains us

Grace is for now and for eternity

Grace is from Jesus

Grace silences the accuser

Grace leads us to worship

Week 6 - 3/26/2018

Father forgive for they know not what they do

Today you will be with me in paradise

Behold your son. Behold you mother

My God my god why have you forsaken me

I Thirst

It is finished & Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit

INTRODUCTION

“10 the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments 11 and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” 16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.”

Exodus 19:10-16

What is Lent?

Well, there’s much to be said about the history of lent and how it got to what it is today. For the sake of time, we’ll work with this definition: “A time of unique preparation leading up to the Resurrection Sunday celebration.” So why a time of unique preparation for Easter? According to the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, “Early Christians felt that the magnitude of the Easter celebration called for special preparation.” Let’s take a closer look.

In today’s reading, the Israelites are also preparing for an event of great magnitude: the glory of God to descend and Moses to enter and speak with him. It’s an event that carried a certain “magnitude,” to say the least. These events take place roughly 45 days after the great exodus from Egypt. After a bit of wondering, God desires to reveal his intention for the house of Israel. After reminding them of how he displayed his power in Egypt, he informs the Israelites that if they obey his voice and keep his covenant, Israel will be his treasured possession among all the peoples of the earth. In fact, to display his presence and power, God is going to come to Moses in a thick cloud and speak to him in a way that everyone can hear.

What a sight if you’re Israel! The God of the universe sees your bondage, hears your cry, saves you, declares that he’s going to make a covenant people out of you, and now is going to display his glory among you! Whoa! The Lord tells Moses that there’s only one thing they need to do still: consecrate themselves. The Lord understood the people needed to get themselves spiritually, emotionally, and physically prepared for this moment. In reality, this is what we do during Lent.

Lent is a time of preparation that helps us consider where we’ve been, our need for a savior, the miracle God has done in salvation, and the cost of that work. All while anticipating the celebration of his victorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. The goal is to humbly see the depth of the Gospel, fully understand our distinct and daily need for it, and posture ourselves to worship the God of our salvation. Over the next 40 days, please, use these devotionals in combination with fasting and prayer to consider the depth of this season. At different times they will call us to contemplate, confess, remember, humble ourselves, worship, lament, repent, sacrifice - yet will always point us back to the Gospel and God’s faithfulness in it.

Hopefully, it’s a time that serves you well over the next 40 days and leads to an amazing celebration of Jesus this Easter.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Below are a couple of guidelines in how to use this devotional. Though none of these are required, they may help you get the most of or the devotional. Overall, figure out what works best for you and do that!

Time:

Though there is no specific amount of time required, setting aside about 15 minutes is probably a good rule of thumb. This gives you enough time to read the scriptures, meditate on it, and walk through the devotional.

Questions:

Every devotional has a few questions for diving deeper. Use these questions as jump starters to examining the text. They'll give you a place to start in conversation, meditation, or personal journaling. They are not meant to be all encompassing, but to be a head start in reason the text critically and applying to your life.

Prayer:

To set good habits of prayer, try to spend a few minutes before reading, and several minutes after reading in prayer. Each devotional includes Prayer Points to help you have a direction in your prayer. Again, these are just points to assist you in adding our reading and message to your prayer. You can pray for several things, though. Some suggestions are below:

Pre-Devotional Prayer:

- The Spirit would give you Divine insight
- God would give you calmness
- God would help you be attentive
- The Spirit would draw your attention to things God may be trying to show you
- You would be able to see the gospel and redemption (Christ) in the passage

Post-Devotional Prayer:

- God would help you apply the truths you read
- The Spirit would remind when we forget about these truths
- The Spirit would lead you on whom to share these truths with
- Christ would be worshipped more through this passage

Though these prayers aren't all-encompassing, hopefully they work in combination with our Prayer Points to help bring prayer into your time with the Lord and his Word.

Community:

This devotional will be best experience in community with others. Going through this with roommates, your family, people you're discipling or being disciplined by, accountability partners, and friends will help you expand the scope of understanding in each passage. We would encourage you to bring as many people with you on this as possible, all diving in to the word together, helping each other see a great scope of the Lord.

Theme:

Each week we will be covering a main theme. The first five weeks are meant to provide us a rough sketch of the Gospel through the themes of God's Glory, Christ's Suffering, Faith, Confession and Repentance, and God's Grace. The last week will be six-day devotional study of the Seven Sayings of Christ. My prayer is that these themes would bring to life the remotes and truths that are communicated throughout the scriptures about who Jesus is and why he came, leading us to an incredible celebration of Christ's resurrection this Easter.

God's Glory

WEEK 1 | GOD'S GLORY IS CENTRAL

DAY 1

Reading

Psalm 29; Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 43:5-6

Diving Deeper

1. What does it mean to be made for God's glory? How do we live this out?
2. How do we observe God's glory a daily basis?
3. What does the reaction of creation in Psalm 29 tell us about the glory of God?

Devotional

"In the beginning, God created." If you've spent much time in church or even at The Well (we did a preaching series over the entire book of Genesis last year), you've probably heard this phrase. It's pretty common and easily passed over. "Yea, God created everything," we might say. But stop for a moment and consider what that statement means. Before there was anything, before the sun, the earth, space, matter, a single molecule, a single atom, there was God.

And from his immense power, authority, creativity, righteousness, and love, he created everything. It's why Psalm 19 says "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims his handiwork." The whole of creation is marked by his infinite glory. Even we, as human beings made in God's image, haven't been made for the achievement of our own glory, but for the reflection of God's glory (Isaiah 43:5-6).

Yet, even as Christians, so many times we lose sight of this central theme of existence. Life get's busy, we get busier, and the very real concerns of our daily lives take center stage. We lose sight of God and begin to search for fulfillment high and low. We run through person after person, job after job, hobby after hobby, yet return to the same emptiness every day. All the while, we've forgotten the thing we're missing is external; we're missing the purpose that makes our lives whole: existing for his glory.

This season, we're preparing our hearts to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, a resurrection that guarantees our redemption into a relationship with God and the ability to enjoy his glory. In order for that to capture our hearts, one theme for our existence has to be center: God's glory.

Prayer

Examine how our lives are being lived to God's glory. How do we do this at work, at home, at school? Pray that God would open your heart to learn about his glory this week, seeing the reason for its centrality.

Reading

Revelation 21

Diving Deeper

1. Why does this new Jerusalem have no need for a temple or sun? What fills the city?
2. From what you understand in our readings, what will life be like in God's full glory?
3. How does understanding life in God's full glory give us hope for the future?

Devotional

If I'm being honest, nothing prepared me for marriage. I read some really good books, had some really good counseling, and thought I was really prepared; I wasn't. The actual acts of serving someone, loving someone, humbling yourself, fighting selfishness every day were actions nothing could prepare me for. It's still hard, but now there are these moments when I see a happy wife and it fills my heart with joy. In addition, I look at how God has used marriage to mold and change me and I realize it was all well worth it.

Similarly, living for God's glory can be hard. It's a constant fight humble ourselves, seeing that everything we have and everything we are is because God has given it to us. Much like marriage, though, we're given a hope that God's glory is not just for him, but God's glory is actually for us. When we enter into a relationship with God, we're given the life-restoring purpose of existing for his glory, but we're also given a hope of enjoying that glory forever. Yes, we fight through heartache, pain, and sickness now, but we're given a hope that we will enter into, and partake in, God's glory with him for eternity.

This is a glory that cures every disease. It's a glory that wipes away every tear. God's glory is for our good. It satisfies the purpose of our lives now and gives us a hope for the future in the midst of our hardest moments. Our future is marked by healing and joy. When we walk through life clinging to God's glory, we're not under some pointless burden; we're actually living life. To live for God's glory today is to live for our own good.

Prayer

Consider how having a hope for the future impacts how we live life today. Does it change how we work through sickness?

Pray God would help us see that his glory, and living for his glory is for our good.

Reading

Romans 3

Diving Deeper

1. What does Romans 3 say our unrighteousness shows us about God? What does our own understanding of right and wrong tell us about God?
2. Why is God being righteous a good thing? What does this tell us about him?
3. How do we benefit from God's righteousness?

Devotional

How would you describe righteousness? No, not that judgmental person that can be a bit "self-righteous". I mean actual righteousness. How would you describe it? The bible is pretty clear about what righteousness is. It's God.

Contrary to popular belief, God's righteousness isn't the same as God's grace. They're distinct. It's why Paul says that God's grace reigns through God's righteousness in Romans 5:21. Yet, for being the means by which we receive God's grace, we can often neglect God's righteousness. It's understandable why we do this, though. To think that an all-powerful being (that's not us) is absolutely righteous has huge implications. It means that there's an objective standard of perfection (righteousness) that exists outside of ourselves. And in a world where we all want to be noticed and approved for something we do, it's scary to think that there's someone who is just better at everything, every time.

Yet, would anything less than this perfection, this righteousness, be worthy of our affections, worship, or praise? At times, we demand God be like us. We would like God to think like us or turn a blind eye to the things we turn a blind eye to, but that would mean God is like us overall. When we think about it, that's a bit scary too. I mean, two weeks ago I forgot my kid's first doctor's appointment. I forgot about the FIRST ONE! What would happen the first time God forgot about something? Would the sun not rise? Would we stop breathing? Would the universes cease to exist?

Yet, the sun rose today, the stars are burning brightly across the universe, and the Lord has established every one of our days. To praise God for who he is is to praise him for being righteous. He is perfect and, for that, we can all be grateful.

Prayer

Thank God for his glorious righteousness. Let that lead you to an intimate time of worship.

Reading

Ephesians 1

Diving Deeper

1. How is God's grace described in today's reading? What about grace causes us to revere it so much?
2. What do we have according to the riches of God's grace?
3. How does understanding God's grace lead to us seeing God and people differently?

Devotional

The culture of fallen humanity has a love/hate relationship with the concept of grace. When someone gains a second chance and makes the most of it, we see it plastered all over the news. When someone is caught in a heinous act of violence, we demand justice. For many, the two are polar opposites.

Yet, in God, they are often utilized side by side. God's grace is so glorious because he paid such a high price to provide it. It's something only he could do. It's something that reflects the uniqueness of God in all the universe. God, whose love and grace run so deep that he offers his only son, Jesus, to satisfy his own justice and righteousness.

What makes God's grace so glorious is whom it depends on. Paul writes that "in him, we have redemption through his blood." Our culture's grace can often be dependent on our actions to prove we deserved the grace we've received. God's grace is based on how he's proved our righteousness through Jesus efforts on the cross.

When guilt or shame fill our hearts based on what we've done in our past, or condemnation fills our heart based what we've done in our present, God's shows his glory is displayed when he looks to Jesus and the redemption he's bought for us through his blood to count us as righteous sons and daughters of God - to the praise of his glorious grace.

Prayer

Pray God to help you believe that his grace is present when you fail

Pray God help you understand that his grace is dependent on him and not you

Reading

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

Diving Deeper

1. How is a king dying for his subjects contrary to what our world says power looks like?
2. How is the cross of Christ seen in our culture today? Can what it stand for be folly to some or stumbling block to others?
3. What does Paul mean when he says he knew “nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”?

Devotional

In the time of Christ, the Roman cross was a symbol of death and despair. The body-laden crosses lining the roads into major cities let everyone know that Rome's authority was absolute. It was a sure fire way to keep the Pax Romana (Roman peace) by letting everyone know that criminals and defectors were dealt with accordingly. Isn't that interesting? The cross was originally a symbol that you would be punished for your crimes for the sake of Rome's peace.

It's no wonder that first century Christians, heralding the message that Jesus took the cross to pay for other's crimes so that they could have peace, would've been looked at as crazy. But I guess that's why Paul says the “foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men.” When Roman authorities were willing to crucify countless people for the sake of their peace, God was willing to be crucified instead of his people for the sake of their peace. The cross shows God's glory, not only because it's the intersection of his perfect righteousness and his perfect grace, but because it shows just how far God's thoughts are above our thoughts, just how far his ways are above our ways. Most of us didn't even know we needed to be saved. Most of us didn't even know we didn't have peace. Where we saw life apart from God, Christ saw death; where we saw death in following the man on the cross, Christ saw life. In the cross, Christ calls us to see that not all is as it seems. He invites us to understand that our life is found in his death.

Today, how do we see the cross? Has it lost its allure? Do we forget that on that cross, the place both God's grace and justice are seen to be so far above our human definitions, is where we find our life and our debt of death is paid? For Paul, that was never the case. It's why in his days, not just with the Corinthians, he would nothing but Christ and him crucified.

Prayer

Ask God to help you respond to Christ's crucifixion with appreciation

Pray that God would help you understand that his death has brought you life; his sin payment has covered our sins

Reading

1 Corinthians 15

Diving Deeper

1. We're called to remember that Christ's resurrection is for a hope that is eternal; with that in mind, how can we avoid living as "of all people most to be pitied"?

2. Because Christ has been raised, we're promised a risen body with him, making our actions meaningful on earth; how does this reality motivate to live every day for God's glory?

Devotional

People often ask the question, "what would you do if you lived forever." So many people respond in so many different ways. But what about if you were promised forever after you die? One of the fundamental truths of scripture is that, though Jesus died, he was resurrected from the grave and lives today! It's a truth that we often lose as a reality in our daily lives.

But, for the Christian, this reality isn't just something to hope for, but something that should impact our daily lives. Christ has risen from the grave to show his power and authority over everything, including death. When we understand that we have a hope that our King has conquered all and promised us eternity, it helps us see that we're able to live without fear that we're wasting our days. We live to proclaim God's glory because we're promised eternity in it.

That's the point, though; we're promised eternity in it. If I were to dedicate my life to some thing, but had no promise in it for anything passed this life, then it would be a life to be pitied. But Paul says that we're not a life to be pitied. In fact, we're a life that is blessed, because the end of our days is just the beginning of eternity.

Prayer

Examine how Christ's resurrection motivates you to live for him
Pray for an understanding that Christ has purchased eternally for us

Reading

Revelation 1:9-20

Diving Deeper

1. When John sees a vision of what we can only assume is Jesus glorified, he responds in awe and worship. What about Jess leaves you in awe?
2. Out of John's awe (and some fear), Jesus tells him not to fear. What about Jesus is comforting to you?

Devotional

Imagine, for a second, that you're John. You've dedicated your life to Jesus. You've been boiled alive, but somehow survived. Now, you're exiled on an island called Patmos, destined to die by yourself. If you're John, how are you feeling? Do you feel alone? Has your life been well spent?

Well, it's in these twilight moments that John is given one of the most extraordinary displays of God's glorious assurance you could imagine. He hears a command, "write what you hear," and turns around to witness Jesus, showing John a symbolic representation of himself glorified. His eyes are like fire and his voice like thunder! It's breathtaking! So much so that John falls on his face in awe and wonder! But Jesus does something beautiful in his response. And in the midst of it, Gives him one of the most treasured assurances he could've given him: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, the living one." Did you see that? He's the first and the last, but when the end comes, he's still the living one. He isn't defeated. In fact, he's triumphant. The triumphant Christ in all his glory.

This the place where Patmos beaches what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:17 as a "light and momentary affliction." Why? Because compared to what John is promised, Patmos is a blip on the movie real. A split second that's forgotten when you see the beauty of the whole story come together! Think back to day 2 of this week (God's glory is for our good). You remember the text? It was Revelation 21. The New Jerusalem, had no need for a temple or son because the Glory of God provided light and palace to worship all around. This moment with John and Jesus, this the introduction to that moment. Because Jesus is glorified, we have a hope for glory. We have the ability to hope in his glory (Romans 5:3). Today, God's calling us to live a life that's not just for this moment, but a life that considers the hope of glory we have in Jesus.

Prayer

Use this examine how a hope for eternity is changing your outlook for today
Let this examination lead you to a time of worship and praise

Sacrifice

Reading

John 1:29-34; Exodus 12:1-3&6

Diving Deeper

1. How does John describe Jesus? What would this have meant for Jesus life?
2. What does John say Jesus will do? What Old Testament act would this have reminded them of?

Devotional

It's pretty crazy when you think about it. Before anyone else (other than Jesus) knew what Jesus fate would be, John the Baptist knew. While he was baptizing at the Jordan River, he sees Jesus and openly says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Again, later, John tells two of his disciples as Jesus walked by, "Behold the Lamb of God."

This would've provoked and excited the crowd around John at the river and I'm sure it would've tickled the ears of his two disciples. You see, Jewish culture was very familiar with what it meant for a lamb to be offered to God. It meant that the lamb, a lamb without blemish, would be killed as an offering. It represented something taking the place of the owner Here is John, saying that this man is the "Lamb of God" and insisting that he is going to take away sin. What could this all mean?

The realization John was hoping everyone got to was that God was about to perform the act of justifying the world, but he couldn't do it without a sacrifice. God needed a perfect Lamb that would be sufficient to not just be offered for one man, but for all men. Not just any lamb or anyone's lamb. He needed a perfect Lamb, an innocent Lamb, the Lamb of God.

Prayer

Consider what it means that Jesus is the Lamb of God

Pray that you would start to see the beauty and grace found in God's sacrifice this week

Reading

Hebrews 9:19-26; Romans 6:21-23; Genesis 2:17

Diving Deeper

1. Why do you think God said Adam and Eve would surely die? What did their action against God mean to their relationship with God?
2. Considering the result of sin, why does forgiveness require bloodshed?
3. What is the wage of sin in Romans 6:23? What is the definition of a wage and how does that make sense with sin.

Devotional

When we think about what we've earned over our lives, rarely do we think of the word "death." We may think that we've earned some hard times, but death is rarely something we think we deserve. That's reserved for murderers and the like.

But according to God, that's exactly what we earn when we sin. The root of it goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. When they sinned, they rebelled and abandoned God in favor of their own desires. The only bummer to that was that they abandoned the only source of life. Sin quite literally meant death, because it separated them from life itself. It separated them from God. Not only that, but sin was a direct rebellion to everything God stood for. His justice and righteousness were attacked by the very creation that was to model them. Between separation and rebellion, it's easy to see that the very nature of sin is death by way of acting against life.

That's where sacrifice comes in. God, in his grace, doesn't inflict this penalty of death directly. Someone has to die, yes. God is just and righteous and he can't just overlook wrong, but by God's mercy, the death does not have to be ours. For us to fully understand what sacrifice means for us today, we first have to understand where and why it's needed. Not because someone says so, but because our sin has destined us for death. In order to understand the sacrifice, we have to understand that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin" (Hebrews 9:22)

Prayer

Consider what sin is by its very nature and how our sin is seen by God

Pray that we would see the depth of our sin and why we need a sacrifice to cover us in general

Reading

Exodus 12:1-32

Diving Deeper

1. What was going to be a sign to God that he should Passover the home?
2. Was the plague going to just affect Egyptians or could it have affected the Israelites too? What's the only thing that stopped the plague from reaching them?
3. How was Israel to commemorate the Passover once they reached the promised land? What was it to be called?

Devotional

We've all heard of the ten commandments. Before it was a Charlton Heston classic, it was the Biblical account of God rescuing his people through a series of plagues on Egypt. And no plague is as severe and has more to show us, than the tenth plague.

The plague of destruction over the firstborn, God informed Moses that there was only one way for the Israelites themselves to escape it. They were to kill an innocent lamb, eat it, and spread its blood over their doorposts. Upon seeing it, God would know that they were covered and pass over them (hence the name "Passover"). Though it's easy to skip over it, when we look closely, there's something unique about this plague: it can kill the Israelites. If there wasn't protection, if they hadn't sacrificed a lamb, the plague could claim their first born as well. They had to be covered by the sacrificed Lamb. This one of the earliest depictions of Israel's sacrificial system and it taught the Israelites a valuable lesson. They were equally guilty.

This wasn't a plague of frogs, this was visiting a rightful judgment of death for sin committed against God and, without a sacrificial covering, they fit the description too. They wouldn't be justified by their own righteousness, they would need the righteousness of something else. A foreign righteousness. The righteousness of an innocent lamb. How often do we consider that our sin is no different than someone else's? How often do we consider the lesson that our lives, apart from Christ's righteousness, have no righteousness of their own? That we, like Israelites, have to depend on the righteous blood of an innocent Lamb.

Prayer

Consider how dependent you are on God covering your sin.

Pray that God would help you see that it's only by his own righteousness that our sins are pardoned

Reading

Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Diving Deeper

1. Who paid for the water that the Israelites received?
2. Though Israel had questioned God and deserved judgment, who received the judgment they deserved?

Devotional

The Israelites had come so far. They had seen the plagues hit Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. Now, though, there's no water and the thought of death seems so much more real. They begin to grumble. They begin to question God.

But is that really too far-fetched? In fact, isn't that the general pattern of humanity? God provides, we rebel. And with that rebellion, we store up for ourselves God's judgment and wrath. This time, though, God doesn't just use an animal as the sacrifice. God informs Moses that he's going to stand on the rock, then he tells Moses to strike the rock - not the people - and water flows from it. God substitutes himself for the people to bring them life-giving water.

As I mentioned, this should seem like a familiar pattern, because it's our pattern. Similar to Israel, our hearts apart from God are thirsty, but we pursue sin that cries out against God. In response, though God could gather us together to judge us, he substitutes himself on the cross in order to give us life-giving water (1 For 10:4). Our hearts, desperate to be restored to God, are called back from exile through God striking himself - not us.

Prayer

Consider what it means for God to substitute himself for us
Pray that God would help you see the amount of love found in his atoning sacrifice

Reading

Isaiah 53:4-11

Diving Deeper

1. Who's will was it to crush the servant?
2. Count each time the word inequity is used, who's inequity is it and who is bearing it?
3. What does it look like to bear someone's guilt and inequity?

Devotional

The book of Isaiah is one of the most prolific predictions of Jesus in the Old Testament. Verse after verse makes mention of the coming Savior and soon-to-be Ruler. Yet, maybe no text more perfectly demonstrates the depth of Jesus purpose in coming to earth than Isaiah 53.

Isaiah passionately writes of a suffering servant that doesn't just suffer, but suffers for his people, he suffers for us. He receives chastisement that gives us peace. His wounds are the reason we receive healing. Through his righteousness, we're made righteous. It becomes painfully evident that this suffering servant isn't just suffering for us, he's suffering in place of us.

Without his wounds, I'm wounded; without his chastisement, I'm chastised; without his righteousness, I don't have a righteousness of my own. You see, when he bears our iniquities, he doesn't just pay for them. He receives what I should have received. He takes my place.

How often do we see the cross as ours? How often do we see Christ's sacrifice as the means by which we're saved from the punishment for sin we deserved? How often do we see heaven/healing/peace/righteousness as his? Something that we didn't deserve, but were freely given through the sacrifice of another.

Prayer

Consider how the hope of forgiveness we have isn't something we could ever gain on our own
Pray that God would fill your heart with gratitude that Christ took your place

Reading

Matthew 26:17-29

Diving Deeper

1. During what festival was the Lord's Supper instituted?
2. What do the elements of communion represent? Why is this important considering what we've learned about Passover?
3. How does this change how we see the Lord's Supper? How does it change how we see the provision of God's sacrifice?

Devotional

During the final hours of Jesus life, he institutes one of the most beloved sacraments of the Christian faith: the Lord's Supper. We know it now as communion. In short, Christ shared the Passover meal with his disciples.

But something unique takes place. As Jesus is breaking the bread, he hands it to his disciples and says that's it's his body and instructs them to eat it. Afterward, he offers them wine and tell them it's his blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Now, if you think back to our devotional from a few days ago, some dots should be connecting. The original Passover lamb was to be eaten and his blood was to be poured out and placed as a covering of protection while the plague of death swept over Egypt.

Jesus, in short, is showing his disciples that he's the fulfillment of the Passover and every other sacrifice in the Old Testament. Jesus is, in fact, the Lamb of God that John mentioned all those years before. He will be the sacrifice that forgives our sin forever. His blood will absorb the wrath of God and set us free from slavery to sin.

Prayer

Praise God that, through him, the plane of death passes us over

As you take communion this weekend, consider the depth of its meaning through history and prayerfully worship God as a result

Reading

Matthew 26:36-39

Diving Deeper

1. How could Jesus have let the cup pass from him?
2. Why does he invite Peter, John, and James into this time of agony with him?

Devotional

Decisions have the power to impact so much of our lives. A single decision can affect the rest of our lives or change the course of our lives in a moment. As we close our week looking at sacrifice, I would like to highlight the decision that was before Christ right before he entered his final hours and how it affects our eternity.

We read that as the hour of his crucifixion drew near, Jesus was filled with sorrow and distress. Unlike his disciples, Jesus knew exactly what was coming. He wasn't just going to be crucified, no. The true Passover Lamb, the Suffering Servant, the Rock in the wilderness, the Lamb of God was about to bear the iniquity of the world. In this moment he asks a startling question of God the Father, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

And for all intents and purposes, it could have. He could have let the cup of God's wrath be poured out on those that it was originally to be poured out on, us. In this moment, the perfect Christ could have called heaven's angels to bring him back to glory. It wouldn't have been hard. All that was needed was a word. Instead, he says something that should fill us with a sorrowful gratitude. "never the less, not as I will, but as you will." In his greatest moment of temptation, Jesus overcomes as he always had, submits to the Father, and drinks the cup of God's wrath on the cross in our place.

What does all of this mean? Though the message of faith is one of hope, Christ does call us to take up our own cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24-26, Luke 9:23). During this season of Lent, we're invited feel the weight of Christ's sorrow just as Christ invited Peter, James, and John into it with him. And as the depth of his sorrow is understood, the depth of our gratitude should deepen more and more. Today, take time to meditate on the cost of our salvation. Let it lead you to a time worship and gratitude.

Prayer

Meditate on the how much our great salvation cost our savior

Spend a period of time in your prayer today to just express gratitude to Jesus and praise him for his sacrifice

Faith

Reading

Mark 1:14-15

Diving Deeper

1. What was Jesus proclaiming in Galilee? Why is that important to note?
2. What does Jesus instruct his hearers to do? What do you think it means to believe?

Devotional

What do you think of when you hear the word faith? Do you think of religion? Maybe you think of the hope someone feels. For some, faith has been narrowed down to a belief in the unbelievable. As a Christian, it's critically important for us to consider the definition of faith and how robust it actually is.

We often times do believe that faith is important, but we often don't realize how important it is. First century Galileans were minding their own business when all of a sudden this man came into town declaring a message of God's Kingdom is near. Sure this would've excited them so much! But it wasn't something they could passively experience. It would require some action from them. It would require faith. It would require them actively interacting with the message by believing and depending on this Jesus.

What does faith even look like? Why isn't just following Jesus teachings loving God and others enough? What does faith have to do with it? Many wouldn't understand that call. Many would just move along with their lives. But to those that placed their faith in this Jesus, they would receive a massive gift of life. As we examine faith over the next week, let's prepare our hearts to see faith in a deeper way. , If necessary, let's even invite God's word to redefine faith in Jesus Christ. You won't be let down.

Prayer

Write down what you believe faith is

Pray that God would show you what the depths of faith looks

Reading

John 20:24-29

Diving Deeper

1. What were Thomas's requirements for believing Jesus resurrection? What had he resolved to if those requirements weren't met?
2. How did Thomas respond to Jesus when he saw him? How did Thomas describe Jesus?
3. Who does Jesus say are blessed? Why do you think these are blessed?

Devotional

In most cases, it would be understandable why Thomas would feel a bit hesitant to believe someone had come back to life from the dead. This isn't most cases, though. Thomas had witnessed Jesus heal the blind, walk on water, calm the sea, even bring three people back from the dead! How could he not believe that this Jesus could come back from the grave? Well, faith.

Faith, at its core, is belief. Thomas lacked faith, the ability to believe that Jesus is who he says he is and has done what he said he'd do. Now, there're a few dimensions to that belief that we have to consider in order to fully understand what Thomas was lacking. Because Thomas didn't believe Jesus had resurrected(1), he didn't see Jesus as his Lord(2), nor did he see Jesus as God(3). Do you see those three distinctions? Thomas needed to believe all three in order to actually believe. He needed to believe that because Jesus is God, he has resurrected and is worthy to be our Lord. To only believe in one would be impossible. To believe Christ is God is to see him as Lord. To believe Christ is resurrected is to see him as God. To believe Christ is Lord is to acknowledge he is God.

The moment one becomes a reality for Thomas, he automatically heralds the other two: "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" When we believe Jesus is who he says he is, then we automatically know that there's nothing he can't do. He's God! That belief is the foundation for everything else faith aims to produce in our lives.

Prayer

Examine whether you believe all three points of Thomas confession of faith
If you don't, pray that God would help your unbelief in the whichever areas you're struggling with
Pray that God would strengthen your faith in Jesus as resurrected Lord and Savior

Reading

Romans 4:1-8 & 18-25

Diving Deeper

1. How was righteousness counted to Abraham? Did he work for his righteousness?
2. What was Abraham fully convinced of? Why is that the reason for his faith being counted to him as righteousness?
3. What do we believe in order for our faith to be counted to us as righteousness?

Devotional

If you've ever been a part of a campus ministry or youth group, you've probably heard that God calls and uses young people to change the world. And while that's true, it sure isn't exclusive.

Abraham was 75 years old when God called him. He told Abraham he was going to make a great nation out of him, later assuring him that he would have a son. Think about that, God promised that a man that was near 100 years old that he would have a child with his wife who was close to the same age. There's no shame in admitting that's hard to believe. In fact, it seems impossible. But Abraham's response tells us a lot about faith. He believed God. Not because it was easy to see how a child was going to happen, but because he trusted that God was able to do what he said he'd do.

That's where faith goes after it covers belief. Not only is faith belief, but faith is reliance. Its reliance on God to do what he said he'd do. For Abraham, knowing that it was impossible for him to produce a child at that stage of his life, reliance on God was all he had. That reliance, that faith, was counted to him as righteousness.

Faith calls us to reliance as well. Except our faith relies on God to do something a little different. It calls us to rely on God for a righteous verdict. Due to our sin, we can never work our way to righteousness before God. It's impossible. But through faith, we rely on God to provide that righteousness through Jesus, "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." When we place our faith in God and rely on him, he counts it as righteousness. He's fully aware that he won't fail. He's fully aware that he's able.

Prayer

Consider what it looks like to really depend on God for something we can't do
Pray that God would help us see that he's able to be relied on

Reading

James 2:14-18; Ephesians 2:8-10

Diving Deeper

1. Why do you think James describes faith without works as being dead? What does that tell us about how faith should change our lives?
2. Why do you think James questions whether a faith that doesn't have works can save someone?
3. How does James say we should show our faith?

Devotional

We've all seen someone say, "I'm a Christian," but we can't really tell. In fact, there's no real display of Christianity in any part of their life. And though many of us have heard and understood that faith alone is counted to us as righteousness, is this the kind of faith that everyone is talking about?

Well, many would argue that it's not, including the Bible. If you've spent much time in church, you might have heard the saying "Faith alone, but not a faith that stays alone." One of the clearest sections of scripture that we pull this from is James 2. James questions whether a faith doesn't involve action, a faith that doesn't provoke change, is actually a saving faith? It's not that James is saying that what we do saves us, but that our faith changes what we do, displaying a real faith. This notion is backed up by Paul in Ephesians 2. Paul lays out that we're saved by grace through faith as a gift from God, not a result of works. He literally calls us a workmanship of grace created in Christ Jesus "for good works."

Faith should fundamentally change us. When we believe that Christ is the resurrected God and Lord of our life, it follows suit that everything he's said is true. That includes everything about sin and the lives we should live. When we believe Jesus has set us free and has done what only he could do, there should be a change of heart that occurs alongside that faith. Though the Bible makes it clear that this won't be perfection, James and Paul make it clear that true faith should never stay alone.

Prayer

Examine how your faith has caused real change in your actions

Pray that God would strengthen your faith as the Holy Spirit helps you live out godliness

Reading

Hebrews 11:1-6

Diving Deeper

1. How does the author of Hebrews define faith? Take a moment and rewrite that definition in your own words.
2. What do we understand by faith? How can understanding come through faith?
3. Why do you think the author implies that faith required to please God? What does it reveal about our hearts when we go to God in faith?

Devotional

My wife recently gave birth to our first child, our daughter. I must confess, the moment I laid eyes on her I was crushed with affection and love. The first time I heard her cry my heart broke, but I can't express the joy I felt when I was able sooth her crying. I hope she always knows that it's my joy to be there for her. Nothing could please me more than her coming to me. Whatever the situation is, it will be my joy to help her.

The author of Hebrews understands that it's God's joy for his Children to come to him. It pleases him to know that we turn to him in every moment and expect him to respond with care and concern. But something is required to even approach God, faith. This God-pleasing faith involves two elements that we've already discussed this week. The author of Hebrews helps us see that, through the belief that faith gives us, we're able to even to turn to God. Through faith, we're able to actually believe that he's there and that he's listening. And, as I mentioned, it pleases God when his children come to him.

Our faith fuels a second element, though. It fuels the trust (reliance) that God will reward those who seek him. Do I know how he's going to do it? No, I don't. But when we have faith that he will, it places a trust in God that is pleasing to him because it shows that we know him. We know he won't fail us. We know that he's faithful. Our faith in him pleases God because it shows that we trust him to be who he is.

So how are we doing trusting God? Admittedly, some days are harder than others. What faith offers, though, is the belief and trust to turn to God even when we don't feel it. We still believe that hears and rewards us for coming to him like the loving Father that he is.

Prayer

Pray God would deepen our trust, even in moments where it seems harder
Go to God in prayer, knowing that he is pleased with our faith

Reading

James 1:2-12; 1 Peter 6-7; 2 Corinthians 4:7-8

Diving Deeper

1. Why should we count it as joy when we meet trials? What are they doing to our faith?
2. What's produced when our faith is tested?
3. What is the reward for the man who is steadfast through trial? How does this come full circle with James original thought?

Devotional

It's counter-intuitive to associate joy and hardship. When the storm waves of hardship pound against the boat of our lives, hardly anyone responds with elation or happiness. Then what is James talking about when he says to count our trials as joy? What does Peter mean when he says we should rejoice when we've been grieved by various trials? Well, if we look closely, neither experience is rooted in some type of fleeting, worldly happiness or comfort. They're rooted in something much better; they're rooted in faith.

We rejoice in hardships because it causes us to cling to our faith, the great hope we have in Jesus. Every moment we cling to that faith is valuable. With every hardship and every trial, our faith is purified and made stronger and stronger like gold through the fire. Every moment we cling to our faith, every moment it's tested and purified, it gets stronger and stronger. As our faith strengthens, we grow more and more steadfast. We're stronger, more grounded. Notice what happens to the steadfast: "he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."

Both James and Paul tell us that the ultimate treasure, eternity with Jesus, is brought a bit closer every time we cling to our faith through trials. It's a little more certain each time we arise from a hardship, broken and grieved, but with our grip firmly around faith that Jesus is victorious, canceled every debt, reigns eternal, and has prepared a place for me with him. It's not easy; it's actually extremely hard. But the treasure is so worth it! So count it joy, friend, count it joy.

Prayer

What trials have strengthened our faith

Ask God to strengthen your faith with every trial that may come

Praise him that he's promised a treasure in Jesus that's worth more and outweighs any of our hardships and heartache, we need only cling to faith

Reading

John 7:37-39; John 4:1-15

Diving Deeper

1. Why do our hearts “thirst”? What do you think is at the root of that unfulfilled desire?
2. What happens to the one that drinks the water Jesus gives?
3. When we come to faith, we receive Christ; what does Christ offer that’s so satisfying?

Devotional

Christ regularly uses the concept of thirsting and drinking to describe those that are far or near to him. We when we think about it, it’s actually a great analogy (I mean, Jesus used it, right?). Think of a time you’ve been thirsty. Maybe you were exercising or exerting yourself in some way. In that moment, nothing else could satisfy your thirst except a drink. Going for another run, watching tv, or reading a book wasn’t going to quench your thirst. Our thirst demands to be quenched in a very certain way.

Christ regularly uses this language because he wants us to understand that deep in our hearts there’s a thirst that demands to be quenched. We all have it. It’s why some people buy more stuff than they’ll ever need. It’s why some people seek affirmation from relationships. It’s that feeling everyone has. There’s not really a great word for it. It ranges from a whisper to a scream, but every time it speaks it demands something out of life. So we go, searching for something to satisfy this feeling. Sometimes it works for a bit. Sometimes it takes our mind off of it for awhile. But it always seems to come back. It’s something deep in our hearts. It’s a thirst and it demands to be quenched in a very specific way.

That’s because the root of our thirst is not just for a better life, but for life period. We have a deep, longing need to be brought to life. What Christ understands, what he desires us to understand, is that our deep longing is for life itself, it’s for him. When we come to Jesus, we’re reconciled to God; we’re made whole. Jesus, talking about the one who believes in him, puts it this way: “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

Through faith, Christ invites us to not just know of and believe in Jesus, but to receive Jesus. Faith is satisfying because it gives us the very thing we need most, the very thing our hearts demand, it gives us Jesus. Through faith in Jesus, our thirst isn’t just momentarily silenced, it’s eternally satisfied.

Prayer

What trials have strengthened our faith

Confession and Repentance

Reading

2 Corinthians 7:8-11

Diving Deeper

1. Paul says that he doesn't regret his words to the Corinthian church, but rejoices, why? What does this tell us about Paul's intention in his exhortation of the church?
2. What are the two types of grief expressed by Paul and where does each lead?
3. What was the Corinthian church eager to do because of godly grief? Why do you think it impacted them so much?

Devotional

Have you ever experienced grief after being corrected? Maybe it was a parent, a teacher, or an employer. In the moment, it can be hard to think that it's a good thing. We feel the weight of hurt, frustration, pain, or anger. And though we can easily see grief as pointless or harsh, in God's plan it's not.

When we experience that kind of grief, we can respond in one of two ways: a godly way or a worldly way. It's what Paul describes as godly grief and worldly grief. They don't always feel different (though it's always easier to feel corrected by someone we love), but our response produces very different results.

When we're tempted to respond to correction or grief by working harder, proving someone wrong, regaining the approval or respect that we lost, it's always an empty endeavor. Even if we achieve it, the satisfaction is always vulnerable to be taken away by the next mistake we might make. We have to be perfect after that. It's impossible. That's why Paul says this kind of grief produces death. But what of this godly grief?

In contrast, God invites us in these moments of grief to turn away from sin, yes, but also to turn to him. He's already proved all that needs to be proved. He's paid all that needs to be paid. He offers life, and life more abundantly. That's why Paul says that this godly grief produces a "repentance that leads to salvation," because it leads to promised forgiveness. It leads to grace and mercy. It leads to God.

Prayer

Prepare your heart for true confession and repentance, knowing that godly grief is a good Ask God to show you places in your heart that require confession and repentance this week

Reading

2 Chronicles 12:1-12

Diving Deeper

1. When did Rehoboam abandon the law of the Lord?
2. According to the text, why did Shishak king of Egypt come up against Israel? Likewise, why had the Lord abandoned Israel to the Hands of Shishak?
3. What was King Rehoboam's response to the Lord's indictment against him and Israel? How often do we consider the severity of our sin?

Devotional

In today's culture, it can be so hard to admit that we're wrong. Additionally, it can be even harder to admit that someone else is right. So much of how we identify ourselves is based on what we've accomplished or what we've done. To admit that we're wrong is to concede some measure of our value and identity.

Rehoboam had done so well for himself as king, yet forgot one thing in the midst of it: God. As a result, Shemaiah informs him that God is judging him based on those actions, abandoning him to Shishak king of Egypt. In this moment, Rehoboam can react one of two ways. One, stick to his guns and prepare to fight, convinced that he's right. Or two, humble himself to admit that he's wrong and, more so, affirm that God is RIGHT.

This is actually exactly what we do when we confess. It's far more than just saying we're wrong. It's examining the Lord's judgment on us and affirming that it's righteous. When we confess, we affirm that he's right. He's right to judge all mankind guilty of sin (Rom 3:23). This concession can seem hard until we realize that it's the only way we see the full beauty of Christ's love. That even when his judgment on was right, he loved us anyway. So much so that he would die for us. "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Rom 5:7-8)

Prayer

Examine where you may need to humble yourself and affirm that God is righteous in his view of sin. Ask God to show you the depth of the statement, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us"

Reading

Joel 2:1-18

Diving Deeper

1. How does Joel describe this “Day of the Lord” coming upon Israel?
2. Joel tells the people that “even now” they can return to God with all their heart, rending their hearts not their clothes; what does this mean and how does it impact how we confess our sin to God?
3. What characteristics of God make Israel’s confession possible? What do we need to know about God when we confess our sin?

Devotional

It’s so easy for the words “I’m sorry” to lose their meaning. Maybe someone says it so many times, but doesn’t change. Maybe someone says it in a tone that’s sarcastic, indicating that they’re not sorry at all. Yet, when someone honestly says the words “I’m sorry,” they can be some of the most healing words spoken.

In today’s reading, we see Israel in a time of crises. From what we understand, the people have fallen away from God and are experiencing his Judgement. When we look closely, we see that God is actually displaying his righteousness. But is that all we see from God? Well, no. Though God is righteous in judgment, we also see his mercy. He calls the Israelites to come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. He calls them to repent.

And a very specific phrase is used after that: “rend your hearts and not your garments.” This phrase is used throughout the Bible to communicate a true confession from the heart. At the time, a way of outwardly expressing repentance was to tear (rend) one’s clothes. Often, this could be just an act. Not this time, though. Instead, God calls for a repentance from the heart. This is what repentance is about. In fact, repentance from the heart is an invitation to encounter God’s heart. Look at what comes after this request, “for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

When we truly repent, we get to experience the mercies of God’s heart. We don’t just see our sin, we get to see the King’s love.

Prayer

Search for areas we may not be earnestly confessing and repenting
Ask God to help you repent earnestly

Reading

Psalm 51 (Supplemental Reading: 2 Samuel 11 & 12)

Diving Deeper

1. Against who did David sin? Why do you think David believed his sin was against God primarily?
2. Who is doing all of the acts of restoration for David, God or David? Why do you think that is?
3. What does David ask God to restore? When we sin, how often do we ask God to restore the joy of his salvation? How does this impact how we see confession and repentance?

Devotional

The story of David and Bathsheba is one of the most heart-breaking accounts in the Bible. Yet, when you read David's psalm of repentance, Psalm 51, we see that the tale isn't void of God. In fact, he's right in the middle of it.

You see, David's sin was first and foremost a sin against God. It was definitely against Uriah and Bathsheba, but it wasn't a sin primarily against them. David understood that taking Uriah's life, adultery with Bathsheba, and partaking in deception with Joab were all violations of God's perfect moral design in creation. More so than murder, adultery, or deceit, David was first and foremost guilty of rebellion against God. That's the reason David confesses that it's against God that he's sinned. Though he doesn't undermine other victims, he knows that the primary violation here has been against God.

Though it's a bit challenging, this hierarchy of offense is also why David believes he still has hope. Take notice of who does all the work forgiving David? God is washing David, cleansing David, teaching David, purging David, creating in David, you get the picture. When we understand that it's primarily against God that we've sinned it also allows us to turn to that same gracious God. How liberating is it to know that the person we've primarily offended is also the most forgiving we've offended.

By no means does that neglect individuals that we may have hurt, no. In fact, if we can see that God is big enough to forgive and restore us from our sin, then we also see that he's big enough to heal and comfort those that may have been impacted by our actions. He may even call us to play a role in it by sharing the greatness of God (v.13). The healing call of God can go out from the midst of hardest moments when we see that he's at the center of it, including at the center of the offense.

Prayer

Help to see that our sin is against God first

Help to see that God's the one that freely forgives in our repentance

Reading

1 John 1:8-2:3, Proverbs 28:13

Diving Deeper

1. Who do we deceive when we say we have no sin? How does this practically play out in our lives? Where are we most tempted to overlook certain sins?
2. What is God faithful to do when we confess our sins? Does this change how we see confession?
3. Who does John say is our advocate with God the Father if we do sin? Why is he able to advocate for us?

Devotional

There's nothing more endearing than knowing that you're safe to share what's going on in your heart. People are willing to pay money to sit in a room and work out heart issues with a professional counselor. So many of us have so many hurts, mistakes, guilt, or shame just built up. So many of us feel that there's no one we can take it to.

Enter Jesus. In today's reading, John explains that Jesus has seen and exposed the darkest secret, the deepest hurt, the heaviest guilt. And instead of judging us or ridiculing us, he's faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteous. How, though? Because we have an advocate, Jesus. He is the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation is a word that communicates an atoning substitute. Someone who literally takes our place, receives our punishment, and has given us a righteous judgment instead of our original one.

And because we have that advocate, we now have peace with God when we confess and repent of our sins. Think about that, someone paid the highest price so you could be safe confessing and exposing things you never wanted to tell anyone. Now, you're free to. And even when those mistakes rear their ugly head again, he stays, advocating on our behalf, saying "they're forgiven, I paid for that." There's no more loneliness in our sin, we have and will always have someone to take it to, and he's faithful to forgive.

Prayer

Pray to see God's faithfulness and advocacy in your confession more accurately
Pray that you know there's safety in confession and repentance to God

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE IS TURNING FROM DARK TO LIGHT, FROM SIN TO GOD

Reading

Acts 26:12-20

Diving Deeper

1. Jesus tells Paul that he is sending him to Gentiles to “open their eyes;” for what purpose are the Gentiles eyes opened?

2. What happens when we turn from darkness to light? What does that say about the role of repentance in our spiritual lives?

3. What does it mean to perform deeds that keep with repentance? What does this look like for us on a daily basis?

Devotional

I think we can often misunderstand what “repentance” is. Sometimes we see it as a type of forgiveness that comes with confessing and saying I’m sorry. And while that’s true, there’s something more foundational that happens in biblical repentance.

You see, repentance in the Bible is so often paired with faith (Mark 1:14-15) because they’re actually two sides of the same coin. When we turn to God in faith, we depend on him and believe that he is who he says he is. We believe that God has done what he said he’d do in forgiving and gusting us through Christ’s death and resurrection on the cross. But when we turn to Jesus, it also involves turning from something else, turning from our sin.

You see, Jesus and sin are in opposite directions. You can’t face both. You either choose to be on God’s side or sin’s side. Don’t forget, it was Jesus that said you can’t have two masters. When we repent, we confess and ask for forgiveness, but we also turn our back to sin and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

That doesn’t mean it will be easy. In fact, we’ll stumble at times. When that happens, God is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:8-2:3). But overall, God desires our lives to face him; he desires our lives to be marked with deeds that “keep with our repentance.” That means living out a life that reflects who’s side you’re on. As author William Arnot writes, “the difference between an unconverted and a converted man is not that one has sins and the other has none; but that the one takes part with his cherished sins against a dreaded God, and the other takes part with a reconciled God against his hated sins.”

Prayer

If you haven’t, pray that God would help you turn away from your sin

Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower you to walk out your repentance on a daily basis

CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE IS WHY JESUS CAME TO EARTH

Reading

Luke 15:11-32

Diving Deeper

1. Why did the younger son believe he was no longer worthy to be called his father's son?
2. What position did the younger son expect to have when he returned to his father's house? How do we think God will react when we confess?
3. How far away was the son when the father saw him? What did he feel toward his son? What did he do?
4. Go back to Luke 15:2-3. Why did Jesus tell them this parable? What action was he defending? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Devotional

If you've spent any time in church, you've heard the uplifting story of the prodigal son. It might even be one of your favorites. Personally, I had a cartoon telling of the parable on VHS I watched before bed most nights.

But what's the real point of the parable? Is it that, because we've sinned, we're no longer worthy of being a part of God's family? Well, that's true, but it's not the point. Is it that the father has compassion on his son, runs to him in love, and restores him as a son based on his love and not the son's merit? Well, that's true too, but it's not the point.

The point is found in Luke 15:2-3: Jesus came to receive sinners. The Holy God of the universe, the King of the world, the Creator of everything, left the perfection of heaven to die for and receive sinners as his own. Not only that, but he celebrates when they come home (Lk 15:24). When we confess and repent, we often believe it's disappointing to God. Yet, Jesus says it's the very reason he came. In Luke 5, Jesus says, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." When we confess and repent, we're letting Jesus do the very thing that he came to do...so come.

Prayer

If you haven't, go through this week's devotionals and examine where the Lord might be calling you to confess and repent

Ask for trust that Jesus is welcoming you to confess and turn away from sin

Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to partner with Jesus is calling sinners to repentance through the gospel

Grace

Reading

Genesis 3

Diving Deeper

1. How does the serpent deceive Eve? Does he affirm God's Word or does he undermine it? How are we often tempted to undermine God's word in favor of our own desires?
2. Why did Adam hide when the Lord was looking for him? When we know we've sinned, how often do we retreat away or hide from God?
3. Read Romans 5:12-21. What are the differences between Adam and Jesus? What is Jesus inviting us to inherit from him as opposed to what we inherit from Adam?

Devotional

In Genesis 3, God asks a puzzling question of Adam: where are you? But this isn't a question of mere physical location. God's question is geared more toward the heart of the matter. Adam's desires and weaknesses caused him to treasure something more than he treasured his God. In truth, Adam had abandoned God in his heart far before he took a bite of the fruit. When his eyes were opened after eating the fruit, his guilt and shame drove him to make up for it by covering himself. When he hears God, he hides.

The Bible tells us that Adam's sin is our sin (Rom 5:12). That all people inherit the desire to see God dethroned and our own desires reign in our own hearts (Rom 1:20). And likewise, so often we hide like Adam. We see our sin and run, hoping that we can escape the eyes of God. Perhaps we can change on our own, do some good things, and when we finally reveal ourselves it'll be better. Yet, in truth, our hearts are still far from God.

Yet during God's curse of all parties involved, God gives a glimmer of hope. The woman's offspring will crush this serpents head. He'll bring life where Adam brought sin (Rom 5:18-19). In Christ, there's no more hiding, because he offers us his life and his life has no sin to hide. He invites us to confess and receive grace and, through his work on the cross, turns God's anger away. And through that sacrifice, he invites us to walk in freedom again. He invites to walk in truth, grace, love. So the questions today is, why are we still hiding?

Prayer

Examine where and why you've run from God instead of coming to him
Ask God to help you see that Jesus grace calls us to God, not away from him

Reading

Ephesians 2:1-10

Diving Deeper

1. Why did God make us alive with Christ, raise us up with Christ, and seat us with Christ in the heavenly places? What does that tell us about God?
2. How are we saved? What part do we play in our salvation?
3. What does it mean to be God's workmanship and why were we created? How are we responding to God's grace? Are we walking in those good works that we were made for?

Devotional

I once heard someone close to me say, "I don't want to be a burden." In our culture, that's a very common concern. We never want to be a burden to anyone. We want to be self-sufficient, always making our own way. I'm often still guilty of this. In this case, though, I really wanted to help this person. It wasn't a burden, it was my pleasure.

Often times we can misunderstand how God sees his own grace. We can see it as a burden to God. As though it stretches his patience and kindness. Though this is often felt with humble intentions, it's just not correct. The most freeing part of seeing God's grace as a gift is seeing that it was freely given. It was paid for by Jesus, then given to us out of love. You see, God's love compels him to offer us grace. And when he shows us his grace, he shows us just how awesome he is.

Because of God's love, he's linked his glory and his grace together forever. It's why Paul says that we were saved by grace and raised with Christ "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Did you see that? God saves us to show the immeasurable riches of his grace. His grace is an ocean without a bottom, a sky without a ceiling. God's grace is both a measure of how loving he is and glorious he is at the same time. This grace makes us his workmanship, a masterpiece of God's grace, and calls us into good works. How beautiful a grace, this immeasurable rich grace.

Prayer

Examine where we try to be independent of God and how that impacts the way we see his grace

Ask God to help you see that grace through Jesus Christ is immeasurably rich and inexhaustible

Ask the Lord to help you respond to his grace by walking the good works he has called you to

Reading

Titus 2:1-14

Diving Deeper

1. What trains us to renounce ungodliness? What connection do verses 1-10 have with verses 11-14?
2. What did Jesus give himself for? Do we sometimes struggle to see how big God's grace is? Can we forget that God's grace is to transform, not just forgive?
3. What are those impacted by God's grace zealous for?

Devotional

We're all guilty of misunderstanding things sometimes. If you've ever been in an argument with a spouse or friend, you can testify that it's usually rooted in a "misunderstanding." A simple misunderstanding can affect our lives dramatically. This can easily be true of how we understand God too. Specifically, how we understand his grace.

When we think of earthly grace, we tend to think of forgiveness. And while that's also true of God's grace, to limit it to the action of forgiveness is to miss so much of what God's grace has to offer. We can often think of God's grace as a starting point in a marathon, but it's more like the carbs that carry the runner through the race. God's grace forgives us, carries us, teaches us. It's why Paul says that there's a grace in Jesus that enables the believer to be strong (2 Tim 2:1).

When we doubt we're able to change and able to turn from the remnants of our sinful desires, we're right. But that's where grace comes in. Grace not just to forgive, but grace to change. A grace that's so great it commands all of our attention (even what we used to give to sin) and, with that attention, trains us. A grace that shows us a perfect life, modeled by Jesus, and invites us to begin a journey there, forgiving us along the way. So next time you see that old person rising up, don't look to yourself, but to grace; look to Jesus.

Prayer

Examine where you may be struggling in obedience to Christ and pray for grace in that area
Ask God to help you rethink your understanding of his grace

Reading

Exodus 34:1-10

Diving Deeper

1. What characteristics of God are communicated in verses 6-7?
2. For how many generations does God's steadfast love reach? For how many generations does God visit the iniquity of man?
3. After understanding who God has declared himself to be, what does Moses do?

Devotional

Have you ever seen one of those pictures of multiple generations together? They usually have a grandparent, a parent, and a child. They make us think of where we've come from or where we're going. It's no coincidence that God titles himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:6). He's a God of generations. His characteristics aren't momentary or for one, they're eternal, they're for all. They span the breadth of time. We so often see grace in a moment (forgiveness) but fail to see it through a lifetime or through eternity.

In contrast, it's so much easier to see how sin affects longterm. It doesn't just hurt for a moment; we have to deal with the consequences of it. It can hurt for generations to come. Some of you may have even been victims of your parent's sin. It's why God says in Ex. 34 that sin is visited upon the third and fourth generations.

This is where eternal grace crashes into the lasting consequences of sin. "The Lord...keeping steadfast love for thousands." A more literal way of understanding this statement is to say keeping steadfast love to the "thousandth generation." You see that? Sin is visited on the third and fourth generation, but the steadfast love of God extends to the thousandth generation. God's grace breaks the chains of where you've been, sets you free to where you're going, and alters the path for generations to come. Let's see grace the way God sees grace: for a lifetime, for eternity.

Prayer

Ask God to reveal any generational sin issues that may be present in your life
Ask for the Lord to provide grace there, liberating you in those areas
Pray that your family/future family would know the eternal beauty of God's grace in Jesus

Reading

John 1:1-18

Diving Deeper

1. What is Jesus glory marked by? What is it full of?
2. How is the fullness of Christ related to the grace we receive? How could this impact how we see grace?
3. From where do grace and truth come from?

Devotional

Promises are funny things. They can cause excitement or skepticism. The actual promise isn't the force behind the response, but the person making the promise. How often do we think about grace as a promise? For some that's scary, but for those that know God, it's exciting.

You see, the grace of Jesus is the very evidence that God keeps his promises. In Exodus 34 Moses witnesses God's glory manifest before him, this glory is filled with steadfast love and faithfulness, and God reaffirms the covenant that he made with Moses. Generations passed away over thousands of years. Then out of nowhere, there're rumblings about a Jesus of Nazareth, but that seems to slow down after he's crucified.

Until one of his disciples, John, writes about this Jesus. He writes that Jesus was with God and he is God; Jesus made his dwelling, his tabernacle, with us on earth; Jesus' glory is "full of grace and truth." And from that fullness, we receive grace after grace. A promised Messiah had come, and it wasn't a messenger of God, but God himself. God had come to fulfill the promise he had made all those years ago. You see that? The promise of grace is trustworthy because God HIMSELF fulfills it. We don't have to doubt it. It's real. It's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that all the promises of God are yes in Christ. Grace won't let you down. You can count on this grace today and a grace tomorrow.

Prayer

Examine where and how we can doubt God's grace at times

Ask that God would let us see how trustworthy his grace is, because it's completed in him.

Pray that you would see the faithfulness of God in his grace

Reading

Zechariah 3:1-5

Diving Deeper

1. What is Satan standing next to Joshua to do? Does the text provide any insight as to whether Satan's accusations were true?
2. In what ways does God describe Israel in his rebuke of Satan? What two things does this tell us about Israel?
3. Who takes away the iniquity from Joshua and who puts clean clothes on him? What's the final piece of clothing placed on Joshua?

Devotional

There's a really special moment in C.S. Lewis's children's book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that's near and dear to my heart. The White Witch, the stories main antagonist and self-proclaimed queen of Narnia, stands before Aslan (the true King) to accuse one of his appointed rulers. As this moment starts, Aslan rebukes the White Witch and agrees that he will pay the penalty (death) for his young ruler's choices so that the boy can be set free. Little does the White Witch know that Aslan will resurrect from the dead and will crown that same young boy as a king over the mythic land of Narnia.

That's a perfect example of God's grace at work in our lives. It takes us from guilty and on death row to a coheir with Christ in the Kingdom of God. It's easy to see the parallel between Lewis's story and today's reading, but it's sometimes harder to see the parallel between those two accounts and our own lives. Zechariah's vision shows Joshua clothed in filthy garments in the sights of a ready accuser, but the accuser doesn't even get to open his mouth. It's not that he isn't right in his accusation, it's that God has pulled this branch from the fire and chosen him. God's going to take away his iniquity and put clean clothes on him. And to top it off, he's going to put a turban on him. A clothing item that was reserved for royalty at the time.

That's the beauty of God's grace. It silences the accuser in favor of a greater opinion. It informs us that there's been a judgment, and Christ has paid our penalty; we're righteous and holy before God. Today, you may be facing accusation. God's inviting you to a grace that trumps the accuser. A grace that doesn't accuse, but declares that we are righteous, holy, forgiven, loved. Not because of our filthy garments, but because of the crown Jesus has placed on us.

Prayer

Examine where guilt and shame be keeping us from receiving the grace God desires for us

Mediate on the fact that grace gives us a new verdict and judgment

Fight any internal accusations by praising God for his grace

Reading

Psalm 103

Diving Deeper

1. What are the “benefits” of the Lord that are revealed in this Psalm? What does this look like in your own life?
2. How does God deal or not deal with those that fear him? What does this text say about what we deserve and what we receive?
3. How great is the steadfast love of the Lord and how far are we removed from our sins? How can we measure these descriptions?

Devotional

The bottom line of grace is that it moves us to worship God. To know that God does not deal with according to what we deserve, but has placed what we deserve on Christ, should move us to respond with worship and praise. In today’s reading, David calls us to observe two aspects of God that should call us to “Bless the Lord, O my Soul.”

He’s gracious (1-14)

He defends the oppressed, he’s merciful and gracious, he’s slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, his anger doesn’t last forever, there’s no height that could measure how much he loves us, and there’s no distance that could measure how far he’s removed our sin from us. In short, the grace of God is staggering. It overshadows anything doubt or concern we could bring it.

He’s faithful (15-22)

Though man’s days are short, the steadfast love of the Lord last from everlasting to everlasting, his righteousness spreads to children’s children, he’s established his throne in heaven forever, his Kingdom rules over all.

Today, use your prayer time to worship God. Whether that’s in prayer, song, word - utilize this time to respond to God’s grace. Lift him high and praise him for who he is and what he’s done.

Prayer

Use this time to worship God however you feel lead
Make sure that it’s a focused time of praising God

Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross

Reading

Luke 23:32-38

Diving Deeper

1. What does it say about Jesus that he desired the very people that were crucifying him to be forgiven?
2. Being that Jesus was taking the cross for our sins, what does his desire for those that physically nailed him to the cross to be forgiven say about his desire for those of us that nailed him to the cross through our sin to be forgiven?

Devotional

As we close the last week of our devotionals, we're going to take a look at the seven sayings of Jesus in the crucifixion. Being that we believe the entire Bible to be inspired by God and authoritative, we don't believe these sayings carry any more significance than any others in the Bible. That being said, many believe these sayings give us insight into the heart of Christ at the cross.

The first of these sayings is "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Though we tend to think this phrase shows us Christ's character, it also tells us much about the nature of Christ's mission. When we think about it, Christ came to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15), that's true. But how many of us knew we were sinners until the truth of the gospel was revealed to us? The beauty is that we didn't know we needed saving, yet he saved us anyway. Our ignorance, Pilate's ignorance, the Roman guards' ignorance, doesn't make us innocent. In our ignorance, we're still guilty.

Yet, our ignorance in sin is still trumped by Christ's grace on the cross. Because he died for those that didn't know what they were doing, we all have an opportunity to come to the one that saves sinners.

Prayer

Consider times that your actions were unknowingly against God. Thank him for his grace even over those moments.

Pray God would give us the wisdom to see the sin in our lives we don't currently see

Praise God that his grace covers all of our sins, even what we don't know about

Reading

Luke 23:39-43

Diving Deeper

1. What do you think inspired the criminal to place his faith in Jesus?
2. In the darkest day, for both Jesus and the criminal on the cross, we still see Jesus doing good works to redeem and comfort this man. How does this impact the how we see Jesus at work in our darkest days?

Devotional

It's so hard to see the light in the midst of darkness. We can struggle to find what some would describe as the "silver lining" of our storm clouds. Yet, when we consider the authority of Jesus, his sovereign control, and his good work through our darkest hours, we're not just given a hope of "silver linings," but a promise that God is working in the midst of our storms to do good (Genesis 50:20).

The criminal on the cross felt this to the fullest extent. Who knows what life had brought this man or the choices he'd made in response, but it led him to be nailed to cross next to the King of the World. And something clicked - really the Gospel clicked - for this guy. Understanding that he's been justly punished for his crimes, he acknowledges and accepts that he is wrong before God, but understands that Christ has earned no part in this punishment he's receiving. This criminal knows that Christ is doing something much bigger here. Riding what the Holy Spirit is clearly speaking to him, the man continues "remember me when you enter your kingdom." In other words, you're the king. Please, remember me when you're in glory. Jesus response, "today, you will be with me in paradise."

From this man's darkest hour, came his brightest moment. From his death on a cross, came life eternal with his King. All of it, because Christ was on the cross next to him. Today, wherever you are in life, dark hours can lurk ahead. Today, we know that Christ has satisfied our debt on the cross and, because of him, we can have life eternal. Because out of Christ's darkest hour, can come our greatest moment.

Prayer

Consider how Christ is at work in the midst of what seems like your hardest moment

Pray that God would show you his good works in the midst of our hardship

Pray that our realization would lead us to a greater understanding of how the Gospel is at work in our lives

Reading

John 19:21-27

Diving Deeper

1. How do we show honor to our parents in a way that is glorifying to God?
2. What does it tell us about the care of Christ that he's caring for his mother and disciple in the midst of his hardest moment?
3. Christ brings together those that are not family and brings them together through his work on the cross. How have we found family through the community that the gospel brings together?

Devotional

"Honor thy father and thy mother" If you've spent any time around church or Christians, you probably know that as one of the ten commandments. If you've spent some time in scripture, you might even be able to tell me which one it is (it's the fifth one by the way).

Our reading today shows us a beautiful fulfillment of this commandment. Jesus, on the cross, honors his mother by providing for her and honors his Father by taking the cross he was sent for.

So many places in the New Testament we're told that we're no longer under the law, but that Christ has fulfilled the law. Here lies a perfect example. Christ fulfilling the law. But there's something else going on here. Christ is proving a beautiful preface of what is going to happen through the very sacrifice he's paying. He's going to make communities out of strangers, mothers out of the childless, sons out of the motherless, all from his own redemption.

In order to walk through our lives, in anticipation of eternity, God gives us help. He gives us a new family. He gives us brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers. He gives us the church. He gives us each other.

Prayer

Think of some people in your faith community that have become family to you

Pray that God would strengthen and create even more familial relationships for you in his family

Reading

Mark 15:1-41; Psalm 22

Diving Deeper

1. We're taught that Christ bore our sin (1 Peter 2:24). With this in mind, what do you think it meant for God the Father to forsake Jesus right now?

2. Despite his turning away, what does our Psalm say God still is?

3. Among other prophecies fulfilled, Christ demonstrates that he's the suffering servant that's in David's twenty-second Psalm. How does a knowledge that Christ's suffering on the cross had been foretold and foreknown for centuries impact how we see it?

Devotional

We're always inspired by people who set their mind to something and get it done, especially when it's a matter of years or decades. The stories of hall-of-fame basketball players seeing a hero compete and knowing that's where they want to be so they practice night and day. Every person that was captivated by the stars and ended up on a mission to space years later. We admire the diligence, faithfulness, and patience it takes to reach their goal.

Yet, we don't always make this same association with God. It's easy for all of us to look at the Bible and think that the crucifixion of Jesus was happenstance. Some of us see the cross as God's recoiled response to sin. In reality, there's nothing farther from the truth. Christ desired for all to know that this was a moment prepared and worked to perfection through the ages. It's why he cries out "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." It recalls a text written 500 years earlier by David. That's not as far as Jesus could go back, though. In the very beginning, God informs the enemy that undermined his order and deceived his image-bearing children that there would be a son of the woman that crushes his head (Genesis 3:15).

These remarks are startling enough, but there's more. In a vision of the end, John's given insight to how long God's been planning the redemption of his people - "everyone whose name has been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the lamb." Today, we can be secure in Christ's work because it's a work that God worked out not just through the ages, but from eternity past. He's claimed you and made you his before anything was created. Jesus cry was one of despair, yes. But it was also one that marked the coming climax of a tale foretold before the foundation of the earth. The tale of Christ saving his people. The tale of Christ saving you.

Prayer

Examine how the understanding that Christ's plan of redemption for your life was set from eternity past change how you see the cross's impact on you today.

Pray for a better understanding of God's eternal love for you.

Reading

John 19:28-29; Psalm 69 (emphasize v. 21)

Diving Deeper

1. Though we can assume Jesus thirst applied to his physical body, what else could Jesus have been thirsty for?

2. Because Christ had not yet died, we know that not everything in scripture had been fulfilled. What does the Bible mean when it says “so scripture could be fulfilled”?

Devotional

Thirst is a familiar topic in the Bible. Jesus uses it to reveal that we have a longing for something more. Something deeper.

Here, though, it’s Jesus talking. He’s lacking nothing. In fact, it’s exactly because he is perfect that he can even make the sacrifice that pays for our sins. Then what is it? Yes, he’s physically thirsty, but scripture isn’t in the habit of just giving us arbitrary information about Jesus final moments, no. John knew this had to be something more. It was in order to fulfill scripture. It was foretold that Jesus, the one who gives fountains of living water, would thirst.

When we see Christ on the cross, what we always have to remember is that it was us that was supposed to be there. Christ saw the thirst of our souls because of sin, took that sin on himself, and gave us his living water. Christ’s thirst is one of the final echoing words that scream “I will take your place.”

As we draw closer to Easter Sunday, try to begin meditating on the work of Christ on the cross. His sacrifice and his victory; his life and his death. As we enter Good Friday, consider the immense weight of sin that was resting on Jesus. Consider that, because he was raised to life after this death, we have a hope for the future. For a disciple like John, watching his friend and God dying on a cross, these would’ve been moments of heartache that were going to give way to the greatest joy. Begin to let your heart nestle into that space, preparing for a great time of celebration this weekend.

Prayer

Consider that Christ’s death on the cross was not his own, but he exchanged his place for ours

Pray that God would prepare your heart for the entire weekend, somberly considering the death of Christ, while joyously anticipating the celebration of his resurrection.

IT IS FINISHED. FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

Reading

John 19 (emphasize 30); Luke 23 (emphasize 46)

Diving Deeper

1. What does Jesus mean when he says, “it is finished”?
2. What do we see in Jesus that causes us to worship him in this chapter?
3. What does it mean to commit your spirit to the hands of God? How are we to follow Christ’s model in this?

Devotional

As we close our devotional, we’re going to combine the last two words of Christ’s seven sayings. They communicate a similar thought, yet use different tones and work together to create a beautiful picture of where we’re to land during this beautiful Easter season. Easter is as much about understanding Christ’s death as it is celebrating his resurrection. If you haven’t noticed, this theme of understanding has run through this devotional over the last 40 days. When we understand the two together, they come alive to provide a promise that sustains us through both the darkest hours and the brightest moments.

In that same vein, our readings today take us on a journey into Christ’s final earthly breaths. Seeing that his time was near, Jesus said the words “it is finished.” They communicate an important truth to our lives, the completion of the journey. The salvation of those Christ claims as his own was no longer in limbo, no longer in the hands of man, no longer something that could be lost, it was finished. Unlike the fleeting approval of a friend or loved one, vulnerable to be taken away, this was an approval and a justification that was purchased in full by the King. Nothing more to add; nothing more needed. The atoning work of Jesus for us has been completed; it was now time for him to breathe his last.

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Jesus, having completed all that the Father set out for him to accomplish, committed his life to God. Take notice with me, though. This life wasn’t taken; this life was laid down freely (John 10:18). This wasn’t a moment where the poor man on the cross finally breathed his last! No! This was the moment the King had accomplished all that he set out to do and was now returning to the glory he had left. The ransom was paid and the journey accomplished. Death would lose its sting and the King would take his throne forever and ever. This where we land. Because it is finished, because Jesus died and rose from the grave, we’re given the opportunity to commit our lives to Christ and enter the fullness of God when we die.

(continued on the next page)

IT IS FINISHED & FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

Devotional (continued)

Today, as we prepare your heart to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord on Sunday, think about the accomplishment of Christ and what it's purchased on our behalf. Think about the moments that will precede your own death. The moments your breaths are growing faint and shallow and you know the time is coming. Think then, of the proclamation of Christ. That because he finished it, we can commit our lives to God. And in those moments, as pain and death give way to victory, know that because Christ has risen we're alive forever more. Praise be to God.

“³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” 1 Peter 1:3-4

Prayer

Use this time to thank God for the gift of his life on the cross.

Prepare your heart to celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the grave with your community this weekend.



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