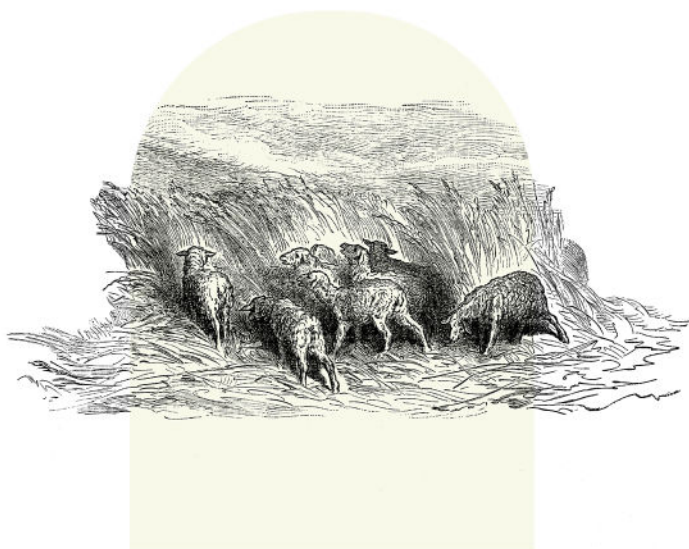


CHRIST

OUR SHEPHERD



7

devotions on God's sovereign grace
&
holy week readings



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH · Devotions
LINDALE, TX



Ministries
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Christ our Shepherd: 7 Devotions on God's Sovereign Grace & Holy Week Readings

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Published by First Baptist Church Lindale
103 East Van Street
Lindale, Texas 75771

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*From heav'n He came and sought her
to be His holy bride;
with His own blood He bought her,
and for her life He died.*

S. J. Stone, 1866

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Preface: Who Sent Joseph to Egypt?

In the devotional, we will celebrate together the doctrine of God's sovereign grace. But before we can do that, we need to understand what it means that God is sovereign. What we think about God's sovereignty will affect how we think about His sovereign grace. One way of revealing what we think about this subject is by asking a simple question: *Who sent Joseph to Egypt?*

At first, the answer seems simple: Joseph's sinful slave-selling brothers sent him to Egypt. And that is true. But it is not the full answer. Consider Joseph's words: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to do what has happened on this day, to keep many people alive" (Gen. 50:20). When Joseph's brothers sent him to Egypt they meant to do evil, but behind it all God had a plan *from the beginning*. God meant to bring about good through the slave selling, namely the preservation of the lives of the sinful slave sellers and their families, thereby keeping His promise to Abraham to have a multitude of descendants. They meant to do evil in the act, but all the while God was causing and intending good for the very men who sent Joseph to Egypt.

Notice that Joseph did not say God *used* it for good. The text says God *meant* it for good. Joseph's brothers had their own intentions for the outcome of the act. They designed the slave selling to accomplish a certain evil outcome. But God also had intentions for the outcome. He designed the slave selling to accomplish His own result. He *meant* to do something that they couldn't see at the time, something that could only be revealed later in God's own perfect timing.

The Hebrew word for "meant" [*hasab*] is used by Moses elsewhere for the construction of the tabernacle by means of skillful designs from a master craftsman. It is a word that implies forethought and planning, even calculating complex numbers: "Moreover you shall

make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet material; you shall make them with cherubim, the work of a *skillful* [hasab] designer” (Ex. 26:1). “If he sets apart his field as holy after the jubilee, however, then the priest shall *calculate* [hasab] the price for him proportionate to the years that are left until the year of jubilee; and it shall be deducted from your valuation” (Lev. 27:18).

The action of the slave selling happened because God’s intentions were to produce good from the action, while the brothers meant to do harm by their actions. In other words, God sovereignly was directing the actions of sinful men to bring about His will. God was the craftsman, and the sinful men were the tools in His hands to accomplish the masterpiece of His goodness. This is confirmed by the Psalmist in Psalm 105:16-17, “And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.” Who sent Joseph to Egypt? Ultimately, God did.

God is Sovereign over all things

This kind of oversight and control of God is not just for a few events in history. He is sovereign over all things:

Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? (Ex. 4:11).

I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted (Job 42:2).

But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3).

Whatever Yahweh pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and in all deeps (Ps. 135:6).

Yahweh has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked

for the day of evil (Prov. 16:4).

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every judgment is from Yahweh (Prov. 16:33).

Many thoughts are in a man's heart, but it is the counsel of Yahweh that will stand (Prov. 19:21).

There is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My counsel will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure' (Isa. 46:9-10).

Who is there who speaks and it happens, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good go forth? (Lam. 3:37-38).

And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding (Dan. 2:21).

And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can strike against His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' (Dan. 4:35).

Are not two sparrows sold for an assarion? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father (Matt. 10:29).

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:36).

He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3).

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are

a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that' (James 4:14-15).

It is this confidence that led Paul to say in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." The only confidence we can have that all things work for our good—even affliction, turmoil, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword is that God is sovereign, even over our afflictions (Rom. 8:35). God was able to work all things for good for Joseph because God was in control over Joseph's afflictions.

Defining Sovereignty

The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) defines God's sovereignty in this way:

God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass;¹ yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein;² nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established;³ in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree.⁴ (Chapter 3.1)

"Nor is Violence Offered to the Will of the Creature"

Many people have concluded that God's sovereignty destroys man's freedom, making us merely robots. However, God decreeing from all eternity whatsoever may come to pass does no violence to the will of the creature. The witness of Scripture holds no contradiction between a creature's will and God's plans. Everywhere mankind is

1 Isa. 46:10; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18

2 James 1:13; 1 John 1:5

3 Acts 4:27-28; John 19:11

4 Num. 23:19; Eph. 1:3-5

called to make choices, and these are viewed as real choices. We are called to repent, to place our faith in Jesus, to delay no more, and to be reconciled to God. The same Paul who wrote Romans chapter 9 never gave in to fatalism but pleaded with tears in his eyes, even begging that men and women would choose life: “God is pleading through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20); “Now I, Paul, myself plead with you by the gentleness and forbearance of Christ” (2 Cor 10:1); “I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31).

As it were, if there could be a golden sign above the gates of God’s Kingdom, it would have carved on the front these words: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13). And yet on the back, only able to be seen by those who enter into the Kingdom, are carved the words “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). We are expected to hold together this mystery of God’s providence.

“Nor is the Liberty of Second Causes Taken Away, but Rather Established”
Second causes are things the Lord uses indirectly to accomplish His will in the world. When God created the universe He also established all the laws of physics. There are “natural” causes for things like thunderstorms and tornadoes. But God is the ultimate cause for everything that comes to pass. A thunderstorm may be created by warm and cold fronts colliding together, but ultimately it comes about by the will of God. For this reason, Elihu said that God “scatters the cloud of His lightning. It changes direction, turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever He commands it on the face of the inhabited earth. Whether for correction, or for His world, or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen” (Job 37:11-13).

A skilled heart surgeon may save the life of your family member, but we ultimately give thanks to the Lord for creating that person and giving them an education. Not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from our Father in heaven—whether it falls by a hawk, a hunter, or a storm—the Lord holds the life of that sparrow in His hands.

What is the Cause of a Table?

However, there are those who will reject everything out of hand in this devotional because they cannot comprehend how two seemingly contradictory statements can mesh together—statements like “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” and “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” These people assume wrongly that if God sovereignly planned for something to happen, then the actions of man that God foresaw and superintended—which would lead to that desired outcome—were not *real* human choices.

Christians throughout church history have found Aristotle helpful in describing the hidden realities of God’s providence. Aristotle observed that there are several elements at work for the creation of a wooden table. When asking the question “What caused the table to be?” there are different ways we could answer the question.

1. The cause of the table is the design of an artist (the Formal Cause).
2. The cause of the table is to be able to use it for meals (the Final Cause).
3. The cause of the table was the tools used to craft it, like a saw and a hammer (the Efficient Cause).
4. The cause of the table was the raw materials of wood (the Material Cause).

All of these things can be true at the same time. So also, God was the Formal and Final cause of Joseph being sent to Egypt, while the sinful slave-selling brothers were the Efficient cause.

Consider what the early church prayed in Acts 4:27-28, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.” The people mentioned in this prayer (Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel) all acted freely. They are held responsible for their sin. And yet it was all according to the plan of the Lord—“to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”

The categories we learned above from Aristotle are able to help us answer the difficult questions that arise from reading the Bible. Questions like “Who wrote the Bible—God or man?”, “Who sent Joseph to Egypt—God or man?”, “Who put Jesus on the cross—God or man?”, and “Who calls us to salvation—God or man?” The answer to each one of these questions is *both*.

Wimpy Metaphysics Destroys Inerrancy

We know from reading Scripture that there is a reality above our reality—an unseen, hidden spiritual realm—and that includes the plans and providence of God, causing all things to work together according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Another word for these invisible structures is *metaphysics*. If physics describes the realities we can see, then *meta*-physics describes the reality *behind* the realities that we can see.

If we do not have a way to affirm both the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man, then we cannot consistently affirm a Bible that is without error. Dr. Craig Carter helpfully explains the conundrum of inerrancy and gives us a way forward to solving this problem:

Well, here’s the problem: if you want to affirm inerrancy then you need to have a metaphysics that allows for different kinds of causality. You’ve got to have a metaphysics in which the human author can be the efficient cause, and yet God can be the formal and final cause. And you’ve got to have a metaphysical understanding of providence that allows you to see God working through the human authors. Because the problem with inerrancy is that when you don’t have this metaphysics in place, when you have a more modernist, thinned-out, metaphysical conception, you have a clash between the divine author trying to keep the text from error and the human author trying to express his own opinion and views. And so it seems like a zero-sum game where the more influence there is from the divine author, the less there is from the human, and the more from the human, the less from the divine. And so that inevitably at some point, it becomes incredible

to suppose that the human author was protected from error in every single case without him becoming just a dictation machine.

That was the dilemma that evangelicals got backed into in the 20th century, because they were not thinking of God being able to cause Paul to say a certain thing by *creating* a Paul with a certain nature and then providentially arranging the world in such a way that at a moment in time, Paul would say that thing. They just thought of Paul moving the pen, and God kind of edging his hand this way to write that word instead of this word.

When you have an occasional metaphysics where God directly causes every individual thing that happens in the world, it's very difficult to have inerrancy without dictation. And then you've got the whole of modern biblical criticism emphasizing the way that the particularity of the human authors is displayed in their text. So each author has his own vocabulary, and each author has a certain style. And this is coming at evangelicals like waves, and it's undeniable that the Bible is written by human beings, and these human beings have histories and backgrounds. How can we say that they're just dictation machines?

[Evangelicals] came under increasing pressure in the 19th and 20th centuries, and so the temptation was to compromise and back off of it and say, "Well maybe the Bible isn't inerrant... Maybe it just has little errors but not big errors. Maybe it just has errors about things that don't matter, but it doesn't have errors about things that do matter." But that was all just a temporary strategic retreat. That was not a solution to the problem.

We need an understanding of causality that allows us to see God as the cause of what is written in the Bible *and* humans as the cause. The mystery of God's providence is that He works *through* these human authors in such a way that what is produced turns out to be precisely what He intends to be produced, without interfering with their personality, or their individuality, or whatever. And if we don't have that kind of a metaphysical understanding, I think we will eventually lose inerrancy. So the

battle for the Bible needs to be a battle for metaphysics.⁵

In the same way, wimpy metaphysics destroys evangelism. If we think it all depends on *us* to save people, then we will resort to manipulation tactics to get results or be swamped with guilt that we are never “doing enough” to save people. If we think that it all depends on *God* to save people, then we will neglect our responsibility to share the gospel and default to a hyper-calvinism that says, “If God wants to save them, then God will save them, and He doesn’t need me to do it.”

Instead, let us be like Paul, as ambassadors for Christ, pleading with men, women, and children to be reconciled to God, all the while trusting in God’s sovereign grace to save.

⁵ Craig Cater (September 5, 2023). “Why I am Not a Biblicist.” *Credo Colloquy*, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City.

1 | The Shepherd Pursued the Wandering Sheep

He then answered, “Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ So they said to him, “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to listen again? Do you want to become His disciples too?”²⁸ And they reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.”²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.”³⁰ The man answered and said to them, “Well, here is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from, and He opened my eyes.”³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him.³² Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered and said to him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” So they put him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out, and after finding him, He said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.”³⁸ And he said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped Him.³⁹ And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “Are we blind too?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

^{10:1} “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the

sheep. ³To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he brings all his own out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will never follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

John 9:25-10:6

The first remarkable thing about the story of the man born blind is its length. Many healings of Jesus are simply reports of His miracles. They demonstrate His divinity and then move on. But this story lingers. Why would John recount the aftermath of a healing? The answer is that Jesus and John have a point to make about *true* sight and *true* blindness. In this story, there are two different directions of movement: the blind man becomes one who sees, and the seeing become those who are blind—“that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind” (9:39). We discover by the end of the story that those who claim to have sight of God were after all truly the ones blind from birth.

This passage teaches that there is a far deeper problem that Jesus has come to heal than physical blindness, a problem that every person is born with. We are all spiritually blind in our sin. We need God to open our eyes to see Christ. If God does not act first to heal our spiritual sight, then *no one* will come to Jesus. As the blind man’s physical eyes become open, his spiritual sight also opens. By the end of the story, he believes in Christ. But those whose eyes are opened physically—the Pharisees—are revealed to be blind because they reject Jesus.

This binary is repeated throughout John’s Gospel: we either will receive or reject (1:11-12), we are of the light or the dark (3:19), born of the flesh or born of the Spirit (3:6), we hate God or love Him (3:19-

20), are sick or are well (5:6), dead or alive (5:21), those who are hungry or those who will never hunger again (6:35), those who are drawn to Christ by the Father or those who are still far away (6:44), those taught of God or those who are ignorant (6:45), those who believe or those who don't (6:47), those who hear the words of life or those who go away (6:68), either free or slave (8:36), either those who are of their father Abraham or of their father the devil (8:44), either blind or seeing (9:39), and, finally, those who hear and know His voice or those who don't (10:3).

The overall effect of these images shows how pervasive and thoroughly desperate our condition is before God. Our condition is so deeply stained with sin that nothing less than the wholesale renovation of our souls is needed. We must be born again. We are not so much struggling to swim and in need of a life preserver as we are dead men and women on the ocean floor in need of a resurrection. In Jesus' own words, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

Paul tells us that "there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12). The Bible teaches that crookedness and corruption pervade every part of who we are—our hearts, minds, and souls. There is not a single part of us that isn't touched by sin. In this way, our depravity is total, or complete. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can know it? (Jer. 17:9).

James Boice wrote that the biblical description of human beings is that of "an utterly ruined state, a state from which we are unable to deliver ourselves and in which we might all have been left to perish, and justly so."¹ The theologian Augustine succinctly wrote that we are "not able *not* to sin."

But how does this square with free will? Are we not able to freely choose to follow God? We are always free to choose, but we always choose what our minds think is best. "The mind of the sinner never

¹ James Boice, *The Doctrines of Grace*. Crossway, 2009, 72.

thinks that God’s way is good. The will is free to choose God. Nothing is stopping it. But the mind does not regard submission to and service of God as desirable. Human beings think that sin is best. Therefore, unless God changes the way we think—which he does by the miracle of the new birth—our minds always tell us to turn from God.”²

Salvation will never be achieved apart from God’s grace. From beginning to end, it is a work of grace—and not a partial grace, but an intervening, thorough, and radical grace.

Who is it who wills to come? The answer is, No one, except those in whom the Holy Spirit has already performed the entirely irresistible work of the new birth, so that, as a result of this miracle, the spiritually blind eyes of the natural man are opened to see God’s truth, and the depraved mind of the sinner, which in itself has no spiritual understanding, is renewed to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.³

Or, in the words of John 1:13, we become children of God “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” The only way to be saved is through the voice of Jesus: “To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3). Like Lazarus, we need the voice of Jesus to call us out from our graves with the power to raise the dead (11:43).

I can pray...

- Thank You, Lord, that Your work of salvation in our lives is, from beginning to end, entirely a gift of Your grace and beyond our own ability to earn or achieve.
- We pray for people to recognize their own spiritual blindness and need for Jesus. Without Your intervention, our inclination is to turn away from God unless You change our hearts and minds.

² Boice, 85.

³ Boice, 86.

- Help me to clearly communicate and explain the gospel because, without Your work in people's hearts, no amount of therapy or coaching can make a person love You and Your law.

2 | The Shepherd Freely Chose His Sheep

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out... ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day... ^{10:3}To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he brings all his own out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice... ²⁶But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

John 6:37, 44; 10:3-4, 27-28

There are only four options available for us:

1. God could decide to provide no opportunity for anyone to be saved. (Universal condemnation).
2. God could provide an opportunity for all to be saved, but final salvation depends on our choice (Human self-determination).
3. God could intervene directly and ensure the salvation of all people. (Universal salvation).
4. God could intervene directly and ensure the salvation of some people. (Sovereign grace).¹

Option 1 would mean that all people go to hell. (Universal condemnation). Option 3 would mean that all people go to heaven. (Universal salvation). Therefore, options 2 and 4 (human self-determination or sovereign grace) are the only real possibilities available to us, given the witness of Scripture that there will be people

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*. Tyndale House, 1986, 33-34.

in both heaven and hell.

The question we need to ask is which of the two options best explains the biblical data and the reason why anyone is saved. In other words, did God merely provide an opportunity for all to be saved in a potential salvation, but the final decisive decision is left in our hands? (Human self-determination). Or did God accomplish salvation for His people, and He will sovereignly ensure that they will finally make it to heaven? (Sovereign grace). We can observe just from the passages above in John's Gospel a number of important points:

1. *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me"* (6:37). First, we see that some are given by the Father to the Son. Not all people are given to the Son. Second, only those given to the Son will come to Christ. If they were given to Christ, then they will come to Christ for salvation.

2. *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him"* (6:44). Only those drawn by the Father come to the Son. The word "draw" is used elsewhere for drawing up fish in a net or drawing water from a well. Only those whom the Father will lead to the Son will come to Him.

3. *"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out"* (10:3). Christ calls His sheep by name. He knows who they are, and as the Word of the Father, He sovereignly calls people to Himself. The way the Father draws people to the Son is through the voice of the Son calling His own sheep to Himself. Therefore, the sign that a person is one of His sheep is that he or she will follow Him.

4. *"But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep"* (10:26). Some people are called His sheep. Not all are His sheep. Some will never believe, and the reason why they will never believe is because they are not His sheep and have not been given to Him by the Father. The fact that they stubbornly refuse to believe and reject the gospel is proof they do not belong to the Son.

5. “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand” (10:28). He gives eternal life to His sheep, preserving their lives and ensuring that they will never perish. Every person given to the Son by the Father will never be lost. They will be found by the Son no matter how far away they are. He will seek them out, and they will hear His voice, follow Him, and be kept securely in His hands.

Another way to describe the biblical doctrine stated above is “election.” God’s people are called “the elect” 15 times in the New Testament. If we reject election, then how can we say that God *chose* the foolish things of the world to shame the wise or *chose* the weak to shame the strong (1 Cor. 1:7)? How can we deny that the Father *chose* us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4)? Are not God’s people a *chosen* family and a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9)? Our only hope of being declared righteous is because God chose us: “Who will bring a charge against God’s *elect*? God is the one who justifies” (Rom. 8:33).

The question each Christian must wrestle with is *why* they were chosen by God. Did God see any good in me? Did God choose me because He knew one day I would choose Him? There are two options: Option 1: It was a conditional election based on foreseen faith. This would require an argument that a person can choose God freely without His intervening grace (contrary to everything said in the previous devotion about how our free will is enslaved by sinful desires and a depraved mind). Or, Option 2: We believe that God’s grace and election are unconditional, and we are saved from beginning to end by His grace alone and without any human merit.

The objection at this juncture is typically to say that it seems unjust for God to choose some and not others. If God freely elects His people based on His grace alone and not on human merit, then is God unrighteous to choose a people for His own glory? This is the exact question Paul dealt with in Romans 9. The way the Apostle Paul addressed this objection was to draw our minds back to Genesis. Think back to Abraham. One man was chosen out of all the peoples of

the earth. Was God unrighteous to show mercy to Abraham? Was God unrighteous to choose Isaac and not Ishmael?

You may think that some were chosen and not others because of some good in them. But what if God were to choose one person who was equal in all ways to another—even one twin instead of the other, even before they were born or had done any good or evil? Because that is exactly what God did. He chose Jacob and not Esau. Is God not free to show mercy on whom He chooses to show mercy?

Is there any unrighteousness with God? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend on the one who wills or the one who runs, but on God who has mercy (Rom. 9:14-16).

If God condemned the whole world and sent all people to hell, He would be just. If God decided to save no one, He would do no one any wrong. No one deserves His mercy. But the wonder of wonders is that God chose to be merciful. And He is free to show His mercy to whomever He wills. All we can do is bow our heads and marvel that He loved us:

*Oh the wonder of wonders that God should love me
A sinner so guilty, so vile and unclean
To love the unlovely, how can it be done?
'Tis only in Jesus, in His Blessed Son.*

*Long before I ever knew Him, my Lord first knew me.
Before I ever sought Him, my Lord first sought me.
When I was in darkness, His sworn enemy
He purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.*

*Not that I first did choose Him, for that could not be
Still this heart would refuse Him had He left it to me
I'd still fight the battle that no man can win*

I'd still bar the heart's door that letteth Him in.

*His love is a mountain that I cannot scale,
As wide as an ocean that I cannot sail!
I'll never lay hold of, my mind fully see
This love that in mercy first laid hold of me.*

“Wonder of Wonders”, Mark Webb

I can pray...

- Give us the wisdom to grasp the depth of Your love and the breadth of Your mercy, as revealed in Scripture.
- Help us to trust in Your perfect judgment and to find peace in the knowledge that You do what is just and right.
- Lead us in repentance, turning away from self-reliance and pride, and towards a life fully reliant on Your grace

3 | The Shepherd Died for the Sheep

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep... ²⁶ But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

John 10:11, 15, 26-28

What did Jesus accomplish on the cross? As we investigate the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus’ death fulfilled the pattern of Old Testament sacrifice. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36). His body is the sanctuary that was torn down and raised in three days (2:21). He is the one whose bones were not broken like the Passover lamb (19:36). Therefore, we know that He died as a sacrifice for sin.

In this passage, He is also the good shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. He is not a victim but a leader. He willingly gave His life to the sheep so that through His life, *they* may have life. In this way, He gives His body to be food and drink, further confirming His role as the Passover lamb: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves” (John 6:53).

There are disagreements among Christians regarding the exact nature of this provision and the extent of the application of Christ’s atonement. But we can all agree on the power of Jesus to save *anyone* who calls on His name to be saved. We should all agree God provided an atonement that fully deals with sin and will accomplish all that

He intended. There is power in Jesus' blood to save—enough for a hypothetical universe of souls and 10,000 worlds. But how do we navigate Jesus' statement that He laid down His life for the sheep?

First, we should examine the nature of atonement. In the Old Testament, God established a system for His people to have their sins covered. The word atonement means “to cover.” But this wasn't a sweeping under the rug to hide wrongdoing from God. If a sin was *covered*, then it was *forgiven*. Often atonement and forgiveness are connected in the same verse: “He shall also do with the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make *atonement* for them, and they will be *forgiven*,” “And all its fat he shall offer up in smoke on the altar... Thus the priest shall make *atonement* for him in regard to his sin, and he will be *forgiven*,” “...the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to Yahweh. Thus the priest shall make *atonement* for him, and he will be *forgiven*” (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31).

The point is that when atonement is made, the worshipper is forgiven. In the act of sacrifice, the transaction is complete: an animal's life has been killed in the place of the worshipper, and the blood of the animal paid for the worshipper's sins that day. No more needs to be accomplished. The worshipper would never have to fear punishment for his or her sins already paid for by the sacrifice of another's life. “For it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before Yahweh” (Lev. 16:30).

There is no such thing as a partial atonement, where the worshipper was halfway forgiven or needed to complete the atonement through acts of penance. There is no such thing as an atonement that did not pay for sins. If atonement was provided, then God and the worshipper were at peace, and his or her sins were remembered no more. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Or, to put it another way, *with* the shedding of blood, there *is* forgiveness. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life” (Lev. 17:11). Therefore,

we can also conclude the opposite: that if there is *no* forgiveness, then there was *no* shedding of blood on their behalf.

Second, we should examine whether we think the Bible teaches Jesus accomplished atonement on the cross. In other words, do we believe Jesus *actually* paid for sins, or did He *potentially* pay for sins? Did He accomplish atonement or merely make atonement possible? Is our salvation theoretical or actual?

Paul wrote that our debt of sin was canceled *on the cross*, not after the cross: “Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us which was hostile to us, He also has taken it out of the way, *having nailed it to the cross*” (Col. 2:14). Paul wrote that the payment for sins was actually borne by Christ *on the cross*: “Who Himself bore our sins *in His body on the tree*, so that having died to sin, we might live to righteousness; by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus’ final words on the cross communicate a resolution to the act, completing His work of atonement: “He said, *‘It is finished!’* And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). These verses lead us to believe that our salvation is not potential, but actual. It is not theoretical, but definite. It is not unrealized, but accomplished.

Third, we should consider that one of the reasons given for our never perishing is because our sins were paid for by Jesus on the cross. A Christian needs never to fear the wolf because the Shepherd laid down His life (John 10:12-15). Death and hell cannot harm us because our Shepherd paid for our sins on our behalf. He was condemned in our place, and there is, therefore, now no possibility that we would face the same punishment He already endured.

In other words, God will never make us pay for sins that were already paid for by Christ on the cross. He will never make us drink the cup of wrath that Jesus already drained. There is nothing left. All of God’s wrath has been spent for His people. He will not punish us in Hell for sins that Jesus paid for already. “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). A legal term that communicates this reality is that of double jeopardy.

If a person has been acquitted of crimes, then they will never fear the possibility of a retrial for those same crimes. There is no possibility of condemnation for those in Christ because Christ was already condemned. We cannot bear the penalty of sins twice because Christ already bore them on our behalf once for all.

John 10 gives us reason to believe in a powerful and definite atonement, one where we will never have to fear the punishment of sins that were canceled at the cross. We will never perish because Christ laid His life down for us and fully dealt with the cost of sins.

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, we praise You for sending Your Son, Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Thank You for the perfect sacrifice that fulfilled the patterns of the Old Testament and brought us forgiveness and peace with You.
- Gracious God, we confess our tendency to rely on our own efforts rather than the complete work of Jesus on the cross. Forgive us for our pride and self-reliance, and help us to rest in the finished work of Christ, trusting that You have fully accepted us through Him.
- Lord, we pray for those who have not yet accepted the truth of the Gospel. Open their hearts to the reality of Christ's sacrifice and draw them to Yourself, that they may experience the joy of salvation and the peace of being forgiven and reconciled to You.

4 | The Shepherd Will Find All His Sheep

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out... ^{10:11} “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep... ¹⁶ And I have other sheep, which are not from this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one takes it away from Me, but from Myself, I lay it down. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

John 10:3, 11, 16-18

God will accomplish all His purposes for salvation in the world. Not one plan will fail. Not one person whom God intends to save will be lost. Not one name written in the Lamb’s book of life will be unaccounted for on the final day (Rev. 21:27). He will find all His sheep and lead them safely home. Aren’t you glad that our good shepherd didn’t stop pursuing you until you were found? Aren’t you glad for Jesus’ determination to “go after the one which is lost until he finds it” (Luke 14:4)? In fact, the only reason why we will be found is because of the Lord’s initiative to find us.

Jesus said that of all who have been given to the Son, not a single one will be lost, but all will be raised up on the final day (John 6:39). There is an absolute certainty in the promise of our Lord that “All that the Father gives Me *will* come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out” (John 6:37). It was the Lord’s initiative to find us, even when we didn’t want to be found. The testimony of every Christian is the same as Augustine in his commentary on Psalm 69, “Lord, You first sought me out and brought me back on Your shoulder.”

There are several things to observe in this regard from our passage:

1. “...*he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*” (John 10:3). First, the good Shepherd knows His own sheep by name. He has always known them. He has always loved them. Every name “written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” is a name precious to our Shepherd (Rev. 17:8). Second, the good Shepherd calls them by name. If they are *known* by Him, then they will be *called* by Him. If they belong to Him, then they will be found by Him. He will not leave a single sheep lost in his or her sins.

2. “*And I have other sheep, which are not from this fold*” (10:16). There are other sheep outside of Israel, from every tribe, whom God has chosen. God desires for all kinds of people to be saved from every nation. We know that the mission of God to glorify Himself will be accomplished. The vision of John in Revelation 7:9 includes a great multitude from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Therefore, we can go with missionary boldness, knowing He will save people from all nations. The vision of Revelation will come true because Jesus has promised to rescue all His sheep from outside the fold of ethnic Israel.

3. “*I must bring them also*” (10:16). Christ will certainly bring them also. God’s missionary endeavors will not fail because He has promised to bring them. They *will* become one flock with one shepherd. Far from discouraging missions and evangelism, the doctrines of God’s sovereign grace encourage us to continue in the work, knowing that God has promised to bring all His sheep home. Before Paul saw many conversions in the city of Corinth, he was tempted to leave the city because of the intense persecution. The Lord encouraged Paul to endure, saying, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent...*for I have many people in this city*” (Acts 18:10). Paul’s encouragement to endure was rooted in the fact that God still had people in that city and that they *would* be saved by Paul’s teaching.

4. "...they will hear My voice" (10:16). They will hear His voice. It is our responsibility to be faithful and scatter the seed of the gospel as widely and as far as we are able as part of an external and general call to salvation. But there is an internal, specific, efficacious, and powerful call to salvation from Christ that will not fail. When anyone hears the call of the Spirit, then they will respond because He calls His sheep, and His sheep will hear and obey. It doesn't depend on our persuasiveness but on God's power to draw people to Himself. We believe that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Our Lord will not leave behind a single sheep of His flock. Those who belong to Him will be found by Him. When we were saved, it was a divine appointment the Lord had arranged. As it says in Acts 13:48, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, *and as many as had been appointed* to eternal life believed." Nothing will stop God from keeping that appointment. No matter how far a person may run from the Lord or how impossible it may seem to us for certain people to be saved, they will never be able to outrun the Hound of Heaven, as Francis Thompson wrote in 1890:

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

*But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me'.*

*Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,
And a Voice above their beat—
'Naught shelters thee, who wilt not shelter Me.'*

There is no rock under which we can hide that the Lord will not find us, nor a pigsty from which the Lord can't bring the prodigal home. God's glory to save and God's sovereignty in His grace are the greatest encouragements for world evangelism and missions. If it is certain that some will be saved, then it is certain that God will use *us* as the means to save them because God's appointment for an unbeliever's salvation is also a divine appointment for someone who will go and share the gospel with them. We preach the gospel because we are commanded, and we trust that God will use us to call the nations to Himself. "The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

I can pray...

- Lord, Jesus, Thank You for seeking us out when we were lost and for Your unyielding pursuit that ensured we were found. Your grace overwhelms us, knowing it was You who first sought us.
- Father, we pray for the 'other sheep' not yet of this fold. Stir our hearts with the same missionary zeal that is driven by Your promise to save people from every nation, tribe, and language.
- God of all comfort, strengthen missionaries and churches facing persecution, and may they not be discouraged. Remind them of Your sovereign presence and the certainty of Your promises, that You have many people in every city yet to be called into Your kingdom

5 | The Shepherd Calls His Sheep

And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father...”^{10:3} To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he brings all his own out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice...¹⁶ And I have other sheep, which are not from this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd...²⁴ The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us openly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me.²⁶ But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

John 6:65; 10:3-4, 16, 24-27

In our last devotion, we mentioned that there are two types of calls to salvation: a general call and a special call. The general call of salvation is a matter of basic Christian faithfulness. We should freely and indiscriminately call all kinds of people to salvation as we share the gospel. The message of the gospel can be summarized in four words: God, Man, Christ, and Response. 1) God is holy, 2) man is sinful, 3) Christ came to save us, and 4) we must respond. We have not fully shared the gospel until we call on men and women to respond to the message of the gospel. There is a choice that every person needs to make when they hear the gospel, and we need to make it clear when we share the gospel what that choice is: either they will choose to submit to King Jesus, or they will continue in their unbelief and

rebellion against Him.

In the general call, we are like the Lord in Isaiah 55: we welcome everyone “who thirsts, [to] come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. (Isa. 55:1). We never know whom God might save, and we should sow gospel seeds far and wide. We believe that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Therefore, we offer it freely.

When we share the gospel, we should be accurate, clear, and courageous. Paul is our example, who prayed for help that in “proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:20). God’s sovereign grace is never used as an excuse for lazy, inaccurate, or half-hearted evangelism in the Bible. We should use our energy persuading and reasoning with men and women to be saved: “So [Paul] was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be present” (Acts 17:17).

As ambassadors for Christ, no Christian should be above pleading, begging, or entreating others to be saved, even to the point of shedding tears: “God is pleading through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20); “remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:31); “I wrote to you with many tears” (2 Cor. 2:4).

God may be pleased to use our tears to move hard hearts. But in the end, we know that it is only God who can save. For that reason, every one of us instinctively prays for God to save our loved ones. Think about the words you choose to use when praying to God on behalf of those whom you love and wish to trust in Christ. What words do you use? “God, save my child! Help them to understand. Draw them to You. Save them from their sins. Shine your light. Bring them to faith. Open their ears to hear. Make them pay attention. Grant them repentance. May Your Spirit speak through me. Soften their hearts. Create in them a pure heart.”

As shown by our prayers, every one of us believes that God has a role to play in supernaturally opening the eyes of the heart and

effectively calling people to Himself. Why is that? Because we know with Jonah and all the prophets that “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). We know that regeneration, or the giving of a new heart and a new birth, is a work of God alone. The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wishes, and we do not know where it comes from (John 3:6-8). We cannot bid the Wind of God to blow upon the heart and give them the new birth. We pray like Ezekiel, asking the Breath of God to breathe upon the dead and bring them to life (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

In our passage of John 10, we learn that it is the powerful voice of Jesus that calls the sheep of His flock together. No matter how far away they may be, His voice will reach them and bring them home. It is no mistake that in the very next passage in John’s Gospel, after Jesus speaks of His powerful voice that calls the sheep of His flock together, Jesus uses His voice to call the dead to life: “He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’” (John 11:43). The voice of God gives life. He can raise the dead to life with a word. The same Word that created light in creation is the same voice that gives the light of salvation. “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

When God calls and draws, it does no violence to a person’s will. Everyone who comes to Christ comes willingly because God has made them willing by opening their eyes to see the surpassing beauty of Christ. When God’s grace calls us to come to Him, we are irresistibly and efficaciously drawn by a vision of the magnificent and compelling majesty of God, seeing Him with new eyes. We say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.” (John 6:68). It is only when the Spirit gives us the new birth that we are able to follow the Lord in faith and repentance freely. “When God works in us, the will, being changed and sweetly breathed on by the Spirit of God, desires and acts not from compulsion but responsively.”¹

The theologian John Gill wrote that God’s grace drawing us to Him is not an exercise of coercive power any more than having our

¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, section 25.

hearts moved by beautiful music is a coercive or violent act:

God in drawing of unwilling, makes willing in the day of His power: He enlightens the understanding, bends the will, gives a heart of flesh, sweetly allures by the power of His grace, and engages the soul to come to Christ, and give up itself to Him; He draws with the bands of love. Drawing, though it supposes power and influence, yet not always coaction and force: music draws the ear, love the heart, and pleasure the mind.²

It is no contradiction to invite an unbeliever to choose to call on the Lord for salvation and to say that it is the Lord who first calls us. Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, said the same: “And it will be that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved...For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as *the Lord our God will call to Himself*” (Acts 2:21, 39). In fact, the only reason why any can call on the Lord is because the Lord first works in their hearts: “And a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening, *whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention* to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14).

Salvation is described as the bringing of the dead to life: “even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5); “And you being dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him” (Col. 2:13). Let us not lose heart but continue praying for our loved one’s salvation, that the Spirit may give them the new birth. And let us not lose heart but continue to persuade them to be reconciled to God.

I can pray...

- Lord, grant us the boldness of Paul to proclaim the Gospel clearly and courageously. Help us to be faithful ambassadors for Christ,

² John Gill, John 6:44. *Exposition of the Bible* (1748).

pleading, begging, and reasoning with all to be reconciled to You, relying on Your strength and guidance.

- Lord, in moments of discouragement or when faced with hard hearts, remind us that salvation belongs to You and that Your word will not return to You empty. Encourage us to continue praying, sharing, and loving those around us with the hope of the gospel, trusting in Your power to save.

6 | The Shepherd Gives Life to the Sheep

So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:7-10

Jesus calls the life that He gives an abundant life. So, how exactly abundant is the life that He gives abundantly? It is as abundant as the God who gives it, for He gives of His own self. If Jesus gives life, it is only because “in Him was life” (John 1:4). If Jesus gives the fullness of abundance, it is only because “of His fullness we have received” (1:16). It is overflowing, uncontainable, and more than can be expected. Eternal life is more than merely a “life without dying.” It is a life without dying of a quality without comprehension. It is without shame or regret. It is without corruption or pain. It is without compare and without exaggeration. It is to have a share in the life of Christ.

The eternal life that Christ gives to His people is not something that is different than Himself: “He who eats *My flesh* and drinks *My blood* has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:54). When we believe *in* Christ we are united *to* Christ because what we receive is His entire person in faith—for to have faith is nothing less than to welcome Him without reservation. And what we receive is not mere religious tenets or principles but to welcome God Himself into all of ourselves. To become a Christian is to become a branch vitally connected to and abiding in Christ the vine so that we may have life (15:5). “He who eats *My flesh* and drinks *My blood* abides in Me, and I in him” (6:56). In simple faith a person can eat of Christ, receiving

Him for all of who He offers Himself to be, for “he who *believes* has eternal life” (6:47).

The life He gives is His own fullness of self, and therefore He gives the fullness of life: “*I am* the bread of life” (6:48). Notice that He does not *give* bread. He *is* the bread. He does not *give* life. He *is* life. He is the bread of heaven, like the manna in the wilderness, which descended from heaven to earth to be handled, broken, and received by men (6:51). He is the one who descended from heaven so that He may be lifted up on a cross, so that all who are below may be lifted up with Him to heaven (3:12-15). It is through the means of the assumption of a *human* nature by His incarnation that we are given His perfect *human* obedience under the Law.

And through receiving His person, we are also given the fullness of His *divine* nature. He gives Himself to us—all of Himself—both His divine nature and His human nature. “For of His *fullness* we have all received, and grace upon grace,” and this fullness that we have received is the grace that is none other than what the Son has eternally received from His Father—a grace and glory that is the same as the Father’s own glory: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, *glory as of the only begotten from the Father*, full of grace and truth” and “of His fullness we have all received” (1:14, 16). The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, meaning He is of the same essence and nature as the Father. The Son is Light of Light, very God of very God, as it says in the Creed of Nicea (325). His glory is the Father’s glory. If the Son is full of grace and truth, and if we have received of His fullness, then we have also received the fullness of the Father and Spirit. If we have the Son in His fullness, then we have the Father and Spirit too.

But how is it possible that we who are human can receive the infinite God? The answer is the incarnation. It is by the Son taking of His humanity into divinity that the human nature is elevated, redeemed, exalted, and restored to the place that God intended it to have. As the Athanasian Creed states: “Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but *by taking of that manhood into God*. One

altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.” Therefore, Jesus Christ is the perfection and exaltation of humanity, and in Him we may be perfected and restored. He is the Son who makes us sons. He is the Word of the Father that brought the world into existence, and by that same Word the world may be restored.

If you’re an architect, you build a building based on the conception or the plan that’s in the mind of the architect. So, you might think of the blueprint. You build a building according to the blueprint. That’s like the Word of the Father—the eternal conception in the Father’s mind. And then, if that building falls into ruin, how do you restore it? You go back to the original blueprint, and you restore it according to that plan. So, in that sense, it’s fitting for the Word to be incarnate, to be the one through whom creation is restored because He’s the one through whom creation was made.¹

By taking in Christ to ourselves by faith we have taken in the Eternal Son who took in our humanity to Himself in the incarnation to the end that He may take our humanity to His divinity. As Jesus prayed to the Father in the garden: “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (17:21–23)

Therefore, the life that Jesus gives to His people is as vast and abundant as the immensity of God’s own being. It is an unfathomable and incomprehensible life of unending joy, as deep and as boundless as the joy that belongs to the blessed God. Through Christ, the door, we are led to the most abundant pastures. And yet we are not led to something other than Christ. Through the door of Christ we are led to Christ. God is the entrance, and God is the reward. He is the door, and He is the pasture. The good news of the gospel is communion

¹ Dominic Legge, “Does the Incarnation Change God?” *Credo Podcast*, December 26, 2023

with the *God* of the gospel. For this reason, Christianity is exclusive. Eternal life is *only* in Christ because eternal life is a share in Christ. Therefore no other religion can lead you to heaven. The triune God is the joy of heaven. If you reject the triune God, then you have rejected eternal life. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (17:3)

Unto the end that we may see the Son with unclouded vision in the beautiful vision, and by beholding we may have the fullness of life in the knowledge of the triune God. “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that *they may see My glory* which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (17:24). In the giving of His life we have life. And we will never perish because the self-existent God will never die, and He shares with us of His own self.

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life. Thank You for the fullness of life He offers, a life marked by Your own divine abundance, grace upon grace.
- Father, we pray for those who search for life and fulfillment apart from You. Reveal to them the truth that eternal life and true joy are found only in knowing You and Your Son, Jesus Christ. Use our lives as witnesses to Your love and grace.
- Father, our deepest desire is to see Your glory and to be with Christ where He is. Strengthen our hope and anticipation for the day when we will experience eternal life in its fullness, seeing You face to face and sharing in Your divine joy forever.

7 | The Shepherd Holds the Sheep

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.

John 10:27-30

What hope do Christians have that they will never be lost but make it to heaven in the end? Do we look to our baptism? Do we look to when we were a child and walked an aisle? Do we look to our church membership, or even to our own good deeds? When we examine this passage in John 10, the hope Jesus wants His people to have is in God’s will to save and God’s ability to accomplish His will.

It is the will of God that His people will endure to the end. That is the only reason why anyone will make it to heaven. And God will accomplish all His will. If you are a child of God, then it was God’s intention for you to become His child and *forever remain* His child. If you have been born again, then you are one who was born “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, *but of God.*” (John 1:13). Ultimately, your decision to become a Christian was *God’s* decision first. It was God’s will that made you His child.

Before the foundations of the earth, He knew you, and because He foreknew you, He will *forever* know you as His child: “Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:29-30). The Puritan William Perkins called

this passage the golden chain of salvation. It is an unbreakable golden chain that reaches from eternity past into eternity future. No man can sever it. Every link is securely forged by God, and if God was the one who foreknew us, then that guarantees He will also glorify us. It is so certain that the apostle Paul spoke of our future glorification in the past tense as if it were something that has already happened.

There are several special promises to consider from our passage in John 10 in regard to eternal security:

1. The Father gave us to the Son for safekeeping. “*My Father, who has given them to Me...*” (10:29). If the Father gave us to the Son, will the Father ever forget us? The very fact that He gave us to the Son is a sign He is ever mindful of us. Because the Father never wanted to lose us, He gave us to the only one who could keep us secure.

Consider the words of Jesus from John 6:39, “Now this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.” The Father’s will is that the Son would never lose us. Will the Son ever disobey His Father? Will the Son ever fail to do all of God’s will? Christ’s endurance, according to His human nature in the garden of Gethsemane, is evidence of His determination to accomplish God’s will. The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that it was by Christ’s human will we were saved—“He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He takes away the first [Old Testament sacrifices] in order to establish the second [atonement by Christ’s willing sacrifice]. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:9-10).

2. Jesus has promised to give eternal life. “*I give eternal life to them...*” (10:28). Christ assumed a human nature, lived obediently under the Law, and gave His life as a sacrifice for sins. He gave His very flesh and blood for us. And anyone who believes in simple childlike faith will be saved. “...he who believes has eternal life...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:47, 54). We are told that the one who *believes* has eternal life, and we are told that the one who *eats* of Christ has eternal

life. Therefore to believe *is* to receive the Lamb of God as their Passover meal, have His blood cover our doorposts, and have His body be our manna that will save our lives in the wilderness of sin. “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). And yet even the generation of Moses died after having been sustained by the manna for forty years. Therefore God has given us Bread that will make us live forever, a Bread that is also His eternal Word. “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). God has given His Word, His own Son, to be our Bread of Life. We live because of the unchangeable promises of God, spoken by the God whose word gives life. And the greatest Word He has given us is His own Son, and on this Bread alone we will live forever.

In light of these great promises, how can a person believe they can lose their salvation? They would have to believe that man cannot actually live on the words that proceed out of the mouth of God. They would have to believe that after having been cleansed by Jesus’ blood, that fountain would lose its power—for their High Priest to no longer live forever and make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him (Heb. 7:25)—for our Head to be content to see His body severed from Him (Eph. 5:23)—for our Husband to be content to see His bride separated from Him (Eph. 5:27).

This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election,¹ flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him,² the oath of God,³ the abiding of his Spirit, and the seed of God within them,⁴ and the nature of the covenant of grace;⁵ from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.⁶

1 Rom. 8:30, 9:11, 16

2 Rom. 5:9, 10; John 14:19

3 Heb. 6:17–18

4 1 John 3:9

5 Jer. 32:40

6 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). 17.2.

3. We are safe in the strong hands of the Father and the Son (and the Spirit). “...no one will snatch them out of My hand....no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (10:28-30). Christ has promised to keep us and secure us according to His humanity through the mission of the incarnation, and He has promised to keep us according to His divinity. If it is the *Father’s* hands keeping us safe, then it is *also* the eternal *Son’s* hands that keep us safe: “I and the Father are one” (10:30). The persons of the Trinity act in unity, having the same divine essence. There is one divine will and power through the one divine nature. The persons of the Trinity act according to nature, and they subsist in *one* divine nature, so therefore, when one acts, *all three* act. If the Father holds us, then the Son holds us (and the Holy Spirit as well). Our eternal security rests in the inseparable operations of the Trinity, for our salvation is *from* the Father, *in* the Son, and *through* the Spirit.

Those whom God has accepted *in the beloved*, effectually called and sanctified *by his Spirit*, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved...and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon...

And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein,⁷ whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit,⁸ come to have their graces and comforts impaired,⁹ have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded,¹⁰ hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves,¹¹ yet shall they renew their

7 Matt. 26:70,72,74

8 Isa. 64:5,9; Eph. 4:30

9 Ps. 51:10,12

10 Ps. 32:3-4

11 2 Sam. 12:14

repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.”¹² ¹³

I can pray...

- Jesus, our Good Shepherd, thank You for the promise that none whom the Father has given You will be lost. Help us to trust more fully in Your safekeeping, knowing that You and the Father are one, and in Your hands we are eternally secure.
- Father, we lift up those who struggle with assurance of their salvation. Reveal to them the depth of Your love and the certainty of Your promises in Christ.
- We adore You, O triune God, for Your unified work in our salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Your inseparable work has secured our eternal life. In You, we have a fortress that cannot be shaken, and our souls find rest

¹² Luke 22:32,61–62

¹³ Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, (17.1, 3)



—
**HOLY
WEEK
READINGS**
—

MARK



1 | Palm Sunday - 11:1-25

written by Mitch Mayfield

And as they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, ² and said to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. ³ And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ you say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately he will send it back here.” ⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. ⁵ And some of the bystanders were saying to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ And they spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and put their garments on it; and He sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their garments in the road, and others spread leafy branches, having cut them from the fields. ⁹ And those who went in front and those who followed were shouting:

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!”

¹¹ And Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.

¹² And on the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. ¹³ And seeing at a distance a fig tree that had leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ And He answered and said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And His disciples were listening.

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; ¹⁶ and He was not permitting anyone

to carry merchandise through the temple. ¹⁷ And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a robbers’ den.” ¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came, they were going out of the city.

²⁰ And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ And being reminded, Peter said to Him, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” ²² And Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. ²³ Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. ²⁴ For this reason I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted to you. ²⁵ And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

Reflection Questions

1. How do we put our faith in action and bear fruit as Christ has called us to? What does that look like in the different areas of our lives? At home, church, school, or the workplace?
2. Are there any areas in our lives where it is difficult for us to submit to our King?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

The gospel of Mark highlights many of the miracles Jesus performed in service to the people around Him. Jesus healed the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-13), calmed the storm before His terrified disciples (4:35-41), raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead (5:21-43), and restored the sight of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). Jesus stated this was His

purpose before His entrance into Jerusalem. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (10:45a). In each of these events, faith has been a key element. Jesus saw the faith of the friends of the paralyzed man. Jesus asked his frightened disciples, “Do you still have no faith” (4:40). Jesus encouraged Jairus, “Do not be afraid, only believe” (5:36). After Bartimaeus cries out for mercy from Jesus, Jesus says, “Go, your faith has saved you” (10:52). Jesus desires for people to have faith that He is going to accomplish His greatest act of service to them; “to give his life a ransom for many” (10:45). And Christ did not just come as any servant but as a servant who is also a king.

Jesus is a powerful king who is worthy of worship and calls for His people to put faith in Him alone. He is the king long waited for by Israel. Even Bartimaeus recognized Jesus’ kingship when he cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me” (10:48). Jesus is a king who is obedient to God’s Word concerning Himself. As Zechariah proclaimed to Israel, “Behold, your king is coming to you; He is righteous and endowed with salvation, lowly and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt” (Zech. 9:9). During this triumphal entry, we see the obedience of the disciples, and the praise the people are giving to Jesus. And for many praising His name, shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD”, it may have been confusing seeing Jesus go up to the temple, look around at everything, and then leave Jerusalem (Mark 11:9-10a). What was this king going to do?

King Jesus ascended back up to the temple the next day and was greatly angered at what was taking place. Jesus showed His anger by driving out those who were buying and selling, overturning money changer tables, and teaching the people concerning the temple. Quoting from Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus declared the temple to be His house, a house for prayer and not for selfish gain and false worship. In His teaching on the temple, Jesus declared Himself king not only of the Jews but also of all nations. The general crowd was astonished at His teaching, but the chief priests and scribes were afraid of Jesus and wanted to destroy Him. The day before, there was praise and obedience, but today, there is rejection and unbelief.

Surrounding these two trips up to the temple, there is an interac-

tion between our Lord and a fig tree. What does the cursing of the fig tree and the teaching concerning it have to do with the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple? The state of Israel is the same as the temple and the fig tree. For the fig tree, there was an abundance of leaves, giving off the appearance of fruitfulness, but no fruit was present. For the temple, an abundance of people attending and making sacrifices, but no real worship. Israel was faithless and fruitless.

Before Christ, our condition was just like that of the nation of Israel. Our failure to bear obedient fruit and lack of faith in our good King has caused us to be cursed, just like the fig tree. Our sins must be removed, and we must be made clean. But instead of ascending to the temple, Christ will ascend to the Mount of Calvary, where He will die, making payment for our sins with His blood. We do not, however, worship a defeated king, but God has shown grace to us in Christ “by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Eph. 1:20-21). Jesus is our conquering king who has come to cleanse His people of all sin and unrighteousness. We are no longer like a fruitless fig tree, but now we abide in Christ the true Vine. May we continue to put our faith in King Jesus and bear fruit in accordance with His grace and power towards us.

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Thank you for cleansing me of all sin and unrighteousness with your blood.
- Thank you for being a King who is trustworthy and faithful where I fall short.
- Thank you for being a King who is powerful enough to provide for all my needs.
- Help me to continue to trust in Your grace and give me strength to abide in You so that I may live a fruitful, obedient life.

2 | Monday - 11:27-12:12

written by Scott Childs

Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, ²⁸ and began saying to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?” ²⁹ And Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me.” ³¹ And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ ³² But if we say, ‘From men?’”—they were afraid of the crowd, for everyone was regarding John to have been a real prophet. ³³ And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

^{12:1} And He began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. ² And at the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vine-growers. ³ And they took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ And again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. ⁶ He had one more, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ ⁸ And they took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not even read this Scripture:

“The stone which the builders rejected, This has become the chief corner stone; ¹¹ This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous

in our eyes’?”

¹²And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the crowd, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

Reflection Questions

1. From yesterday's devotion (Mark 11:15-19), Jesus entered the Temple the day before and cleared out those who sold pigeons and the money changers, teaching that it should be a “house of prayer for all the nations.” Why might the religious leaders feel threatened by Jesus walking in the temple today (Mark 11:27)?

2. Ultimately, if the religious leaders are rejecting Jesus, they are also rejecting who?

3. Jesus includes in his quote of Psalm 118:22-23, “It is marvelous in our eyes.” How might the rejection of Jesus, the Son of God, be a part of God’s purposes that are “marvelous in our eyes” and deserving of God’s praise?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

Growing up, I learned a lot from watching my older brother. Sometimes it was learning what the right thing to do was. But most of the time, it was learning from his mistakes. Probably this sounds very familiar to you, and you have learned things the same way.

Our passage in Mark is a warning passage and climaxes in Mark 12:9. In essence, “Don't be like the religious leaders in rejecting Jesus, for they will be rejected by God and be destroyed.” But there is hope in our passage from Jesus’ parable of the vineyard, which is given to others. Jesus points out that this is in fulfillment of Psalm 118—this is the Lord's doing. We are the “others” in the parable if we have put our faith in Jesus.

Our passage starts innocently enough with Jesus walking in the

temple. The religious leaders come up to Him and ask a very important question, “Who has given you the authority to do the things you have done?” Their question is in reply to what had happened the day before when Jesus came into the temple and drove out the money lenders and those selling pigeons declaring that “they have made God's house a den of thieves.” They are seeking a reason to arrest Him.

Jesus replied in a way that they would be familiar with. It is a way that a Rabbi or teacher would reply: “Answer my question, and I will answer yours.” Jesus' question exposed the hearts of the religious leaders. “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” John's baptism was a baptism of repentance in preparing for God's Kingdom (Matt. 3:2). Their reply of “We do not know” demonstrates their rejection of John the Baptist coming from God. So, Jesus refused to answer directly about who gave Him His authority but instead answered them with a parable.

The parable of the vineyard is the story of Israel and their continued rejection of the prophets of God and, finally, the Son of God. What is shocking in the story is the progression of how the tenants reject and treat the owner's servants and the tenants' distorted conclusion that if they kill the owner's son, they will inherit the vineyard.

When Jesus asked, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?” I wonder if the chief priests, scribes, and elders felt anything. Jesus then pronounces judgment on those who will reject Him as the Messiah. This judgment is of destruction: the owner will come and destroy the tenants.

But Jesus' parable gives us hope. This vineyard that is taken from the tenants is given “to others.” Then, Jesus explained what He meant by quoting Psalm 118:22-23. This same Son, who had been rejected, became the cornerstone. This was God's plan, and it is marvelous or wonderful in our eyes. The next verse in Psalm 118 helps us define how we should react—“This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” We should rejoice that God's plan includes those who have accepted the stone that the builders rejected and have made Him their cornerstone.

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Lord, as we read that those who reject your Son will face judgment, I pray for those that I know who have rejected you. I pray that You would open their eyes and heart to your Good News.
- Thank you, Lord, for Your plan in sending Your Son to be my Savior.
- Lord, help me to rejoice each day that I am right with You through Christ.

3 | Tuesday - 14:1-26

written by Dylan Bacon

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how, after seizing Him in secret, they might kill Him; ²for they were saying, “Not during the festival, lest there be a riot of the people.”

³And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster jar of perfume of very costly pure nard; and she broke the jar and poured it over His head. ⁴But some were indignantly remarking to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? ⁵For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they were scolding her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She did a good work to Me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. ⁸She has done what she could; she anointed My body beforehand for the burial. ⁹And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went away to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. ¹¹And when they heard this, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

¹²And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?” ¹³And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, “The Teacher says, “Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?”” ¹⁵And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there.” ¹⁶And the disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared

the Passover.

¹⁷ And when it was evening He came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—the one who is eating with Me.” ¹⁹ They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, “Surely not I?” ²⁰ And He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, the one who dips with Me in the bowl. ²¹ For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”

²² And while they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is My body.” ²³ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it significant that Jesus was not the victim of a conspiracy but rather the willing participant of a plan He created?
2. What does God’s plan of atonement say about the seriousness of sin and the depth of His love?
3. How do we draw hope and comfort from Jesus’s atoning sacrifice?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

English was one of my favorite subjects in school, especially when we got to critique and analyze literature, plays, and even movies (Full disclosure: I’m a nerd when it comes to this sort of stuff even now). I was taught to identify a literary element called “dramatic irony.” Dramatic irony is when the reader or audience knows something the

characters (usually the protagonists) do not. The audience knows the masked slasher is in the abandoned house the damsel decides to go into; they know that Juliet is just asleep while Romeo thinks she is dead.

In Mark 14:1-26, these real-life events exhibit dramatic irony, which we identify with the benefit of biblical hindsight. The Jews, in their conspiracy with Judas, think they have our Lord in a snare. Even the disciples who have witnessed Jesus sovereignly bring events to pass before their eyes don't grasp the full picture. Yet in these events, Mark is showing us that Jesus not only knows everything that is happening, but He is willingly bringing it about according to God's divine plan. In verses 1-11, we see "The Plan," in verses 12-21, we see "The Passover," and in verses 22-26, we hear "The Purpose." Jesus knew everything about and willingly prepared for His foreplanned atoning sacrifice.

Look at verses 1-11 in "The Plan." In verses 1-3, we see the Jewish conspiracy. They will kill their enemy after the Passover so as not to cause a riot among the people. Then Judas enters into the plot in verses 10-11. Between these brackets, our Lord reveals His knowledge of events in verses 4-9. Jesus permitted the worshipful anointing of perfume, explaining how His time on earth was drawing to a close. The woman of Bethany had anointed His body "beforehand for the burial," as the Lord explains. In the "Passover," we again see Christ keeping things moving along according to God's plan. He remains in Jerusalem and prepares for the Passover, then reveals His knowledge of the "conspiracy." In the ultimate "I know what you think I don't know" moment, Jesus reveals that He is aware of everything happening around Him.

Now, it's worthwhile to pause here briefly and answer a cynical argument about this passage. Like other polarizing leaders of history, the skeptic would say, 'Well, Jesus was under intense pressure from His enemies; He was paranoid that a disciple would betray Him or that someone would finally get to Him.' Mark shuts that thought down with the events in verses 12-16. Everything happens according to Jesus' words, down to the letter, removing any doubt as to His per-

fect knowledge of events. Furthermore, the text indicates that Jesus had no way of knowing one of His disciples was a traitor apart from divine foreknowledge. Finally, His staying in Jerusalem to faithfully carry out the Passover while He knows the truth is not the move of a paranoid cult leader but rather an obedient Suffering Servant.

Finally, we come to “The Purpose” in verses 22-26. Having revealed the reason behind all these things in verse 21, Jesus now elaborates on why His body will be broken, His heel bruised in the bruising of the serpent’s head; His blood will be poured out for the washing away of sins and the ratification of the New Covenant. Jesus knew about and willingly participated in these events for the atonement of His people. Think about that: Jesus, being coequal and coexistent with the Father, was part of developing this plan in eternity past and knew all aspects of it. The plan of the Jews was to take His life, but Jesus’s plan was to give His life for many; their plan was to kill, but His plan was to save. Consider how Jesus perfectly executed the plan of our atonement and salvation, unencumbered by the futile machinations of sinners. Furthermore, Jesus’ resurrection proves the greatest witness to the truth of His words and the acceptability of His sacrifice. The Holy One was not given over to see corruption but suffered, died, and rose triumphant that we might be reconciled to the God from whom we fell so far. No question, no doubt, and no irony remaining.

In closing, the commentator Matthew Henry provides a beautiful exhortation in response to this passage: “Apply this doctrine of Christ crucified to yourselves, and let it be meat and drink to your souls, strengthening, nourishing, and refreshing, to you, and the support and comfort of your spiritual life.”

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Praise God that He is not dependent on or hindered by the plans of man; His will be done.
- Thank the Lord Jesus for knowingly and willingly carrying out the plan for our atonement.

- Pray for a greater hatred for the sin in our hearts which necessitated our atonement.
- Pray for a deeper understanding in our hearts of the grace of God, displayed both in the cross and the empty tomb.

4 | Wednesday - 14:27-42

written by Lucas Aubrey

“Oh how can they?” said Lucy, tears streaming down her cheeks. “The brutes, the brutes!” for now that the first shock was over the shorn face of Aslan looked to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever.

The above-mentioned quote is taken from C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. The context for such tears is that of seeing Aslan, the great Lion, willingly giving himself over to the White Witch in exchange for one of Lucy's brothers, Edmund. To further add to Aslan's humiliation, the Witch's minions are commanded to shave him bare and expose him as the simple cat they perceived him to be. These creatures of darkness, self-deceived as being brave for "capturing" such a great lion, did not see that Aslan was fulfilling what was foretold—of how death itself would be defeated. What seemed to be the moment of great weakness in Aslan turned out to be his greatest triumph and moment of strength.

As we come to the text in Mark 14:26-42, the simple truth stays true, we were never able to carry such a burden. We, as frail humans, were never meant to help bear the cup that Christ was to bear alone. The plan of redemption unfolds before our eyes in the pages of scripture with countless examples of God's "power made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are weak, and Christ is strong to save

“Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Mark 14:25-26). After coming away from a time of fellowship around the Passover table, Jesus and his disciples “went out to the mount of Olives.” The words of verse 25 are left hanging on the reader with the foreboding tone of the unthinkable: the impending death of the Son of Man. How

could this happen? How could the beloved Son of God (Mark 1:11), the one who has authority over creation (5:41; 6:33-49; 11:12-14), demons (3:15), and the dead (6:41-43) partake in death himself? Mark takes his audience to this most confounding point, one which he has been preparing us for throughout the story, and shows that all of this must take place to fulfill all that God has promised to those who will be called according to his purpose. This plan of redemption foretold of a humble savior who must come alone to fulfill the Father's will. With this in mind, Jesus takes his disciples to a place that was familiar to them during their time together, the Mount of Olives.

Read Mark 14:27-31 - And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.'²⁸ But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."²⁹ But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not."³⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that today, this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times."³¹ But Peter kept saying insistently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also.

On their way to a small garden outside of the Mount of Olives, known as Gethsemane, Jesus tells his disciples again what must take place (Mark 9:30-37; 10:32-34). He instead does not speak to what will happen to Him mainly, but what the response will be to such humiliation. Quoting Zechariah 13:7, Jesus tells of what will become of His most devoted followers. Yet, during the unthinkable betrayal, Jesus assures them that He will gather them again and be with them. In His most trying moment, His closest friends would abandon him, and He would die alone, a criminal's death. This, too, must take place so that Jesus can fulfill the foreordained plan of God. Down to the most minute details, this plan of redemption is coming to its climactic end. As his custom, Peter speaks and thus is foiled. The last time Peter opened his mouth to confront the truth of Jesus, he was rebuked (Mark 8:32-33), and this time is no different. We see the zeal

and loyalty in Peter's proclamation, yet Jesus reveals the weakness and true nature of his heart. As before, Jesus must show one of his most trusted disciples that the plan of God cannot be foiled with such weakness of flesh. His willing spirit is seen by some as commendable, but Jesus shows us that his strength is absent to fulfill that which God has willed. A heart weakened by rebuke has two options: one of repentance or one of pride. Peter chooses the latter and is left, along with his brothers, wondering if this rejection and scattering will truly come to pass.

Read Mark 14:32-42 - Then they came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." ³³ And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." ³⁵ And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. ³⁶ And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." ³⁷ And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ And again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. ⁴¹ And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us go; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

As Jesus and his disciples come to the garden, he leaves them to sit and pray while He alone goes off to pray to the Father. The image Mark chooses to paint is one true strength in the Son of Man. Jesus willingly seeks his Father's will in the midst of such dire circumstances.

As the Saviour goes in strength to face His suffering for those He loves, His disciples are overtaken with sleep. How weak they seem now when just moments ago they proclaimed their strength and zeal. Mark poetically shows this weakness in the disciples by the three-fold visitation of the Savior upon His sleeping disciples. Peter's zeal to stay with Jesus through His trials results in a foretelling of his three-fold denial. Now, he is asked to pray but must be roused awake three times. Mark is showing yet again that man can boast of the strength of his own will, yet he is not able to endure. Jesus bows to the Father's will and, in so doing, shows His strength to endure to the end. The cross of Christ cannot be changed or thwarted by the weakness of men. We have a Savior who goes alone in the strength of His might to save to the uttermost. Without fear or weakness, He faces His betrayer and the hands that will put him to death.

As we reflect on the sobering truths that are found in this section of Mark and look back to the foreordained plan of redemption, where the suffering servant would face the wrath of God alone for those whom he loves, let us consider:

Are we a people who know and trust in God's plan of redemption?

Are we a people who might reject the plan of God and try to instill our own way?

Are we a people who seek to pray to the Father through Christ to strengthen us in times of trial and great weakness?

We need a Savior who is mighty to save and whose power is perfected in weakness. Praise God for His power, strength, and obedience that who "redeem[ed] us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14).

Reflection Questions

1. Peter's vehement declarations of loyalty followed by his eventual denial of Jesus provide a stark example of the frailty of human re-

solve. How can we relate to Peter's experience in our own spiritual journeys, and what lessons can we learn about grace, forgiveness, and restoration?

2. Considering the entire narrative, what does this passage teach us about the nature of God's plan of redemption and the human role within it? How does the realization of our own limitations and weaknesses inform our understanding of God's strength and sufficiency?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, we are profoundly grateful for Jesus, who faced the ultimate trial and suffering with perfect obedience and unwavering dedication to Your will. Thank You for His sacrifice, which has opened the way for our salvation.
- We confess our frailty and the many times we, like the disciples, have failed to stay spiritually awake. We acknowledge our need for Your strength in every moment of our lives.
- Lord Jesus, cultivate in us a heart that desires not our own will, but Yours to be done. In every decision and circumstance, may our chief aim be to glorify You and to follow Your example of submission and trust.

5 | Thursday - 14:43-72

written by Michael Pettiette

Surely it was not supposed to go this way. Surely God's plan to save the lost and bring glory to Himself would not include His Son being betrayed, falsely accused, and found guilty in a sham of a trial by His own people.

If we were writing the story of a king coming to have an everlasting dominion foretold by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7:13), the story might include conquering or sweeping restoration, but it would also include the King's closest allies right by His side.

That is not how the story went for Jesus. Long before the betrayal, arrest, and trial of Jesus, prophets foretold that not only would the Christ suffer and die, but He would also be abandoned by all of His disciples.

Does this sound like everything is going wrong? In all actuality, Mark 14:43-72 shows us that everything was going exactly how God the Father said it would happen. It also shows us that Jesus was the only one who knew everything was happening just as the prophets of old had foretold.

Read Mark 14:43-72 out loud with your family:

And immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, and with him was a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." ⁴⁵ And after coming, Judas, having immediately gone to Him, said, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. ⁴⁶ And they laid hands on Him and seized Him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ And Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber?" ⁴⁹ Every day I was

with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place in order that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.”⁵⁰ And they all left Him and fled.

⁵¹ And a young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. ⁵² But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.

⁵³ Then they led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. ⁵⁴ And Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. ⁵⁶ For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. ⁵⁷ And some, standing up, were giving false testimony against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We ourselves heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this sanctuary made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” ⁵⁹ And not even in this way was their testimony consistent. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in their midst and questioned Jesus, saying, “You answer nothing? What are these men testifying against You?” ⁶¹ But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him and said to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” ⁶² And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” ⁶³ And tearing his tunics, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ And some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.

⁶⁶ And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, ⁶⁷ and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.” ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the entryway. ⁶⁹ And when the

servant-girl saw him, she began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is one of them!”⁷⁰ But again he was denying it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are also a Galilean.”⁷¹ But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this man you are talking about!”⁷² And immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said the statement to him, “Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And throwing himself down, he began to cry.

The time has come for Jesus to be betrayed, arrested, and tried. Before this, He spent a final night with His disciples and praying (14:1-42). After this, He would be delivered to Pilate for His death sentence. He would be crucified, and He would die

At the beginning of Mark 14, we see our time and place: Jerusalem two days before the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread. The Chief priests and Scribes want to arrest and kill Jesus in secret, fearing an uproar from the crowd. Though the leaders thought they were acting in stealth and winning a great victory for their cause, their sinful actions would be recorded for all to see for eternity, and their plans for evil would help accomplish God’s ultimate plan of salvation.

In order to accomplish salvation for sinful man, Christ had to suffer and die. This passage directly leads to His death, but it also shows how He suffered. Namely being rejected by His own and abandoned by His closest disciples. He is the only one in this story who knows exactly what is happening and knows that it is going exactly the way it was supposed to go. In Mark chapter 14 alone, we can see that Jesus knows what is coming: “but you do not always have Me,” “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me,” “It is one of the twelve, the one who dips with Me in the bowl,” “today, this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times,” “behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand,” and “you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:7, 18, 20, 30, 42, 62). What an amazing Savior Christ is to pray what He prayed in Mark 14:36—“remove this cup

from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the ten commandments (Exodus 20) are broken by the chief priests, elders, and scribes in Mark 14:43-72? What does this show about the chief priests, elders, and scribes? Without the Holy Spirit, would we be any different from them?
2. People abandon Jesus even to this day. What are some reasons people abandon Jesus? What guards can you put up to ensure you do not abandon your Lord and Savior?
3. The disciples, shown here in Mark 14:42-72 are cowards who would rather be shamed (verse 51) or outright lie (verses 66-72) than stand up for Jesus. Yet in Acts, we see these same men preaching with amazing boldness, going to the ends of the Earth, and even dying for Jesus. What changed from Mark to Acts?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, we thank You that even in the darkest moments, Your sovereign plan is unfolding. We are grateful that Jesus knew all that would happen and willingly submitted to Your will, demonstrating the depth of His love and the certainty of our salvation.
- Jesus, in times of trial and temptation, help us to remain faithful and not abandon You. Strengthen our resolve and faith that we might stand firm in the truth of the gospel, regardless of the cost.
- Father, as we await the return of Christ and the fulfillment of all things, stir in us a deep longing for Your kingdom.

6 | Friday - 15:1-41

And early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Sanhedrin, immediately held council; and binding Jesus, led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. ² And Pilate questioned Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him and said, “You yourself say it.” ³ And the chief priests began to accuse Him of many things. ⁴ Then Pilate was questioning Him again, saying, “You answer nothing? See how many accusations they bring against You!” ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate marveled.

⁶ Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. ⁷ And the man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. ⁸ And the crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. ⁹ And Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” ¹⁰ For he was aware that the chief priests had delivered Him over because of envy. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² And answering again, Pilate was saying to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?” ¹³ And they shouted again, “Crucify Him!” ¹⁴ But Pilate was saying to them, “Why? What evil did He do?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify Him!” ¹⁵ And wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he delivered Him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ So the soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. ¹⁷ And they dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; ¹⁸ and they began to greet Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ¹⁹ And they kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him; and kneeling, they were bowing down before Him. ²⁰ And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify

Him. ²¹ And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the countryside, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to carry His cross.

²² Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. ²³ And they tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide who should take what. ²⁵ Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. ²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

²⁷ And they crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. ²⁸ [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."] ²⁹ And those passing by were blaspheming Him, shaking their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the sanctuary and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself by coming down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way, mocking Him to one another, the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. ³² Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

³³ And when the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ³⁵ And when some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Look, He is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." ³⁷ And Jesus, uttering a loud cry, breathed His last. ³⁸ And the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

⁴⁰ And there were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James

the Less and Joses, and Salome,⁴¹ who, when He was in Galilee, were following Him and serving Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Reflection Questions

1. In this passage, we see Jesus bearing the full wrath of God on the cross as the punishment for sins. How does this portrayal of divine wrath and sacrifice impact your understanding of the nature of God's love and justice?

2. Discuss the theological concept of substitutionary atonement: "He lived the life we should have lived, and He died the death we should have died."

3. We see the progression of betrayal and rejection that Jesus faced leading up to and including His crucifixion. Discuss the significance of each group's (chief priests, crowds, soldiers, passersby, friends, and God) rejection of Jesus. How does understanding these layers of abandonment deepen your understanding of the crucifixion narrative?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

Scene by scene, as Jesus is brought to meet different people, we see greater and greater levels of abuse. As it were, through the trial and crucifixion narratives, Christ slowly ascends to the hill of Golgotha while at the same time slowly descending into ever-deepening levels of agony and abandonment, culminating with the lowest point imaginable: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (15:34).

First, we see the chief priests forsake their Messiah (verses 1-5). Those who should have received Him, having studied the Scriptures their entire lives, chose to renounce Him. Second, the crowds demanded His death, and Pilate abandoned his duty to uphold justice (6-15). Those who should have received Him as king of the Jews

chose to demand His blood, and the man who should have protected the innocent abandoned Him to the mob. Third, the soldiers rejected the Savior and King of the world (16-21), and those who crucified Him cared more for His garments than for His life (22-26). Those who were created by the Son, who ought to have given Him their worship, instead choose to mock, beat, crucify, and rob their Lord. Fourth, those who pass by, and even those crucified on the left and right, mock Him (27-32). Those who listened to His teaching rejected His message and scorned His promise to save. Fifth, His friends and disciples look on and cannot help Him but are only able to grieve at a distance or have already run away (40-41). Jesus is truly alone at this point. The only one left who hadn't forsaken Him was His God. And finally, worst of all, God poured out His divine wrath upon the Son's human soul (33-39).

He has come to this moment alone, bereft of all human friendship and help. The Son, according to His human nature, had perfectly followed God's laws, experiencing uninterrupted communion as a man with His Father, being filled with God's Spirit without measure. Yet on the cross for one terrible moment, He was counted as the worst of sinners, even bearing the full wrath of God as the punishment for sins that His people deserved. Why must Jesus be abandoned by all? Why must He face this terrible moment alone? Because God's sacrifice must be given by God alone. He has no co-redeemers.

It was the compassion of God alone that led Him to assume a human nature in the person of the Son. It was His initiative to save us. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). No one else gave the Son but God alone. No one else loved the world like how God loved the world. Therefore no one else but God will accomplish our redemption.

In the crucifixion, this compassion and love reaches its highest point, where the Son lovingly chose according to His human will to endure the punishment of sin in His human soul, fulfilling the will of God before creation. We were not redeemed with any corruptible thing, whether it be gold, silver, or even man's effort and help, "but

with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (1 Peter 1:19-20)

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, we are deeply grateful for the willing sacrifice of Jesus, who endured betrayal, rejection, and the ultimate punishment on our behalf. His love and obedience, even unto death, demonstrate Your unfathomable love for us.
- Holy Spirit, deepen our understanding of the love displayed on the cross. Help us to grasp how wide, how long, how high, and how deep is the love of Christ, and to live in response to this love with gratitude and faithfulness.
- Lord Jesus, as we remember Your sacrifice, we also eagerly await Your return. Fill our hearts with a yearning for the day when every tear will be wiped away, and we will see You face to face, sharing in Your glory forever

7 | Saturday - 15:42-47

And when evening had already come, because it was Preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent Council member, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ And Pilate wondered if He had died by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He already died. ⁴⁵ And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ And when Joseph had bought a linen cloth and took Him down, he wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He had been laid.

Reflection Questions

1. John Mark may have included a personal and embarrassing story within his Gospel (14:51). Peter had many of his failures on display in the Gospels. How does the inclusion of such personal narratives affect your perception of the authors of the Gospels and their intentions?
2. In the gospel, we learn about the promise of forgiveness and the clothing of righteousness through Jesus. How does this promise influence your understanding of Christian friendships and interpersonal relationships in the local church?
3. How can the stories of failure, shame, and subsequent redemption in the Bible guide Christians in dealing with their own regrets and failures? Discuss ways in which these biblical narratives can provide comfort and direction for personal spiritual growth and development.

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

The Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. It is believed to have been the first written, and Matthew and Luke built much of their structure and stories from Mark. The three together are called the *Synoptics* (“see together”). As such, the accounts in the other two often have more details than Mark’s. However, when a story in Mark has more details than the other Synoptics, it is a point worth examining.

In the arrest of our Lord, Mark alone has the detail of a nameless man who seems to have been awakened from sleep by the noise of the soldiers and chooses to venture out of his home to investigate the crowd while wearing nothing but a linen cloth from his bed (Mark 14:51-52). The soldiers, supposing he was one of the disciples, attempt to grab him, taking the linen cloth and leaving the young man with only his cowardice and deep shame to run naked through the night. Most commentators believe this man is none other than John Mark, cousin to Barnabas and author of the Gospel of Mark.

If you were John Mark, would you have chosen to include this detail of yourself in the Gospel? If we were writing one of the Gospels, we probably wouldn’t have included this autobiographical detail, but John Mark, being a disciple of Peter, recorded for all Christians to read his own shameful cowardice in abandoning his Lord, along with the other disciples. He, too, was like Peter, not ashamed to have his shameful past recorded in the Gospels. He wasn’t afraid to have his foolishness and sin exposed for all the world to read because he knew the death and resurrection of Christ could cover all his shame.

Mark takes special care to use the same word when describing the linen cloth that wrapped the naked body of Jesus: “he wrapped Him in the linen cloth [*sindona*] and laid Him in a tomb” (15:46). “And a young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet [*sindona*] over his naked body; and they seized him” (14:51). John Mark was sinful, naked, and ashamed of his actions, but Christ bore his shame and clothed him with righteousness. Even in the next passage of Jesus’ resurrection, the angel is clothed with shining white robes, showing the progression of glory and joy, covering our shame with the glory and joy of heaven. No matter how ashamed we may

be of our past, Jesus can cleanse us and cover us with His garments of righteousness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9). “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be manifested; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see (Rev. 3:17-18).

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Heavenly Father, like John Mark, we, too, have moments of failure and shame. Help us to bring our sins and failures to You, trusting in Your promise to forgive us and to clothe us in Christ’s righteousness.
- Compassionate Father, we pray for those burdened by shame or guilt from their past. May they experience Your deep cleansing and healing, knowing that in You, they are forgiven, loved, and clothed in righteousness.
- Help us to live in the joy of being forgiven. Teach us to let go of past regrets and to live in the freedom and joy of being clothed in the garments of righteousness You provide.

8 | Easter Sunday - 16:1-8

And when the Sabbath passed, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was very large. ⁵And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. ⁶And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, the place where they laid Him. ⁷But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’” ⁸And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment were gripping them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Reflection Questions

1. The Gospel of Mark is noted for its use of attention-grabbing phrases and a narrative style that lends itself well to being read out loud. What does this teach us about God and ourselves?
2. How does the abrupt ending of Mark's Gospel shape or reinforce your understanding of the resurrection of Jesus?

For family devotion: any other questions or insights about this passage?

The ending of the Gospel of Mark has remained a perplexing question for every generation of Christians. The historiographic and textual critical question is easily answered: Mark 16:9-14 is not original and was not written by John Mark. It was added later by well-intentioned

Christians who sought to bring a satisfying resolution to the story. We know what happens after verse 8: when Christ was raised from the dead He appeared to His disciples, taught, gave promises, commissioned them, and ascended into heaven after 40 days. But Mark does not include these details. We are left like the women, trembling and astonished. We are left to ponder what is the meaning of these things.

Likely the Gospel of Mark was written with the intention of being read out loud. It takes an hour and a half to read, with appropriate pauses and inflections. Mark is filled with details that make it especially pleasing to the ear, with its many attention-grabbing phrases that help to also speed along the narrative: *immediately, and it happened, suddenly, and then, right away, quickly, as soon as*, etc.

There is a tradition of reading and reciting the Gospel of Mark out loud for audiences, including performances from Max McLean and David Suchet. The Reverend Bert Marshall memorized the Gospel of Mark and has been reciting it for crowds for several decades. He writes,

The most powerful and most poignant silence in the Gospel of Mark comes at the end, at verse 8 of Chapter 16. I maintain that if you have not heard the whole Gospel of Mark told aloud straight through, and have not experienced directly the sudden plunge into the abyss of silence at the end, you have not heard the Gospel of Mark. In that shocking silence the story makes itself manifest and burns itself into the minds and hearts of its listeners. “*So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone. They were afraid!*” Pause. Walk out of the room. Count slowly to ten. Walk back in. With very few exceptions, the silence at the end of the story has become the silence of the listeners’ immediate experience. To move from sound to no sound—suddenly, wrenchingly—is to be transported into a story space beyond rational understanding. It is palpable yet indescribable. It is a realm outside the familiar senses, a place of enlightenment, a clearing of light in a forest of primordial darkness, a foreign land. We have traveled far from

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Messiah...”—or perhaps only now just arrived in its presence.¹

If Mark were read aloud to a crowd by evangelists in the early years after Pentecost, no doubt in the silence of the women of verse 8, the crowd would also be silent. They would sit in astonishment while considering these things. They had just been told how the expected Messiah was crucified and buried. They would have heard just a few minutes previously the cry of “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” But out of the darkness of despair, a blazing light of hope suddenly flashed—the tomb was empty! An angel! An announcement! “He is risen! He is not here!” And then silence.

And in that silence, the evangelists of the early church would likely have begun a gospel invitation to the crowd. They would tell of His commission for all to be His disciples and follow Him, of the forgiveness of sins for all who believe, and of Christ’s certain return. May we, too, know our sins to be forgiven and to follow our Lord.

For family devotion: any other questions or comments before we pray?

I can pray...

- Lord God, we stand in awe of the resurrection of Jesus, just as the women were amazed at the empty tomb. Fill our hearts with joy and wonder at the reality that death has been defeated and that Jesus is alive.
- Jesus, in moments of uncertainty and fear, help us to remember the empty tomb and the angel’s message. Strengthen our faith to trust in Your promises, even when the path ahead seems unclear.
- Holy Spirit, guide those who are searching for truth into the profound silence and mystery of Mark’s ending. Use their contemplation to draw them closer to the reality of Jesus’ resurrection and the hope it offers.

¹ Bert Marshall. “The Gospel of Mark Out Loud” *Divine Radiance*, Yale University, Spring, 2015.