



*Together at the  
Foot of the Cross  
Part 2*

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH



# Together at the Foot of the Cross

Part 2

*Lent Devotional* from  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
2023

Written by  
Pastor Joe Meyer



Daily Devotions Questions located on last page of  
this booklet.

**Day Twenty-One—Friday, March 17th**

**“White as Snow”**

**Read Isaiah 1:18/Romans 3:23,24**

We just had a nasty winter-storm blow through and leave behind a hefty layer of snow. Mind you, I’m writing this in mid February, and truth be told, most of us are a little sick of the cold and ice and snow at this point in the season! I’m one of those weirdos that actually loves Winter, but by this time in the season, just like everyone else, I’m all in on Spring making an early-appearance and giving us some relief from the winter temps and precip! Give me Spring and warmer air and give it to me now! In fact, referring to the cold, ice and snow, I said to Robin the other day “I want warmer temps and some serious ‘kay-ak-tion’”...and those of you who know my favorite hobby know what I mean. I even went over to the window and spoke out-loud the old children’s mantra, “Snow, snow, go away, come again some other day!”

Truth be told however, though most of us are sick and tired of the cold and the ice and the snow by mid to late February, we’d all have to admit, regardless of when it comes, snow is actually incredibly beautiful! Of course this latest bout of winter precip basically shut-down the city and people were stuck in their homes and yes, some folks who had-to-go-out, slid into ditches while driving! But what was left behind after the storm pulled out of our state really was absolutely stunning! When I looked out the window earlier to make my proclamation “Snow, snow go away...”, I was genuinely overtaken by the snow’s beauty and majesty in the moment! A brilliantly-bright-white-blanket of snow is about as pure and perfect an image as you can see! The lovely layer of white which fell from the heavens covered up all the dirt and mud and imperfections on the ground, virtually taking them completely away!

Now, if you took a moment to read the Bible passage from Isaiah before launching into this devotion today, you know why I’m mentioning the purity and cleanliness of snow. Isaiah prophesies here about a wonderful truth regarding our Lord and Savior’s work in our sinful lives and does so with a snow imagery that is extremely encouraging to our hearts, minds and souls! Isaiah wrote those now familiar words, *“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool”* Isaiah 1:18.

Amazingly rich imagery here! In your mind's eye, you can easily imagine the stark visual change...moving from deep-dark-scarlet to sparkingly-bright-white! You can visualize being brought from filth and stain, or "scarlet", to cleansed and pure and "white"!

But you can do a lot more than just visualize this truth since, in fact, you have personally experienced this life-altering transformation from God! Again, Isaiah wrote *"Though your sins are like scarlet... they shall be white as snow"* and you know full well that those words are true of every Christian person including you! Of course, you also understand all too well the reality of the "scarlet" nature of your sin. You know the deep and enduring struggle you have with sin and can almost see the "blood red" stains of sin on your hands as a result. You know that each and every one of us stands guilty of sinning against God and sinning against one another. We have to admit then, that our hands (and our lives) are stained deep red by who we are and what we do day after day after day. As Paul would write it in Romans 3:23 *"...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God..."*. Paul certainly could have written there *"...all are stained scarlet...and have fallen short of the glory of God..."*

Having said that however, you're also quite aware of what God has done for you in Jesus! While Paul writes that *"all have sinned..."* in verse twenty-three, he continues this way in Romans 3:24 *"...and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."* In other words, all are "scarlet" but all are also made "pure and white" by Jesus Christ. If you understand the Gospel, then you know that in fact Christ's hands were literally stained scarlet with His own pure and perfect blood spilled on the cross. You know that Jesus' hands were covered in scarlet but they were covered in scarlet that you might be forgiven, set free, and washed clean...as pure and white as snow! In fact, Peter would write these words: *"...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1Peter 1:18,19)*. And it is through that precious blood of Christ, His pure and perfect scarlet blood, that you and I are made *"as white as snow"* as Isaiah would prophesy! Thank you Jesus for seeing our scarlet stains and thank you Jesus for cleansing us with your blood shed on the cross! Amen?

**Day Twenty-Two—Saturday, March 18th**

**“There’s Just Something Different About You!”**

**Read Romans 6:1-4**

If you’ve ever had something change in your life, you may also have had someone (or multiple someones) say, “There’s just something different about you!” You get a haircut or shave a beard and your co-workers say “There’s just something different about you!”. You lose some weight or begin working-out, and your friends say “There’s just something different about you!” When something changes who you were, or perhaps better said, changes who you are, people will notice and sometimes proclaim quizzically “There’s just something different about you!”

In our reading from Romans six for today we’re reminded that in fact the saying “There’s just something different about you!” could be said of every Christian person! Paul writes it this way in verse four *“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father...we too might walk in newness of life.”* Romans 6:4. Paul reminds us here that in our baptism we were intimately connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism appears to be just a little water on the forehead, albeit done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and honestly, it can seem like it’s a no big deal event! But this text is a reminder that in our baptism Christ not only forgave our sins and gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit as Acts 2:38,39 tells us, but also gave us a brand new existence, a brand new life! In our baptism Christ came into our hearts and into our lives and therefore Christians have been completely changed by Him and are enabled to *“...walk in newness of life.”*

When we look closely at who we are day by day, it can, at times, seem like nothing in our lives has changed whatsoever. You look in the mirror and you don’t see any change in who you are and you experience little to no change in what you think, say and do. We know and understand the fact of it...we know we have indeed been given “newness of life” in Jesus.

We cognitively and spiritually grasp the accuracy of Paul's statement here and are indeed further grasped by the amazing nature of our Christ-nature given to us in our baptism! But as we look in the mirror, it sure seems like we're the same ol', same ol' person we've always been! We look in the mirror and when we are truly honest with ourselves, we have to admit that our sin-nature often takes over our Christ-nature. It has been said "The old Adam was drown in the waters of Holy Baptism...but unfortunately he's a good swimmer!" You know the truth of that statement too, don't you.

And yet, in spite of the fact that our sin-nature or "Old Adam" plagues us all the days of our lives, we have indeed been given new life in and new life through Christ. Yes, we have a battle raging in our bodies and in our lives all the days of our lives, but by Christ's death and resurrection and through our baptismal connection to Him by His Holy Spirit, we are enabled to walk in newness of life every day! Yes, we will trip and fall. Yes, we will be entangled by our sin. Yes, we will sometimes consciously wander away from Jesus. But in and through the Risen Christ in our bodies, we are enabled to walk with Jesus in "*newness of life*" in this world nonetheless!

And let me assure you, when you do, when people see the Christ-difference in you, they will wonder and they may just say "There's just something different about you!" And how wonderful is it that we can then tell them exactly what that difference is! Not a hair-cut or work-out or change of clothes, but Christ living in me and Christ living through me too! Thank you Jesus for claiming us in baptism...thank you Jesus for making an eternal difference in our lives! Amen?

***Sunday Devotion—March 19th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is "HE Renews" from Ephesians 2:1-10; Ezekiel 11:17-20.***

***Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

**Day Twenty-Three—Monday, March 20th**  
**“You’re Not the Boss of Me!”**  
**Romans 6:5-18**

Interacting with children is always interesting, but is often, nonetheless, very complicated and can be very difficult at times too. Besides being emotional rollercoasters with the energy of a thousand jet-engines, they can also be, and more often than not are, very strong-willed about what they want and what they don’t want. As such, that strong-will can also cause them to brazenly push-back against any authority figure in their lives, all the way up to and including their parents. But if you’re not their parent, you are definitely subjected to the double-the-push-back-rule and so much more! You tell them to do something and they may just say to you “You’re not the boss of me!” Of course it depends on who they’re talking to since an adult will likely get more deference than a teen baby-sitter would, but just about anyone could be subject to their pushback and hear from their tiny little vocal chords, at close to a hundred decibels mind you, “You’re not the boss of me!”

I mention it because I’d like to take that inappropriate children’s-statement and turn it on its head for a moment. We understand that children expressing to anyone given charge over them “You’re not the boss of me!” is never a good thing and must be controlled and quelled. But for the Christian, embracing and living (and even saying) “You’re not the boss of me!” is actually our calling from God when it comes to our sin and sinfulness! Paul writes it this way in our text: *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”* Romans 6:12,13. We are not only called by God to reject our sin and live for Him, but because we’ve been “brought from death to life” we are empowered by Him to do that very thing! Yesterday’s devotion reminded us of the truth of our sinful human nature and the fact that it clings to us tightly. We remembered that we’ll never shake its effects and/or its ability to hamper our lives in Christ.



We will always struggle between obeying God by following Jesus vs. obeying our sin-nature that wants us to follow our own will and our own desires. Nevertheless, we are to daily shout-out to our sinful human nature “You’re not the boss of me!” Paul writes it this way: *“We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. Romans 6:6.* And then, later on in Romans six, Paul writes this: *“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” Romans 6:16-18.* While our sinful-nature doesn’t go away when we are baptized, through the presence of the Risen Christ in our bodies we are enabled to say “You’re not the boss of me!” since slavery to sin has been broken in our lives and slavery to God and His righteousness has taken its place!

And when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we reject our sinful-human-nature and push back on its false-authority in our lives, we are then enabled to truly live for the One who is highest Authority-Figure and yes, who is in fact, “The Boss of me” ...and you...and everybody else! Paul would write that truth this way: *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Romans 6:11.* Praise you Jesus, we are dead to sin...but praise you Jesus, we are also alive to God! We will struggle every day, but because of the presence of Jesus in our lives, we can also faithfully follow Him in the midst of that struggle. Thank you Jesus for giving us your Spirit... thank you Jesus for being our one, true, Lord and Master! Amen?

## **Day Twenty-Four—Tuesday, March 21st** **“True Freedom”**

### **Read Romans 8:1-8/Isaiah 53:4-6**

In our human existence on this third-rock-from-the-sun, we experience instances of freedom that can be wonderful and impactful and speak into the core of who we are as freedom-loving human beings. There are the more basic instances, like simply being on vacation and the freedom we're given when work isn't necessary and enjoyment is the only "task" for a span of time. Some of us will go to college and university and, after a lot of hard work, experience a definite feeling of release and freedom brought about when graduation happens! Of course it might be a big freedom like retiring or it might be a small freedom like that found in free-times spent reading or praying. And of course, all of us as Americans love the freedoms that the citizens of the USA enjoy...the day to day blessings of being part and parcel of this great and free land. I'm fairly certain that all of us can say that together, we love and embrace the deep blessings of true freedom.

Of course, I can say that about you even if none of the above things were true about you. Even if you've never been on vacation or stepped away from work, you've experienced true freedom. Even if you've never graduated from any institution anywhere, you've experienced true freedom. Even if you're not retired or don't have a moment to yourself, you've experienced true freedom. And no, with this freedom I don't mean our shared American experience of freedom, as great as that may be for all of us! Of course, I think you realize that the "true freedom" I'm speaking of is only found in and through faith in the Lord and Savior, Jesus! Paul writes about freedom in Christ here in Romans eight. *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* Romans 8:1,2.

As you read that verse, I presume that you understand the word condemnation, but have you ever stopped to think that the word "condemnation" once applied to you? Have you ever thought about the fact that prior to having faith in Jesus you were underneath the condemnation of God Almighty? I don't think we think that way about our sinfulness, nor do we think that way about our faith. We were condemned because we were sinners. We were condemned

to a life without God and without hope in this world (See Ephesians 2:11,12). We were furthermore condemned to an eternity without God and without hope...forever!

And yet, I say “were condemned”, past tense, because as deep as the condemnation was, God’s love for us was far deeper! His love drove Him to set us free from the condemnation that we brought on ourselves and fully deserved! Amazingly, the way God gave us this freedom, the way He set us free in Christ, was for Christ to be condemned in our place! Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us that very thing: *“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* Of course Paul would write about this very thing in our reading from Romans 8:3 *“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...”* Truly amazing words here! Truly frightening words here too! The horrors of the cross by itself are enough to make you weak in the knees, but the horrors of the cross coupled with the condemnation which Jesus suffered, are unimaginable! Jesus went through eternal condemnation on the cross in a six hour period! Jesus was condemned for the sins of every man, woman and child that would ever live! He willingly went through it however, in order that by His condemnation you and I could be set free in Him! Though He was guiltless and sinless and pure and perfect, He was nonetheless condemned to die the sinner’s death, and pay the sinner’s price, so that the sinners, and that’s all of us, could be given “true freedom” in Him! Through faith in Christ, I can indeed say that everyone that’s reading this devotion completely understands what it is to have “true freedom” in their lives! I can unequivocally declare about every Christian in the words of Romans 8:1,2, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”* Thank you Jesus for standing in our place! Thank you Jesus for setting us free! Amen?

**Day Twenty-Five—Wednesday, March 22nd**  
**“Don’t Judge a Book by Its Cover”**  
**Read Romans 8:9-11**

*“Don’t judge a book by its cover!”* This famous old saying, spoken by parents and teachers for decades if not centuries, is an important one to hear and to obey, particularly in our day and time. We live in a desperately judgmental time where people violate this principle and rule and do so all the time. People will look on the outside and presume they know what’s on the inside. People will look at a person’s exterior and presume they know what’s residing on their interior...and we all do it and we all do it regularly. We must admit that we are altogether a “judge a book by its cover” people.

But I bring that to you today because while there’s no question that Christians themselves can be guilty of “judging a book by its cover”, Christians can also be the recipients of having their “book cover” judged by others. I say that because all of us have to come clean and confess, particularly in a penitential season like Lent, that as Christians, our “cover”, can be messy and abrasive and sometimes, hateful and hurtful and down-right-ugly! In other words, people can encounter our sinful human nature and therefore see a “cover” on our “book” that’s not-so-nice to look at and indicate that the inside is not-so-nice too. In moments like those, they may very well become down-right judgmental about what’s on inside of you by what they encounter on the outside of you. We have a bad day... we hang onto some bad attitude the Lord is trying to weed out... we blow up and bark at people...we all do and say things that in the moment, make the “cover” of the Christian, look pretty bad. Paul says it this way about our sinful human nature in our text “... *the body is dead because of sin...*”. Being “dead” is perfect imagery for those moments we have a bad day...hang onto some bad attitude...blow up and bark at people! I say that because “dead” has a stench to it. “Dead” is decay and degradation. “Dead” isn’t pretty, not pretty at all! And when someone encounters our “dead” state hanging out on the outside, they can smell the stench, see the decay and degradation, and walk away “judging” our “book” by its not-so-pretty “cover.”

Now before I move on from this, let me remind you that we are called to push away our sinful-selves and live for Jesus in all that we think, say and do. People should not be given a reason to judge you by what they encounter from you! We are called by God to love our neighbor and do so by living for Jesus in a way that they see Him and not us in our words and actions. Paul wrote it this way in Colossians: *“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”* Colossians 3:9,10. Put off old self...put on new self...that’s the call of the Christian...Amen?

With that said, let me remind you of the new self...or better said, let me remind you of what’s on the “inside” of the sometimes ugly “cover” of your “book”. Paul wrote this in our text from Romans 8: *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”* (Verse 11). Your mortal, sinful, dead, body, is quite alive because it is inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God! What is your new self? What’s on the “inside” of your “book”? The very Spirit of Jesus living in and through you!

If then the very Spirit of Jesus lives in you, you need to get out of the way so that people can see Jesus and not you...yes? Please don’t think that living out your sinful human nature is God’s will for your life...it’s not. Get out of the way by putting off the old self so that people can see Jesus in you and know, without a doubt, that the “cover” and the “book” are in sync with one another. More than that, so that people might not be distracted by you and your sinful-self, but instead see Jesus and thereby want to be a Christian too! Thank you Jesus that you’ve given us your Spirit! Thank you Jesus for living in and...living through us as well! Amen?

**Day Twenty-Six—Thursday, March 23rd**

**“Myopic”**

**Read Colossians 3:1-11**

You likely know what the word “myopic” means but let me make sure that you do: “Myopic” is often defined as “near-sighted” and of course, the word “near-sighted” is easily understood...but simply means “the inability to see things that are far away.” You understand those words well. In other words, if you’re “myopic”, you are only able to see things that are right in front of you, right near you, right at your feet. Myopic people can’t see things that are far ahead, far away or in the distance. In fact, if we apply “myopic” to someone’s life and lifestyle and not just their eyesight, you could say that a myopic person is focused on the here and now and so they’re unable to see anything that is coming from a distance or in the future.

I do that for you today because as Christians, you and I are called by God to be far more than a “myopic” people as we live our lives in this world! What does “myopic” look like for a Christian? Well, we Christians can indeed get our heads down, staring at the immediate, making too much of our lives lived in this world or making more of our lives lived in this world than we should. Rather than being focused on Christ and the things of God and things of eternity, we can be focused instead on things temporal, things right around us, things that will never last. Paul writes it this way in our text: *“Since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” Colossians 3:1.*

Notice first of all what is true about you as a Christian here! Notice that Paul reminds us that Christians have already *“...been raised with Christ”!* Most Christians associate *“being raised with Christ”* to the end of time and the Second Coming. But we need to remember that our *temporal lives* lived in this world are lived as *eternal-life-people*, people that have gone from death to life! Paul wrote that very thing in Ephesians two when in verse one he reminds us that we *“...were dead in our trespasses and sins”* but then he further tells us what is true about us by writing *“...but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:4-5.* You were dead but you have in fact already *“been raised with Christ”* as Paul writes it in Colossians 3:1!

What that means however, is that your focus is no longer to be “myopic” in regards to the things of this temporal, fleeting and dying world. Because we’ve been brought from death to life in Christ, we are not to live as head down people, focused on the dead things of this world, but our eyes are instead to be on the living God and the new-life He’s given you through faith and baptism! Paul writes it this way in our text for today: *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Colossians 3:2.* In other words, the Lord doesn’t want you to simply see what’s directly around you, but wants you to also keep your eyes fixed on Jesus the Author and Perfecter of your faith! (See Hebrews 12:2). In fact, more than just keeping your eyes on Jesus as you live in this world, the Lord also wants you to keep your eyes on the future that He has for you in heaven, or as he wrote it there, *“set your minds on things that are above.”*

Now, I need to admit something here: Though the temporal things of earth are broken and therefore decaying and dying, we also know that God gives us good gifts in this world, and in fact, God gives us a good gift through this world. The things we enjoy every single day are indeed gifts from His Almighty hand and should be enjoyed and cherished as such...gifts from God indeed!

But to the point of today, we’re called to remember that the good things of this world are nonetheless temporal, and as such are unfortunately also part of our broken existence! The Lord therefore calls us here in Colossians three to keep our focus on Him and the eternal things, the never-ending blessings, He’s given us in Jesus...eternal and never-ending things that will not decay or die! In fact, it could be said that He calls us to be “myopic” towards Him when it comes to our faith in Jesus! We are called to be “myopic”, focused on the one “thing” that is nearest to us, namely our Lord and Savior Jesus...who lives within us and has caused us to live with Him forever by raising us from the dead! Thank you Jesus for giving us life! Thank you Jesus for keeping our eyes fixed on you! Amen?

**Day Twenty-Seven—Friday, March 24th**  
**“Real Treasure”**  
**Matthew 6:19-21**

Robin and I have watched many seasons of the show “The Curse of Oak Island.” Don’t know if you’ve seen it but it’s a weekly show on the History Channel and has run for more than ten seasons now. The show is less about “the curse” and more about “the treasure”... and that “treasure” is something that was supposedly deposited on Oak Island off of Nova Scotia about three centuries ago. There are all sorts of theories about this island and its supposed massive treasure haul. Many think it was The Knights Templar that came to the island and brought treasures and bounty from all over the world, including the Ark of the Covenant by the way! In fact, they have found some items on the island that date from the early 1700’s including tools, jewelry and other ancient artifacts. They have also found intriguingly high levels of bronze, silver and gold in the water samples from the mine shafts, which has of course, peaked everyone’s interest.

But while they have found things that are cool and historical and some that are even valuable, and while they’ve found elevated bronze, silver and gold in the water samples...truth is, every thing they’ve done so far, every search they’ve made so far in regards to the “main treasure”, has come up totally and completely empty. They have made bore holes in the ground and dug up the dirt and searched the island from head to toe, but there is still no big treasure pile...nothing to write home about...and no Ark of the Covenant either! Even though all that’s true however, they nonetheless ceaselessly talk about finding “the treasure!” Ten years of searching has left them empty-handed, but they nonetheless, invent new ways of trying to find the treasure they have yet to uncover. They are consumed by the treasure and frankly, “see the treasure around every corner”. But pursue it as they may, they keep coming up empty-handed. The earthly treasure they are seeking has left them with nothing but broken hopes and broken hearts and empty hands.

I bring that to you because of our broken hearts...our sin-broken-hearts that is...sin-broken-hearts that also seek the treasure of this world rather than the true Treasure which alone will satisfy us. What I see in the men and women that are searching on Oak Island is a head-down, intense and constant drive for a treasure that hasn’t materialized and the search for which has flat-out left them wanting. But I see that very same thing in so many people around me as they look around this world and see the things of this world as the “treasure” that will satisfy them and make them whole. All of us do it. All of us make too much of this place we call home!



I will of course, encourage you to remember yesterday's devotion and the fact that the things of this world are indeed gifts from God. We can't forget that our very lives lived here are gifts from God, let alone all the other stuff He brings our way! But I also need to remind you here that those things are temporal and therefore will not last into eternity. In truth, they may not last all that long here on earth! Our cars will rust. Our houses will fall apart. Our careers will end. Our memories (and our memory) will fade and falter. Our friends, family and loved ones will die. Jesus said it this way in our text: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal..."* Matthew 6:19. *"Moth and rust"* will indeed *"destroy"* everything that we own or hold-onto in this world...except for one.

You see, there's only one permanent and everlasting treasure and that's your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the eternal life He's given to you! There's only one thing that cannot be touched by the brokenness of this world, and that's your faith in the Risen Christ. Moth? Can't eat away my faith in Jesus! Rust? Can't tarnish or diminish my who I am in Jesus! In fact, not even death itself can do damage to my faith in Jesus! When your faith is your treasure, or better said, when your heart is taken-over by Jesus and what He's done for you, the import of things of this world begin to fade into the background of your life. Remember that wonderful worship song? "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth, will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace!" Let's not simply sing those words, let's also live them every day until that day we see our true Treasure in person...that day when we see our Lord Jesus face to face! Thank you Jesus for capturing our hearts! Thank you Jesus for being our one, true, treasure! Amen?

## **Day Twenty-Eight—Saturday, March 25th**

### **“Drive a Stake Through It!”**

#### **Read Colossians 3:4-17**

I don't really like horror films and in truth, have rarely seen any of them. I have maybe seen two or three in my life-time...I just don't like those things. But that admitted, I do know a few things about one of the horror-film characters, namely, vampires. I suppose I should say that I know what literature and cinema...and “Rabbi Google”...tell me about these fictional characters! Vampires don't like sunlight so they skulk about at night. They don't normally violently kill their victims, it's much more insidious as they slowly drain the blood out of the individual via their vampire fangs. But what about what you can do to ward them off if you encounter one? Well, there are all sorts of options to keep them away. I read that sprinkling mustard seeds on the roof of your house will keep them away. Plant life like “wild rose” and “hawthorn” supposedly work to fend them off, but garlic is the much more common plant-element people lean on. You can go churchy on them and use holy water or crucifixes if need be!

Having said all of that, personally, I would simply want to get rid of them altogether, rather than just ward them off! Makes sense, right? I'd much rather finish the job and put them down completely so that they won't come back for additional blood donations! But if you want to get rid of these blood-suckers you have to put them down, and in order to put them down, you have to drive a stake into their heart! When it comes to vampires you have to go all the way... with the stake in the heart...the problem will die.

Now I bring up all that ridiculously-odd-fictional-folderol, to make a point about something very real in our lives and very frightening too, namely, that is, our sinful human nature. Paul says it this way in our text *“Put to death what is earthly in you.” (Colossians 3:5)*. In a sense, Paul is saying “Drive a stake through it!” in reference to the sins and sinfulness that plague us every day. Our sinful human nature is the very real “vampire” in our lives, that which is then also very good at “sucking the life right out of us”! As such...we need to do more than ward it off, we need to *“put it to death!”* At one time the sinful-human-nature was our master and lord and ran our days. At one time we were managed and directed by our sinful human nature. And I realize that it still seems to be the case and that you often feel ruled by this thing called “original sin”...but when we were baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we were given a new Lord and Master in the Lord Jesus Christ! Your sin-nature no longer has mastery over you and you can indeed put a stake in the heart of it!

The problem with that? It's very hard to kill this particular "vampire" in our life. In fact, at times, it feels like we have a never-ending army of "vampires" within, all trying to drain the Christian-life right out of us! Paul writes about the "blood-suckers" in our life in this way: *"But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."* Colossians 3:8. While that list fits most if not all of us, the truth is, the list is long and the "vampires" are many in everyone's life! What is it for you? What trips you up causing you to sin against God and others, thereby draining the joy out of your life in Christ? Whatever it is, you have to put a stake in its heart! Of course, you will likely have to do so over and over again since we often will conquer one "thing" and have another "thing" pop up in its place!

That admitted, the principle remains, you simply have to put a stake in it, or again, as Paul says it in our text, and to the point of today's devotion, *"Put to death what is earthly in you..."* Each and every day we are not to be conquered or overwhelmed by our sin-nature, but to instead, conquer and bring into submission the things that daily trip us up. Paul wrote it this way in Romans six: *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions."* Romans 6:12. The only way you can do that is to drive a stake in its heart! Let me make sure you understand what I'm saying because the stake I'm referring to is in the shape of a cross! As you encounter sin again and again, you do so remembering what Jesus went through for you because of that sin! As that next misdeed raises its ugly head, you remember Jesus bowing His head in death and the lengths to which Jesus went to redeem you from that misdeed! When *"anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk"* show up and try to overtake you, you remember the condemnation that He endured for you on account of those things...indeed, the "anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk" Jesus endured at the cross for you! In other words, when sin attempts to drain you of the new and abundant life Jesus has given you, you take all of that "cross-talk" and drive the truth of Christ crucified into the heart of that sin! When it comes to sins in your life, you simply have to go all the way and pound a cross-shaped-stake into the heart of it! Thank you Jesus that you have conquered sin, death and the power of the devil for us! Thank you Jesus that you enable us by your Holy Spirit to *"put to death"* and ultimately conquer the sin in our daily lives! Amen?

***Sunday Devotion—March 26th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is "HE Redeems" from Ephesians 1:3-10; Hebrews 9:11-14. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

## Day Twenty-Nine—Monday, March 27th

### “You Ask the Impossible!”

**Mark 7:14-23/Romans 7:22,23**

In the Star Wars movie “The Empire Strikes Back,” we are made privy to the relationship that “Luke Skywalker” has with the “Jedi Master” known as “Yoda.” Luke is the young, up and coming hero of the series and a wanna-be Jedi Master, and Yoda is the 900 year old Master of the Jedi Masters. Luke meets up with Yoda on a planet called “Degoba” and he does so because he needs Yoda to train him in what it means to be a Jedi and help him hone his Jedi skills through that training. During his rigorous regimen, one scene depicts Yoda demanding something from Luke that Luke does not believe he has the strength to do. Yoda demands it of him anyway and Luke slumps down in a frump and responds in frustration “You ask the impossible!”

At times, that’s how I feel too. When I consider my sinful human heart and yet consider what Jesus asks of us in His Word, I am tempted to say the same thing to our Lord and Master! Maybe you feel that way too? “You ask the impossible!” may be on your mind when you consider yours sinful heart, and yet read what our Lord expects of us as His followers!

Our reading gets at why we’d feel that way. These verses from Mark seven remind us of what is true of every, single human being on the planet. Every single human being is, as David wrote it, *“Sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Psalm 51:5.* Jesus said that very thing in our Gospel reading when He proclaims: *“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Mark 7:20-23.* All of the horribly sinful things Jesus elucidates here have a definite point of origin but the frightening thing is that the definite point of origin is inside us, in our human hearts. We are born with it. We cannot shake it. We struggle to even control it. Paul wrote about this struggle in Romans seven this way: *“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” Romans 7:22,23.* Can you relate? I know I can. And at times I feel like pointing to this passage from Romans seven and saying to the Lord “You ask the impossible!”

And yet, in those moments, I also know a very important truth... namely, nothing is impossible for God. Can I do it? Nope...not gonna. Can I suppress my sinful heart and push back the sin that crops up in my life every hour of every day? By myself? Nope, not going to come to pass. I'll just get frustrated with the situation and slump down in a frump and say along with Luke, "You ask the impossible!"

But if God is doing it through me...then we're on to something! Let me repeat, "Nothing is impossible with God!" Perhaps you've heard me say this truth another way: "What God demands...God also provides", and that's especially true in this instance. You see Christian, in and through the Holy Spirit you are indeed able to push back on sin and then, by the power of the same Holy Spirit, live for and obey the Lord Jesus instead! The easiest way to understand that is to remember what Paul wrote in Galatians chapter five: "*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*" Galatians 5:22-24. We are called to display this fruit but...who's fruit is this? You know the answer...it's the fruit of the Holy Spirit, not the fruit of...insert your name here! You are able to display "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*", but you are able to do so because it's not your fruit...it's the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you! Said another way, He doesn't ask impossible after all, because nothing is impossible for the God who chose to make us His living temple! Thank you Jesus for living in us! Thank you Jesus for living through us! Amen?

## **Day Thirty—Tuesday, March 28th**

### **“Wrestling Match”**

#### **Ephesians 6:10-17**

Growing up in a household of boys, impromptu “wrestling matches” happened all of the time and in fact, did so just about every single day. One moment we were calmly watching TV together and the next minute we were rolling around the floor and pushing and pulling and twisting one another into human pretzels. That made for plenty of interesting afternoons at our house...and plenty of times mama yelled “No holes in the walls!”...but it also provided us an easy transition to take part in real wrestling as we got older. Our family loved wrestling in fact, and all of us boys participated in the sport prior-to, as well as during, High School.

What you quickly figure out about wrestling is that on any given day, at any given meet, at any given moment, the tide can turn in the match as to who is in the lead, who is winning. One wrestler takes down the other and not only scores two points but by all appearances looks have taken immediate command of the match. But then the other wrestler switches him out and the match is tied up and the tide has turned. Back and forth it goes and it’s not until the last buzzer buzzes, and the match is over, that you know whose hand will be raised as the victor.

Now, whether or not you participated in wrestling yourself, you are in fact personally involved in a back and forth wrestling match every day! You and I as Christian people are de facto in a wrestling match that is spiritual to be sure, but also one that goes back and forth as to who is winning in the moment. Paul writes about the wrestling match that all of us are in as Christian people in our text from Ephesians six: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:10-12.* Our wrestling match is very, very real but is also very, very frightening! I mean c’mon, I used to quake in my boots at some of the physical opponents I faced at wrestling meets, and yet I read here that I wrestle against spiritual opponents... wrestle against opponents I cannot see? Indeed...indeed we do.

But in the saying of it, you might be moved to say “There’s no way I can win a wrestling match against a spiritual/unseen opponent!” And I’m not gonna kid you, the match is difficult and the opponent is skilled. Being straight up with you? The match is harrowing and the opponent is violently strong! Often, the opponent isn’t just skilled and strong, but the opponent also seems to consistently have the upper hand in the match! It’ll go back and forth but it often seems as if I can’t win no matter what I do! Frankly, some days it feels as if all that’s happening is that I’m being pinned to the ground and unable to even get up!

And yet, I also know that we can win and that we can claim victory over this spiritual and unseen opponent and we can do so every single day...but do so through our Lord and Savior Jesus. Notice how Paul was moved to start this section of Ephesians six: *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might!”* The Lord’s strength and the Lord’s might are ours and the Lord’s strength and the Lord’s might is what gives us victory over our unseen opponent! In fact, though we might struggle back and forth, we should be reminded that Jesus claimed victory for us long ago when He *“wrestled against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic power over this present darkness...”*. His “wrestling match” was done on our behalf and the victory He won as He walked out of the grave on Easter, was won for us too! And that same victorious Lord Jesus then empowers you and gives you victory every day in your grappling with sin and your wrestling match against the spiritual forces of darkness! As you lean into Him as your source for victory, you are therefore *“strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might!”* In and through Him then, at “the last buzzer”, your hand will be raised and the wrestling match of this life will be concluded and indeed, walking into heaven, the victory will belong to you! Thank you Jesus for giving us your strength and power! Thank you Jesus for giving us your victory every day!

**Day Thirty-One—Wednesday, March 29th**  
**“In the Crosshairs”**  
**Ephesians 6:10-17 (again)**

The phrase “In the crosshairs” is one that I’m sure you have heard before and likely fully understand. The phrase comes from the black-wires or black-lines that intersect at right angles in the middle of a gun’s scope so that the shooter of the gun can, with precision, strike the target. We use the phrase then to indicate when someone has a bead on you, or is laser-focused on you, for one reason or another. It could be something like “My boss has to cut four positions in our office and she has me in her crosshairs.” In other words, the boss is going to pull the trigger and let someone go...and you’re the one he or she is focused on. I think you got the idea.

Now...for the truly frightening part of “in the crosshairs” from our text. Being in your boss’s crosshairs is like playing a game of “Candy Land” compared to the crosshairs you and I find ourselves in as Christians. In our last devotion we were reminded that for Christians, our battle in this world is more than a flesh and blood battle. We were reminded that all of us are embroiled in a daily battle with the spiritual forces that are hell-bent on taking us to hell with them. But notice what verse sixteen says to us: *“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one...” Ephesians 6:16.* I can’t speak for you, but while it makes me anxious to be thrust into a battle with the minions of satan, it makes me far more anxious to consider “flaming darts” from satan himself! In fact, one of the more frightening passages of God’s Word is found in Luke 22 and John 13 where, just before the crucifixion of Jesus, satan is described as “entering into Judas Iscariot”! What? Satan himself entering into a person? Every time I read those words I shudder and get chills at the truth of it! How terribly spine-chilling that satan himself entered into the disciple that would ultimately send Jesus to the cross! And yet, you and I are facing off with “the evil-one” too! Granted he’s not “entering into us”, at least that I know of, but nonetheless, as Paul writes it here, we are in his cross-hairs and he is firing his flaming darts our way!



And yet, we have wonderful words of comfort here too! While satan is firing flaming darts at you, you have in your hand your shield of faith given by God Himself! So satan accuses you of the sins of your past and you simply hold up the shield of faith with which you can repel his accusation and be reminded that Jesus paid for those sins! Satan accuses you of not being a “good enough Christian” and you hold up the shield of faith to repel his accusation and remind you that Jesus’ declares you righteous in His sight! Satan accuses and accuses and accuses, and God has given us the shield of faith that over and over again repels his attacks and reminds us of our status as children of God! We therefore can sing both loud and long those wonderful words “I’m no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God!” and satan and his accusations will be sent packing when we do.

You see, this scary thought of satan and his work against us, is also an amazing reminder of your status before God! From all time and eternity you were in God’s cross-hairs too...but you were so in a very good way! Our Lord had a bead on you, but He did so out of His deep and enduring and tireless love for you! And as a result of His love for you, though you deserved His wrath, His cross-hairs of judgment and condemnation were not leveled at you but were instead brought to bear fully and completely on Jesus. Jesus would say it on the cross this way “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” *Matthew 27:46*. Jesus knew the answer to the question because He was indeed forsaken...for you! Jesus was in God’s cross-hairs...Jesus took God’s wrath on the cross...so that you could have salvation and be given the shield of faith from Him! Thank you Jesus for standing in our place! Thank you Jesus for giving us faith! Amen?

**Day Thirty-Two—Thursday, March 30th**  
**“Truly Amazing Grace”**  
**Read 1Timothy 2:1-7**

I have been working for the Lord Jesus for a very long time. In that time span, I've read and studied the Bible and the things of God and have done so deeply and faithfully. What I can unequivocally say about God from my life lived working for Him and my study of Him during that time, is that our Lord is most definitely in charge of all things and He directs all things too. The Lord is completely and fully “sovereign” as we say it. Sovereign of course means that He is the “ruler” but it also means He is all-knowing and all-powerful as well. He is fully in control. He is completely in charge. He owns it all...everyone and...everything. I think you got it, He is the one and only sovereign God!

So, if God is “sovereign”, He gets whatever he wants, right? That seems to naturally follow. “All-knowing and all-powerful”? With that as His “title” He gets whatever He wants, yes? But hang on a second, if He gets whatever He wants, and He wants all to be saved as our text from 1Timothy for today says it, why in the world is it that there are some people who will never become Christians? We know not everyone will become a Christian, Jesus said that very thing. Matthew twenty-two records Jesus saying “*Many are called but few are chosen!*” *Matthew 22:14*. We know that's true because on the planet right now there are eight billion people and only about two billion of those profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior... sounds like “few are chosen” is definitely the reality of our reality. But then, by extrapolation, God *doesn't* actually get *everything* He wants, right?

This is certainly one of the more difficult things to understand about our faith, but one that brings even more love and devotion to the life of the Christian as well. To begin with, does God want all to be saved? Absolutely He does, again, this passage from 1Timothy says so. Paul writes it this way, “*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” *1Timothy 2:3,4*. Therefore, when we read in John 3:16 that “God so loved the world...” we can say without reservation that in truth He did love the world, the whole world! He loved this whole sin-torn world and He loved its broken inhabitants too...even...you and me! He loved us so much in fact, that He willingly came into our world to rescue us, or as Paul wrote it here, to be our “mediator” and our “ransom”. Paul writes this truth about Jesus: “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*” *1Timothy 2:5,6*. The Lord wanted all to be saved and so He made the provision for all to be saved through His “mediator” and “ransom” found in the Lord Jesus.

But hang on...while that's true, we need to deal with the fact that God Almighty doesn't always His way in every single person's heart, mind and soul. How do we reconcile that? How do we deal with that? Well, this is a reminder that our Lord refuses to force anyone to love Him. While our Lord gets the credit for providing our salvation and the Lord gets the credit for bringing us to salvation, He nonetheless will not force anyone to believe in Him. The best example of that is the story of "The Rich Young Ruler" found in Matthew 19:16-30. If you take time to read that story, you'll find out that Jesus called the young ruler to faith but the young ruler nonetheless walked away from Jesus. Jesus said "Follow me!" and in the lives of so many disciples they did just that...but in the case of the young ruler, the extremely wealthy man followed his riches instead. God is a loving Father that in effect says to us "I love you and have what's best for you and it's free and clear and yours!" and yet He doesn't force you to receive what He freely provides for you. That's what true love does.

But there's one more thing here. This is where our Lord proves Himself to be truly amazing and truly loving towards us His creatures! While He wants all to be saved and while He provided for all to be saved in and through Jesus, He knew that not all would be saved. What that means is that even though He knew so many people would never trust in Christ, Jesus nonetheless stood in their place and died for their sins! Would you die for someone who would ultimately reject you? Probably not. But Jesus did! Jesus willingly took the punishment for people who would never, ever believe in Him! John wrote about this truth in 1 John 2:2 *"He is the propitiation (payment) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."* When you consider that truth, the term "Amazing Grace" is wholly accurate and describes this truth, but it hardly captures the depth of God's love for His creation when you realize what He did. Paul wrote about God's love in another Epistle this way: *"...may (you) have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* Ephesians 3:18,19. Truly amazing grace indeed! Thank you Jesus for loving us so much! Thank you Jesus for being our mediator and ransom! Amen?

## **Day Thirty-Three—Friday, March 31st** **“Every Christian’s Role”**

### **Read Ephesians 4:1-8/Galatians 2:20**

On any given team you will find varying gifts, skills and abilities. While there will always be crossover skill-sets, most solid teams bring together people of varying strengths which complement one another and get the job done. This applies to teams at work or teams at play. As you look around the people you work with you could probably elucidate their strengths or abilities and do so fairly accurately. Similarly, if you play on a sports team, you can probably list the gifts and talents given to the players on the team. On any given team there are separated and complementary roles based on the gifts, skills and abilities of the players on that team.

One of the hallmarks of our Christian faith is found in this fact about “teams” as I wrote it above. One of the hallmarks of our Christian faith is found in the truth that the Church is very much like a team and so every Christian then plays a “role” in the overall mission of God in this world! In Romans and in 1Corinthians, both chapter twelve by the way, Paul tells us about the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to God’s people and utilized within God’s Church. God’s Holy Spirit, indwelling all Christians, gives gifts, skills and abilities to the children of God and does so for the whole “team” or “Body of Christ” as Paul identifies us in our text. Paul writes similar language here as is used in 1Corinthians 12 and Romans 12: *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.” Ephesians 4:4.* God gathers us as a “body” and yet uses all of us in different ways and at different times. We are connected to one another and are in sync with one another, operating as a body or a team by the Holy Spirit’s power, to collectively bring about His Gospel mission in our world.

But this is where our text becomes very important for understanding not our separate roles, but our collective role in the Lord’s mission. Pay close attention to what Paul writes in our text: *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3.*

Notice here that while in the life of the Christian Church every Christian has been called to play his or her separate roles, there are things that we're all called to and all have in common. As Paul writes it here, we are all called to *"walk in a manner worthy of your calling"* and therefore called to live in and through Jesus with *"all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love"*. While we certainly all have separate roles in the Body of Christ and while we celebrate the complementary nature of those roles, we also know that all of us are called to live for Jesus by living through the Holy Spirit within us.

In fact, we remember that the description of every Christian's life here in Ephesians four is actually a description the Lord Jesus! Jesus was humble and gentle, coming to us in human form and yet being God Almighty all at the same time! (see Philippians 2:1-11). Jesus came to us with patience as His long-suffering-love was displayed at the cross for those that didn't deserve it! (see 1Timothy 1:16). Jesus came to us with forgiveness or as Paul writes it here, "bearing with us in love", bearing with us through God's love, God's unconditional love given to those who were His enemies! (see Romans 5:10). Again, the description of the life of every Christian, *"walking in a manner worthy of our calling in all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love"* is actually a description of Jesus Himself!

And my Christian friends...that's significant! What you are called to be in this broken world and in your brokenness...is Jesus! We are, altogether, called to be Jesus in this world! Now, I can hear you saying "Nope, can't do it!" and you can likely hear me saying back atcha, "Yes, yes you can!" And I can confidently say "Yes, yes you can!" because of what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20 *"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live...but Christ who lives in me!"* Every Christian's role in this sin-ravaged world is to be Jesus in our every day interpersonal relationships, and therefore Christ lives in you to display His humility, gentleness, patience and love to those around you every day! Thank you Jesus for calling us to faith in you! Thank you Jesus for living in us and through us, using us in this world for faithful service to you! Amen?

**Day Thirty-Four—Saturday, April 1st**  
**“April Fools?”**  
**Read 1John 5:13**

Today devotion is coming to you on the calendar day that has come to be known as “April Fools Day”. I think you’re good when it comes to a definition for “April Fools” but let me make sure you know from the website, [www.history.com](http://www.history.com): “April Fools’ Day—celebrated on April 1 each year—has been celebrated for several centuries by different cultures, though its exact origins remain a mystery. April Fools’ Day traditions include playing hoaxes or practical jokes on others, often yelling ‘April Fools!’ at the end to clue-in the subject of the April Fools’ Day prank. While its exact history is shrouded in mystery, the embrace of April Fools’ Day jokes by the media and major brands has ensured the unofficial holiday’s long life.” Long and the short of “April Fools” in modern times is for the prankster to make someone believe something is true, only for them to find-out later that what they thought was true, was actually a prank, and a lie, and the person being pranked are then further made fun of when they hear a loud “April Fools!” by their “fooler.”

Now, though I’m the one who brought it up, I’m not a huge fan of “April Fools Day.” Just don’t like making people feel stupid and don’t like taking advantage of them so I can get a laugh...so you won’t likely find me playing an April 1st prank on someone today! But I chose to bring it to your attention because sometimes our faith in Jesus can feel like it’s going to turn out to be an “April Fools Day” prank! By that I mean that sometimes it can feel like the faith that we hold might someday just be found to be a fools dream... and...that at some point we’re going to have someone jump out and scream “April Fools!” And in that moment all that we hold dear will all go away like a puff of smoke. We believe we’re forgiven... but it can feel like someone is going to say “April Fools, you’re still in your sins!” We believe we have everlasting, never-ending life... but it can feel like someone is going to say “April Fools, you’re just pushing up daisies!” All the hopes and dreams of life in Jesus now and life with Jesus forever can, at times, feel like someone is going to say “April Fools!” and it will all come to an end and disappear!

Therefore, here enters our text from 1John 5:13! Our 1John text reminds us that there is not even a possibility of “April Fools” to be said about our faith in Jesus! If you’ve heard me preach a time or two you’ve encountered this powerful and wonderful verse from the New Testament and you need to hear it because you need to be overtaken by its truth. The Apostle John writes *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”* 1John 5:13. I presume you can see the underlined? John tells us that our faith is sure and certain! John tells us that we don’t have to just guess, we don’t have to just hope, but we can in fact know without a doubt that we have eternal life through Jesus!

But how can we be so sure it’s not a joke? I know what John wrote, but how can we be sure no one will jump out and say “April Fools!” at the end of our lives? How can we know that we have eternal life? We can for the same reason John could be certain, and how he could, without reservation, write the words of our text. John knew that Jesus died for our sins. John *saw* Jesus dying for our sins on the cross. John likely witnessed everything that led up to Jesus’ death as well. But John saw something else didn’t he? John saw something that made him certain about Jesus and certain about his faith in Jesus. John saw Jesus die, but...John also saw Jesus raised from the dead! John knew that Jesus was alive! John could write *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life”* 1John 5:13 because he knew that Jesus had conquered sin, death and the power of the devil for us! And of course, because John was an eyewitness along with all the other Apostles, we can trust with all of our heart, mind and soul that what he wrote is true. You can know Christian! You can know! You have eternal life, sure and certain eternal life, and you have eternal life through your faith in the Son of God! Thank you Jesus for dying and rising for us! Thank you Jesus for giving us a sure and certain faith in you! Amen?

***Sunday Devotion—April 2nd—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “HE Restores” from Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 5:6-11. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

**Day Thirty-Five—Monday, April 3rd**  
**“To Persuade or not to Persuade”**  
**Read 2Corinthians 5:11-21**

I have often said that if I believe in something, I will talk about that something and in a sense will “sell” that something to whoever will listen to my pitch. If I buy a car and that car is solid and sound, I will talk about that car and in effect, “sell” it to the people who will listen. If I use a contractor that does a fantastic job on our home, I will talk about the contractor and in effect, “sell” their services. If I travel to a beautiful or meaningful place that impacts me greatly, I’ll talk about it and I’ll again, in effect, “sell” it. Let me say it just a little differently...if I really believe in something I will speak to others about that something and be persuasive about the merits and worth of that something.

Here enters our text for today. Paul writes this in verse eleven: *“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.” 2Corinthians 5:11.* In other words, since Jesus has caused us to wholeheartedly believe in what He’s done for us, we’ll talk about it, and yes as we talk about it we’ll attempt to persuade others of the truth of the Gospel message! Having said that of course, I need to admit that as you read that verse, you may just get stuck on the first half of it and have a hard time getting to the “persuasion” part of it. Truth is, before we can get to the idea of persuading people, we actually need to get stuck for a moment as to why Paul wrote what he wrote here in the first part of the verse, namely, *“...knowing the fear of the Lord”*. Why did Paul write about the *“fear of the Lord”* and what does that have to do with persuading others?

To get at an answer we need to step back into verse ten. Paul writes this just before our text *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” 2Corinthians 5:10.* Paul reminds us in this text that at some point in time we will all be called to stand in front of the Lord. We will be separated as Jesus says it in Matthew 25, between the “sheep” or Christians, and the “goats” or non-Christians. Then we’re told that the “sheep” will go to heaven and the “goats” will go to hell. Therefore, Paul is writing about the *“fear of the Lord”* not only the use of “fear” as in honor or respect, but also “fear” as is “you might want to be afraid.” Just in case you’re not sure about that, let me remind you what Hebrews says: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:31.* Indeed, indeed it is.



So, as we look around us and see the lost, see those people who do not know Jesus as they're Savior, we are moved to not only talk about the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus Christ, but also to "persuade" people to believe in Him! We know unequivocally that we are going to heaven (see yesterday's devotion)! We also know that the only way to heaven is Jesus! We know too that if someone dies or the Second Coming happens and a person is not yet saved, it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God! And so what will we do about it? We must talk about it. We must share the Gospel. We must be used by the Holy Spirit of God to persuade people towards faith in Jesus and His finished work at the Cross and the Grave.

With all of that said however, we do need to admit something here. Are we called to talk about our faith? Yes. Are we called to be persuasive? Yes. But ultimately none of this is up to us. To be sure, you are involved in the process of bringing people to Jesus and Jesus to people by talking about His love. You are used by God to bring people to Jesus and Jesus to people by persuading them of the truth about who He is. But it's absolutely not your job to persuade anyone! 1Corinthians 12:3 is clear "*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.*" Are you involved? Yes. But the persuading is actually done, managed and brought to fruition by the Holy Spirit of God through you! To persuade or not to persuade...that is the question! And the answer is "Yes". You live your faith daily...you talk about Jesus...you persuade other's of His love and by His love...but you leave it in the Lord's hands as the Holy Spirit of God is the one who actually does the work! Thank you Jesus for giving us faith! Thank you Jesus for using us to bring that faith to others! Amen?

**Day Thirty-Six—Tuesday, April 4th**

**“Christ Control?”**

**Read 2Corinthians 5:11-21 (again)/Galatians 5:22,23**

In our day and time, one of the more admirable traits that a person can display is what we call “self-control”. Of course, I say that because folks in our predominantly hedonistic society seem to lack any semblance of self-control about any thing at all! Therefore, if someone does exercise self-control, we are genuinely amazed! I just went to the pantry and was blown-away in this regard! I actually found a completely full package of Oreos that’s been in our pantry for a whole week! Three adults in the same house with a full package of Oreos and no one ate a single morsel-of-goodness for a whole week? Now that’s true self-control! You get the idea and understand the principle: When someone is able to say “no” to the things in life that are detrimental and instead says “yes” to the positive or good-choice-things, we admire them and even envy their self-control!

Interestingly, it’s not just a societal expression, the Bible also talks positively about self-control. Galatians 5:22,23 contains what’s called “The Fruit of the Spirit”. As you likely know, this is the list of the nine things that are given to every Christian by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You’ll likely recall that the fruit are listed this way: “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness...”. Of course all these things are the good things that we’d expect to be given to us from our good and gracious God and also given through us as followers of that same, good and gracious God!

But then Paul adds the ninth of the nine fruits at the end of the list and he uses our term “*self-control*”. So indeed, the Bible does in fact speak about “*self-control*” but the problem with it here in Galatians five is that “*self-control*” is in the list of “*The fruit of the Holy Spirit*”. The other eight sound like God’s attributes, but the last one Paul throws-in is something that sounds like it comes from us! I’d guess I’d have to ask, whose fruit is this? Who is the “*self*” in “*self-control*” here?

Well I bring it all up because Paul answers that question for us in our other text from 2Corinthians chapter five. Paul writes this about our Christian life: *“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”* 2Corinthians 5:14,15. I think you saw it there but let me reiterate it for you *“...the love of Christ controls us.”* We are reminded here that the “self control” of Galatians 5:22,23 is in fact a fruit of the Holy Spirit because though it is “control of self”, my “self” is now inextricably linked with Jesus through the Holy Spirit of God!

It’s important at this point to remember how Paul gets at explaining why he wrote *“...the love of Christ controls us”*? Paul reminds us there that the Christian is a Christian because they’ve died to themselves. Paul writes it this way: *“...one has died for all (that’s Jesus), therefore all have died (that’s you and me).”* We know that Jesus spilled His precious blood for our sins and that when He did, He *“died for all.”* But we also know that our connection to Jesus has brought the death of our self and linked us forever with Him in newness of life. Romans six reminds us of that very thing: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”* Romans 6:3,4. In our baptism, we were connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus and in that moment, we not only died to self, but also came under the rule and reign, came under the control, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the term “self control” for the Christian is genuinely better called “Christ control!” “Christ control” is what the Holy Spirit brings to every Christian every day! Paul wrote it this way in our text: *“...He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.”* Christ-control moves us to live for Jesus instead of being self-centered and selfish! Christ-control causes us to follow Jesus into this world instead of walking our own path! Thank you Jesus that you use us in this world! Thank you Jesus that you came into our hearts and that you walk with us the whole of our lives! Amen?

## Day Thirty-Seven—Wednesday, April 5th

**“Trade Ya!”**

**Read 2Corinthians 5:11-21 (again)**

When I was a kid, I would often hear the phrase “Trade ya!” exclaimed by my friends at school and elsewhere. What most often precipitated the phrase was when one of us had something that another of us wanted to get ahold of. If your friend had an amazing looking peanut butter and jelly sandwich at lunch, you might hear “Trade ya!” as someone tried to barter for it with what was normally a lesser item. Might be a Reese’s peanut butter cup, might be a cool t-shirt, might be all sorts of things...but “Trade ya!” generally meant that someone was trying to *trade-up* for something better for themselves than what they had to offer in return.

It should be absolutely incredible to us then, that the truth of the cross of Jesus is actually the exact opposite! In a very real sense, at the cross, our Lord said “Trade ya!” to you and me! Of course, what makes it incredible and amazing is that Jesus went to the cross to trade His righteousness...for our sinfulness! He didn’t *trade up*, He *traded down* instead! What? I think you’d agree we definitely got the better end of the deal! Paul writes it this way in verse twenty-one of our text: *“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Instead of trading-up, when Jesus said “Trade ya!” He got our sin and we got His righteousness...but that’s why He came and what He wanted!

Think about that truth for a moment. The book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was exactly like us in every way. Jesus was absolutely 100% human being and therefore experienced all the things we experience, including temptation to sin. Having said that, Jesus shared every attribute and experience of every single human...except for one! The writer to the Hebrews writes it this way: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* Hebrews 4:15. Jesus was indeed 100% human and Jesus was indeed tempted as we are, but unlike us, Jesus was the perfect, pure and sinless Son of God all the days of His life!

And yet, this pure and perfect Son of God nonetheless said “Trade ya!” at the cross. In a very real way Jesus said “I’ll take your sin... and I’ll give you my righteousness in exchange.” And indeed He did. Jesus took in His person the due penalty of our sin and sinfulness. What that actually means is something that we cannot truly fathom, after all, Paul tells us here that Jesus “became sin” on the cross. We often say “Jesus died for my sins” or “Jesus took my punishment”... both true. But when he wrote that Jesus “became sin”, Paul gets at the gravity of what it meant that Jesus was punished for all the sins of all the people that would ever live. Jesus becoming sin is certainly beyond our ability to understand, beyond our ability to comprehend, but we do get it, it was beyond horrific and terrible and yet, it was all done by Him and for us!

Indeed, it was done for us. Our sin would keep us from God and His presence forever. We had to be made righteous or we’d die in our sin and die in our sin forever, because even our “righteousness” was no “righteousness” at all. Isaiah wrote it this way: *“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” Isaiah 64:6.* All that we had to offer to God was our sin-filled-polluted-garment-selves, and so Jesus came to us and said “Trade ya!” Jesus came into our world because He wanted to trade our sinfulness in exchange for His righteousness. When we come to faith in Jesus we are then not only declared righteous by God on account of Christ, but when we stand before Him at His throne, we are indeed righteous in His sight and welcomed into heaven itself!

As you come to the celebration of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, celebrate this year with deep thankfulness in your heart mind and soul, knowing that Jesus has made you righteous and made you righteous forever! Thank you Jesus for exchanging our sin for your righteousness! Thank you Jesus for your love for us! Amen?

**Day Thirty-Eight—Maundy Thursday, April 6th**  
**Read 1Corinthians 11:17-26; Matthew 26:26-29**  
**Consider these questions as you prep for going to worship:**

1) What do you know about the term “Maundy Thursday”?

2) Why do you think Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper? What’s its Old Testament background and how is that helpful?

3) How has your love for Jesus grown as a result of receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus on a regular basis?

**Day Thirty-Nine—Good Friday, April 7th**

**Read Matthew 26:36-27:66 (Known as “The Passion” narrative)**

**Consider these questions as you prep for going to worship:**

1) With this fresh reading of the last hours of Jesus’ life, what jumps out at you this time?

2) Is it hard for you to read what happened to Jesus? What emotions do you feel as you do?



3) If you were asked to describe what Jesus did to someone, how would you describe it from what you've just read?

**Day Forty—Saturday, April 8th**

**Read Matthew 28:1-20**

**Consider these questions as you prep for Easter worship:**

1) What are some of your favorite Easter memories? What are your favorite memories in regard to Easter Worship?

2) What disciple do you relate to the most at Easter? Thomas? Peter? John? Mary Magdalene? Road to Emmaus guys? Why did you choose that person(s)?

3) What will you do differently this week, month, year...as a result of the truth of the Resurrection in your life?

## **Daily Devotion Questions**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?



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