

Heart to Heart

Written by Jeff Bradshaw, United Missions, Inc.

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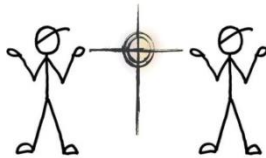
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Heart 4 God
(Spiritual Formation Journey)

Mark 12:30 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...”



The **Heart 4 God** series of writings are meant to lift hearts up to be loved by God and to love Him and others:

1. Heart to Heart (Devotions on the Gospel of John)
2. The Light of Christ and God's Kingdom (walking in relationship, covenant with God)
3. Righteous Heart and Radical Love (The Gospel Life which sets God's children apart)

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i. Introduction

John 9:35 *Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"* ³⁶*"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."* ³⁷*Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."* ³⁸*Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.*

This encounter in the Gospel of John occurs after Jesus has healed this man who was born blind. Since this man was blind when he walked away from Jesus with mud in his eyes, he had never seen Jesus before this encounter. The Pharisees have thrown the previously blind man out of their presence because he told them that Jesus was sent to him by God. This is a very special encounter as Christ himself is standing before the man and asking him "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Many today will tell you that they too had a personal encounter with Christ as they came to faith, were in a time of crisis or during worship. Faith comes by the Spirit of God and when faith in Christ is quickened in our hearts there will be encounters with the Son of Man.

A series of devotions have been written on the Gospel of John with the hope that many through faith will encounter Jesus repeatedly as they read the devotions. Although the Bible can be difficult to read, faith in Christ has a way of opening up the Scriptures and speaking into our lives. Our Lord desires to plant, water and harvest His Living Word in us as we encounter Him. As we encounter Him daily, He inhabits our thoughts, words and deeds. Daily encounters with God's Living Word will change our lives radically just like the blind man's life was changed in the healing story found in John 9.

Make a daily appointment by setting aside a time and place where you can sit comfortably and meditate upon these devotions which take the reader through the Gospel of John. Most of us have been taught how to consume written material quickly for information. Fight the tendency to read quickly. Rather, read slowly through these devotions with the expectation of encountering Christ. Re-read them as well. Our devotional time is a time for us to fellowship with our God in Spirit and Truth. Some even journal in a notebook or electronic notepad to capture what they have received during their devotional times. It's strongly encouraged to do this to extend the written devotions that have been provided.

As you begin this devotional journey, I want to share this timeless blessing from the book of Numbers 6:24-26 with you:

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you and
be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and
give you peace.”

28. Go now and leave your life of sin

Reading (John 8:1-11)

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ²At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Reflection:

The Mount of Olives is directly east of the city of Jerusalem. It stands 200 feet above Mount Zion and from there Jesus had a clear view of Jerusalem and the temple. Jesus enjoyed this view every evening before returning to Jerusalem the next morning. Has it ever helped you during difficult times to step away and look from a distance at what's at the heart of your life challenge?

The Pharisees were threatened as Jesus' teachings appeared to come in conflict with God's Law. It certainly conflicted with their interpretation of the Law. We will never know exactly what Jesus wrote on the ground but what type of message might the words have been communicating? In the story of the "Garden of Eden", man is formed out of the dust.

Now Jesus is forming a profound message, a key to understanding His teaching in the dust as He writes. To the Pharisees, this woman's life was like dust but to Jesus she was a dear heart whom He desired to form into something extravagant for God. The Pharisees' interpretation of "The Law" was incapable of restoring this woman as according to their interpretation she must be returned to dust (put to death). Jesus' Teachings (Way) bring forgiveness and life into desperate situations like this woman who was trapped by sin found herself in. Do you believe Jesus thought the woman caught in adultery was guilty of sin? Of course, but His Way is able to separate and restore the woman from her sin without taking her life. His Teachings offered eternal holiness to her life.

In verse 6, Jesus doesn't speak with the Pharisees but writes on the ground. He knew the hearts of all those judging and the one standing in judgment before Him. Now, go ahead and envision His handwriting on the ground. Could He be writing "My love conquers all sin"? What might Christ write if you or I were standing in judgment before Him? Would His writing point to one saved by grace of His life and teachings or one cursed by the law that the Pharisees' practiced?

Do you believe that verse 7 teaches us that we can never judge anybody because we are sinners? The issue here isn't about judging sin. It's the way the leaders are attempting to remove sin that has been judged by Jesus. We should re-read verse 11 and take it to heart for ourselves. There are two parts to this verse: the first part of the verse talks about "no one condemning the woman"; and the second part talks about "leaving a life of sin". It's very significant that at the end of this verse we find Jesus all alone with the woman. Only Jesus, the Righteous One, can take away the condemnation of God's wrath from us and place us on the path of freedom from sin. We should remember that as we look at others' struggling with sin. All need to be connected to the life and teachings of Christ which speak life NOT death into the soul of humanity.

Perhaps, as Jesus viewed Jerusalem and the Holy Temple of God from the Mount of Olives each morning, He found himself reflecting upon His love being sent to the world and the need for Him to go to Calvary to remove sin' hold on you and me. At the cost of His own life, he willfully went into Jerusalem during Passion week to share the Good News about what the Father of Creation was doing, bringing eternal life and NOT death into the world.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You stand now on the heavenly Mount of Olives looking down upon my heart and soul. I am forever thankful for Your perfect obedience and that now there is no condemnation for me as I trust in You. You always knew that judging by appearance is not the way our Heavenly Father wanted to bring about true holiness. Rather, your taught about being centered in God's holy love which draws His people of faith to holiness. Help me Lord to distance myself from ALL that is displeasing in Your sight and to embrace Your grace and its power over sin...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe that God desires to remove all the sin inside our hearts and replace it with the love of Christ? As you keep your eyes on Jesus, do you believe that His life is faithfully removing sin from God's children? Can you hear His words "go now and leave your life of sin?"

29. I am the light of the world

Reading (John 8:12-20)

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. ¹⁶But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. ¹⁷In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. ¹⁸I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." ¹⁹Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Reflection:

Photosynthesis is a physical life process found in plants that uses sunlight to produce cell growth. This life process requires the sun to shine on this world. As plants grow healthy, their growth testifies to the existence of the star in the solar system we call the sun. "Faith in Christ" like photosynthesis can be thought as a corresponding spiritual life process. It produces life as its power shines upon human hearts. The "light of the world", Jesus bears eternal life as God's eternal light shines on many hearts and draws them to become fruit bearing vessels that witness to His light by loving God and others. Jesus is the Father's true testimony, the life-giving light for the world sent to arise in hearts daily. The Pharisees kept a system of laws for living that gave witness to God's holy standard for righteousness (holy love). The "Light of Christ" came to eternally yoke God's holy love with human hearts.

In John's Epistle, 1st John 1:5, it's written that "God is light." Also, in the same Epistle, 1st John 4:16, it's written that "God is love." The light of the Pharisaical teaching was incapable of connecting both God's mercy and justice to one's heart. Their paranoia about being obedient to their interpretation of God's law had caused them to miss the "spirit of the law", God's redeeming love at its best. On the other hand, God's light shining through Christ was bringing His children of faith to walk the marriage of God's holiness (justice) and love (mercy). There's a stark difference between the light of Christ (grace and power) and the light of the Pharisees strict teaching as we look at Scripture. How were the people outside of Jerusalem living who worked hard just to survive? What was their glaring need?

In Verse 14, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they have no idea where He came from or where He was going. They interpreted Scripture as: a way to be separated from the world; a way to achieve holiness and a way to establish a religious (air-tight) system which pleased God via 613 commandments. Consequently, their eyes were always on their self-righteousness and not looking for the Word made flesh coming down from heaven. They missed the heart of God in Scripture (Hosea 6:6) and His desire to provide to this world a Savior (messiah) to separate ALL people (including the Pharisees) from the hold of sin, death and the grave.

Scripture spoke of the coming of the Messiah throughout its prophecies in the Old Testament. John the Baptist warned that the time had come to prepare hearts for Christ. The Pharisees remained hard hearted despite this warning and others about their shortsighted, human judgment. They had no clue about how God would mercifully overcome ALL sin. That the Messiah would take upon Himself the judgment of sin on the cross. The Pharisees' lack of insight was based upon their 613 commandments (mizvot). Jesus was bringing to light the power of His one commandment, "to love another". The Lord's love which covers a multitude of sins was about to be revealed.

In Christ God is testifying, He is shining His light upon the “Way of Redeeming Love” which was coming to abide in the hearts of His people and to draw all nations to His gift of eternal life. Repeatedly, God spoke to the Jewish people through the prophets about His light and its purpose coming in verses such as: Isaiah 9:1-2, Hosea 6:6 and John 3:16-17. As Jesus testifies above, can you hear God speaking “listen to my Son” as His Son declares “I am the light of the world!”? Through the light of Christ, God’s grace has come and now one must choose: 1) Do I follow Jesus (the light of the world) and His one commandment for eternal life (to selflessly love one another); OR 2) Do I create my own way to self-centered love and self-serving justice (righteousness) which is doomed to fail like those religious commandments that the Pharisees had created.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are “The Light of the World”. Let your redeeming love and Holy Way of abundant life guide me to Your eternal holiness and justice, Your Kingdom coming down from heaven to earth. Your holy “light and love” removes the darkness of sin from my heart and replaces it with Your life-giving righteousness and mercy. I pray that You continue to shine Your light Lord upon my life forever...

Personal Insight:

Shouldn't knowing the Gospel truth change the way we approach life as we trust in the light of Jesus to lead the way?

30. What I have heard from him I tell the world

Reading (John 8:21-30)

Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." ²²This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" ²³But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ²⁴I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." ²⁵"Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. ²⁶"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." ²⁷They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. ²⁸So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." ³⁰Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

Reflection:

Jesus was speaking to men (Pharisees) who were considered some of the greatest holy men of their time. Yet, Jesus is drawing a stark difference between himself and the Pharisees. ("you are from below...you will indeed die in your sins.") God's holiness comes from heaven above and shall return to heaven when Jesus leaves. In Mark 10:18 Jesus shares "no one is good except God." The spiritual pride of the Pharisees keeps them blinded to the words of the prophets such as Isaiah. They are looking at someone who wasn't one of their own star pupils or a man of means (royalty) standing before them. Their pride prevents them from believing that this was God's only, begotten Son. The holiness of Christ would return to earth through His righteousness on Pentecost to equip and empower the church to follow Jesus but NOT unbelievers like the Pharisees.

In verse 24, Jesus has judged the current Jewish leadership as corrupted by their sin. The Pharisees thought they were the ones living a righteous life but Jesus condemns their overreaching interpretation of the law and its inability to lead the people away from sin to heaven (verse 21). When we ask people the question “Do you believe you are going to heaven?” many will answer “yes, because they are a good person.” They believed their self-righteous deeds will move God’s heart to bring them into heaven. After hearing these words spoken by Jesus to the Pharisees we know that even being a good Jew won’t save people from their sins. The Pharisees worked daily to be good people and follow the Law but their efforts failed to satisfy God’s sinless standard for “thoughts, words and deeds”.

The early patriarchs of the faith and God’s prophets sent to guide Israel, heard God’s voice. In verse 26, Jesus tells them He has been sent with a message from God. However, the Jewish leaders followed their predecessors who focused on the Law and never would consider the “spirit (heart) of the law”. Jesus and His message continue to fall on the deaf ears of the Pharisees. Even after God has sent both John the Baptist and Jesus their ears remain closed to the words of both messengers from the Father in Heaven. The religious leaders were afraid to listen to the voice of God as Moses had instructed them to do in Duet. 30:20. Their disobedience was leading them to die in their sin.

In verse 28, Jesus’ words clearly allude to the cross, His destiny. He knew very well that He alone was sent to bring forgiveness to God’s people who were dying in their sin (verse 29) as they followed their leaders. As the Pharisees ignored God’s words given by Jesus and the prophets before Him, they would become pawns (rather than co-laborers) in serving God’s greater good as His Son was lifted up on the cross. Do you believe Jesus was willing to die for the sins of the Pharisees who persecuted Him as well? Listen to these words spoken by Jesus on the cross “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for being so bold as You shared the Father's message despite its consequences for You. Your Gospel message has brought me eternal life and unending access to Your righteousness. May Your life given for me, continue to move me to listen for Your voice which gives instruction on how to share Your message; a message which points to the goodness of God and leads many to follow Your heaven-sent words...

Personal Insight:

Are you pressing into the words of Christ and letting the message of Jesus' forgiveness go out from your life into the world? Did you know that you can hear clearly the voice of God through the heaven-sent words of Jesus as you live to love God and others?

31. The truth will set you free

Reading (John 8:31-38)

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.

Reflection:

Recently, I heard some powerful testimonies in church from some women (guests in our church) who had earlier in their life made the unfortunate choice to abort a child they were carrying. They shared how they had dealt with the abortion both before and after they came to know "the truth." When Jesus stepped into their lives, they received total healing and total freedom from their sins, even the abortions. In addition, they now possessed a greater reverence for the sanctity of life as God's love for them (His word) has become real.

The "Living Word" in Christ is truth that sets us free from "sin, death and the grave". This truth brings about a radical life changing impact on believers as they believe that God will love them eternally through His Son; they have received the word of Jesus. This new freedom (gift of eternal life) releases believers from the wages of sin (death) and opens the door of understanding to a deeper level regarding the gift and sanctity of life. God desires all to come into this light (understanding) through faith in the words of His Son.

In verses 34-36, Jesus talks about slavery and freedom from sin. How is it possible for us to be free from our sin? What did the Jews in verse 33 believe set them free from sin? We know that Jews who followed their religious practices claimed that their obedience made them clean (free from sin). However, their religious practices never completely removed their inward sin (sin nature) which we all struggle with as we fail to perfectly love God. Christians believe Christ has set them free from ALL sin by His death on the cross (payment for our sins). The finished work of Christ on the cross produces righteous sons and daughters unto God. Those who live under the law are living as slaves under sin unto death (Romans 6:23).

God's truth in Jesus was bringing us freedom from sin through a perfect (unbreakable) covenant between God the Father and God the Son, our representative of righteousness. Abraham longed for a perfect covenant with God for His children when he offered his own son as a sacrifice to God. God provided the lamb then and now God was providing "The Holy Lamb of God", His Son, again. The Lord's descendants unlike Abraham's, born of sinful man, would be born of the righteous word of Jesus and its promise of eternal life. His truth is setting hearts free to humbly walk with God in His justice and mercy (Micah 6:8).

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for setting me free from sin. Sin came into this world to separate me from God. You came into the world to reconcile me to God. Although, I battle in this life with inward temptation and sin, Your truth, Your righteousness word sets me free daily from being held captive by sin. Lead me to rest in Your truth, Your gift of forgiveness and righteousness which keeps me abiding in You, Word of Life, forever...

Personal Insight:

How has His truth set your heart free and changed your life? Tell others about His great deeds in your life so that they too may experience the freedom that His word brings...

32. Why is my language not clear to you?

Reading (John 8:39-47)

"Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. ⁴⁰As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Reflections:

There's a popular book written to help couples understand one another called "The Five Love Languages". It's used to counsel married couples on how to better understand one another. Couples struggle to understand one another when they love their spouse in a way that the other don't recognize as love. Apparently, the Pharisees lack the understanding of God's love languages because Jesus' words are falling on deaf ears. This causes Jesus to declare "why is my language not clear to you?" What is preventing the Jewish leaders from receiving the words of Jesus above? They associate loving God only with strict adherence to the Law. They can't understand the other ways that one can love God such as by giving one's life for another. These other love languages are spoken about in Scripture. Jesus questions if the Pharisees truly know God's Word.

In verse 39, the people say that they are aligned with the traditions and teachings passed all the way down from Abraham by claiming that Abraham is their father. However, in verses 39-41, Jesus states that they are behaving like they have another father (the god of this world). How do you believe Abraham would have received Jesus based on Jesus' words in verse 39 and readings like Genesis 18:1-5? (Note: In this reading, we see Abraham as a humble man who was very open to receive God's messengers and the words they shared.)

Abraham walked with God and listened to God by trusting in the messengers God sent to Him. His life of faith was often tested by these messages he received. Abraham wasn't restricted by fulfilling the righteousness of the Law when he listened to God's messengers. He did cherish listening to the voice of God. Jesus is comparing how Abraham acted in faith versus how the religious leaders of Israel act. They had very little space in their religion for hearing from the messengers of God (the prophets). Yet again, the Jewish Authorities, using the excuse of following the Law, would ignore God's message and kill the messenger. Jesus is very blunt in talking about their father as they have consistently rejected God's messengers for generations. Our proclivity for doing things without seeking the heart of God (His love languages) will close our ears and lead us in the opposite direction away from God's will. It prevents us from receiving the gift of God's Spirit and being guided by His "Living Word" to us in one's journey of faith.

How does one approach testing a message we believe is from God? Here are 3 general guidelines for testing a message from the Lord: 1) Does it affirm the Truth? 2) Does it lead us to love God and others? 3) Does it bring glorify God? God desires to speak to His church (bride) which is why He sent Jesus and His Spirit to her. We grow in our ability to hear God as we: worship God, pray, read the Bible and submit our lives to God's plan. His language is simple to understand when we believe that we are His instruments of love, something foreign to the Pharisees.

A popular definition of insanity is “doing things the same way over and over again and expecting different results.” It’s insane to think we can set up rules or traditions that will guarantee that they’ll lead us to perfectly hear and obey God. Jesus is challenging us to be children of faith who listen for God’s instruction. Jesus says in verse 47 “he who belongs to God hears what God says”. Unlike the Pharisees, we must keep our hearts open to hear from God despite our traditions or familiarity with how we’ve had success in the past. We should always be thankful that God is directing loving people to positively impact our lives as He directs us to do the same for others. *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 7:12)”* The knowledge that Jesus personally directs hearts to do this should motivate us to listen and obey when He speaks to us.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for continuing to speak to me. Forgive me when I miss Your direction to love others. You have sent many into my life to bless me. Let your message of agape, heaven-sent love continue to speak to me and through me even when I’m uncomfortable with Your instruction. As I grow in my ability to listen to and obey You, may others hear You and encounter You through my life...

Personal Insight:

Has this section of the Gospel made the words of Jesus more understandable to You? What changes do you believe in one’s life make His words more understandable? Unfortunately, there is a little pharisee in us all...

33. Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day

Reading (John 8:48-59)

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" ⁴⁹"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." ⁵²At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. ⁵³Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" ⁵⁴Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. ⁵⁵Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" ⁵⁸"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" ⁵⁹At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

Reflection:

In verse 51, Jesus' words are of great comfort to us as we hear His promise that anyone who keeps his Word (in their hearts) will never see death. His truth reveals that because of sin, this body we inhabit will be laid down; but through faith an exchange has been made for an eternal, incorruptible life (and body). Where else in this Gospel before now has Jesus shared about the truth about overcoming death? (Note: John 3:16-17, 5:24, 6:29, 8:11-12 and 8:36) Are you keeping His words like these verses alive in your heart? Faith in His Word makes our bodily death but a bump in the road of life. ("absent from the body, present with the Lord" - 2 Cor. 5:8).

In verse 56, Jesus says that “Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day?” Could Abraham’s joy be based upon God’s promise in Genesis 17:6 being fulfilled? Do the words in this verse “he saw it and was glad” reflect that Jesus would be the source of nations and kings being birthed? Abraham, a man of faith believed that God would fulfill his covenant (keep his word) with Abraham and His people. Have you ever been in prayer for a long season and then witnessed God answer your large prayer request based upon His faithfulness to His Word? This should cause one to rejoice like Abraham did as he looked forward to the day of his redeemer coming to earth.

Remember, Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son to purchase this covenant blessing for ALL his descendants, but God would provide an eternally unblemished sacrifice. Now was the appointed time for God to send His Son Jesus to be that perfect sacrifice and fulfill God’s promise to Abraham and us, his descendants, a people of faith across all races and nations with Christian leaders. Abraham believed God’s covenant Word and experienced God’s mercy as his son’s life was spared. The religious people of Jesus’ day have forgotten that the covenant to Abraham was based on God’s mercy and provision to the world (they had tunnel vision).

As Jesus journeys to the cross, we must remember God’s provision, similar but better than Abraham’s at Mount Moriah. Abraham rejoices even now as God’s seed (Jesus) has taken its rightful place above his seed (Isaac). Eternal life couldn’t come from an earthly seed and had to come from the heaven-sent seed, the Holy Spirit Jesus Seed. Believers will have the last laugh (Isaac means laughter) in the face of death which the adversary has wielded against God’s people of faith in this world. As we keep Jesus’ Word (Good News) in our hearts, we realize that God’s message to His people is recorded throughout Scripture (the Bible) and never changes. We worship God and rejoice in seeing it fulfilled now (Matt. 5:17) through the “life, death and resurrection” of our Lord Jesus.

The Jews who rejected Jesus' words didn't believe or failed to understand the message passed down through the patriarchs and prophets of God. It is a message is one of eternal hope being provided by a loving God who never changes. Like Abraham, the Jews of this time offered their sacrifices to God but unlike Abraham they never rejoiced as Abraham did when he understood that God's holiness and mercy was greater than any sacrifice they could make or offer. They saw the justice of God without the fullness of God's love. They misunderstood the importance of covenantal words like these in Hosea 6:6 as our God emphasizes "I desire mercy...". The Law shows us our sin but God's grace leads us to eternal life. The unending day of the Seed of God's mercy had come and even now it's raising up (birthing) sons and daughters of faith, nations and kings.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing God's mercy into clear view. Holy Spirit, I pray that You keep Christ' Word alive and active within me forever. Father, I know I can trust You because of the fulfillment of Your Word in Your Son Jesus. Your faithfulness guarantees that I will spend my days forever praising You for all You have done, all You are doing and all You shall do for Your glory alone...

Personal Insight:

Have you thought about what you will do on the day you see Jesus face to face? Will you be rejoicing like Abraham rejoiced as he saw Jesus? We get to practice for that day by worshipping and adoring the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

34. How then were your eyes opened?

Reading (John 9:1-12)

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." ¹⁰"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. ¹¹He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." ¹²"Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said.

Reflection:

The miracles Jesus performed not only witness to the authority of His Word but also were teachable moments for His disciples. On seeing the blind man, the disciples asked Jesus "who sinned, this man or his parents?" They asked this question because the Pharisees taught that a baby could sin in the womb to explain why God would allow a baby to be born blind. How does Jesus respond to the disciple's question in verses 3-4? Jesus points to the faithful work of God rather than trying to explain every unfortunate situation as caused by an individual's sin. While it is true that humanity now lives in a fallen world caused by sin it serves no greater good for people to identify the cause of suffering. The "Light of the World" had come to illuminate the mercy of God while the Law had illuminated sin.

With the sending of Christ into the world, God desires us to look past the blame for sin (mankind's disobedience) towards the One who is greater than sin, even its consequences (death). In Genesis 1:27, we see the Lord's eternal plan for humanity. God is forming mankind into His image, the greater good. Sin will NOT stop this faithful work of God. Jesus has been sent to remove man's blindness regarding God's faithfulness and to fulfill humanity's calling. Was the Pharisees work and teaching about sin capable of doing what Jesus was sent to do? Jesus wanted His disciples to observe the God's supernatural work of healing blindness through Himself. The Pharisee's teachings about blindness had NOT only been incorrect about the cause of the blindness but caused the Pharisees to be spiritually blind to the faithful work God was about to do. God sent His Son Jesus, their Messiah and King to open both hearts and eyes.

The miracles of Christ pointed to our need for God to supernaturally intercede in our lives. This is God's answer to the pharisee's question "how were your eyes opened?" Jesus has interceded for us miraculously to restore our eyes of faith to believe that God is perfectly making us into His image. What else can we learn from this incredible miracle in the reading above? As we observe what Jesus used to heal this blind man, we see that God can use anything in creation to assist in His work of redemption, even a man born blind. In using spit and mud, we see God using ordinary and readily available materials to produce supernatural healing. Followers of Christ are mindful of this as they share the Gospel through a variety of services provided to others done in the love of Christ.

God is the only One who can bring holiness, the reflection of His being upon our lives. When this truth becomes real to us through Jesus' life given for us, then like this blind man, our eyes are opened as well. How then were your eyes opened? Like the blind man, we encountered a loving God interceding for us. Our "Pool of Siloam" that we were washed in was the "Blood of the Lamb". As He washed the eyes of our heart in His blood, our sight was recovered and we saw His Light.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the faithful work of Your redeeming love which restores spiritual sight to souls. I confess that at times I can focus on the sin of others to use as the blame for my troubles. You desire me to focus on Your faithful work of bringing Your redemption to bear upon my life. The fruit of Your redemption is to equip me to love God and others. It is NOT to lead me to be the judge of what God can or should do as I co-labor with You. Therefore, I pray that You would open my eyes to Your presence so that I can see You every day working to achieve Your greater good in my midst...

Personal Insight:

Is Jesus still interceding for us both naturally and supernaturally? When was the last time when things got difficult that you asked the Lord to open your eyes to His supernatural presence? How did you observe Him working?

35. He listens to the godly man who does his will

Reading (John 9:13-33)

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. ¹⁷Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." ¹⁸The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" ²⁰"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. ²³That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." ²⁴A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God" they said. "We know this man is a sinner." ²⁵He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" ²⁶Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" ²⁸Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does

not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. ³²Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

Reflection:

At times, we have the difficult task of examining another believer's words and actions to see if they line up with God's will. This particular reading focuses on the measuring stick of God's Grace (The New Covenant) versus the measuring stick that the Pharisees used (The Old Covenant) which was based on their interpretation of Mosaic Law. What is the specific dilemma that the Pharisees are dealing with in verse 16? The blind man believes God's work isn't limited by the Pharisees' interpretation of Mosaic Law as he says "Jesus is a prophet" (instrument of God) in verse 17. Why do you think there is such a big difference between the blind man's judgment of Jesus and the Pharisees?

The parents of the blind man are drawn into this dilemma as well. If they tell the Pharisees that their son was born blind, then they will be viewed as people who support Jesus. They know anyone who follows Jesus (who came to reveal God's mercy to mankind) will be banished from the synagogue because of how Jesus' teaching clashes with the Pharisees' understanding of God and faithfulness. Therefore, the parents avoid answering the Pharisee's question and say instead "He is of age; ask him." Like the parents, have you ever bypassed sharing the truth about God's merciful works because it might cause you great trouble?

In verse 25, we see that the blind man believes God has healed him and used Jesus (a godly man) in the process. As he continues to try and share his healing story, he becomes upset with the Pharisees who will not believe his story. He accuses them of wanting to be Jesus' disciples as they wrestle with believing that this miracle occurred.

The Pharisees don't want to believe this story because they believe a godly man wouldn't heal people on the Sabbath. The Pharisees believe that a godly man follows the letter of the law (their measuring stick for righteousness) and proudly declare they are Moses' disciples in verse 28. Their understanding of being obedient to the Mosaic Law clashes with it being possible for this miracle to occur. They wrongly believe this healing is the work of Jesus the sinner. Wrongly, in their eyes they view Jesus as the one who breaks the Law. However, from God's perspective healing a man on the Sabbath is NOT breaking the Law. They refuse to acknowledge that Jesus is like Moses but greater as has come sent from heaven to serve God's people.

God's Holy Word satisfies both the "Spirit of the Law" (love) and the "letter of the law" (holy). God has sent Jesus to fulfill God's Word on our behalf with both perfection in love and holiness. Moses was an instrument of God (a prophet) who brought the law to the people and listened to God. Moses met with God on the Sabbath and did as He commanded. Their unwillingness to accept Jesus as a prophet (sent by God to heal the people) is the real issue here. Certainly, God doesn't want His people to be disobedient to His will. The Pharisees have been disobeying the will of God for some time even though they have made outward attempts to appear as sinless servants of God.

In verse 31, the man previously blind states that "God listens to the godly man who does the Father's will." He must have questioned the godliness of the Pharisees when he was left to beg as he was wrongly judged by the Pharisees as a sinner. The blind man most likely sought a higher understanding of justice than what the Pharisees were satisfied with. The blind man listened to Jesus and was accredited godliness for it. The Pharisees improperly judged the blind man as a sinner deserving of his situation. The Pharisees improperly judged Jesus as a sinner for performing a miracle on the Sabbath. They had become blind to God's justice and found themselves outside of the will of God. Their blindness made them ungodly despite their feeble attempts to look good in front of others.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, because of Your life given for me, I am forgiven and set apart to do my Heavenly Father's will. All who receive You, can know for certain that God hears our prayers. God listens to the godly man. Your Word makes me clean. Your life empowers me to be a vessel for Your Kingdom justice to reach many in this world. Your gift of the godly man of Christ who now lives in me through the Holy Spirit keeps me on the straight and narrow for all eternity. I will always worship You for this is my Father's will and brings Him alone ALL the glory...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe that having a God who hears our prayers to bring about His eternal Kingdom, makes our lives meaningful and impactful to the ends of the earth and time? Didn't Jesus live His life in this fashion? Have you placed your trust in the God who listens to ALL who receive His Son?

36. For judgment I have come into this world

Reading (John 9:34-41)

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." ³⁸Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." ⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" ⁴¹Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Reflection:

The blind man who received his sight through the healing miracle of Jesus, found himself being thrown out by the Pharisees (his accusers) after declaring that Jesus was doing the will of God (verse 33). Sometimes, as we stand for truth, we are rejected like the man who had been healed, for the position we have taken. Other times, like Christ we go to the defense of those who have been rejected for standing up for truth. Jesus sought out this man and told him the truth about whom He was and why He came.

What truth does the blind man ultimately place his faith upon in verse 35-38? He has encountered the "Son of Man" like He is described in Daniel 7:13-14; a heavenly figure that is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power. Often, Jesus uses this title for himself in the Gospels. He is the son of Adam that Eve was looking for after the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:13-16). He is the Righteous One who brings judgment to the unrighteous (spiritually blind) something the Pharisees had become through their blindness; thinking they were sinless.

As Christians, how do we reconcile Scripture's portrayal of Jesus regarding John 3:17 and John 9:39? The Son of Man, Jesus, is the One we place our trust in as our Redeemer. He has been sent to save the world and to bring judgment upon ALL sin. God hates sin NOT the sinner. The Pharisees looked at themselves as being sinless and they hated sinners. From their perspective they were ceremonial clean but from God's perspective their hearts were evil. They needed more than their ceremonies, they needed a new heart and a new life. Jesus has made a way for sin to be judged and for man to be saved from God's judgment of sin. We know that the Son of Man brought both the perfect, all-in-one sacrifice for sin and a new life to share with fallen humanity.

This portrayal of a God who desires them to magnify His perfect love in worship to Him and among others, even their enemies was foreign to them because they looked towards their own strength to accomplish it. The God of mercy (in Hosea) had spoken to them about this in Scripture and their answer remained focused upon satisfying the Law of Moses out of their own understanding and strength. Even Moses the lawgiver was prevented from entering the promised land which should have indicated to them that God required more than they could provide to enter His Promised Land (Isaiah 9:6-7). Often, the Pharisees ignored the prophets who lived by the strength God was soon to give to ALL His people as they trusted His Son to lead them into God's holy, eternal presence, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit (Zech. 4:6)".

Understanding God's eternal plan leads many to thank God for sending His Son to save the world and to bring judgment upon the world. God's children who understand His mercy confess that ALL lives without Jesus are outside of God's holy will and will be judged as unrighteous. Only those whose lives who trust in Christ have been judged righteous. The glory of Jesus is that He loved God and others perfectly. As we trust in His body of work by faith; we are forgiven our sin before God through His Son's sacrifice on the cross and follow Jesus away from sin.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for opening my eyes. As you came into the world to judge sin, you accomplished the work of setting the people of God totally free. By grace through faith alone, my sin has been covered (forgiven) and I am judged innocent. When God looks upon me, He looks upon Your righteousness rather than my unrighteousness. Lord, my sin stands judged so I can live like the blind man in this story whose sight was restored. Help me to give a Jesus-filled witness to ALL I encounter of Your goodness and Your salvation from the eternal judgment of ALL sin in this world...

Personal Insight:

Do you look at and live your life differently now that Your guilt, judgment of sin has been removed by Jesus? Knowing you have been forgiven do you look upon life as an opportunity to tell others what Jesus has done? Jesus can heal every heart suffering from the judgment of sin in this world.

37. He calls his own sheep by name

Reading (John 10:1-10)

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Reflection:

At night when possible the sheep would be kept in a pen for their safety with only one entrance gate so that they could be protected from an attack by a predator. In this reading, Jesus identifies strangers as those who didn't enter through the gate like thieves who came to steal, kill and destroy the flock. If we look ahead to the end of John 10 (next devotion), who can we deduct Jesus was calling thieves and robbers?

At the end of every day, it was common for the shepherd to inspect his sheep as they entered through the gate to determine if they had sustained any injuries during the day while grazing in the pastures. A shepherd not a stranger would provide this sort of care for his sheep. He would run his hands over the sheep to know their problems intimately. Strangers didn't care deeply for the sheep like the shepherd did. In fact, their lack of care made it easier to harm the sheep.

The Sadducees and Pharisees may have been sincere in their attempts to honor God but their care for others (the sheep) was being spoken about by Jesus. A good shepherd looks out for his flock, not just for himself even risking his life to save them. Thieves and robbers look at the sheep only to satisfy their own needs. This is a temptation religious leaders can fall prey to.

Often, a watchman was necessary to assist the shepherd in protecting the sheep at night by guarding the gate while he slept or left. The watchman was supposed to keep unwanted people out and only let the shepherd come and go into the sheep pen at night. Who might be thought of as the watchman in this parable? We believe Jesus could be referring to God's Word and those He entrusted with it (the religious leaders of Israel). Together, they would properly provide care for His flock as God's wisdom would lead God's watchmen to allow His prophets to come and go into the sheep pen. Now, the "Good Shepherd" Himself had arrived and the religious leaders were acting like thieves and robbers. These supposed watchmen were trying to refuse yet another messenger from God, the Son of God, entrance into the pen (the people of Israel).

Despite this, many people (sheep) recognized the "Good Shepherd". His voice was familiar to them as it was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Unlike the deceived watchmen, the "Good Shepherd's" voice had the authority to speak words that were ALWAYS in perfect alignment with God's Word. Jesus was speaking with the Jewish people in the courts of the temple. This was God's fenced in sheep pen for the religious Jews and the watchman (the Sadducees and Pharisees) wanted to prevent Jesus from entering its courts.

Nonetheless, Jesus was able to fulfill his mission and collect God's flock together under God's Eternal Word. He overcame the wayward watchman's attempts to keep ALL the sheep and the world from the Truth, the promises and fulfillment of Scripture. The "Good Shepherd" was calling God's sheep into greener pastures. His sheep were recognizing His voice.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, by the grace of God You have stepped into my community (my pen) and called me by name. From the first time I recognized Your voice, the anointing of the Holy Spirit drew me to whom I belonged, to You. Continue to keep my heart tender to Your Word and eternal ways so that my heart will never stray from Yours. Now, Your chosen flock comes from across the world to inhabit the Eternal Kingdom of God. Your amazing grace leads the way. It's Your staff and Your rod meant to lead, protects and guide Your sheep to share Your life-giving words with others...

Personal Insight:

Have you heard Him calling you by name? Do you believe He cares for you and wants you to know Him intimately? Sheep seem to say "baa, baa, baa" a lot when you're around them and yet the shepherd never berates them for making that sound. As necessary, he gives them the timely assistance they need. Like sheep we call often upon the Lord (baa, baa, baa) and wait for Him to speak over and into our lives as He sees fit, like when we are going astray or are in times of deep need. Forgive all who have misled you as you seek the voice of the Lord...

38: I am the good shepherd

Reading (John 10:11-21)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." ¹⁹At these words the Jews were again divided. ²⁰Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" ²¹But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Reflection:

Unfortunately, we hear and read stories of church leaders falling into sin as they are led astray by temptation. Like the hired hand, their personal interests and lack of love for the flock, have led them astray. Jesus surrendered His life to the Father so that He wouldn't be led astray by the temptations of personal interests and a lack of love for the community He was placed into. Jesus is declaring "I am the Good Shepherd" and "the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (verse 11)" Have you ever served in a leadership role? Have you struggled with making decisions that were void of personal interest? As we are called into leadership positions within the body of Christ (or outside the church for that matter), it's of the utmost importance that we follow the Lord's example and live for God. A good shepherd for God's Kingdom isn't like the hired hand.

Who might be the hired hands whom Jesus is alluding to in his allegorical language in verse 12? Who might have been the wolves of Jesus' day that the Pharisees (the hired hands) may have been abandoning the flock to? The wolves can be any misguided enemy of God's faithful such as the Romans or King Herod who eventually would unwillingly become pawns of a cause greater than themselves. The cause of the pawns who have made their own self-interests king, leads them to become the loveless wolves of this world. As we read the Gospels, we observe God using bad situations like the scattering of His sheep (His remnant of faithful) from the temple (pen) to eventually spread His Gospel message to the world. The "Good Shepherd" has made himself obedient to God's will through the Holy Spirit so that His leadership would NOT be misguided. As Christians we have been called to follow Jesus' model of leadership by being led by the Holy Spirit when serving and loving others in our households, neighborhoods and churches.

What are some of the differences between the world's leadership and Christian leadership? Often, worldly leaders seek to possess tight control over their flocks and they look for ways to be recognized for their good deeds. These worldly leadership qualities were common practices of the Jewish leaders. However, the time for nanny leadership was coming to an end. Now in contrast, look at some of the characteristics of the leadership of the "Good Shepherd" listed in verses 14 and 15 as the Christ was bringing godly leadership back to God's flock. The "Good Shepherd" knew His sheep intimately and His sheep know Him intimately. The "Good Shepherd" intimately knows the Father and the Father intimately knows Him, His Son. The "Good Shepherd" acts separate from personal interest by laying down his life (his will) for His sheep (God's will for His people). Who are the other sheep that Jesus refers to in verse 16? In this verse, our Lord is talking about you and me (the Gentiles whom the Jewish leaders had shunned). Similarly, as we lead in this life, we should NEVER count others out of God's plan for the world (John 3:16-17).

In verses 17-18, we see the greater authority given to Christ over the Jewish leaders. Jesus has the authority to lay down his life and pick it up again. In addition, He has been given authority over our lives both now and forever (after we die). All who follow the “Good Shepherd” (our Lord) will be led into the holy pen (Kingdom of Heaven), which abounds in our Heavenly Father’s mercy. Intimacy with the “Good Shepherd” leads to intimacy with the Father and a life transformed by the Holy Spirit. This is the green pasture Jesus calls us to and leads us to. Can you hear His voice calling you to be with Him in this place He has prepared in advance for you and me? As we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow His voice, we NOT only know that our future is secure in the hands of the “Good Shepherd” but encounter others who need to follow Him.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the “Good Shepherd” who knows me intimately and desires me to know You intimately. May I surrender my heart daily to You. Thank you for coming into this world to lead Your flock out of the hands of worldly leaders. May the confidence I have in Your leadership both guide and empower me to be a good leader born to put others first. There is no better example for living and following when it comes to glorifying my Heavenly Father than Yours. Continue to lead me in Your everlasting Way...

Personal Insight:

Are you following Jesus’ leadership style? Do you believe that Christians are all being called to lead others to Jesus?

39. I and the Father are One

Reading (John 10:22-42)

Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, ²⁶but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one." ³¹Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, ³²but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" ³³"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." ³⁴Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? ³⁵If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— ³⁶what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? ³⁷Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. ³⁸But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." ³⁹Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. ⁴⁰Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed ⁴¹and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." ⁴²And in that place many believed in Jesus.

Reflection:

Have you ever met someone who you found yourself drawn to because they were a believer and your souls were connected by the Holy Spirit? The work of the wooing of the Holy Spirit has brought about the consummation of the soul to Christ in believers and made us one. We read about this work of the Holy Spirit wooing the Jews as Jesus spoke to them. However, as their doubt remained, there was still a great divide between their hearts and Jesus' new life for them. Does Jesus believe He has been keeping them in suspense? His words were anointed with the Holy Spirit (Remember, the guards saying "we have never heard anyone speak like this" in devotion 27?) The people were resistant to both the Truth (Jesus' testimony) and the Holy Spirit. The bond that believers share is the bond of new life that Jesus has brought to His flock. The Holy Spirit brings this bond into our lives as faith in Christ makes us one with God.

What was it that finally caused you to surrender to the wooing of the Holy Spirit and place your faith in Jesus? In this reading above Jesus speaks of the miracles He has done. The greatest miracle in this world was Christ' resurrection and the second greatest miracle will be our own resurrection, yet to come. Jesus' miracles came from God and this leads Jesus to say in verse 30 "I and the Father are One." His miracles show His ministry to be united with the Father. It was God's time for His King to come through the lineage of the people of Israel. Jesus is God's Eternal King sent to all people. He is more than the king the people of the Old Testament asked God to give them, someone like Moses, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. (1st Samuel 8:7-8)". Jesus, the Son of God is a Redeeming King who the people rejected. The Father and Son were one in heart in desiring to join God's Heavenly King with His Heavenly Kingdom come to earth. Meanwhile, His spiritual leaders at that time were ready to stone Jesus for His miracles.

In verses 27-30 Jesus shares with the Jews plainly about the work His miracles are pointing towards. Those who listen to Jesus and believe Him as they witnessed His teachings and miracles at work share in His promise of eternal life. God's Heavenly Kingdom (and Kingship) shall be established upon the holy covenant between God the Father and God the Son at the cross. The resurrection guarantees that no one (even death itself) can snatch His subjects (followers) away from His Heavenly Kingdom and covenant promise. The suspense around the revelation of who Jesus claims to be is leading Him to move from metaphoric language to more explicit language to reveal His Heavenly purpose to eternally lead God's people. The time for His ministry and work on earth to be completed is growing closer.

In verse 42, it declares that many had placed their faith in Jesus. How about you, have you placed your faith in the teachings and miracles of Jesus? *“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1st John 5:11)”*. When you believe God's “Good Testimony”, the Word revealed through the life of Christ, you receive eternal life through by believing in the eternal work that Christ and the Holy Spirit accomplishes as it draws many into God's “Kingdom of Heaven” reigning on earth. Just as Jesus declared “the Father and I are one”, He wants us to be joined with His “life, death and resurrection”. This is the reason why the world needs a King, to unite them around His throne of Grace NOT judgment.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I believe that Your life is One in holy substance with my Heavenly Father. Your finished work on earth has given me an unbreakable promise of eternal life with You in heaven that can never be snatched out of Your hands. As You live in me through grace by faith, draw my heart ever closer to my Heavenly Father's heart...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe you are joined to God in Christ? Trust and obey!

40. Lord, the one you love is sick

Reading (John 11:1-16)

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." ⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. ⁷Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." ⁸"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" ⁹Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." ¹¹After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." ¹²His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Reflection:

Imagine being able to spend time with Jesus like the family of "Mary, Martha and Lazarus". In the Gospels as we read about them, we see a family united in its' love for Jesus. Also, this is a family who loves one another very deeply. Seeing this isn't meant to make us jealous of what they shared. Rather, this special family relationship between the Lord and "Mary, Martha and Lazarus" points us towards the kind of relationship God desires between Himself and His holy family, all who follow His Son Jesus (His redeemed).

The words in verse 3, “Lord the one you love is sick”, suggests that the disciples thought that Jesus wasn’t concerned about the health of this blessed family whom He spent time with. Jesus loved the ones who made their home a sanctuary for Him. In this life, our relationship and their family relationship is different because they had time together (face to face) on earth to grow their relationship. However, even as they spent time together on earth, Jesus still knew He must put the Father’s priority (the world) ahead of this special family’s needs. While He doesn’t drop everything for Lazarus’ need, He knows what’s going on and how He will work through the situation in both places (Romans 8:28). Sometimes, both places are this life and the life to come. Trusting in Jesus believes that He has His eyes on eternity even when it looks like all hope is gone.

As we read the complete story over the next few devotions, the need for a strong deep bond with Jesus based on love and trust will be emphasized. Even though this family loved and trusted Jesus, they still had to endure a great test through the death of Lazarus. Verse 4 reminds us that Jesus came into this world to glorify the Father through His deep commitment to God’s eternal plans. As we follow Jesus’ example in this story, we will have times where we are tested to determine where our trust is bound to, the world or the eternal glory of God (John 6:40). Resting in Jesus, demonstrates faith in a God who is glorified as His family believes that He knows what’s eternally best for His children, even when they must endure suffering.

Thomas’ words “let us also go so we may die with him” shows concern about Jesus’ safety as He tells them it’s time to go help Lazarus. Why are the disciples fearful for the Lord as He tells them that He is going to go help Lazarus in verse 8? The disciples are focused on the danger involved with returning to help Lazarus. Jesus is emphasizing to His disciples that they must walk (work) in the light (Truth and Spirit) of God’s purpose and NOT focus on the darkness (of the world). The disciples don’t fully understand how important it is to trust in God’s plan (His Light) for His people no matter the presence of darkness.

The light of day for Jesus; is the time God ordained for His promises about the Messiah to be fulfilled, a time of redeeming the world. The light of day for us personally; is the time God ordained for us to walk in His light on earth as we “do the good works God has prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)” From our perspective we only see this temporary life (light and darkness), however, God sees the “Eternal Light”. In this story, God is going to shine His eternal into the darkness of a world that stands judged. Jesus shares in verses 14-15 that He plans to use Lazarus’ death to strengthen the faith of His disciples as they see Jesus continue to fulfill ALL messianic prophecy found in Scripture. Jesus is fully aware of Lazarus’ situation and the darkness in this world. He knows the one he loves is sick which is why He came into the world. The ultimate question to all is “Will we walk in His Light as the darkness approaches (the judgment of sin and this world)?”

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I confess that disappointments and suffering can cause me to feel unloved and abandoned by You. However, I know that these feelings are far from the truth. Like Your disciples, I must learn to surrender everything to you for You see “the beginning to the end”. Just as You brought Your healing at the proper time, now, I must learn to become an instrument of healing led by Your Spirit. One who waits upon Your timing as they trust that You’re working out what’s eternally best for us all through Your Eternal Light...

Personal Insight:

Do you know that God knows how many hairs are on the top of everyone’s head and how often one’s heart beats daily? Are you engaged in the journey of faith in this life that leads God’s children to learn how to trust in His Son who knows exactly what’s going on in every life and in every moment? Rest in Jesus, The Lord of Life, as you read about His disciples who were the first to learn how to do this...

41. I am the resurrection and the life

Reading (John 11:17-37)

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁹and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. ²¹"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." ²⁸And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." ²⁹When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. ³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴"Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Reflection:

I'll never forget my first day in the Air Force, as I was riding in a bus onto "Lackland Air Force Base" with a bunch of other recruits for the beginning of basic training. We had no idea what was in store for us that day. Some even screamed as panic and the thought of "what did I get myself into?" took hold. Have you ever gone through a major change of life experience like this? Perhaps: you went away to college; got married; moved because of a job or career change; or ended a serious relationship that you thought would continue for life. We will go through some major changes in our lives. However, stepping into the river of eternal life with the One who says "I am the resurrection and the life" will top them all as His resurrected life leads us down the journey of walking forever with Him.

In John 10:7, Jesus shared that he was the gate for the sheep. When we place our faith in Him, as stated in John 11:25, we enter the realm of resurrection and eternal life. This leads one to view life through a different lens and the enormity of possessing eternal life will begin to flow through one's life. Like a branch we are grafted into a new tree, a new (eternal) life and a new way of looking at and living life because death is no longer the end, rather, it begins a new season with Jesus.

In this reading, as we see that "Jesus wept" we should be comforted by the knowledge of the deep love Jesus possessed for Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Jesus has this same love for us. He proves that on the cross. The timing of answers to prayers and their results are not always how we expect them to be. Life in the Air Force was not without its disappointments. Life in Jesus doesn't mean that we are set free from the disappointments this world throws at us. We learn through faith in eternal life to have patience and to persevere. Mary and Martha believed that they would see their brother in the next life. Even Lazarus if he was told that he would suffer an early death in his life so that Jesus could glorify the Father, might have asked "is there another way?"

As we enter by faith through the gates of God's promise of resurrection and eternal life, we receive into our hearts Christ as King (Lord of Life) and we willfully become participants in creation's eternal purpose which brings glory to the Eternal One. In this life, our faith, like Mary and Martha's, will be tested to demonstrate to the world that "lifting up Jesus" is the only way to live. Overcoming a sinful world and life only comes when one trusts in the crucified and resurrected King.

There are many times we want to give up or are overwhelmed by emotions like Mary initially was when Jesus arrived. Mary eventually overcame her emotions and went to Jesus. He responded to her need by asking her "where have you laid him to rest?" Sometimes, there may be things we need to lay to rest by trusting in King Jesus. No matter our execution of faith in these moments, Jesus is ALWAYS faithful and willing to hear our prayers. He is aware of our loving requests even when we have laid them to rest elsewhere and given up on them. He looks at all our requests through the lens of eternity with the glory of God in mind (verses 25-27). Perhaps, even now, He is waiting for us to speak to Him again about something we've prayed to Him about in the past and sought rest elsewhere.

God is aware of the large and small details of our lives. His purpose never changes which is to complete us in His holiness, the image of Christ. As "The Resurrection and The Life" (Jesus Christ) is lifted up over this world, our Heavenly Father is glorified and His "Eternal Kingdom of Heaven" comes to earth. Walking in this truth, brings glory to God and makes His children instruments of love like Jesus sent to reach our fallen world. If you've never done this before, take the time to write down a list of your prayer requests and place the list in an envelope. Open and review the list 6 months to a year later to see how God responded. Some people even maintain a prayer board with prayer requests in a private place in their homes. God is faithful and never forgets our prayer requests. Remember, prayers are answered with eternity in mind so some may be answered at the resurrection when Christ returns.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, my ability to see what You see from an eternal perspective is limited. I believe that although I was born into this temporary world that You have grafted me into Your eternal life. You are “The Resurrection and The Life”. Draw me ever closer to Your eternal calling upon my life even if it requires me to endure disappointments and challenges. Strengthen my faith so that I may overcome the waves of emotions that come to me when things don’t work out as I think they should. Help me to rest in You and to place my plan for this life under the Heavenly Father’s plan for eternity. Father knows best...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe the door of eternity has been opened for you to step through? Do you believe that when one steps by faith through the door of eternity that you should look at your life differently? I love what the angels proclaimed as Jesus came into the world, “Emmanuel, God is with us”! Jesus has opened the door to bring Heaven, His presence into our lives.

42. Take away the stone

Reading (John 11:38-45)

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹"Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." ⁴⁰Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." ⁴⁵Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Reflection:

Christians are called to be a people of faith. We are called to believe in the improbable, the unseen (as this type of miracle seems impossible) and to hope for the impossible. Now, as we intercede in prayer for those who are fighting for their lives we should go to the Lord with this type of faith; "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:3)."

How did Martha first respond when Jesus told them to "take away the stone" in verse 39 above? Initially, Martha couldn't imagine what Jesus could do and resisted his instruction because of her lack of faith. Jesus must demonstrate to them that He is the "Lord of life". Through faith in Him, ALL must surrender their temporary lives to what He came to do with them. Although she didn't fully understand, what had Martha confessed to Jesus in John 11:21, earlier in this chapter?

God the Father has made death a servant of His Son; no longer a weapon used by the enemy (satan). This is why Scripture declares repeatedly that without faith it's impossible to please God. Through faith Jesus states in John 11:40, you will see the glory of God. In verse 41, by taking away the stone, they were acting in faith through Martha's words spoken to Jesus (John 11:21). Her faith was more important than her lack of understanding about how her brother's death would serve God. Through faith, the death of Lazarus served God's eternal purpose for ALL. As Lazarus was raised from the dead, this miracle pointed to the Son whom God had sent to bring eternal life to ALL. This miracle points to God's call for us to ask, speak and act in faith so that His glory and sovereign power will be received by ALL (John 6:40).

The raising of Lazarus is an amazing miracle. In verse 42, Jesus states that the Father always heard the Son during His earthly ministry. We can be confident that God continues to hear us through our Risen Lord even during times when we don't understand the outcomes. The Father always hears us and deeply cares for us. Death is no longer a weapon but rather a servant of God's eternal purpose for us (to be free from sin). As we pray in Jesus' name, we are declaring this work of the Father through His Son. As many came to faith in verse 45, so now many continue to come to faith in God's power over death.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I am called to live a life of trusting in You. I believe that You are with me both in "the here and now" and in "the life to come". Forgive me for approaching so many circumstances out of only my own understanding and strength. Teach me to walk with You as a person of deep faith. Use me to point others towards Your glory breaking into their lives through faith. Help me to "take away the stones of unbelief" in my heart which stand against Your desired release of life-giving holy deeds through faith...

Personal Insight:

When one trusts in the power and victory of the Son of God over death, they should no longer look at their lives the same. Are there any obstacles (stones of unbelief) standing between you and what the Lord has purposed for God's eternal good in your life? Jesus lived to bring the Father glory, is this not the cause for us as well? Can you imagine what it will be like to talk with Lazarus about this event? 😊

43. What are we accomplishing?

Reading (John 11:46-57)

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.” ⁴⁹ Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰ You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, ⁵² and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. ⁵³ So from that day on they plotted to take his life. ⁵⁴ Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea. Instead he withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. ⁵⁵ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. ⁵⁶ They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” ⁵⁷ But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

Reflection:

It’s both a very eye opening and challenging experience to serve on a leadership team in a local church. First, we get to look closely at the inner operations of our church as we serve on these teams. Second, we must overcome frustrations that can arise as we strive to unite around action plans for moving forward within our leadership team.

When it appears that a good plan of action is out of reach, the same question stated in verse 47 might be heard, “what are we accomplishing?” In this reading, we have the Jewish Authorities (the Pharisees) trying to decide how they’re going to deal with this man Jesus who continues to cause problems by performing great miracles and claiming to speak the word of the Lord. What’s unfortunate to observe from this meeting is that the leaders speak as though they don’t expect to hear from God about this matter. Recently, they refused to acknowledge John the Baptist’ ministry as being from God. We know this from the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 21:25) where they refused to answer Jesus’ question “Where did John’s baptism come from?” The Jewish leadership believes they are the only ones accomplishing God’s will for His children. However, like some leadership groups in the church today, they don’t consider that God might want to speak to them through His faithful congregation. Out of apparent frustration, they declare that they need to take quick action to protect God’s children. They’ve decided it’s time to put Jesus to death. This story is a humbling story for those who serve as leaders. God is ALWAYS in control and leaders MUST work with Him (as His royal priesthood). Otherwise, they could become common cups in His-story of redemption.

As the pharisees try to justify their position and future action, God speaks through Caiaphas. Unfortunately, no one understands the eternal significance of the words he speaks as he prophesies “it is better for us (‘you’ is properly translated into the plural ‘us’ here) that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish.” Once Caiaphas finishes speaking in verse 53, they begin to plot Jesus’ death. Whose side is this leadership team on, God’s or the enemies of God? Jesus knew the Pharisees were plotting to take His life and withdrew to Ephraim rather than move around in public. Verse 56 states that the people were looking for Jesus and questions abounded as they discussed what they expected Jesus to do next. Did the pharisees have to cooperate in sending Jesus to the cross or could the Romans have done this alone eventually?

The Jewish people needed a leadership team that was willing to ask the question “what is God advising us to do?” rather than “what are we accomplishing?” This first question is better because it causes the leadership team to listen for God’s leading when tough decisions are made. Humanity has twisted the Scripture for years in the name of God. Why were the Pharisees so hesitant or afraid to ask this question about Jesus and John the Baptist? If they had prayed, “Lord, we’re not going to move forward until we hear from you about this matter”, could we be reading about them playing a different role in His-story? After all, King Herod and Pontius Pilate could have crucified Christ without the blessings (united vote) of the entire Sanhedrin. The role of leadership isn’t centered on one’s position.

Jesus knew the Father’s will and when to take the next action. God will lead us to His will and perfect timing in our lives when we turn away (repent) from plotting our own courses. God the Father through His Son’ finished work on the cross has sent the Holy Spirit to be the prophet / shepherd of His children especially during the times of making difficult leadership decisions. Leaders must look for God’s direction today through the Christian disciplines the Lord gave us (fasting, prayer, worship, fellowship around the “Living Word”, etc.). Serving and loving God must revolve around our willingness to seek Him and His will repeatedly. His eternal harvest is something we don’t get to direct but He calls us to join Him nonetheless. He is faithfully reaching the lost through His eternal love, power and authority (Kingdom).

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are always calling us through Your life given for us to come to Your throne of grace. Thank You for the gift of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Lead us to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as we live and serve as Your Body. You are very pleased when we diligently ask the question “What is Your will and how should I obey it?” As we continue to grow closer to You, may we be quick to stop and seek Your guidance daily...

Personal Insight:

Is God impressed with our quick actions and accomplishments or with our determination to seek and rely upon His guidance daily before moving ahead with big decisions?

44. A dinner was given in Jesus' honor

Reading (John 12:1-11)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." ⁹Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

Reflection:

When my parents reached their 50th wedding anniversary, our family had a special dinner to honor them for all they did in their lives together. This dinner for Jesus reminds me of that special event which honored my parents for all their love and kindness they displayed as they served their family (and others). Knowing what's about to come, it's very special to read about this dinner for Jesus. Like my parents whose lives with us were winding down after their 50th anniversary celebration dinner, Jesus' earthly ministry was winding down after this dinner given in His honor. Although now, we can't host a special dinner for the Lord Jesus, we still can do many other things to honor Him and His legacy of love.

Many when they go to church are very reserved and lack the enthusiasm that God desires to honor His Son and worship Him. Where was the heart of Judas, close to the Lord or far from the Lord during this dinner event as he voiced his concern for the way Mary poured out the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet? Mary has made an expensive gift to Jesus in a wholehearted manner to show her appreciation of what He has done. Letting her hair down to wipe his feet with the perfume was an act of intimate adoration. When we open our lives up to being intimate with the Lord, we honor Him like Mary did in this story. Thankfully, Mary wasn't dissuaded from doing what the Spirit was directing her to do even though everyone might not approve. We shouldn't be discouraged from holding back our love for Jesus as well when we worship God. After all what are we responding to when we worship the Lord? "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:13)"

When I look at this offering by Mary, I am drawn to the actions of the father in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The father sacrificed his honor in the eyes of the community as he forgave and ran to the errant son who was returning home from his life of extravagant living. The father was overwhelmed with joy as he looked upon his opportunity to lavish his love and generosity once again upon his son. He didn't care what his peers might say as he ran to his son and exposed his delight for a wayward child. He knew that his son had made the decision to return home and was responding in love to the son's wise decision despite what happened in the past. Do you think that Mary cared about what others thought as she let her hair down and wiped Jesus' feet? Have you ever been questioned about your generosity or kind actions towards others in situations where it might not be warranted? Intimacy with God will take you to places where others will question your actions as you go beyond the boundaries of doing what's customary or expected. How does Jesus response to Judas as he criticizes Mary? He emphasizes the need to respond from a place of deep thankfulness to be balanced with being a good steward.

The time has come to honor Jesus before his humiliation on the cross. The Lord Jesus by accepting Mary's gift acknowledges that she has done the proper thing despite what others might judge as improper. She was expressing deep joy for the miracle that Jesus had performed for her brother. She was seeing Jesus for whom He was like never before and worshipped Him with her whole heart in that moment recorded forever in Scripture. Unfortunately, I have witnessed too many people walk away from the church because other people couldn't accept the fact that at times in church people become undone by the kindness of God and act in uncustomary ways to give Him praise. Do we ever think that a person's out of place gift to Jesus may be their last opportunity in this life to bring Him an unexpected gift? Can we allow for people who are undone by something kind that the Lord has done to respond with actions that might seem extreme to us? Are we capable of always hearing what the Holy Spirit is speaking to others' hearts? Walking in reverence to the Lord leads us to respect God's work in others. This is something that was lacking in the thoughts and words of Judas. We all need to expand our ability to let others express their individual love for Jesus no matter how uncomfortable it makes us or extreme it might look.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, there will be a day we'll all be sitting at a dinner given in Your honor. In anticipation of this day, I want to honor You by committing my heart to love You radically and be able to accept the radical actions of others who love You like Mary in this story. Help me to be emotionally mature enough to permit others to express their love to You in what at times might seem as being emotionally immature. Lord, lead me to trust that Your Spirit is fully capable of policing God's people so that I don't need to be constantly correcting people about how one should worship God...

Personal Insight:

Do you act to honor Jesus often by sharing: words of encouragement; kind deeds and gifts with others?

45. Blessed is the King of Israel

Reading (John 12:12-19)

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" ¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, ¹⁵"Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." ¹⁶At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. ¹⁷Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

Reflection:

Jesus has raised both the hopes and curiosity of the people as he enters Jerusalem. Many are still talking about the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. How could the same people who shout, "Blessed is the King of Israel!" during His entrance later in the week turn against Him? By the end of the week, at His trial many will shout "Crucify Him!". What were the people looking for as they declared Jesus as their King? As Jesus goes through the Passion Week, He will encounter a people who aren't that different from us. They are focused on their own self-interests and become unhappy as they discover that God's "King of Israel" hasn't come to shield His people from their neighbors but rather to send them out to love them. The peace and authority (Kingship) of Jesus has come to bring God's eternal Kingdom (Spirit of love) into the world to reign over the hearts of ALL mankind. In "Spirit and Truth", God's "Kingdom of Heaven" through the "love of Jesus" has come to set hearts apart from sin, death, and the finality of the grave.

Old Testament prophecy was being fulfilled from Zechariah 9:9 as quoted in verse 15 above, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see your king is coming on a donkey's colt." This prophecy was something that no one was thinking about as King Jesus rode in on a donkey's colt. The "King of Israel" was fulfilling Scripture. If you read Zechariah 9:10 closely, it speaks of a King who will proclaim peace to all the nations. What kind of peace was the Son of God, their King sent to bring? The people desired peace and rest from the attacks of their neighboring kingdoms. Was this prophecy speaking of a King who would bring immediate peace between all nations or about bringing a new covenantal, eternal peace between humanity and God into the world? The religious authorities and people thought they had established peace with God because they kept the Law and made sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. They didn't realize that their sin was keeping them from entering the eternal peace God desired for all (Rom. 6:23). Jesus was about to fulfill the prophecy to the nation of Israel as His sinless life would pay for the wages of sin and make available to them the gift of eternal peace with God. Many things such as: fear, denial, ignorance, and a lack of faith stood in the way of the people's ability to see this prophecy being fulfilled right before their eyes (Zech. 9:9).

The reception of Jesus entering on a colt into Jerusalem is opposite to how the people of Israel reacted to God's invitation to His people to meet with Him on the mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-17). In this previous encounter, the people trembled as they saw God approaching them. Now, the Holy One of God is entering Jerusalem on a donkey's colt in humility bringing God's New Covenant to the people. There is a major shift about to take place here in the relationship between God and humanity through the "King of Israel". God remembered His word (Deut. 18:15) to His servant Moses. Now, God in Christ was bringing His peace NOT physical war to bear through His King riding on a donkey and His amazing grace to ALL nations.

God's Eternal Kingdom peace is now available to all who turn to God's King and call upon His righteous name, Lord Jesus. Let ALL the people of the world join together with God's people shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus You are, and blessed is the "King of Israel". I'm amazed at how you brought your message of peace to bear in humility without a conquering army or a life lost. You laid down Your life as You humbly rode on that colt into Jerusalem. Now, come in "Spirit and Truth" into ALL hearts riding on the colt of Your unfailing and abiding love. Help me to remember that the weapon You have given God's people is eternal peace and the calling is to be humble and to trust in the ability of Your love to reign over hearts and lives. Thank you for being totally committed to revealing God's redeeming Word. Come now Blessed King of Israel and rule with Your peace over my life...

Personal Insight:

Do you approach life's challenges and situations humbly with the peace of Christ or like a bulldozer that violently clears a path for its rider? I've heard from a relative in the Marines that the way of the Marines is to follow the scorched earth policy; to let destruction pave the way to victory...

46. We would like to see Jesus

Reading (John 12:20-26)

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²²Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Reflection:

I've been privileged to lead "worship and praise" music time during Bible studies and church service. To be prepared for this, all involved in leading worship spend time practicing prior to leading worship. What amazes me is the major difference between the practice time and the actual worship time. The sense of God's presence and being drawn to His "Throne of Grace" is markedly different when a group comes together for the actual worship time. Experiencing the difference between preparation and actual worship time gives me a greater understanding of what the Greeks are asking for. They have heard about Jesus or heard Him from a distance but now they want to experience His presence personally, to a greater level.

In this reading as the Greeks ask to see Jesus, He knows this isn't the time yet for them to encounter Him. He wants to give them the full worship experience. Jesus must fulfill His Gospel message for His disciples first (and bring their practice time together to a close) so that later after His resurrection they can carry His Light, His Gospel and Spirit to the Greeks. Why were the disciples excited by the Greeks' request to see Jesus? What did the disciples think of Jesus' response in verse 23?

His answer wasn't "yes" and it wasn't "no". Rather, His answer was to "wait" for the completion of God's preparations "the Son of Man to be glorified". His Seed (kernel) must be planted in the soil of the people of God, the Jewish people first. The Lord knew the seeds (kernels) of the disciples would later be prepared to enable the Greeks (Gentiles) to receive and experience what the Jews now were receiving and experiencing (a personal relationship with Jesus). The disciples thought they were ready to move forward with the ministry, but Jesus knew they still had to grow together by walking in faith through the crucifixion and resurrection together. They would lose one disciple (Judas) in this last leg of their journey of faith together. Verse 24 points the disciples yet again to the call to surrender all like Jesus was committed to do so that each kernel will contain the life-giving Seed of Christ, His peace and gift of eternal life to the world.

Verses 25-26, details what it means to follow Jesus. His life given for us opens the door of eternity to billions of people. His followers believe His message (Gospel) and follow obediently where His truth leads them. First, they understand that if they make by faith the Lord's "Kernel of Truth", preeminent over the world's truth they too will produce followers of Christ. Second, they understand that if they live a life of making others need for Jesus greater than their own personal needs, they will witness the Seed of Christ being passed on through them. Eternal life is a gift that keeps on giving. When we receive it, we can't keep it all to ourselves. How can a small cistern hold all the rainwater that falls from the sky? It can't but it can be an effectively used cistern if it passes along regularly the rainwater that falls from the sky. The water of eternal life is used and passed along as the gift of Christ is shared. As we see the Greeks (strangers) approaching Christ through us we re-experience our first encounter with the Lord (the Holy Spirit moving in our hearts). Ultimately, this is our greatest act of worship as it brings glory to God the Father through God the Son.

There are many people we encounter daily who need to meet Jesus. Some are looking for Him and others don't even know He is who they are looking for. We are called to introduce people to Jesus like the disciples desired to introduce the Greeks to Jesus. The Lord's preparations have been completed for all (Jews and Gentiles) to encounter Him. We're personally prepared to lead people to Christ as we surrender our days to Him to be used as His ambassadors. Jesus has made it easy for us to help people meet Him. He's given us the Holy Spirit who lives in us and guides us to introduce others to Christ.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I am thankful that I stand on this side chronologically of the cross. On this side, I see You as our risen Savior and Lord. I see Your Holy Spirit made available to draw many to the Father. I believe in Your finished work for the forgiveness of sin and the power of Your blood. Guide me now through Your Gospel Truth to lead others to You. Now is the time for ALL to come to You...

Personal Insight:

When you meet people who need to know Jesus do you mention your faith in Christ and ask for the Lord (Spirit) to draw them to Him? When we receive God's "Word and Spirit" we are fully prepared to share Jesus with others...

47. The Christ will remain forever

Reading (John 12:27-36)

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³²But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" ³⁵Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. ³⁶Put your trust in the light while you have it so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Reflection:

For many years in the United States, the national anthem has been a treasured song which many sang in remembrance and appreciation of those who gave their lives to win independence for the nation. The song speaks of "Old Glory", the flag flying high over the nation and speaks of those who fought valiantly for the freedom of the nation. The national anthem was written so that Americans would always remember the glory of a young nation being formed through tremendous courage and valor while under attack. The history of mankind has shown that nations like the U.S. come and go. The earthly kingdom of Israel would soon be conquered one generation after Christ. Unlike the glory of the earthly nations, our Father in Heaven's glory shines forever upon His Eternal Kingdom that remains in Christ, the Living Word.

The people are confused when Jesus speaks of leaving them (verse 34) as they are focused on the physical, glorious structures and kings of this world. Biblical prophecy (Psalm 110) speaks of a Kingdom that would never end and a King that would rule it forever. Christ came to eternally rule our hearts in “Spirit and Truth” and demonstrate God’s glory forever. Jesus didn’t come to seek glory for himself or to be the founder of an earthly, “here today gone tomorrow” nation. He came to bring glory to God the Eternal One and to fulfill the Scripture’ eternal Word (Promise). In Verse 28, Jesus speaks to the Father in front of the people declaring “Father, glorify your name!” God the Father shall be glorified as Christ completes His mission (Re-read Duet. 18:15-18). A Prophet (and King) who would tell them everything God was commanding, stood before them. However, they were blind and couldn’t see this.

The people thought it was time for a ruler like king David, who defeated Israel’s enemies, to be sent by God to defeat their earthly enemies and reign on his throne. They misunderstood Scripture which pointed to an eternal kingdom where God’s eternal peace through the forgiveness of sin would reign. In verse 34, Christ above declares “the Son of man must be lifted up”. He must sit on the throne of heaven and rule over hearts. The Lord must fulfill Scripture (Matt. 5:17) so He can be lifted up and reign forever over God’s people’s hearts. This is how “the Christ will remain forever”, in our hearts. He would forever glorify the Father in doing so. The everlasting government that Isaiah 9:7 spoke about was a government of righteousness that was being established through faith in God’s promise fulfilled. The eternal banner unlike the flag of a nation would be Christ on the cross lifted up in the hearts of God’s redeemed.

At the end of this reading in verse 35, Jesus tells the Jewish people that they will only see their Messiah, God’s Word in the flesh for a little while longer. It will be much harder for the Jewish people to receive Him once He leaves. When darkness comes the miracles and teaching of Jesus ends. Jerusalem will be destroyed, and the Jewish people will be scattered.

The Jewish leaders wanted an earthly king that had the power to defeat the Romans. That desire has closed their hearts to considering God's desire which is to rule over every heart through His eternal kingdom. Therefore, they were incapable of seeing and understanding the ministry of Christ (John 12:40). Jesus who came to fulfill Scripture would be the final testimony for them from God. His light shined greatly upon the land of Israel but unknowingly they chose the darkness as they were ignorant of God's covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:6). Despite their ignorance, they couldn't stop the Eternal Light, Christ' Gospel from remaining and shining forever in the hearts of "the sons of light" (1 John 5:11-13).

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, come and sit upon the throne of my heart. As Your light shines within my heart and it will never be distinguished. Your Word, Light remains forever in the hearts of those who trust in You. As I trust in You, may I bring glory to the Father and walk in the Spirit of Your love and eternal reign...

Personal Insight:

Have you asked Jesus and His love to reign forever in your heart? The eternal reign of the love of Jesus in hearts will be seen and bring glory to God forever!

48. They loved praise from men more than praise from God

Reading (John 12:37-50)

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ³⁹For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ⁴⁰"He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them." ⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. ⁴²Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. ⁴⁴Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. ⁴⁶I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. ⁴⁷"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. ⁴⁸There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. ⁴⁹For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ⁵⁰I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

Reflection:

Not since Moses, Elijah and Elisha had the people witnessed the signs and wonders that Jesus performed. Despite this powerful testimony, many of the Jewish leaders held on stubbornly to their unbelief; a distrust fueled by the fear that to believe in a God who sent a son like Jesus into the world would cause them to be put out of the synagogue they loved.

During the days of the prophets of old, the people had looked upon great prophets as their God sent spiritual leaders. Now, who was looked upon as the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people sent by God in Jesus' time? How did these leaders, the Pharisees compare to the leadership of Jesus and the prophets of old? The Pharisees were code enforcers (morality police) who produced little fruit compared to the God powered leadership Jesus and the prophets of old provided. What was preventing these leaders from receiving the revelation of Christ as their messiah?

In verse 42, we observe that the hearts of the Pharisee were hardened and unreceptive to the Seed of Jesus' words. Their religion had produced pride and fear in their hearts which kept them from the inward work of true religion that Jesus came to do. Their people's hearts were filled with hatred towards the Roman leaders. They had become enslaved by all the religious codes (traditions) to follow and the strong desire to hate gentiles rather than become an instrument of love to them. Jesus sent was sent to bring a New Covenant and Kingdom from heaven to God's people, but both the leaders and people were rebelling against the heart of God (Hosea 6:6). They had a choice: love the religion of the Pharisees or through God's mercy step into the destiny of God's people to be a light into their world of darkness. God allowed them to make their choice and many chose their traditions over God, "men loved praises from men more than praise from God. (verse 43)"

The prophet Isaiah had prophesied about the message and the messenger God would send. God's Word would judge those who opposed the message of His prophets (verses 44-50). This list summarizes God's fulfilled prophesy, the life of Christ:

- 1) God's salvation has come to us through His Son;
- 2) God the Father now is seen through His Son's words and deeds;
- 3) The Son of God provides the True Light for (interpreting) Scripture;
- 4) God the Father will judge all who reject His Son;

- 5) The Son of God spoke as directed by His Father;
- 6) The Son of God's Word lead us to eternal life.

Many have been caught up in the piety of religious practices and the recognition from others that comes with it. This leads us to become spiritually prideful and fall into the trap of judging one another based on our outward appearances, a false holiness. When this happens, false holiness actually puts blinders on us in regards to God's call for us in Christ. Only humility keeps ears open to hear God's voice and to avoid "loving the praises from men more than loving praise from God". The angel Lucifer fell into this trap of loving the praises of his peers (the fallen angels) more than the praise that comes from God's true servants. Lucifer wound up loving to be praised more than being a servant for the glory of God. Living for the glory of God leads His servants to worship His holiness and give Him praise for His abounding grace found in Christ alone.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, keep us mindful of the fact that pride comes before the fall. The Pharisees, great religious men let their pride stand in the way of the compassionate branch of peace You were offering to all the world. You offered the olive branch of peace to the Jewish leaders who were consumed by their prideful hearts. Forgive me Lord when I have prideful thoughts and let me NOT be consumed by them. Rather, prepare my heart to be focused on reaching out with Your mercy to the least, the last and the lost; NOT be found in a state of resting on my quick thinking or past accomplishments...

Personal Insight:

Are you a people pleaser or a God pleaser? Have you discovered that always giving people what they want can stand in the way of what God wants to do?

49. Unless I wash you, you have no part with me

Reading (John 13:1-17)

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. ²The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" ¹⁰Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. ¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Reflection:

Many leaders have made a name for themselves by seeking after: fame, power and money. The world teaches us that all great leaders seek after these things. Jesus is teaching His disciples about another way of establishing themselves as great leaders as He washes their feet. In the Kingdom of God, the demonstration of: humility, self-sacrifice and love for others are the things that a great leader should seek after.

Jesus came as a servant and modeled servant leadership to His disciples. He didn't come to judge but to serve humanity as He journeyed to the cross. Often, a great leader in our society only allows people into his life if he/she thinks the person is worthy of their time; they have something to offer. As a world leader' name becomes greater, they tend to focus on ruling over people rather than serving them. Jesus approaches His leadership role desiring to offer all of himself (His name) as God the Father directs Him to serve (love) others. What type of attitude do we take on as we approach others in need? It's natural for us to judge others prior to offering them assistance. Jesus humbled himself first rather than judging people first. He even washed Judas' feet. Jesus would soon send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. The Holy Spirit would bring both understanding about what Jesus had done and His power to them so they could follow His example of serving others.

When we receive Christ, we turn from sin and trust in the Lord' ability to wash away of our sin. In verse 8 when Jesus tells Peter that he has no part with Jesus if he doesn't let Jesus wash his feet, is He talking about trusting in Him or continuing to rely on Him to wash away Peter's sin (the way for followers of Christ)? Why was Peter initially resistant to and embarrassed by Jesus' action of washing his feet? Peter thought that Jesus' action of washing a person's feet was undignified for a leader to do. However, throughout Jesus' ministry He was led by the Holy Spirit to humble Himself and love others. Eventually, His disciples would follow His example of leadership. The disciples would receive the Holy Spirit and become humble servants.

Here are two other important insights that can be drawn from the Lord's words to Peter about foot washing. Peter has previously said "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" in John 6:68 to Jesus. This confession has led Jesus to tell Peter in John 12:10, that he is already clean. Faith in Jesus' Word (John 5:24) has made Peter clean while others (like Judas) lacked this faith. Despite this, Jesus is teaching Peter (and others) that His disciples' feet still need His attention, to be washed. He's instructing us that:

- 1) We must go to the Word of Life (Jesus) regularly to be set apart, kept away from falling into the ways of the world. In other places in Scripture, Jesus instructs us to shake the dust off one's feet that comes from serving others and living in this fallen world. Receiving Christ brings eternal life to one's soul but sin in this world still tries to attach itself to us. Jesus is demonstrating how we must humble ourselves before God so that we will remain available to Him and be cleansed by Him to love others through the righteousness of Christ (1 John 1:9);
- 2) We are being taught to stay humbly connected to Him and His body (the church). Jesus' act of washing the feet of His disciples and His later teaching about the sacrament of communion emphasizes the need for the body of Christ to minister from a clean heart to the people. Remaining humble before the Lord is key for Christ followers to be best positioned to love others.

In Christ, we are born again into the family of God. The Apostle Paul described this as being grafted into the vine. Jesus (The Vine) loved His disciples and washed their feet even knowing that they would desert Him as He went to the cross. We must stay connected to the family of God and serve our family even though there are times they will disappoint us. As we humble ourselves before His God, He cleanses us for serving others and demonstrates His righteousness working through us.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, truly I have no part in You if I haven't turned from my sins and been washed clean through Your cleansing Word. As I follow You, I must be joined with Your body, the church to learn how to lead and to serve. Continue to teach me how to become an effective servant, to remain humble and to serve selflessly. You have set the perfect example of how to love God and others. Draw me ever closer to Your example and Your cleansing Word so that I might better testify to others about the "Kingdom of Heaven" and Your Word alive in me...

Personal Insight:

Are you able to serve and be served by Your Christian family? Would God call you to serve your enemies like Jesus served Judas?

50. Whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me

Reading (John 13:18-30)

"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' ¹⁹"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. ²⁰I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." ²¹After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." ²²His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, ²⁸but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Reflection:

Have you ever felt betrayed? Betrayal comes when someone leads or exposes another to harm. Judas was a trusted disciple who had the special responsibility to be the group's money keeper. However, this evening as others believed he left to serve Jesus as the money keeper; Judas went off to betray Jesus. It was a custom to offer a gift to the poor when celebrating the Passover feast. It's possible that some of the disciples thought that Judas had left to give a gift to the poor. Instead, he left to hand Jesus over to the Pharisees.

Verses 18-19 indicate to us that Jesus knew Judas was about to betray Him as Jesus said “do it quickly”. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit know the hearts of men. God’s grace is amazing; His Son (Jesus) has patiently walked for 3 years with His first disciples and God has chosen to spend eternity with us even knowing our hearts. How should the church carry itself knowing that the inclination to betray is a part of fallen humanity’ nature? Our Lord rose above the betrayal. How does the church rise above betrayal and other sins against it? Amazing grace; we see its victory through the love of Christ at the cross. His love conquers a multitude of sins. We must lift up the victory of the “love of Christ” over all sin including betrayal and not be overcome when it occurs. Jesus’ words to Judas “do it quickly” demonstrates that He wasn’t caught off guard and was ready to quickly remove any power this sin had.

Simon Peter is overcome by the desire to know who would betray Jesus as he asks the Master “who is it?”. What good will knowing this do for Peter? Can He protect Jesus or change God’s will? Is Peter afraid that he might be the one to betray Jesus? After all Jesus in another Gospel, Matt. 16:23 says at one point to Peter “get thee behind me Satan”. Judas wasn’t the only disciple that had tried to stop Jesus’ ministry over the past 3 years. Peter’s denial to those who questioned him about knowing Jesus after the Lord’ arrest was a form of betrayal because He betrayed the Lord’ confidence in Peter to always be a steadfast follower. One of the greatest lessons to be learned from this story of betrayal is that betrayal of our relationship to the Lord is more common than we think. It won’t lead to His crucifixion again, however, sin leads us to betray ourselves and others through promises (words) to God we are unable to keep. Certainly, Judas’ betrayal of our Lord is the greatest betrayal recorded in Scripture.

God's forgiveness for us through faith in Jesus empowers us to live above sin and to overcome any permanent harm betrayal can cause. The world is full of betrayal situations and circumstances (drama and injustice). Knowing that this behavior is part of humanity's sin nature (fallen spiritual DNA), we must learn to rely on the victory of Christ through His shed blood on the cross every day. Jesus wasn't surprised by His betrayal; He had prayed about it beforehand and was prepared to face it as it came upon Him. When we face betrayal or are tempted to partake in it, we remember that Jesus has empowered humanity through the forgiveness of ALL sin on the cross to overcome this very damaging sin as we trust in God.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, truly You sought and followed the perfect will of our Heavenly Father. You didn't let the fear of betrayal from the people that surrounded You redirect Your steps. You prayed for heaven's best to be available to You when it came. Help me to trust that You will be there for me as I accept others who come in Your name. Even the betrayal You experienced from Judas didn't stop God's work of reconciliation and redemption from happening. Help me to remember this whenever I fear or feel like I'm being betrayed as the drama and injustices of this life fall upon me...

Personal Insight:

Are you guarded in how you receive others? Do you believe God is in control when you are betrayed? We must admit that the world tries to use us as pawns in the betrayal of others for the enemies plans and that God has the power to foil all of the enemies plans as we live for God's work of reconciliation and redemption, His redeeming love that's been activated at Calvary.

51. Now is the Son of Man glorified

Reading (John 13:31-14:4)

³¹When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." ³⁷Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times! ^{14:1}"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going."

Reflection:

Verses 31-32 point to how our merciful God makes it possible for sinful man to be joined with the glory of God through the holy union of the Father and the Son. The darkness that had fallen upon Judas' (humanity's) heart would be overcome by the "Light of the World", God's peace offered to ALL. God's holy plan, the laying down of a righteousness life (His Son) for ALL would demonstrate His perfect love (grace) for all eternity, His eternal glory being reunited with fallen humanity. Humanity is the darling of God's creation. His Son, the Word made flesh is going to atone for humanity's sin and make His righteousness available to ALL. As the Son of Man is laid down and lifted up, His life brings eternal glory to the Father and restores humanity.

In verse 33, Jesus tells the disciples “He will be with them only a little longer.” Have you ever participated in a lengthy training that you were sorry had to end because you thoroughly enjoyed the instructor?” Have you ever had a Pastor (Teacher) leave your church that you loved dearly? The disciples must be experiencing similar emotions of remorse as they hear Jesus tell them “He will only be with them for a little time longer”. Goodbyes are never easy for loved ones, especially when one dies unexpectedly. While Jesus is able to tell the disciples that He must leave, His words must be very difficult to hear.

As Jesus shares that He is leaving, He instructs His disciples to follow His commandment “to love one another.” The Lord’s consistent display of love for them and others has drawn them together. Now, Jesus is asking them to emulate the way He lived. Do you look at yourself, a believer, as someone who loves people? This is the Lord’s calling to all believers. In addition to teaching about salvation through Christ, the church teaches us to follow the Lord’s one commandment. Jesus has fulfilled the Law perfectly, so that God’s children can walk in His grace and be charitable; they can demonstrate love to others in His name. His first love is about to unleash an eternal, tsunami wave of charity (love) into the world. As He was going to be lifted up, He would draw redeemed humanity upwards in Himself to bring glory to God through the works He did and the works He taught His followers to do.

In verse 37, Peter shows how good intentions aren’t always God’s intentions. Alone, without the crucified and “Risen Christ”, Peter is unable to join His Holy Lord in laying down His life on the cross at Calvary. Jesus, the Righteous One was sent to establish peace between God and humanity. Through the Word of Life and charity (love), we are called to walk in everlasting peace with one another. Imagine if all believed in Jesus and focused on His one commandment to love others in this world. This is how God sends us out now to instruct others to be joined by faith with the glory between the Father and the Son as we await His return and heaven coming to earth.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, truly the Son of Man has been glorified as You ascended and assumed Your rightful position as the Lord of Life. You have brought glory to the Father. You have joined me to redeemed humanity through your glorious life and now compel me to share Your life with others. May your promise of a heavenly home motivate me to be more charitable to others with my life as I look towards Your best to come...

Personal Insight:

Are you investing in the lives of others through acts of charity and telling others about Jesus' love?

52: You know the way to the place I am going

Reading (John 14:4-13)

You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Reflection:

Legend has it that William Tell, the famous archer, could split an apple with an arrow. If we were spiritually sharp enough to see to the very core of God's heart and mind, what would we see? I believe these verses suggest that we would see our Lord, Jesus. We wouldn't see an egotistical, abusive task master but rather a very compassionate, Heavenly Father who loves to be with and bless His children. How comforting it is to hear our Savior Jesus' words "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." God is holy, perfect in every way love, through and through in "thought, word and deed".

How often in life have you wondered, “Where is my life leading me to?” In verse 34, Jesus tells the disciples “You know the way to the place I am going.” He has previously told them in John 14:2-3 about his Father’s house and the place He is preparing for them. In the culture of that day, it was traditional for a husband to prepare a room for his new bride in his father’s house prior to bringing her home to the new room. The wedding couldn’t take place until this work was done. A tremendous amount of time, preparation and love would go into preparing that room. It’s commonly believed that Jesus is responding to Thomas’ words in verse 5 from this cultural context of a man preparing a place to bring his bride.

Thomas and Phillip question Jesus, “Lord we don’t know the place you are going? Show us the Father?” Wouldn’t a new bride be curious about the house, the new room being built and what the Father of the house was like? A good son demonstrates the very best qualities of his father. Likewise, Jesus demonstrates God’s very best to us. We can trust that the Father, the Son and the place being prepared are excellent in every way. In verse 6, Jesus pledges to the disciples and us “I am the way, the truth and the life”. This is Jesus’ wedding proposal to us as the husband to be. A daughter would leave everything to go and be with her husband. Jesus was promising all of himself to the disciples and us. Have you ever looked at coming to faith in Christ like this? When we come to faith, Jesus is offering all of himself to us like a faithful husband-to-be proposing to his future bride. Certainly, as we look to see the Father through Jesus we would look at: what Jesus valued most, what Jesus taught and how He carried himself.

Some have said Jesus never claimed to be God but read again verses 9-12 above. Also, in the Gospels Jesus says “only God is good (Luke 18:19)”. What do these verses declare about the goodness of Christ? Like God the Father, we can trust the “thoughts, words and deeds” of the Son. This is what Jesus is declaring as He says “I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me”.

Together, Father and Son are of one holy will and one holy substance. Together, via the “Spirit and Truth” they are bringing us to live with them under one holy roof. When we follow Jesus, we are being led to God the Father’s house and as a popular contemporary Christian song declares “Our Father’s house is a Big, Big House!” Where Jesus is leading us, there is plenty of room to experience God’s unbroken holy presence, His unending joy and everything Jesus’ life exemplified in “thought, word and deed”.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, truly You are “the Way, the Truth and the Life”. Father has revealed the very center of His heart to us through You. Thank you for Your holy, eternal, life-giving love. You have always desired me to be and live with You. Help me to grow in my ability to trust You and to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit who keeps me in the faith and guides me via the Truth which directs us home to You...

Personal Insight:

On His way home, Jesus went to the cross because of God’s love for us. Where is He calling you to follow His example of selfless love as you journey in faith home to Him?

53: I will not leave you as orphans

Reading (John 14:15-27)

“If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” ²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Reflection:

Have you ever visited an orphanage? While on mission trips to Haiti, I have had the privilege to visit with and deliver gifts to many children in orphanages. During the visits, I could sense the presence of God moving within and through me as I shared with the children about Jesus and His love for them. Even though these children missed having their parents around, the people who God places in their lives repeatedly demonstrate God’s truth and love to them so that the Holy Spirit confirms to them that they aren’t alone.

Jesus personally delivered God's love to the disciples (orphaned from their Heavenly Father by sin). Who has empowered Jesus to carry God's love? In verse 17, Jesus tells the disciples "the 'Spirit of Truth' will be with them forever", the same Spirit who inspired the Word of God. What is the greatest message we can hear that comes from the center of our God's heart? God loves us and has a plan for our lives. This is the message that the "Spirit of Truth" has led Jesus to give His life for ALL at Calvary. Jesus loved the Father by carrying this message of eternal hope. In love, we are called to do the same, even if it means taking a mission trip to an orphanage in a foreign country to do it. God doesn't expect us to do this alone. The same Holy Spirit that was with the Lord and with the prophets has been given to His disciples (including us) now.

Jesus is telling His disciples that he must leave soon and that the world will not see him as the disciples have. Imagine the disciples' mixed emotions of sadness and misunderstanding as they hear these words from the Lord. If you have ever lost a loved one, you can relate to their sadness and time of questioning. If you have a loved one in heaven, you know about having someone in your heart that you believe is waiting for you on the other side of this life. The new way His disciples will see Him is through the Holy Spirit Jesus will place in their hearts. Remember, the Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of Truth'. As we carry the truth (Word of Life) in our hearts, we will be loved by the Father just as Jesus was loved by Him. The new life shared by Christ with all His disciples (including us) will be founded upon the truth, light Jesus has brought into this world.

As we believe the truth, we share it through God's love and tell others no matter where that leads us. Faith has led Jesus to reveal himself to the world (no matter the cost) and led Him to speak these words to His disciples "I will love them and show myself to them." Soon, His disciples will only see Him and experience His love personally as they allow the "Spirit of Truth" to live in them and be shared with others through them.

They like orphans are being separated from their caregiver (Jesus) but they will come to understand why He must go to the cross. Our true Father comes to us all in 'Spirit and Truth' as we believe in His Son. Jesus prepares the hearts of His disciples for the reason He gave His life for us. The forgiveness of sin He will attain will bring the gift of eternal life and peace with God for all who believe His message. Like a dove, the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of Truth' comes to us from His Throne of Grace. All believers as they open their hearts to the Holy Spirit are taught about God's truth and love (His peace). We know this is true because He, the Holy Spirit, lives in us. He reminds us that God hasn't forsaken us and His Son' love will never leave us as unloved orphans.

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You never planned to be far from Your disciples. Rather, You have purchased us, all your disciples with Your precious blood and sealed our hearts with the guarantee of possessing Your everlasting love by the power of the forgiveness You attained for us at Calvary. I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to teach me about following You and loving others. Thank you for Your example of being bold and strong as You followed the 'Spirit of Truth' to the cross. Come Holy Spirit, bring me peace and lead me to tell others about who You are and what You have done...

Personal Insight:

The peace of Christ is the greatest peace in this life because it is with God and leads to eternal life. Have you received the Lord's promise of unending love and placed your trust in Him? His peace endures forever, for believers it leaves no orphans...

54: I am the true vine

Reading (John 14:28-15:4)

“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. “Come now; let us leave. ¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Reflection:

Gardening can be a time consuming and difficult task as one deals with the unwanted weeds and unproductive branches that constantly grow in or around the crops or flowers you have planted. In John 15:1, Jesus states “I am the true vine.” The ‘True Vine’ has always been rooted in, planted in and purposed to demonstrate, the love of God. It isn’t a weed and grows to become the life that is in the seed planted by the gardener. Jesus and the Father stand united against the prince of this world (faithless, fruitless weed-seed sower) that acts contrary to the love of God. God’s Living Word (The True Vine) has come into clear view through the life of Christ. The weeds (untruths, lies and deceptions) of the “prince of this world” have caused some of the branches in the Father’s vineyard to be unproductive whether they are from the vine or the weeds. The prince of this world has deceived many of the Pharisees and the Jewish people. Now, Christ through His perfect life and demonstration of the love of God is about to prune the unproductive branches that lead Israel and the world astray.

The fruit that Jesus, the 'True Vine', will bear will be holy love for God alive in the hearts of His people (branches of the vine) who love His one and only begotten Son. The people who previously tended the vineyard had lost their way. They misunderstood the prophets and thought they were capable of raising a people who could demonstrate God's holy love. Their pride had blinded them to the need for a Messiah (Savior). Now, the fruit (holy love) God desires would come to humanity through faith in His Son alone and His perfect obedience to the Father would fulfill His commandments perfectly (John 14:31).

In John 15:2, Jesus speaks of branches that bear fruit and branches that bear no fruit. We know that good fruit can only come from branches that are attached to/rely upon the righteousness of Christ flowing through them. The perfect demonstration of love for God would come as His people proclaimed Christ in their "words and deeds", this would produce the fruit God desires. The 'love of this world' and the pride it produced had infiltrated the hearts of the Pharisees and their teachings. Their religious practices weren't producing the fruit (selfless love) God had called for in His Word. Now, God was redeeming His Vineyard (Israel) through the perfect leader, His Son who loved not His own life as He sacrificed himself for His people. Any branch that is incapable of producing the life in the Seed that the Father has sown, the holy love of Christ, will be cut off and thrown into the fire. That is why Jesus tells His disciples "remain in me and I will remain in you." Only faith in God's holy love produces heavenly fruit on the "True Vine".

Time for Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You and You alone are the source of my life joined with God. You are united with God the Father and the Holy Spirit through holy love. You have been sent into this world to bring forth a harvest for the Father that will magnify God's holy love for all eternity. Through grace by faith You have connected me to God's love. Now, Holy Spirit, prune me so that I might become more open to God's holy love and become the fruitful branch of faith You are calling me to be...

Personal Insight:

Do you believe that Jesus is the “True Vine”? How do you see yourself attached to Him? Can you believe that His love for you can produce growth in your life and the life of others?

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